BUILDING CAPACITY TO LIVE AND WORK TOGETHER AT AN ECOVILLAGE
IN SUPPORT OF SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY: A CASE STUDY

by

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Abstract

Ecovillages are important models of sustainable community and reflective of an alternative lived paradigm that values collectivism over individualism and cooperation over competition, in pursuit of bio-regionally-based, shared prosperity. In the face of growing threats to the predominant social and economic models of individualism, globalization, and unfettered growth (e.g. the decline of cheap oil), some experts have postulated that the greatest contribution that ecovillages can make is to help us understand of how to live "smaller, slower and closer (Litfin 2013)" – in other words, how to organize socially and economically in a post-carbon world. Through a qualitative case study of Whole Village ecovillage in Caledon, Ontario, this thesis explores the structures and processes through which ecovillagers build capacity for living and working together, and reveals the complex interplay between elements of community building, community dynamics and capacity building, which can either support or undermine the development of sustainable community.

Dedication

To my children, Simon Alexander and Evelyn Grace:

"When you act on behalf of something greater than yourself,
you begin to feel it acting through you
with a power that is greater than your own.

This is grace."

- Joanna Macy (edited into verse by Tom Atlee), Grace and the Great Turning

Quotes

"There is one overriding problem with collaborative groups – they are groups of people, and people are damn difficult to get along with. Were it not for that fact, we would have already saved the world many times over. Instead, we're left down here in the muck, struggling with the irritating, irresponsible, pig-headed, stubborn, judgmental, egotistical and petty people who are supposed to be our allies."

- Starhawk, The Empowerment Manual

"If you want to bring fundamental change in people's belief and behaviour, you need to create a community around them where their new beliefs can be practiced and expressed and nurtured."

- Malcolm Gladwell, The Tipping Point

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Chapter One: Introduction

North Americans consume the equivalent of four Earths worth of resources[1], and the primary resource fuelling this consumption – cheap oil – is in decline (Heinburg, 2005; Kunstler, 2006). Over-consumptive lifestyles, and the systems which support them (e.g. long-distance transport of goods), are blamed for a myriad of environmental, social, and economic problems - global climatic change, unmanageable waste levels, war and violence, to name a few. It is clear that the way we live is no longer sustainable, leading change advocates to call for massive overhaul of our economic and social systems, a transition to a post-carbon world, and to pursue prosperity in a more local direction (for example: Heinburg, 2004; Hopkins, 2008; McKibben, 2008). This is, essentially, a call to create sustainable, place-based communities.

While there is growing recognition of the need for change, much of the response appears superficial (e.g. buying 'greener' products), and 'the great turning' – described by Korten (2006) as a time when we learn to live in partnership with one another and the living Earth - does not appear to be an approach embraced by much of modern society. Like Serrano, many believe that a transition to sustainability is only possible if we abandon our "faith in growth", which he states "has great cost for humanity – poverty, destruction of culture, community and environment, and increased conflict – but perhaps the greatest failure is never succeeding in learning how to live together (2000:86)". Ultimately, the perspective of these theorists is that the viability of the human experience

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[1] We have been in *global* biocapacity overshoot since the 1970s, meaning we use more resources in a year than the Earth can produce. Currently we are in 50% overshoot globally, meaning we need the equivalent of 1.5 Earths worth of resources; but North America uses much more than that, and is the primary global culprit contributing to overshoot (Moore & Rees 2013).

here on Earth requires that modern societies undertake a dramatic shift from individualism to collectivism, and from competition to collaboration. Furthermore, this vision for a reconstruction of society is couched in a conception of humans as part of nature, not separate from it (often referred to in eco-spirituality terms as the 'oneness' of all beings, or in environmental philosophy as the 'land ethic' paradigm[2]). In other words, there is a call for the adoption of a worldview shared by partnership societies of the past, and aboriginal cultures of past and present, which was all but abandoned in western thought in the era of industrialization (though Korten (2000) suggests the shift began some 5,000 years earlier during what he describes as the dawning of 'Empire'[3]). Thus, a "re-learning" or "re-building" of the capacity to live and work collaboratively is necessary, in order to create sustainable community.

Ecovillages are part of a growing global counter-culture movement which has adopted this 'new' worldview and is challenging the predominant notion of progress by pursuing sustainability in a local direction through the creation of collaborative communities (Dawson 2006). Furthermore, as Norberg-Hodge (2002) suggests, due to their holistic nature – including ecological, economic, social and spiritual aspects - they

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[2] Kasper provides a brief overview of the rise in popularity of this concept, in the latter half of the 20th century, in the academic disciplines of environmental sociology, environmental anthropology, environmental philosophy, and environmental economics. However, she suggests that perhaps one of the earliest and most popular championing of this worldview was by Aldo Leopold, in his 1949 essay *The Sand County Almanac: and Sketches Here and There*, where he calls for development of a 'land ethic' that "simply enlarges the boundaries of community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land" and "acknowledgment of the interdependence of all members of the land community (2008:13)."

[3] Korten notes: "…I use the term *Empire* with a capital *E* as a label for the hierarchical ordering of human relationships based on the principle of domination. The mentality of Empire embraces material excess for the ruling classes, honors the dominator power of death and violence, denies the feminine principle, and suppresses realization of the potentials of human maturity. Similarly, I use the term *Earth Community* as a label for the egalitarian democratic ordering of relationships based on the principle of partnership. The mentality of Earth Community embraces material sufficiency for everyone, honors the generative power of life and love, seeks a balance of feminine and masculine principles, and nurtures a realization of the mature potential of our human nature (2006:20)."

are potentially the most important models of sustainable community to consider. However, little academic focus has been given to exploring their potential to help us understand how to re-build capacity to live and work together in sustainable, place-based communities – the kinds of communities that are necessary for humans to successfully navigate a post-carbon world. Thus, my research will add to the limited research that exists, and demonstrate the contributions that the sociological study of ecovillages can make to understanding how to create sustainable communities.

1.1 Research questions

My research explores how ecovillages build community capacity for living together (cohabitation) and working together (collaboration) in order to embody their vision of sustainable community. I have undertaken this exploration through a case study of Whole Village – an intentional community and ecovillage in Caledon, Ontario. For this research, I established the following research questions:

1. What are the historical and current community dynamics and inter-personal tensions which present challenges for living and working together at Whole Village? What contributed to their manifestation?

2. How is community capacity (i.e. community building and capacity building) built to address these challenges (e.g. processes and structures; formal and informal approaches)?

3. How do Whole Villager's perceive their efforts (e.g. successes and challenges) to make living together and working together, in support of sustainable community, possible?

The results of the case study have been compared to the generalized and anecdotal evidence on building ecovillage community capacity for cohabitation and collaboration available in current literature.

1.2   Chapter Outline

Terms such as 'sustainability' and 'community' are used often, but are frequently misunderstood, and even abused. Using the two as a compound term adds to the complexity. Thus, any academic discussion of 'sustainable community' must begin with a clear articulation of what the term means in relation to the research being undertaken. In Chapter Two, I provide this necessary context, by undertaking a critical look at the concept of sustainability, utilizing Litfin's (2013) 4-window framework - ecology, economy, community, and consciousness. This critical examination concludes that modern social, economic, and political constructs are fundamentally unsustainable, and I align with the positions of social theorists who suggest that the only viable way out of the 'global sustainability crisis' is through cooperative, place-based communities, rooted in bioregional economies, and built from the ground up. Ecovillages are introduced in this chapter as models of this type of sustainable community.

Chapter Three introduces the two-part theoretical framework for this research, which draws upon interactional theories from the group studies and community development literature. This theoretical framework provides both a theoretical basis and rational approach for studying three major elements of ecovillages – community-building, community dynamics, and capacity-building – in order to better understand potential social organization of sustainable communities in a post-carbon world. This theoretical discussion reveals that the processes of building cooperative communities and building functional groups are very similar processes - each requiring a focus on healthy relationships based on trust, and structural elements that foster interactions, communication, interdependence, and cohesiveness - and that these processes are

foundational to the development of community capacity for cohabitation and collaboration.

Chapter Four utilizes the categories of community building, community dynamics, and capacity-building, which were identified through the theoretical framework, and reviews the literature on ecovillages to provide examples of the ways that ecovillagers appear to build cooperative community and the capacity to live and work together, and to identify common dynamics that may challenge the community-building or capacity-building experience. This literature review provides useful context for understanding the general approach employed by ecovillages in order to foster a culture of partnership and belonging, and results in the identification of a set of categories of community building structures and processes, community dynamics challenges, and capacity-building tools and skills.

The methodology for studying the Whole Village experience is outlined in Chapter Five. A case study approach, involving document review, participant-observation, and interviews, was utilized in order to gain in-depth information and the perspectives of Whole Villagers on the successes and challenges of creating sustainable community, with particular consideration of community-building and capacity-building efforts, and the dynamics that influenced or impacted these efforts. On-site study was conducted from January 2014 to May 2014, and was instrumental for addressing the research questions developed for this study.

The findings of this field study are outlined in Chapter Six. They reveal active community-building and capacity-building efforts at Whole Village, which contribute to

group cohesiveness and healthy inter-personal relationships. As well, they reveal a community culture that values sustainability, conservation, inclusivity, interdependence, and a mix of individualism and collectivism. However, they also reveal challenging community dynamics which contribute to variability in feelings of trust and belonging. The community structures, processes, and circumstances that fuel these challenging dynamics are presented. In addition, this chapter provides the perspectives of Whole Villagers, who reflect on their successes and challenges building community and community capacity for cohabitation and collaboration, and address the question of what it will take to create a socially sustainable community at Whole Village.

A discussion of the findings is undertaken in Chapter Seven, which reflects on the theoretical underpinnings of this study, and the generalized ecovillage experience that was extrapolated from the literature review. This discussion provides considerations for creating sustainable community at Whole Village.

Concluding remarks, including what this research can contribute to an academic understanding of how to create sustainable community in a post-carbon world is presented in the final chapter.

Chapter Two: Contextualizing the research

In this chapter I provide context for research into how ecovillagers build the capacity to live and work together toward sustainable community. I begin with a critical look at the concept of sustainability, and ultimately build a case for the need to live differently on this planet. Alternative paradigms for development and society are presented, centred on the building of collaborative communities. These communities are grounded in the principles of bioregionalism and permaculture, and aim for material sufficiency and resilience through cooperation. Furthermore, they are guided by a worldview with an extended notion of *full* human community, encompassing humans, nature, and spirit, and which understands that all life fundamentally exists through interdependence. Ecovillages are presented as a model of the type of collaborative community we need to create sustainable societies.

2.1   What is sustainability?

Sustainability is an often used and poorly defined term. It is perceived, at one extreme as nothing more than a feel-good buzzword with little meaning or substance (Dunning 2006), and at the other as an important but unfocused concept like 'liberty' or 'justice' (Blewitt 2008). According to Meltzer, the concept originated in current discourse in the 1970s when the influential paper *Blueprint for Survival* used the term in reference to the 'unsustainable' industrial way of life (2005: 1)[4]. However, use of the term in the environmental and development fields gained traction after 1987, when the term *sustainable development* was used in the Brundtland Commission's report *Our*

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[4]There is some debate as to whether this book actually sparked the sustainability discourse, though it is popularly believed so (see for example Sumner 2005, pg. 80).

Common Future (Worldwatch Institute 2013), which defined it as development which "meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (WCED 1987: 43)."While the report did provide some recommendations as to how such development might be achieved, the vagueness of the definition has ensured that no unified conception of sustainability has ever come to be, and so it is often quite difficult to determine what is meant exactly when the term is used (e.g. what are sustainable jeans?). Furthermore, as usage of the term gains in popularity, often based on needs and proclivities (Meltzer 2005), misuse fuels misconception and threatens to render the term meaningless. In fact, according to the Worldwatch Institute, most common usage of the term 'sustainable' is conflated with the adjective 'green', with the actions, activities or products these terms are applied to being no more than "a little better for the environment than the alternative (2013: 5)." Consequently, the Worldwatch Institute has suggested that we are now living in the "age of *sustainababble* (2013: 3)" (emphasis in original).This is problematic, as mounting evidence of worsening environmental, economic, and social circumstances, suggests that determining how to live sustainably on this planet is more crucial than ever (Worldwatch Institute 2013).

Most attempts to define the term 'sustainable' refer to the notions of continuity, futurity and viability, and to the three spheres of environment, economy, and society (Meltzer 2005; Worldwatch Institute 2013). Often the concept of sustainability is depicted as three intersecting circles, with 'sustainability' being achieved by balancing needs within the three spheres of economy, environment and society (shown as the point where the three spheres intersect). However, Litfin (2013) argues that this balancing act, which suggests there is some 'sweet spot' that can be found in the middle, is not an

accurate depiction of what might in fact be sustainable. An alternative is the depiction of three concentric circles, with the economy represented as a subset of society, and society placed within the all encompassing sphere of environment (or ecology). The intention of such a depiction is to illustrate that a healthy economy is dependent on a healthy society, and a healthy society is dependent on a healthy environment. Furthermore, Litfin believes one of the problems with the 'three-legged stool' approach to sustainability, it that it ignores the inner dimension – "deeper questions of meaning and cosmological belonging that have informed human existence for ages (2013: 30)." So she suggests another depiction, one of a four-sided house, each side with a window looking in, and each window having a view of all the other three; she labels these windows: ecology, economics, community and consciousness (or E2C2 as she calls it). To Litfin, each of these windows provides a different view inside the house (our 'planetary household'), but each is valid and essential. Furthermore, these dimensions are interconnected – reflecting and refracting – taking on "…a dynamic, self-reinforcing, character (2013:31)." Litfin's depiction of sustainability is useful because it highlights the need to view issues from all four perspectives, but it still requires an understanding of what would in fact be 'sustainable' from each perspective. Therefore, I will provide a brief overview of the sustainability concept from each perspective below, as articulated by sustainability theorists of a predominately 'political/ human ecology' persuasion, to conceptualize a way of living and being on this planet that could in fact be 'sustainable'.

2.1.1 Ecology

The *ecological footprint* is a tool to measure ecosystem productivity against human usage, and the latest global calculation shows that we are currently in 'ecological

overshoot' by as much as 50% (Moore & Rees 2013). This means we are collectively using 50% more resources than the Earth can produce (i.e. living on the equivalent of 1.5 Earths worth of resources). Furthermore, usage differs based on lifestyle and location, with the Western, North American lifestyle being the most resource intense. The impact of this intensive resource use, combined with the associated pollution (e.g. greenhouse gases), is increasingly evident (for example, food system disruptions due to changing climate patterns; water shortages; higher incidence of extreme weather events; toxics in the environment linked to cancer), and presents significant challenges for the survival of ecosystems and the ability of humans to meet their material needs. Compounding these challenges is the uncertainty of the state of the global biophysical environment, which remained relatively stable throughout the Holocene era in which humanity thrived. An attempt to measure the state of Earth's biophysical processes – called 'planetary boundaries' – has shown that 3 of 9 of these critical processes– parameters causing climate change, rate of biodiversity loss, and nitrogen cycle disruption – have been exceeded, meaning that increased instability and unpredictability in global biophysical conditions is expected (Folke 2013). Given the dramatic change in the biophysical conditions of the Earth, and the role human activity has played in creating these conditions, we have entered a whole new geologic era - the Anthropocene (Folke 2013) – which will require significant adaptation of human activity, in uncertain conditions, if we are to remain a viable entity on this planet. Furthermore, as the calculations of Moore and Rees (2013) point out, getting to 'one planet living' cannot be achieved by even the most significant 'greening' of current lifestyles (e.g. eating a mostly vegan diet; living in a passive solar house; never driving a car or flying in a plane) within current global

patterns of goods and services provision. For Moore and Rees (2013), getting to one-planet living requires addressing the systems which support our lifestyles – such as globalization and the mass transport of goods, and capitalist-based growth. Essentially, we need to learn to live within our ecological means, which are defined by where we live.

2.1.2 Economy

Economic growth as a means to prosperity and happiness has been at the heart of the human story in the industrial age, but evidence of the impact of this unfettered growth on a finite planet (as demonstrated above), shows it is clearly an unsustainable approach to meeting human needs. To put a 'human face' on the impact of unsustainable growth (and the corporate interests it serves), we need only to think about the decimation of livelihoods in Eastern Canada with the collapse of the cod fisheries, or the countless farmer suicides in India which have been spurred by crippling debt caused by increased costs of inputs (controlled by multi-nationals) and decreases in soil fertility and steady rainfall. Ultimately, the growth paradigm has proven ineffective in achieving prosperity, in the broadest sense (i.e. thriving), as every alternative measure of human well-being (i.e. alternative to the money indicator, Gross Domestic Product) shows - "…quality of life in the industrialised world peaked in the mid-1970s and has been going downhill ever since (Dawson 2006: 11)."

Einstein is famous for saying that problems cannot be solved using the same thinking that created them in the first place, and that is exactly the problem with the *sustainable development* solution presented in the WCED's 1987 report, *Our Common Future*. That report couched 'solutions' in continued but 'better' economic expansion; for instance, the report states, "We see instead the possibility for a new era of economic

growth, one that must be based on policies that sustain and expand the environmental resource base. And we believe such growth to be absolutely essential to relieve the great poverty that is deepening in much of the developing world (WCED 1987: 11)." Furthermore, the WCED report maintained the primacy of industry in meeting human needs: "Many essential human needs can be met only through goods and services provided by industry, and the shift to sustainable development must be powered by a continuing flow of wealth from industry (1987: 19)." In other words, the authors of the WCED report believed that achieving sustainability could only happen through improvements to the industrial age's way of operating. This myopic view of economy, seen through the lens of capitalism/neoliberalism[5], is likely why governments and businesses, who claim to be working toward 'sustainability', have merely 'tweaked' business-as-usual, and the unsustainable, industrial way of life critiqued in *Blueprint for Survival* remains largely unchanged.

Countless academics and activists have critiqued neoliberalism and globalization[6], and the unfettered economic growth they support, and identified them as the root causes of all current planetary crises. For instance, Lockyer and Veteto say our planetary crises have been "…created in large part by hegemony of thought and practice that

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[5]'Neoliberalism' is a theory of political economic practices, which has dominated since the 1970s, that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade. Application of neoliberal theory has resulted in widespread deregulation, privatization, and withdrawal of the state from many areas of social provision, as well as increases in military, defense, police, and legal structures to protect private property. Neoliberalism values market exchange as 'an ethic in itself', capable of acting as a guide to all human action (Harvey 2005).

[6] 'Globalization' refers to the trend toward international integration of economics and culture, facilitated through global connections and trade. Although it can be argued that globalization has had positive impacts on society, for example through global communication systems, there is a large body of knowledge that speaks to the negative impacts of globalization. See for example Sumner (2003) that lists impacts such as: a widening gap between rich and poor, growing alienation in a wired world, increased environmental degradation and a propensity for war that targets the poorer nations of the earth.

ontologically separates humans from nature, rationalizes the externalization of the social and environmental costs of production and consumption, justifies extreme inequality, and sees solutions only in a continuation of the same systems that generated the problems in the first place (2013: 1)." Furthermore, as Dawson (2006) points out, it is not merely unfettered growth which needs to change, but the spatial scale of our economic activity as well – from global to local. He points to the fact that the globalized economic system is under constant threat of collapse by 'crises' such as: rising fuel prices or insurance damages associated with global warming; a drop in food supply due to the reduction of chemical inputs; decreased availability of water and soil fertility; financial market meltdown, and terrorist attacks with can affect vital supply lines. Adding to all these critiques, McIntosh suggests that our economic theory is flawed because its designers failed to understand the concept of economy itself, which, according to McIntosh - as a 'household management' approach (as per the root meaning of the term 'economy') - "…must serve the planetary household in the fullness of its community", including each other ('society'), the Earth ('soil'), and Self ('soul')(2008: 48-49).

Korten poses an alternative theory to the neoliberal, growth-driven development paradigm: that "Strong communities and material sufficiency are the true foundation of economic prosperity and security (2006:13)." To realize such prosperity, Korten calls for a re-orientation to supporting local economies and the building of communities "from the bottom up (2006:13)". Dawson (2006) echoes Korten's theory when he suggests that the only viable way forward for humanity is a return to decentralized economic systems

based on bioregional self sufficiency[7]. A primary aim of such re-localization efforts will

be to build *resilience* - which is often stressed as an important characteristic that will

enable individuals and communities to deal with the uncertainties arising from unstable

economic and financial systems, the threat of diminishing cheap oil reserves (on which

all of industrial society is based), and the structural impacts expected to result from

climate change, including damage caused by increased frequency of natural disasters (van

Gelder 2010).   The three ingredients of a resilient system are: diversity, modularity, and

tight feedback (Hopkins 2008). Tight feedback means that a system is quickly alerted to a

problem, and can act to address it before it becomes insurmountable; diversity increases

the system's potential to address challenges; and modularity means the system can more

effectively self-organize in the face of broader network disruptions (Hopkins 2008: 55-

56). Resilience is the impetus for hundreds of *transition initiatives* appearing around the

globe, which "are actively and cooperatively creating happier, fairer and stronger

communities, places that work for the people living in them and are far better suited to

dealing with the shocks that'll accompany our economic and energy challenges and a

climate in chaos (Transition Network 2012)".

Ultimately, these calls for 're-localization' (e.g. Dawson 2006; Hopkins 2009;

Korten 2006; McKibben 2007) amount to an abandonment of individualism, materialism,

and competition, toward social and economic systems based on collectivism, sharing, and

cooperation. Building strong, place-based communities then, becomes the primary work

necessary for economic and ecological sustainability.

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[7] This is the basis of the bioregionalism paradigm, described in detail by Lockyer and Veteto (2013); it is also the approach adopted by the Transition Towns movement, which is striving to create resilient communities which will thrive in a 'post-carbon world' (see: Hopkins 2008).

2.1.3   Community

The primacy of economic growth and neoliberalism has focused much of society on material acquisition and individual competition in pursuit of ever-increasing personal wealth. However, this primary pursuit of money and 'stuff', and the oppressive state which supports this goal, comes at great cost, not only to the biophysical state of the planet, but also to our sense of well-being. Modern industrial society is characterized by alienation: we operate individually to meet our needs, and live separately in homes where we increasingly do not know our neighbours - conditions which are most acute among the affluent. Dawson (2006) attributes this alienation to the 'steam rolling' of community integrity, resulting from an industrial system that has favoured specialization, efficiency, mass production and consumption, and the free flow of capital and goods across the globe. This loss of community integrity has manifested social ills, such as poverty, violence and crime, substance abuse, depression and suicide (Dawson 2006). The neoliberal response, according to Dawson (2006), has been to maintain focus on the growth-through-trade agenda, under the assumption that the socially marginalized would benefit through a "trickle-down" from policies which foster economic growth. This approach has not restored community integrity, or enabled communities to become self-sufficient, while at the same time relying on continuous economic growth and the environmental devastation it incurs.

When Karen Litfin, a professor in international environmental politics at the University of Washington, talks about a viable path forward for humanity in light of the multi-faceted crises of peak oil and climate change, she likes to refer to the words of Benjamin Franklin, who was purported to have said to compatriots at the signing of the

US Declaration of Independence, "We must hang together…else, we shall most assuredly hang separately (quoted in Litfin 2013: 5)." For Litfin, the basis for a sustainable future is clearly cooperative communities. Similarly, Hanover College Philosophy professor, Robert J. Rosenthal, believes in the following 'profound truths', "… that human life is at its best in small, supportive, healthy communities, and that the only sustainable path for humanity is in the recovery and refinement of traditional community life (quoted in Dawson 2006: 11)." Korten would likely partially agree to Rosenthal's statements, but he warns that "…a complete return to traditional ways is neither possible nor appropriate (2006: 291)." Rather, he suggests we take lessons from traditional societies – such as organizing around 'living' instead of organizing around money – and that we apply these lessons to creating societies that are "…human, rooted in their place, and modern in their global connections, understanding, and use of technology (Korten 2006: 291)." Finally, from an ecological perspective, Meltzer says "*collaborative alternatives* are essential if we are to move towards a society where there is a lower level of material consumption (which from an ecological point of view is inevitable) without a corresponding reduction in the quality of life (2005: 168)". Together, these positions suggest that sustainability will require living and working together in collaborative communities of place. This would require us to determine: how do we restore the community that has been lost?

Block refers to *community* simply as being about "the experience of belonging", and thus, *community building* is simply about increasing the amount of belonging, or relatedness (2008: xii)." Just as industrial society has broken down a sense of belonging and community between humans, it has also broken down our sense of community or relatedness to nature (e.g. through urbanization). Block (2008) says that when there is no

sense of belonging or relatedness, there is no feeling of accountability, and no desire to nurture or protect; nor do we develop a strong conception of the impact that the destruction of the 'other' will have on ourselves. This would explain our behaviour toward nature, which has often times been likened to a 'cancer' destroying its host (Korten 2006; Litfin 2013). Litfin draws an analogy between our social relationships and our relationship with nature: quoting social theorist Philip Slater, she says that the approach to relationships in modern society can be likened to how we use toilets: "unwanted matter, unwanted difficulties, unwanted complexities, and obstacles" are thought to disappear when removed from our immediate vision, but the result of this approach is a decrease in "the knowledge, skill, resources, and motivation necessary to deal with them (2013:53)."Thus, re-building community is a function of believing that it's important, and having the capacity to do so.

Furthermore, Litfin (2013) presents the position that social sustainability is the foundation of ecological sustainability, and that, while understanding how to re-work the human-to-nature dynamic is essential to designing a more sustainable society, it can only be achieved if a collaborative human-to-human dynamic can be achieved. Litfin's assertion suggests we need to do more than restore 'community'; we need to ensure that people in communities can live and work together well. How to foster communities that can live and work well together will be articulated further in Chapter Three (Theoretical Framework) of this thesis, but before turning to that, I will discuss the concept of sustainability from Litfin's 4th 'window' – consciousness – which touches on the shift of mindset necessary to build cooperative, place-based, communities.

2.1.4   Consciousness

From their calculations on the state of the global *ecological footprint* and *planetary boundaries*, Moore and Rees conclude that the avoidance of environmental catastrophic and societal collapse will require nothing short of 'cultural transformation', including a "rewrite of our prevailing growth-oriented cultural narrative (2013:49)". There are a variety of themes that emerge from the literature, which describe the characteristics of the 'new' culture we need to bring into being; these include shifts from: a culture of 'power over' to *partnership* (Plant 1993; Korten 2006); *money* values to *life* values (Korten 2006; Sumner 2003), and *market* ethic to *land* ethic (Kasper 2008; Lockyer & Veteto 2013). Within these are concepts like shifting focus from: materialism to relationships, individualism to collectivism (community), and competition to cooperation. Furthermore, extensive discourse on how to build such a culture appears to be premised on a change of worldview, which includes a change in thought and action.

Korten (2006) believes that 'worldview' is a factor of human consciousness, and that the cultural shift to *Earth Community* - a partnership society which honours life – will be birthed by those with 'Inclusive' and 'Integral' worldviews, based on attaining the highest levels of human consciousness – the 4th and 5th orders - what he jointly calls "the *democratic orders of consciousness* (Korten 2006: 53)." Korten bases his position on the capacities of the Cultural and Spiritual Creatives of these orders (as he refers to them) to:

> "…understand complexity, identify with the well-being of the whole, have no interest in acquiring arbitrary power, and are unlikely to succumb to the manipulations of advertisers, propagandists, and demagogues. They encompass the whole within a greatly enlarged circle of individual identity and see

opportunities for the peaceful resolution of conflict and advancement of the

common good…(Korten 2006: 52)."

Furthermore, he sees these 'creatives' as embodying "…the human capacities for creative

self-direction and choice within a framework of responsibility to and for the whole";

capacities which he claims are "…the foundation of positive cultural innovation,

democracy, and the higher possibilities of our human nature (Korten 2006: 52)." Finally,

he claims that while these capacities are "within reach of each human", that "…they are

most likely to be achieved if intentionally cultivated by the individual and supported by

the community (Korten 2006:52)." Here, Korten aligns with Litfin (2013), who suggests

that achieving sustainability is both an 'inside' and 'outside' job.

Finally, McIntosh (2008) identifies three 'pillars' or full human community; in

addition to community with others and the Earth, he identifies community with Self (big

'S' – the essence of who we are, not little 's' – ego). Materialist pursuits alienate us from

Self – we fail to discover our authenticity, our whole selves, which Block suggests can

only be achieved in community, "…the container within which our longing to be is

fulfilled (2008: xii)." Eco-theologian Thomas Berry, among others, has suggested that

Earth's environmental crisis stems from a spiritual crisis – a kind of 'spiritual autism'

where we no longer feel our kinship with other life on this planet (Sternfeld 2006). For

this reason, McIntosh highlights the need for 'integral development' – a reconnection

with our spirit and the spirit of all beings, as part of what is necessary to build

community, and thus, achieve sustainability. Collectively considering the positions of

theorists such as Korten, McIntosh, and Berry, we see a pattern that suggests building a

sustainable society requires a shift in mindset to broaden the concept of 'community' so it

includes humans, nature, and spirit, and that the work to do so will be both an individual and community endeavour. Furthermore, this shift in mindset will impact not only how we relate to one another and the Earth, but also how we act – it will be the impetus to shift from competition to cooperation.

2.2 Getting to Sustainability – The three-part model of bioregionalism, permaculture and ecovillages

Moore and Rees (2013), and Korten (2006), among others, have suggested that any sustainability initiative should be guided by a new narrative, or story, which conveys the vision we aim to bring into being. Litfin (2013) suggests that one of the most compelling stories of our culture supports our sense of separateness from nature, and thus, the conquest of nature through technology so that we might be protected from its 'vagaries'. However, she believes that in this present planetary moment, when the sheer number of people on this planet results in environmental impacts which undermine the potential for the continuation of life itself, this conquest 'story' could be considered "evolutionarily maladaptive (2013: 4)." Like Korten (2006), she identifies the need for a new human story based on the interconnected nature of all life, and the notion that the well-being of the individual and the community are inseparable. Litfin (2013) suggests that the new story can be summed up with the word 'interdependence'. Furthermore, in the light of this new story, Litfin suggests that 'sustainability' is "just a dry word for our new story's central plotline: coming home to our place within the larger community of life that sustains us (2013: 5)."

Stories are ways to convey ideas, but models help us translate those ideas into action. Korten believes that the model for a transformed human society is found in nature.

Citing the works of biologists Mae-Wan Ho and Elisabet Sahtouris, he explains that all healthy, living systems are "…fundamentally cooperative, locally rooted, self-organizing enterprise(s) in which each individual organism is continuously balancing individual and group interests (Korten 2006: 14)." Consequently, he believes that building healthy, human living systems requires organizing them around the principles of partnership. Lockyer and Veteto (2013) have described ecovillages as 'ecotopian' models of an alternative development paradigm (alternative to modern liberal capitalism) "…grounded in a bioregional worldview and permaculture design principles (2013: 3)." Considered collectively, this 'trifecta' of bioregionalism, permaculture and ecovillages (Lockyer & Veteto 2013), appear to reflect a conceptual model of healthy human development, as described by Korten.

The first part of this three-part alternative development model – bioregionalism – provides the framework. Lockyer and Veteto describe the bioregional concept as one that, "envisions a re-grounding of culture and community within particular watersheds and ecosystems"; where "economic activities (are) dictated by ecological boundaries rather than arbitrary political divisions (2013: 8)", and where "local governance is the political ideal", characterized by empowered citizens governing their own bioregions based on an ecological worldview (2013: 9)." Part two of the model – permaculture – provides the ethically-grounded design principles for initiatives developed within a bioregional context (Lockyer & Veteto 2013). Permaculture principles – which mimic the patterns and relationships found in nature[8] - were originally conceived as a way to re-design

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[8] There are three ethical principles in permaculture: Earth care, people care and fair share. There are 12 design principles: 1) Use change creatively, 2) Observe and interact, 3) Catch and store energy, 4) Obtain a yield, 5) Self-regulate and accept feedback, 6) Use and value renewables, 7) Produce no waste, 8) Design

agriculture, but have since been recognized as applicable to the redesign of all human systems of production, consumption, and inhabitation. Accordingly, Bang says:

> "Permaculture looks for the patterns embedded in our natural world as inspirations for designing solutions to the many challenges we are presented with today. Permaculture encourages individuals to be resourceful and self-reliant and to become a conscious part of the solution to the many problems which face us both locally and globally. Permaculture means thinking carefully about our environment, our use of resources and how we supply our needs. It aims to create systems that will sustain not only for the present, but also for future generations. The idea is one of co-operation with nature and each other, of caring for the earth and its people (2005: 49)".

Referring to its holistic nature, Lockyer and Veteto describe permaculture as based on the fundamental recognition that economic viability, social justice, and a functioning ecology, are all interrelated (Lockyer&Veteto 2013:11). Finally, part three of the model – ecovillages – have often been described as 'living laboratories' of an alternative development paradigm (Dawson 2006; Litfin 2013; Lockyer and Veteto, 2013) – and thus, could be considered demonstration projects of communities designed based on permaculture principles and developed within a context of bioregionalism. As such, they may provide the working models necessary to guide development of Earth community, as called for by Korten. The next section will describe ecovillages in further detail in order to illustrate the elements of the model they provide.

