

COMMUNITIES TOWARDS SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY: A CASE STUDY OF  
LA'AKEA PERMACULTURE COMMUNITY AND LOST VALLEY EDUCATION  
AND EVENT CENTER

By

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## ABSTRACT

### COMMUNITIES TOWARDS SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY: A CASE STUDY OF LA'AKEA PERMACULTURE COMMUNITY AND LOST VALLEY EDUCATION AND EVENT CENTER

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In this research, I explore social practices that members of two intentional communities identified as contributing positively to their experiences and the functioning of their communities. Specifically, I examined the social practices that deal with conflict resolution/prevention, the decision making processes of consensus and sociocracy, and how knowledge about these practices is shared within the ecovillage context. The intention is to present how community members develop and use these social practices to live together more harmoniously and authentically by utilizing activities and techniques to help mediate and resolve conflicts and make decisions collectively.

In order to investigate these questions I traveled and lived at several different sustainability oriented communities ranging from three weeks to five months. I participated in day-to-day life at these communities and interviewed residents of the two communities I stayed at longest. Through my participation in these two communities it appeared the social practices of heart shares, check-ins, community meetings, mediations, and personal growth workshops helped to reduce conflict and foster social cohesion between community members. The insights from this research revealed how knowledge shared about these practices is done so mainly through participation. Results indicate that

knowledge sharing about these practices may benefit from increased involvement of both community members and visitors, specifically, through holding events and gatherings.

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“It is my firm belief that the fate of the planet depends on the future of the Global Ecovillage Movement, and that there is nothing more important for us to do now than to help the Movement flourish” -Ted Trainer

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Everyday our societies edge closer towards an ecological crisis that some scholars believe may be beyond our control (Bendell 2018; David Wallace Wells 2018). Scholars have identified a multitude of threats in this ecological crisis to human existence, such as climate change (Nolan 2018) to loss of genetic diversity, desertification, and pollution of water sources, largely caused by human activity (Foster 1994). The list of ecological problems we face as a planet are vast. The lack of, and inability of, governments and institutions to take action to address these issues has many scholars now focusing on adaptation and mitigation strategies with recognition that “...local government, households, and individuals are under-recognized, yet highly significant sites of climate change mitigation and adaptation” (Ireland and Clausen 2019, 769).

With these ecological and climatic threats to humanity's future there is a need to find alternative ways of living that are not only sustainable but that also do not compromise people's quality of life (Grinde 2018) and provide resilience to climate change. Some people are taking action to address this looming ecological crisis by coming together to find more sustainable ways of living, in ecological villages (ecovillages), also collectively known as the global ecovillage movement (Trainer 2000).

## What is an Ecovillage?

The term ecovillage was first used by Diane and Robert Gilman in 1991 and is 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 and Gilman 1991, 7). Over the past twenty-five years, the phenomena of ecovillages has emerged as a growing movement that promotes living in a manner that reduces the human impact on the world’s natural environments by changing lifestyles and consumptive behaviors, such as buying local, meeting material needs onsite through renewable practices, and reducing consumption by sharing resources (Boyer 2016). Their growth over this period can be understood as an expression of desire to establish a simpler, more meaningful, and environmentally sustainable lifestyle governed by inclusive decision making processes within the community. Ecovillagers seek alternatives to the destructive and wasteful practices of modern consumerist society by living in consciously designed communities that reduce their energy and resource consumption while promoting regeneration of social and natural environments (Avelino et al 2015).

## Four Dimensions of Sustainability

Scholars have identified ecovillages as significant demonstrations of four different dimensions of sustainable living through (1) ecology, (2) economy, (3) social, and (4) cultural (worldview/perspective) sustainability (Avelino et al 2015). Ecovillages

are said to be environmentally more sustainable than traditional households due to many of their practices, such as their use of renewable energy systems (e.g. solar photovoltaic panels), reduced resource consumption, reduced carbon footprint (see Figure 1), and use of communal bulk food purchase and preparation (Boyer 2016). Many have reduced waste generation by diligently recycling, composting organic food waste, composting human excrement as nutrients for soil, and through vehicle and tool sharing (Boyer 2016; Dvorak 2007). Economically, ecovillages have experimented with alternative forms of employment, low-income housing, currency, and bioregional cooperatives that attempt to build resistance to the fluctuations of global economic markets (Dawson 2006; Kunze 2015). Socially, they strive to develop communication and conflict resolution skills while operating on inclusive democratic decision-making models to insure residents voices are heard (Christian 2007). Culturally ecovillages have pushed many different boundaries of dominant mainstream beliefs and values like “exploring intimacy, personal growth, transparency, radical honesty, equality, compassion, sexual freedom, and the power of community” (Network For a New Culture, n.d.). Of the four dimensions, the ecological is the most studied by scholars (Boyer 2016; Fittschen and Niemczynowicz 1997; Walker 2009).

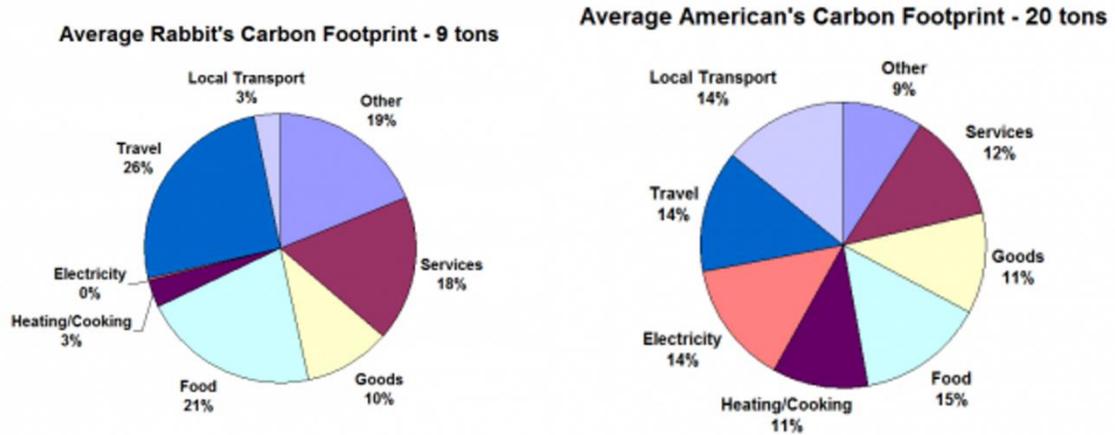


Figure 1. Two pie charts displaying the average carbon footprint of Americans and Dancing Rabbit ecovillagers (Sirna 2017).

It is the transformative nature of these ecovillages that make them important subjects of research. The change in perspectives from seeing human waste as a resource instead of a burden, to questioning and rejecting hierarchical systems and decision-making processes, represents a paradigm shift away from mainstream values and consumerist perspectives (Kunze 2015). Proponents of the ecovillage movement argue that there is no one aspect of ecovillages that make them healthier and more sustainable ways of living, but rather it is the integration of all parts that create more fulfilling lifestyles that mainstream society could learn and benefit from by researching them more intensively (Boyer 2016).

One way to understand this is that all of these dimensions of sustainability intersect and are important to the operation of an ecovillage. For instance, the issues and conflicts that may arise with collectively managing shared resources can be mitigated and

reduced by employing various communication and conflict resolution strategies like nonviolent communication and co-counseling. By employing consensus and participatory decision-making processes multiple perspectives coincide to inform the conversation of how it is possible to live healthier and more sustainable in any given place (Huntermoon 2018).

### Intention of Research

The majority of scholarly research on ecovillages has often centered on understanding the ecological practices of the community (Eshtafaki 2012), examining issues of environmental philosophy (McGlaughlin 2016), practices of environmental sustainability (Boyer 2016), and ecological design and construction (Shed 2012). What has not been explored in such depth in the study of ecovillages are the practices of “social” sustainability of ecovillages. By “social” dimensions I mean research that examines how newcomers to ecovillages learn about the organization of ecovillages, decision-making processes, approaches to conflict management, and interpersonal communication; rarely has the social aspect of this learning been explored by scholars. “How is knowledge shared and passed on to members of ecovillages?”.

This research aims to shed light on these understudied and important aspects of ecovillages. To understand these “social aspects of sustainability” I focus on two sustainability oriented intentional communities: Lost Valley Education Center which is

home to Meadowsong Ecovillage in Dexter, Oregon and La'akea Permaculture Community located on the Big Island of Hawai'i.

The primary research question guiding this study is – what are the social sustaining processes at work in these ecovillages? More specifically, I investigate the decision-making, conflict resolution, and knowledge sharing practices of ecovillages. In order to identify these social sustaining processes I explored the formation and organization of these communities while observing the practices they utilized.

These two cases are used to examine the 'social' dimensions, (1) exploring the ways in which power is distributed inside these egalitarian intentional communities, specifically through decision-making processes, (2) what practices do these communities use to prevent and resolve conflict, and (3) how is knowledge sharing and learning about these practices happening in these communities?

Understanding how and why these communities formed gives insight into the intentions of the founders, the challenges they faced in establishing their community, and highlights the values and visions integral to the communities founding. As the scholar Kozeny (1995, 7) has identified, “It is apparent that people–dissatisfied with the gap between their ideals and reality–will keep trying out new approaches until they find lifestyles that solve most of the problems they see in the dominant culture.” Ecovillages attempt to fill that gap by creating spaces for experimenting with how can we live more sustainably and have fulfilling authentic relationships with the people around us.

The ways in which the members of these communities organize their daily lives contributes to understanding how they have chosen to relate to one another; and what

social structures enable them to live together. This includes the legal, social, and economic organization of the community and the rules and agreements by which they govern themselves. These organizational aspects of ecovillages are essential for having fair and mutually beneficial relationships. They do this by having clear agreements, inclusive decision-making processes, shared ownership, and conflict resolution strategies. Contrast this to the relationships of those outside of ecovillages where there may be no formal way to address conflict with your neighbor or feel comfortable to express when your boundaries have been crossed.

Focusing on these processes of decision-making, knowledge sharing, and conflict resolution explores how these ecovillages maintain their communities and their relationships between each other over time. These may be of the most important facets to study as these processes may largely be what keep the community together. The sustaining processes involved with conflict resolution are diverse because there are so many different practices utilized, such as nonviolent communication, mediations, and various spaces for expression. Since communities like these have been proven to be educational demonstrations of healthier and more sustainable lifestyles, I wanted to know how the residents of these communities experienced knowledge sharing and how they believed it could be improved.

Decision-making, conflict resolution, and knowledge sharing are essential to ecovillages because their egalitarian nature seeks to find equitable ways to share power and coexist peacefully. In order to maintain practices that promote equality and peace within a community there must be a knowledge exchange between experienced long term

members and newcomers. Researching the practices used in these two communities and how knowledge is shared about them may reveal valuable insights for other intentional communities seeking to share power and gain tools for resolving conflict.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to understand how these communities formed, are organized, and how they sustain themselves I review the scholarly research on the theory and practices of intentional communities and ecovillages.

### Ecovillages as Intentional Communities

Ecovillages are one of the many types of intentional communities. An intentional community according to Kozeny (1995, 1) is

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

Some of the different types of intentional communities are “communes, student cooperatives, land co-ops, cohousing groups, monasteries and ashrams, and farming collectives” (Fellowship for Intentional Community, n.d.). Although ecovillages are a relatively recent phenomena they share commonalities with other types of intentional communities that can contribute to the understanding of the sustaining social processes of ecovillages.

Krammer (1956, 1-2), a scholar who researched intentional communities in the 1950's in the United States, gave an interesting definition of intentional communities as,

“a group of persons associated together for the purpose of establishing a whole way of life. As such, it shall display to some degree, each of the following

characteristics: common geographical location; economic interdependence; social, cultural, educational, and spiritual inter-exchange of uplift and development. A minimum of three families, or five adult members is required to constitute an intentional community.”

The interesting aspect of this early definition is that it includes the importance of the exchange of the social, cultural, educational, and spiritual aspects of intentional communities that the definition of ecovillages fails to note due to its focus on ecological dimensions. To leave out these dimensions of ecovillages misses out on some of the most important sustaining processes and behaviors of these communities, such as how knowledge is shared between community members.

### Success and Failures of Intentional Communities

Scholars of both ecovillages and intentional communities have highlighted the factors that lead to success or failure of various communities. An extensive case study by Krammer (1956) on dozens of various types of intentional communities focused on the reason communities succeeded or failed. Krammer’s research indicated that the interpersonal environment of intentional communities often produced the criteria most associated with community success, that being “personal maturity”. She identified four categories that if not present would almost certainly lead to failure of the community:

“(1) a smooth running operational policy, respecting both the individual and the social needs of the group; (2) A sound economic structure; (3) Personality fitness equal to the needs of the community; and (4) Social functioning of a creative nature and such as builds social solidarity within the group.” (Krammer 1956, 198)

Krammer (1956) notes that most failures were due to a combination of these categories not being met but there were a significant amount of failures that were due to only one category not being met. Her analysis of these categories found that human relationships such as love and friendship were more important than economic relationships. Lastly, one of Krammer's compelling conclusions is "...that human beings can purposely alter and mature their cultural habit patterns through the means of the intentional community" (Krammer 1956, 201); meaning that by living collectively we can mature not only personally, but also culturally by changing people's attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. She insisted though that this may be temporary because

"A vital aspect of the relation of Intentional community to culture is that under ordinary circumstances it will, in time, be absorbed back into the stream of the surrounding culture unless something very extraordinary takes place. That extraordinary something which is necessary is to change the outer culture, lest it change the intentional community." (Krammer 1956, 202)

In regards to ecovillages, this statement highlights the importance for ecovillages to be more than just islands of sustainability in an unsustainable world, but advocates for having an outward approach that cultivates sharing knowledge of their social practices that contribute to sustainability with neighboring communities, cities, and institutions (Hausknot 2017).

