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The creation of an ecovillage: Negotiating boundaries and identities in a Norwegian sustainable valley

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Abstract:

This paper presents a qualitative study of Hurdal ecovillage in Norway. It explores how the involved human and non-human actors have interacted over time and contributed to shaping the ecovillage. We show how the ecovillagers have sought to maintain the boundary between themselves as a group and the wider community, while balancing various values and what it implies in practice to live in accordance with such values. The study demonstrates that the ecovillage as a concept and being negotiated, both internally within the ecovillage community and vis-à-vis the larger society. At stake is the question of ecovillage identity and what this should entail.

The interviewed ecovillagers report two main motivations for deciding to move to the village. One is to become part of the internal ecovillage community, while the other is more outwardly attuned and centres on becoming part of an ecovillage movement. Further, Hurdal Ecovillage has undergone two distinct development phases. First, the members jointly owned the land, built their own houses and attempted to be self-sufficient. Decision-making was consensus based and the ecovillage was largely isolated from the local community. In the second phase, professional actors took over the responsibility for developing the village, offering ready-made houses to be owned by individual families. This shift implied a mainstreaming process in that the selected housing construction and the change from collective to individual ownership of the houses made the ecovillage appear more like conventional settlements. Also contributing to mainstreaming the ecovillage was the strengthened support for sustainability articulated in the wider society. Today's ecovillagers express a wish to constitute an attractive, sustainable alternative to conventional living, but for doing so they have to negotiate and maintain the boundary between themselves and the wider community.

1. Introduction

The ecovillage (EV) movement has received considerable attention in the literature. Scholars have looked at how EVs, as a particular form of ‘intentional communities’ (see below), have appeared and evolved over the years, and various barriers experienced in the process of establishing and maintaining such initiatives, which have often failed.¹ Moreover, in a substantial part of the academic work on EVs, a key question has been to explore the shared values underpinning these initiatives, hence the ‘essence’ of such projects for sustainable living. A central and overarching idea observed among EVs is the notion of ‘connectedness’ which is often articulated within the movement itself, for example between human beings today and in the future and between humans and nature. In terms of how such connectedness is to be realised, EVs tend to highlight four ‘pillars’ on which the movement may be said to be constituted; environment, economy, community and consciousness (Liftin, 2014). Because EVs vary considerably in terms of which pillars they emphasize and the meanings associated with each of them, Liftin uses the metaphor of “the windows of a house” to highlight that different EVs embrace the four pillars to varying extent and in different ways (ibid, 31).

The ecovillage movement can be regarded as an example of ‘lifestyle movements’ (Haenfler et al. 2012:2) which “consciously and actively promote a lifestyle, or way of life, as their primary means to foster social change”.² Lifestyle movements (in line with political consumerism and socially conscious consumption) represent ways in which individuals express political and moral concerns outside the explicitly political realms such as voting and protesting practices (Dobernig and Stagl 2015:452). Here, lifestyle choices constitutes the protagonists’ main strategy to obtain social change, and personal identity work play a key role (Haenfler et al. 2012:8).³

This paper provides a detailed and relational account of one single ecovillage (EV); Hurdal Ecovillage in Norway. We first explore how and to what extent residents of the EV express political and moral concerns when accounting for their choice and practicing their new lifestyle. Hence, we ask whether residents of Hurdal EV perceive themselves as associated with a wider EV lifestyle movement with intentions to produce social change. Secondly, we focus on the creation of the EV and the ecovillagers’ potential expression of a shared EV identity while adapting a decentred and dialogic approach (Holland et al. 2008). By this we mean that we acknowledge the possibility that there are multiple discourses, practices and (partly shared) identities within the EV. Furthermore, if a collective EV identity is articulated, this is likely to be influenced and worked on by outsiders (c.f. the notion of “alter versions”, treated by Holland et al. 2008:106). This perspective resonates with classical anthropological work (Barth 1969:10) on a group’s identity and belonging, which are always created

¹ Forster and Wilhelmus (2005:378) observe that 80% of ecovillage communities have ceased to exist within two years of starting.² By introducing the concept of lifestyle movements, Haenfler et al. (2012:2) aim to bridge theories associated with social movements on the one hand and lifestyles on the other. They seek to obtain analytical focus on the “intersections of private action and movement participation, personal change and social change, and personal identity and collective identity.”

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³ “The relationship between collective and personal identity is particularly important to LMs. In LMs, rather than simply being linked to an organization’s collective identity for purposes of political mobilization, personal identity becomes a site of social change in and of itself as adherents engage in identity work directed at crafting personal integrity and authenticity (Grigsby, 2004).” Haenfler et al. 2012:8.

in relation to other groups. Hence, to social groups, maintenance of boundaries is an enduring concern. In the present work, we scrutinize the social boundaries that are created in the process of establishing and maintaining Hurdal EV.

For these purposes, we examine various types of relationships that have contributed to the creation of Hurdal EV. The types of relationships include internal relationships in the EV, and ecovillagers' relationship with the local population in Hurdal and the wider society. We draw on in-depth interviews with residents, representatives of the local population and with the developer/architect of the EV.

The next section shortly reviews the literature on EVs and intentional communities. Section 3 accounts for the methods used in this study. In section 4 we present Hurdal municipality and two key phases in the development of the EV. Section 5 presents today's ecovillagers' motivations for moving to Hurdal EV, and accounts for various types of relationships that have contributed to creating Hurdal EV. In section 6 we discuss the findings, and section 7 concludes.