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from pattern to detail, 9) Integrate, 10) Use small, slow solutions, 11) Use value and diversity, 12) Use edges and value the margins, Details at: www.permacultureprinciples.com

2.3 Ecovillages

Put simply, ecovillages are intentional communities, in rural or urban environments, which are formed with the goal of becoming socially, economically and ecologically sustainable (Bang 2005). When this category of intentional communities was originally identified (i.e. the term 'ecovillage' came into use), an ecovillage was defined as a "…human scale, full-featured settlement in which human activities are harmlessly integrated into the natural world in a way that is supportive of healthy human development, and can be successfully continued into the indefinite future (Gilman 1991, quoted in Dawson 2006:13)." However, Dawson believes describing ecovillages this way identifies what they strive to become, but aids little in our understanding of what they actually are. Thus, he identified five fundamental attributes and included them in the following definition of ecovillages:

> "Private citizens' initiatives in which the communitarian impulse is of central importance, that are seeking to win back some measure of control over community resources, that have a strong shared values base (often referred to as 'spirituality') and that act as centres of research, demonstration, and (in most cases) training (2006: 36)."

Similarly, Walker (2005) considers ecovillages to be communities where members live out shared values in a cooperative manner, through alternative social structures and economies. In addition, Lucas identifies peace and social justice as important aspects of the ecovillage approach to building sustainable community (in Foreword to Dawson 2006). These views on what ecovillages are, places them within the global, grassroots movement to live the 'new' partnership society paradigm.

Furthermore, as pointed out by both Litfin (2013) and Dawson (2013), the ecovillage concept is proving to be a relevant response to the 'unsustainability' of development in both the global North and South (East and West). According to Litfin, while the 'raison d'être' may differ for ecovillages in affluent versus less affluent countries (the former generally seeking to create communities to overcome social alienation and reduce material consumption, and the latter aiming to make existing villages economically and ecologically sustainable), all seem to share the following perceptions about the world:

- The web of life is sacred, and humanity is an integral part of that web.
- Global environmental trends are approaching a crisis point.
- Positive change will primarily come from the bottom up.
- Saying yes is a greater source of power than saying no (2013: 16).

Ecovillages could be considered, from a sociological and anthropological perspective, as the latest incarnation of the search for utopia, which has been a known human pursuit since the beginning of recorded history (and probably before that)[9]. From this perspective, ecovillages can likely trace the roots of their worldview back to the Celtic Christian monasteries of the 5th – 8th centuries which existed off the wild west coasts of Ireland and Scotland, and which Dawson describes as, "…small, decentralized, generally mixed-gender, only occasionally celibate, and dedicated to loving the land, celebrating the sacred and keeping alive the candle of learning in a time of profound darkness across Europe (2006: 7)." However, ecovillages are most commonly understood – particularly in the Global North, to be the most recent wave of what has been referred to as 'eco-

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[9]Claeys (2011) says that the concept of 'utopia' was made famous by Thomas More in 1516 with his publication Utopia. However, Claeys provides us with a history of utopia showing it was pursued long before that time. According to Claeys, "When our lives in this world deteriorate or are threatened, we react by cultivating a reinforced sense of familial harmony and ethnic, national and/or religious identity…to balance strife by privileging the communal, usually by making property and social classes more equal (2011:8)."

topianism', which began with the 1960s 'back to the land' and alternative agriculture movements (Lockyer & Veteto 2013). According to Dawson (2006), this most recent wave began to take root in the 1980s, and burgeoned in the 1990s, as a civil society response to the neoliberal agenda focused on growth and trade. However, Litfin (2013) maintains that their lineage is more diverse than that, with some beginning based on the ideals of self-sufficiency and spiritual inquiry that have historically characterized monasteries and ashrams and, more recently, Gandhian movements, and others, particularly in developing countries, arising from the participatory development and appropriate technology movements.

As part of their aim for a more self-sufficient and harmonious lifestyle, based on an 'eco-spiritual' belief system, eco-topias such as ecovillages seek to align their social and economic structures to the ecology that they inhabit - in effect, internalizing the externalities, or righting the wrongs, of the dominant economic approach (Dawson 2006; Kasper 2008; Lockyer & Veteto 2013). From a political economy perspective, this would be seen as an 'act of resistance' or demonstration of the 'politics of the possible'. Lockyer and Veteto (2013) also situate ecovillages from a political ecology perspective, describing them as living laboratories, based on a bioregionalism worldview, and designed according to the principles of permaculture. Furthermore, Kasper (2008) identifies them as an embodiment of the land ethic paradigm, which extends the notion of 'community' to all elements of the land, and understands that there is interdependence between all members of the land community. Thus, it could be said that ecovillages are attempting to live out the 'new' human story of interdependence, referred to earlier. All of these perspectives align with the original conception of ecovillages, which Dawson

claims intended them to be designed as a microcosm of broader society, emphasizing connections and relationships between activities, processes and structures (mirroring complexity theory and systems thinking), and in essence, becoming the "physical manifestation of a new holistic worldview (2006: 14)."

Essentially, these various perspectives identify ecovillages as private-citizen attempts to build sustainable communities – communities with a culture that challenges the predominate notions of progress, and pursues sustainability in a local direction through collaboration between humans and nature (Norberg-Hodge 2002). However, despite common philosophical/ideological starting points, the place-based nature of ecovillages has given rise to a stunning diversity of them worldwide. As Litfin states: "Ecovillages are diverse in every way you can imagine – cultural, architectural, economic, climatic…" ranging in size from "like a big family" to "bigger than some small towns" and espousing "beliefs rooted in all the major world religions, paganism, and atheism, as well as by a spectrum of moral codes (2013: 10)."

2.4 Why study ecovillages?

Lockyer and Veteto suggest that, "Despite our best efforts, we do not know exactly what a sustainable society looks like (2013: 1)", but they believe that, "…in the current global context of increasingly negative news about interrelated social and environmental conditions, it is time to put forward work that is solution-focused rather than problem-oriented (2013: 2)". According to Litfin, we need modern-day models that can show us how to live "smaller, slower, and closer", and ecovillages provide these models (Litfin 2013: 63). Also, while ecovillages are not the only response to the growing global awareness that the way we currently live on this planet is fundamentally

unsustainable, Norberg-Hodge (2002) suggests that, due to their holistic nature, they may perhaps be the most important models to consider. Similarly, Litfin finds them so compelling "because they weave together the various strands of sustainability into integrated wholes at the level of everyday life and because they've sprung up spontaneously all over the world (2013: 3)."

Lockyer and Veteto (2013) call ecovillages "living laboratories" that are redesigning real-world communities according to the principles of ecology. They go on to suggest that ethnographically-informed studies of these place-based eco-communities, looking at both their successes and challenges, could contribute to answering the age-old, yet increasingly relevant, question of how should we live, or as they put it "How can we create sustainable communities and livelihoods (2013: 2)?" Yet, despite the proliferation of ecovillages in recent decades[10] , growing recognition of their importance as potential models of sustainable community (Dawson 2008; Litfin 2013; Lockyer & Veteto 2013), and rising threats which demonstrate the unsustainability of the current global development path (e.g. climate change) and the need for workable alternatives, ecovillages remain largely on the fringes of academic study. However, recent exceptions include Liftin's (2013) sociological study of 14 ecovillages globally, and Lockyer and Veteto's (2013) compilation of articles on ecovillages from the anthropological discipline, which suggest that further study of ecovillages, in order to undertake an alternative discourse that promotes a localized approach to sustainable development, is warranted and should be considered by various academic disciplines.

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[10] The 2010 edition of the Communities Directory shows North American listings of intentional communities has jumped from 304 in 1990 to 1055 in 2010. In 2007, only 7% of all communities described themselves as ecovillages, and by 2010 that grew to 32%. The Fellowship of Intentional Communities describes this growth as a "movement…like a vehicle with no one behind the wheel (Schaub 2010)".

Much can potentially be learned from the ecovillage model about how to build alternative human constructs that are economically, environmentally and socially sustainable. However, as suggested by one ecovillager, perhaps "...the real gift an ecovillage offers is to show the world how people can live together (quoted in Litfin 2013: 112)". To this end, Litifin's work provides a useful framework for understanding the lessons ecovillages can teach in terms of building sustainable community. For instance, from the perspective of 'community', Litfin (2013) identifies ecovillages as demonstrating a 'culture of belonging', which is built and maintained through:

- A shared vision which transcends personal differences;
- An inclusive but efficient decision-making process;
- Development of communication skills (to work with conflict, for instance), drawing on practices such as non-violent communication and compassionate listening;
- Opportunities for non-verbal communication, such as through song, dance, celebration or collective work;
- Incorporating children;
- Sharing the joys and sorrows of life, and
- Continuous learning and embodiment of what is learned.

As referenced earlier, 'belonging' is a key determinant in relating to a group, and provides the motivation for collaboration. However, many of the supporting elements of the 'culture of belonging' described by Litfin are likely also what contributes to ecovillagers building capacity to live and work together. For this reason, I have undertaken a literature review, articulated in Chapter Four of this thesis, which distinguishes between the concepts of community-building and capacity-building, and demonstrates how ecovillages do both in order to live and work together to create sustainable community. The theoretical framework for analyzing community-building and capacity-building in ecovillages is provided in Chapter Three of this thesis.

2.5   Chapter conclusion

In this chapter I undertook a critical examination of the concept of sustainability, utilizing Litfin's 4-window framework, considering elements of ecology, economy, community, and consciousness, in order to articulate that modern social, economic, and political constructs are fundamentally unsustainable. Furthermore, referencing leading sustainability social theorists, I presented the position that the only viable way out of the global sustainability crisis is through cooperative, place-based communities, rooted in bioregional economies, and built from the ground up. These communities would differ from village communities of the past, in that they would take advantage of advances in communication and technology, and be based on a broadened notion of community to include both the human and natural world. Ultimately, these communities would embody a 'new' culture that has shifted from: 'power over' to partnership; money values to life values, and market ethic to land ethic. To do so would require shifting focus from: materialism to relationships, individualism to collectivism, and competition to cooperation. Furthermore, this shift would be facilitated by integral development, cultivated by the individual and supported by community, and guided by the new human story of 'interdependence'.

Korten asserted that models for these communities could be found in nature, which is a "…fundamentally cooperative, locally rooted, self-organizing enterprise in which each individual organism is continuously balancing individual and group interests (Korten 2006:14)." Furthermore, ecovillage proponents have suggested that ecovillages are modeling this systems-based conception of viable human communities, acting as living laboratories, grounded in a bioregional worldview and permaculture principles, where the shift to the new culture of partnership is being experimented with and

demonstrated (e.g. Dawson 2006; Litfin 2013; Kunze 2012). In addition, as Litfin (2013) has suggested, while demonstrating how to rework the human to nature dynamic is important, demonstrating how to rework the 'human to human' dynamic, so that we may live and work together well to build sustainable community, may be one of the most valuable lessons that ecovillages have to share. Litfin provides a starting point for further consideration of community-building and capacity-building in collaborative communities such as ecovillages, by identifying how they build a 'culture of belonging'. However, this is insufficient for rigorous study on the topic of community and capacity building in ecovillages. Thus, the next chapter builds upon this starting point, and develops a more robust theoretical framework for my research. The framework draws from both the community development and group studies disciplines.

Chapter Three: Theoretical framework

This thesis is concerned with how ecovillagers build the capacity to live and work together, in order to achieve their vision of a sustainable community. In this case, there are two elements of community capacity-building to consider: living together and working together; both have a common community-building foundation. As a community-building and capacity-building study, with an overarching concept of building sustainable community, it is appropriate to conduct this research using a sustainable community development framework. However, given that the community under study is a small, intentional community (i.e. planned group), also warrants consideration of group dynamics theory. While stemming from various disciplinary backgrounds – including psychology, sociology, anthropology, planning, and community development - there are intersections between the theoretical frameworks of sustainable community development and group dynamics theory, in particular respecting the inter-personal processes (e.g. trust and relationship building) and community/group structure that make cooperation possible. This chapter provides an overview of the two theoretical frameworks, how they are relevant to the research topic, how they are related, and how they will be applied in this study.

3.1   Group dynamics theory

Every group has its goals, but the only way to achieve them is to ensure that the group can stay together and work together effectively. For ecovillages, the ultimate goal is to create a sustainable community – ecologically, economically, socially, and sometimes, spiritually. Understanding how ecovillagers come together, stay together, live together, and work together, to achieve sustainable community, can be considered

through the lens of group dynamics theory. This section provides an introduction to group dynamics theory, including its history and use, particularly as it applies to making collaborative groups more effective.

3.1.1 The study of groups and group dynamics

Groups are "…two or more individuals who are connected to one another by social relationships (Forsyth 2006: 3)." Groups tend to fall into one of two categories: *planned groups* deliberately formed for some purpose, either by their members or an external authority, or *emergent groups* which come into existence spontaneously (Forsyth 2006). According to Forsyth (2006), virtually all the activities of our lives, including working, learning, playing, and often sleeping, occur in groups, and thus, in order to understand humans we must understand their groups (Forsyth 2006). Kurt Lewin – often thought of as the grandfather of the study of groups (from a social psychology perspective) - saw the discipline as having ultimate importance in the improvement of society, stating that there "…is no hope of creating a better world without a deeper scientific insight into the function of leadership and culture, and of other essentials of group life (quoted in Forsyth 2006: 26)". The study of groups was advanced by both the sociology and psychology disciplines starting in the early 20th century (Forsyth 2006). However, as Forsyth (2006) notes, the contemporary study of groups has moved beyond these founding disciplines, and is now considered by all the social sciences from their various perspectives.

Forsyth defines 'group dynamics' as "…the influential interpersonal processes that take place in groups (2006: 1)." The scientific study of group dynamics was instigated by Kurt Lewin in the middle of the 20th century, who used the term to refer to

the way groups and individuals act and react to changing circumstances, and to the discipline devoted to the study of these dynamics (Forsyth 2006). Cartwright and Zander, two of the most prolific researchers in the field, provided a more substantive definition, calling the study of group dynamics a "field of inquiry dedicated to advancing knowledge about the nature of groups, the laws of their development, and their interrelations with individuals, other groups, and larger institutions (quoted in Forsyth 2006: 17)." Forsyth (2006) also explains that an understanding of group dynamics serves a variety of functions: it helps to describe the activities, processes, operations, and changes that transpire in social groups; it illuminates the interdependence of people in groups; and it provides insight on a group's capacity to promote social interaction, to create interrelationships between its members, to bind members together, and to accomplish goals. The study of group dynamics by psychology researchers is primarily interested in individual-level analysis, which seeks to explain individual behavior within a group, whereas sociological researchers focus on group-level analysis, which assumes that the actions of an individual are reflective of the state of a group (Forsyth 2006). Applied studies in group dynamics consider a vast array of topics, such as group development, influence and interaction, power, performance, conflict, change, and collective behavior.

3.1.2   Group qualities and group efficacy

This thesis is concerned with how ecovillagers (as a group) build the capacity to live and work together, in order to achieve their vision of a sustainable community. Therefore, this section provides a basis for understanding the qualities of a group and how they can impact group efficacy.

According to Forsyth, every group is a "…unique configuration of individuals, processes, and relationships (2006: 10)", but they all possess common properties and dynamics. Therefore, Forsyth maintains that, "When we study a group, we must go beyond its unique qualities to consider characteristics that appear consistently in most groups, no matter what their origin, purpose, or membership – qualities such as interaction, interdependence, structure, cohesiveness, and goals (2006: 10)." The following paragraphs provide considerations for each of these qualities, as described by Forsyth (2006), and highlight how they may impact group efficacy, including the achievement of group goals. For clarification, I note that in his description of goals, Forsyth appears to conflate the terms 'goal' and 'task', which is confusing, particularly as he uses the term 'goal' throughout his book to refer to the desired outcomes of a group, rather than a group quality. In fact, his description of 'goals' appears to highlight the nature of group 'tasks', not 'goals' at all. Further detail will be provided later in the relevant paragraph of this section.

The two types of interaction common in groups is *task interaction*, focused primarily on the group's work and goals (which could be as simple as planning a family vacation), and *relationship interaction*, which is focused on the interpersonal, social side of group life (Forsyth 2006). According to Forsyth, task interaction requires a group to coordinate skills, resources, and motivations, so that a group may accomplish their work, whereas relationship interaction is what sustains the "…emotional bonds linking the members to one another and to the group (2006: 11)." Thus, relationship interactions play an important role in group efficacy in task interactions, and ultimately, in the achievement of group goals.

According to Zander, an effective group is, "…a set of persons who interact with and depend on each other – who collaborate and behave in ways that suit mutual expectations (1994: 1)." Zander's description of an effective group leans heavily on the concept of interdependence. There are various types of interdependence. Relationship interaction often results in emotional interdependence, where members' feelings and experiences are partially determined by other group members (Forsyth 2006). However, interdependence may also be tangible, resulting from task interaction. Zander (1994) explains that interdependence is built when members feel they can count on the actions of others – a feeling that is based on cooperation (task interaction) and trust (relationship interaction).

Forsyth describes cohesiveness as, "The strength of the bonds linking individuals to the group, feelings of attraction for specific group members and the group itself, the unity of the group, and the degree to which the group members coordinate their efforts to achieve goals (2006: 15)." Here we see, as with the building of interdependence, the building of cohesiveness is the result of both task and relationship interaction. In addition, according to Zander (1994), the attractiveness of a group is based on members' beliefs that their needs can be satisfied by being a part of the group, meaning that cohesiveness is also fostered by trust and interdependence.

Forsyth (2006) points out that every group has a reason to exist, and group members are united in the pursuit of common *goals*. As pointed out earlier, he conflates the terms 'goal' and 'task', and in his description of *goals* essentially provides a categorization of group *tasks*. Using J. E. McGrath's 'task circumplex', he lists eight task types of group within four categories: 1) generating (ideas, plans), 2) choosing (solving

problems, decision-making), 3) negotiating (resolving conflicts of viewpoint, resolving conflicts of interest), and 4) executing (competing, performing). Some groups may perform all or most of these tasks, and some may concentrate on one or a few, dependent on the purpose of the group (Forsyth 2006). A community is likely to engage in most of these tasks, and it would need to decide on its goals, plan out how to achieve them, and engage in the action necessary to accomplish goals.

Group structure is described as the complex of roles (behaviours expected of people who occupy specific positions in the group), norms (behavioural standards for all), and the inter-member relations that organizes the group (Forsyth 2006). Some of the structural considerations identified by Forsyth (2006) include: when people join a group, they initially spend much of their time trying to come to terms with the requirements of their roles (12); conflicts often emerge as members violate norms (13); in group meetings, the opinions of members with higher status carry more weight (13); when several members form a subgroup they exert more influence on the rest of the group (13), and, when members chose to place themselves at the hub of the group's information exchange patterns, their influence over others increases (13). Group structure is an extremely important element that contributes to group efficacy and the achievement of group goals. In fact, Forsyth believes that, "If you had to choose only one aspect of a group to study, you would probably learn the most by studying its structure (2006: 13)", because "Roles, norms, and other structural aspects of groups…lie at the heart of their most dynamic processes (Forsyth 2006: 12)."

This subsection has shown that understanding group dynamics requires looking at the qualities of groups, and that ultimately, the effectiveness of a group is based on

positive dynamics (influential interpersonal processes), which is a factor of group

qualities, including the nature of its interactions, tasks and structure, and levels of

interdependence and cohesiveness. Furthermore, it appears that these qualities are inter-

related, and both build, and are built by, trust and a willingness to cooperate. For

instance, positive relationship interactions are likely to build trust and a willingness to

cooperate, which in turn foster interdependence and cohesiveness, and an even greater

level of trust and willingness to cooperate. This spiral process makes an important

contribution to group efficacy, which enables the group to achieve mutual goals.

While Forsyth's description of group qualities was intended to apply to any type

of group, it also provided insight on what contributes to making a group more

cooperative, which is of particular importance to so-called 'cooperative groups' like

ecovillages. The next section will provide further information on the nature and dynamics

of cooperative groups, in particular, the role of trust.

3.1.3   Understanding the dynamics of cooperative groups

According to social behaviour theory, cooperation is basic to human nature – we

have evolved to realize that our very survival requires cooperation with others – but our

behaviours are more heavily influenced by our social situation, rather than our nature,

and in Western society the social situation heavily favours competition (The Saylor

Foundation, n.d.). Thus, cooperation occurs when we trust the social situation – the

people and groups with whom we are interacting – and that they will behave in a way that

serves mutual benefit (The Saylor Foundation, n.d.). Trust was evidently an important

contributor to cooperation in the above discussion of the qualities of groups, and thus

appears to be essential for group efficacy and the achievement of group goals. In fact, this position is central to trust theory.

Jack Gibb's *Trust Theory*[11] postulates that the most effective groups are those with higher levels of trust. Gibb developed a scale of group trust with 10 levels, each with a distinct nature (from punitive to cosmic), and explained that, "…in most group contexts, people are scattered within two to three levels on (the) scale, and where there are wider discrepancies, it is hard for people to be in the same group (Sutherland 2012:35)." According to Gibb, most groups operate in levels 2-4 (from autocratic to advisory). However, there are also groups operating in trust level 5 (participatory) that are focused on resolving conflict and building consensus, and groups operating in levels 6-10 (emergent to cosmic) that Gibb refers to as leaderless groups which "are more creative, innovative, dynamic, and effective (Sutherland 2014:37)." Gibb ascribes the greater functionality of the groups with higher trust levels to their correlating higher levels of interdependence and community (stemming from greater openness and realization that builds from trust), where "…boundaries blur and there is ever more synergy and effectiveness (Sutherland 2012:37)." Sutherland concurs with Gibb, stating that trust is the foundation needed for individuals, relationships, and groups to thrive, and that without it, "People's perspectives and gifts are locked away…people 'show up' less and less over time. There is an ever-growing gap between what is expressed and what is underneath (Sutherland 2012:35)."

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[11]As described in Sutherland (2012), pgs. 33-50.

Mattessich and Monsey's (1992) research on collaborative[12] groups showed, in practice, trust is also considered important for efficacy. For their research they reviewed the literature on studies related to collaboration and identified 19 factors within 6 categories that appear to make collaboration effective. Factors were grouped into six categories: environment; membership; process/structure; communications; purpose, and resources (Mattessich & Monsey 1992: 11). Of the 19 factors identified that support effective collaboration, 3 were found to be most frequently cited; these were:

- Mutual respect, understanding and trust (including of cultural norms and values, expectations and limitations);

- Appropriate cross-section of members (i.e. those who are affected participate), and

- Open and frequent communication.

Spatig et al. (2010), also reviewed the collaboration literature as part of their study of a community development health partnership in West Virginia (WV), reaching the conclusion that a focus on healthy, trusting relationships was the key to collaboration success, and that to ignore relationship-building in favour of task completion could result in failure of the initiative. Furthermore, their study of the WV partnership confirmed these findings; as they explain, multiple organizations working together to a common purpose, but with different missions, leadership style, 'turf' issues and cultural differences, address these challenges by "…getting the 'right people' to the table and nurturing trusting, respectful, reciprocal relationships among them (Spatig et al. 2010: 9)."

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[12] Mattessich and Monsey (1992) make a distinction between cooperation – work involving multiple individuals, and collaboration – work involving multiple groups. Although the research was intended to be reflective of collaboration across organizations with a shared goal – such as governments, agencies and community groups – the findings could potentially be applied to cooperation within groups.

Given the importance of trust for positive group dynamics and the achievement of group goals, it seems reasonable to ask, how do cooperative groups build trust? The qualities of the group, as described above, are contributors to trust building. However, as Sutherland points out "…trust is a finely graduated choice for each person in a human system, such that people can choose to trust even in unlikely conditions", thus, the best anyone can do is to "…create the conditions that cultivate trust (2012: 34)." Starhawk (2011), who has been working with cooperative groups for 40 years, believes they cultivate trust when members communicate – sharing information, feelings and stories - and interact, in ways that enable them to get to know one another, realize they have a shared vision and values, and provide an opportunity to connect from both the heart and head. These opportunities to get to know one another come in many forms: meetings, celebrating and having fun together, having a chat, working together, and when dealing with conflict and crisis, for instance (Starhawk 2011). The WV partnership cultivated relationships early through a retreat, where "…lengthy personal introductions and a Native American Medicine Wheel activity invited participants to discuss their personalities and values, enabling them to get to know and trust each other more (Spatig et al. 2010: 11)." In addition, since the membership of the WV partnership was fluid over the course of the initiative, use of protocols, such as 'policing' of acronym use during meetings, was used to ensure newcomers felt comfortable and an air of exclusivity did not exist (Spatig et al. 2010). The cultivation of trust in ecovillages will be explored further in the literature review (Chapter Four) of this thesis.

3.1.4   Section conclusion: the effective group

A review of group dynamics theory suggests that learning to live and work together, to create sustainable community, relies on building effective groups. The effectiveness of a group is based on positive dynamics (influential interpersonal processes), which is a factor of group qualities: interactions, interdependence, cohesiveness, tasks and structure. These qualities both build, and are built by, trust and a willingness to cooperate. Ultimately, higher levels of trust result in greater group functionality. The building of trust is a complex process, but it is understood to be nurtured by openness (communication and interaction) which fosters understanding and reciprocity. Furthermore, while both process and outcome are important for groups, as Spatig et al. state, task completion and the achievement of goals (outcomes), must be based on a foundation of relationship-building (process), that "pav(es) the way for consensus building, developing authentic shared visions, and a comfortableness with learning, change and growth (2010: 13)."

The theoretical framework provided by the study of group dynamics will be used in Chapter Four (literature review) of this thesis, to explore the ways that ecovillages build group efficacy in order to create sustainable community. This exploration will include: the building of relationships, including trust and a willingness to cooperate, through the group qualities of interaction, interdependence, cohesiveness, tasks and structure, and the dynamics that influence group efficacy. However, group qualities and dynamics are only a part of what makes a group effective – a group must also have skills, abilities and resources. Thus, the next section of this chapter provides a framework for community capacity building (within a sustainable community development framework), which will also influence the exploration undertaken in the literature review. These two

theoretical frameworks, and findings of the literature review, will be combined into a framework that will be used for the data collection and analysis components of this thesis.

3.2 Interactional theory of social organization and capacity-building for sustainable community development

3.2.1 What is 'community'?

The two most common current usages of the term 'community' refer to 'territory-free community', which is generally applied to social groupings or networks (e.g. the business community), and 'territory-based community', which is a geographically localized settlement (Theodori 2005). While there is no universally accepted definition of a territory-based community, Theodori identifies four common components of most sociological definitions, "shared territory, common life, collective actions, and mutual identity (2005: 662)". Furthermore, according to the interactional theory perspective of social organization, as articulated in the writings of Harold Kaufman and Kenneth Wilkinson, it is 'social interaction' that is "the thread that ties together the four ingredients of community (Theodori 2005: 663)". Using social interactional theory as a basis, Theodori defines 'community' as, "a place-oriented process of interrelated actions through which members of a local population express a shared sense of identity while engaging in the common concerns of life (2005: 662-663)". An ecovillage - a place-based group of people who have joined together intentionally to collectively pursue the common concerns of life (i.e. live, work and play) - fits well within Theodori's definition of community.

According to Day (2006), the sociological study of communities, which began early in the 20th century, has had a tendency to see 'true' community as a characteristic of pre-modern societies, where tight-knit relationships (or 'social solidarity') formed in geographic locations, often along kinship lines, whereas modern society is lamented to have resulted in a 'breakdown' of community due to a focus on associational relationships, often referred to as 'networks'. As such, Day states that there are a "…large number of sociologists and social commentators who have celebrated the virtues of small town and village life, the solidarity of various ethnic communities, and the warmth of relationships to be found among those who share common interests and goals…(2006: 16)." Among these is Amitai Etzioni, who Day refers to as "…the most celebrated recent advocate of communitarian values (2006: 15)." For Etzioni, the second half of the 20th century saw a rise in self-centered individualism which led to a decline in social harmony, solidarity and responsibility, and thus, he supports the notion of revival of community as a means to address the social ills of modern society (Day 2006). Etzioni views community as a place where people know and care for one another, and as such, he identifies a central feature of community as a "network of reciprocal obligations" (quoted in Day 2006: 15). According to Day (2006), Etzioni and other social theorists of a similar persuasion believe that obligations are stronger where people actually know and understand one another.

However, Day (2006) points out that this type of knowing and understanding of one another has become increasingly difficult in highly mobile contemporary societies which are less rooted in place. Kunze raises additional challenges for a revival of the concept of community in modern times; as she points out, modern individuals both long

for community and are skeptical of the control over the individual that it suggests, and thus are faced with "…a variety of dilemmas: freedom versus commitment; spontaneity versus consistency; creativity versus consumption; and adventure versus the humdrum of daily life (2012: 44)." Thus, one of the primary social questions respecting community today, is "Under contemporary conditions, is it possible to designate sets of social relationships that will foster the kinds of solidarity, and commitment to shared purposes and interests, that have been associated with communities in the past (Day 2006: 19)?" Kunze's answer is that to do so "…requires a completely new and creative social structure" – one that balances individual freedom with mutual long-term commitment (2012: 44).

3.2.2 Ecovillages – a post-carbon community model

Day (2006) suggests that the social arrangements that exist today, which have largely replaced 'community', are 'networks' and 'lifestyle groupings' that roughly equate to social movements, and that these new social arrangements fail to offer the "possibility of people joining together to act to maintain favoured ways of life, or engage in collective projects to change them (2006: 230)." However, he fails to consider ecovillages, which, as articulated in Chapter Two (Contextualization of research) of this thesis, have arisen as a direct response to the alienation and unsustainable way of life presented by modern society, and are models for the kind of sustainable community required in a post-carbon world. Day (2006) essentially dismisses intentional communities as exclusive and separated from the world, and the possibility that his opinion is shared across Community Studies scholars may explain why intentional communities and ecovillages are largely absent from the Community Studies literature.

However, there is a small, international group of scholars that have studied ecovillages and other intentional communities, who are attempting to advance the study of ecologically-focused intentional communities for their potential contribution to the intellectual debate on how to development more sustainable social structures for a post-carbon world (for example: Dawson 2006; Kasper 2008; Kirby 2003; Kunze 2012; Litfin 2013; Lockyer 2010; Miller 2001). They argue that, rather than being exclusive and separate from the world, ecologically-focused intentional communities, such as ecovillages, seek to embrace a high degree of diversity in areas such as philosophy, spirituality and lifestyle, and they are both locally and globally networked, for instance, through partnerships with educational institutions and organizations such as the Global Ecovillage Network. Furthermore, Kunze contends that, despite the assertions of sociologists who suggest that 'community' and the pursuit of freedom and individualism are incompatible, these intentional communities are demonstrating the possibility of the contrary, balancing "…individual freedom and self-realization on the one hand, and cooperation, responsibility, a sustainable lifestyle, and social security on the other hand…(2012: 53)." Thus, she believes they provide an opportunity to explore the construction of social structures and values that lead to sustainability (Kunze 2012). Specifically, ecovillages aim to achieve socio-political dimensions that:

(1) are founded consciously on the basis of an alternative vision of society,

(2) search and explore new ways of living with other people and with nature,

(3) develop group-building qualities through common aims, communal living, and a derived lifestyle, and

(4) strive for transformation of society (Kunze 2012: 46).

Thus, ecovillages provide us with a model of what 'community', as conceived from interactional theory, might look like in a post-carbon world. These communities fit Theodori's definition of place-based communities, and reflect the 'communitarian' values and 'networks of reciprocal obligations' advocated by Etzioni as necessary to combat the lack of solidarity and social ills of a highly individualized modern society. In other words, they are communities where people know, understand and care for one another. Furthermore, as described by Kunze, they are not mere networks, or lifestyle groupings, nor are they exclusive and separate from the world, as suggested by Day, but rather, they demonstrate a new social structure that balances individual freedom and mutual long-term commitment, which may be exactly the type of 'sustainable community' required for a post-carbon world. In the next section, interactional theory is considered to understand how such communities may develop.

3.2.3   Interactional theory and sustainable community development

Theodori (2005) is careful to point out that while local societies may consist of many of the conditions necessary for the manifestation of community, the existence of community is not guaranteed. Theodori explains that, according to interactional theory, in a local society there is social interaction within the 'social fields' that pursue interest-specific goals (e.g. economic development, environmental protection, education), and there are also actions within the 'community field' that are guided by an overarching interest in community structure, and aim to link and coordinate the actions of the social fields. To this end, the interactional theory perspective sees 'community development' as the "process of developing the community field" in a manner which is purposive, positive (i.e. improves the community) and structure-oriented. Theordori called this development

of community, which he suggests contributes to community resilience and longevity. He

distinguished this from development *in* community, which focuses on task

accomplishment (e.g. building buildings), which may improve the well-being of

community members but can have effects that are often transitory.

According to Theodori, the broader process of 'development of community'

exists in the "efforts of people" and involves "activities that establish and maintain

community-level relationships" by "establishing, fostering, and maintaining processes in

the community that encourage communication and cooperation (2005: 666-667)". In

essence, while both development *in* community and development *of* community

contribute to the well-being of the population, work to maintain positive relationships

across the group are essential for persistence of the community. Kunze (2012) appears to

apply a similar interactional lens to consideration of the development and maintenance of

sustainable community – the type of community described in Chapter Two of this thesis.