Another prominent scholar of ecovillages and intentional communities, Diana Leafe Christian(2003), conducted extensive fieldwork on a variety of intentional communities examining the process of creation and maintenance of ecovillages. She found that only 10% of intentional communities were successful in establishing their communities and even some of those fail in the following years (Christian 2003). Some

reasons for failure are (1) lack of planning in regards to zoning, (2) not having clear written agreements, and (3) not having a vision statement prior to land purchase or before inviting in new members.

Christian (2003) outlined necessary components that contribute to having a successful intentional community, highlighting the importance of developing early on 1) the vision and mission of the community, 2) the construction of written community living agreements to refer to later, 3) carefully choosing what type of legal entity best suits the needs and intentions of the community, and 4) figuring out zoning issues before land purchase. Ideally all these would be established before inviting new membership or before members moved to land.

Another important subject she covers is determining the internal finances of the community. Rural intentional communities face the challenge of being affordable enough for new members to join along with lacking employment opportunities nearby. Although there is no easy suggestion for this challenge Christian (2003) describes how some communities have addressed this by organizing income-sharing structures, creating onsite small businesses, or employing remote businesses that do not require commuting.

Christian tells precautionary stories of people who were eager to get into community living that underestimated the challenge of such an endeavor and ended up being the 90% of intentional communities that fail. Christian's books (2003; 2007) are "how to" guides for creating and joining intentional communities, offering advice from the failures and successes of intentional communities she has researched and includes detailed descriptions of best practices.

Christian's two books "Creating a Life Together" (2003) and "Finding Community" (2007), outlined the importance of communities using consensus decision-making, conflict resolution, and nonviolent communication. Christian insists it is a worthwhile investment to have members new and old be trained in these skills though hiring professionals to provide workshops and classes on these subjects (Christian 2016). She notes that by having these training it will likely save much frustration and heartache by reducing conflict because it gives community members the tools, techniques, and a common language for addressing conflict.

#### Ecovillages as a Growing Trend

The general goal and vision of ecovillages is to live harmoniously with the natural environment so as to preserve the earth's ecological systems for both the sake of human survival, but also out of deep spiritual respect for all life on the planet (McGlaughlin 2017). Over the last two decades ecovillages have become a growing segment in what is known more commonly as the intentional communities movement, with over 1000 ecovillages and over 15,000 related villages or projects listed by the Global Ecovillage Network (Global Ecovillage Network, n.d.). The intentional communities' website lists 574 established and self-designated ecovillages, and an additional 450 establishing communities (Fellowship for Intentional Community, n.d.). There are countless other communities that have not added themselves to ic.org site.

The diversity of research about ecovillages is expanding due to scholars' interest in the many social and environmental experiments these communities undertake. Wagner (2002), conducted a review of existing research on the subject and found it is indeed a growing movement with expanding amounts of knowledge produced through academic research but concluded there needed to be more research exploring how results of past studies can have relevance to other social contexts. Understanding the ways in which knowledge is shared within ecovillages can contribute to transferring the successes of these communities to other social contexts.

#### Communities of Practice: Knowledge Sharing in Community

Mychajluk (2017) described how the multitude of different skills and knowledge individuals contribute to the collectives of ecovillages create forms of knowledge sharing that are largely based on experience. Mychajluk (2017) introduced the theory of community of practice and its associated concepts into ecovillage research demonstrating that it is a helpful approach in understanding many of the common types of learning present in these communities (Mychajluk 2017).

The theory of community of practice (CoP) was first described by Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger, in their study of how apprenticeships help people learn (Lave 1991). Lave and Wenger used the theory to point out that learning occurs through “experiential knowledge sharing” where learning is not seen just as an intellectual transmission of

information, but a process informed by one's environment and historical, cultural, and social settings.

Lave and Wenger (1991) define CoPs as groups of people with shared common interests that come together to improve their skills and knowledge by participating with more experienced members and with ever increasing involvement in the community. They argue that CoPs exist everywhere and all of us participate in various different types (Lave and Wenger 1991). Examples Lave gave are forms of apprenticeship, groups like Alcoholics Anonymous, and occupations such as midwifery (Lave 1991).

In addition, they identified the concepts of situated learning and peripheral participation as important to understanding how learning occurs in CoPs. These concepts are akin to the ways in which people relate and informally share knowledge with each other in ecovillages. The recognition that learning often occurs through experience highlights the importance of knowledge sharing through participating in community meetings and conflict resolution practices.

#### Situated learning and peripheral participation

Lave and Wenger's (1991) theory of communities of practice highlights "situated learning" that signifies the importance of social interactions in contributing to the learning process and proposes that "learning occurs in social relationships with other learners by observation and peripheral participation in the community rather than in a classroom setting" (Agrifolio 2015, 27).

Situated learning is mediated through what Lave and Wenger (1991) describe as legitimate peripheral participation where “initially people have to join communities and learn at the periphery. Learning is, thus, not seen as the acquisition of knowledge by individuals so much as a process of social participation” (Smith 2003, 3). What constitutes legitimate participation is determined by each CoPs willingness and guidance to grant newcomers into engagement through having relationships with experienced members of the CoPs who guide the newcomers in practices until the newcomers become old timers of full participation (Brown 2013).

#### Communities of practice in ecovillage research

In Mychajluk’s case study of an ecovillage, she found the theory and concepts of “community of practice” to be useful in examining how knowledge is shared and maintained within an ecovillage context as a lived experience, specifically examining knowledge sharing of sustainability practices. She identified that differences in status can affect participation as renters “expressed a tendency to moderate their interactions based on their real and perceived position of being relatively less powerful” compared to owner members. This generated marginal participation that limited both renters and owners from the benefits of having all residents being fully engaged. The key component of peripheral participation to this research is understanding to what degree new individuals to these communities are guided to learn about the ways in which the communities organize and sustain themselves.

Mychajluk (2017, 191) recommends the concept of CoPs “for broader application, to consider how ecovillages foster learning for sustainability, and how they practice living well “in place””. She identified five categories that are useful for examining ecovillages:

1. inclusive discussion and decision-making
2. honest and compassionate communication
3. non-violent conflict management
4. embracing diversity of people and perspectives
5. personal growth or inner work

These categories provide a conceptual framework for this thesis and help in describing some of the main organizing and sustaining processes in ecovillages and intentional communities. To give context to each category they will be briefly examined here and tied to other reoccurring themes in this ecovillage research in later chapters.

### Inclusive Discussion and Decision-Making

Intentional communities scholar, Kasper (2008, 15), highlighted that intentional communities are bureaucratic in nature due to their many rules, policies, and living agreements that govern them, but that the use of the inclusive decision-making process of consensus “stave off precisely the characteristics that make bureaucracy undesirable to them: a strict hierarchy, an imbalance of power, impersonality, and inflexibility”. By utilizing consensus it gives residents the opportunity to re-estimate current rules and

make new rules according to what serves the community and its constituents overtime (Kasper 2008). In Kasper's research (2008) of ecovillages she observed the differences between well organized and poorly enacted consensus and describes some of the good practices that set them apart as 1) assigning roles (facilitator, scribe, secretary, time keeper) at the beginning of meetings, 2) arranging the meeting into a circle to reflect the egalitarian nature of the meetings, 3) giving time for people to gather their thoughts and remember the purpose of the community, and 4) an evaluation at the end to recount what went well and what did not in order to promote mindfulness. She concludes that

“carefully thought out meeting processes not only reinforce community among the ecovillagers — by having to listen to one another, compromise, and overcome conflict — but in being regularly reminded of the ecological, social, and spiritual goals of the community as a whole, their sense of purpose, and the paradigm under which they operate, is renewed” (Kasper 2008, 19).

Christian (2003), one of the leading scholars on eco-villages, considers proper use of consensus to be one of the most important components of having a successful community as poorly enacted forms of consensus or pseudo-consensus often leads to power imbalances and frustration of members. Consensus decision-making is a process that seeks to arrive at decisions that everyone can live with, by seeking to resolve or mitigate the concerns of the minority (Williams et. Al. 2006).

The concept of Sociocracy, or “dynamic self-governance” is another prominent type of inclusive decision-making process in ecovillages. As Christen describes, Sociocracy is an inclusive decision-making process that,

“includes an interconnecting stack of semiautonomous, self-organizing circles, each of which governs a specific area of responsibility within the policies of the higher circle, and executes, measures, and controls its own processes in achieving

its goals. Representatives from each circle pass information, needs, and requests between circles. Sociocratic governance also includes a circular, three-step process of planning, implementing the plan, and, evaluating the plan, and then revising the plan if needed, implementing it, evaluating it, etc.” (2012, 65).

Buck (2017) explains that the egalitarian nature of sociocracy comes from the feedback loops or conversation between the different circles or groups that perform different duties. Basically, there is a main circle that consists of the whole community and then there are smaller circles that deal with specific tasks and these smaller circles consist of only some members of the community who are either experts or just the most interested individuals on that circle’s particular focus (Buck 2017). This inclusive decision-making process creates many opportunities for input from all individuals involved. Christian (2016) notes how it is essential that everyone is trained in the basic principles of sociocracy and thus communities who use it must constantly educate or promote new members to learn the process. Without clear and structured agreements and informed participants, in both consensus and sociocracy, the processes can become overwhelming and exhausting.

### Honest and Compassionate Communication

Kopaczewski’s (1998) found that honesty and compassion were highly valued by residents of the intentional communities she visited. The interviews she conducted with residents and an analysis of the community’s vision and agreement documents reflected this value. This category explores the contribution social activities like “check-ins, heart

shares, ZEGG (German acronym for “Center for Experimental Cultural Design”) forums, etc.” play in community conflict prevention/resolution, community cohesion, and depth of connections/relationships. Christian (2003) describes how these social activities contribute to the sustainability of the communities by reducing and preventing conflicts by allowing opinions, feelings, and perspectives to be expressed. The ZEGG forum is

“a ritualized form of transparent communication for larger groups. It offers a stage upon which people's thoughts, feelings or anything that moves them can become visible to others. One person, “the presenter” steps into the middle of the circle of the group and presents herself. It is like an existential stage for the whole person which includes the physical and verbal expressions, the mind, creativity and feelings. The aim is to reveal whatever is authentic, alive and true and to share the inner motivation behind actions. By this sharing it creates a space of trust and openness between people and supports a healthy transparency when it comes to the issues of love, power and decision structures. It helps to maintain a clear distinction between factual discussion and emotional processes. The forum is thus a significant building block in the development of self-knowledge and trust within the community. Participants experience freedom and a permission to be who they are and allow others to witness themselves”. (Meyer-stoll and Ecker, 2019)

ZEGG forum has been used extensively by groups across Europe and by a Network for New Culture (NFNC) ((Network For a New Culture, n.d). NFNC is a network of people that “strives to provide an open, caring, and supportive environment that promotes the confidence necessary for participants to shed defenses and open themselves to quantum leaps of personal growth.” (Network For a New Culture, n.d.).

## Nonviolent Conflict Management

Matfin (2019) explains how “community members use Nonviolent Communication (NVC), co-counseling, and a variety of other communication and personal growth tools to maintain harmony within the group” (Matfin 2019, 29). Christian (2003) points out that these practices are key to sustaining the relationships between individuals that make up the ecovillages. Nonviolent Communication (NVC) refers to a communication strategy developed by Marshall Rosenberg and was first introduced in his book “Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Compassion (1992). Rosenberg’s (1992, 1998) books encourage individuals to use NVC as a common language to understand their emotions and those of others to empathize with each other’s experiences.

Rosenberg (1998) described how NVC prioritizes the expressions of emotions and the needs tied to those emotions over stories drawn from perspective. Rosenberg (1998) suggested that perspectives about events and actions are less important than feelings and emotions about those events and actions because perspectives are subjective while emotions are the experienced reality of those feelings. That does not make individuals exempt from responsibility over their emotions, but instead actively encourages individuals to become aware of their emotions and emotional triggers.

According to Rosenberg (1992) NVC bypasses stories to focus on emotions as a more valid focal point for communication and connection and asserts that these emotions stem from universal basic needs such as connection, physical well-being, honesty, play,

peace, autonomy, and meaning with many more specific needs under these concepts. As Rosenberg (1998) explained, the needs are considered not in conflict but instead conflict arises from differing strategies for meeting the needs they arise from.

This idea was simultaneously and independently explored in the work of Max-neef (1992), who categorized important basic human needs as: subsistence, protection, affection, understanding, participation, idleness, creation, identity, and freedom. His book “Human Scale Development” criticized the top down decision-making of neoliberal and structuralist development and advocated for development for the people and by the people (Max-neef 1992). Not only does identification and categorization of emotions and needs benefit ecovillagers’ ability to express themselves, but the idea of “human scale development” is what ecovillagers attempt to make reality.

NVC has been used widely throughout the world for many purposes such as conflict resolution and mediation (Larsson 2011), healthcare (Sears 2010), academia (Rosenberg and Eisler 2003), businesses (Miyashiro 2011), peace programs in conflict zones (Rosenberg 2001), and has found itself as a language within intentional communities (Christian 2003). Many communities hold classes on NVC and residents have coordinated NVC study and practice groups (Christian 2003).

## Embracing Diversity of People and Perspectives

According to Huntermoon (2018) the ways in which intentional communities organize themselves to promote and embrace a diversity of people and perspectives helps sustain the community. She explains that when different perspectives and people are included in the decision-making processes it helps 1) value member's voices, 2) minimizes minority disappointment, and 3) diversifies the knowledge of the group. (Huntermoon 2018).

This is very valuable when studying ecovillage communities where often the main purpose in common is the desire to create more sustainable ways of life, while factors like religious beliefs, dietary choices, political beliefs, and worldviews can widely vary and often residents must navigate others beliefs. The scholar and co-founder of permaculture David Holmgren points out that “although shared beliefs and cooperative behavior are fundamentals to the success of intentional communities, too much similarity in skills, ages, needs, and personalities encourages competitive behavior rather cooperative relationships” (Holmgren 2002, 176).