2. Ecovillages in the literature

Intentional communities are defined by Kozeny's (1995:18) as

... a group of people who have chosen to live together with a common purpose, working cooperatively to create a lifestyle reflects their shared core values. The people may live together on a piece rural land, in a suburban home, or in an urban neighbourhood, and they share a single residence or live in a cluster of dwellings."

The current EV movement forms part of what has been described as the fourth wave of "intentional communities" (Smith, 2002). Smith (2002) draws on Kanter (1972) who identified the three earliest periods of intentional or communal development in the USA: the first wave was devoted to communities with a religious theme (continued up to 1845), the second emphasized economic and political issues (lasted up to 1930) and the third focused on psychosocial issues (peaked in the late 1960s). The current movement of intentional communities, including the growing number of EVs, are characterized by eclecticism and "are not as alienated from mainstream culture as were their predecessors; and they appear to be more adept at balancing individual and community needs." (Smith, 2002:111).

Globally, the increasing concern for climate change and the environment over the past decades has spurred renewed interests in intentional communities as potential models for sustainable living (Liftin, 2013). One example is Findhorn EV⁴ in Scotland, which started as a spiritual community in the 1960s, but which from the 1980s, and negotiations surrounding the Rio Summit, came to include environmental sustainability as a central pillar or "window". The renewed interest in EVs should thus be understood in the context of increasing worries about the environment. Kaspar (2008) considers the EV movement as an attempt to create an integrated ethic in which both humans and nature are considered to have a value on their own. Moreover, dissatisfaction with a societal trend towards more segmentation of people and nature, development away from community principles and

⁴ The Findhorn Foundation is a trust registered in 1972 based in the Findhorn EV in Scotland. This EV was initially formed by the spiritual community existing in the eco-village at that time.

withdrawal from political participation appears to motivate the formation of EVs (Kaspar 2008, Kirby 2003).

Current EV initiatives, through their often articulated intention to change society by promoting and practicing sustainable living, may thus qualify as a 'lifestyle movement' (Haenfler et al. 2012:2), as noted in the introduction. Some studies have looked at the challenges faced in the process of establishing and operating EVs and the struggle to reach consensus-based decisions has received considerable attention. For example, lengthy discussions about a given EV's aims and structure have put stress on participating individuals (Sutcliff, 2000; Kirby, 2008). Further, both Ergas (2010) and Forster and Wilhelmus (2005) point to the financial insecurity faced by many EVs and argues that this may hinder their capacity to attain sustainability goals.

The dynamic relationship between EVs and the society that surrounds them has received limited attention, but Ergas (2010) is an exception. She conducted a joint analysis of identity formation amongst ecovillagers on the one hand and the macro-political structures on the other. The author shows that some of the ecovillagers under study (USA) projected a collective identity in attempting to be "a model of sustainable living" to the wider society (Ergas, 2010:49). However, the ecovillagers did not have a unified vision of how to achieve this goal. Ergas (2010:43) also finds that ecovillagers' "relationship with the dominant cultural structure is interactive; villagers negotiated their goals within and through the surrounding banks, schools, media, car culture, and dominant ideologies." Here, the wider society both provided opportunities and posed constraints to sustainable living (e.g. local laws for housing codes). In response, the ecovillagers sought to "push back" by modifying the limiting structures (ibid.:50). This is an important type of relationship that will be examined in the present work.

The potential, mutual influence between conventional architecture and traditional ecological architecture has been studied from the perspective of science and technology studies.⁵ Berker and Larssæther (2016) refer to the architecture used in the first phase of the Hurdal project as "experimental building projects within and outside of the ecovillage movement." (ibid.: 103). The project consisted of low-tech self-built houses with the use of local materials and confirmed the idea of traditional ecological architecture as home-spun and low-tech (Ryghaug 2010, Sørensen 2015). The majority of architects in Norway perceived this type of architecture as rather uninteresting and badly designed (Ryghaug 2010). Drawing on the work of Ryghaug (2010), Sørensen (2015) notes that in the realm of architecture (in contrast to electric cars, for example) it is rather the *concept* of sustainability rather than the materials, practices and processes associated with traditional ecological architecture that has been mainstreamed. The dismissal from architects of traditional ecological architecture has made the possibilities for mainstreaming more difficult in the form of integrating ideas and practices associated with traditional ecological architecture with conventional technologies. Hurdal EV went through different phases with radically different architectural designs, and we will show how this affected the relationship between the EV and the local population.

⁵ Ecological architecture (often employed in EVs) aims at low-tech alternatives, the use of local resources and often demands active involvement of the inhabitants when building the houses (Sørensen 2015).

3. Methods

Hurdal EV was selected as our case because it is the only EV initiative in Norway with a considerable size. It has received considerable attention in the popular media.⁶ In 2015 the Norwegian broadcasting company (NRK, 2015) produced a television documentary about Hurdal EV, which claimed to document some of the challenges and conflicts experienced in the process of establishing the community.

Our main empirical material derives from interviews, as we account for below. We also participated in the “Hurdal Sustainable Valley Festival” in 2015, which has become an annual event organised by Hurdal municipality. National politicians and well-known NGOs have attended this festival. To gain insight into the EV movement we visited Findhorn EV in the UK in May 2016, which is regarded as one of the first EVs and often termed “the mother of other EVs”. We also draw on observations made by the research team on their repeated day visits to Hurdal EV, as well as on reports and information retrieved from the Internet⁷ and from the television documentary (NRK, 2015). Further, our account of Hurdal EV and how it was established (Section 4) draws on reports written by stakeholders in the process.