Upon completion of an extensive review of the literature on sustainable community

development, and field research over the course of seven years in ecologically-focused

intentional communities in Europe, Kunze claims that the interaction necessary for the

development and management of sustainable community will be "…achieved by

transparent, human-scale, and democratic organizational structures created and controlled

by the participants, and by a culture of non-violent communication and cooperation

(2012: 53)."

Community-building – as described through the lens of interactional theory –

does not occur naturally in a locale, but is the result of intentional interactions, fostered

by structures and processes designed to facilitate such interactions, that enable

communication and cooperation, trust and reciprocity. Described this way, interactional theory of community development almost exactly mirrors group dynamics theory and the building of effective groups. Collectively, these two theoretical approaches provide a solid framework for exploring community-building processes within ecovillages. Furthermore, as Kunze points out, if the goal is to build *sustainable* community, specific types of interactions should be observed; namely, ones that are transparent, occurring within a human-scale environment, are democratic, participant-controlled, communicated non-violently, and are cooperative.

An exploration of how ecovillages build community and effective groups is important foundational work for understanding how they build the capacity to live and work together to achieve sustainable community, but it is an incomplete picture. A useful analogy may be to consider an individual's transition from school to the workplace, and how the employer builds the capacity of the team to work together well. The new employee comes to the job with academic knowledge and some applicable skills, but likely knows very little about the organization – its processes and dynamics, for instance – or about the other members of the team and the most effective ways of working with them, and they may also lack specialized skills that are necessary for this workplace and might only be acquired 'on the job'. It is in the employer's best interest to ensure this new employee can be effectively integrated into the team, and that requires capacity-building, of both employee and organization (i.e. the whole community).

In a community, the ability to manage conflict is an example of the type of capacity that must be developed, both by the individual and the organization. Conflict in community is inevitable. In fact, Peck suggests that elevated levels of tension are signs of

a 'true' community, which is the "most alive of entities", and so must "pay the price", by learning to deal with conflict (1987: 137). There are two ways to resolve conflict: violently or non-violently. As Butler and Rothstein explain, "If war is the violent resolution of conflict, then peace is not the absence of conflict, but rather, the ability to resolve conflict without violence (2007: v)." According to Zander, conflict can in fact be useful if:

- Members critically evaluate one another's ideas;
- Participation among members is widely shared;
- Members are flexible in their ideas and actions;
- Responsible members try to summarize where the discussion is heading;
- Members deliberately work to find a conclusion they and others can accept;
- Members successfully influence colleagues and are influenced in turn by them,
- Members seek and underscore their agreements with one another (1994:116-117).

The capacity to do all these things that Zander suggests is not generally fostered in a competitive environment.

The next section introduces a framework for community capacity building to enable an understanding of how the capacities of sustainable community may be built.

3.2.4   Community capacity building: definition and operational framework

Chaskin (2001) reviewed the literature on community development for definitions of 'community capacity' and 'capacity building', and found that the focus of definitions varied in their emphasis, including: emphasis on the existence of elements such as commitment and skill; emphasis on participation of community members in relationship building, planning, decision-making and action; and emphasis on community competence and empowerment. Thus, he sought to "…craft a clear definition of community capacity and a systematic framework for understanding how it can be built and the mechanisms

through which it operates (Chaskin, 2001: 293)." His study resulted in the following

definition, which is widely used in the fields of community development and social work

or social service delivery (Marré & Weber 2010):

> "Community capacity is the interaction of human capital, organizational
> resources, and social capital existing within a given community that can be
> leveraged to solve collective problems and improve or maintain the well-being of
> a given community. It may operate through informal social processes and/or
> organized effort (Chaskin, 2001: 295)."

Marré and Weber (2010), note that while some of the literature sees community capacity

as a static condition most view it as a dynamic process. Furthermore, they maintain that

in order to "…understand why some communities succeed and some fail, a dynamic,

process-oriented view of community-capacity is needed (Marré & Weber 2010: 93)". To

this end, Chaskin developed a six-dimensional framework through which community

capacity can be operationalized, noting that, while there are core characteristics of

community capacity, it "…operates through the agency of individuals, organizations, and

networks to perform particular functions (2001: 295)." The following section outlines

Chaskin's framework for community capacity.

3.2.4.1 Chaskin's Six Dimensional Framework for Community Capacity[13]

Based on an extensive review of the community development literature, key

informant interviews, and case studies, Chaskin (2001) developed a multi-dimensional

framework to understand community capacity, how it is built, and how it is used.

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[13] In this section I have summarized the framework, as discussed in Chaskin (2001).

Dimension 1: Fundamental characteristics of community capacity: There are four fundamental characteristics of community capacity: 1) a sense of community, 2) a level of commitment among community members, 3) the ability to solve problems, and 4) access to resources.

Dimension 2: Levels of social agency: Community capacity is engaged through some combination of three levels of social agency – individuals, organizations, or networks. These levels may also be points of entry for interventions such as training and development. At the individual level, this would involve human capital (e.g. skills, knowledge, resources) and its availability as a collective resource (i.e. applied for collective good). At the organizational level, it applies to the ability to carry out its functions responsively, effectively, and efficiently. Networks refer to patterns of relations among individuals and organizations, or other collectives; the notion of social capital – positive social relations that provide a context for trust and support, and represent access to resources – is relevant to all types of networks.

Dimension 3: Functions of community capacity: Refers to the intent of engaging community capacity, for example, for: planning, governing, producing, informing, organizing, or mobilizing. The performance of these functions leads to two kinds of outcomes: 1) achievement of specific outcomes (e.g. better services)(dimension 6), or 2) an increase in sustainable community capacity overall (dimension 1). Community capacity may also be engaged to perform normative functions such as: promoting shared values, socialization, or informal social control.

Dimension 4: Strategies for building community capacity: Refers to the means through which community capacity is intentionally built or engaged, and is linked to community-building strategies like organizational development and the fostering of collaborative relations. The focus of these efforts may be programmatic or procedural. They may operate through informal social processes or organized, community-based processes. Also, it is important to note that, since community capacity is not a unitary thing, but resides in a community's individuals, formal organizations, and relational networks, strategies for building community capacity must focus on these components.

Dimension 5: Conditioning influences: These are mediating circumstances that either facilitate or inhibit community capacity and efforts to build it. For instance, a sense of community may be fostered through participation in problem-solving activities, but the likelihood of that participation will result from factors like residential stability and a sense of safety, which also contribute to increased social networks and social cohesion, and thus, a sense of community.

Dimension 6: Outcomes: Refers to community development outcomes sought, beyond the enhancement of community capacity.

Chaskin's six-dimensional framework for community capacity provides a useful framework for understanding the fundamental characteristics of community capacity, including highlighting the importance of the foundational work of community-building, and how community capacity may be operationalized to serve collective needs. In addition, his framework provides important points to consider respecting the development of community capacity, such as avenues for intervention (e.g. individual or

organizational training), as well as circumstances to consider that may influence the development of community capacity (e.g. a sense of community).

3.2.5   Section conclusion: capacity-building for sustainable communities

Theodori (2005) uses interactional theory to describe community as a place where people share an identity and engage together in the common concerns of life. Furthermore, this community is not the result simply of living in the same locale, but is built through structures and processes that allow people to get to know one another, care about each other, and want to help each other. This community-building – as with the development of effective groups – is predicated on trusting human relationships that foster communication and cooperation (which is very much a circular, reinforcing process). However, people socialized in a competitive environment are wary of trust. Thus, appropriate processes and structures must be in place so that trust can be built (e.g. a safe space for conversation where only respectful language is tolerated). In addition, individuals and organizations must have the necessary skills and resources to participate in this new environment.

Chaskin's (2001) six dimensional framework for community capacity provides a useful means to understand how such capacity is built and used. In dimension 1, the foundational element of community-building is evident. Throughout the capacity building process (as seen in the other dimensions), community building may also be further built or reinforced, and may in fact be the aim of the capacity-building process itself (dimension 6). Capacity-building in this framework is clearly both an individual and organizational endeavour, with the intent that capacity is being built to serve collective needs. Capacities include skills, knowledge and resources, that may be built and

mobilized through either organized training and development, or informal social processes.

3.3   Linking the theoretical frameworks

To conduct this research, I have chosen to incorporate two different theoretical frameworks: group dynamics theory and sustainable community development theory. I see these theoretical frameworks as complementary, and collectively they provide a more robust theoretical background for exploring ecovillage community capacity building for sustainable communities than either would provide alone. Figure 1 illustrates how these two theoretical frameworks complement one another, and can be collectively considered.

Figure 1: Relationship between theoretical frameworks
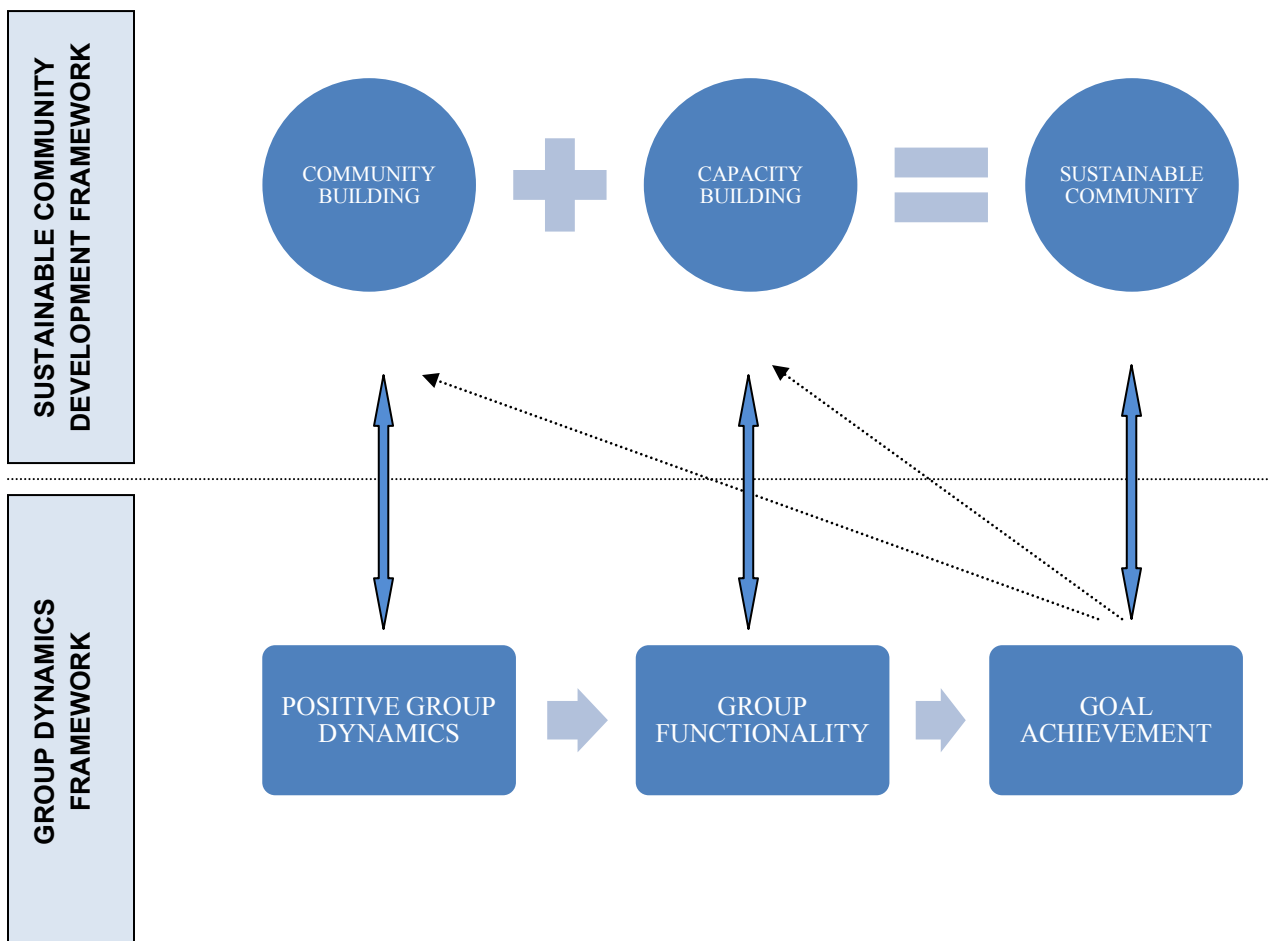
As described in this chapter, there is significant overlap between the processes of building positive group dynamics and building community. Sustainable community development theory focused predominately on describing the nature of community that needed to be built, describing community as a network of reciprocal obligations where people actually know and care about one another. Furthermore, community development (or community building) was described as a positive, purpose, structure-oriented process established and maintained by relationships (supported by communication and cooperation). Similarly, group dynamics theory highlighted the importance of structure and relationships, but provided a more detailed list of considerations, including qualities such as interactions, interdependence, tasks, and cohesiveness. In both theoretical frameworks, building community and positive group dynamics appears to be both predicated on, and to reinforce, trust and a willingness to cooperate. Furthermore, both community building and positive group dynamics were positioned to be foundational work for goal achievement. In group dynamics theory however, more insight is provided on what contributes to group efficacy (or functionality), which is part of what enables goal achievement. On the other hand, the sustainable community development framework takes considerations beyond group functionality, to include important considerations about community capacity, including skills, knowledge and resources, as well as the conditioning influences that might facilitate or inhibit the building of capacity (e.g. residential stability). Finally, both frameworks end with a consideration of goal achievement. In group dynamics theory, specific goals are set by the group based on their mission or purpose, and are achieved as a result of group functionality. Within a sustainable community development framework, the ultimate goal is sustainable

community; however, the framework for community capacity provided by Chaskin reveals that goals may also be specific, aimed at building community, or aimed at building capacity.

3.4   Chapter conclusion: theoretical framework

Social organization was radically transformed in the 20th century, resulting in a social fabric heavily entrenched in individualism and competition. This social organization is deemed incompatible for a post-carbon world that will need to learn how to live smaller, slower and closer. Re-localization, including the re-construction of place-based communities, is seen as a critical approach for the realization of a sustainable future. However, the building of community cannot be mandated or directed; it is a participant-led process. Modern people are generally unequipped to participate in this process, and carry around the perceptional baggage of an individualistic paradigm, which makes participation in a communal project difficult. However, those living in ecologically-focused intentional communities, including ecovillages, are building and experimenting with a radically different social organization based on cooperation. The theories of group dynamics and community capacity building, applied to the building of sustainable community, provide a framework for exploring how ecovillagers build the capacity to live and work together, in order to achieve their ultimate goal: their vision of a sustainable community.

Collectively, these theories provide rationale for exploring the social interactions of ecovillagers from the perspectives of: community-building, community dynamics, and capacity-building. The logic of this approach is supported by the findings of Kunze's (2012) 7-year study of the creation processes of sustainable structures in ecologically

focused intentional communities. Her research revealed common considerations of sustainable community management, including:

- though varied in their structure, organizational elements such as membership, decision-making, and property ownership, were major contributors to the effective functioning of the communities;
- social dynamics were a relevant consideration, and
- the building and running of the communities required individuals to have specialized social (e.g. communication) and organizational skills (Kunze 2012).

Her more salient and specific findings will be identified in the literature review section of this thesis. Overall however, her findings provide a rational approach for further research into how ecovillages build the capacity to live and work together in support of sustainable community, by considering: 1) community building and organizational elements, 2) community dynamics, and 3) capacity-building elements.

In the next chapter I will undertake a literature review to explore the ways that ecovillages build a sense of community, positive dynamics and group functionality, in order to create sustainable community. This exploration will include consideration of foundational work, such as: community structure and organization, and ways that healthy, trusting relationships and a willingness to cooperate are built. Furthermore, the literature review will explore the capacity needed (e.g. skills, abilities and resources) in order for ecovillagers to live and work together. Finally, the literature review will aim to identify common group dynamics challenges within ecovillages, that may impact on community building activities and that may need to be addressed by their capacity-building activities.

Chapter Four: Literature review

In Chapter Three, building effective groups and community was shown to be a function of very similar processes; both required a focus on healthy relationships based on trust. Group and community interactions, communication, interdependence, cohesiveness, and structure, all play a role in fostering these relationships, which are essential for the encouragement of cooperation and reciprocity. This chapter reviews the literature in order to identify the structures and processes utilized by ecovillages that provide opportunities for interaction and communication, as well as to build trust, interdependence, and cohesiveness.

4.1 Community building structures and processes

Following are examples of ecovillage community building activities that arise in the literature. The first four categories are tangible elements of community organizational structure, which, if well-organized can minimize what Diana Leafe Christian (2003) refers to as 'structural conflict'. As Christian explains, these are:

> "problems that arise when founders don't explicitly put certain processes in place or make certain important decisions at the outset, creating one or more omissions in their organizational structure. These built-in structural problems seem to function like time bombs. Several weeks, months, or even years into the community-forming process the group erupts in major conflict that could have been largely prevented if they had handled these issues early on. Naturally, this triggers a great deal of interpersonal conflict at the same time, making the initial structural conflict much worse (2003:7)."

The final two categories include processes that contribute to the intangible yet crucial elements of sustainable community building: group cohesion, interdependence/reciprocity, and consciousness-raising.

4.1.1 Purpose / Vision / Principles

This section contains a range of elements – vision, purpose, principles - that guide members in living and working together. This is a category of community-building that is quite 'messy' to sort out. For instance, there are differences in the use of the terms – such as 'purpose', which is referred to as both, identification of a group's 'reason for being' or 'guiding question' that everything else unfolds from (Sutherland 2012), as well as the equivalent of 'mission' – the concrete actions to bring a vision – the world you want to create – into being (Christian 2003).

Furthermore, there appears to be differing views on the extent to which each of these elements needs to be articulated in order for a group to live and work together well, as well as 'exceptions to every rule'. For instance, in respect to 'vision', Litfin states, "Group living of any kind requires a commitment to something higher than the fixtures and plumbing of life (2013:6)." She further suggests, "When the going gets rough, as it inevitably does, clarity of intention can help a community put aside factionalism and personality conflicts in service of a larger vision (2013:114)." Karin Sundberg (2013), who spent ten years living in intentional community, agrees that a clear, succinct, specific vision is essential for guiding members in making decisions, running a business and creating alignment within a community, and is very helpful for incoming people. Alternatively, Dee Hock, founder of 'chaordic design' believes that healthy organizations are not built from vision, but instead, from a clear articulation of purpose and principles "…deeply understood and commonly shared…(quoted in Sutherland 2012:51)." On the other hand, Sutherland (2012) suggests that both purpose and vision are important, as long as purpose is articulated first. And Christian concedes that, while she believes there

is, "…probably no more devastating source of structural conflict in community than various members having different visions for why you're there in the first place (2003: 7)", there are also "Some well-known, long-lived, apparently successful communities (that) don't have and never had a common vision, or at least, never wrote anything down (2003: 36)." Tolstoy Farm in Daveport, WA (USA) is such an example – a secular intentional rural community with only one founding principle "no one can be forced to leave", requires 'working things out', and so, despite few group processes and little philosophy that binds them together, the group has endured since 1963 (Sternfeld 2006: 114). Finally, regardless of how 'clear' an element is articulated, it appears that wide interpretation is always possible (Sundberg 2013). For instance, Litfin suggests that the guiding principles of 'permaculture', which are often seen adopted by ecovillages, "...are not enough to hold a community together. For one thing, people can have very different ideas about what it means to design from nature (2013: 20)."

Documenting the purpose, vision and principles of all ecovillages would be a significant task. Instead, below are a few examples which illustrate how varied they are, and how each ecovillage can take a unique approach to their development.

For instance, the well-known intentional community Findhorn in Scotland - a spiritual community (est. 1962), ecovillage (est.1985) and international centre for holistic learning - has the following 'founding principles':

- deep inner listening, and acting from that source of wisdom
- co-creation with the intelligence of nature
- service to the world.

According to documentation on Findhorn, these principles have remained at the centre of their activities over the years, but how they are expressed continues to change and grow,

reflecting both the evolution of the consciousness of the community and the needs of the world around them[14].

Another well-known ecovillage, Ecovillage at Ithaca (EVI) in Ithaca, New York, was founded under the auspices of the Center for Religion, Ethics, and Social Policy (CRESP) at Cornell University, and as such, has an educational mission: "To promote experiential learning about ways of meeting human needs for shelter, food, energy, livelihood and social connectedness that are aligned with the long term health and viability of Earth and all its inhabitants." Furthermore, they have developed a concrete goal: to build a replicable model of a cooperative, environmentally sensitive village that can also serve as a demonstration site for teaching principles of sustainability and permaculture.[15]

O.U.R. Ecovillage on Vancouver Island in British Columbia began with an overriding principle: that the project would be created "by the community, for the community and through the community" so that none of the overall project would be established for anyone's primary personal gain. This guiding principle led them to undertake a far-reaching visioning process that extended beyond those who live in the community, to involve representation from nearby neighbourhoods, various levels of government, people from corporate and educational backgrounds, and international visitors.[16]

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[14] Source: https://www.findhorn.org/
[15] Source: http://ecovillageithaca.org/evi/
[16] Source: http://ourecovillage.org/

Finally, the example of Lost Valley Educational Center's Meadowsong Ecovillage in Dexter, Oregon, shows how some ecovillages choose to translate their visions into a strategy and goals; their goals are:

- To provide affordable community housing for staff and resident supporters of the nonprofit center;
- To serve as a living laboratory for observation, research, hands-on learning, experimentation and education that is relevant to helping rural, suburban and urban areas become more sustainable communities;
- We acknowledge and enhance our connection to the spiritual basis of our lives;
- We foster self awareness and growth;
- We encourage fulfilling work and creative expression.
- We manage the land to restore and enhance diversity;
- We steward the land for our sustenance in food, medicine, and clean water;
- We construct and maintain affordable, eco-friendly homes and structures;
- We work to establish closed-loop systems using renewable resources;
- We practice Permaculture principles such as caring for the Earth, caring for people, conscious frugality, and sharing/reinvesting the surplus.
- We network with the local community to share knowledge, goods, services, and support;
- We demonstrate positive life ways though on-site educational and social opportunities;
- We serve as an information resource for communities and individuals around the world;
- We participate in the global network of ecovillages, communities, and others working towards positive change for the planet.[17]

Thus, just as unique as each ecovillage may be, so are their identified purpose, vision, principles, and the specific work they hope to accomplish. Furthermore, they range in nature, from dynamic (e.g. Findhorn principles) to specific (e.g. Lost Valley goals). In addition, while they have different ways of articulating their values and intentions, the majority appear to demonstrate a commitment to building sustainable community, and to being a model or learning centre for others.

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[17] Source: www.lostvalley.org

4.1.2   Membership process

The achievement of vision and goals is dependent on who joins the endeavour, and their capacity to live and work together; thus, an ecovillage's 'membership' could be a key factor in social sustainability, and achieving sustainable community.

Every intentional community appears to have some standards and process for accepting new members. For instance, Svanholm ecovillage in Denmark, founded in 1979, attributes some of its success to its lengthy membership process that aims to ensure new members can support themselves economically and emotionally (Litfin 2013). To this end, Svanholm "rarely admits recent divorcees or single-parent families (Litfin 2013: 22)." Christian (2003) stresses one primary consideration for membership, that potential new members are selected for 'emotional maturity'. According to Christian, this is a quality that is so important it could literally 'make or break' the community. As she states,

> "I've seen forming communities — even those with otherwise fine process skills — break apart in conflict and sometimes lawsuits because even just one member didn't have enough self-esteem to function well in a group. The person's "stuff came up"— as everyone's does in community — but theirs was too destructive for the group to absorb (Christian 2003: 221)".

Christian believes that intentional communities are magnets for emotionally-dysfunctional people (often with deep seeded wounds from childhood), who "…look to community to provide the loving family they never had (2003: 221)", which makes emotional maturity a concern for just about any ecovillage to deal with when considering new members. Furthermore, while she acknowledges that "most people naturally mature in community because of the (hopefully) constructive feedback they'll receive and the natural tendency to learn from the (hopefully) good communication skills modeled by

more experienced members", she believes that the "…effect appears to hinge on the willingness of the potential new member to learn and grow and change (2003: 221)."

Given that it is difficult to identify a person's level of 'woundedness', or their willingness to heal, in a short period of time, likely explains the lengthy membership processes adopted by most ecovillages and intentional communities. For instance, Dancing Rabbit ecovillage, a forming community in rural Missouri (USA), has a lengthy membership as follows:

- It starts with a 1-3 week visit (the 'visitor program'), which is designed to give visitors an experience of daily life at Dancing Rabbit, as well as an opportunity to learn elements of 'sustainable living' such as 'green' construction, inner sustainability & communication skills, and more;

- Next, interested persons can apply for the 'Residency Program' – a six-month period where a potential new member can live in the community, and participate in all aspects of community life, and behave as a member (with the exception of being able to block consensus during decision-making). The application involves writing a 'Letter of Intent' detailing reasons for wanting to join, potential contributions to the community, and how they intend to meet their needs (financial, social, spiritual, physical). The application process also involves an interview with the Membership and Residency Committee (MARC) – which, "rather than an inquisition, is more of an inquiry and reality check for both sides", and

- Finally, following the residency program, residents become eligible to apply for membership which again involves a review of the application, interview and recommendation by MARC, with two weeks given to all Dancing Rabbit members to comment on MARC's recommendation. Information on the Dancing Rabbit website says: "While this sounds scary, MARC and the Dancing Rabbit community in general work hard to keep the process kind and compassionate; usually there are no surprises."[18]

In the discourse on sustainable community, which seems to value 'inclusivity', it may be considered a contentious proposition to limit who can be part of the group, but Peck maintains that inclusiveness is "not an absolute", but that 'true' communities should

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[18] Source: www.dancingrabbit.org

continuously reach "…to extend themselves and justify any exclusivity (1987: 61)." As Kunze points out, working infrastructures, such as ecovillages, "…depend on active people creating and maintaining them and behaving responsibly toward the community (2012: 50)", which justifies the careful selection of new community members based on demonstrated commitment and responsible behaviour. Ecovillages appear to approach membership by balancing inclusivity and exclusivity, so that they may model sustainable community, while at the same time ensuring they can remain together so they can achieve their goals.

4.1.3   Decision-making process

'Consensus' appears to be the most popular decision-making process amongst ecovillages and other intentional communities. According to Sternfeld, the process was established by the Quakers over 350 years ago, and is based on a belief that "each person has some part of the truth and no one has all of it", and so the group must work to achieve unity (2006:10). Liftin clarifies the process as follows: "Consensus does not mean that everyone agrees on everything; it only means that people must be sufficiently satisfied not to block decisions (2013: 117)." Furthermore, she has found that, when it works well, the consensus process has the potential to express a deeper individualism than the voting process in representative democracies, as, rather than being overruled, minority views are considered and incorporated into better proposals (Litfin 2013). She likened this approach to how a healthy ecosystem works, stating "…each individual offers a unique and essential contribution to the collective intelligence of the whole (2013: 117)." In addition to achieving high quality decisions, Litfin suggests that consensus also builds stronger relationships.

Though Litfin maintains that she saw consensus working well, for the most part, in all the ecovillages she visited, she also witnessed, on the flipside, that when consensus does not work well, it essentially equates to "tyranny of the minority (2013: 117)." This may be the reason for communities that were once consensus-based, experimenting with alternative forms of decision-making, such as super-majority voting (where a prescribed majority is needed for action) and consent-based sociocracy (a decentralized form of governance with feedback loops within and amongst a community's sub-groups)(Litfin 2013). Certainly, there is debate currently within the intentional communities circuit as to whether or not consensus is the best approach for decision-making. This debate has been explicit in recent issues of the *Communities* periodical, most notably, in a three-part series called "Busting the Myth"[19], where three well-known group process consultants have provided their views on how well the consensus process is working for communities, including reflecting on the experiences of communities exploring other decision-making processes. Diana Leafe-Christian – one of the writers of the 'Busting the Myth' series - is a particularly strong advocate of sociocracy, which uses 'circles' – similar to committees - but with the authority to make decisions and implement projects within their sphere of authority, and 'double links', which involves representation in each circle between what are called 'higher' and 'lower' circles, through which information can flow two ways. She describes sociocracy – which has also been referred to as a form of 'social permaculture' (Rios 2011:20) - as "a whole-system self-governance method with a built-in (consent-based) decision-making process…", but also, "a method for measuring, evaluating, and, if needed, modifying an implemented proposal to…account

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[19] Full title: 'Busting the myth that consensus-with-unanimity is good for communities' – Part 1 published in *Communities* Magazine Issue #155; Part 2 in Issue #156, and Part 3 in Issue #158.

for changing circumstances…(Christian 2013: 61)." According to Christian (2013), sociocracy is a more efficient and effective system for making decisions, because it balances accountability with flexibility in approving and moving forward proposals, while also maintaining the inclusiveness and trust which results from consensus-based decision making. Melanie Rios (2011) from Lost Valley Educational Center / Meadowsong Ecovillage (Oregon, USA), describes some of the positive experiences at her ecovillage that resulted when a switch was made from consensus-based decision making (i.e. whole group decisions), to sociocracy (i.e. small group, consent-based decisions). One benefit she identified was greater engagement and faster decisions made by the small groups, over what was commonly experienced when decisions were made in large groups. Another benefit was derived from the process of electing a person within a group to undertake a task based on a multi-staged nomination process where nominators had to express their reasoning for a nomination. According to Rios, "The mood of a group after elections is often one of connection and trust because we've taken time to tell each other why we love and respect each other. The person who is charged with …executing the assigned tasks knows he or she is supported by the group… In this way, sociocracy is both participatory, in that each person in a circle has an equal voice in selecting someone to do the work, and effective, in that those who are selected to do the work are given the power to act (2011:23)."

Alternatively, The Farm in Summertown, Tennessee (USA) – an ecovillage / intentional community which was established in 1971, and once grew to over 1,500 people but now is home to about 200 - is an example of a community which uses a mixed consensus approach. According to Doug Stevenson (2012),

"Leaders are represented by people who have an established track record of making good decisions and who regularly demonstrate their love for the community through positive actions. We work toward consensus in small groups and use democracy on larger community issues. The board of directors and membership committees are our two elected decision making bodies. Numerous volunteer committees take on various issues, making recommendations to the board or membership and to the community at large."

While the answer to the question, what is the best group decision-making process for communities such as ecovillages?, is not abundantly clear, it does show how the consensus process is both being questioned and affirmed by groups who use it. Furthermore, while there are alternative forms of decision making being used by ecovillages and intentional communities – such as 'holacracy'[20] and the 'N Street Consensus Method'[21] – sociocracy appears to be the most common alternative being experimented with, and the consensus-process remains the most common decision-making process utilized by current groups. Unable to ascertain the best decision-making approach as a result of her one-year long ecovillage study, Litfin simply suggests to:

- Cultivate group mind without sacrificing individuality (decisions might take longer but they will be better), and to

- Practice decentralized leadership as trust and competency grows (2013: 121).

Ultimately, regardless of the decision-making approach being chosen by these collaborative communities, they all appear to strive for inclusiveness, trust, and effectiveness (i.e. making good decisions), all of which builds community and capacity to live and work together.

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[20] See: www.holacracy.org

[21] See: "How the 'N Street Consensus Method' Helps N Street Cohousing Thrive," Communities #157, Winter 2012.

4.1.4   Agreements / rules

According to Dee Hock, the pioneer of chaordic design, excessive structure (e.g. rules, regulations, procedures, and policies) is the main reason human systems fail to achieve their intended purpose, thus, the goal of chaordic design is to find a balance between excessive structure (order) and no structure (chaos), in order for social systems to be dynamic and effective, and for people to thrive (Sutherland 2012). However, most ecovillages that I have come across seem to lean toward more, rather than less, order. This order largely includes: rules / agreements that members must agree to live and act according to (i.e. allowed activities and behavior); design guidelines for infrastructure development on-site, and legal documents that outline the rights and responsibilities of land, real estate, and business owners.

For instance, The Farm adopted standards of conduct which were required of all members, which included: non-violence, vegetarianism, voluntary poverty (i.e. no materialism), no social position (i.e. equality), no unhealthy practices (e.g. no alcohol, coffee, or extreme diets), fiscal responsibility (e.g. thrift), personal responsibility (e.g. not taking advantage of others), no blame ("a form of social tyranny"), fair group process, and honest interest (Bates 1995).The Farm's agreements were largely reflective of the sentiments of the prevailing counter-culture during the time of its establishment in the 1970s; according to Bates (1995) they have been somewhat modified now.

In contrast, Dancing Rabbit's rules and agreements appear reflective of more recently established ecovillages. For instance, members are expected to contribute to meeting the community's stated goals and mission, participate in inclusive decision making, resolve conflicts peacefully, commit to pioneering a lifestyle that will serve as an

example of ecological sustainability (as per Sustainability Guidelines), agree to the 'Ecological Covenants' of the Dancing Rabbit Land Trust, pay established dues (including money and time), and give up membership upon request, in accordance with the bylaws of the community[22].

Rules and agreements, at times extensive, are established by ecovillages with the intention of guiding members toward living and working together effectively. Hock suggests the need to find a balanced structure in order to enable groups to thrive. However, Kunze believes that ecovillages do just that, as established rules are coupled with communication processes that "…keep formalized structures responsive and flexible to individuals and particular needs (2012: 53)". Ultimately, striking the right balance will require determining what structure will best enable them to meet their goals, while ensuring they stay together as a group.