Farmer (2018) highlighted how although many intentional communities are often progressive and forward thinking there are still many social barriers to making them accessible spaces for people of color. She points out- income inequality in the US, noting that only 41% of African Americans own their homes, compared to 71 percent of European Americans and that African Americans access to bank loans is much lower than European Americans. This makes it much more difficult for black families to invest

upfront into community-building and translates to hundreds of dollars difference in home loan payments and interest rates (Farmer 2018). Some suggestions Farmer (2018) gives to address this structural inequality are 1) hosting anti-racism trainings, 2) have educational workshops and discussions about white privilege and how that plays out in day-to-day life, and 3) making space for people of color and other minorities to speak and to be heard.

### Inner Work or Personal Growth

Greenberg's research (1993) examined the effects of growing up in contemporary U.S. intentional communities and claimed that inner work or personal growth is a point of contrast between contemporary and historical intentional communities. Greenberg has compared modern intentional communities of the 1990's to historical intentional communities of the back to lander movement of the 1960's and 70's. Greenberg (1993) found that contemporary communities focus more on psychological and personal growth orientation whereas historical intentional communities of the back to landers focused more on spirituality or political orientations like protesting of the Vietnam war. Greenberg (1993) does not mean that these back to the land communities did not focus on personal growth but that it was less of a focal point of those communities' formation. An important conclusion made by Greenberg (1993, 24), was the challenge to studying personal growth because although intentional communities often promote "the personal

growth of its members... these are basically subjective criteria and impossible to measure objectively”.

Intentional community scholar Kopaczewski (1991) highlighted the focus of many of these more modern communities tends to be on encouraging people to push their boundaries with what they describe as “hard work” to support and challenge one another’s personal growth and empowerment like redefining notions of love or relationships. Suzanne Moberly’s research (2014, 65), also showed that for some the environment of intentional community living “provided (them) with the time and support needed for continued personal growth”.

In Moberly’s book (2014, vi) “Walden III or Cult: Examining the Organization and Structure of Life within Contemporary Intentional Permaculture Communities” she examined three intentional permaculture communities to determine “factors of community cohesiveness and commitment that could transfer back into mainstream communities to rejuvenate depleted levels of social capital and civic engagement”. Her research showed that the shared “sense of purpose and goals of the community... in which the needs and goals of the community as a whole reflect and fold back upon the needs and goals of individual members... continually presents new opportunities for personal growth” (Moberly 2014, 88). She reflected on how individual personal growth has a direct effect on the collective influencing all aspects of community life from decision-making to interpersonal communications. She reasoned that mainstream society could benefit from the practices of these intentional permaculture communities and that utilizing such practices would “improve and maintain a high quality of life” but that it

could not occur without a major shift away from consumerist society (Moberly 2014, 101).

By utilizing these insights from scholars on intentional communities and ecovillages it can help inform my questions into these communities sustaining processes. I will also use the concept of communities of practice to frame how the knowledge of these processes is maintained and shared in these ecovillages and how it preserves the continuity of these communities. In the next chapter I will discuss my methods and how I went about conducting the research.

## CHAPTER 3: METHODS

During the course of the research I stayed and worked at multiple communities in Puna district of Hawai'i, New South Wales Australia, Coromandel Peninsula and Golden Bay of New Zealand, and in Oregon, but I choose to focus my study on two sustainability oriented communities. The reason for choosing these two communities was their use of inclusive decision-making (consensus and sociocracy), practices of conflict resolution, and compassionate communication. I utilized the methods of participant observation, as well as conducted semi-structured interviews at these communities: La'akea Permaculture community on the Big Island of Hawai'i and at Lost Valley Education and Event Center (Meadowsong Ecovillage) in Dexter, Oregon. I also drew from countless more informal interviews with individuals that although may not be quoted here, have greatly informed this research. The respondents interviewed included five women and eight men ranging in ages from twenty-two to seventy-five. These were residents of the communities, new arrivals, or farm supporters, with the majority of interviews being with residents. Interviews were recorded using a voice recording app on my smartphone. Written consent was received from the interviewees specifying on how they may be quoted (directly or indirectly). The length of the interviews ranged from forty minutes to upwards of two hours. The semi-structured interview had an ordered progression of questions but respondents were encouraged to elaborate on their responses and give information on what they felt was important. I took notes during the interview process

but the interviews were transcribed from the audio recordings to insure accuracy of the respondent's responses.

I read through the interviews many times and coded them for common terms and themes. Themes and terms identified were used to correlate reoccurring responses to existing literature on the subject of ecovillages and intentional communities, as outlined by Lisa Mychajluk's (2017) ecovillage research. The entire extent of this research has included the reviewing of dozens of articles, journals, magazines, books, and websites related to the subjects of intentional communities, ecovillages, and permaculture.

There were two essential questions I was asked by a friend when trying to figure out what I wanted to focus my thesis research on that helped immensely. They were "Where do you want to go and who do you want to talk with?" After pondering upon the questions I realized I wanted to go to Hawai'i to study tropical permaculture and I wanted to live and talk with people who were actively living their lives in more sustainable fashions by growing food, collecting rainwater, using renewable energy sources, and living together collectively.

### Case Study Selection

After searching the main website on intentional communities (ic.org) I noticed that there was a concentration of communities on the east side of Hawai'i in the Puna district. I reviewed the different communities' websites and ic.org profiles and selected for ones that suited my desired interest in intentional communities. I wanted to research

communities that had no one doctrine besides interests in sustainability or off grid living, because I wanted to see how they lived and if their lifestyles could possibly be used as a model to address larger environmental and social problems of the wider society. I also was fascinated by the diversity of people these communities attract to create prefigurative communities of residents with very different backgrounds and beliefs.

I selected Cinderland Ecovillage and La'akea Permaculture as they both articulated beliefs in permaculture, food forests, equality, and inclusiveness. I headed off to Hawai'i for a short scouting trip in early January and visited Cinderland for their Taco Tuesday Community Potluck and got in touch with La'akea about visiting. When summer came, I headed back to Hawai'i with the intent of living in these communities and work trading where possible as to contribute to these communities and make the research more financially feasible. The idea was to immerse myself in ecovillage life to get a personal and in-depth experience of what it was like to live communally in a more sustainable fashion. I stayed at Cinderland for a few weeks before being invited to farm support at La'akea Permaculture Community. Although it was significant for its use of permaculture and being a substantial food forest I decided not to include Cinderland Ecovillage in the research project as it is owned by a single individual and the community lacked many of the characteristics of intentional communities and ecovillages described in the literature (e.g. not consensus based). La'akea Permaculture Community was the first community I stayed at that had collective land ownership and consensus community living. Staying there gave me deep insights in what it takes to live together authentically and peacefully.

My desire to conduct this research started with wanting to learn about off grid living, permaculture, and other sustainability practices. I recognized intentional communities, specifically ecovillages and permaculture communities as the best site to interact with people actively living these lifestyles. I imagined helping in communities by gardening with special types of planting such as plant guilds or hugelkultur beds, maintaining off grid electricity and water systems, planting trees and collecting fruits, and utilizing compost toilets. While all of these happened to one degree or another, I realized eventually that what was even more important to the people of these communities was not these physical practices of sustainability, but the social practices of sustainability, that were necessary for living together.

Although I continued to study the formation and organization of these communities, I redirected my attention to focus on the sustaining processes, examining the social practices of decision-making, conflict resolution, and knowledge sharing that contribute to both physical and social sustainability. I was interested in exploring the ways in which these egalitarian intentional communities address the issue of power – how it is distributed inside these groups and how power is exercised in the process of making decisions. I was also intrigued to find out how these communities dealt with conflict and what practices they used to manage disputes. Lastly, I wanted to know how residents experienced knowledge sharing about these practices and how they believed knowledge sharing might be improved.

### Participatory Action Research (P.A.R.)

I employed the method of participant observation, which was essential in informing me of the realities and lifestyles of these communities. A few researchers who have also utilized participant observation in ecovillage research are Boyer (2016), Christian (2003), Kirby (2003), Lawlor (2008), McGlaughlin (2017), and Myachuljak (2018). This method allowed me to confirm accounts in the literature researched prior to visiting the communities. Without extended stays at these communities it would have been very difficult to understand much about the sustaining processes of these ecovillages and what residents valued most about their decision making and conflict resolution strategies. Through participation in the day-to-day life of the communities for extended periods of time I was able to see the value of different social skills and practices people develop in these communities. I participated in meetings, learned about the use of nonviolent communication and other forms of compassionate communication, and utilized various conflict resolution/prevention strategies.

As a participant observer, I engaged in a variety of events and activities related to community living like Cinderland's Taco Tuesday potluck, Hawaiian Sanctuaries free permaculture classes, and Heart of Now at Lost Valley was pivotal for me gaining access, earning trust, and making connections with members of communities. My desire to learn and be an active participant in different but related events was a less planned part of the research process that was more from personal interest that just so happened to spark potent connections.

By living at some of these communities for extended periods of time (two weeks to five months), I learned aspects of communities that cannot be perceived with a short visit. The sharing of ways of living such as working the land together, standing in circle, cooking for one another, and celebrating the Solstices were insightful and enhanced my understanding of what it means to live well in a collective. I believe this participation is the richest data source of all and is of the type of knowledge that even the greatest writers struggle to demarcate with words. This experiential knowledge is hard to describe, but the ways in which people organize and conduct themselves in these practices can be more easily identified, understood, and transmitted.

#### P.A.R. at La'akea and Lost Valley

At the time of my arrival most of the members of La'akea were involved in a construction project to upgrade the main house by adding more deck space, changing the entrance to the yoga room, and to installing a few electrical outlets. The project proved to test the communication skills and conflict resolutions skills of all members involved with differences about work flow or how work should be carried out. When asked what a recent success of La'akea, one member responded saying "We are successfully doing a major remodel without getting into conflict". I wouldn't say conflict did not arise but the important thing is that those involved were typically eager to settle their differences through communication and get back to work.

I came to La'akea after meeting and talking with one of the founders at a free permaculture class at Hawaiian Sanctuary she was teaching that day. She invited me to come work as a farm supporter. They needed help with the remodel project and other land based activities. A farm supporter is someone who comes to help out with projects and daily tasks. It is a work-trade situation that can be either full time of 24 hours a week for room and food, or it can be half time where you get room but pay \$360 a month to contribute to the communal food kitchen costs. Dinners are shared every week day and sometimes weekends when there are enough people to cook. The cooking and cleaning duties are shared by everyone with two or more people assigned to one night of the week. At La'akea they advocated for doing what was in your passion and when workflow allowed would let people choose what tasks they preferred. There were obviously things that were not in everyone's passion that people were still willing to do nonetheless.

An important thing to note is that La'akea has no mandatory minimum requirement for its members to contribute per week but through need and passion members contributed in their own and very different ways from the more seen aspects like farming and grounds maintenance to the less seen aspects like organizing events and handling finances. After staying and working at La'akea for four months I continued traveling to other communities.

I had learned of Lost Valley from various people at La'akea including a member who had lived there before and two other residents who were living there prior to coming to La'akea. My initial visit was short but very welcoming and within those few days I was there it seemed I had meet a majority of the community. Everyone was very friendly

and familiar with me due to my connection with other members at La'akea and the resident application I had filled out prior to coming. People were excited to talk about issues of sustainability, land management practices, and various diet choices and lifestyles at the main lodge that serves as a space to interact and share meals.

After my initial visit I returned to participate in the event Heart of Now as a student. Heart of Now (HON) is a weekend long transformational workshop with the purpose to

“radically change the way people live their lives, interact with each other and see the world. Our goal is to influence individuals, groups, organizations and political movements, primarily by supporting and educating people to become present, flexible and fully alive. We live by the truth that each individual has value and wisdom and that we all are teachers as well as students.” (The Heart of Now, n.d.)

Lost Valley members explained how Heart of Now originated from an earlier workshop called Naka-ima. Naka-ima according to one Lost Valley resident was started by two prior members of Lost Valley and proved to be essential to contributing to social cohesion at Lost Valley.

Many members of the community along with others from outside the community participate in HON and the experience of the weekend workshop accelerated the depth of connection I had with various individuals in the community. The longer I stayed the more comfortable I was engaging with all the different people at Lost Valley and began to understand more about what roles each person had in the community and what were their specific interest.

Lost Valley has communal meals every day for lunch and dinner so attending one or both of these meals every day or so was the best time to connect with people I had not

gotten to know yet and to have informal conversations about life in the community. The lodge would be full of conversation and most people used to frequent interaction were not timid to engage with me. A few members found great interest in my project, which gave me great joy to be able to discuss my travels to various communities and ask them about their experiences with community living and how they got to be there.

I found it very easy to find members willing to do an interview but much harder to pinpoint a time to actually conduct the interviews. Many people were very busy throughout the week with community duties and jobs, various meetings, and personal plans and obligations. I wanted my interviews to be as less disruptive to individual's schedules so I would always express that I was not going to leave the community anytime soon and that my schedule was very flexible and could be changed to meet their needs. People were always very generous with their time and would often invite me to their homes to conduct the interviews.

I paid to stay at Lost Valley as a guest visitor and although I did not work trade while at Lost Valley I made sure to try to contribute where I could. Often I helped out with the kitchen and lodge cleanup after meals, I started and stoked the sauna and hot tub fires for two of the monthly ecstatic dances, and I helped with land management such as trimming trees and lending a hand in the gardens. Working alongside members of Lost Valley whether in maintenance or garden parties always proved to consist of insightful and enjoyable conversations. The dedication to sustainability, both physical and social, made Lost Valley a potent environment for having discussions about topics that I have

found many people outside of these communities are not very interested or unaware of, such as permaculture and nonviolent communication.

After traveling to so many communities and coming to Lost Valley it was apparent that there are specialized concepts, community jargon, and a common language that does not exist in mainstream society. Conversations can skip past informing people of what things are and definitions to critical and constructive dialogue about very specific topics of sustainability. This was reflected in the meetings as well where even if individuals were not highly involved with a particular aspect of Lost Valley like the garden circle they were fully aware of their activities and happenings.