3.1. Recruiting respondents

In total we conducted 23 in-depth interviews in 2016. 15 of these included individuals or families among the current 64 households (150 inhabitants) in the EV, six interviews were held with people representing the Hurdal local community (see below) and we interviewed three people who have played a central role initiating and/or developing the EV: Kristin Seim Buflod (General Manager Hurdal EV), Simen Torp (company Filago) and Rolf Jacobsen (company Aktivhus, former Gaia Architects).⁸

With one exception, the ecovillagers were engaged in the research through self-recruitment. One of the architects involved in developing the EV, put us in contact with the communication adviser in Filago, who sent out an email to all the EV inhabitants, describing the project and inviting the inhabitants to participate in an interview. Fourteen households responded and were interviewed (see Appendix A for household’s characteristics). In addition, we recruited one couple spontaneously while visiting the EV. All the interviews with the ecovillagers took place in their homes and lasted approximately one and a half hour.

Respondents unaffiliated with Hurdal EV were contacted directly by looking up their names on the web, calling them and following up with emails. This included the Mayor, the Planning Manager in Hurdal municipality, and four people from the local community (staff at the primary school, and in commercial services). In addition to the 23 formal interviews, we talked with other individuals and groups we met in Hurdal centre and at the café in the recently opened (2016) Cultural Centre

⁶ For example, Berker and Larssæther (2016) partly base their material on newspaper articles.

⁷ Hurdal EV: <https://www.hurdalecovillage.no>. The ecovillage also has one open group on Facebook (Hurdal Økolandsby) and a closed group. Hurdal municipality: <https://www.hurdal.kommune.no>

⁸ These three interviewees have agreed that we identify their names in the present work. Seim Buflod is also one of the 15 ecovillagers interviewed, whereas the other two do not live in the EV.

'Fremtidssmia', run by the EV. These informal meetings provided additional insights into the relationships and interactions between EV inhabitants and the local population in Hurdal.

3.2. Interview topics and strategy for analysing the material

The interviews were semi-structured, which allowed the respondents to bring up issues of concern. For each of the three types of respondents we developed a specific interview guide. Generally, after introducing ourselves and the project, we provided information about how the data would be collected, stored and used, and we asked if we could record the interview. All participants received information about the project including their right to withdrawal and how we would manage anonymity.

The interviews with the ecovillagers covered four main topics. First we asked about their background (age, gender, family background, occupation, where they come from), their consumption practices in general, and their reasons for moving to Hurdal EV. Secondly we asked them to elaborate on their experiences with living in the EV (the house, the solar panel and other equipment, social aspects, organizing daily life, etc.) and whether their habits, consumption patterns or attitudes had changed after moving to the EV. Thirdly, we invited their reflections on their relationships with co-inhabitants in the EV and with the local community. Finally, we asked about their views on broader issues such as the role of EVs in the wider society.

The interviews with the local population centred on their views on the process of establishing the EV and the relationship between the local administration/population and the EV. In the interviews with EV developers we mainly focused on the process and the various people, technologies and relationships involved.

Four researchers conducted the interviews, most of them individually. With three exceptions, the interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. To help structure the analysis, we produced a coding tree with key issues from the interview guide, and systematised and coded the material accordingly.

4. Hurdal and the ecovillage: The place and the project

4.1. Hurdal

Hurdal municipality is in Akershus County,⁹ about 80 kilometers from Oslo (capital of Norway) and comprises 2910 inhabitants (2016).¹⁰ Hurdal EV is situated approximately four kilometers from the administrative center. Figure 1 shows where Hurdal and the EV are located.

Figure 1: Map over Hurdal municipality and the ecovillage.

⁹ In Norway, county is the regional level of government and municipalities are the primary unit of local government and administration. Municipalities are governed by councils which members are elected every fourth year.

¹⁰ Of the 426 municipalities in Norway (until reduction in 2017), more than half have less than 5000 inhabitants (Norwegian Government, 2013).



The municipality's stated ambition is, by 2025, to be a 'plus society', 'which implies that Hurdal will be carbon neutral or better, experience economic growth and provide improved life quality to inhabitants and visitors'¹¹.

4.2. Establishing Hurdal ecovillage

Phase 1 (1996 – 2009)

The story of Hurdal EV goes back to 1996 with the establishment of "Kilden Økosamfunn" (Halvorsen, 2003). The founders of Kilden Økosamfunn wanted to establish an EV in Norway. In 2001, the community was contacted by the Mayor in Hurdal who supported them in establishing an EV at Gjøding (a farm in Hurdal) owned by Hurdal municipality. Gjøding was situated only an hours' drive from Oslo, had a quite substantial amount of land for growing crops,¹² attractive plots for constructing houses, and the municipal plan had already opened for building houses in this area. The community proceeded with establishing an EV in this place. From 2002, they rented Gjøding and members of the EV built temporary houses using materials like straw and wood, hence traditional ecological architecture.

An EV cooperative was established in which each member owned a share of the farm and had direct influence on decision-making (Halvorsen, 2003). The initial inhabitants had to carry the costs of establishing the EV and those coming to the village later had to pay a certain amount to become part of the village.

In 2002, the cooperative started to collaborate with Gaia Architects, an umbrella organization for architectural firms interested in contributing to sustainable design (Gaia Arkitekter 2016). Gaia

¹¹ <http://www.sustainablevalley.no/>

¹² In total Gjøding covers 590 dekar of land of which 160 dekar is farmed land.

assisted the cooperative in developing the zoning plan for the area as part of the approval process to start the building of houses.