4.1.5   The Intangibles: group cohesion, interdependence and reciprocity

Trust has been identified as an important aspect of community building, and ecovillages are fertile ground for the development of trust. In particular, they reveal how building group cohesion, interdependence and reciprocity are aided by, and build, trust, so that communities might live and work together effectively. Litfin suggests that trust is the basis for all cooperative activities in ecovillages: "If I were to assemble a list of best ecological and economic practices in ecovillages (for example, car-sharing, co-ownership of land and housing, or community-wide food production), it is quite likely that every one of them would require trust (2013:146)." Litfin believes that in an ecovillage,"…trust is built upon a gift economy of symbiotic relationships, with the key nutrients being honesty

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[22] Available at www.dancingrabbit.org

and compassion. This is especially critical during times of conflict. … Building trust can be a messy process, but when we come together authentically, something is born that is far greater than the sum of its parts… a 'culture of belonging' (2013: 147)." The experience of Kimchi Rylander, a resident of Earthaven ecovillage, provides an illustration of how trust is a form of equity (or 'social capital') in community life that is built up and reduced through an individual's actions within the community. When Kimchi, along with another resident, presented the community with a document (which became known as 'The Threats Document') that outlined actions they felt were necessary to restore 'the community's social fabric', and then threatened to block *all* community decisions until their suggested actions were taken, rather than co-creating solutions, they instigated what became known as the community's 'civil war'. According to Kimchi, this had the effect of reducing her 'social bank account' to zero (Litfin 2013: 119).

The building of trust is a process that unfolds over time, and is facilitated by various activities and events that compound a sense of belonging, such as eating together, working together, celebrating life together, and just simply interacting on a daily basis in the community, the quality of which may be impacted by community design. Following are examples of community activities and design found in ecovillages that appear to contribute to group cohesion, interdependence, reciprocity, and either build or are aided by trust.

4.1.5.1 Food and eating together

Food is a powerful factor in community life. All ecovillages engage in food production, at least to provide the community with some portion of their food needs, and often to produce food for sale as a source of income for one or more community

members. Food can also be a means through which values are expressed in community; for instance, as mentioned earlier, The Farm in Tenneessee adopted a vegetarian diet as their means of living harmoniously with the broader Earth community. Similarly, Sieben Linden in Germany developed a 'Peace Contract with Animals' that maintains that no animals be raised for slaughter in the community, and one of its neighbourhoods, Club 99 – which has managed to reduce its ecological footprint to just 10% of the German average – has adopted vegan eating and farming practices that use no animal products whatsoever, including as fertilizer (Litfin 2013). While not all ecovillages adopt such radical approaches to food production and consumption, most are expressing some level of greater environmental consciousness in their food practices; according to Litfin, in the ecovillages she visited, "Organic and local food, edible landscapes, compost bins, beekeeping, and activism against genetically modified food: these are ubiquitous (2013: 54)."

Furthermore, as Hopkins suggests, as an opportunity to build 'social glue', "eating together is highly recommended (2008: 165)." Almost every ecovillage seems to take this suggestion to heart, eating one or more meals together each week, or turning meetings into potlucks, and celebrating special events with a meal. Eating meals together is also an opportunity to take a break from the busyness of the day, and to catch up with one another in a manner less formal than the average community meeting. Konohana in Japan, for instance, shares close quarters and meals three times a day, but Litfin (2013) suggests the real 'community glue' is the intense post-dinner conversation which can go on all evening. According to Yeshe Kadro, who lives at Chenrezig in Australia, of all of their activities that build community feeling – making decisions by consensus, working

together, meditating together – "…the most important is simply eating lunch together. This is the time that we communicate the best, sharing our ideas, talking through problems, relating information from the larger community, and sometimes just having a good laugh together (quoted in Metcalf 1995: 125)."

Therefore, whether food is a means to express shared values, or an opportunity for communicating and strengthening relationships, connecting through food is an extremely important aspect of community building in ecovillages.

4.1.5.2 Working together

Working together can also be a powerful bonding experience: "…when we join together with like-minded souls to realize our ideals, the earthly pragmatism and nonverbal communication entailed in shared work can help us overcome discord, whether it's personality- or ideology-based (Litfin 2013: 128)." The members of the small Emerald Earth ecovillage in California (15 members), bonded over the labour-intensive practice of natural building; in their first few years they spent much of their time building together, establishing skills and a sense of community. Also, since it took a year to build a house, membership expanded slowly which made the process of bonding easier (Litfin 2013). In contrast, architect Robert Owen's 1824 utopian society experiment in Harmony, Indiana, which was not built by the labour of those who were to live there, is thought to have failed partly due to lack of community-building that would have resulted from shared satisfaction and unity of purpose if members had engaged in physically building the community rather than purchasing a ready-made community (Sternfeld 2006).

Sundberg (2013) also suggests that, while just living on a piece of land year after year can develop a feeling of rootedness, communal activities, like planting gardens, fixing infrastructure, and creating sacred spaces, contribute to being committed to helping a place and a community to flourish. Working together in this manner, not only strengthens community between people, but working on the land (literally, with your hands), is a form of practical engagement – fostering a knowing from doing – and is a means to develop the land ethic that Leopold considered integral for re-engagement with the broader community of the land (McIntosh 2008).

4.1.5.3 Ritual and celebration

Social cohesion is also built in ecovillages through shared rituals and celebrations, such as holidays and birthdays, and a variety of other events which provide opportunities for artistic and cultural expression. Litfin recounts: "When I asked ecovillagers about the experiences that brought the community together most strongly, many of them spoke about standing together in the face of serious illness and death. Some communities were grappling with questions that come with an aging population, and a few of the more established ones (like Findhorn and Auroville) had created their own cemeteries and rituals surrounding the dying process (2013: 142)." At Lost Valley Educational Center, rituals have been developed to celebrate events such as birthdays and the changing of the seasons, to honour transitions (e.g. becoming an elder), and to provide support during tough times (e.g. grieving a miscarriage or divorce) (Sundberg 2013). During these times, and also daily (e.g. before mealtime), Sundberg finds that their ritual of singing together is "…a simple and powerful way to uplift and literally harmonize the energy of the group (2013: 11)." According to Litfin, "Most communities I visited either had their

own singing group or were integrally involved with a local choir. Some, like Findhorn, have regular dances. Others, like UfaFabrik and ZEGG, organize huge cultural events for the wider public. In every case, the point is to strengthen community bonds through shared aesthetic experiences and rituals (2013: 138)."

Sigrid, a member of UfaFabrik ecovillage in Germany, explains how opportunities for nonverbal communication and bonding through the arts can make important contributions to effectively working and living together: "We can interact and have fun together beyond words and community issues. This gives us a bigger perspective. I might argue with someone in a meeting, but when I play music with him later, I see another side of him (quoted in Litfin 2013: 139)." Reflecting on the interplay between cultural expression, bonding, and collaborating within ecovillages, Litfin posits, "…it is culture, not words, that holds us together…when we explore the creative heights of our humanity, it's then easier for us to navigate its narcissistic depths (2013: 139)."

4.1.5.4 Community by design

Most people join an ecovillage for the purpose of living in community with others, and the design of the community can have a significant impact on the bonding experience that happens informally, through daily life interactions. For instance, some ecovillagers share homes, but those that do not often share other spaces, such as communal laundry and recreational areas, or common gardening space. Furthermore, residences are often close together, like at Ecovillage at Ithaca, where members live in one of three co-housing developments, each with their own common houses, and which face inward to a shared, pedestrian only courtyard, with car traffic limited to the exterior of the residential area (Walker 2005). This design has the dual benefit of conserving land

and resources, and providing ample opportunity for daily interaction between community members. Dancing Rabbit ecovillage is also being designed with these goals in mind: "We strive to cluster buildings to increase density and create positive social and ecological interactions between them (e.g. courtyards, shared infrastructure, etc.)."[23] However, as Guess points out, designing for community, and for sustainability, can be as simple as having a community clothesline: "A community clothesline does much more than dry clothes with solar power; it can help to build community. It teaches the need for better cooperation and communication, requires deeper attention to the rhythms of nature, and provides a place for quiet contemplation and good conversation as well (2013: 12)." Furthermore, she states, "Sometimes an unfinished conversation will carry over the next morning at the clothesline. Sometimes it is only at the clothesline where folks that don't normally make time to talk are standing still long enough to really check in with one another... the daily task of hanging laundry forces us to slow down and it keeps us connected to the earth, to one another... Guess 2013: 13)."

In sharp contrast, Litfin (2013) found that Crystal Waters, a permaculture ecovillage in Australia, had failed to build community cohesion through a variety of non-conducive physical and organizational design features, including: homes sold on the open market, no common meeting space, a distance between homes that reinforced car culture, and the only requirement for joining the community being to receive a copy of the by-laws.

Finally, the development of N Street Cohousing, in a suburban neighbourhood in Davis, California, shows that community building can sometimes result 'unintentionally',

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[23] Source: www.dancingrabbit.org

or through organic design. N Street began when a few neighbours took down their fences and started gathering frequently in the shared space they had created. In time, communal areas such as gardens and play structures were created, and joint social activities, such as eating together, became more frequent. Eventually, they decided to formalize the group and become a co-housing community, after which a communal kitchen and community center was built (Sternfeld 2006). However, N Street is somewhat of an anomaly amongst the groups I came across – most had intentionally formed as a community, and thus had to actively cultivate the conditions needed to build trust, group cohesion, and interdependence, in order for the endeavour to be successful.

Co-housing designer Charles Durrett stresses the importance of designing for community as an integral part in designing for sustainability. He says: "Yes, we're looking to have the lowest possible energy bills, the best natural ventilation, natural light…", but his main concern is, "Do people love living there? Is it a high-functioning community? – because that is *the* crux of sustainability. Above all else, if it doesn't work socially, why bother (2012: 49)."

4.1.6   Raising consciousness

The previous sub-sections identified how community structures and processes can be designed to nurture trust, group cohesion, and interdependence. Though to a great extent social in nature, examples such as Guess' community clothesline show how ecovillagers may strive to go beyond improved relationships with other humans, to improving their relationships with the whole Earth community. To do so, requires achieving one of Korten's higher levels of consciousness, which includes having an inclusive and integral worldview, recognizing the interdependence of all beings. Such

recognition is what is necessary to undertake a cultural shift, from domination to partnership, money values to life values, and market ethic to land ethic.

While it would require study beyond the scope of my research to determine whether or not ecovillages successfully foster the type of consciousness necessary to build Earth community, Litfin suggests that "…ecovillages offer fertile ground for the shift from individualism to synergistic interdependence (2013: 17)." Thus, here are just a few examples of how ecovillages express a desire for nurturing inclusive and integral consciousness.

At Earthaven ecovillage (Black Mountain, North Carolina, USA), residents share an eco-spiritual perspective, described as "…a reverence for the Earth and our land, and the belief that our land is alive and conscious and it's our sacred duty to honor and care for it (quoted in Sternfeld 2006: 30)." Another example is Sarvodaya (literally means the "awakening of all"), which is a collection of 15,000 traditional villages in Sri Lanka, reformed based on Gandhi's vision of a network of self-sufficient villages, which has been described by its founder, Dr. Ariyaratne, as "living in harmony with the cosmic laws of interdependence (Litfin 2013: 28)". Similarly, Sirius Community in Massachusetts (USA) strives to embody "the new planetary consciousness that honors the interconnectedness and sacredness of all living things (Sternfeld 2006: 100)." Finally, Kirby suggests that, based on his research on the experience of residents at Ecovillage at Ithaca (Ithaca, NY, USA), an ecovillage design that situates a compact, built form within a wild landscape, can foster "…an awareness of one's place in the larger scheme of things…", and can underscore a "…sense of belonging and communion with all life, in its wildest and most spiritual sense (2003: 331)."

4.1.7   Section conclusion

This section has demonstrated how ecovillages build community, including trust,

cohesion, and interdependence, in order to facilitate cooperation and reciprocity. Thus,

the culture they foster is one of partnership (with each other and the Earth) and of

belonging. They express these intentions in their founding documents, they choose

members who will commit to bringing this vision into being, they establish processes and

agreements that seek to build community and enable members to live and work together,

and continuously reinforce community bonds through sharing their lives, eating and

working together, in sadness and in joy. And while they may not all actively seek to raise

consciousness, they create environments where the inclusive and integrally conscious

may thrive.

4.2   Community dynamics

Ecovillage community-building – as described above – uses and enhances

community resources, both human and structural, to build a culture of partnership and

belonging in order to develop sustainable community. This community-building is

foundational work, but a review of the literature suggests the capacity to live and work

together in ecovillages also requires the application of certain tools and necessary social

skills (or competencies) to support: community participation and decision-making;

conflict and issue management; communication; inter-personal relating; and reflexivity

and personal growth. Later in this chapter I will outline these 'core competencies' and

provide examples of the tools used to foster collective capacity in these areas in

ecovillages. However, as previously mentioned, the literature suggests that an important

step between community-building and capacity-building is to understand the community

dynamics at play which present challenges for ecovillagers in living and working together, and may influence their capacity-building potential (i.e. 'conditioning influences', as per dimension 6 of Chaskin's community capacity framework – see Chapter Three). An understanding of these dynamics, and associated challenges, is important for determining what action is necessary to address them; for instance, should policy or organization changes be made, or is the acquisition and application of resources and skills necessary? Therefore, this section highlights common community dynamics challenges/tensions identified in the ecovillage literature.

Christian (2003) and Litfin (2013) suggest that the majority of challenging community dynamics or tensions faced by ecovillagers in living and working together stem from 'structural' conflict, which can be inherent in the vision or mission of the community; can be the result of organizational elements, such as who owns the land, or who gets to decide what is done on the land; can arise because of the contrasting types of people who are attracted to ecovillages, which tend to be a mix of thinkers and doers; or come up as a result of financial issues. Examples of each of these dynamics challenges are provided below.

4.2.1 Vision / principles

Throughout her book on ecovillages, Litfin provides many examples of structural conflict "…associated with how a community defines itself (2013: 19)", such as: 1) an ecovillage with an educational mission, and where families are raising children and do not want to do so in a 'fishbowl', or 2) an ecovillage with a conservation mandate that wants to farm, which may require cutting down trees for farmland. Furthermore, she

describes how the consensus-process plays into this, e.g. those in the community who want to uphold the vision / mission above all else, can block any proposal they see as a threat to it (i.e. a principled block) (Litfin 2013).

4.2.2   Organization

Organizational elements, such as the membership and decision-making processes, can result in challenging community dynamics, particularly respecting issues of power, influence and privilege within the community. For instance, as Timothy Miller points out in his book *The 60s Communes*, a highly inclusive and relaxed membership approach tends to lead to high turnover in community members, which results in conflict and instability as the community struggles to integrate newcomers and cope with large numbers of short and long term visitors (referenced in Sternfeld 2006).

Perceptions of power also have a major impact on community dynamics and personal relationships. For instance, Kat Kinkade (1994) describes how Twin Oaks, which uses a system of planners and managers as a means to make strategic/long-term and operational community decisions, can often give rise to feelings of resentment should any member hold a position for too long. According to Rios (2013), based on her 35 years of living in intentional communities, a good structure and clear understanding of roles of responsibility is important in order to foster good power dynamics, but that isn't sufficient, as good power dynamics require constant maintenance work. Also, she feels that equalized power is not necessary for a successful household, but that it is helpful that anyone living in close proximity share something that they care about in common (e.g. a spiritual practice; an interest in homesteading), and that they are compatible in what they

eat, how clean they like to keep the house, and their relationship with drugs and TV (Rios 2013).

4.2.3   People

Both Christian (2003) and Litfin (2013) suggest that living in community can be challenging because the majority of people who join ecovillages are seeking an alternative to mainstream society, which many find alienating, but their personal strategies to being in community differ. Litfin explains that most people are drawn to ecovillages either because they "…feel a sense of urgency to build another kind of world…" – these are the 'strategic, goal-oriented' people – or because they "…crave a deep sense of community (2013: 120)" – these are the 'relational, process-oriented' people. Litfin (2013) identifies the challenge of the dynamic between these two types of people in community as pitting the 'doers' against the 'thinkers', or in terms of a strategic approach, pitting 'fast' against 'slow'.

4.2.4   Economics

Litfin says: "People might imagine that the hottest issue in community life is sex, but my observations suggest that it's economics. Unresolved tensions around money have unraveled many a community. Even relationship conflicts – say, divorce – quite often play themselves out most contentiously on the economic stage (2013: 109)." According to Litfin, "The dichotomy between the haves and the have-nots is present to some degree in most ecovillages (2013: 108)." In line with Litfin's observations, Sundberg expresses the belief, based on her experience living long-term in an ecovillage, that "The financial health of each individual impacts the whole (2013: 12)", and for this reason, she

recommends that communities work collectively to support 'abundance', both in thought and in actuality, for instance, by supporting members to create their own businesses.

Sundberg's recommendation is demonstrated in the mutually beneficial arrangement described by Litfin (2013), between Martha – a retired lawyer – and Brian – a young man with skills in green building and organic farming – at Earthaven ecovillage. According to Litfin, Martha describes herself as a "middle-aged woman from the privileged class with big dreams about sustainability but very limited …physical abilities", and Martha describes Brian as "nineteen with no assets (and) all the skills and excitement to manifest the things I wanted (quoted in Litfin 2013: 108)." Accordingly, Martha paid Brian to build her eco-home at Earthaven, and also invested in his work at Gateway Farm (the on-site organic farm), which provided Brian with both income and experience to apply to the building of his own home. Furthermore, according to Brian, "Martha's support has given me the staying power I might not otherwise have had in the face of adversity (quoted in Litfin 2013: 108)."

Another approach to foster a positive dynamic around economics is to work to minimize financial inequality – an approach demonstrated at Twin Oaks in Virginia (USA), which has created community-owned businesses that support many members' financial needs and eliminate the need for individual wealth. These businesses include the manufacture of hammocks and soyfoods, and seed growing[24].

4.2.5   Section conclusion

As is evident, community dynamics in ecovillages are multi-faceted and complex, and they force members to consider sensitive issues such as principles, power, personality

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[24] See: www.twinoakscommunity.org

types and money. While Christian (2003), suggests that there are times when fundamental differences cannot be resolved, resulting in members leaving the community, M. Scott Peck suggests that 'genuine' communities "…continually construct and reconstruct themselves…", in order to stay vibrant (1987: 148), and thus, that addressing conflict and challenging dynamics is essential for genuine community to exist. Similarly, Litfin (2013) suggests it is unreasonable to try to eliminate the challenges present in a dynamic community, and so the best that an ecovillage may be able to do is to minimize the negative impacts of community dynamics. To do so, each must start with first, recognizing community dynamics challenges and identifying their causes, and then determining if something needs to be done to address them. The 'something' might require a change in policy or organizational structure, or it may require building members' capacities to navigate the tensions created by community dynamics. Such capacity-building is the focus of the next part of this chapter.

4.3   Capacity-building - tools and skills

Kunze's (2012) 7-year study of intentional communities in Germany revealed the imperative for all community members to work on their social competencies and communication in order to have a functional community. Similarly, Litfin concluded that, "Successful community living requires enormous skill – the kind that often comes only through the school of hard knocks (2013: 113)." However, she also claims that everyone she spoke to in the 14 ecovillages she visited agreed that it was "…well worth the price (Litfin 2013: 113)." Furthermore, while some of the capacity to live and work together in an ecovillage develops through experience, trial and error, ecovillages generally also commit time and resources to ensuring that members have the necessary abilities to make

community life work. For instance, as Litfin states, "Nearly every community I visited

had undergone years of training in consensus, meeting facilitation, and relationship

building (2013: 120)." This section provides a discussion and examples of capacity-

building activities in ecovillages.

4.3.1 Conflict management

Conflict in community is inevitable. In fact, Peck suggests that elevated levels of

tension are signs of a 'true' community, which is the "most alive of entities", and so must

"pay the price", by learning to deal with conflict (1987: 137). There are two ways to

resolve conflict: violently or non-violently. As Butler and Rothstein explain, "If war is

the violent resolution of conflict, then peace is not the absence of conflict, but rather, the

ability to resolve conflict without violence (2007: v)." According to Zander, conflict can

in fact be useful if:

- Members critically evaluate one another's ideas;
- Participation among members if widely shared;
- Members are flexible in their ideas and actions;
- Responsible members try to summarize where the discussion is heading;
- Members deliberately work to find a conclusion they and others can accept;
- Members successfully influence colleagues and are influenced in turn by them,
- Members seek and underscore their agreements with one another (1994: 116-117).

Litfin believes that the conflict management approach used at Ecovillage at Ithaca

(New York, USA) is "a commonsensical approach mirrored in most ecovillages. First, go

to the person directly in order to avoid gossip. Second, call on the mediator list. If that

fails, bring the dispute to the steering committee (Litfin 2013: 112)." This does appear to

be a common approach to conflict management in the literature on ecovillages. However,

at Lost Valley / Meadowsong Ecovillage (Oregon, USA) the process of 'Worldwork',

developed by Arnold Mindell, has also been helpful at diffusing resentments and conflict.

The purpose of Worldwork is to gather to discuss a significant topic, without the intention to make any decisions, but to allow for a sharing of many perspectives – even of those not in the room[25] - and it tends to lead to greater understanding of various perspectives and a resolving of issues without the need to change policies (Rios 2013).

Worldwork aligns with Peck's idea of genuine community, where conflict is resolved by "…humans both celebrating their differences and transcending them (1987: 39)." Regardless of the conflict management approach used by an ecovillage, it is clear that the aim is not for a conflict-free utopia, but rather, to seek ways to embrace and harness a diversity of perspectives, in order to foster a cooperative culture.

4.3.2 Decision-making

`   Embracing and harnessing a diversity of perspectives, thus managing conflict, may also be facilitated through effective application of a cooperative decision-making process. As previously identified, consensus decision-making is such a process that is often employed by ecovillages. However, the formal consensus process is one that must be learned. Stressing how important it is to a cooperative group to learn how to use the consensus process properly, ecovillager Rob Sandelin says, "If even one person in your group doesn't fully understand consensus - don't use it (quoted in Christian 2003: 62)."

A common misunderstanding is the use of the 'block' in the consensus process, which essentially means that a proposal cannot proceed. When blocks are used inappropriately, the group eventually becomes dysfunctional. A block results when a member withholds their consent – they also have the option of staying silent or 'stand

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[25] Rios provides a few examples of how this works; e.g. when gathering to discuss child-raising practices, someone steps in and says "I'm speaking for my grandmother, and she says 'Children should sit quietly during dinner hour'", and then someone else might say, "I'm speaking for an indigenous village elder, and he says that we are all responsible for the behavior of our children, not just their biological parents (2013:26)."

aside' (which means you have unresolved concerns but are willing to accept adoption of the proposal) (Butler & Rothstein 2007). According to Butler and Rothstein (2007), a legitimate block must be based on the principles of the group, not of the individual. Therefore, it is impossible for a group to use consensus effectively if they have not established a shared vision/purpose, and principles/values, which focus the group during times of discussion and decision-making (Christian 2003). Furthermore, as Butler and Rothstein (2007) point out, a block should only be declared after the three rounds of discussion of the formal consensus process have been followed, and it has been determined that concerns cannot be resolved. Stressing the intensity with which a block should be considered, one consensus trainer suggested it should only be made, "…after a sleepless night and a shedding of tears (quoted in Litfin 2013: 117)."

However, the experience at Earthaven ecovillage shows that sometimes, even sufficient training in consensus is not enough. In 2006, the community experienced a crisis in their use of consensus decision-making when the community divided over the need to install a well. While the process was properly applied, confusion arose when it could not be determined whether the block to the decision on building a well was in line with the community's *sustainable development* principle, chiefly because members on both sides of the issue had opposing views on whether or not digging a well could be considered *sustainable*. This put into question whether highly contentious issues can be overcome using consensus[26]. Ultimately, after much reflection and discussion over a 2-

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[26]Litfin (2013) provides an outline of the issue faced by Earthaven, which was instigated when a local authority shut down the community's educational programming to the public until a well was installed to serve the potable water needs of visitors. While the educational programming was a major source of livelihood to many community members, the well was heavily opposed by certain individuals who felt digging into the Earth was a form of abuse, and therefore, felt their personal values were threatened by the proposal. Furthermore, while the community was committed to sustainable development, there was acknowledgement that the sustainability of wells is scientifically questionable. Therefore, it became difficult to determine whether the objection to the well constituted a principled 'block', or one which stems from personal values (a block is a

year period, and the creation of "The Consensus Document"- a 12-page guidance document, the community reinforced its commitment to consensus, and clarified that proposals "…can only be blocked if it can be shown to violate Earthaven's mission or if it represents 'grave, catastrophic endangerment to the community' (Litfin 2013: 118)."

4.3.3   Facilitating discussion

According to Laird Schaub (2014), a process consultant who does most of his work with collaborative communities, effective facilitation is a major contributor to how well conflict is managed. For this reason, training in meeting facilitation is highly recommended. Schaub provides significant advice on his blog *Community and Consensus*, which seems well worth the read for anyone wishing to learn how to better facilitate conflict and discussion. In addition, Butler and Rothstein's (2007) guide to consensus provides step-by-step guidance on how to run discussion and decision-making meetings. Butler and Rothstein (2007) also recommend providing an opportunity to evaluate the process, and how well people interacted during a meeting, at the end of every meeting, and including the evaluation in official meeting minutes. They note that, in addition to providing an opportunity to improve the process, the information in the meeting minutes can provide insight on "…what actually happened, beyond what decisions were made…(and) they give a glimpse into complex interpersonal dynamics (Butler & Rothstein 2007:27)."

Another strategy for effective discussion it to set a positive tone at the outset of meetings, and to incorporate activities that assist people to be 'present' during discussions. Hopkins (2008) has found that effective Transition Towns meetings are

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formal opposition to a proposal under the consensus decision-making regime that results in a proposal not proceeding; a block must be principled, in that it aligns with the mission / principles / values of the whole community, in order to be valid).

aided by starting meetings with 'Go-Rounds' – a time for everyone to provide updates and share how they are feeling, which enables people to get to know each other better and to relax more with each other. He also recommends clearly defining the beginning and ending of a meeting (e.g. with a minute of silence). Likewise, at the Ecovillage at Ithaca (New York, USA), community meetings start with a 10-minute 'check-in' where members provide an update on events and how they are feeling. According to Litfin, this process is likely a great contributor to setting a positive tone for what can often be difficult and tedious decision-making meetings; as she notes, the check-in "…seemed to clear the air and set the stage for tackling a tough agenda with a team spirit. People were succinct in their comments and friendly, even in their disagreements; they obviously took pleasure in being together (2013:17)."

Also, finding the appropriate time to discuss issues is an important consideration. For example, at Lost Valley Educational Center / Meadowsong Ecovillage (Dexter, Oregon) they separate weekly 'well-being' meetings from business meeting - where the former is an opportunity to share personal challenges and triumphs, lessons people are learning about themselves, and to express needs for support (Sundberg 2013). According to Sundberg (2013), the effect of having a separate 'well-being' meeting enables them to have more effective business meetings that might otherwise become cloudy and dysfunctional from unexpressed emotions. Along the same lines, Sieben Linden (Germany) makes time annually to address major issues; the 'Intensiv' is an opportunity to dedicate significant time to both major interpersonal and strategic planning issues (Litfin 2013: 144).

These recommendations and examples show that learning how to facilitate and participate effectively in discussions and decisions are important capacities in ecovillages. Furthermore, they indicate a desire to take the emotions out of organizational decisions, to the extent that is possible. However, when dealing with issues that affect how people live and work, this is likely not as easy as stated. Communities can foster effective participation by ensuring that all members have appropriate training, by consistently following the established processes, and being sensitive to members' needs, while keeping the goal of efficacy in mind.

4.3.4   Communication

Throughout the processes of meeting, discussing, decision-making and conflict management, good communication skills are essential. Litfin (2013) also suggests that good communication skills are necessary to manage privacy needs appropriately in a highly interactive environment. As she points out, when communities are designed specifically to increase social interaction, "good communication skills are crucial for striking the right balance between contact and solitude (Litfin 2013:127)."

Jeff Gilmore, who moved from a well-paid Silicon Valley job and suburban home in California, to raise his family at Ecovillage at Ithaca - "EVI" (NY, USA), states that, while they were looking for an ecologically viable alternative lifestyle, it is the high quality of social interaction at EVI which affirmed their decision to move. Jeff attributes the positive social interactions to community members' willingness to talk honestly and to seek solutions which benefit all. According to Jeff, "We've been in several hot meetings, and we're always impressed by people's ability to find the best solution (for everybody). It's self-reinforcing: when people set the tone for honest communication,

there's less need to be self-protective, so trust grows (quoted in Litfin 2013: 112)." In addition, everyone at EVI is trained in Nonviolent Communication (NVC), to avoid getting into conflicts that can be triggered by how people engage with one another (Litfin 2013). Non-violent communication (NVC) is a compassionate approach to communication designed to foster empathy, both for others and oneself, by speaking to the underlying needs and feelings of all parties. Practicing NVC involves formulaic statements along the following lines: "When I observe X, I feel Y because I need Z. So I'm asking you to do Q (Litfin 2013:123)." According to Litfin, "When the life-alienating language of shame and blame gives way to the life-enhancing language of honesty and compassion, conflict becomes the gateway to a deeper sense of connection (2013: 123)." Use of NVC also helped the members of Earthaven ecovillage deal with their crisis surrounding the use of consensus decision-making (example discussed in detail earlier), but they took it one step further, translating the 'Threats Document' in light of NVC and creating a theatrical performance based on their work (Litfin 2013).

Peck (1987) identifies good communication, and the ability to practice it, as a primary requirement for community. These examples show that good ecovillages recognize this requirement, and work actively to ensure members can communicate with one another honestly and compassionately. Being able to communicate well is important for managing and avoiding conflict, and in order to relate well to one another. While this certainly applies to everyone, in every relationship, it is of utmost importance if your goal is collaboration. Living in an ecovillage provides an opportunity to practice these skills every day.

4.3.5   Interpersonal relations, reflexivity and growth

Sometimes the challenges that arise in community are not necessarily related to conflict or other tensions, but rather are the result of how members relate to one another (i.e. inter-personal relations). According to Starhawk, "Kindness, respect, compassion, and encouragement are the compost tea of relationships – they feed all the beneficial impulses. When we respect one another's ideas, think well of one another's motives, and support one another's visions, we create a high-energy atmosphere in which creativity flourishes (2011: 16)." However, it is not always easy to interact with others in this manner, especially when dealing with competing perspectives within a group. In addition, according to Kunze, all the community members that participated in her study identified a "…need to learn not only to accept but also to appreciate different opinions, to be moderate and fair, and at the same time to dare to express their own wishes (2012: 51)."

One way to address differing perspectives is to bring greater awareness of a perspective to those who do not share the same perspective. This was the purpose of the WorldWork approach used by Lost Valley / Meadowsong, mentioned earlier. WorldWork is rooted in the concept of 'process-oriented psychology', developed by Arnold Mindell, which posits that in every human dynamic – individual, group, society - there is a primary and secondary process at play (the former being what we see, and the latter being what we do not see, or do not *want* to see), and simply being able to recognize the secondary process, in yourself and others, can make group relations more positive (Sutherland 2012). According to Sutherland (2012), process-oriented psychology is particularly good at helping groups deal with issues that arise from power dynamics, marginalization, and change. Process-oriented psychology seems to be practiced by New Culture, a network of individuals with a shared vision to "…create a sustainable world

based on love, freedom, and community (Taub & Rios 2013: 28)". New Culture meets every summer for a 10-day summer camp[27] to "…explore the big questions about culture re-design – how do we get our food? how do we deal with money? how do we care for kids and elders? how do we handle relationships? – and practice living, loving, working, and having fun together (Taub & Rios 2013: 28-29)." According to Taub and Rios, problems are aggravated by painful emotional reactions, which can intensify and spread the more people that are involved, and that addressing these reactions requires a skilled response by the person reacting to "…take an inner 'step back' and witness their own process" in order to "…break the cycle of reactivity (2013:29)." Furthermore, Taub and Rios state that, "…the more skilled each person is in doing this, the more stable the community as a whole becomes (2013: 29)."

While I cannot tell from my review whether ecovillages generally employ process-oriented psychology, it does appear that they have used a variety of creative means to identify differing perspectives, and to apply this knowledge to improve relationships, and to grow personally. In the spiritual community of Damanhur (Italy), for instance, an appreciation for different perspectives was nurtured through education play. Litfin (2013) describes a game of 'capture the flag' played there, which pitted the younger, rebellious faction of the community against older members of the community. The 3-day game was eventually won on Day 2 by the older team, which had the opportunity to demonstrate that experience gained over time can often be more valuable than youthful energy. Ultimately, the game had the effect of releasing tension within the

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[27] Though they currently only meet during the summer, they are in the process of establishing an intentional community, e.g. ecovillage.

community, and generating more respect for the knowledge and abilities of the older members of the community.

Sutherland states that "…the process of becoming more effective in groups calls on us to grow personally, and when we grow personally, we automatically become more effective in groups (2012: 4)." Similarly, Peck suggests that self-examination and contemplation (individually and as a group) are important to community-building, and enable the group to "address threats to community well-being…transcend divisions and recapture spirit of community…(1987: 66)." In addition, as suggested by one communard who participated in Kunze's study of intentional communities in Germany, "…everyone needs to get rid of his patterns of controlling and ego-strategies to be able to live communally (2012: 51)".