While at Lost Valley I attended multiple community meetings, workshops, work parties, and other spontaneous gatherings. Like many of the communities visited where even though I was just a visitor I was quickly integrated into the operations of the meetings. From my initial participation, it was easy to question to myself “What is my place as a new person to comment on the happening of a community I am new to?” Community members encouraged input from new people and recognized that fresh perspectives can be very useful. These communities I visited were confident in their group decision-making processes and appeared to not worry about influence from outside perspectives to sway opinions.

This research journey was not without complications of personal life and reflection. Due to unexpected circumstances, I could not return to Humboldt State University when I originally intended to, so I applied for and received an educational leave for two semesters. Although complicated at the time it turned out to be a blessing in

disguise as it allowed me the time to visit and live in additional communities extending my understanding of the intentional communities.

The next chapter will give descriptions of the communities visited, my personal observation of these ecovillages, and findings from the interviews conducted at the case sites.

## CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Before going into the insights gathered from the interviews I will describe both case sites primarily using information from the communities' website descriptions and documents. The intent is to display the case sites in the fashion and perspective they have chosen to present themselves to the outer world. After this introduction, I will describe my personal observations from my time spent in these communities and display key themes, events, and reflections as they relate to my main question. I give geographical context at the beginning of each community description with maps pinpointing the location of the two communities I conducted interviews at and stayed at longest. Lastly, the keys themes of inclusive decision-making, compassionate communication, conflict resolution, diversity of people's and perspectives, personal growth, and knowledge sharing are discussed.

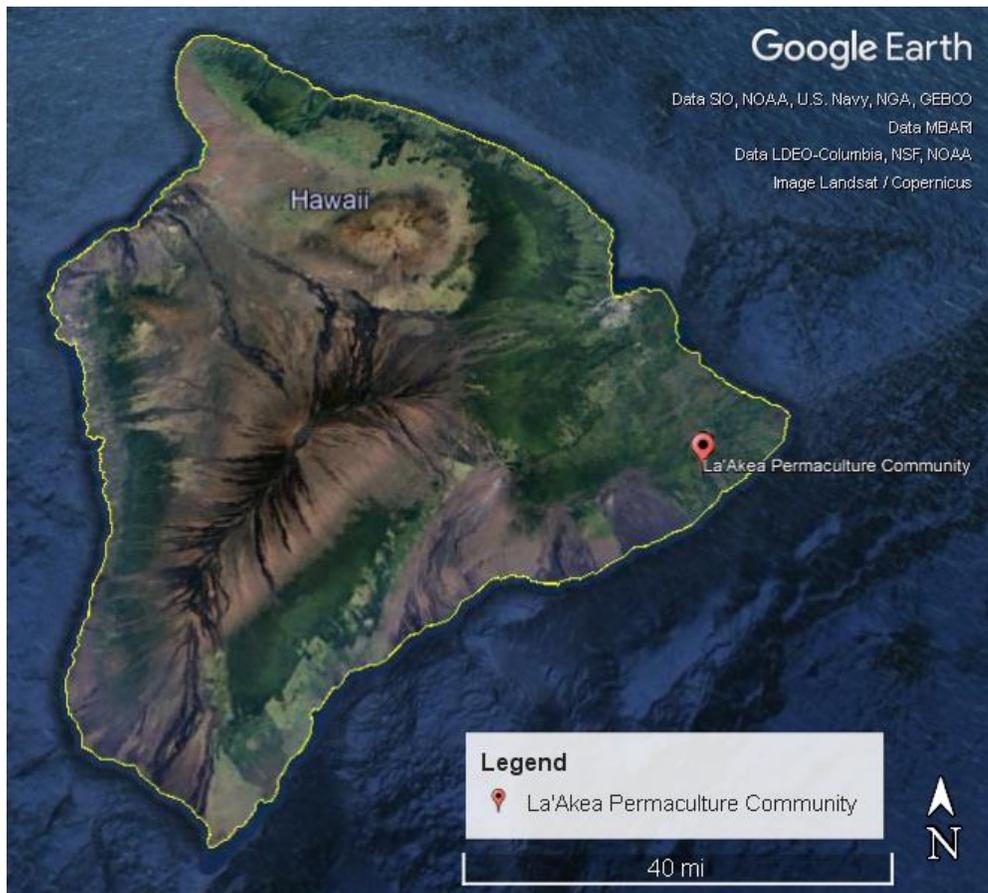


Figure 2. Map of the Big Island of Hawai'i showing the location of La'akea Permaculture Community is located near the town Paho. It is about forty minute drive from the city of Hilo, HI.

### La'akea Permaculture Community

#### Community of La'akea

I arrived at La'akea on November 1, 2017, and stayed there until March 24, 2018. I spent a total of five months at La'akea. During my time at La'akea their membership was nine members and two children. There were also a few visitors/renters and twelve

farm supporters at different times ranging from a few weeks to months. La'akea's process for new members begins with an online application to be a farm supporter or renter.

There is a six month trial period to make sure the individual applying is a good fit for the community and existing members.

The buy-in (amount to become a member and shared landowner) at La'akea is fifty thousand dollars. One founding member contributed around half of the finances for land purchase as a loan with interest. This became difficult for the group to manage the loan with the interest. The issue was resolved when that member, through following a spiritual leader, decided to remove the interest from the loan. This supported La'akea's survival, because the group could then manage the debt without it accumulating interest and being a financial strain on the community. As one of the founders noted, the funding to purchase the property for the community was described as

“Whoever had money to contribute put it in but most came from one member. So the contributions were a mix of two amounts of fifty thousand, one hundred thousand, twenty thousand, five thousand, and the rest was by one member who put in more than half. The property had cost five-hundred and thirty thousand dollars. All members had equal power despite not contributing the same money into the community” (Interview La'akea resident A).

Since then La'akea has gained five members and works with each individual's ability to pay the buy-in by doing payment plans on top of monthly fees. According to La'akea members, they describe their community as

“We are a small, family-style, egalitarian, intentional permaculture community on the big island of Hawai'i. Staying with us is a vibrant immersion in our community lifestyle. Many visitors find it transformative and life-changing. We are a committed group of people working together closely as a means to health, relationship vitality, economic stability, and personal and spiritual growth. We integrate the social aspects of sustainability into daily life: how to live together

with honesty, love, and peace, and shared power and leadership” (La’akea Community, n.d.).

La’akea Permaculture Community is located at 1300 ft. in the lush jungle of the Puna district of Hawai’i. The community is off-grid with solar energy and rain catchment and water purification system. The property is 23+ acres and has citrus orchards, large gardens, a greenhouse, and many other fruit trees planted throughout the property. The intention for the landscape described by the residents was to preserve portions as wild land and utilize others for agriculture.

### Vision

Members of La’akea explained how the values of both permaculture and the Network for New Culture (NFNC) were essential for the founding of La’akea. According to the founders, the NFNC events were the initial connection that brought many of the founding members together to form the community. The members of La’akea Permaculture Community define their vision as,

“We, the members of La’akea community, dedicate ourselves to each other’s long term health and well-being. We honor and work in harmony with the land we own and steward. We commit to nurturing our connection with each other and with the people of our bioregion. We encourage cooperative endeavors and building loving relationships. We value sustainable practices, and consider future generations in all our choices. We commit to creating a child friendly environment and holistic childrearing. We embrace processes which work to bring us into unity, while respecting each person’s autonomy. We aim for egalitarian relationships by practicing consensus decision-making. We aim to bring awareness to the various roles we play in regard to gender, economic class, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and age. We aspire to shift out of oppressor and oppressed roles moving toward mutual empowerment” (La’akea Community, n.d.).

### Permaculture

For La'akea both environmental and social permaculture are founding principles and ethics that inform the community's actions and decisions. Environmentally, La'akea is more sustainable than the average American household due to their use of solar energy and hot water, worm farms, various onsite food production of vegetables, fruits, and meats, utilizes rain catchment, Korean natural farming, and compost toilets. Members of La'akea describe the social dimensions of permaculture they incorporate as "Our philosophy and practice of permaculture starts with cultivating supportive and empowering relationships among ourselves. We have developed systems and practices that nurture this vital component of farm life" (La'akea Community, n.d.).

### Decision-making processes

The members of La'akea operated on consensus at their community meetings when deciding important decisions such as capital improvements, new members, changes to existing agreements and any other long term decisions. The only exception was for a vote to ask a member to leave it was consensus minus one. For both community meetings and heart shares each week members would switch who facilitated so each member got to practice and shared the responsibility. The way the members describe their community is

"We value personal empowerment, trust, and accountability in our decision-making process. A key concept of consensus is that members know and communicate their individual truth and desires, while balancing the wellbeing of the community with their personal preferences. Our process meeting (see below) informs our decision-making to the extent that we reveal ourselves to each other and support each other in meeting our needs" (La'akea Community, n.d.).

Members share power through this clearly articulated vision and their process of consensus. The process was sometimes long for community meetings and occasionally took up to three hours.

### Authentic relating

La'akea Permaculture Community was the first community I stayed at that had collective land ownership and consensus community living. Staying there gave me deep insights into what it takes to live together authentically and peacefully. Members explained how many of them had spent time developing their communication skills and doing research into how others have formed and maintained communities specifically in regards to conflict resolution. One member said how one of the main founders had years of previous community living experience that greatly informed La'akea's creation. Founders of La'akea reported that they utilized and were influenced by Marshall Rosenberg "Non-violent Communication: A Language of Life" by, Diana Leafe Christian's "Creating a Life Together: Practical Tools to Grow Ecovillages and Intentional Communities", and Chris Scott-Hansen's "The Cohousing Handbook". These texts are pivotal to the intentional communities movement because they describe conflict resolutions strategies, lessons from other intentional communities successes and failures, and guides for how to live collectively.

A founder of La'akea also reported that they were greatly influenced by the Germany permaculture community called ZEGG. According to one founder ZEGG was

a permaculture community formed in Germany that integrated the social and the ecological in their work. In the early years on the land, they realized that the physical aspects and work of permaculture was not the only ingredient to make a stable community; the most important aspect they believed was the social dynamics and conflict prevention and resolution. They experimented and came up with the forum, which was a space held regularly where people could be authentic and vulnerable with what is going on with them at that time, without interrupting reactions or comments of others. La'akea members described the forum as a place where emotions are supposed to be seen and accepted without going into the messy details of the stories around those emotions. The founders noted the forum is very helpful for preventing conflict because the idea is that if people are given the opportunity to express themselves when negative feelings like anger, jealousy, annoyance, etc. first arise they can be aired before the problems/grievances of people within the community grow to the point of no resolution, compromise, or communication. La'akea members hosts events for the network they met through, Network for New Culture, called winter camps that hold this type of forum for five days with workshops one to two times a year. Members expressed the importance of these camps in connecting them to people outside the community where they mutually share knowledge through participation and experience in the practices of forums and other forms of authentic relating.

### Sustaining community practices

At La'akea they hold "heart shares" weekly that are less structured spaces where people within the community can share with each other what's going on for them. The activities of these meetings appeared to help foster social solidarity as clear and authentic expression allowed awareness of others needs and a level of transparency needed for an empathic understanding of one another. The activities of heart shares would manifest in various ways depending on who is facilitating that week.

Extended check-ins are common where the time of heart share(one and a half to two hours) is divided by the number of people present, after which each person took a turn expressing what is going on for them. Triads are another practice where people split into groups of three and then split the time equally for each person to share. These are common but the facilitator and the group can determine how the time is spent and sometimes the group realizes that one or some specific people need some extra attention and time. There are also times where people do not really want to share or do not have much coming up for them so they just pass and let the next person begin.

These gatherings are important and essential to the healthy functioning of the community as they allow space for emotions to be expressed in a setting intentionally set up for it instead of things surfacing in less optimal or problematic times like community meetings. By preventing or reducing conflict through authentic and transparent relating in heart share, blockages (such as interpersonal conflicts, personal traumas, diffidence) that can interfere with the decision-making process can be addressed early on. Also by sharing these spaces with guests, visitors, and new members, all participants learn how to

hold such spaces and gatherings and in order to take these practices into other social contexts.

As noted in the methods, La'akea utilizes farm support to build community by bringing in prospective members and visitors that help work on the land contributing to the community as a whole. Members reported that the extra help farm supporters provide often brings in fresh and needed energy when the community is engaged in projects such as the remodeling or for the preparation of a large event. Many of these sustaining processes, such as heart shares and check-ins, I identified in other communities.

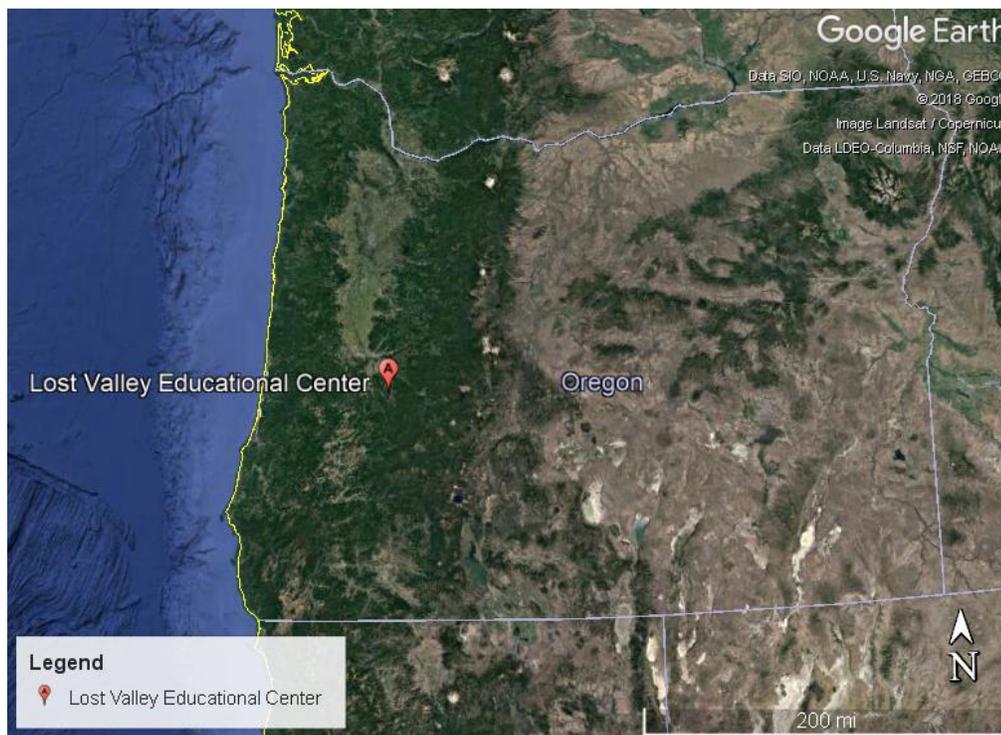


Figure 3. Map of Oregon showing the location of Lost Valley Education and Event Center in the town of Dexter. The site is about a thirty-minute drive to Eugene, OR.