Figure 2: Self-built houses in Hurdal EV, Phase 1 (Picture from Miller and Torp 2013).

However, the project soon met challenges in the County administration (Miller and Torp, 2013), due to conflict regarding the protection of central cultural heritage sites. Spruce trees in the hill that formed part of the ground planned for the EV were a central element of the cultural heritage sites. However, just weeks after the cooperative received the rejection from the County administration, a fierce storm hit Hurdal. As a result, all the trees fell down, and the County issued their approval to the plans. In 2004 the EV bought Gjøding from the municipality, and in 2006 the zoning plan was approved.

The small EV community lacked necessary competence regarding economic issues and law. It was for instance a major challenge to obtain funding for establishing a substantial amount of new houses. Therefore they decided that it would be better to proceed to collaborate with a developer who would bear the financial risk. They also saw a need for a different concept for building the houses. Self-building required a lot from individuals in terms of competence and time-use (Berker and Larssæther, 2016). The EV project turned towards ready-made modules, with individual households owning their own home and plot.

Phase 2 (2009 – present)

In 2009 the overall ‘zoning plan’, for the EV was approved. The company Aktivhus was established the same year, partly as a result of the experiences made by Gaia architects in Hurdal, and also for generally promoting an alternative to the passive house concept (Berker and Larssæther, 2016).

Aktivhus provides module-based environmentally friendly houses, referred to as “Shelter” (Aktivhus, 2017) and became a close partner and important actor in phase 2 of the EV.



Figure 3: The Shelter houses in the Hurdal EV (Hurdal Økolandsby, 2017).

The financial challenge remained. In their search for a developer, the EV tried to establish a collaboration with several actors. In 2012, the firm Vitrina (later Filago¹³) AS took over the financial responsibility for the project. Some of our respondents said they had felt a strong relief when an investor (Pål Lund-Roland, today head of Business development, Filago) was willing to take over the debt.

The construction of the Shelter houses started in 2013. Aktivhus had to balance the ideals of ecological architecture with national regulations and available support schemes. For example, to meet the energy requirement specified in TEK 10¹⁴ and also zero emissions, which would allow considerable support from Enova¹⁵, they included solar panels on the roofs. To receive additional support, the project agreed to install monitoring equipment in some of the buildings to enhance research. This led to the introduction of ‘smart technologies’ for control of window screens, light and the like. Nonetheless, the architect was determined to maintain a central aspect of ecological architecture by using natural rather than balanced ventilation, hence active rather than passive houses.

However, the EV faced new challenges when sub-suppliers went bankrupt and technical equipment did not function as prescribed. As a result, Aktivhus nearly went bankrupt. As we show below (Section 5.2), there is still considerable frustration with the equipment among our respondents, and some concern about the financial viability of the two companies involved.

5. Identities and relationships

In this section we start by presenting ecovillagers’ expressed motivation for moving to the EV. This will help us answer the question whether ecovillagers regard themselves as forming part of a lifestyle movement. Then we examine how ecovillagers relate to each other and other internal “actors” such as houses and smart technology and how they relate to the local community. We discuss the implications of the findings in section 6.

¹³ Filago has the stated aim to establish similar EVs across Norway, including 10 pilot projects.

¹⁴ Tek10 er en byggeteknisk forskrift til den norske plan- og bygningsloven. (Kommentar til språkvasker: Kan du oversette ☺).

¹⁵ Enova is owned by the Ministry of Petroleum and Energy and was established in 2001 to contribute to the conversion of energy consumption and production.

5.1. Stating intentions: Why moving to Hurdal Ecovillage?

Our EV respondents vary in terms of when and why they moved to the village. Some of them have been there almost from the start while others have moved there recently. All express a wish to live in a sustainable way.

The respondents reported two main types of motivations, which we term “community” and “example”, respectively. Though several respondents fit into both categories, there is variation in their accounts of why they wanted to move to Hurdal EV.

The first category refers to those who said they were motivated by the possibility to join a community, both to meet other people who share the same values, and to get away from the conventional society where they experienced that their attitudes, views and practices were at odds with or diverging from what is considered “normal”. The other category, “example” was a word used by many to convey that they felt motivated to move to the EV because they wanted to demonstrate to others what sustainable living may imply, and inspire others to do the same. As we elaborate below, the first type of motivation is directed inwards, while the second type brings attention to the role of the EV and the wider society.¹⁶

Seeking a community

The importance of social belonging was a theme in many accounts. A man (PH1) told us: ‘For sure, the dream is to have an environment that one recognizes and feels at ease with.’ A woman (PH2) provided more details:

There are people here who do not think you are strange because you make such decisions. Because you buy used clothes or don't buy clothes. There is a complete understanding amongst people who live here. And it helps feeling that people understand you. I have received strange looks and things [outside the EV]...

Other ‘community’ motivated respondents complained about the barriers to sustainable living in the larger society: “We are environmentally conscious and think it may be difficult to have an environmentally friendly lifestyle in our society. In that sense, it is not a coincident that we are here.” (PH9) . These quotes signal that the respondents felt uncomfortable or constrained when living in conventional communities, which is why they wanted to move to the EV.

People in this group elaborate on different aspects of the community dimension and what living here means to them (see Table A1 in the Appendix A). Some are preoccupied with giving their children a good upbringing in what they denote as the “protective environment” provided by the EV. Others, as PH2 above, say that they find it valuable to meet people who share the same views as themselves when it comes to consumption patterns and other matters. And to several, a passion for growing their own food was a highly motivating factor for moving to the EV.