Sutherland (2012) recommends 'groundwork' – which brings a focus to 'being' rather than 'doing'–as a means to grow personally and to help groups thrive. As she explains, the process of 'grounding' has three steps: 1) Centre through self-awareness (which can be as simple as bringing awareness to one's breath, as is common in meditation and yoga); 2) Set an intention (something 'big picture', e.g. "may I serve beauty and truth" – the goal is to shift awareness from 'self'/ego to 'Self'/soul), and 3) Open (i.e. become receptive to new ways of seeing)(2012:11-13). Naka-Ima (meaning 'here now') workshops, developed at Lost Valley Education Center / Meadowsong ecovillage (Dexter, Oregon, USA) in 1996 as a means to address a great time of friction between old and new members (Sternfeld 2006), seems to embrace the concept of 'grounding'. Sundberg (2013) describes naka-ima as a practice of honesty and letting go

of attachments. Furthermore, Albright (2010) describes how, coupled with deep listening and compassionate communication, the process can profoundly beautiful and healing.

Damanhur (Italy) uses a process called 'Technakarto' as a means for individual community members to better understand how they are perceived by others, essentially by having others identify what they appreciate about the individual, and what bothers them about the individual. The individual can then delve into the findings with "a group of wise elders" with an aim toward self-improvement (Litfin 2013: 122). While Litfin claims the process is uniquely designed to be appropriate in the Damanhur culture, the general approach seems like it might be useful in other communities. ZEGG – a community in Germany – also using an interesting tool to foster greater self-awareness and social bonding, called 'the Forum'. The Forum is "…a fusion of group therapy, improvisational theatre, and collective meditation (Litfin 2013: 122)" that draws highly charged feelings into the open in group settings. As Litfin (2013) describes, the process involves community members forming a circle, with one to two members at the centre dealing with an issue 'fishbowl style' while being guided by a facilitator trained to help those involved partake in a dramatization of the issue. The goal is to achieve a greater sense of clarity on the emotional dynamics that underlie the issue, as well as to develop greater compassion, by both participants and observers. According to Litfin (2013), the Forum approach has been 'imported' by other European communities, and successfully applied to for the purposes of improving self-awareness and interpersonal relations.

The above examples demonstrate how building capacity to live and work together in community is a function of inner work, outer work, and collective learning. It is work that improves relationships with ourselves and others. Also, alluding to the on-going

nature of this learning, long-term ecovillage resident and well-known process consultant

Diana Leafe-Christian, refers to living in ecovillages as "…the longest personal growth

workshop you'll ever take (quoted in Litfin 2013: 113)." However, as Forsey warns,

"Noble intentions and community involvement do not automatically free us of the

baggage we all carry with us – negative behavior patterns and destructive ways of

relating to ourselves, each other and the Earth (1993: 6)." According to Forsey, what is

needed to build "…sustainable and life-affirming communities…" is 'praxis', as

conceptualized by Paulo Freire, which is "…action and reflection feed(ing) into each

other and build(ing) on one another in a creative and continuing spiral (Forsey 1993: 8)."

The examples above show how ecovillages can provide opportunities for praxis, by

actively working to collectively build positive interpersonal relationships, enhancing

appreciation of different perspectives, and bringing awareness to dynamics at play within

oneself, others, and the group, as well as a safe environment to practice development of

these skills. As such, Kunze identifies ecovillages as contributing to capacities of

sustainable community management, by providing "…fields of practical education for

social competences, in which members can learn and are socialized as communally

competent beings (2012: 55)."

4.4 Chapter conclusion

Living in community may not be easy, but it is rewarding. To reap these rewards,

however, requires commitment to learn how to be 'in community'. Such a commitment is

at the heart of every vision of every ecovillage. This vision is then enabled through

structures and processes that build community, and a culture of partnership and

belonging, based on trust, cohesion, and interdependence. However, there are tensions

that are bound to arise in any community of this kind, that will impact on group dynamics and interpersonal relationships, thereby influencing group functionality and community capacity; therefore, every ecovillage must aim to minimize the negative impacts of these tensions, either through changing policies or organizational structures, or developing the competencies necessary to navigate them. Learning how to be in community is also learning how to balance – for instance, balancing inclusiveness with effectiveness in decision-making, and balancing individual needs with that of the group. Learning to balance requires skill: the skill to hear and understand others, for example. Learning to balance also requires awareness: to be aware of what is best for the group, for example. This is not learning that is actively cultivated in most of society, but it is absolutely essential for the success of ecovillages. Thus, an ecovillage that wants to succeed is one that fosters development of the necessary skills and awareness that make being in community possible. Managing conflict non-violently, approaching discussions and decisions with honesty and creativity, communicating with openness and compassion, and continuously reflecting on and practicing what is learned – these are the capacities that enable ecovillagers to come together, stay together, live together, and work together.

In the next Chapter I present the methodology I used to explore the structures and processes of community-building and capacity-building at an ecovillage in Southern Ontario. The information obtained through this study was compared to the generalized and anecdotal experiences presented in this literature review, in order to provide considerations for living and working together, to create sustainable community, in a post-carbon world.

Chapter Five: Methodology

The social sciences are the study of people, or groups of people, and their individual or collective behaviours (Bhattacherjee 2012). Research can be either inductive (theory-building), where the researcher infers theoretical concepts and patterns from observed data, or deductive (theory-testing), where the researcher tests, refines, improves or extends known theory based on new data. Due to the complex nature of people, theories are rarely perfect in social science research, providing ample opportunity for the creation or improvement of theory through new research (Bhattacherjee 2012). Ecovillages are a fairly new alternative human settlement approach, which has gained in popularity over the past 30 years, and they have yet to be the focus of much academic inquiry. While there are some studies, books and journal articles that have been produced in a variety of disciplines – anthropology, sociology, and planning, to name a few – which consider ecovillages and what can be learned from them as models and living laboratories of sustainable communities / cultures / societies, much of the research to date appears to be exploratory in nature, seeking to develop some basic understanding of the ecovillage phenomena (see for example Litfin 2014). This is understandable as, according to Bhattacherjee (2012), exploration is often conducted in new areas of inquiry. There is also descriptive literature on ecovillages that provides personal accounts of lived experiences in ecovillages, written predominately by so-called 'ecovillagers' or 'communards' themselves (for instance, Liz Walker's account of life at Ecovillage at Ithaca, 2005 & 2010), or in a few cases compiled by an academic (see Bill Metcalf's compilations, 1995 & 1996, which were obtained using a 'biographical discourse approach'). The existing literature on ecovillages provides useful contextual information

for understanding the ecovillage phenomenon, and in some cases provides useful

frameworks for exploring elements of ecovillages in further detail (e.g. Litfin's E2C2

framework).

The research I undertook remains within the exploratory realm that has been the

most common approach to studying ecovillages, but aims to delve deeper into

understanding how ecovillages build community capacity for living together

(cohabitation) and working together (collaboration), while in pursuit of common

sustainability goals (ultimately, to build sustainable community), by looking at the

structures and processes employed to build community, manage tensions, and develop the

skills and tools necessary to support trusting and cooperative relationships. To do so, I

employed an exploratory, qualitative, individual case study approach (Yin 2014) which is

detailed here. This research is a 'sense-making' process, rather than one of hypothesis

testing, paying particular attention to the perspectives of the ecovillagers themselves

regarding how successful or unsuccessful they feel they have been in building the

capacity to live and work together.

5.1   The qualitative case study approach

According to Denzin and Lincoln, "Qualitative research is a situated activity that

locates the observer in the world…", enabling the researcher to "…study things in their

natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the

meanings people bring to them (2011: 3)". Qualitative research aims to understand or

seek meaning, rather than measure (i.e. quantitative research), and does so through

methods used to gain a variety of perspectives on a phenomenon, such as observation and

interviews (Denzin & Lincoln 2000). Whole Village is one of a growing number of

intentional communities that self-identify as ecovillages where people are attempting to live and work together harmoniously in order to build sustainable alternatives to mainstream living. Understanding how they build this capacity to live and work together is dependent on the input of Whole Villagers, and their perspectives, which are influenced by individual personalities and experiences, as well as broader cultural influence (e.g. the predominant cultural norms of the surrounding region where their community is located, as well as the norms that have been established by the community and which may influence interactions within the group). Consequently, a qualitative approach is most appropriate for achieving the aims of my research.

The design of this research project was aided by my previous experience and interactions with the community, having visited on several occasions and participated in community activities such as meetings, work bees and group meals. These experiences provided a basis for understanding the Whole Village community, and to design a context-appropriate research approach.

A case study approach utilizes a variety of data collection methods in order to obtain rich, detailed, contextual data (Bhattacherjee 2012; Yin 2014). This is an appropriate approach for the study of a delineated community ('bounded case'), including its historic and present circumstances. The unit of analysis for this case is the Whole Village community (described further in the section 5.2 below), with a focus on looking at community capacity-building to support living and working together, including building positive community dynamics. A review of the literature on ecovillages suggests that such capacity building can be influenced by a variety of processes, such as: organizational structure (e.g. roles, vision statements, rules, covenants and agreements,

ownership structure, shared values, behavioural norms); membership processes and requirements; informal community-building activities such as shared meals and social events; the decision-making process; conflict resolution processes; training (e.g. communication skills; mediation) and organized / planned group dynamics activities (e.g. group activity using role play to address specific issues of group dynamics).

According to Yin (2014), use of a case study approach is appropriate when contextual conditions are believed to be relevant to the phenomenon under study. Such is the case for understanding community capacity-building in an ecovillage, which requires consideration of the ecovillage culture, as well as the structures and processes which may impact group dynamics. A single case study approach can be justified as, according to Kasper (2008), no two ecovillages are alike. Also, as Lockyer and Veteto (2013) suggest, each is a unique 'socionature' rooted in a particular place. Therefore, developing a basis for understanding ecovillage capacity-building requires consideration of the culture and dynamics at play within the ecovillage being studied.

Furthermore, choosing this particular ecovillage for study can be justified on several points. First, this ecovillage has intrinsic value given that it has been in existence for over a decade (while many ecovillages fail in the first year) and it is the only fully established ecovillage in Ontario and one of a few in Canada, making it a 'success story' in the Canadian context, and unique in the Ontario context. Second, it is accessible to the researcher (about 1 hour drive), which allowed for frequent interaction with the community over a sustained period of time, and multiple opportunities to observe and collect rich data. Third, the community is currently actively working to build positive community dynamics and interpersonal relations, including addressing specific

challenges related to community building and capacity building. The uniqueness, accessibility, and activeness of this case, provide a valuable opportunity to explore how the ecovillage experience can inform the development of sustainable community in Ontario; a topic which has not been covered by much academic research to date.

5.1.1 Strengths of the case study approach

A case study is an ideal approach for study of a complex phenomenon, like a community and its dynamics, because it is both rigorous and flexible, and it allows for rich description and in-context exploration using a variety of data sources (Baxter & Jack 2008). Furthermore, unlike ethnographic studies, which emphasize observational and interview evidence collected over a long period of time, case studies involve a variety of data collection methods, which may be collected in a shorter period of time (Yin 2014). The case approach also supports the 'deconstruction' and 'reconstruction' of the phenomenon, which Baxter and Jack (2008) suggest can be usefully applied to developing theories, evaluating programs, and developing solutions to identified problems. In other words, a case study approach enables the development of a holistic understanding of a phenomenon for solutions-oriented research. According to Flyvbjerg, "…case study produces the type of concrete, context dependent knowledge that research on learning shows to be necessary to allow people to develop from rule-based beginners to virtuoso experts (2011: 302)." In addition, use of a case study approach enables reliability testing through multiple sources of data triangulation (Yin 2014).

5.1.2 Weaknesses of the case study approach

According to Baxter and Jack (2008), a case study approach can result in the collection of overwhelming amounts of data that require management and analysis. Yin

(2014) suggests development of 'theoretical propositions' to guide data collection and analysis, which can contribute to the manageability of case data.

Also, there has been some criticism of the transferability of individual case study. In this case, it would suggest that findings may not be applicable to other ecovillages, nor could conclusions be drawn on what broader society can learn from ecovillages. However, Yin suggests that even a single case study can be used for 'analytic' generalizations – meaning that they can be generalized to theoretical propositions – if "not to populations and universes (2014: 21)". Furthermore, Flyvbjerg (2011) believes that case studies can highlight general characteristics of the societies in question (called a 'cultural paradigm case'), and that generalizations based on a single case can reveal reasons for action that might be transferable over a wide range of action-contexts.

5.2   The case: Whole Village ecovillage and intentional community

Whole Village is an intentional community and ecovillage, located on a 191-acre farm in Caledon, Ontario, about 1 hour NW of Toronto, with a commitment to sustainability and land stewardship seeking to live together in harmony with each other and with the natural habitat (Whole Village pamphlet, n.d). Members live in a co-operative house, Greenhaven, which includes eleven private suites and shared kitchen, dining, living, laundry, office, and recreation space. The suites are privately owned by members, and membership includes ownership in-common of the shared spaces and the land. However, only 3 suites are currently lived in by members, with the rest being rented both short and long term. My study included both on-site owners and renters. The distinction between on-site owners and renters is of particular interest to this study given evident dynamics created between these categories. In addition, off-site owners

occasionally attended some of the events at Whole Village, and so were included in parts of this study (e.g. participant-observation) when they were attending these events. Furthermore, there are a couple of renters in the farmhouse (the secondary dwelling on the property), which were also included in this study. Seasonal volunteers (farming season) were not included in this study, as the study period took place during off-season.

Owners and renters fall within three Whole Village organizational categories: members (a category reserved for owners), provisional members (renters who have lived there for more than a year) and associates (occasional renters or renters living there for less than one year, though there are some exceptions where renters have lived there for over a year but have not paid the joining fee). Whole Village currently has 11 full members, only four of whom currently live on site (all women); 6 provisional members (all of whom live on site), and 20 associates (11 of whom lived on site during the study period). Therefore, of the 37 persons who could be considered part of the Whole Village community during the study period, only 21 lived on-site. Also, from observation, I concluded that 4 members who lived off-site regularly attended activities. Consequently, a total of 25 Whole Villagers could reasonably be considered part of this study (e.g. likely to be present during participant-observation).

In terms of demographics, the community is almost exclusively Caucasian, which has implications for consideration of ethnic diversity. However, diversity exists in the mix of male and female, and across the age spectrum. An important factor that impacts this community's dynamics however, is that suite owners are all 50+ in age, and mostly retired, and renters fall in the under 50 category, mostly in the 25-35 age range. Renters in Greenhaven are a mix between singles and couples. There were several families with

children living on-site during the study - all renters. Renters in the farmhouse are currently single males. Suite ownership status has been relatively stable over many years, with a recent suite purchase being the exception, and the potential sale of another suite this year is pending. There has been significant turnover in renters over the years, though there is also a small contingent of renters who have been living at Greenhaven for several years. Presently, all suites are occupied by either owners or renters.

In this thesis, study participants will all be referred to generally as 'Whole Villagers', with the characterization of on-site owner, off-site owner and renter being assigned only when relevant. Furthermore, when it seems appropriate to use personal names, pseudonyms will be used (at the request of the community) to protect the identity of participants.

5.3   Use of literature

The literature review undertaken for this research had several uses, including: 1) developing an understanding of the ecovillage movement as part of a broader, global counter-culture shift based on embracing life-sustaining values, and 2) identifying some of the elements – both processes and structures - that enable ecovillagers to develop the capacity to live and work together, in support of sustainable community. Organization of the literature review was informed by resources consulted to develop the contextualization and theoretical framework chapters of this thesis. The result was the identification of the following categories of community-building structures and processes, tensions of ecovillage living, and capacity-building tools and skills:

Community building structures and processes:
- Purpose, vision and principles

- Membership process
- Decision-making process
- Agreements / rules
- 'Intangibles' – group cohesion, interdependence and reciprocity
  - Food and eating together
  - Working together
  - Ritual and celebration
  - Community by design
- Raising consciousness

Tensions of ecovillage living:
- Vision / principles
- Organization
- People
- Economics

Capacity-building tools and skills:
- Conflict management
- Decision making
- Facilitating discussion
- Communication
- Interpersonal relations, reflexivity and growth

This set of categories was used as a guide when collecting and managing data, as described below.

5.4   Data collection methods

Use of multiple data sources is a hallmark of case study research, and also enhances data credibility through 'source triangulation' (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Data from these multiple sources are each considered a 'piece of the puzzle' that can be converged in the analysis stage, or as Baxter and Jack state, "…braided together to promote a greater understanding of the case (2008: 554)". Data collection methods for this research, as described below, included: document review, participant-observation, and interviews. Furthermore, the literature on group dynamics and community development theory, as well as the literature on the ecovillage experience, as documented in other studies and by

ecovillagers and process consultants that work with ecovillagers, made an important contribution to the management and analysis of data collected.

5.4.1   Obtaining consent

Prior to starting data collection, an information sheet and consent forms were developed (and received Ethics Board approval in January 2014) to obtain consent from the community to conduct research (see Appendix A). In addition, the research proposal was presented at one of the community's monthly Meetings of the Round, to enable discussion, questions, and ratification of the research in line with the community's consensus-decision making process. Community consent to proceed with the research, as proposed, was obtained in January 2014.

5.4.2   Study period

Data collection began in late January 2014 and continued to the end of May 2014. This timeframe proved sufficient to obtain the data necessary to address the research questions identified for this study.

5.4.3   Document review

Review of Whole Village documents was undertaken for the purposes of obtaining background and contextual information. In particular, documents provided factual information on the group's history, the types of structures and processes which guide relations at Whole Village, and some insight on current and historical community dynamics and tensions, as well as community-building and capacity-building activities. Document review included:

- online material (e.g. website information and Youtube videos)

- community documents (e.g. Community Covenant; bylaws; process guidelines), and
- a sample of meeting minutes (e.g. Community Dynamics Mandate Group; Membership and Communications Group; Meeting of the Round).

Any of the above information not readily accessible online was available in Whole Village's on-site library. The list of documents reviewed was shared with a member of the Community Dynamics Mandate Group to verify that all key documents were included in the analysis. A complete list of documents reviewed is available in Appendix B.

Prior to document review, a codebook was created that aligned with the categories of community-building, community tensions, and capacity-building, identified during the literature review component of this thesis. This codebook was used to tag data. A second review of the data by tag code enabled identification of case specific themes.

5.4.4 Participant-observation

Participant-observation was an important component of on-site data collection. Put simply, observation is a research method which allows "…researchers to study people in their native environment in order to understand 'things' from their perspective (Baker 2006: 171)". Participant-observation involves some level of engagement by the researcher in the activities of the group under study, and the level of engagement can vary from what has been described as "observer as participant", where the researcher's involvement is minimal (e.g. mostly observing; maybe a few short interviews), to what has been called "complete membership", where the researcher essentially becomes a member of the group, adopting their values and participating fully in daily life (this has been termed 'going native')(Baker 2006). My engagement with Whole Village could likely best be described as a 'moderate membership' approach, which Spradley (1980)

says involves maintaining a balance between participation and observation, engaging in similar activities as 'insiders' (i.e. Whole Villagers), but not in those that would "stand at the core of group membership and identification (referenced in Baker 2006: 176)". To this end, while I occasionally engaged in discussion, during meetings which I attended for instance, I did not voice an opinion on specific community issues under debate, including when consensus was being sought on the issue. Looking at Baker's (2006) assessment of the various types of observation, the role of moderate membership appears to have the fewest drawbacks, as it allows for development of a significant level of understanding of the social world while still enabling the researcher to remained 'detached' (a condition considered favourable in order to avoid bias or 'clouding' of judgment). In addition, this level of participation, where all were aware of my presence there as a researcher, enabled Whole Villagers to get to know the person who was observing the intimate act of 'community living', which likely supported authentic communications in my presence.

My participant-observation activities included a sample of most community activities. In total, I was on-site eight days for participant-observation purposes during the study period (including one overnight stay), and participated in a variety of activities, including organized meetings, shared meals and informal discussion. Field notes were taken during these visits, which were later reviewed using the same categories and themes identified for the document review portion of this research. The activities in which I participated during the study period included: two Meetings of the Round (a monthly plenary open to all Whole Villagers, including on and off site suite owners, renters, volunteers, and interested friends); a 'work bee' (monthly organized collective

work days, including a shared potluck lunch), and several shared dinners (dependent on whether a sufficient number of Whole Villager's signed up to cook, shared meals occur weeknights – Monday to Friday – and are open to visitors). In addition to these activities, which are generally open to visitors, I also attended – by invitation - a Monday night 'check in' meeting (where day-to-day issues and new concerns are raised); a meeting of the Community Dynamics Mandate Group, and two theme-based community retreats (Resiliency Retreats part 1 & 2). I was unable to participate in a 'family day', which is a meeting to discuss predominately organizational issues so that the shared 'household' runs smoothly, as one of these did not occur during the study period.

Ultimately, this participant-observation allowed me to observe the group in action and to develop a stronger understanding of the current workings and issues faced by the group. Through this participant-observation I came to better understand current community dynamics challenges at Whole Village, how the community planned to address these challenges, and the processes engaged to address these challenges. This participant-observation added richness to my understanding of community dynamics at Whole Village, as obtained through document review (described above), as well as through one-on-one interviews (which will be described below). In addition to providing important context for my research, and gaining the perspectives of Whole Villagers on issues of community dynamics – as expressed during meetings or informal conversations – the participant-observation allowed for the establishment of rapport with community members, which may have mitigated what Krefting (1991) calls 'social desirability responses' (i.e. participants reveal only what they want to, or respond in the way they think you want them to, driven mostly as a result of not feeling comfortable with the

researcher) (referenced in Baxter and Jack 2008), especially during the one-on-one interview portion of this research.

5.4.5 Semi-structured interviews

There were two types of interviews conducted for this research. The first was a single, key informant interview conducted with a member of the Community Dynamics Mandate Group who was assigned to be my key community contact for this research. This interview was conducted upon completion of document review and was intended predominately for fact-checking purposes (e.g. What is your conflict-resolution process?; What is the intended purpose of 'check in' at meetings?). This type of interview is in line with what Baxter and Jack (2008) call 'member checking', where a researcher shares interpretation of data for discussion and clarification. The interview allowed me to gain a solid understanding of Whole Village, as an organization and how it operates, in a short period of time. Questions addressed the topics of: community rules; decision-making process; membership categories and requirements (including confirmation of current community membership status); purpose of various meetings; communication and conflict management processes; mandate of various committees, and financial / equity considerations. Furthermore, this interview provided insight on past community dynamics challenges, and what was deemed effective in addressing those challenges (or conversely, what was not) and what challenges may continue to linger and present themselves in current community dynamics issues. This interview was conducted by phone on March 28, 2014.

The second type of interview conducted was a semi-structured interview of a sample of Whole Villagers. Interviews were designed to complement document review

and participant-observation, but ultimately provided the most insight on Whole Villager perspectives on community dynamics challenges, and the effectiveness of community-building and capacity-building activities. Interview questions were designed based on consideration of the theory and literature on group dynamics, community-building, and sustainable community capacity development, as reviewed for this thesis (a list of the questions has been provided in Appendix C). Interview questions were open-ended, and allowed interviewees to express their perspectives in narrative form.

A total of eight one-on-one interviews were conducted throughout May 2014, both on-site at Whole Village and at other pre-arranged locations that were convenient for interviewees. Given the significant tension that was evident, both in documents and during participant-observation, between suite owners and renters at Whole Village, it was decided to explore this dynamic further by conducting interviews with an equal number of representatives from both groups. Interviews were conducted with all four suite owners that currently live on-site, and a random selection of four renters (with the pool narrowed to those renters who have lived on-site for at least a year, thus ensuring they had sufficient on-site experience to reflect on for the purposes of addressing the interview questions). Interviews lasted approximately one hour and were recorded, with the participants' permission, and later transcribed. Content analysis of the transcriptions was undertaken using the same categories and themes identified for document review and analysis of participant-observation field notes. This approach enabled the categorical and thematic analysis detailed in Chapter Seven of this thesis. However, interview results have also been discussed on a question-by-question basis in Chapter Six (Findings).

5.5   Data management and interpretation

As already mentioned, the creation of a set of categories of community-building, community dynamics/tensions, and capacity-building, was used to create a codebook that was applied to collect and manage data. In addition, review of the data revealed case specific themes in some of the categories. The results of document review are discussed, on a category-by-category basis, in Chapter Six (Findings) of this thesis. For each category I considered: do these exist at Whole Village; if so, how have they come to be, and how are they maintained (e.g. maintenance of shared vision through a membership process and member responsibilities which requires subscribing to the identified vision). The results of participant-observation have been presented in two ways: 1) observations from two key events – Resiliency Retreats Part 1 & 2 are presently separately, 2) all other observations are compiled, and discussed on a category-by-category basis (as appropriate). Finally, the results of the individual interviews have been discussed on a question-by-question basis.

In Chapter Seven (Analysis), case study findings are analyzed to answer the following research questions:

4.   What are the historical and current community dynamics and inter-personal tensions which present challenges for living and working together at Whole Village? What contributed to their manifestation?

5.   How is community capacity (i.e. community building and capacity building) built to address these challenges (e.g. processes and structures; formal and informal approaches)?

6.   How do Whole Villager's perceive their efforts (e.g. successes and challenges) to make living together and working together, in support of sustainable community, possible?

In addition, case study findings are compared against the generalized and anecdotal accounts of community building, community tensions, and capacity-building group work

at other ecovillages, as revealed through the literature review. This analysis reveals considerations for community-building and capacity-building activities at Whole Village.

5.6   Limitations

This research is an exploration of community-building, community dynamics, and capacity-building activities at Whole Village that support (or challenge) the creation of sustainable community. Findings are based on what can be gleaned from community documents, observations of the researcher, and from the perspectives of Whole Villagers themselves. In addition, analyzing findings against the literature provides an understanding of how the Whole Village experience aligns with the generalized ecovillage experience.

This research was not designed to be a complete investigation of individual perspectives on community and capacity building for positive community dynamics and interpersonal relations in the Whole Village community, or a complete evaluation of such activities. Nor was it designed to be a longitudinal study which would assess changing community dynamics issues, or community building and capacity building strategies, and their real or perceived effectiveness, over time. That said some retrospective information has been included in the findings, as revealed through document review and interviews. Primarily however, this study must be recognized as reflective of a 'snapshot in time' and a representative view of perspectives.

Furthermore, while this research was not intended to be an evaluation of Whole Village as a sustainable community, or even of the processes or structures that may assist in the creation of sustainable community at Whole Village, it does provide an important

basis for such evaluation, which could be undertaken as future research. In addition, while it may be difficult to generalize the results to other such communities, which would each have their own unique 'socionature', it can nonetheless provide insight on the impact, importance, and challenges of community-building and capacity-building efforts at this ecovillage, which may be of value to other groups involved in building sustainable community. In fact, this research could be duplicated to look at capacity-building initiatives at other ecovillages, and comparative analysis undertaken to determine transferability of the ecovillage community-building and capacity-building experience.

5.7   Chapter conclusion

This research seeks to better understand how ecovillagers build the capacity to live and work together, in order to achieve their vision of a sustainable community. I have sought this insight through a case study of Whole Village in Caledon, Ontario, using a variety of qualitative data collection methods: document review, participant-observation and semi-structured interviews. Data was collected and analyzed with the aid of a codebook of community-building, community tensions, and capacity-building categories, which was developed based on the literature review. Data review also revealed case specific themes. For each category I considered: do these exist at Whole Village; if so, how have they come to be, and how are they maintained (e.g. maintenance of shared vision through a membership process and member responsibilities which requires subscribing to the identified vision). Findings, presented in Chapter Six, address the following research questions:

1. What are the historical and current community dynamics and inter-personal tensions which present challenges for living and working together at Whole Village? What contributed to their manifestation?

2. How is community capacity (i.e. community building and capacity building) built to address these challenges (e.g. processes and structures; formal and informal approaches)?

3. How do Whole Villager's perceive their efforts (e.g. successes and challenges) to make living together and working together, in support of sustainable community, possible?

The results of the case study have been compared to the generalized and anecdotal

evidence on ecovillage community and capacity-building for cohabitation and

collaboration available in current literature, and this analysis is discussed in Chapter

Seven of this thesis.

Chapter Six: Findings

This chapter presents the findings of my research into community building, community dynamics, and capacity building, in support of sustainable community, at Whole Village ecovillage in Caledon, Ontario. These findings address the research questions developed for this study, specifically:

1. What are the historical and current community dynamics and inter-personal tensions which present challenges for living and working together at Whole Village? What contributed to their manifestation?

2. How is community capacity (i.e. community building and capacity building) built to address these challenges (e.g. processes and structures; formal and informal approaches)?

3. How do Whole Villager's perceive their efforts (e.g. successes and challenges) to make living together and working together, in support of sustainable community, possible?

I begin with a brief description of Whole Village, followed by my findings, based on the data collected through document review, participant-observation, and semi-structured interviews of a sample of Whole Village residents. These findings include both my interpretation of the data, gained through the document review and participant-observation, and the perspectives of Whole Villagers, gained through the individual interviews and informal conversations during participant-observation.

6.1   About Whole Village

Whole Village is an intentional community and ecovillage situated on a 191-acre farm in Caledon, Ontario, about an hour's drive north-west of Toronto. The community identifies itself as one with a "commitment to sustainability and land stewardship seeking to live together in harmony with each other and with the natural habitat (Whole Village pamphlet, n.d)." It is the only established ecovillage in Ontario.

Whole Village is situated in an ecologically-sensitive area, adjacent to Shaws Creek near the headwaters of four river systems, and features a provincially significant wetland, hardwood forest, open fields, rolling hills and a spring fed pond (Whole Village pamphlet, n.d.). As part of their commitment to land stewardship, their activities are guided by a Conservation Plan prepared by Credit Valley Conservation Authority, and they have registered a Conservation Easement on the property enforceable for 999 years (Whole Village pamphlet, n.d.). Land stewardship activities have included planting of native trees and shrubs, the creation of windbreaks, shelter belts and wildlife corridors, and protection of woodlots and wetlands with buffer zones and other ecologically-sound land management practices. In addition, all building, landscaping and agriculture activities are guided by permaculture principles (Whole Village pamphlet, n.d.). The property and buildings are legally owned by the member-based Whole Village Property Co-operative Inc.

Members live mainly in a co-housing style arrangement in Greenhaven, a 15,000 square foot building which includes 11 private suites (with private living quarters and kitchenette) and shared common space with a community kitchen, dining and living room areas, recreation and children's play space, laundry facilities, an office and library. Greenhaven enables residents to lower their resource usage in a variety of ways, including through collaborative consumption (e.g. sharing of space, facilities, appliances, tools), and via the eco-friendly technologies of the building itself, such as passive solar design, high-quality insulation, radiant floor heating, natural lighting, a masonry heater, a geothermal system, and solar hot water. Furthermore, residents strive to reduce their ecological footprint through on-site food production, and by buying organic and eco-

friendly products collectively through the Ontario Natural Food Co-op. Of the 11 suites, 3 are currently occupied by owners, with the remainder rented to both short and long term renters. There are also occasional renters in the old farmhouse on site, and students, interns or visitors often camp on the land during the summer. Thus, occupancy fluctuates throughout the year.

Whole Village welcomes visitors to attend monthly orientation sessions and tours, and to participate through monthly work bees and special events (e.g. fundraisers; seasonal celebrations). Also, after attending an orientation session, interested persons may attend monthly community meetings, where decisions are made related to the business of the community using a consensus decision-making process.

In the next section I describe the community-building, community dynamics and tensions, and capacity-building activities at Whole Village, as identified through document review and participant-observation during organized meetings and retreats.

6.2 Findings of document review and participant-observation

Review of Whole Village documents was undertaken for the purposes of obtaining background and contextual information. In particular, documents provided factual information on the group's history, the types of structures and processes which guide relations at Whole Village, and some insight on current and historical community dynamics and tensions, as well as community-building and capacity-building activities. Further insight on these activities and dynamics was gained through participant-observation, when for eight days over a 5-month period I participated in a variety of community activities, including organized meetings, shared meals and informal discussion. This participant-observation was particularly insightful regarding current and

significant community activities and dynamics that impact the development of

sustainable community at Whole Village. Documents and field notes were tagged

according to a codebook I created that aligned with the categories of community-

building, community dynamics, and capacity-building, identified during the literature

review component of this thesis, and my findings are detailed below. In addition, some of

these findings were corroborated through a fact-checking interview which I conducted

with a member of Whole Village's Community Dynamics Mandate Group on March 28,

2014. The findings below, however, are my interpretation of the data collected.

Collectively, document review, participant-observation, and the fact-checking interview,

allowed me to gain a solid understanding in a short period of time of Whole Village, as

an organization and how it operates, while at the same time proving context for

understanding community building, community dynamics, and capacity building at

Whole Village.

The findings in the sub-sections that follow align with the categories of

community-building, community dynamics, and capacity-building which were identified

during the literature review for this thesis.

6.2.1   Community building at Whole Village

The majority of the common ecovillage community-building structures and

processes identified in the literature were evident to me at Whole Village.