### Lost Valley Education and Event Center/Meadowsong Community

#### Community of Lost Valley

Lost Valley Education and Event Center provides sustainability oriented educational programs and offers building rentals to events that are aligned with the community's values. The land is owned through a community land trust and the community of residents is called Meadowsong Ecovillage. Since the land is owned through a land trust there is no buy-in process at Lost Valley. Everyone who lives at Lost Valley long term is technically a resident staff. There are also students and visitors that

come for the Ecovillage Design Education, Permaculture Design Certificate, ecstatic dance, and other workshops and events. The ages of residents vary from four to seventy. The residents say everyone at Lost Valley is a teacher (and life-long learners) co-creating this educational village together. Residents of Lost Valley describe their community as:

“We are not governed by religion or politics. We have no leader or guru. We *are* a community that deliberately gathers around a set of collective understandings and interests. While every resident member is drawn to the land for a slightly different reason, there are aspects that all of us hold in common in our hearts: 1) a deep care for the value of life on this planet – from which the desire to serve arises, 2) a willingness to explore and venture upon a more benign and holistic life-path, 3) an interest in understanding and creating the essence of family, tribe, and partnership, and 4) a dedication to personal growth, healing, transformation, and/or spiritual understanding” (Lost Valley Education Center, n.d.).

Since Lost Valley is both a nonprofit educational center and an ecovillage there are two separate mission statements. The mission statement for the non-profit is

“Lost Valley is a 501 c3 learning center, educating youth and adults in the practical application of sustainable living skills. We take a holistic approach to sustainability education, engaging students in ecological, social, and personal growth” (Lost Valley Education Center 2019).

The community outlines four avenues for working towards the goals of the nonprofit's mission statement as 1) hosting the 2019 Northwest Permaculture Convergence, 2) offering our Holistic Sustainability Semester, 3) offering Permaculture Design Certificate Courses, and 4) hosting transformational gatherings, retreats, and conferences (Lost Valley Education Center 2019).

Meadowsong Ecovillage’s mission statement is described as

“Meadowsong Ecovillage provides affordable housing, access to land, and facilities for community development. We are an intentional community of

educators, entrepreneurs, and cultural evolutionaries, committed to creating a life together in a sustainable way” (Lost Valley Education Center, n.d.).

To work towards these goals in 2019 the community has written three goals:

“1) Continue to be an educational model for experimentation and implementation of sustainable social systems through modalities such as Non-Violent Communication, Sociocracy, and Permaculture, as well as ongoing practices in conflict-resolution and deepening relationships.

2) Keep our community full, happy, and connected, while improving community processes and technologies.

3) Continue to offer a vibrant visitor program that educates and restores.” (Lost Valley Education Center 2019).

One resident explained how these goals provide a roadmap for community decisions and proposals in the upcoming year. Lost Valley members describe their community as “not organized in opposition to or against any particular ideal, so much as we are working towards the emergence of something new.” The operations of Lost Valley are organized through participation in community roles (called “HIVE” roles), which involve “governance, new residents intake, health and safety, trail clearing, landscaping, cleaning and beautifying, and much more”. The residents reported that many of them participate in meal preparation for their communal Meal Plan program. There are multiple common areas used by all residents such as the “lodge, kitchens, bathhouses, dorms, classrooms, nature trails, sauna, hot tub, swimming hole and other resources with our students and guests”. Members mentioned how it is crucial for residents to be familiar with and abide by the community living agreements (Lost Valley Education Center, n.d.).

### Participant observation

The history of Lost Valley is complicated and diverse. None of the founding members still reside there and many generations have come and gone. As there were no founding members of Lost Valley present at the time of my visit, I could not get a very detailed description of the history of Lost Valley's formation. I was able to have a brief informal interview with one of the main founder's over dinner when she came for a visit. Luckily, one of the current members has been there for a majority of Lost Valley's existence and gave me some insight into the history, important values, and the early years of the community. He described the foundation as a commitment to personal growth and that it had "an international element that was important. I remember a Guatemalan teacher came and taught us about traditional techniques. Burmese monks came for a meditation retreat so Lost Valley built covered walking platforms for them in the woods." (Lost Valley Resident A 2018).

In the interview with the one founder, she explained that the land of Lost Valley was home to a Christian intentional community called Shiloh prior to Lost Valley's founding. She said Lost Valley inherited not only the twenty-five buildings that were on the land when it was purchased but unfortunately also tense relations with neighbors and the county zoning department. This presented many difficulties in establishing the non-profit and the community. She noted that the county was resistant to granting special zoning status to allow for multiple unrelated adult occupancy. The lawyers who worked with the community instructed them to be very transparent about the intentions of the community and to expect a visit from county officials. She said she expected that visit to

come sooner than it did. Two years into the establishment of Lost Valley, two men in suits from the county strolled down the driveway and were greeted with “we have been expecting you”. She believes this brought relief to the men who were worried they would find resistant or militant hippies. She went on to tell me that they worked with the county officials and often invited them to events and dinners as guest speakers. Eventually, the community was granted zoning as a nonprofit and could legally have multiple unrelated adults living on site.

The other issue that many intentional communities struggle with is relations with neighbors (Christian 2003). The founder I spoke with explained that in order to demonstrate their “humanness” to the neighbors as not “a bunch of crazy hippies” and to make good relationships they would join in on the neighborhood volleyball game and potlucks, go caroling at Christmas, and trick or treating at Halloween.

This signified to me the importance of having good relations and dialogue with both county officials, neighbors and into the greater public for the long-lasting success of communities. It seems neighbors and officials are more open to supporting a community that is transparent and keeps all parties informed of their processes instead of remaining behind closed doors where the perceptions can often be skewed by the stereotypical “hippy commune cult”. By attending or hosting neighborhood events, residents of Lost Valley were able to build common ground with neighbors and outer public, hopefully decreasing negative stereotypical perceptions; as their children play together, and parents eat together they might discover their commonalities.

The foundations of a community contribute to how it will grow and sets an example of a way of being. Not only do communities inherit the history of the land they reside upon, as Lost Valley has with the infrastructure from the previous community Shiloh, but people inherit the decisions of those who came before them. Utilizing inclusive decision-making processes makes it so communities can change the way they are organized, although it may not always be easy to address, they can continually renegotiate what meets residents needs and sustains the community.

### Revisioning

At the time of my visit to Lost Valley, the whole community had just returned from an organizational process known as a revisioning retreat to reconsider if Lost Valley's current membership still resonates with the purpose and aim of the original vision. What seemed to be a large part of the conversation, was if the focus of Lost Valley should be a community or an education and event center? Can it continue to be both and if so what is the best way to do so?

Their revisioning process reflected the ability intentional communities have to change and grow in response to their evolving membership and circumstances. This innovative and engaging capability of these communities allows them to continue to grow through reflection upon their membership, needs, and circumstance. A few common discussions in community meetings that reflect this dedication to collective growth are the exploration of what ways the community can become more sustainable, cohesive, and in service of its constituencies needs. It should be noted that although I have made a great

attempt to explain these communities through the words of community residents, my own personal experience is likely reflected in these results, thus some topics may have been covered in more depth than others and should not be taken as conclusions about these two communities. These results are an amalgamation of many different interactions with community residents that seek to contribute to the knowledge about the ways of living these communities foster.

## Research Insights

In order to explore the insights gathered from my participation in these communities, conversations with residents of these communities, and the interviews conducted with residents I will discuss my specific questions and highlight the major themes of this ecovillage research. This will be done through the use of direct quotes from interviews and paraphrasing conversations when useful. The discussions will be organized under the five categories provided by Mychaljuk's ecovillage case study: Inclusive Discussion and Decision-Making, Honest and Compassionate Communication, Nonviolent Conflict Management, Embracing Diversity of People and Perspectives, and Personal Growth. Her research explored how ecovillages foster learning for sustainability and highlighted the theory of "community of practice" as a conceptual framework for understanding how knowledge is shared and maintained through the participation of residents. Utilizing this theoretical framework I will discuss knowledge sharing within these communities to understand how learning occurs through involvement in particular social practices. In order to allow interviewees to remain confidential, I have designated each quote with the name of the community and an arbitrary letter to signify the respondent. This allows readers to follow residents' quotes and hopefully contribute to understanding the separate opinions of residents and communities.

Inclusive discussion and decision-making: sociocracy and consensus

From the many different community meetings I observed a majority of them were well organized and remained so even when tensions arose or things got personal. At Lost Valley, the use of sociocracy was regarded highly in interviews by all residents with little to no objection to the processes. One resident described Lost Valley's use of sociocracy as,

“a circles based system with up and down links that create groups for multiple people to maintain a certain project or part of the community. Each of these circles are all connected to each other through up and down links so all have chance to be represented as a check and balance.” (Lost Valley Resident A 2018)

The use of rounds where each person gets a turn to speak going around the whole circle appeared to take up more time occasionally but was likely worth it because it prevented people from talking over each other or interrupting, and people seemed to listen more closely than a popcorn session. A popcorn session is where people take turns speaking in in no specific order. As one resident noted it encouraged less vocal or shy people to share, stating that “Being reminded that my voice matters” (Lost Valley Resident B 2018) was her most beneficial learning experience from living in the community. Some comments from the interviews regarding resident's experiences using sociocratic decision-making are

“I believe the strength of this community compared to other communities is our governance system; sociocracy: An inclusive decision-making process that involves circles of interest such as the garden circle, kitchen circle, HIVE roles, community petal meeting, finances and so on. This is so people can share responsibilities and help things move smoothly, and translate it transparently within the community using up-and-down links to connect each circle of responsibility and interest and to hold each circle accountable. We allow everyone to be heard and empower people to speak up about how things that could possibly

be better here as a fluid, transforming community. We also really push for nonviolent communication as our main way of resolving or preventing conflict. Workshops on this topic are also taught here to expand this to other parts of the world, particularly in businesses and family settings. Our revisioning project is to hopefully create a more involving group where people work in teams in these circles and everyone is involved on a more volunteer level than just one person or staff member being overworked and underappreciated monetarily and emotionally” (Lost Valley Resident H 2018).

"I think sociocracy is pretty nifty. I think we need to have some sort of governance and organization just to keep things going so everyone understands which way we are going and how, so we can stick to the scripts. It's a version of it: The Lost Valley adaptation. Originally it was a business model, but we are using it as a community format. It can sometimes be frustrating to go in rounds and rounds and be in the circle and go to all these meetings, and check-ins, to listen to every bodies opinion, but you know, I would want my opinion heard too, so I put myself in those shoes. It keeps things flowing. I also like how we can be flexible in sociocracy as well too" (Lost Valley Resident C 2018).

This reflects that sociocracy is a more involved and a longer process than other decision-making processes, such as representative democracy, because it is so inclusive that it takes time for each person to express themselves and for others to co-create in the process on each other's ideas. As this resident pointed out, it can be frustratingly time consuming but residents perceive it is worth it to insure that the process is fair and inclusive. A resident reported that even if it is a slow process initially, in the long run, this saves time because if people's needs are met the first time a proposal is discussed it prevents the group from having to revisit the topic or from having issues arise later.

Residents of Lost Valley referenced how the use of sociocracy has been an ever-evolving process of revisiting how this organizational structure can actualize fair and inclusive decision-making by distributing power and responsibilities throughout the whole community instead of to just a few individuals. Insights from residents reflect this:

“We are making progress in that. We have had a more traditional model. We are sociocratic inspired, but still had some hierarchical aspects play into that that were not the best. The result of our revisioning has been a distillation and desire of improving in that regard from a hierarchical, single person(s) bearing the responsibility which causes resentment amongst some people or isolation where people who were wearing boss hat had trouble being part of community as well because they were always being seen as representing this authority. Probably here more than most places, people do have a problem with authority, and I think that’s good. I think we are doing pretty well in the strides to improve on some of those pain points. More shared responsibility, which also brings more openness and transparency, sharing more decisions, preventing staff burnout. Making socially and organizationally a more sustainable structure” (Lost Valley Resident D 2018).

“Right now we are looking at our vision again to make sure it continues to align with our communities’ values as a whole and as individuals. I like this because this can give us a more fluid system based on our needs as a community right now and not being stuck in old past written ways” (Lost Valley Resident H 2018).

These statements reflect that in general, residents were partial to inclusive decision-making and nonhierarchical involvement. This includes having a structure that is open to change and evolution to meet these values over time. Residents expressed that not only was the shared power of decision-making important to long-term community sustainability but also having an equal distribution of responsibility and work. This was because when individuals are overloaded with responsibilities and work they may burn out. Also, when a few people are solely handling aspects of the community’s organization residents felt that there may be a lack of transparency and communication with other residents.

From my participation and interviews with the members of La’akea, it appeared they strived to make their decision processes both egalitarian and inclusive. Although individuals staying at La’akea that were not members could not technically vote they still took consideration from all who participated in the meetings and were interested to hear

what everyone thought. Most members were trained in various conflict resolution practices and facilitation.

At La'akea, the meetings were often less structured likely due to close relationships and smaller size of the group. Members referenced it as "family consensus". The meetings had a family feel to it where individuals were very comfortable fully expressing themselves which appeared to have benefits and costs to the decision-making process. Since people were familiar and comfortable with one another they would clearly speak their truths but their comfort with each other also may have made it less awkward to interrupt one another. La'akea did not regularly use rounds and would popcorn from person-to-person which seemed appropriate most of the time due to if a member had something to say they would make sure they spoke it.