On the issue of spirituality six of our respondents specifically mentioned that it is important to them that the EV does not put too much emphasis on spirituality. At the same time some ecovillagers said they appreciate the possibility to practice spirituality without being judged by other people in the EV community.

Being an example

People who said that their motivation to move to the EV was to become “an example” actively seek to be pioneers who show the way for others (see table A1 in Appendix A). Most of them (six out of

¹⁶ An overview of the respondents and the categories is provided in Table A1 Appendix A.

seven “examples”) stress the importance of being part of a lifestyle movement that contributes to social change with respect to food consumption, transport, housing and how people live together. For that purpose, they reflect on how their own activities match “normal” criteria set by the wider society:

So we thought, ok, we want to try to live a couple of steps more sustainable, or like push, and see how far we can take it, but at the same time, like, within the four walls of society and within the normal. The good thing about being part of this project is that it is pretty accessible, also to the commons (allmenheten). (PH14)

Hence, for being an example, the link to society is important and should be actively maintained, as PH14 further elaborates

...it was, at least one of the most important questions to me, was... to get an impression of whether this was an isolated unit, a little village that took a step away from large society to do something else, or if they actually formed part of the larger society and tried to take part and create something. (PH4)

5.2. Relating to developers: the architect Aktivhus and entrepreneur Filago

Respondents expressed mixed feelings towards the architect and entrepreneur. On the one hand, they stated their admiration for the houses and the entrepreneurs: ‘Innovation takes time, innovation is frustrating.’ (PH6). They appreciated the physical structure and the quality of the housing construction. Few of them spoke about aesthetics, but many conveyed satisfaction with living in houses which materials they considered to have limited environmental impact. Several emphasized the good indoor quality and the direct access to outdoor air through valves rather than having a closed system of balanced ventilation. A man with a background in natural sciences said he highly appreciated that the houses are not concealed “aluminium tins” and referred negatively to “passive houses” On the other hand, they articulated dissatisfaction with several technical components of the houses (particularly in the early phase 2) and the way their complains were met by Filago, Aktivhus, and sub-contracting firms. Respondents complained about uncomfortable draft from uneven window frames, cracks in kitchen countertops and yellowing grout. Several also commented that the material had been processed and shipped from Eastern Europe and processed in Denmark – hence transported over considerable distances with environmental implications.

A common question was who to contact that would be financially responsible when technical problems occurred. Our respondent from Aktivhus underlined that his firm is responsible for ensuring that the houses function. However, to several residents, delays in having things fixed and lack of responses to emails made them wonder about this promise and whether Filago has economical capacity to do the necessary work. Some respondents also doubted whether Filago ‘is as idealistic as they claim to be’. Others were uncertain of what property (the farm and the Cultural Centre) Filago actually owns today. Some were also sceptical to Filago’s previous involvement with a Czech company which went bankrupt after having supplied construction material to the EV. Finally, there was considerable confusion among residents regarding the distribution of responsibilities between the ecovillagers and the three actors on the “supply side”: Aktivhus (the architect), Filago (the entrepreneur) and various sub-contracting firms. One of the points of confusion was that some individuals were said to be working both for Filago and Aktivhus.

From the perspective of our respondent from Aktivhus, the shift from phase 1 to phase 2 represented a risk that the people moving to the EV could lack a commitment to sustainability. One year after initiating phase 2 he had the impression that residents did not seem too eager to join activities on the farm or establish new joint initiatives. 'What if we only get people here driving SUVs?' he asked, to illustrate the problem.

However, on the ecovillagers' side, they express that they indeed possess the capacity to initiate activities. Most of the interviewed families are part of at least one of several groups initiated by the ecovillagers (dancing courses, painting course, wine club, Friday club for women, yoga, outdoor recreation, boat group), and by default they are part of the 'user association' (beboerforening) where many contribute on a voluntary basis. Though there were some complaints about certain people being 'free riders' rather than contributing to the common good, our interviewees were more concerned that Filago should let go of some of their responsibilities.

Woman: ...I think many people, and us included, expected that Filago and Aktivhus would not decide on so many issues, after all people have come here for discussing things thoroughly. Then our enthusiasm gets killed a little.

.....people thought they could just start things here. I can shovel snow in the winter, and then you go to Filago and asks if that is ok, they say they have already thought about that, so don't think about it. Then that person lost motivation completely.

Hence, there seems to be a mismatch in expectations regarding decision-making where some residents' call for more independence while Aktivhus and Filago keep control to ensure the project's viability. A woman put it this way: "People don't want to follow Simen's dream, but their own dream." (PH-3)

5.3 Relating to the local community

The value of social involvement with the local community was often highlighted by the ecovillagers. Several expressed the importance of keeping contact with the wider society to avoid becoming a closed EV:

"... I do hope it will become more naturally, what should I say, so-called integration. Between us and the local inhabitants [referring to the place: *bygda*, (lit. "rural area")]. I think it is important. That one does not become like a sect." (PH9)

Also, to some of the "example" oriented respondents, the outward reach of the EV had triggered them to move to the EV (Section 5.1).

Many ecovillagers regarded the Cultural Centre 'Fremtidssmia' and the open courses (dancing events, painting course) attended by people from Hurdal as «a bridge» between them and the local population (PH-13). One man said he liked to exchange knowledge and learn about traditional, botanic knowledge in Hurdal (mapping meadows with flowers, PH-14). However, another man remarked that there are also specific events that are not so suited for the local population because they are too alternative, 'very hippy oriented.'