6.2.1.1 Vision and principles

For instance, Whole Village has an established vision and guiding principles which aim to provide a common understanding of Whole Village's purpose as a community. These are:

Whole Village Vision

We intend to create a community with a commitment to sustainability and land stewardship that provides a place to farm and to live in harmony with the natural habitat[28].

Founding Principles

It is fundamental to our shared purpose that we:

1) Welcome all those who embrace the founding principles.

2) Celebrate what we share in common, while being mindful of each other's unique individuality.

3) Foster an atmosphere of mutual interdependence through shared facilities, resources, responsibilities and activities balanced with an appreciation of privacy and private ownership.

4) Form a community that is planned, built and sustained through the leadership and participation of its members using a consensus discernment process.

5) Create a safe, healthy, and supportive village in which to nurture children.

6) Strive to be sustainable in all ways, ecologically, economically, spiritually and socially.

7) Integrate biodynamic, organic, permaculture and other ecologically sound farming principles in an economical manner.

8) Commit ourselves to the development of economic, political and cultural connections with our neighbours, our community, and the world as a whole.

In addition, on the Whole Village website, and in the property co-operative's by-laws, it further states that:

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[28] This vision and guiding principles are embedded in the by-laws of the Whole Village Property Co-operative Inc., and are available at: www.wholevillage.org. However, there is an interesting alteration of the Vision Statement on the Whole Village information pamphlet (n.d.), which does not make reference to farming, as included in the by-laws, and expands the statement about harmonious living to include people, as well as the natural environment; it says "We are a community with a commitment to sustainability and land stewardship seeking to live together in harmony with each other and with the natural habitat".

In bringing these principles to life, it is our intent to:

- Use not only the finances but also the sweat-equity of our members as much as possible.

- Educate ourselves to a better, and more sustainable lifestyle.

- Implement ecologically responsible energy, water and waste systems within the limits of present technology and economic viability.

Collectively, this vision and guiding principles reflect a 'life values' (Sumner 2003) culture, characterized a focus on: sustainability (demonstrated through lifestyle); conservationism; inclusivity; interdependence (between people and nature); balancing individualism with collectivism, and education.

6.2.1.2 Membership process

As explained on the Whole Village website, "an individual or family becomes a full Member of Whole Village by buying a suite and a share of the land. Members have full legal and financial obligations and privileges within the co-op. A Provisional Member has fulfilled most of the requirements for full membership but has not assumed the full legal and financial obligations of a Member. Provisional membership is a step toward becoming a full Member".

However, before becoming a member, or even moving in as a renter, prospective residents must go through Whole Village's membership process, as follows:

a) Attend an Orientation Session and be assigned a mentor from the current membership.

b) Attend at least six Whole Village events. These might include meetings, work bees, community dinners, or social events such as Games Night.

c) Fill out a New Member's questionnaire, and provide a short (auto)biography to be shared with the members.

    d)   After attending a Meeting of the Round in which the prospective resident shares her/his biography and answers questions by the members, the prospective resident will have to be approved by the consensus of the members.

According to information on the Whole Village website, "The membership process is intended as a mutual getting-to-know-you experience for both community members and the prospective residents". Furthermore, as is stated on the questionnaire, the process is intended "to determine the prospective member's probable fit with our community".

6.2.1.3 Decision-making process

At Whole Village, leadership, responsibilities and financial commitments are shared by members. In addition, all residents (including renters) participate in the governance of the community through participation in the consensus-based decision-making process. The majority of community decision-making occurs during the monthly Meetings of the Round (MotRs). All residents and members (Full or Provisional) can participate in these meetings and the consensus process; however, the right to block (a principled objection to a proposal which stops the proposal from moving forward) and the right to vote (usually reserved for highly contentious issues where consensus has not been achieved) is reserved for Full members only. The use of consensus aims to create an inclusive decision-making process, where every member/resident has the opportunity to ask questions, make suggestions, and request changes to any proposal put forward for consideration. Another example of inclusive decision-making that I witnessed during one of the meetings was the use of 'dot-mocracy' in order to decide the top 4 issues that the community would discuss during the upcoming 'Resiliency Retreat'. For this exercise, the retreat planning committee provided a list of potential discussion categories and assigned each attendee 8 dots, which they could distribute amongst the categories

however they wished (e.g. one dot per category; all dots on one category), and the four categories that received the most dots formed the agenda.

6.2.1.4 Agreements and rules

The legal organization of Whole Village is set out in By-law No.5 ("A by-law relating generally to the transaction of the business and affairs of WHOLE VILLAGE PROPERTY CO-OPERATIVE INC."). However, the rules that govern living at Whole Village are laid out in By-law No.1 ("A by-law that contains the rights and obligations of GREENHAVEN CO-OPERATIVE and its member/owners). This by-law includes an occupancy agreement, as well as extensive provisions on member rights, expected member contributions, housing charges, allowed use (of land and buildings) and expected behaviour, occupancy rights and standards, and provisions relating to membership termination including the sale of suites. For instance, there is a monthly occupancy cost for each suite in Greenhaven, which covers land taxes, insurance, heat, electricity, capital reserve fund and maintenance. This monthly fee varies according to the size of the suite. In addition, members are responsible for the condition of their private suites. Furthermore, there are community participation expectations, including meeting attendance and community service hours (e.g. cooking communal meals, cleaning shared spaces, working on community projects during monthly work bees) – it is estimated that this community work takes approximately 9 hours per week to complete. There is also a sub-occupancy agreement that essentially requires renters to abide by the same residency rules as owners. Schedule F – Land Use Policy includes an extensive list of rules to "preserve and protect the natural environment, buildings and belongings" of Whole Village. In addition, there is a pet policy, guidelines for parents and children, and a

kitchen handbook. Finally, there is a Whole Village Community Covenant, which is an agreement intended to provide guidance on how to be 'in community'; it reads as follows:

> "As a member of Whole Village community, I shall strive to be the best version of myself:
>
> 1) by taking responsibility for personal growth, community participation and leadership;
>
> 2) by maintaining high standards of personal integrity;
>
> 3) by using clear and honest communication and open listening;
>
> 4) by practicing non-violence, protecting others from violence and working to resolve conflict;
>
> 5) by trusting the good intentions of others;
>
> 6) by relating to others with respect and acceptance;
>
> 7) by co-operating with others and honouring agreements;
>
> 8) by thinking and acting for the good of the community;
>
> 9) by offering my service to the community and the planet, while preserving my own health and well-being,
>
> 10) by developing and deepening my respect for and sense of connection with the natural world".

The complex of by-laws, policies, guidelines, articulated expectations, and the community covenant, provides a fairly comprehensive community structure at Whole Village. This structure is clearly intended to support co-operative living, and to foster personal growth and healthy inter-personal relationships.

6.2.1.5 The Intangibles – interactions for cohesion, interdependence and reciprocity

There are a variety of organized activities at Whole Village that encourage interactions between residents and provide opportunities for the development of relationships, bonding, and trust, and contribute to a sense of belonging and community

(i.e. cohesion, interdependence, and reciprocity). As already mentioned, eating together is one of these activities. At Whole Village, residents aim to eat dinners together from Monday to Friday. However, a community meal is dependent on someone volunteering to cook, and there have been challenges lately getting someone to sign-up. Due to the changing make-up of the community, with more residents working off-site or having childcare responsibilities now living at Whole Village, there are fewer people available to cook (which can take an entire afternoon given there may be up to 25 mouths to feed per meal). Also, some residents find cooking for such a large number of people overwhelming, so do not sign up for these duties. That said there were well-attended, community dinners every time I was on-site, and I found that they certainly did provide an opportunity to get to know people and to discuss recent happenings at Whole Village or current events.

Whole Villagers also work together, but the majority of this collective work appears to occur during monthly workbees – this work tends to involve work in the community gardens, tending to the berry bushes and maple trees, and land conservation activities. The workbee I attended included participation by at least 10 residents and several off-site members. Also, a few of the younger residents recently took over the Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) gardens this year (gardens that produce food for community meals and individual residents, and also generate food for sale at market), and so this sub-group will be working together this growing season. The remainder of the work on the land is done by the Property Manager, and a couple of the older, retired residents, with the support of seasonal volunteers and interns. In addition, there is committee work to do to keep the community running (e.g. mandate groups for

community dynamics, land stewardship, membership, communications and outreach, and legal and financial) – there are at least several members/residents on each of these committees. The community also comes together to raise funds for community projects, collectively contributing to bake and craft sales, and events like the fall 'Scare-raiser' (a public event which involves food and outdoor activities).

In addition to working together, community members socialize through organized activities, such as monthly games night, solstice celebrations and family-friendly fun days. Also, major life events in the community (e.g. two deaths and one wedding), have brought residents together in grief and celebration. Finally, as well as the organized activities described, there are informal get-togethers (e.g. a spontaneous Friday night movie in the common lounge, or an after dinner soccer game), which simply result from sharing common space and living close to one another.

6.2.1.6 Raising consciousness

Raising consciousness could be considered to essentially involve what Korten (2006) describes as developing an inclusive and integral worldview, and realizing the interdependence of all beings. This is certainly the type of consciousness presented in Whole Village's vision and guiding principles, and supported by other community structure and processes, such as the membership and decision-making processes, and the community's agreements and rules. Thus, while it is likely that Whole Village attracts the inclusive and integrally-conscious (or those moving toward that path), the environment also appears conducive to the heightening of consciousness. In terms of actively pursuing consciousness-raising however, much of what I witnessed appeared to lean toward growing awareness of the interconnections between people, specifically emotional

interdependence, and was largely linked with building capacity for understanding how to relate well to one another (these activities will be described later, in the capacity-building section of this chapter). Occasionally however, there were references made to nature connections, such as during opening or closing meditations that were sometimes part of community meetings / retreats. That said, while spirituality is mentioned in the founding principles of Whole Village, it does not appear to be largely present in the Whole Village culture.

This section has provided my findings on community-building processes and structures at Whole Village. Through my observations, I conclude that there are significant community-building opportunities, both organized and informal (e.g. workbees; social events), that may contribute to group cohesiveness and healthy inter-personal relationships. These community-building activities occur within a culture that values sustainability, conservation, inclusivity, interdependence, both individualism and collectivism, and education. However, despite valuing inclusivity, Whole Village seeks to exclude, through its membership process, any person who would not seem like a 'good fit' for the community, and any person who would not abide by the community's established rules and expectations. Later in this chapter I will discuss residents' perspectives on community-building at Whole Village. Next however, I will identify the community dynamics challenges and tensions that were evident through document review and observation.

6.2.2   Community dynamics at Whole Village

As identified in my literature review, many of the challenges associated with living and working together in an ecovillage can arise from community dynamics

challenges, or 'structural conflict', that may be present in how a community identifies itself (e.g. vision; principles) and in how it organizes itself (e.g. membership; decision-making), or between identifiable groups of people within the community, such as action-oriented versus process-oriented people. These dynamics challenges require the community to address sensitive issues such as principles, power, personality types and money. In this section I identify the community dynamics challenges evident at Whole Village. I focus on current dynamics, as identified both through observation and interviews. However, reference will also be made to historical challenges, as derived from document analysis, to identify those that are long-standing.

Economic challenges certainly exist at Whole Village, to the extent that an open letter to friends of Whole Village several years ago identified the community as 'in crisis', from a financial perspective. As the letter explained, the crisis arose as, over a five year period, a substantial number of members had left the property, and they had been unsuccessful at selling their suites. In two cases, the community bought the suites, leaving the co-operative with a substantial mortgage. Currently, the community is in better financial shape, as one suite has recently been purchased, and there is another suite sale that appears imminent. Also, all suites not currently occupied by owners are rented at a price that covers the majority of the mortgage costs, but not necessarily all of the occupancy costs. Costs not covered by rental income are paid collectively by the owners. In addition, there appears to be substantially more interest in Whole Village, in particular by younger people looking to live in an ecologically-conscious community, but who do not have the financial means or desire to take on the financial responsibilities of ownership. This has created a 'full house' at Whole Village, but the financial risk is not

evenly distributed. In addition, the cost to rent a suite at Whole Village is relatively high (according to renters who are familiar with rental prices in the area), and cannot be covered by working on the property (which is largely unpaid work). Thus, paying rent requires most renters to work off-site, which drastically reduces the time and energy they have to commit to community work. These economic circumstances greatly contribute to the 'renter-owner dynamic' – a huge tension in the community that will be discussed later in this chapter, based on the perspectives of Whole Village residents gained during the interview process.

The economic situation at Whole Village also reveals tension between the community vision and individual beliefs about how the vision should be realized. Whole Village's vision and guiding principles speak to a commitment to economic sustainability, farming, and sweat equity. However, none of these elements are currently well supported at Whole Village. For instance, the lack of income-generating opportunities at Whole Village means that residents spend more time off site attending to their individual financial needs, and less time working on community endeavours that would provide benefit to the community. Furthermore, the general lack of financial resources at Whole Village means that it is impossible to create more affordable access to the community, such as through the provision of sweat equity. Thus, those who are interested in supporting organic farming at Whole Village, for the most part end up being unpaid volunteers who cannot build the equity necessary to stay in the community. For this reason, the farm at Whole Village is not a fully functioning farm, and its financial stability is constantly precarious. In fact, if it was not for the full-time commitment of one of the retired owners, farming at Whole Village would likely not take place.

Another challenge that may impact the economic stability of the farm at Whole Village relates to conflicting values between members about the raising of animals for sale. The documentation reveals that there has been continuous conflict over the issue throughout Whole Village's history, with a decision reached that no animals would be raised for sale, despite some members' contentions that responsibly-raised animals were necessary to have an economically-viable organic farm, and despite the fact that vegetarianism is not a collective principle of the community. This decision limits some income-generating potential on the property, and thus may contribute to limiting who can afford to live on the property. The challenge was highlighted for me when I attended an orientation session at Whole Village, and another attendee decided this community would not be suitable for him, as his desire to raise rabbits for sale, which would provide him with his primary source of income, could not be accommodated. The issue was also raised during a Meeting of the Round which I attended, where a proposal for an aquaponics system was presented. In this case however, it was decided that the proposal could proceed, as the number of fish raised would only be sufficient for community consumption, not for public sale. The community decision around the raising of animals for sale, was described to me by one member as a decision that 'balanced the values of community members'; however, it appeared to me to be based on individual preferences, rather than being clearly aligned with community principles.

It is impossible to know how many people have wanted to live at Whole Village, but eventually decided it was not financially feasible, but it was certainly a concern raised repeatedly during my conversations with Whole Villagers, and it was one of the primary issues stated in an exit interview email prepared by a departing resident (dated 2009),

which shows this has been an on-going concern in the community for quite some time. That same exit interview email was particularly insightful in identifying structural conflicts at Whole Village, where vision, organizational structure, and the priorities / values of members do not align. This person, who had lived in the community for about 5 years, identified a lack of community cohesion around the following issues:

a) whether Whole Village should co-manage and operate on-site businesses,

b) whether Whole Village should be 'biodynamic',

c) whether meat animals should be part of the farm plan,

d) whether outreach and education is a core objective of the Ecovillage,

e) whether younger, low-income people should be incorporated,

f) whether members are investing enough time and energy into the project, and

g) whether the founding principle of self-sufficiency is a worthwhile or achievable goal.

Furthermore, in his email he stated that, "despite having a vision statement and founding principles, I witnessed several differing visions being played out simultaneously, which is the result of a lack of unified direction at the organizational level". As well, he felt his contributions to the farm received only half-hearted support from some members, making him feel like he was pursuing his own personal vision for the farm. Also, he saw "lots of resistance to idea of 're-visioning'", and thus, "It became more and more difficult for me to figure out if the project was headed in a direction that was in alignment with my thoughts and desires". He ended with the statement: "In order for me to stay committed to any organization for the long-term, I would need to see a clearer set of documents outlining why the organization was formed, what it intends to do in the world, and how it

will achieve its goals." Reading this email, I was reminded of some of the concerns I had heard expressed by some of the current residents at Whole Village – particularly the younger ones who had not bought in – and I imagined that several of them would have whole-heartedly supported the sentiments expressed in this departing letter.

The review of documentation and participant-observation revealed that economic and financial instability was at the root of the primary tensions associated with living at Whole Village. However, these were exacerbated by lack of cohesiveness around the vision and goals of the community, and thus, a lack of strategic planning to support collective action. As a result, there is an unhealthy organizational dynamic, where people who may have the desire to commit their energy to community endeavours do not have the time to do so. The perspectives of current Whole Villagers on these issues will be identified later in this chapter. Before turning to that however, I will discuss some of the capacity-building activities I witnessed at Whole Village, that are being employed to address some of these challenging dynamics.

6.2.3   Capacity building at Whole Village

The literature on ecovillages identified common tools and skills necessary to develop the capacity to live and work together, including: conflict management, decision-making, facilitation, good communication, and healthy inter-personal skills, as well as the ability to reflect on one's own behaviour, and improve where necessary. All of these skills appear to be evident at Whole Village, to varying extents. In large part, it is the goal of Whole Village's Community Dynamics Mandate Group (CDMG) to ensure this capacity is being developed, as its mandate is to: promote common understanding, facilitate authentic communication, and deal with conflict creatively. To this end, the

CDMG leads community exercises during meetings that are designed to help members develop knowledge and skills that would support healthy inter-personal relationships and community dynamics. For instance, recently they have been discussing a set of 'Conversation Cafe commitments' during MotRs, which provides members with some 'food for thought' and an opportunity to discuss their reactions to these commitments; an example of one of these commitments is: "Everyone wants closeness with others, and autonomy – and these are compatible." The CDMG also uses a prescribed conflict resolution process that helps members find reconciliation on difficult issues. This process was actively applied during the participant-observation period, for instance, when two members had an intense conversation around the issue of power during one of the retreat discussions, which caused them both to leave the room angry. When this occurred, a member of the CDMG joined then, and applied the reconciliation process, which enabled the two members to continue their discussion in private, and to eventually re-join the larger group.

The Resiliency Retreat was another organized attempt to address community dynamics challenges at Whole Village. This was a two-part, two weekend retreat. Part one included: discussion on Whole Village's vision and guiding principles, a discussion on the acquisition of community food, and small-group discussions about how to make Whole Village more resilient, over the short and long term. The discussion around vision and principles was not undertaken to change them, but to build understanding in the group about what individuals align with and prioritize the most, because, as was stated by one of the organizers: "these ideas shape how we engage in Whole Village and are

reflective of what is important for each member now and why they are here". Some interesting observations from the event were:

- Most participants felt that the principles were open to interpretation;

- Some felt the principles may have made sense when the community was formed, but do not accurately reflect the group that is there now;

- There was almost an even split between members who most valued 'building community' and those who most valued 'environmental protection / food production';

- There was surprisingly low support for consensus as a decision-making process, with one participants actually stating "I hate consensus – I see it as a form of compromise."

Another activity that was undertaken before the retreat, with the results presented at the retreat, was a survey of community work hours to determine where the majority of energy was applied (30% of all hours go toward growing food), and the creation of a task list to "make visible all the things that happen to make this place run".

Part Two of the Resiliency Retreat was focused on community dynamics, and a large part of the day was dedicated to discussing the renter-owner dynamic, including issues of power, responsibility, and security. Much of this dynamic was also addressed by interviewees during the individual interviews portion of my research, so will be discussed later in this chapter. An interesting observation I made from the day however, was the positive feeling created by several community-building exercises that closed-out the retreat. The first was The Gifting Circle, where for about 2 hours participants engaged with each other one-on-one to 'provide feedback' in a compassionate manner. The Gifting Circle requires participants to indicate when they are open to receiving feedback (e.g. by placing an object in front of them to indicate they are ready to be approached), and then any participant is free to approach the person and provide feedback by finishing

these sentences: 1) "Something I appreciate about you is…", 2) "Something I find challenging about you is…", 3) "Something I know about myself is…". The purpose is not to engage in discussion, but to create a safe space for this kind of feedback, in which the receiver is given the 'gift' of insight on how they are perceived by others, which enables them to make changes to their behaviour, if necessary, and supports improvements in inter-personal relationships. The retreat ended with a group song, followed by a double-back circle that enabled every participant to express to every other participant one of the following statements: "I see you", "I appreciate you", "I honour you", or "I love you". The result, I found, was that a difficult day ended with an air of conviviality and peace.

Through participant-observation I was able to identify the use of activities and techniques used at Whole Village to build the capacity to live and work together; in particular, to support healthy inter-personal relationships, good communication skills, opportunities to build understanding among members on issues of collective interest (e.g. how to build community resiliency), and opportunities for personal growth. Collectively, all of these attempts at building the capacity to live and work together at Whole Village must be having some impact, because as one participant stated during the retreats: "one of our accomplishments is that, even after some nasty disagreements, we are still civil to each other, we look each other in the eye the next day – that doesn't happen everywhere."

In the sections that follow, I consider community-building, community dynamics, and capacity-building, from the perspectives of Whole Villagers, as gained from individual interviews. These perspectives will be combined with the findings of

document review and participant-observation, as detailed above, and used in Chapter 7 of this thesis as the basis of analysis.

6.3   Results of semi-structured interviews

Interviews were conducted with eight Whole Village residents; this included four owner-residents and four renters. Each were asked a series of eight, open-ended questions (see Appendix C). Occasionally, additional questions were asked to obtain greater depth on the issues raised by respondents, or for purposes of clarification. Each interview began with introductory questions, to get a sense of who the respondent was, and what drew them to Whole Village. This was followed with a set of questions that aimed to explore their perspectives on community-building, community dynamics, and capacity-building at Whole Village, including their perspectives on how to build sustainable community at Whole Village. Questions 1-2 aligned with the concept of community-building, and sought to understand how Whole Village fosters a sense of community, in particular respecting some of the foundational elements suggested as necessary in the theoretical literature on community-building and group dynamics, such as 'belonging', 'trust' and 'interdependence'. Questions 3-5 aimed to develop an understanding of the community experience – the challenges and rewards, differences in individual and group interests, and how these are balanced, and the specific dynamics at play that create tensions between residents and impact on their ability to live and work together. Question 6 asked residents to reflect on capacity-building at Whole Village – specifically how their capacities to live and work 'in community' were improved and/or supported during their time there, and how (i.e. through formal or informal activities). Respondents were given six capacities to consider (taken from the literature review which identified skills and

abilities needed for living in community and collaborating), but they were not required to address them all individually. These capacities related to: discussion, honest and compassionate communication, and decision-making; non-violent conflict management; embracing diversity of people and perspectives; and inner work, such as trying to be less reactive, more reflective, and to live authentically. Finally, question 7 asked respondents to consider how to build sustainable community at Whole Village, focusing on the needs of people (e.g. social, economic, spiritual), rather than land-based physical requirements (i.e. environmental aspects of sustainable community). Respondents were also given an opportunity at the end of the interview to add thought (question 8 – anything else?); the responses to this question have largely been included where appropriate in the compilation of responses to questions 1 – 7, but in some cases feed into the analysis included in Chapter Seven of this thesis. Following are the compiled responses from the interviews, which draw out the key themes in community-building, community dynamics, and capacity-building, in support of sustainable community, at Whole Village, from the perspective of Whole Villagers.

6.3.1   Perceptions on community building

When asked to explain why they decided to live at Whole Village, the majority of interviewees identified a long-held desire to live 'in community' with others, rather than living in the typical North American arrangement of single families living an individualized lifestyle, with little to no shared property. Some of their sentiments included: 'this opportunity came at the right time'; 'this was an opportunity to fulfill a dream', and 'I had been looking for this for years'. Some had previous experience living more communally, or came from large families, but the majority did not, yet all believed

that there are benefits to living in community that cannot be achieved through the typical

North American living arrangement. The benefits of living 'in community' were not

clearly articulated by all, though a desire to live a less isolated lifestyle appeared to be

commonly shared. However, several respondents also made reference to the

environmental benefits of living in community, such as: a reduced ecological footprint,

growing their own food, and sharing (which reduces consumption). In addition, a few

mentioned a hope to model a more sustainable lifestyle.

After developing an understanding of what brought respondents to Whole Village,

they were asked to reflect on their community experience. This began with a question

about their experience of belonging, and what they believe contributes to their sense of

belonging at Whole Village. Some respondents mentioned that their sense of belonging

resulted from a vague notion of 'fit' (e.g. 'I feel like I fit here'; 'I've been told that I fit

here'; 'I feel like an integral member of this community'; 'I create belonging'). Several

suggested it was the collaborative work that they do (e.g. growing food; conservation)

that provides a sense of unity. Yet others spoke to specific interactions that foster a sense

of belonging, such as supporting each other in times of celebration and grief. However,

the majority suggested it was the inclusive nature of the community that contributed to

their sense of belonging - this included eating together and other social activities that

everyone was invited to participate in, and the decision-making process (i.e. use of

consensus), which provides an opportunity for everyone's voice to be heard, or as

described by one respondent, 'levels the playing field'. However, not everyone agreed

that the decision-making process was truly inclusive – in fact, the issue of power

differentials between two community sub-groups, the owners and renters, was a theme

that arose throughout most of the interviews, and in response to many of the questions posed. Generally speaking, owners feel more secure in their status as Whole Villagers, as they own the suites that they live in and cannot be asked to leave, except under extreme circumstances; thus, they confidently expressed feelings of belonging. Comparatively, the majority of the renters felt their sense of belonging was much more fluid - changing over time based on events that made them feel either secure or insecure about their status within the community. Renters were also more likely to refer to a feeling of belonging based on the relationships they formed (which changed as people came and went), which resulted in their sense of belonging not being universal (e.g. belonging to a sub-group of the community, rather than the community as a whole). Most renters described their sense of 'belonging' as something that 'ebbs and flows'. This fluidity in a sense of belonging among the renter group, coupled with tensions associated with how community work is valued at Whole Village (a tension that will be addressed in further detail in this chapter), has resulted in some particularly negative perspectives on the status of renters at Whole Village; for instance, as stated by one of the respondents who is a renter, "it doesn't matter how long I have been here, or how much I contribute – if someone comes along and buys a suite, I'm out – I'm just a placeholder". However, the impact of this tension is not limited to the renter group: as one owner suggested, it is a drain on everyone's mental and emotional energy. This owner-renter dynamic will be discussed in further detail in the next section of this chapter.

The next question asked respondents to consider how trust and interdependence were fostered at Whole Village. All made reference to the type of culture created at Whole Village, describing it as a place that feels safe, where talking behind people's

backs is discouraged, and being open and honest (e.g. 'you can't wear a mask') is encouraged. As part of this culture, some suggested there was a general commitment to building understanding, trying to honour emotions and be compassionate, and to work out their issues, not jumping to blame, and working on how they relate to one another. Some reference was made to specific processes that support this culture, such as the membership process that screens people before they move in for 'fit' and demonstrated ability to live in community, and other processes such as the decision-making process and established conflict resolution processes that help people talk to each other and work out their issues. In addition, as with building a sense of community, many respondents felt that trust was built through relationships and everyday social interactions (e.g. check-in, games night, rituals, eating together, workbees), which help people get to know and understand one another and build camaraderie. Finally, there was some suggestion that trust was built when you knew you could count on someone, or as one respondent suggested, "when you do what you say you're going to do".

Despite the myriad ways identified that build trust at Whole Village, there were suggestions that trust levels were not high at this time. For instance, one Whole Villager said, "I don't feel we're getting high grades on this at the moment". Again, similar to the experience of belonging, a few made reference to the "ebb and flow" nature of trust, and how it can be limited to sub-groups. A few mentioned recent events (e.g. the departure of the CSA manager over disputes with some of the owners; suite sales which have displaced renters), as having a significant effect on trust levels, including between the owner and renter sub-groups. Other suggestions for decreased levels of trust included, a perception that some owners feel the need to maintain control over what happens in the

community, and that there are challenges with communication (e.g. don't confront each other; uncomfortable expressing feelings).

The difference in perspectives between owners and renters was also evident, to some extent, on the issue of interdependence at Whole Village. For instance, the owners were more likely to suggest that interdependence was high (one even suggested 'obvious') at Whole Village, making statements such as "we couldn't do all this without each other", in reference to how much collective work is necessary just to keep the place running, as well as the varied contributions by residents with different skills. They suggested that interdependence was fostered through activities such as growing food, cooking and eating together, as well as weekly check-in meetings which provided an opportunity to sort out logistics and keep in touch with one another about how they were doing. The perspective of renters, on the other hand, while acknowledging the interdependence that resulted from this collective work, hinted at an ideological rift between the two groups; for instance, suggesting that the level of material interdependence was superficial or basic, and that deeper interdependence was not possible with the economic and power disparity, as well as the prevailing culture of individuality they believe exists in the community.

Both sides however, made reference to high levels of emotional interdependence within the community. For instance, there were several references to providing support during times of grief. Or, as one respondent suggested: "we are all part of the same organism here", going on to explain how, in sharing their lives together they affect each other's experiences and ability to function in a healthy manner, and that they all have the choice of whether they want to be a positive or negative influence.

The responses to these questions revealed that a sense of belonging, trust and interdependence, were not universally felt at Whole Village, and that the renter-owner dynamic was particularly divisive in these respects. The next set of questions posed to the interviewees delved into the community experience – the challenges and rewards, differences in individual and group interests, and how these are balanced, and the specific dynamics at play that create tensions between residents and impact on their ability to live and work together (some of which have already been introduced).

6.3.2   Perceptions on community dynamics

Questions 3 and 4 asked interviewees if they could relate to common sentiments in the literature on intentional communities, which suggest that living 'in community' is not easy, but it is rewarding, and that there is a need to continuously balance individual interests with those of the group. If they agreed, they were asked to elaborate on the difficulties and rewards of community living, and what enables them to achieve a balance of interests. Finally, question 5 asked interviewees to identify dynamics at Whole Village which created tension and impacted on their lives and collective work. There was some overlap in responses to these questions, in particular in respect to what is not easy about living in community, and the dynamics at Whole Village that create tensions. For this reason, the responses to questions 3-5 have been compiled collectively and discussed in a logical manner below (rather than strictly sequentially).

The majority of respondents agreed with the sentiment that living in community was hard, with one stating that "life would certainly be easier if we didn't live here right now". However, one respondent took issue with the sentiment, suggesting that living in community is no more difficult than getting along with friends and family 'on the

outside'. That opinion aside, the majority appeared to align with this response: "anyone who thinking living with other people is easy is crazy." Some of the reasons suggested that community life is harder than the average, non-communal lifestyle were:

- the need to deal with your own short-comings and to look at your own behaviour;

- the inability to ignore conflict;

- the work expectations, or sheer volume of work that needs to get done, as well as differences in the time and energy that people have or are willing to commit to communal activities (and associated feelings of stress, guilt, being watched, being judged, resentment, or not being able to relax);

- different standards (e.g. cleanliness) and priorities amongst community members (e.g. food production versus group process work);

- lack of appreciation or accounting for various contributions (e.g. child care is undervalued), as well as varied needs for acknowledgement of contributions;

- the emotional and psychological impact of such intense and constant engagement with others (as one respondent stated: "I've cried more at Whole Village than I have in my entire adult life");

- everyone having to have a say, which makes it difficult to get anything done;

- residential instability – people coming and going a lot which makes it hard to build relationships, as well as to plan effectively for the future;

- a feeling of a constant power struggle, and

- a lack of shared vision (despite the existence of a vision statement and principles).

The continuous need to balance personal and group interests was also a component of why many respondents felt that living in community was challenging; however, the nature of this balancing act seemed to vary by age and extent of multiple commitments. For instance, the younger respondents, who for the most part had multiple commitments related to careers and family, in addition to community work expectations, expressed significant stress associated with trying to satisfy all of these commitments. In

comparison, the older respondents, who were all retired, spoke more of their personal well-being and willingness to do community work. For instance, some felt that as they got older they were less inclined to contribute all of their free time to the community, feeling their well-being was better served pursuing personal interests and hobbies, whereas others felt community work to be of utmost importance (going as far as to say they were committing their whole lives to the community), but felt they needed to hold back somewhat as resentment grew over a feeling of giving everything while others were not giving as much as they could. Maintaining relationships with friends and family outside the community was also mentioned as a challenge.

Furthermore, an interesting challenge associated with balancing individual and group interests was raised by one respondent, which related to the lack of shared vision previously mentioned. This respondent suggested that, "the interests of the group are not uniform; sometimes it seems more like balancing your individual interests with someone else's individual interests". At least three other respondents shared similar sentiments, adding that it is "hard to balance interests when people are here for different reasons", for instance, some residents are more interested in the farm work and food production, and others are more focused on building community through process work and nurturing healthy relationships. In addition, this tension is exacerbated by differences in standards, expectations, and how varied contributions are valued. To that last point, the valuation of child-raising presented additional complexity to the balancing of individual and group interests. For instance, several respondents suggested that there is some lack of appreciation for how much time and energy childcare takes (taking away the ability to contribute to other community activities) - some of which is the result of different

opinions on parenting styles and the level of engagement parents should commit to child development - as well as some lack of appreciation for what these children bring to the community, and more broadly to working toward creation of a sustainable future: as one respondent suggested, "arguably, you can achieve more (toward sustainability) raising children rather than organic carrots, but it's hard for everyone to see integrated sustainability."

Respondents expressed various strategies for coping with the pressures of the community-life balancing act. Among these was the 'pulling back' strategy already mentioned, or leaning toward giving their personal needs priority, as a means to maintain emotional well-being. Almost every respondent mentioned the need to set limits, and to develop the ability to say 'no' and not feel guilty about it. Having a partner who reminded them not to take on too much was a benefit to some. Others mentioned leaving the property as helpful for providing separation from the community, and an opportunity to relax and re-charge – however, almost every respondent who mentioned this strategy also expressed a wish, or ideal, to be able to deal with community living without the need for periodic 'escapes'. One respondent pondered, "perhaps I'm too attached"?