At La'akea they utilized moments for centering or clearing at the beginning of meetings, when people appeared to be getting tired, or when tensions rose. For example, the facilitator would ask that each person take a moment for themselves to ground in and to become fully present to release all stagnant thoughts and feelings that may interfere with the goals of the meeting. When tensions rose beyond what the facilitator thought was productive they would call a break and give time for people to release some of their built up emotions. This could be dancing around a bit, meditating for a few moments, or screaming into a pillow; honoring each and everyone's authentic process. A founder of La'akea commented on their decision-making process as,

"A nice balance of autonomy, freedom, anarchy, and balanced on the other side with organization, coordination, delegation, and collaboration. We honor autonomy, and yet we come together and collaborate on many things. Our

strength is the sharing of power and control in decision-making and we have the structure that encourages that. Including shared land ownership, and consensus meeting decision-making.” (Interview La’akea Resident C)

In terms of participation, La’akea was usually open to having visitors and farm supporters attend meetings if they wished. The only times visitors were asked to leave the room, was when the topic was about private matters of members or about farm supporting. Members were open to farm supporters and guest giving their opinion on meeting topics and observing how the consensus decision-making process occurred. All residents interviewed at La’akea noted how they were pleased with the way the community was organized and governed with one resident reporting,

“I love the way the community is organized. The most core structure is an LLC owns the land so members have an equal share from that we make all important decisions through consensus. Everything is voluntary. We have some expectations and agreements that could be seen as a requirement but deeply there’s a culture where we choose what we want to do... mostly organizational systems beyond that they arise to fit the problem or need and only as big as the need is to so there’s not a lot of this extraneous hierarchy... so that helps when coming to being more authentic ourselves” (Interview La’akea Resident E).

As a La’akea member noted the only exception was that there were limitations to participation for farm supporters due to their temporary nature of being there, usually no longer than 2-3 months.

“There is another organizational structure. We have ongoing agreements between farm supporters around a trade of work and money to stay here and use resources and live together so there’s more of an ongoing hierarchy I think that can be challenging. Things frequently come up around that and can be challenging, both for us and farm supporters. Right now, I’m not currently aware of an alternative. It’s just a challenging thing. Challenges are good possibly” (Interview La’akea Resident E).

The challenge of having farm supporters for short-term stays surfaced when one of the founders wanted to have a garden meeting to discuss possible projects and brainstorm ideas. All parties became frustrated in the meeting due to farm supporters knowing their temporary nature and self-censoring due to perceived and real power imbalances between farm supporters and members. One member of La'akea questioned the purpose of the whole meeting on those grounds and also pointed out that many of the ideas brought forth had been attempted in the past that never got off the ground or failed due to various reasons like lack of interested long-term individuals.

These limiting factors may have led to the marginal participation of farm supporters because it prevented people whom were farm supporting from being able to dedicate to long term projects and goals. Even though farm support is not full participation it appeared to be an extremely enriching experience to the farm supporters there at that time by giving insights into decision-making, conflict resolution, compassionate communication process, and enabling them to have connections to both the land and people of La'akea. Although, most communities allow visitors or guests to sit in on their community meetings, there is no real substitute for experiencing it as a member. Without membership, full participation in the community of practice of consensus is not possible. This mirrors Mychajluk's research that found an imbalance between the participation of renters compared to owners due to self-censorship from perceived power imbalances.

In conclusion, both Lost Valley and La'akea represented a working and evolving alternative self-governance system that strived for inclusion and equality. Even though,

both of these communities aspired for this ideal process they both noticed some hierarchies still exist within their structure and within themselves that one resident concluded

“the most beneficial learning experience is about being in my power, this process of experiencing and learning how hierarchy exists within me, as I’m in this place that is nonhierarchical, and healing those parts to go from being perpetrator or victim to being empowered, self-actualized being. Taking responsibility for my own life. This comes out of equal ownership and consensus decision-making” (Interview La’akea Resident E).

This position reflects the awareness that the on-going development of these decision-making processes is not only a process for the group but involves each individual member’s journey of self-discovery and reflection. The interviews revealed that as each member of the communities grew personally, through communication and practices with other community members, their ability to contribute to the group expanded.

#### Honest and compassionate communication

At La’akea most members participated frequently in the morning check-ins and weekly hearts shares and meetings. They describe heart share as “a process where we support authenticity and self-revelation for transparency and community support (La’akea Community, n.d.). The importance of heart share and the practice of the ZEGG forum at La’akea was pivotal for allowing each resident to be heard and be able to express issues with other residents. Heart shares created a safe container for people to express themselves without judgement and tried to minimize defensive comments and

reactions. I became aware of the significance of this process when another resident farm supporter expressed how I had hurt her feelings while having a discussion while making breakfast. I was totally unaware of how my words had affected her and by hearing what she experienced emotionally gave me insight into her reality that if not aired through the practice of heart share I would have continued to be oblivious to how my words came across to her. After discussing it with her and expressing that I did not intend to hurt her feelings we have been closer friends ever since. It was these authentic revelations of what we feel inside to those around us that allows everyone in the group to understand and empathize with each other's lived experiences. Heart shares<sup>1</sup> helped to create and strengthen the bonds between people instead of burying feelings and negative emotions that will in time drive people apart.

It was not easy for me at first to open up to the group and the group had reservations about me until I finally did. After a while, I tried to stop discussing superficial aspects of my reality, such as how my day went and started expressing how I was feeling. What I realized is that by refraining from diving into my own personal issues and emotional challenges I was preventing the group from getting to really know me. This simultaneously wasted precious time of being seen and heard, by a trusted group of people that can help facilitate personal growth and healing. The time I spent at La'akea

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<sup>1</sup> There was another community in New Zealand that held heart shares as well and the presence of this meeting for authentic expressions made me feel much more at home. Experiencing heart shares in multiple communities brought on the realizations that what do we have to lose by expressing ourselves authentically to strangers, as they let my partner, other visitors, and I participate. The only things we lose are the masks we sometimes hide behind or that people have constructed about us. It breaks the illusions of societal stereotypes and gives glimpses into our internal worlds. I may not have gotten the time to know many of these people personally, but through that heart share, I felt with them and could admit that those few hours gave me more depth into who they are than how I know some friends or colleagues.

was on occasion, very challenging, but it helped me grow and reflect on who I am, how I come across to others, and how expressing my emotions benefits both me as an individual and the group as a whole. One member of La'akea noted the evolution that many visitors and new members experience as

“I've watched people who flow through this community, and in their time here they change from being relatively protective and closed around their emotions; their joys or suffering, who can be at times not very active and have poor diets. To eating better, and being more active, expressing more joys, and feeling safe to express their range of emotions” (Interview La'akea Resident E).

It seemed that for both of these communities honest and compassionate communication was the glue for the success of the relationships and their survival as a community. Both La'akea and Lost Valley held in-depth personal growth workshops that created space for people to connect on a deeper level with each other and with people from outside the community. The purpose of these events, to have more authentic and heart-centered interactions, aligned very well with maintaining and improving relationships within these communities. The importance of heart-centered communication is that it enables the mutual support and social cohesion needed for not only living collectively but for organizing, preparing, and hosting events, workshops, and educational opportunities that stimulate knowledge sharing among members and visitors.

#### Nonviolent conflict management

Multiple residents in both communities noted that participation in social practices such as heart share, check-ins, forums, and personal growth workshops helped to prevent or reduce conflict by making spaces for people to express themselves. These gatherings

designated for authentic and compassionate communication I observed helped people to air their grievances or troubles with one another while the issues were still minor. While commenting on what brought them to Lost Valley a member highlighted the importance of a personal growth workshop in reducing conflict and creating community cohesion saying,

"It was a process of knowing what actually living here was like instead of just visiting...It seemed like things were going on and it was not some sort of utopia like I had imagined, a year before I sensed there was a lot of conflicts and thought secondly, but when I came back this time, people were getting along so much better and communicating so well and it was largely due to this new workshop they had been doing called "Naka-ima". It was a personal growth workshop that a friend of some community members had offered to do for the community when she heard that some things were challenging. It made a huge difference and it caused some people to decide "I'm not really into personal growth or really working through things with other people, communicating about our issues. I don't really want to put my time into that and I'm just going to leave the community." So a few people decided to leave but the few people that remained formed a much tighter group and there was a real culture around that that was very attractive. Doing a workshop like that, I've never done before, and it wasn't easy. It was challenging to talk about stuff that I wasn't used to talking about, but it really brought people together and everyone that joined the community at the point did that workshop and we had weekly wellbeing meetings which were mini two-hour versions of that workshop and we did exercise from that. Eventually people at Lost Valley started teaching it and it was held monthly after a while and lots of people from outside started taking it. It was a big part of the culture for a number of years" (Interview Lost Valley Resident E).

Both La'akea and Lost Valley hold personal growth workshops: Heart of Now at Lost Valley and Network for New Culture Camps at La'akea. The interpersonal environments of these communities and the feedback residents gave to one another stimulated personal growth through self-reflection and heightened self-awareness. This can be overwhelming for some people and more than they want to live with daily. A

member of La'akea explained when discussing why some individuals had left the community commenting

“people who left did not want to deal with their own issues. It was easier to leave than deal with the challenges and emotions of living with other people. Some don't want to give up creature comforts like having an individual kitchen or a flush toilet twenty feet away from their bed” (Interview La'akea Resident A).

This highlights how communities want members who will be dedicated to personal growth and reflection, whether that is emotional growth or changes to behavior for the sake of sustainability. It appeared that people who are not willing to work on themselves will either self-select out of the community by choosing to leave or may even be asked to leave. It could be said that the reason many people call personal growth “inner work” is the fact that for most people it is challenging, difficult, and/or uncomfortable. As many residents noted this challenge is too much for some people to live with and that mainstream society does not accept or necessitate the expression of emotions needed for personal growth. As a resident of Lost Valley explained when describing the strengths of the community,

"Personal and social sustainability are our biggest strengths in my opinion. I can see that we are trying to do a lot to conflict resolution and mediation and hosting forums. We had one last night, and first and third Mondays, and one month is more experimental like ZEGG, and the other one we had a sociocratic inspired round where we passed around a talking stick and everyone had a chance to check-in with extended check-ins and ask for feedback. So that's where we talk about what's going on if there are weird vibes going on between two people or persons. We are like the "the vibe alert crew" I think that's what keeps people feeling connected in the community. We give that space to be heard and using nonviolent communication to sort out judgments and assumptions to get to the deeper feelings so we can have our experience with our feelings and what does that mean? Mainstream culture doesn't really allow us to just experience feelings you tend to want to run away from them or dampen them, or go to the bar. Being a pretty much sober campus, it's also up to you to figure that out and being with

others who are also doing the deep work. It's a natural interconnectedness, and I think it's worth it" (Interview Lost Valley Resident C).

Another resident of Lost Valley described the difference of living in the community versus wider mainstream society as

"People are trying to be real with themselves and others here. It seems there is this phenomena in society that promotes people to self-censor. It's considered not polite to cry in public or deeply criticize. The mentality is that people are supposed to suck it up. People here at Lost Valley want more than that and it can lead to bounce off or an intense experience for people new to the community that are not ready for that level of communication" (Interview Lost Valley Resident D).

Some residents noted that it was the environment of a community of people willing to work on their issues together that attracted them and keeps them at their communities. A resident of Lost Valley described what convinced him to come to the community as,

"I knew I was attracted to this place because it was land-based and rural, and I had been really involved in gardening and wanted to live in a rural community but it was the human element that really drew me and clenched it, for that brought me to wanting to be here, seeing that I had been really involved in these really dysfunctional patterns at another community that none of us knew how to break out of if we all stayed there" (Interview Lost Valley Resident E).

Multiple interviews revealed that relationships and the connections made within the community are either what brought individuals to their communities or what keeps them there. The social practices described here served many purposes and one of the main purposes is the deepening of connection between residents. My participation in many of these social practices and skills greatly informed me of their practical nature more than reading about them ever could. Before coming to La'akea I had read about nonviolent communication but I had never been around anyone who actively practiced

the communication skill. My first introduction was when a resident explained to me how to use one of the most basic practice of nonviolent communication of: observe your experience, identify how it makes you feel, figure out what need that feeling is related to, and make a request to the another person involved or group of people for how that need may be met. This is simply referred to as an OFNR (observe, feeling, need, request). Residents explained how this way of relating had multiple benefits such as it helps to reframe our speech to “I” statements, instead of “you” statements, to take responsibility for our emotions instead of blaming others. It allows people to get more in touch with their feelings, promotes contemplation of what need(s) those feelings may be associated with, and encourages people to make feasible requests to others to help get their needs met and to create a deeper connection with empathy and compassion for each other. There is a prime importance that the requests are reasonable and also that they are requests and not demands as agenda driven uses of these practices is not real nonviolent communication but can be seen as a strategy for manipulation. This is because the essence of nonviolent communication is to understand the needs of both parties to create empathic and compassionate connections while having flexibility and acceptance to various outcomes.

Besides heart shares and check-ins at La’akea that prevent conflict from growing, residents also described other sustaining conflict resolution processes such as mediation, withholds, and clearings. Mediations are where a third person, hopefully impartial to the conflict and trained in mediation, sits with those in conflict and helps them to hear each other by often focusing more on emotions and less on their different stories of what the

conflict is about. Withholds are where one person says “I have a problem, are you willing to hear it?” and the other person responds by either saying yes or no. If they say yes, then the person explains their withhold or problem they have with the other person who doesn't respond, but just says “thank you” or “ok”. One member reported that the use of withholds was influenced by the author Blanton's (2005) book “Radical Honesty: How to transform your life by telling the truth”. A clearing is the same as a withhold but allows for a back and forth conversation to discuss the conflict.