The respondents representing Hurdal municipality spoke warmly about the EV's influences on the local community, emphasizing the EV's contributions to the 'Hurdal Sustainable Valley Festival' and in

activities surrounding the local school: 'Things move faster with their engagement', (HL2). They also expressed concern that not all EV families send their children to the local school and underlined that Hurdal should be 'a place in which people can dwell, live and work' referring to the municipal strategy 2010.

Similarly to staff in the municipality, ordinary residents in Hurdal also acknowledged what they consider to be positive contributions of the EV. They pointed to the attention Hurdal had received nationally as a result of the EV, making Hurdal more visible:

How clever they have been in receiving all kinds of people, and it has opened, I mean, put Hurdal thoroughly on the map, from the start there have been people from all parts of the world, and they have been working for free, (HL4)

However, the locals' expressed joy over mutual contact and the EV putting Hurdal on the map does not necessarily reflect ambitions to fully share identity. The notion of 'Huddøling' ('a person from Hurdal') came up in interviews with local residents. They emphasized that in order to be a 'Huddøling', one has to be born here, and hence it would be hard for anyone moving to the village to obtain this label. With 30 years or even 50 years of residence in Hurdal, a local resident born in Oslo may still experience being excluded from certain social networks: 'You are and remain an immigrant, in a way.'

The local respondents gave vivid accounts of the shift from phase 1 to phase 2, and their perceptions of a radical change that had occurred regarding the kind of people who have come to live in the EV over the years.

But all the first houses they built standing on the farmyard, they were this kind of straw houses covered with concrete, and that is the eco... eco... yes, in the beginning, that is. They nearly froze to death in the winter. (HL3)

Other comments about the first phase EV included questions about the ecovillagers' financial capability; 'one cannot make a living by farming carrots', and about their lack of good hygiene and tidiness; 'the children were dirty and got problems at school'.

However, local respondents also acknowledge the increased economic activities that the EV brings to the area and denote this as a shift in relations towards increased "reciprocity" (HL4).

Sometimes the local inhabitants also indicated their own subordinated status in the context of knowledge provided by the EV: 'They are high above us' (HL1). Strengthening this impression of a hierarchy, local residents highlighted that EV people now have proper jobs and live in «nice houses worth 3 million kroners and upwards, more than other houses in Hurdal".

6. Discussion

6.1. Positioning Hurdal EV in the global ecovillage community: which windows have the clearest view?

Despite its young age, the concept of Hurdal EV has radically changed as the initiative went from childhood (Phase 1) to early adulthood (Phase 2). Our empirical material only derives from Phase 2, but secondary sources written by involved protagonists (ref Simen/Gaia) indicate that the first

project largely resembled the four-pillar concept observed in other EV across the globe (Liftin 2014). As of today (Phase 2), the shared values appear to be less settled and less comprehensive with mostly newcomers in the village with a wide array of different perspectives and motivations to join the EV. However, the developer and the majority of ecovillagers tend to share an outspoken and strong emphasis on environment and community as joint values in Hurdal EV. By this, they create and reproduce some key connections while living in the EV; both to the environment and to each other as a community.

As to the third pillar often associated with EVs, economy, this aspect has less explicit connotations in Hurdal EV today than what has been observed elsewhere, where ‘the purpose of the economy is to promote human wellbeing within the limits of finite ecosystems.’ (2014:78). Primary production (e.g. of food) constitutes an important element of economy, as does sustainable consumption. However, in Hurdal EV, food production is not (yet) a joint enterprise, but maintained either by the developer (Filago owns the farm) or by some individuals. Moreover, with the practicing of individual ownership to houses, the collective economy component of sustainable living in Hurdal EV is far less articulated than in many other EVs.

Regarding the fourth pillar of EVs, spirituality or consciousness (Liftin, 2014), the present Hurdal EV denotes itself publicly as a secular community. Although several of our informants explained that they are regularly involved in spiritual activities such as yoga and meditation, they all refute towards external individuals (such as the researchers) that spirituality is a central, shared dimension of their community. In official documents (NOU 2013) Norway is characterized as ‘the spiritually-open society’ (‘det livssynsåpne samfunnet’) where many religions and practices co-exist (see also Schmidt, 2010). Religious activities in Norway are considered to belong to the private realm and are less organized than before (Taule, 2014). By regarding spiritual activities as a private matter, Hurdal EV has adopted a similar stance on spirituality as the wider society. In conclusion, both the developer and the ecovillagers in Hurdal EV strongly articulate the dimensions of environment and community, while the two other pillars (economy and consciousness) constitute more individualised realms of practices and concerns and form less prominent parts of the community.

6.2. Negotiating boundaries and identities

Ecovillagers negotiating boundaries

The presented material has provided an account of how a Norwegian EV was created. We started from the premise that there might be multiple discourses, practices and identities within the EV and that their shared identity is also influenced by the perceptions and work of outsiders, such as the local population in the Hurdal Valley which provide “alter versions”(Holland et al. 2008) of what the EV is. After scrutinising various types of relationships involved in this process, we are now positioned to discuss how social boundaries and identities are negotiated in the process of creating the EV. Because Hurdal EV has gone through two radically different phases, its story is particularly revealing in terms of illustrating how the concept of an EV may change (6.1) and the relational nature of ‘the

ecovillage' as a project and locus for identity construction, heavily informed through interaction with the outside world. The outside world has also changed in the period.¹⁷

The most striking shift in relations is the way the local population has looked upon the EV. In the first phase this relation was highly distanced, when their alter version of the EV with their "dirty children" may bring associations to impurity and social danger (Douglas, 1982). In contrast, today the local population express admiration for and sympathy with the ecovillagers, in some cases even signalling a feeling of subordination vis-à-vis the ecovillagers. The most decisive moment in this transformation was when the project abandoned traditional ecological architecture and replaced this with ready-made houses. To the observing local population, this shift in choice of 'cultural artefacts' (Holland et al. 2008) or material representations of the EV, significantly changed their perceptions of the EV, and also how ecovillagers themselves think of who they are.