Some of the responses to what was not easy about living in community, including what interests needed to balanced, were repeated in the identification of community dynamics and tensions that challenged Whole Villagers as they lived and worked together. Challenging dynamics included:

- difficulties in inter-personal relationships, impacted by lack of trust, poor communication, and different standards;
- tensions around work expectations and priorities;

- differences in values between generations;

- lack of group cohesiveness due to lack of unity around the community vision, and

- economic and power disparities between owners and renters.

Though these dynamics overlap in respect to the issues they create in the community, I have nonetheless discussed them separately in the paragraphs that follow, pointing out obvious overlap where possible.

First of all, all respondents made reference to challenging inter-personal relationships as having an impact on their lives and work at Whole Village. In some ways, challenging inter-personal relationships resulted by how community residents relate to one another; for instance, some cited poor communication as a significant challenge (e.g. not expressing feelings and letting resentments build up, then raising feeling which often came across as anger). Related to poor communication was the issue of trust levels, which varied between residents as previously discussed. Also, some mentioned the strains on inter-personal relationships caused by different standards in respect to shared space (e.g. aesthetic preferences), or in relation to farm work (e.g. the tension created when a high number of inexperienced, 'would-be' farmers are attracted to Whole Village as a place to learn organic farming, meets up with a desire to produce high quality fruit and vegetables for sale at market). Inter-personal tensions were also exacerbated by the dynamics discussed in the following paragraphs.

All respondents made some mention of the tensions around work expectations, their fulfillment, and how different types of work was valued and accounted for. As previously mentioned, significant tension was evident around work expectations, with the

majority of interviewees responding that they felt pressure to meet a level of work expectations at Whole Village (either in Greenhaven, or on the property, or in committee work) that was not compatible with their individual interests or obligations (whether that be outside work and family obligations, or pursuing other interests which were personally fulfilling). On the other hand, the few respondents who did not have significant responsibilities outside the work at Whole Village and were willing to spend the majority of their time contributing to Whole Village work, felt constantly under pressure from the overwhelming amount of work that needed to be done (that at times they felt they were the only ones doing), and the associated resentments that built up.

Related to the tension created by the work-time-willingness dynamic was the specific issue of child-raising, and differing perspectives on how much time a parent should dedicate to child development activities versus working in the community (e.g. on the farm). While child care is, and always has been, a time consuming task, the dynamic here was exacerbated by a difference in inter-generational values. This dynamic highlighted values on child-raising amongst the younger generation (both parents and not) that included a high degree of involvement in child development, and a prioritizing of child-raising over other work, butting up against up against the 'hard work' ethic of certain members of the older generation, who saw farm work and child care as compatible pursuits. Some respondents also felt that this dynamic was further challenged by differing perspectives on the time and energy demanded by childcare between those who have raised children versus those who have not. Ultimately, this dynamic resulted in some members of the younger generation expressing a feeling of unfair judgment and the setting of unreasonable work expectation on them, and some members of the older

generation feeling unfairly burdened or used by others who they felt could be contributing more.

Another challenge mentioned by a significant number of respondents was the lack of shared vision and priorities at Whole Village, which fed into the tensions around work contributions, but also resulted in a lack of community cohesion. For instance, despite the explicit reference to farming in the Whole Village vision statement, it was clear that there was no unified commitment to farming, including by the founding members (which one respondent mentioned were generally not 'farm people'), or by the existing residents, the majority of which did not have the time to commit to farm work, or were not so inclined, preferring to focus on the inter-relational aspects of building community, including eating together and socializing, rather than working on the land. This lack of commitment to farming has had spin-off effects, such as a lack of commitment to farm planning which resulted in an annual community budgeting process which one respondent likened to 'guessing'. In addition, despite reference to a 'commitment to sustainability' in the community's vision statement, as one respondent pointed out, "there isn't one version of what 'living sustainably' really means", or, as another respondent mentioned, "there's no one idea about the future people want here", which results in sub-group conversations around visions of the future for Whole Village. Collectively, however, there appears to be hesitancy to engage in long-term visioning exercises, which seems to be influenced by the over-riding consideration of 'who will do the work'? This issue feeds into, and is influenced in many ways, by the tensions associated with economics and power – a dynamic discussed in more detail in the next paragraph.

Undoubtedly the most significant dynamic raised by interviewees was the dynamic between owners and renters at Whole Village, which is a complex dynamic which appears to be predominately related to the economics of life and work at Whole Village, disparities in financial situations and interests between the two groups, and associated perceptions on power and status within the community. While this dynamic does not necessary result in a unified experience within the two sub-groups of owner and renter, I discuss the dynamic below as if the experience within each of the two groups is somewhat homogenous; obviously this is an oversimplification, but it would be impossible to provide a summary that would accurately reflect each individual's perspective, especially as these interviews represent only a sample of owners and renters at Whole Village.

The challenging dynamic between renters and owners appears to have been fueled by recent events that highlighted the vulnerable status of renters as residents at Whole Village: namely, the recent suite sales to new members that displaced long-term renters, and the recent departure of one of the community's farmers (who several residents had a strong personal bond with), who many respondents felt was essentially 'forced out' by a strong, minority (i.e. a couple of owners). As presented by the perspective of the renters, these events highlighted that, regardless of the number of years you have lived at Whole Village, and the amount you have contributed to the community, your value to the community (and some argued, your power and influence), was ultimately decided by your ability to purchase a suite and gain ownership status in the community. This created a general feeling of fear and vulnerability within the renter group, which was mentioned earlier, and has had a significant effect on their feelings of trust, interdependence, and

belonging in the community. On the other hand, fear and vulnerability were also raised as feelings experienced in the owner group, who saw the sale of suites as generally necessary in order to provide financial stability at Whole Village; this perspective results from the fact that there is a shared mortgage on the property that only owners are responsible for, and that rental fees alone do not cover, thus the sale of suites is seen as the primary means to financial stability. Interestingly, despite the dynamic creating a feeling of diminished value amongst the renter group, all of the owners interviewed expressed an appreciation for the contributions that many of the long-term renters made to the community, as well as a desire for them to stay.

Running through this dynamic was the tension created by the differing ideologies associated with money. Ultimately, the majority of the renters interviewed expressed that they were not money driven, and were drawn to Whole Village by the possibility of living a less money driven lifestyle (e.g. grow own food; share more, buy less). However, in the absence of a work-trade option at Whole Village, which was not deemed possible by owners because of the lack of financial resources to provide such an option, accommodation at Whole Village needed to be supported by a money paying job, which for the most part required renters to work off-property for companies that may not align with the values of Whole Village.

Finally, the renter-owner dynamic was identified as a 'constant power struggle' by one of the respondents. The issue of who does and doesn't have power at Whole Village was certainly a contentious one. On the one hand, the use of the consensus decision-making process, where everyone has a voice, and the community's bylaws, which provided equal rights between owners and provisional members (the status of

many of the longer-term renters) with the exception of the right to 'block' (owners only),

was thought to create a relatively even power balance between owners and renters. Also,

from the perspective of some (both owner and renters), where there was some power

imbalance, it could be considered justifiable (e.g. it may be appropriate for some of the

big financial decisions to be ultimately made only by those who have a financial stake in

the property). On the other hand, there were both structural and social power disparities

that were identified as both 'inevitable' between the two groups, and largely undesirable

for the healthy functioning of the community. For instance, as previously mentioned, a

renter could live at Whole Village for many years and not have the right to block

proposals, but a new owner, who goes through the 3-month process of becoming a full

member and being accepted by the community, automatically gets that blocking right

(this is an example of a structural power imbalance). Also, a social power disparity was

raised by several respondents in association with this 'right to block' status. This

disparity occurred as a result of lack of insecurity among the renters in relation to their

residency status, and the fact that they could be asked to leave anytime, or would need to

go through the consensus-process and be approved for membership should they

ultimately decide to stay and buy a suite. In order to maintain favour amongst those who

would ultimately decide whether they could stay at Whole Village, renters identified a

wariness to be too open about their opinions, or to be too pushy in regard to their interests

– they didn't want to 'rock the boat' so to speak, lest this be used against them, and

essentially impact their future status in the community. Thus, for the most part, renters

perceived that they had less social power than owners at Whole Village. Also, they

believed that this resulted in a less than healthy community, as there was less authenticity

in interactions, as well as the creation of an alliance of sorts by the renters (or owners more sympathetic to their interests), which has had a significant impact on healthy, inter-personal relationships.

Ultimately, the renter-owner dynamic, the associated economic and power disparities, and the recent events that have fueled negativity within this dynamic and resulted in strained inter-personal relationships, was identified as "a major breakdown in the community", which is thought will have a serious long-term impact on the community, or as was put by one respondent "we'll be paying for this for a long time". Furthermore, while the "need to keep talking", and to "remember that there are no bad guys, we are all on the same team", were identified as approaches necessary to manage this dynamic, it was clear that there was no foreseen solution to the challenges presented by it. This community dynamics challenge, and some of the others raised in this chapter, will be considered further in the next chapter of this thesis, which analyzes the Whole Village situation against the theoretical framework for community development and group dynamics, as well as the generalized and anecdotal ecovillage experience presented in the literature in respect to these issues.

Taking into consideration all of these challenges identified with living in community, it seems reasonable to question, why would anyone want to bother? Part of the answer must certainly have to do with the rewards of living in community. Every respondent agreed that on some level, community life is very rewarding, or has the potential to be. Responses included sentiments of fulfillment, such as: "it's exciting", "there are many opportunities to learn", and "I can really feel the impact of my work here". However, the majority of the rewards identified involved relationships, including:

"I have a built-in social life here", "I get to spend time with children", "children get a lot out of it", "I am more open and engaged", "people know the real me, so I can live more authentically", and "relationships are the reward".

Do these rewards outweigh the challenges? That is exactly one of the questions posed by the respondents themselves, when she said "the question is, is it rewarding enough'? The interviews certainly revealed varied levels of weariness with community living, and the relational challenges presented. One respondent expressed feeling grumpier and less tolerant, especially when people didn't keep the commitments they made. Another expressed fatigue in dealing with the same issues over and over, re-processing emotions with the same, or different, people. Yet another brought a philosophical consideration into their response, stating a belief that "even dysfunctional, stressful situations have their rewards – I believe we are spiritual beings having human experiences". Irrespective of the comparative heft of challenge versus reward, those who remain in the community today after many years, for some over ten years, for others on a second round after leaving and coming back again, reflect that both challenges and fulfillment can co-exist in community life. I think this sentiment was summed up nicely by the person who earlier expressed the belief that "anyone who thinks living with other people is easy, is crazy", when that same respondent stated, "now that I have lived in community, I wouldn't live without it – I would feel lonely, I would feel a loss of purpose."

In the next section of this chapter, perspectives are presented on how the capacities to live and to work at Whole Village are fostered and supported, so that

Wholevillagers may be able to deal with these challenges and reap the rewards of being a part of this community.

6.3.3   Perceptions on capacity building

During the individual interviews, when I asked one of the interviewees whether living in community was hard, the considered response was: "I don't want life to be about a smooth ride, I want good suspension so I can ride it out." Admittedly, we did not delve deeply into what 'good suspension' means in the context of community living, but arguably, building capacity to live and work together must be a part of that system. To obtain perspectives on how the capacities to live and work together were developed at Whole Village, interviewees were given a set of capacities that commonly appeared in the literature on communal living and collaborative work, and were asked to discuss if and how these capacities were fostered and supported in the community.

In general, the majority of respondents felt that most, if not all, the capacities identified were fostered or supported at Whole Village, though the perspectives on the extent they were actively or successfully fostered and/or developed varied. In addition, several respondents expressed the opinion that this type of capacity development is a long-term, labourious endeavour, as reflected in one response: "I would say a slow, slow yes to all". Following are some of the perspectives presented for specific capacities.

Many of the respondents felt that their capacity to participate effectively in community discussions and decision-making was fostered and supported at Whole Village, regardless whether they came to Whole Village with very little or significant prior experience in a collaborative group or community setting which would require such

skills. Several respondents suggested Whole Village had established a good, inclusive process for discussion and decision-making, and commended the consensus process and residents' ability to use it. Some respondents made reference to their personal growth and development, making statements like: "I have learned to assert myself"; "I was so quiet at first no one had any idea what I was thinking, but now I participate", and "Now I know if I am not heard, that is not ok – I have a right to be heard". Many of the respondents suggested that their abilities were improved simply through watching and practicing, with some being more specific, referring to the regular rotation of meeting facilitation or note-taking duties that enabled practice. One respondent did critique the decision-making process however, stating that use of consensus only works if you have a common vision, but that Whole Village's vision is flawed, as it does not adequately represent those of the people that live there now. This critique refers back to one of the structural challenges previously raised by respondents, and will be considered further in the next chapter of this thesis.

Similarly, the majority of respondents felt that the ability to manage conflict non-violently was fostered and supported at Whole Village. In fact, some statements were made about non-violent communication (NVC) being part of the culture at Whole Village (and good communication skills were referenced as central to non-violent conflict management); therefore, while not everyone was confident that they were 'good at it', they all felt they had ample opportunity to watch and learn. Also, several respondents made reference to specific processes that support non-violent conflict management at Whole Village, such as the activities organized by the Community Dynamics Mandate Group (CDMG), which are incorporated into community meetings, as well as the support

provided by CDMG members (i.e. if a conflict cannot be resolved by the involved parties, CDMG members will step in and assist). In addition, several residents were mentioned as having particularly good process skills, and who acted as process coaches for discussion, decision-making and conflict resolution, but as one respondent suggested "no one is truly neutral", adding further that, at times, it might be helpful to have more external expert support (though the cost for such support was considered an inhibitor). Again, personal growth was mentioned by several respondents in respect to the development of their conflict resolution abilities; for instance: "I don't run away as much now", and "I'm learning I can disagree with someone and still care about them". Also, there was reference made to needing to learn the appropriate time and place to address to conflict issues; for instance, one respondent suggested that waiting until the weekly 'check-in' meeting was inappropriate, especially if it meant that feelings about the issue had time to fester, and that it could contribute negatively, both on the people involved and on the well-being of the community, to use that particular forum to address inter-personal conflicts, as the individuals involved may feel 'under attack' is the discussion occurs in a group setting, and it could be perceived as 'dumping your emotional baggage everyone'. In addition, there was mention of the role that building understanding and trusting relationships – a process that can take some time - can play role in supporting the communication necessary for non-violent conflict resolution; for instance, as one respondent suggested: "you can be freer around people you've known for a long time", and several others mentioned The Gifting Circle, which provides a safe and respectful way to share feeling and perspectives one-on-one, which can alleviate inter-personal conflicts. Finally, if the conflict resulted from miscommunication, one respondent

suggested that the best way to deal with it is, "to take ownership for your miscommunications, then let it go".

There were varied opinions on how well diversity of people and perspectives were fostered and supported at Whole Village. In respect to people, several respondents noted that they thought they did 'pretty well' in respect to age, gender and sexual diversity, but that they were not "quite diverse enough", with several specifically referencing ethnic diversity as a area where they were challenged. However, while ethnic diversity would make Whole Village more representative of the broader, Ontario society, one respondent suggested it may not be exactly ideal, pointing to the experience of one resident of East Indian descent who has had challenges participating in shared meals due to differences in food preferences; as this respondent suggested, since one of the axioms of community living is "those who eat together, stay together", it may be reasonable to question whether ethnic diversity can be well-supported in intentional communities (that is however, a complex consideration well beyond the scope of this thesis). Furthermore, in respect to diversity of people, one person suggested that the economic structure of the community, which realistically made living at Whole Village affordable only for retirees with adequate finances and professionals who earned a living off-site, meant that it was essentially impossible to foster economic diversity at Whole Village.

The issue of diversity of perspectives was not addressed significantly by respondents, though there appeared to be a general sense that they naturally fostered a diversity of perspectives through the consensus decision-making process. However, there was one reference made to potentially "getting worse" at accepting different perspectives, with this respondent going on to suggest that it may be easier to accept differences

perspectives when you're on some sort of committee (i.e. a work setting), but that is gets

harder when you live with people, because its more intimate. Another respondent shared

that "some people find it hard to accept diversity (of perspectives)", and that everyone

seems to get along well when perspectives are 'like-minded', but when they are not, "it

feels like different perspectives are 'scary' for some people".

The perspectives on building capacity for honest and compassionate

communication, somewhat mirrored perspectives on discussion and decision-making and

non-violent conflict resolution, with some suggesting their communications skills have

improved, and that the culture of Whole Village has helped to "grow our capacity for

healthy dialogue" through example and practice, or as one respondent put it: "here we

learn to tell people the truth, unlike the rest of the world." However, others suggested that

that their ability to communicate well varied from person to person, and thus was

reflective of their inter-personal relationships. As one respondent suggested, "if you love

a person you can be open and honest, and you can take criticism from them." However, a

few respondents pointed out that honest communication and compassionate

communication were not the same thing, and that while they may be learning to 'be more

honest', they are still having some difficulty with 'the compassionate part', especially as

it appears that in the natural process of 'learning to say what you feel', that it all tends to

come off very negatively at first. One interesting example of this is when the

Communication Book, which is in the community kitchen and is available for anyone to

share messages with the whole community (on just about anything it seems), is used to

express frustrations in a seemingly 'violent' manner, like "CAN WHOEVER LEFT

THEIR DIRTY DISHES ON THE COUNTER YESTERDAY PLEASE CLEAN THEM

UP!!!!!". This example, while somewhat comical, shows that even attempts at honest, non-written communication can come off as aggressive (note use of capitals and multiple exclamation points). Also, another person suggested that good communication goes beyond being honest and compassionate, it is about being able to speak so that someone else can 'hear you', which this person noted is not easy when people come to a conversation with different perspectives. Learning to speak so that someone can 'hear you', is one of the intentions of tools such as The Gifting Circle and NVC, which are used by the community, and they are incorporated into community meetings and retreats which enables all attendees to practice good communication. The 'bowl' is another tool used by the community that was mentioned which can help to improve communications – this is essentially a gong-style bowl that is on hand during meetings, and can be rung whenever a person feels the discussion is getting too heated, and people's perspectives are not getting heard; once the bowl is hit, talking ceases and attendees are expected to sit in silence and reflect on the discussion, until the group is ready to resume the discussion. In addition, a few people mentioned the book "Getting Real" by Susan Campbell – a book that is suggested reading on the information sheet in the Whole Village membership package – as a resource that helped them understand what honest and compassionate communication is all about. Despite all of the support identified for the fostering of honest and compassionate communications at Whole Village, many respondents suggested this is an area where it is easy to 'slip up'. One respondent felt like the challenge lay in a failure to practice ("we have the tools but we don't practice enough"), but also acknowledged that there are differences in abilities as people have come to the community at different times and may not have not been around when a particular skill

set was being actively developed (e.g. a time period when monthly discussions were organized around the 10 skills for effective communication identified in 'Getting Real'). In addition, some respondents suggested that open and honest communication was impacted somewhat by personality types (e.g. "I find it difficult to be honest with some people – they're too sensitive"; "some of us can only do it in contrived settings, like the gifting circle"). Also, as another respondent pointed out, the effectiveness of all these tools really depends on each individual's willingness to change their own behaviour. Finally, while most people felt that Whole Village fostered honest communication by creating an environment that discouraged gossip / talking behind people's backs, others felt that 'a good rant' was helpful once in a while to help them sort things out, and then to be able to engage in a conflict situation with more compassion. A few confided in doing just that with their partners, 'behind closed doors', after a particularly difficult meeting for instance, and credited the ability to do this strengthening their capacity to live in community. However, this strategy certainly highlights one of the potential disadvantages of living in community as a single person.

Part of being a good communicator and being able to manage conflict is dependent on how you react to and relate to others. When asked about whether or not they have become less reactive since living at Whole Village, the majority of those who identified has having a tendency to be reactive expressed that they have found it was very difficult to change this inclination, despite being in a supportive environment; as one respondent put it: "it's hard to change life-long patterns". Additionally, one person stated "I feel like I'm being more reactive since I came here", making reference to the additional 'triggers' of community living that resulted both from specific tensions and

simply from a greater numbers of interactions that result from living so close to so many people. In respect to the fostering of reflectivity, the majority of respondents felt that they were already quite reflective before they came to Whole Village, or were inspired to reflect more on their behaviour since living there, with only two admitting that they were probably "not reflective enough". One respondent mentioned The Gifting Circle specifically, as a community activity that has caused them to be more reflective, stating that "'Powerful' is not part of my self-image, but I have learned (through the gifting circle) that what I say can hurt people, so I need to be able to reflect on my own behaviour". However, one respondent suggested that reflection can sometimes be difficult, especially when you are feeling vulnerable and in 'self-defense mode' – a condition that was felt to be heavily present at the moment due to the renter-owner dynamic already mentioned. Two respondents identified a strategy they have learned and employed at Whole Village which has helped them to be both less reactive and more reflective, particularly when conflict arises: "never assume bad intent". Another suggested it would be helpful if everyone took up meditation, so that everyone could come "more fully to be table."

Finally, in respect to whether or not their ability to live more authentically has been a part of their Whole Village experience, while not everyone specifically responded to this capacity, about half felt that Whole Village was a place where people "know the real me" (or at least knew them better than most people, in some cases better than their families knew them). While this does point to a fair degree of tolerance at Whole Village, and the fostering of authenticity, there were also some reservations expressed. For instance, one respondent identified some limits in what they share about themselves,

based on a feeling that "not everyone here would be accepting of it" if they were their truly authentic selves. This perspective came from a renter, and the response aligns with the general fear expressed by renters that caused them to hold back, for instance, in community discussions and decision-making, as a result of instability in their residency situation, and the knowledge that consensus is needed if they wish to stay. Another response which aligned with the idea of a feeling of security being linked to the ability to be authentic came from one of the older respondents – also an owner – who stated: "as you get older you care less what people think about you", but this person also added: " but you also don't want to create discord". The responses to the building of capacity to live an authentic life really pointed to the impact of the social situation on people's personal abilities. While I got the sense that living an authentic life was certainly something that drew people to Whole Village in the first place, and that to some extent this capacity was supported, there was sentiment expressed that more could be done in this area. In fact, one respondent stated that, while she was living with authenticity at Whole Village "more than ever in my life", she also stated "but I want to do better, I want to be challenged". Finally, taking a slightly different angle on this quality of life discussion, one respondent suggested that seeking a good quality of life is not merely in one's individual interest, but should be a consideration of the whole community, stating that "the general health of this community is affected by how many members are living a somewhat balanced life – so many are not".

Throughout their responses on the fostering and supporting the development of this set of capacities at Whole Village, various references were made to both informal and formal ways that these capacities were developed. For instance, formal approaches

included: group study (e.g. discussion of suggested readings), organized activities (e.g. community dynamics exercises during meetings), established processes (e.g. conflict resolution), the practice of rotating roles (e.g. facilitation; note-taking), monitoring the meeting of accomplishments (e.g. the points system used for kitchen work), and the use of experts (e.g. group process consultants they had hired to teach NVC or to help resolve conflicts, using role play for example). Several respondents also felt that these formal approaches were predominately responsible for their capacity-development at Whole Village. However, informal interactions also clearly had an identified impact for some, as they mentioned the effect of the 'culture of Whole Village' (i.e. cultural norms), as well as how they learned through watching others, and as one respondent stated "we learn because people here care that we learn." One respondent summed up the difference in what was achieved through formal and informal capacity development as follows: "through the formal ways I've learned the specifics about how to live in community and through the informal ways I've learned the bigger picture stuff - how to 'be' in community."

The perspectives gained through these interviews revealed how the capacities needed to live and work in community were being actively pursued at Whole Village, with varied opinions on the extent of the successes. However, the variability is understandable given that all these residents came to this community already with varied skills and experiences contributed to their capacities of community living and collaborative work. In addition, there was significant variation in how long these interviewees had lived in community - some for two to three years, some for ten years or more – which impacts the benefits they have received from organized capacity-building

activities, as well as the amount of time they have had to apply learned skills and practice using the various tools available. Furthermore, while the social environment was identified as a contributor to capacity development, interviewees also pointed to the influence of the inter-personal relationships, their personalities, and their willingness to look at their own behaviour, and to make changes if necessary, as either supportive or inhibitive for the development of capacities to live and work in community. Finally, some of the respondents pointed to an important consideration - that building these capacities in a community is a slow, and often all consuming process, or as one respondent put it: "it's a life-long process."

6.3.4   Perceptions on links to sustainable community

The final question posed to interviewees required them to reflect on how to make Whole Village into a sustainable community from a 'people' perspective. In other words, given the challenges they faced living at Whole Village now, compared to whatever their personal visions were for a sustainable community – one that met the social, economic, and perhaps spiritual needs they felt was necessary for Whole Village to continue to exist, to be healthy, to be resilient, and to thrive – what needed to happen, either from a community-building or capacity-building perspective?

The responses basically aligned with that idea that Whole Village needed to address the challenges and unhealthy community dynamics identified in response to the other questions, and not surprisingly, almost everyone stated that the negativities of the renter-owner dynamic needed to be addressed. Many of the respondents made reference to the need to find ways to keep the people at Whole Village that want to stay, and who have so much to contribute, but can't afford to buy-in. While no one knew exactly how to

do this, suggestions were to: address suite affordability; get more creative about financing and spreading out costs; pooling resources, and developing more on-site employment. However, there seemed to be significant doubt as to whether living at Greenhaven could be made more affordable given the financial constraints on current suite owners (e.g. collective mortgage; suites already priced at or below cost). As well, there was some questioning as to whether some of the renters' ideologies regarding the generation of money in a capitalist system could be reconciled with the financial requirements to live in Greenhaven. As one owner pointed out, perhaps their ideologies fit better with the concept of an egalitarian, income-sharing community which isn't the reality at Greenhaven? In fact, the concept of starting a 'sister community' – presumably one which is more affordable, and perhaps more egalitarian – is one that has been percolating within the renter community at Whole Village at the moment. It is clear however, that from the owners' perspectives, while there is some general support of that idea, it is 'them' (the renters), that have to do it. This is also the general perspective of the owners with respect to any new business endeavours that might provide income-generating opportunities; as one respondent put it: "there's so much opportunity here, but they need to step up and do it". For their part, it is clear that the resident-owners at Whole Village are 'done' with any notions of large-scale community development – and rightly so – they've worked hard, they've created this amazing community, and they've welcomed people to join them, and now they want someone else to take on the 'heavy lifting' (a reality that appeared well-appreciated in the thoughts shared by the renters on this topic). However, the reality on the other side is that financial and time constraints are seriously

impacting the ability of the renters to 'step up' and take advantage of the potential at Whole Village.

Another significant issue raised by many of the respondents as to what challenges Whole Village in becoming a sustainable community, is the lack of shared vision about the future they want there. In many ways, this is an offshoot of the renter-owner dynamic, as the renters were largely not around when the vision and guiding principles of the community were drafted, and they do not appear to 'buy-in' to them exactly as stated, but there is a generally feeling that there is 'wiggle room', or as one respondent suggested, "there is an undercurrent of a feeling that there's a chance to re-invent this place" – a sentiment that is driven by a sense of a lack of cohesion around the vision amongst the owners. Their sense was in fact corroborated by the owners themselves, as during their interviews they were admittedly there for different reasons – some for the farm, some for community. On this issue, one of the owners expressed frustration about this split in priorities, and felt that it represented an abandonment of the original vision that they had all agreed to. Another agreed that a lack of commitment to the farm was highly problematic, and that a serious commitment to the community farm was necessary, or they might need to consider selling the property as it was financially unsustainable to keep such a large piece of farmland without running a functioning farm, and it was felt that, realistically, the rest (e.g. growing their own food; living communally) could be done on a much smaller piece of land, and in a semi-urban environment.

The question of shared vision for the future of Whole Village, and the availability of resources to bring that vision into being, was also linked to the issue of the affordability of living at Whole Village. For instance, one respondent stated that "this

place won't function well if only professionals who work off site and retired people live here – the community farm needs people who live here to run it." Another stated a frustration about the lack of vision and the drive to sell suites to address financial stability without looking at the broader needs of the community, stating there was a need to "look at interior resources – there's such a diverse skill set here. We need to stop trying to pack a full box without knowing what we have and what we really need to put in it". Finally, one respondent made a suggestion which put into question whether a shared vision centered on the community farm as the primary economic driver was really necessary, pointing out that, very few people on site now have farm skills, but there is a wealth of skilled educators, so perhaps more consideration needed to be given to creating an internal economy based on an alternative education niche.

Economics and lack of vision were the predominant, and coupled, themes raised by interviewees as issues which challenge Whole Village's ability to be a sustainable community. However, a close second theme was a belief that more work needed to be done to address inter-personal relationships and the social health of the community. In some ways, this theme seemed linked to the others, in that relationships were strained over differing perspectives on money and vision. Thus, perhaps the community should – as one respondent suggested – have some good, honest conversations about these issues, and really build understanding around the varied perspectives. However, at least half of the respondents suggested a need to prioritize relationship-work, or "learning to live together", over working on the land, because as one respondent put it "if we can't get along, the rest won't last either". There were no clear suggestions provided from the group on what exactly needs to be done to build more positive relationships, but a few

half-joking suggestions for the need for a marriage counselor seemed indicative of an

opinion that the community was in crisis. On a lighter note, a few people suggested

perhaps all they really needed was to have more fun together. Finally, identifying the

need for everyone to take some responsibility in addressing their collective inter-personal

challenges, there were several suggestions to show: "a willingness to look at our

emotional selves", "be more reflective", "not to hold onto resentments", and to "deal with

our own shit."

6.4 Chapter conclusion

Through document analysis, participant-observation, and interviews, this study

provides insight on community-building, community dynamics, and capacity-building

activities that influence the creation of sustainable community at Whole Village. For

instance, there are significant community-building opportunities, both organized and

informal (e.g. workbees; social events), that may contribute to group cohesiveness and

healthy inter-personal relationships. These community-building activities occur within a

culture that values sustainability, conservation, inclusivity, interdependence, and both

individualism and collectivism, which are supported by the community's stated vision

and guiding principles, membership and decision-making processes, and agreements and

rules.

However, while Wholevillagers generally agree that these community-building

structures and processes are important contributors to a sense of community at Whole

Village, it was also clear that variability existed in member's feelings of trust and

belonging. Furthermore, they identified challenging dynamics and tensions, often

intertwined, within their community, including:

- difficulties in inter-personal relationships, impacted by lack of trust, poor communication, and different standards;

- tensions around work expectations and priorities;

- differences in values between generations;

- lack of group cohesiveness due to lack of unity around the community vision, and

- economic and power disparities between owners and renters.

These challenges impacted the sense of community at Whole Village, and the ability to live and work together toward sustainable community.

However, despite the challenges, Whole Villager's largely agreed that living in community was fulfilling, and showed a willingness to work on addressing the challenges presented in community life. Building the capacity to live and work together was collectively supported through a variety of efforts to improve communication, understanding, conflict resolution, and inter-personal relationships, such as: group study (e.g. discussion of suggested readings), organized activities (e.g. community dynamics exercises during meetings), use of established processes (e.g. conflict resolution), the practice of rotating roles (e.g. facilitation; note-taking), monitoring the meeting of accomplishments (e.g. the points system used for kitchen work), and the use of experts (e.g. group process consultants they had hired to teach NVC or to help resolve conflicts, using role play for example). Furthermore, capacity-building efforts were supported by informal interactions, personal relationships, and the social environment (i.e. 'culture of Whole Village'). The individual capacity-building experience however, was impacted by the level of skill that the individual came to the community with, and their willingness to work on improving their competencies.

Finally, while economics and the lack of cohesion around the community's vision were identified as predominant, and coupled, themes which challenge Whole Village's ability to be a sustainable community, sentiment was strong on the need to do more to address inter-personal relationship challenges and the social health of the community. Whole Villager's generally appear to acknowledge the latter to be a slow, long-term process, which can only be achieved through full community commitment.

In the next chapter, I will consider these findings in light of the theory on group dynamics and community development, and the generalized and anecdotal experience of community-building, community dynamics, and capacity-building at ecovillages, as identified in the literature.

Chapter Seven: Discussion

In Chapter Three I identified the overlap between the processes of building positive group dynamics and building community. For instance, interactional theory, as applied to sustainable community development, describes 'community' as a network of reciprocal obligations where people actually know and care about one another, and 'community building' as a positive, purposive, structure-oriented process established and maintained by relationships (supported by communication and cooperation). Similarly, group dynamics theory highlights how group structure and interactions support positive group dynamics, including qualities such as interdependence and cohesiveness. In addition, both theoretical frameworks are predicated on healthy inter-personal relationships characterized by trust and a willingness to cooperate.