At Lost Valley, the community council is a more formal structure that deals with and manages conflict within the community and between residents. The process of conflict resolution is described by one member as

“There is an agreement that we all try to use nonviolent communication, then we can work together to try to resolve a conflict between each other using this method. If there is no progress, there is a group of people dedicated to conflict resolution, the community council that can mediate the situation and hopefully find some resolve between the conflicted parties. It's used as a support system instead of discipline. If people are not willing to come to some sort of resolve the community council can create action steps for each party if need be” (Interview Lost Valley Resident A).

Residents responded that the promotion and use of nonviolent communication gave them a common language for expressing themselves and did so in a way that some residents commented made them feel safer. Despite utilizing these practices to prevent and resolve conflict, there were times at both communities in their histories where conflict could not be resolved and people were asked to leave. As a member of La'akea described the progression of a conflict in the early years with one member

“Then about a year into living together on the land there was a major conflict with one member. At about the year and a half mark, we had to have a mediator come

to attend business meetings to deal with the conflict because it had gotten so bad. That member went on sabbatical for six months and when he returned it was good for two months, but after some time same problems arose so we as a community decided to end his membership” (Interview La’akea Resident A).

Lost Valley residents also mentioned that there had been times where members were asked to leave for the general peace of the community. It seemed if one persons caused a lot of turmoil in the community, even if it was not a direct conflict, they were asked to leave. The way this was described was there is only so much social energy in a community and if one resident takes up too many energetic resources it can be damaging to the community as a whole.

#### Embracing diversity of people and perspectives

At many of the communities visited there was an awareness by some members that their communities lacked certain types of diversity including: income, age, race, and ethnicity. Many communities are composed of largely white middle-aged and older residents who were on average, more financially secure. Younger individuals struggle to find consistent forms of income that would allow them to contribute financially. It is also difficult for residents who work outside the community to balance the responsibilities of their employment with those of living in the community, such as participation in meetings, common house chores, and cooking. Community members also admitted that it was hard to find younger members who were ready to settle down and who could contribute financially. Younger members who were interested in making a community their forever home expressed the difficulty in earning the money needed to do so and

many wished there were more options for sweat equity to work off buy-ins or rent. A resident of Lost Valley described the limited options for younger people as

“It can be difficult to make your own living here independently, some people can, but most of them are retired, so land work credits and little jobs on the land are helpful to make some of my means here. I need to be looking for income outside too, and it’s gotten me more aware of my relationship to money. Through the winters months I sort of float by with the small credits with a little bit of cushion without working on the farm separately. This is a low-income residency spot, so I like that part of the system” (Interview Lost Valley Resident C).

One member at La’akea told me how the community he lived at in Australia attempted to address the issue of making their community accessible to younger families. He said the group had lived together for decades and were all growing grey together and realized that if they did not attract younger members the community would be in jeopardy of lacking a continuation of generations. He said to address the issue they took special notice to younger couples with children, because they assumed they are often more committed to settling down for people their age, their children diversify the ages of the community, and that couples with children can be more stable than single parents, single people, or couples without children. I found it fascinating that the members of this community had identified a serious problem in their social sustainability of not being intergenerational and that they were creatively coming up with ideas to address the issue. It seemed large issues as this at many communities can go unnoticed or undiscussed for long periods of time, because they can be so difficult and sensitive to address. A member of La’akea recognized the necessity of being inter-generational for long-term community wellbeing and sustainability stating

“Currently we are edging towards a lack of children. We have two kids around ten, the energy of children is critical in inspiring us, keeping us closer to truth. Especially young children. I hope we have more kids in the next few years. There’s an imbalance in terms of age, the group is older and our physical capacity to do work is limited” (Interview La’akea Resident E).

An interesting dynamic of the affordability of these communities is that they are usually cheaper than rent in other living situations and often have far more benefit such as workshops, saunas, hot tubs, fully stocked and equipped kitchens, land to garden/farm, acres of natural environments, and a community of people to interact with. Despite them being cheaper alternatives, the lack of access to employment or income due to the location of these communities can be a challenge for residents. One resident of Lost Valley commented about how some manage to live there,

“The residents of Lost Valley do pay costs associated with living here for things like rent, communal dining, site use and/or vehicle storage fees. Consistent, paid employment opportunities are limited, so most residents need to supplement their living through other means. Some earn extra money by commuting to jobs in Eugene (about a twenty-five minute drive from here), while others work remotely online” (Interview Lost Valley Resident D).

A contrast between the two communities is that La’akea has a buy-in for membership whereas Lost Valley does not. Lost Valley residents commented that having no buy-in contributes to the transiency nature of Lost Valley’s membership because there are no long term agreements for living on the land, but that it also makes the community more accessible to younger people and those with lower incomes. La’akea members remarked that the buy-in may be an obstacle for some to be able to live at the community but that it also ensures that people who become members are committed. They expressed flexibility with the process stating,

“The title to the property is held in common as a Limited Liability Company. We are currently seeking members who can contribute \$50,000 towards full membership equity. We will also consider potential members who don’t have access to the full buy-in amount, but do have viable skills and/or a steady income flow. We are moving towards self-sufficiency” (Interview La’akea Resident A).

The openness of these communities does bring a diversity of people to them but whether they stay or leave is up to many different factors such as acceptance by current membership, financial ability, and dedication to living communally. Members recognized that their communities lacked certain types of diversity but there was not much conversation about how to address this issue. These communities are generally open to different peoples and beliefs. For example, one farm supporter at La’akea expressed his reservations at first about expressing his Christian beliefs in an alternative “hippie” community, but that he realized his Christian beliefs were just as accepted as any other belief system. Members of La’akea stated

“Our daily life reflects our spiritual values. We revere the sacredness of how the life force unfolds in each moment. We honor spiritual diversity, and discourage proselytizing. We treat the land and each other respectfully, with compassion and kindness. We value truth, authenticity and self-reflection. We support the inherent connection among all beings” (La’akea Community, n.d.).

I found this to be true to the reality of living at La’akea and Lost Valley where residents were open to various ideas and beliefs seeing the discussions of spirituality as enriching to their lives. At Lost Valley residents reported that spiritual connection and exploration were integral to their journeys of personal growth.

### Personal and collective growth

Both La'akea and Lost Valley have personal growth as part of their vision and living agreements. One resident in their interview praised the environment of living in community as,

“Learning about myself more, doing the personal work that I never had time for with school... living together reflects a personal story by looking at myself thinking I'm shy, nervous, quite but realize that it's a very supportive community and there are opportunities to better one's aspects. To see myself and be stronger in the future as I go off into the world” (Interview Lost Valley Resident C).

Residents noted on how the environment of their community supported their personal growth when explain what brought them to the community as,

“The need to live in a culture that matches my values. Self-sustainability is the main one. Being able to be authentic and have open-mindedness. I wanted to be able to be myself and practice what is sacred to my heart and being supported and not being resisted, doing yoga, and meditate. Organic food is another value, and a laid back vibe, as opposed to a Ritz Carlton landscape, more of the Lost Valley landscape. I was intuitively drawn to it. I didn't know about it until I was ready to move in. I began learning about permaculture and sustainability, I became fascinated to live in an intentional community but didn't know how to look for one. I knew I wanted to be in a mountain forest. I found on craigslist a cabin in the woods at Lost Valley, and so on. I feel I've done all the inner work and it felt like we were drawn together. I feel we are a good fit” (Interview Lost Valley Resident G).

“The most beneficial learning experience about community overall is the reflection we give to each other. The personal growth, the personal contentment of needs getting met through living together. How living amongst a group of people stimulates us. Gives us a mirror to look in and provides the opportunity to give empathy and compassion and receive these things. Just the complicated web of relationships that happens in the community is maturing to the human spirit, maturing to people. In that way the personal growth that happens living collectively” (Interview La'akea Resident C).

"I learned to accept and allow more into my life, doing the shadow work here. Accepting things I have resisted before, and transcending them in the way of accepting and moving forward. Seeing strength in everyone. Even opposed

personalities or people whom I may resist or not like from the start. So learning to accept and move through resistance. I would also say communication. Learning how to communicate clearly, effectively, transparently, offering a balanced perspective which is a huge growth for me. I was a black or white person and now I'm finding the golden middle" (Interview Lost Valley Resident G).

This highlights how personal growth is not only a likely side-effect of living in community but that being willing to do inner work is a pre-requisite. One resident reported that throughout Lost Valley's history they have gone through waves of prioritizing expression of emotions and focus on personal growth due to changing membership by holding weekly wellness meetings and having workshops starting in the early years with Naka-ima that has since evolved and changed into Heart of Now. As members have come and gone, the commitment to these various elements has fluctuated with one member noting that resident staff has not always been inclined to participating in these various events. The vision of Lost Valley has remained the same but as a resident mentioned its membership and their commitment to it has differed from time-to-time.

The visions of communities often do not reflect their realities for the good reason that they are future desired ways of being that as collectives of people must experiment and learn to work towards. Visions of equality, freedom, expression, sustainability, and growth set communities on a course for this future and the practices they are utilizing and developing, like consensus decision-making and authentic relationships, will be their compasses. As two residents of Lost Valley spoke upon the community's vision,

"I feel like the way our vision or purpose is nicely worded and I resonate with it. For the most part we match that vision by going in the direction, I wouldn't say we embody the vision yet. Cohesiveness and sustainability is a key part of the vision" (Interview Lost Valley Resident G).

"Our mission is personal, social, and ecological sustainability. Ecological is what most people seem to focus on; food, water, shelter, electricity stuff like that, but that takes the most monetary injection to make it work. You can't just grow your own solar system, you have to buy it from someone and have it installed. But the Personal and social doesn't require outside resources, it's just the people together, which is the social or personal realm of sustainability. I think those are where Lost Valley has excelled, with the community process, like interviews and membership processes and nonviolent communication as a recommended mode of communication here. As well as people being healthy within themselves, experimenting with fasting or raw food or meditation or whatever is healthy for them and being in a place that facilitates that. We are not in a cement square in the city. We are in the woods in a place that is pretty and natural and soothing and healing in that way. So I think that personal and social sustainability can thrive anywhere maybe better than ecological can at least initially and we are doing it pretty well here" (Interview Lost Valley Resident D).

From the interviews with residents, it became clear that they do not have to live in a way that is completely aligned with their communities' vision for their values to match that desired way of being. It is a learning and growing process that works towards their stated values and produces these social practices that are essential for community wellbeing and growth.

#### Knowledge sharing: A dynamic process of participation

Living in community is an "on-going dynamic process" of learning as Mychajluk research indicates, but the community itself is always learning and adapting due to consensus decision-making and community changes in residents and needs. As one community resident said so eloquently when describing her community,

"It's a polygon. It's a form with many angles and it can change depending on the points. It's a fluid structure and that's the strongest structure. Those Chinese big temples you know they built those huge pillars and then they cut some wood. It's never fell from any earthquake, because it's not attached, it's just balancing so

when there's some big waves of energy it shakes a little bit, but it stays stable. It's stable in the unstableness" (Interview La'akea resident B).

This description reflects what I was impressed by with in all the communities I visited in their decision-making processes. That was the adaptability of the group to change ways of doing things to meet the needs of different peoples and circumstances that fosters community resiliency. As another member commented on the question; "what keeps them at the community?" they responded "Freshness. Every day there's freshness there's change, new people. Not necessarily new bodies, but new consciousness. I'm hypersensitive to stagnation and this place is everything but that" (Interview Lost Valley Resident G). This reflects how residents are learning all the time and shifting their awareness according to relationships around them and new information, whether it is about sustainability practices or health-oriented diets.

The openness of these groups to trying new things reveals the experimental culture that exists in communities that promotes growth by learning through participation. It appears that as hegemonic narratives of sexuality, race, class, age, and gender are being critically examined and in some cases refuted, intentional communities such as these are the grounds for which people seek new ways of relating to and living with each other. Many residents expressed that the environment of living in their community was a learning experience through participation in activities and tasks, and through interaction with other residents. As a resident of each community reported,

"In terms of knowledge sharing, where I gain my knowledge from, and why it's legit that we are students here: our legal charter that says we are either student, teacher, or staff. Nobody here is just a resident, we are categorized as one of those otherwise we are technically not allowed to be here. As I lived here longer, now I

can one hundred percent see how living here makes you a student. If you live here and participate in life here, one way or another, you are a student because you are going to learn from just the day-to-day interactions like the meetings, the forums, lots of personal growth, lots of communication skills, and lots of love. That's the wisdom I take away from living here" (Interview Lost Valley Resident F).

"Another reason I stay here is it's the perfect place to be the editor of Communities Magazine because there are lots of different community experiences and challenges we have here and had here over the years and there are a lot of people that come through that are exploring community or who live in other communities. It's a lively environment or very supportive about thinking about community and gives me a lot of theme ideas and article ideas and things like that" (Interview Lost Valley Resident E).

"Lots of ways to share knowledge. One way is to be an experienced person here and lead my life and share throughout my day, whether that be cooking with someone who has less experience, or leading work parties, or doing woodworking, various ways that I can share my knowledge and experience. Through heart share, interpersonal knowledge or processes. Sometimes there's more formal knowledge sharing such as internships, or I lead events and may teach some class; like co-counseling and interpersonal and permaculture oriented topics. I similarly can glean information all day long if I want from people, because there are so many different people around that are doing a lot of different things that are sharing bits of knowledge, insights and new things from those passing through that I gain just by living in this environment" (Interview La'akea Resident C).