We already noted that the ecovillagers shared the basis value of environmental sustainability and wished to become socially engaged in larger group of same-oriented people. However, when further probed on their motivation for moving to the EV, we received two different types of answers and we noted that the wider society serves as a key reference to both groups, if in different ways. We referred to the first group as 'community' oriented members. They said they had moved to Hurdal EV because they wanted to get away from critical evaluations in their former neighbourhoods, for example to be able to keep chickens or grow carrots without being judged by others. By moving to the EV, the community group created a boundary between themselves and mainstream society and became typical inhabitants among equals rather than outcasts in foreign land.

The other group that we referred to as "examples" had primarily wanted to join the EV to constitute an example for sustainable living. Their goal fits explicitly with perceptions of EVs as 'lifestyle movements' that actively seek to promote social change (Haenfler et al. 2012:2). This group cherishes continuity with their former external relationships and networks. They underlined that the EV is not a sect, that the houses are very comfortable to live in and that they are fortunate to be close to Oslo so that people can visit the EV. Hence this group 'needs' the external network, including the local population in Hurdal, as witnesses for creating who they are: progressive and responsible people who have managed to merge their sustainability ideals with comfortable living. To distance themselves (and the EV) from being judged as too alternative, they spoke critically about practices associated with the EV in Phase 1 such as straw bale houses, sects and spiritual practices. This group needs to display a collective identity that is normal enough for mainstream society to be willing to adopt their lifestyle. At the same time, as pioneers or early adopters in a sustainability marked, they are likely to enjoy social esteem from their wider social networks (Pantzar 1997).

Apparently positioned at the steering wheel in the endeavour of creating an EV according to their vision, we find Aktivhus (the architect) and Filago (the entrepreneur). They express a clear intention to affect mainstream society and be part of a lifestyle movement, resembling our group of 'examples'. Upscaling is an expressed goal and Hurdal EV is perceived as the start of a larger project in Norway. The enduring contact with the municipality for transforming Hurdal into "The Sustainable Valley" in the long term confirms this ambition. However, internally, the developers partly has a

¹⁷ Table A2 in the Appendix summarises the two main phases, some of the characteristics of the EV at the two points in time, and how the EV is regarded by the municipality and the local community, though our material on the latter group is limited.

challenge in handling the internal variation in aspirations. The most articulated tension between developer and ecovillagers was the issue of the farm in terms of who should own it and be responsible for its functioning. Whereas the developers seemed hesitant towards letting control be passed on to the ecovillagers, the latter group called for more responsibility. Finally, the developers worries that the ongoing provision of ready-made houses in the open market will attract people to the EV who are not committed to sustainability. Hence, at the same time as they aspire to be part of a lifestyle movement the developer express concern that the boundary between the EV and larger society would dissolve. The risk involved in this balancing is losing one's EV identity. As seen, the Hurdal EV has a momentum towards the larger society in terms of demonstrating how to live a sustainable life in a comfortable way. This corresponds with what has been termed the forth wave of intentional communities in which members increasingly attempt to become integrated in the larger society rather than escaping and being alienated from mainstream culture (Ergas, 2010). At the same time, the larger community has changed and become more attuned towards the values and practices that constitute important principles for the Hurdal EV. In Norway, sustainability is increasingly accepted as an important policy dimension, and concern for climate change seem accompanied with increased amount of initiatives for developing novel solutions that are more environmentally friendly (e. g. Wang et al 2016).

As noted, Sørensen (2015) suggests that the mainstreaming process in ecological architecture is mainly conceptual rather than innovative and practical and that this field is still being dominated by small-scale, locally controlled activities using an experimental approach. However, the presented material on how Hurdal EV developed from the first to the second phase clearly demonstrates that this mainstreaming process was not only conceptual but also practical/technological. At the same time also the concept of the EV was negotiated as the concept moved towards norms held by the larger society. Figure 4 below illustrates the process in which Hurdal EV and the larger society have approached each other.

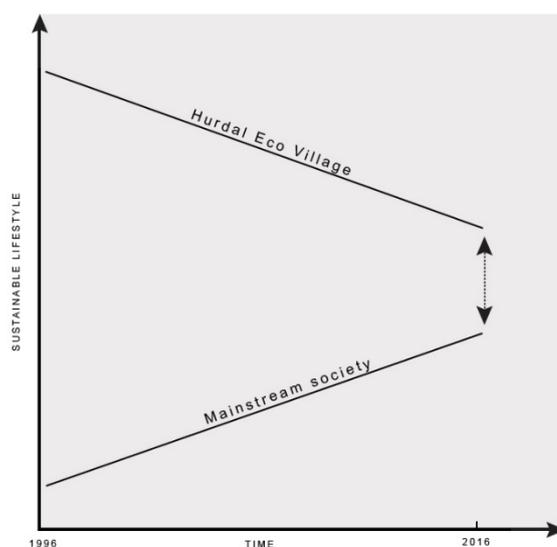


Figure 4? : The shifting relationship between Hurdal EV and larger society.