In Chapter Three I also identified the overlap between group functionality, which stems from positive group dynamics and contributes to the achievement of group goals, and community capacity, which Chaskin explains is necessary "to solve collective problems and improve or maintain the well-being of a given community (2001: 295)", or whatever other outcomes are desired by the community. Together, these theoretical frameworks provide insight on the skills, knowledge and resources necessary to have functional groups and to build a community's capacity to work toward desired collective goals or outcomes, as well as what 'influencing' conditions need to be considered. For instance, certain community dynamics may have an influence on the success of failure of capacity-building efforts. Furthermore, the theories highlight the need to foster a sense of community and commitment, and positive community/group dynamics, as foundational work for the achievement of desired community outcomes or collective goals. Thus,

according to these theoretical underpinnings, achieving the ultimate goal of sustainable community is a function of community-building/positive group dynamics, and group functionality/community capacity.

In this chapter I consider community building, community dynamics, and community capacity at Whole Village, in light of this theoretical framework and the comparative experience of ecovillages identified in the literature.

7.1 Community building and positive group dynamics

Community structures and processes can support or hinder the positive group dynamics, including trust, cohesion and reciprocity, necessary for sustainable community. As identified in the literature review outlined in Chapter Four of this thesis, for intentional communities such as ecovillages, the structures and processes to consider are: vision and principles, membership, decision-making, agreements and rules, planned social interaction (e.g. eating together), design, and raising consciousness.

Whole Village has a vision and comprehensive guiding principles, but there is a sense among current residents that they are flawed in some way – either too open to interpretation, or not representative of the views of those who live there right now – so they fail to do what they intend, which is to provide a frame of reference for community decisions. As an example, Whole Village's guiding principle, to 'Strive to be sustainable in all ways, ecologically, economically, spiritually and socially' is vague, and as such, has failed to generate one cohesive community understanding of what living sustainably really means. In addition, the community's commitment to farming varies across the membership, which creates a myriad of challenges for sustainable community

management, and confusion over where the community should focus its collective efforts. Diana Leafe Christian (2003) has described this kind of lack of cohesion and solidarity as devastating for cooperative groups. For this reason, it seems imperative that Whole Village face this lack of unity around the vision and principles head on, potentially through the creation of more concrete goals and objectives that clearly identify what this community is striving to accomplish together. Granted this will not be easy given the renter-owner dynamic – where renters have a limited stake in the outcome, and owners have varied and competing priorities. Furthermore, it will require addressing complex challenges; for instance, the community must decide whether socio-economic diversity is part of its collective vision of sustainable community, and if so, how such diversity can be supported given the financial constraints they currently face.

Related to the issue of unity around vision – and the strategy to get there – is the question of membership: who should live at Whole Village, and what should they be expected to contribute? These questions can only be addressed by knowing first, what the group wishes to accomplish together, determining what resources are required to accomplish these things, and taking a look at existing community capacity in order to determine what resources the community lacks. Then, a logical next step would be to align the acceptance of new members with the needs of the community. At Whole Village however, the failure to attract new members willing to make financial commitments, combined with the strain of the financial burden on existing members, appears to have driven 'money values' (Sumner 2003) to the top of the selection criteria. Considering the critical look at sustainability that I undertook in Chapter Two of this thesis, this approach to member selection does not align with the concept of a sustainable

community based on 'life values' (Sumner 2003); however, as Baker (2013) points out, this is reflective of the challenges faced when trying to create a sustainable community within an unsustainable context (i.e. a capitalist system). For Whole Village, the key challenges manifest from trying to build an organic farm and high-tech, eco-conscious home on an expensive piece of land in Ontario that is only affordable for working professionals who cannot commit the time necessary to operate the community. A significant amount of creativity will be required to overcome this challenge.

The issue of socio-economic diversity aside, Diana Leafe Christian (2003) recommends that ecovillages select for 'emotional maturity' when considering new members, as the lack of such maturity can result in inter-personal conflicts and toxic dynamics which she claims have caused the unraveling of many communities. This type of screening seems evident in the Whole Village member selection process, as the membership questionnaire and 3-month 'getting to know you' period is designed to determine whether the applicant is a 'good fit' for the community, and can demonstrate a competence for community living. However, several of the ecovillage examples identified in the literature utilized a longer 'trial' period of six months, which suggests it may be advisable to give prospective members more time to prove their community 'fit'. Furthermore, Peck (1987) advises a balanced approach between inclusivity and exclusivity, maintaining that 'true' community justifies any exclusivity. In my observation of the member consideration process at Whole Village, it seems that concerns about an applicant, such as a history of psychological issues or challenging personality traits, were considered against what the person could contribute to the community. Furthermore, Whole Village appears to view the community's active

commitment to developing good group process and inter-personal skills, as a mitigating strategy to address potential behavioural challenges. The result is a membership process that appears fair and balanced.

The decision-making process is an organizational element of ecovillage governance that can also impact on group dynamics and building a sense of community. Most collaborative communities strive for an inclusive process that fosters trust and is effective. The formal consensus process, or some modification of it, is common amongst such groups. However, a variety of alternatives that balance inclusiveness with distributed, more efficient decision-making are also being experimented with. Distributed decision-making is often more desirable for larger groups, and is likely not necessary for a community the size of Whole Village, but could be considered if the community grows. That said the community is challenged by the lack of complete buy-in for the consensus process (e.g. a perception that it is a form of compromise), and the belief by certain residents that it is not exactly an inclusive process due to the variations in social power between the renters and owners. In fact, Kunze's (2012) research on intentional communities in Germany identified a similar concern with the use of consensus in communities where ownership is not equal. She contends that when just one or several people own community land or buildings, consensus cannot be effectively applied as a democratic process, because it is thwarted when a hierarchy of interests is created by the owners' responsibilities (Kunze 2012). In addition, as already mentioned it is hard to achieve consensus when there is no unity around vision and principles. Furthermore, Diana Leafe Christian (2003) warns that consensus should only be used if it is fully understood by all community members, which might not be the case at Whole Village,

partly because residents come and go frequently, and partly because not everyone appears to be interested in fully learning the process, preferring perhaps to leave it up to a few members to develop the expertise. A lack of full appreciation for the process may have contributed to some of the sense of dissatisfaction that appears to persist around the contentious issues that the community has faced – such as the ban on meat animals and the departure of the CSA farmer; two issues that appear to have been influenced by the personal interests of more powerful members, and not necessarily decided based on the shared principles of the community.

The vision and guiding principles however, are not the only structures that guide the community. Whole Village also has a comprehensive set of rules, guidelines and agreements, which largely appear to align with the nature and complexity of organizational governance adopted by more recently established ecovillages. Such a structure tends to foster compatibility and cohesion within a community, as well as encouraging interactions that comply with community norms, thus minimizing conflict and supporting positive inter-personal relationships. In general, the aim is to find a balance between flexibility and prescription, so that expectations are clear, but behaviour is not overly controlled. In addition, expectations for community contribution should match what the community is trying to achieve. In the case of Whole Village, this has clearly been a difficult balance. First of all, it is difficult to balance expectations with goals when the goals are not clear. Second, the structural dynamic of this community created by the cost of living and the need to work off site to meet those costs, means that a significant portion of the community feels expectations are too high. Kunze (2012) provided evidence of ecovillages in Germany that have successfully managed having

varied levels of commitment to community work, including the sharing of resources; however, she warned that this was only possible within an established community with a committed core group. Whole Village lacks a strong core group, which makes it difficult to maintain the community based on the varied levels of commitment that exist.

Litfin (2013) believes that ecovillages are built on a gift economy of symbiotic relationships, and that this results from authentic relationships and the development of a culture of belonging. Furthermore, the literature suggests that interactions in ecovillages, such as eating together, working together, and supporting each other during important life events, foster these relationships and culture. Group dynamics theory supports this suggestion, also highlighting how positive interactions contribute to, and are supported by, elements such as trust and cohesion. Furthermore, positive group dynamics are fostered through interdependence and reciprocity. Collectively, authentic relationships, a culture of belonging, positive interactions, and the existence of trust, cohesion, interdependence, and reciprocity, are evidence of successful community-building. The experience of Whole Villagers, as shared by interviewees, demonstrates the complexity of community building. Activities such as eating together, working together, and supporting each other during significant life events, was identified as contributing to feelings of belonging, interdependence, and trust at Whole Village. However, Whole Villagers also identified the fluid nature of these feelings, and the fact that the degree varied between people and sub-groups within the community, based either on inter-personal relationships or a perceived power imbalance. The 'ebb and flow' nature of feelings like trust and belonging was reminiscent of the example at Earthaven Ecovillage,

identified in the literature review of this thesis, where a resident described trust as a form of 'equity' in the community, that increased and decreased based on interactions.

Ecovillage design is also an important structural aspect to consider in respect to fostering these feelings that may be associated with community building. For instance, the design of the ecovillage has a direct impact on the frequency and nature of interactions, which may in turn impact levels of trust, cohesion, and interdependence. Ecovillages tend to seek balance between individuality and collectivism (which could be considered a departure from the communal approach favoured by in the 1960s and 1970s). This balance is reflected in ecovillage housing that includes both private and shared spaces. Ecovillage at Ithaca (NY, USA) is such an example, and Whole Village, though not exactly the same in design, has a comparative balance of spaces. This is an interesting trend, as the shift to greater individualism has been criticized (Dawson 2006) as part of the reason why ecovillages are challenged in creating cohesiveness. Furthermore, it could be argued that some of the economic challenges faced by ecovillages (e.g. affordability), could be addressed through greater collectivism (e.g. reducing the footprint of private spaces in housing, which would lower build costs; income-sharing to improve accessibility). However, this was certainly not identified as a desirable approach to take at Whole Village – even by those who expressed some ideological agreement with such an approach – but rather, the preferred approach appears to be to provide some level of support for individual efforts to create greater income-generating opportunities at Whole Village.

The last community-building effort identified as a potential part of the ecovillage experience, was taking action to raise consciousness and heighten awareness of

interdependence, both between humans and with the rest of the natural environment. This is the integral and inclusive worldview advocated by Korten (2006) as necessary to create a culture that shifts from domination to partnership, from money values to life values, and from a market ethic to a land ethic. Liftin (2013) suggested that ecovillages provide an ideal environment to support such a shift – what she refers to as a shift to 'synergistic interdependence' – however, it is not clear how exactly such a shift is supported. Certainly, some ecovillages identify with an eco-spiritual approach – such as Earthaven (USA), Findhorn (Scotland), and Damanhur (Italy) – which is focused on building awareness of the interdependence of all beings. Others might suggest that the adoption and use of permaculture principles (based on working with, instead of against natural systems) in the design of agriculture, buildings, land use, and economic and social systems at ecovillages, promotes heightened awareness of interdependence within these systems. I saw limited evidence of any sort of organized attempts to raise consciousness regarding interdependence at Whole Village. Yet, despite that, I heard ample perspectives which would suggest a keen awareness of interdependence within the community, especially in respect to emotional interdependence. Perspectives on the existence of material interdependence varied however, with some stating that it would be essentially impossible for the place to exist without the contributions of everyone there, and others believing that the interdependence that does exist is superficial. In addition, though Whole Village did appear to be a highly eco-conscious group, this did not stem from a shared eco-spirituality (one respondent suggested some residents perceived eco-spiritual practices as 'kooky'). Furthermore, the application of permaculture principles on-site,

predominately for agriculture and land use, did not appear to translate to consideration of how to design social and economic systems.

Overall, the literature on community development and group dynamics suggests that the structure and processes of ecovillages will directly impact the achievement of sustainable community, as community-building and positive group dynamics are foundational for group functionality and the achievement of desired community outcomes. Consequently, when structures and processes result in challenging ecovillage dynamics, being able to live and work together to achieve desired outcomes is also challenging. Challenging dynamics associated with ecovillages include structural conflicts embedded in the vision or mission of the ecovillages, or they may result from various organizational issues (e.g. who has the greatest influence on decision-making). Challenging dynamics also arise due to differing priorities (e.g. between the people who value the process of community building – 'the thinkers', versus the people who value efforts with tangible results 'the doers'). Furthermore, as Diana Leafe Christian (2003) believes, just about every tension within an ecovillage plays out around money. As documented in Chapter Six of this thesis, all of these challenges are evident at Whole Village, and they are most evident in the dynamic between owners and renters. The renter-owner dynamic at Whole Village is fuelled by issues of money and power, but it is also heavily influenced by ideology. My observations of this dynamic were supported by the perspectives of Whole Villagers themselves during the interview process: it is clear that this dynamic has placed significant strain on inter-personal relationships, has stood in the way of honest and compassionate dialogue and the co-creation of solutions to the

economic challenges faced by the two groups, and threatens Whole Village's ability to create sustainable community.

Litfin (2013) suggests that conflict in ecovillages cannot be eliminated, and the best ecovillagers can do is to minimize their negative impacts. This may include addressing the structural issues creating the tensions and challenging dynamics, or developing the skills deemed essential for successful ecovillage living. The next section considers how Whole Village builds community capacity to mitigate and manage the conflicts and tensions that arise, also reflecting on the theory and literature that speaks to community capacity development.

7.2   Capacity building and group functionality

According to Peck (1987) – a practitioner of 'community-making' - conflict in community is inevitable, and is actually desirable as it is evidence of 'true' community. Furthermore, according to Zander (1994), managing conflict well, so that it contributes to group effectiveness, requires the existence of a variety of elements, such as good communication, constructive feedback, wide participation, flexibility, a commitment to working at it, and the establishment and meeting of agreements. These elements are essentially the competencies of functional groups, and are necessary for goal achievement. Building these competencies can be achieved through a capacity-building process, which, according to Chaskin's (2001) framework for community capacity, involves building and /or mobilizing the skills, knowledge and resources of the group to serve collective needs. Furthermore, Chaskin's framework identifies that community capacity-building can be either an individual and organizational endeavour, and may involve organized training and development, or informal social processes. The literature

on ecovillages, and my study at Whole Village, identified a tendency for active capacity building for group functionality. The following sections highlight how the necessary competencies to live and work together are developed at Whole Village, compared to the generalized and anecdotal ecovillage approach.

Whole Village employed the type of 'common sense' conflict management approach that Litfin (2013) believes is used at most ecovillages. It relies first on the conflicted parties trying to work things out themselves, but if unsuccessful, a dedicated team intervenes and attempts to mediate the conflict. Part of this work involves helping each side understand the other's perspective. Meadowsong ecovillage at Lost Valley Education Center (USA) goes one step further, using a process called World Work in order to diffuse resentments by building appreciation for a variety of perspectives, including those not present in the room. This may be an approach that Whole Village could consider to embrace a greater diversity of perspectives.

Communication is a key skill required to manage conflict effectively. Most ecovillages, including Whole Village, use a variety of tools and appropriate language to support non-violent conflict resolution. Good communication skills include the ability to speak honestly and compassionately, being able to listen, and being able to provide feedback in a way that will be heard. For the most part, Whole Villagers feel they have the skills necessary to communicate effectively, but that it is easy to slip up, and constant practice is required. A buddy-system was recommended by one resident as a way to facilitate practice. In addition, there was some suggestion that honest communication was difficult, unless the setting felt safe; for instance, the Gifting Circle was considered an opportunity when respondents felt that communicating, and receiving feedback, felt safe.

Comparatively, during one meeting I attended in the community, when a contentious issue was being discussed, one participant expressed not 'feeling safe' because they felt what they said was often not well received. In addition, some renters expressed discomfort with completely expressing their opinions during group discussion, as felt it could have negative repercussions should they decide to stay on longer in the community. Given these experiences, Whole Village may want to consider how to address the unease that some residents have expressed about honestly communicating their perspectives.

That said I did have an opportunity to witness the use of approaches to facilitate effective discussion at Whole Village. For instance, the community uses many of the approaches evident at other ecovillages, such as having a 'check-in' at the beginning of a meeting to help attendees understand what may be impacting others at that moment to participate in the discussion. Another approach used at Whole Village is the end of meeting evaluation, which is included in the meeting minutes; Schaub (2014) points out, not only does this provide an understanding of how people felt about the meeting, it also provides a record that can be referred to later to identify patterns and to help people understand what might have been discussed, that had an impact on how people experienced the meeting, that would otherwise not make it into the official meeting minutes (this can be insightful when trying to unpack the complexities of a conflict, for instance). Whole Village also sets aside time to discuss issues in greater depth, often separating out well-being discussions from business meetings, as they do at Sieben Linden in Germany (e.g. the Intensiv).

The ability to effectively participate in community discussions, and have competency applying the decision-making process, also contributes to group efficacy in

ecovillages. The challenges associated with the use of consensus at Whole Village were discussed earlier in this chapter, and need not be elaborated upon. Should Whole Village wish to address these challenges, they may want to consider the approach undertaken by Earthaven ecovillage (USA): they undertook a two-year committee led process to evaluate the use of consensus, and its suitability, for the community. Ultimately, they reaffirmed the use of the process, created a guidance document relevant to their community, and used the dramatic arts to reflect on the breakdown in their community which caused them to question the use of consensus in the first place. While this may seem like a complex undertaking, as Butler and Rothstein (2007) explain in their handbook on consensus decision-making, it is unreasonable to expect anyone to come to community with an understanding of the process, because it is not the norm used in the competitive societies that most of us are used to.

In addition to all of these competencies, that are essentially developed through what is sometimes referred to as 'outer work', or group process skills, the literature reflects the need for personal growth (or 'inner work'), in order to maintain healthy relationships in community (including the broader notion of community which includes nature). Starhawk (2011) identifies the qualities of kindness, respect, encouragement, and compassion, as feelings that must be cultivating within and between people in order for cooperative groups to flourish. Furthermore, Peck (1987) identifies self-examination and contemplation as important to community building. Part of this self-examination can be facilitated by process-oriented psychology, which Sutherland (2012) explains involving taking an inner 'step-back' and becoming aware of your secondary process (the side of yourself that you do not want others to see), which can help to break the cycle of

reactivity that often occurs in conflict situations. Process-oriented psychology has been identified as useful in helping groups deal with issues of power, marginalization, and change (Sutherland 2012). Peck (1987) also talks about the need to let go of expectations, prejudice, ideologies, and the need to control others (or the outcome). Meadowsong ecovillage / Lost Valley uses a process called the Naka-Ima workshops in order to practice honesty and letting go of attachments (Sundberg 2013). Whole Village residents identified the Gifting Circle as a practice which helped them reflect on their behaviour and how what they do impacts others. In Germany, ZEGG uses the Forum, which is considered a highly successful approach (that has been taken up by ecovillages across the world) to bring highly charged feeling out into the open, which provides greater clarity on the emotional dynamics at play that are impacting the groups effectiveness (Litfin 2013). The philosophy behind The Forum is that:

> "When feelings are hidden, life energy will get stuck. Stuck energies breed fear and violence. We aim for a life where feelings and energies are flowing freely; a life where we don't avoid conflicts, but look at them as opportunities to go deeper."[29]

While ZEGG (a German acronym for the name 'Centre for Experimental Culture Design), claims that the Forum can offer the "fertile social 'soil' for building community", and create a space of openness and trust between people, they warn that it requires 'profound prior training' in order to be facilitated effectively.

The need for expert assistance presents another challenge for ecovillages, which often do not have the financial resources to hire outside assistance. Whole Village has used expert assistance in the past, with varying degrees of success according to those

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[29] http://www.zegg-forum.org/forum-further-readings.phtml

residents who were involved. Expert assistance has included: the use of a group process consultant who is well known in the intentional communities circuit, to assist with address complex group dynamics that had got the community 'stuck'; training in non-violent communication (NVC), and a workshop provided by a process consultant that specializes in compassionate communication. However, during my study it was evident that additional training in facilitation and mediation was desired, as well as the assistance of an outside expert more often, but that the availability of time and money were a factor.

This section has shown how the efforts to build community capacity at Whole Village, to mitigate and manage the challenging dynamics, conflicts and tensions, that arise living in community, compare to the theories of community development and group dynamics, as well as the experiences of other ecovillages. In the final chapter I present concluding remarks on the insight this research provides for discourse on building sustainable community in a post-carbon world.

Chapter Eight: Conclusion

If we truly wish to live sustainably on this planet, we need to understand how to do so. Change advocates have called for a massive shift in our economic and social structures, including a transition to a post-carbon world, and the pursuit of prosperity in a more local direction. As radical as this may sound, the position is grounded in compelling scientific evidence that we have severely disrupted 3 of the 9 biophysical processes - related to climate, biodiversity and the nitrogen cycle - that create a stable environment necessary for humans to thrive. Litfin (2013) suggests that the economic and social organization of a post-carbon world will require us to live smaller, slower and closer. Other theorists have identified a comparable shift, sometimes referred to as the 'Great Turning' (Korten 2006), which requires a move away from individualism to collectivism, and from competition to collaboration. Furthermore, these positions align with those of theorists in the field of community studies, such as Amitai Etzioni (referenced in Day 2006), who advocate for a revival of 'true', place-based communities - characterized by 'communitarian values' and a 'network of reciprocal obligations', where people actually know and care about one another - as the means to address many of today's social ills (including a lack of harmony, solidarity, and sense of responsibility).

On every front, ecovillages have answered this call. They are communities experimenting with the alternative economic and social arrangements that they believe will smooth the transition to a post-carbon world. As such, they provide models for a more sustainable human society - ones reflective of what biologists Mae-Wan Ho and Elisabet Sahtouris suggest is already found in nature in healthy systems; Korten describes such systems as "…fundamentally cooperative, locally rooted, self-organizing

enterprise(s) in which each individual organism is continuously balancing individual and group interests (2006: 14)." Thus, ecovillages have the potential to show us how to make sustainable community possible.

However, ecovillages – like any community – are only successful if they have the collective capacity (e.g. skills and resources) necessary to achieve their desired outcomes. For people socialized in fundamentally individualistic and competitive environments, the capacity to live more communally and work more collaboratively is something that must be gained. To date, studies and anecdotal accounts suggest ecovillage capacity-development is supported first, by creating community structures and processes that foster a sense of community cohesion and inclusion. Organizational elements such as established visions, principles, agreements, and decision-making processes, contribute to this end. Furthermore, a collaborative culture and a sense of belonging is supported by trusting, inter-personal relationships that result from positive interactions, like when community members eat together, work together, or spend social time together. However, a variety of challenging dynamics may impact community cohesiveness and functionality, and feelings of belonging and trust, and ultimately challenge the creation of sustainable community. Such challenges include lack of clarity around community vision, different perspectives around how to achieve vision (i.e. approach), different reasons as to why members are there in the first place (i.e. priorities), and varied financial circumstances across the membership. Addressing these challenges depends on identification of root causes, but often requires either organizational change or capacity-building (e.g. building social competencies) to navigate or minimize the negative impacts these challenges present. Largely, ecovillages appear to focus capacity-building efforts on

fostering effectiveness in community decision-making, and honest and compassionate communication, to build understanding, embrace diversity of perspectives, and manage conflict. Furthermore, ecovillagers identify the need for a commitment, by all members, to this capacity-building, including by working on their 'inner' selves and considering how they are engaging with others in the community, and how their actions may be impacting the community's collective capacity to live and work together.

This case study of Whole Village in Caledon, Ontario, revealed significant similarity in community building, community dynamics, and capacity-building elements evident in other ecovillages in North America, Europe and Australia. However, the case study provided greater insight on the complexities of the interplay between the elements. In particular, it showed how one powerful dynamic – in this case the inequalities in status, power and financial circumstances between owners and renters – can pervade and unhinge community-building and capacity-building efforts, and ultimately undermine the creation of sustainable community. Furthermore, it demonstrated that consideration should be given to re-visiting the design of community structure to determine the extent to which it may need to change to alleviate the negative impacts of the dynamic (in this case, re-consideration of the community's vision and principles, and whether or not renters and socio-economic diversity are part of the 'grand plan'), as well as to how much the community should focus on building the social competencies necessary to live together and work co-operatively.

Based on my study of Whole Village, I believe the need to address social competencies should not be under-estimated. Baker (2013) undertook field research at Whole Village in 2007, and witnessed many of the challenging dynamics that were

evident to me during my study, suggesting that the community has been operating despite these challenging dynamics for some time. In fact, since 2007, the community has continued to attract a variety of new residents, many of whom have stayed on long-term, and are demonstrating a commitment to 'making the community work', despite the fact that there is no clear sense of where this communal project is going, and if in fact it will be successful. To some extent, the Whole Villagers seem to have embraced what Macy and Johnstone (2012) call 'active hope', which involves actively working to bring about what is hoped for, without being overly optimistic that it may actually happen. However, it does not appear to me that Whole Villagers are naively chasing a dream, as their efforts appear to be continuously rewarded by what being 'in community' seems to offer, which among other things is a sense of solidarity, support, and purpose. Furthermore, the Whole Villagers interviewed for this study specifically identified that the 'culture' of the community – characterized by the majority of residents showing willingness to actively build the capacity to live communally and work cooperatively – as one of the primary reasons why they could continue to commit to the place themselves – for now.

That said, the extent to which developing social competencies can assist ecovillagers in building sustainable community is impossible to quantify. Furthermore, the challenges they face in creating workable models of sustainable community are immense. Baker (2013) identified an overarching challenge succinctly, as trying to build a sustainable community in an unsustainable world. In addition, Dawson (2006) highlighted that the trend in ecovillage development, of trying to find the perfect balance between individualism and collectivism, was adding to the complexity, and likely undermining the realization of benefits of communal living and cooperative work.

However, Dawson (2006) has also pointed out that ecovillagers have accomplished a tremendous amount, despite the fact that they are largely grassroots initiatives with little to no government or institutional support. For this reason, I believe the continued study of ecovillages, including their approach to social organization, and how they build the capacity to live and work together, will make a significant contribution to our understanding of how to create sustainable community in a post-carbon world.

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APPENDIX A: Information sheet and consent form

Information Sheet

Whole Village Community Dynamics Research Project 2014

(ORIGINAL PRINTED ON UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO LETTERHEAD)

Dear Whole Village resident,

This information sheet provides an overview of the research that I will be conducting on community group dynamics and capacity building at Whole Village. This information should help you to decide whether or not you would like to participate in this study.

Attached to this information sheet you will find a consent form to fill out should you agree to participate. Please be aware that you must be at least 18 years old to participate and that you may withdraw your consent to participate at any time. Please sign the consent form and keep a copy for your records.

Purpose of Research

The purpose of this research is to explore the ways that the Whole Village community fosters and maintains positive and collaborative group dynamics; in other words, how do Whole Village residents learn how to live and work together? I would look at both organized community activities and everyday interactions at Whole Village.

This research will go toward the completion of a Masters of Arts degree thesis requirement in the Adult Education and Community Development program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto (UT/OISE). The research project will be supervised by Dr. Jennifer Sumner, a professor in the Leadership, Higher, and Adult Education Department at UT/OISE.

Research Approach

For this research I will undertake the following:

Review community documents and meeting minutes to identify the ways in which Whole Village, since its inception, has actively supported positive community dynamics and to identify the key issues faced, and activities or strategies employed, in doing so.

Observe meetings and organized community dynamics activities (e.g. Community Dynamics Mandate Group meetings; Meetings of the Round; retreats). During my time on-site I may also engage in informal discussion to better understand community dynamics and capacity-building activities at Whole Village.

Interview a sample of the Whole Village community in order to better understand the group dynamics challenges faced, in the past and now, and what the community, and individuals, have done to address these challenges.

What this means for you

First of all, participation in this research is completely voluntary. For the purposes of research ethics, I will need to obtain community consent (i.e. sign off by a community representative), to undertake this research as described. I will also seek individual consent from interviewees. Each interview is anticipated to last about 1 hour.

Study Period

This research will run between January and April 2014. It is anticipated that document review and on-site research will begin in January 2014, and interviews will take place later in the study period, at a convenient time and place.

Privacy and confidentiality

I will take notes during meeting participation and interviews. I will seek consent to record these events (recording will involve taking written notes and electronic voice recording; visual recording will not be undertaken). I will be taking the following steps to protect your privacy and ensure that information you provide remains confidential:

All information collected during this study, whether by email or in-person, through group discussion or observation, will only be accessible to me, the researcher, and the supervisor for this research, and will be kept in a secure location in either paper or digital format, and digital files will be password-protected.

Each participant's name will be systematically coded (i.e. Participant A, Participant B, etc.) and these codes will be used in all research notes and transcripts.

Your name will be falsified in my final thesis paper or any other written material prepared on this study.

All information collected, through interviews and observation, as part of this research, will be destroyed one year after the completion of this study (anticipated destruction date: April 2015).

Potential limitations in my ability to guarantee anonymity are:

- Anonymity is not possible during group discussion.
- Due to the tight-knit nature of this community, anonymity of interviewees cannot be guaranteed amongst community members.
- If the community provides consent, the name of the community will appear in the final report; this may allow an individual very familiar with the community and its members to recognize individuals from their responses, despite name falsification.
- Safety of information provided via email cannot be guaranteed during transmission

Your personal health and well-being

This research is not intended to cause any harm. However, due to the nature of the research topic – community dynamics – there may be times when issues of discord may be raised, and this may be uncomfortable for some. Usual community measures will be applied to manage uncomfortable situations. However, you will always have the option not to answer a question, participate in a discussion, or withdraw your participation from this research study altogether. Your participation is completely voluntary.

Why participate?

Collaboration is the bedrock of any sustainability endeavour, and for ecovillage residents, there is the added need to live together harmoniously. However, most of us have been conditioned in a highly individualistic society, and therefore, choosing to live and work 'in community' requires both individual and collective "re" learning of how to do so. This is a constant and crucial learning activity.

My research has the potential to contribute to Whole Village's collective learning of how to support positive community dynamics. I am not proposing to undertake a systematic evaluation of Whole Village community dynamics activities, but the research could provide a basis for doing so, if the community wishes. The research will look at community dynamics work at Whole Village now, and retrospectively. It will identify key challenges and successes which could be built upon. It will also provide an opportunity for community reflection. The final report will include an analysis of community dynamics work at Whole Village within a broader theoretical context of group dynamics in pursuit of sustainability.

Please let me know if you have any questions. Also, if you have any questions related to your rights as a participant in this study, or if you have any complaints or concerns about how you have been treated as a research participant, please contact the Office of Research Ethics, ethics.review@utoronto.ca or 416-946-3273.

Please keep a copy of this letter and a copy of the consent form you sign for your records.

Sincerely,

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WHOLE VILLAGE COMMUNITY DYNAMICS RESEARCH PROJECT 2014

INTERVIEWEE CONSENT FORM

(ORIGINAL PRINTED ON UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO LETTERHEAD)

Name: _____

By signing below I confirm the following:

- I have read through the description of the study and I understand the nature and limitations of the research.
- I agree to be interviewed for this study and for both electronic devices and written notes to be used to record my responses.
- I understand that I am free to withdraw my participation at any time.

If I am making any exceptions or stipulations, these are:

Signature: _____ Date:_____

APPENDIX B: List of documents reviewed

By-law #5, Whole Village Property Co-operative Inc.: Feb. 2, 2007

Communications Mandate Group meeting minutes: Oct. 16, 2012

Community Dynamics Mandate Group (mandate document): Jul. 6, 2002

Community Dynamics Mandate Group meeting minutes: Sept. xx, 2013; Sept. 24, 2013; Aug. 21, 2013; Jun. 11, 2013; May 22, 2013; Apr. 17, 2013; Jan. 8, 2013; Dec. 3, 2012

Community Dynamics Mandate Group report: 2002-2003

Draft guidelines for facilitation: (n.d.)

Exit interview: (n.d.)

Family meeting minutes: Nov. 21, 2007

Guidelines for effective meetings: (n.d.)

Notes from mediation session with Laird Schaub: Nov. 17-19, 2010; Nov. 18-20, 2011

Notes and emails related to exit interviews: 2003 & 2009

Occupancy by-law, By-law #1, Greenhaven Co-operative Inc.: Mar. 23, 2007

Participation Expectations for those who live at Greenhaven: Mar. 12, 2012

Private Enterprises on the Farm (policy): Jan. 8, 2007

Reconciliation Approach: (n.d.)

Stewardship Proposal 2008 (From the Stewardship sub-committee): Mar. 16, 2008

Whole Village Community Covenant: Aug. 2008

Whole Village Membership & Partnership Policy and Procedures: Jun. 2012

Whole Village Questionnaire for Provisional and/or Guest Members: Feb. 2009

APPENDIX C: Individual interview questions

<u>Introductory questions</u>

Name?

Age (e.g. 18-35, 36-55, 55+)

How long have you lived at Whole Village?

Why did you decide to live here?

<u>Community and capacity-building questions</u>

1. 'Community' has been described as "the experience of belonging". What has most contributed to your sense of belonging at Whole Village?

2. 'Trust' and 'interdependence' are identified as two of the central elements of community building. In your opinion, how are these conditions fostered at Whole Village?

3. Do you feel that living at Whole Village requires you to continuously balance your personal interests and the interests of the group? If so, can you provide examples? What assists you in achieving this balance?

4. A common perspective of 'ecovillagers' is that living 'in community' is not easy, but it is rewarding. Do you agree? Why / why not?

5. What community dynamics / tensions currently challenge your ability to live / work well at Whole Village?

6. While living at Whole Village, do you feel your capacity to do (any of) the following has been supported / improved? *Please provide examples of specific processes (formal or informal) that supported your capacity development in any of these areas.*

    a. participate effectively in community discussion and decision-making

    b. manage conflict non-violently

    c. embrace diversity of people and perspectives

    d. communicate honestly and compassionately

    e. be more reflective and less reactive

    f. live authentically

7. Please finish this sentence: *In order to be a sustainable community, Whole Village must....* (please focus on 'people' perspectives rather than specific work that may need to be accomplished on the land).

8. Is there anything else you would like to add?