In the beginning there was a large discrepancy between the ecovillagers' values and lifestyles practiced by the ecovillagers and those of the large society. Today, this gap is narrowed.¹⁸ The EV concept has been negotiated and modified to constitute a pragmatic and attractive sustainable alternative to mainstream society because it is not beyond reach, but draws on a mix of values in terms of sustainability, comfort and aesthetics that are widely shared. So far, there is still a distance between the ecovillagers and mainstream society (illustrated by the gap in the figure in year 2016 (the year of data collection)). Currently there are both internal and external forces that seek to close the gap, but at the same time, it is crucial to maintain this difference, hence the boundary between different identities, if the EV is to survive as an alternative to conventional living. A movement would not be a movement if there was no such gap to close.

7. Concluding remarks

In this paper we have examined how the involved human and non-human actors in Hurdal EV have interacted over time and contributed to shaping the ecovillage. The study shows how the ecovillagers have sought to maintain the boundary between themselves as a group and the wider community, while balancing various values and what it implies in practice to live in accordance with such values. It demonstrates how the ecovillage as a concept is being negotiated, both internally within the ecovillage community and vis-à-vis the larger society. At stake is the question of ecovillage identity and what this should entail.

Two of the four pillars of EVs (Liftin 2014) are clearly embraced by the Hurdal ecovillagers - community and environmental friendly living. However, economy and consciousness are pillars that are played down and rather privatized. Most of the ecovillagers come to the EV to enjoy community

¹⁸ Mainstream society at large has not necessarily become more sustainable. In addition to increase in 'sustainable practices' (driving electric vehicle), unsustainable practices' has also increased in amount over time (e.g. travel by air transportation). But several of the practices are not as radical as before, such as eating less meat.

life and share their interest in an environmental friendly lifestyle. Some of them actively express a wish to contribute to a lifestyle movement where their practices and ideas are expected to lead to social change. Another group of ecovillagers are more inward looking, complaining about the barriers for sustainable living in the larger society which are found to be much lower in the EV. Both groups, however, despite their somewhat different emphases, may be considered as participants in a lifestyle movement, promoting private action towards social change and cultivating a meaningful identity (Haenfler et al 2012).

We also showed how the gap between the EV and the larger society has been narrowed. In the beginning the EV inhabitants were largely isolated from the local community and were looked upon as odd and even impure. However, by mainstreaming of the EV concept and practices through a revised ecological architecture, replacement of a collective economy with privatized solutions and decision making processes, Hurdal EV received a higher degree of esteem and acceptance of their values and practices by the larger society. In the period, the increasing general acknowledgement of environmental problems contributed to normalizing the EV. In this process, the ecovillage as a concept was negotiated by different stakeholders and outsiders who were engaged in identity work. At present, some EV members, and particularly the developers, appear mostly concerned about maintaining the boundary between the EV and the larger society.

Critics of lifestyle movements sometimes worry that individual action might not be an effective means for social change compared to for instance collective action targeting institutional change (Maniates, 2001; Szasz, 2007). Haenfler et al (2012) calls for further research on whether individual-level actions can spur social change. From our perspective it is also important to investigate when and how this is the case. Would narrowing the gap between the lifestyles of larger society and lifestyle movements such as EVs, constitute a greater possibility for social change than when this gap is large and if so – why and how? Or would the worry of the developers of the Hurdal EV that the village might become too “mainstream” and thus not constitute a real example for sustainable living, make the possibilities for social changes that matters in terms of environmental sustainability, too small? To qualify these questions, a first step might be to consider and attempt to quantify what “the gap” actually entails in terms of environmental footprint. However, because identity construction and socially driven concerns beyond the EV itself constitute a major part on the endeavor of creating and living in an ecovillage, the issue is far more complex, and also demand further in- depth studies .

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank all the interviewees for sharing their thoughts with us, and Brigid McCauley for language wash and translation. Thanks also to Eilif Ursin Reed for drawing graphical illustrations (Map and Figure). This research was funded by the Norwegian Research Council.

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Appendix

Table A1: Overview of interviewed ecovillagers and their stated motivations for moving to the EV

Age group	Gender of respondent(s)	No. of children	No. of adults	Motivation	
				Category	Main Aspect
60+	M	2	2	Community	Children –growing up
30-45	W	1	1	Community	Environment
20-30	W+M	0	0	Community	Farming/Growing food
20-30	W+M	1	2	Example	Movement
30-45	W	0	2	Community	Health
30-45	M	0	2	Example	Innovation
30-45	W	1	1	Example	Movement
30-45	W+M	2	2	Example	Movement
30-45	W	0	2	Community	Environment
30-45	W	1	1	Community	Children – growing up
20-30/ 30-45	W+M	0	2	Community	Environment
60+	M	0	1	Example	Movement
30-45	W	2	1	Example	Movement
20-30	M	1	2	Example	Movement
45-60	M	2	2	Community	Health

Table A2: The two phases of Hurdal EV.

	First phase (2001-09)	Second phase (2009-2017)
Physical buildings	Self-construction, traditional ecological architecture	Ready-made units, modern ecological architecture including advanced technology
Community markers	Every member had influence on joint decisions	Individual homes: individual decisions Farm: owned by Filago, lack of clarity regarding decision making in the future Shared social activities, some also open to people outside EV
Environmental values	Highly expressed	Highly expressed
Spirituality	?	Not a shared value

Position of municipality vis-à-vis EV	Took initiative to collaborate	Highly engaged in collaboration
Position of local population vis-à-vis EV	Distanced	Admiration