This shows that in day-to-day life, knowledge is shared either through passing by conversations or by involvement in community events and activities. A majority of the interviews with residents of these two communities noted how involvement in their communities was an enriching and beneficial learning experience. Even though informal forms of knowledge sharing were most prevalent in these communities many residents believed that more formal types of knowledge sharing could be beneficial. A few responses from residents that expands on how knowledge sharing may be improved are

"The first would be more successful marketing and recruiting so that we run more programs so more people can get direct teaching from them. Have more education

programs going year round. Another could be more sharing of what we are up to in other ways, I used to pay someone two hours a week to publicize the things we were making, like a layout for how to make a compost toilet and drawing, sketch and list of materials needed, everything needed to make it really easy for someone to digest themselves and to put it on the web so it was a remote resource to have on the web, but it didn't work really well. We didn't have enough money in the budget for it... but the idea of taking what we are already doing here, we don't have to do anything more of and just milk it for its knowledge sharing more broadly. We have a marketer who posts Facebook things that she comes across but we could take that and go further with it, it can be more inspirational in broad senses, not just on the eco-groovy front, but on lots of others things too. Our experiences here are so broad! One other possibility is resident themselves could have info swapping evenings or experiences shares, like I could share what living in a tiny indigenous village was like in Venezuela, or what it's like to grow up in Alabama for another resident, people could do that in a more intentional way instead of a casual sense around dinner or something" (Interview Lost Valley Resident D).

"I would like more of a mentoring system, like a one-on-one buddy system. We have this in the works but just for new residents to have a point person, I'd like it more for example, our land steward to really work with me together side-by-side so I am able to carry on the torch and share the vision. Given the trust and responsibility to go at it after being guided. Having more of a solid education "department" instead of just one person, which we have at the moment, who's kind of one foot in, one foot out right now. Can we have a conversation of how can we educate each other more? We had a meeting about how all these sociocratic circles work together. Improving taking turns and realizing that everyone has a skill and share all these crafty things that you may not think someone's into. I want to learn more about maintenance even though it may not look like that on the outside, but I do, so maybe I can shadow the maintenance guys for a day, why not!" (Interview Lost Valley Resident C).

These insights reveal how members of Lost Valley recognize the value of both formal and informal forms of knowledge sharing. There was also multiple residents from each community who believed that having more events and gatherings would benefit their community's educational opportunities by connecting the diversity of knowledge within their communities with knowledge of individuals outside of their communities. Both communities recognized the importance of having an outward approach to

knowledge sharing as essential for fostering sustainability in the wider community.

Whether this was hosting events, workshops, or internships, visitors and students were seen as types of ambassadors that would take the knowledge they gained in the community with them when they left. The desire to have a positive impact on people from outside their community was reflected by multiple members,

“New people that come here are invigorating. It’s how we share what we do here: they come here and experience something that’s in their joy and then they take it out into the world with them and they can share it later and be inspired to do similar things. That’s huge for the contribution that we make, we need people coming in and out of here otherwise we are isolated and not making a difference in the world, not setting a real example. And then the second benefits to that is the opportunity to interact with all these new people, hear about their lives and make new friends and it just keeps flowing through here all the time and I love it, I would also like more people to stay longer, but I would not want to be in a community where it’s always the same people” (Interview Lost Valley Resident F 2018).

This reflects the benefits of having new people come to the community. Residents highlighted that newcomers bring energy into the community and fresh perspectives while often learning social and ecological practices of sustainability that they take with them when they leave. They act as a bridge to the outer world bringing in knowledge when they come and taking knowledge with them when they depart.

“Although, I would like to see more of a push for more sustainable resources on the land: like becoming all off-grid with solar systems and I would like to see more food grown as a whole to cut down a lot of unnecessary costs and costs to the environment. That takes a lot of money. What is free and easily accessible is the community as a whole, thriving symbiotic relationship. Especially the connection to each other, the authenticity that we share, and the communication we practice and use makes a powerful effect for people within and outside of the community. We create a ripple effect out into the world and plant seeds of consciousness, truth and authentic connection wherever we end up in the world after lost Valley” (Lost Valley Resident H 2018).

This quote reflects what was most apparent to me about both of these communities, that although each of them had made efforts to become more physically sustainable they excelled at practicing and sharing knowledge about social sustainability practices. As was made clear by the examples of the ZEGG community and La'akea, physical sustainability and practices like permaculture are only possible if the individuals working together on these projects can get along and are able to resolve conflicts when they arise. The practices of heart shares, check-ins, and personal growth workshops support the social glue and cohesion of these communities that improve how they function and in turn how they can organize to hold events and classes to share knowledge.

The interviews reflect the dynamic nature of knowledge sharing within these communities that highlights the importance and accessibility of social aspects of sustainability. Knowledge sharing in these two communities appears to mainly occur through informal interpersonal connections where individuals share their expertise, skills, and knowledge with others based on needs or interests. Residents reported, they desired more formal methods of knowledge sharing, whether it be arranged classes and courses or scheduled gatherings where both informal and formal exchanges may arise. There was a consistent recognition that the education that occurs within these communities needs to be shared with peoples outside of them and that social teachings of sustainability may be easier to transmit to the outer world to support knowledge sharing around sustainability.

## CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

I went in search of off-grid sustainable living and ended up with something very different and much closer to the heart. Before going to these communities I could not have understood the depth of commitment to living together that community members make through social practices and activities such as meetings, heart shares, check-ins, and events. For decision-making in meetings the use of sociocracy and consensus aligned with Diana Leafe Christian research in that the rare occasion of objections and the fairly smooth working of consensus and sociocracy in the two case study communities it seems was related to all residents agreeing with the communities' vision statements. This alignment around vision allowed communities to be able to make tough decisions because it was not only the opinions of the residents that informed the process but the vision that members resonate with. At both communities it became apparent what members had invested time and energy into learning the skills of facilitation and mediation and their presence greatly enriched the group's processes. These more experienced members likely wield more power in the process but this power was conferred through trust and many of these experienced residents recognized that for the benefit of the process people both new and experienced need to participate, learn, and refine their skills.

As for the use of consensus, this form of decision-making process was surprisingly unique at each community with different rules around meeting culture. Some communities visited in Australia and New Zealand used a card system to more easily feel

out people's opinions in an attempt to expedite the process, especially with larger groups (Sargisson 2004). In some communities, consensus means that if even one person objects the proposal is stopped or altered until no objection exists. This can be very difficult and gives each individual the ability to derail projects and puts more of an energetic strain on meetings and member's attention spans and willingness to participate. One community explained that "true" consensus is not where one person can hold the group hostage with a veto, elaborating that consensus is a conversation, so an objection must be accompanied with a legitimate reason for objecting that is in line with the communities stated vision, not just an objection based on unexplainable beliefs or sentiments. If a person objects without reason or proposed alternative they are considered to be outside the conversation and thus cannot object on the subject or matter.

The necessity for experienced members to inform and teach newcomers about consensus and sociocracy aligns with Sargisson's (2004, 330) research that found to ensure these decision-making processes are appropriate for egalitarian communities there needs to be "efforts made to equip members with the necessary skills and tools for equal participation. This right to participate (being) fully formalized through membership". Residents commented that workshops and groups centered on nonviolent communication and facilitation helped inform them on these processes along with regular participation in these practices. Most residents interviewed reported that having more events and gatherings they believed would help improve the knowledge sharing within the community and to the outer public. This highlights what multiple residents had referenced in regards to wanting to have an outward approach to sustainability and

connection with people outside the community. One resident noted how he wanted more than the back to lander self-sufficiency and isolationist ideology of being a sustainable island in an unsustainable world.

“I feel aligned with the purpose of the community. There would be something missing for me if the community did not have an outer purpose. To me that's not enough, I wouldn't be satisfied with a very inward focused community and at the same time there needs to be inward focus so this is like a really good combo, but it seems like everyone is excited about that vision rather than just being very self-contained and living a very comfortable, separate existence... That's not what I aspire to at all... I think that's what we are here to do. We are obviously a part of something bigger so the idea of being some sort of separate sustainable society doesn't seem like a realistic, practical, possible or even appealing to me whereas in one point in my life it might have. Maybe in my twenties I would have thought that. The radical rejection of the outside world, but it's so obvious that we are so intertwined that there's no way to establish a separate utopia anyway. I'd much rather connect more with more people and have influence” (Lost Valley Resident E 2018).

There was recognition that the microcosm of community is a reflection of the macrocosm of the wider society as one resident noted the challenge to this reality,

"One of the inherent challenges for here and any other intentional community, is we are a downstream of America. Anything that is happening in the broader society ends up affecting us. The dysfunctions of our society end up affecting us because we can't be that far away from what's all around us” (Lost Valley Resident D 2018).

There seemed to be a recognition that the larger societal issues could benefit from intentional communities sharing their knowledge about both physical and social sustainability to create a healthier and more just world. A starting point for this is events and workshops such as Heart of Now or even the ecstatic dances that bring awareness to people about these communities. As one resident reported the ecstatic dance is what brought her to the community.

It seemed that besides the logistical challenges of organizing such events, people were generally desiring more times set for sharing knowledge, both formally and informally. In terms of formal knowledge sharing two residents said it may be beneficial if there were more structures in place to get people to work with more experienced members in various responsibilities, such as maintenance or gardening, similar to an apprenticeship. This would also address the issues of staff burnout reported at Lost Valley and the transition of projects when key members leave by having more than one or multiple residents involved with different tasks to ensure continuity.

Although this research has focused on social practices, participation in the sustainability aspects of these ecovillages aligned with the research of Boyer (2016, 9-10) that found there could be

“...incredible environmental and economic savings by 1) transforming individual and household practices into collectively managed community systems; 2) investing in interpersonal communication skills that help guide collective management processes; and 3) taking advantage of readily available, locally sourced materials”.

At both La’akea and Lost Valley, this equated to having shared spaces and eating communally, utilizing resources from the land such as wood or bamboo for construction purposes, and focusing on the various social practices described in this thesis. Many specific practices as described by Shedd (2012) were present at these communities such as natural buildings techniques, compost toilets, solar photovoltaic panels, solar hot water heaters, and upcycling of resources. The utilization of both physical and social practice of sustainability depended on the interest of residents present and as there are changes in membership projects may arise or falter. As one member of Lost Valley noted “there’s a

transiency issue...projects that are left undone and there isn't much policy with that" (Lost Valley Resident C 2018). The different make-up of communities determines the knowledge of skills, techniques, and practices that may be shared amongst members.

The changing membership of these communities resembles the definition given by a resident of La'akea as a transforming polygon where each person is a point creating through relationships and lifestyles an ever-changing community form. In a discussion with a long term member, he admitted that you may leave a community and come back years later to find many things rearranged or that it consists of a largely different group of people. This depends on the nature of the membership and commitment to place that will determine how much turnover in residency there is.

Another concern for membership and commitment to the land is the effect of natural disasters can have on the cohesion between members when their physical places are threatened, because their land is a large part of the glue that holds them together. As one resident of La'akea noted due to threats from the recent lava eruption, "With our safety and security on the land under question, the structure of our intentional community nearly collapsed" (Matfin 2019, 29). Future research could examine how intentional communities respond to natural disasters and that if the social practices they utilize help build a resiliency to such events.

The space created in these communities to share skills, knowledge, and passions appears to acknowledge the value of diversity in all its different forms. The questions to why certain types of diversity are lower in ecovillages and intentional communities could

constitute a study of its own to figure out how they can be more inclusive to different types of diversity.

## CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The emphasis on the physical practices of sustainability has often left the social aspects under-appreciated. This way of conversing about sustainability negates the reality that most projects and practices that promote more sustainable ways of living are performed by many people through a multitude of relationships. Maintaining healthy relationships between people, and people and the environment is seen as crucial in both the communities described in this thesis. The social aspects of sustainability are seen as a prerequisite for enacting physical sustainability actions in intentional communities because they help the individuals of the collective work together by having practices to prevent and resolve conflict and to make inclusive and supported decisions. Residents in both communities pointed out how access to fostering social sustainability is much more affordable than physical sustainability because all you need are people willing to spend time together to work out their differences and listen to one another's ideas, as compared to buying and installing expensive green technologies. This is not to say that these communities are not making shifts to more sustainable resources and energies but that in order to do so they must focus on the social aspects of sustainability first.

Living communally itself is a big step towards a more sustainable world, where instead of each family turning on their own oven to make dinner, only one or two ovens are turned on to make dinner to feed a whole community of families. The sharing of resources such as tools and tractors reduces the consumption of products by having one for many people instead of each person having their own. The reason social practices of

conflict resolution and inclusive decision-making are essential to this lifestyle is because to avoid or resolve conflict around the use of these collective resources it is helpful to have inclusive agreements and rules for how they are used, when, and in what manner. It is a radical change to how we relate as humans. Instead of our relationships to each other being determined by our relationships to things, our relationships to things is determined by our relationship to each other.

The social practices of consensus and sociocracy, heart shares, check-ins, and conflict resolution strategies and skills enable these new ways of relating to exist in these communities by fostering fairness and peace. The positive benefits of these practices have shown to be intertwined with one another and mutually supportive, in that the activities that promote expression of emotions contribute to the deepening of relationships of community members and give them an opportunity to be seen and heard by one another. It appeared that tensions within the communities could be diffused in times set for expression instead of spilling over into decision-making processes.

The use and acceptance of these social practices were dependent upon the willingness and interest of residents of communities to participate in these authentic and transparent gatherings. The societal norms of suppressing emotions that are considered ugly or problematic, such as sadness, anger, rage, fear, or pleasure, often surface in visitors or newcomers to these communities and may be so ingrained that they are uncomfortable to participate in these expressional practices. This leads to either those individuals leaving the community or to a change within how they navigate their

emotions and expression to others, possibly working to release internalized social constructs. As one resident of La’akea explained,

“I’m learning more and more over five years to show up in a heart-centered way, to show up more vulnerable with what kind of emotions I am having. To share those and receive support. Through those I am more able to receive and experience love. A lot of this connects to Network for New Culture as it is such an inspiration around being vulnerable, heart-centered, giving and receiving love” (Interview La’akea Resident E).

Lastly, it is important to note that the cross-pollination of members of different communities by visiting one another’s communities can have lasting benefits and effects. There were members who had lived at both of these communities and through their experiences have exchanged ideas about how to relate and live collectively. Members of Lost Valley have been inspired by the heart shares and forums of La’akea and are working to revive the practice that used to exist in Lost Valley’s early years as “weekly wellness check-ins” and are holding biweekly forums. The ZEGG forum is an example of how the social practice of one community can be used by other communities and social contexts. This inter-community knowledge sharing should be explored further through future research and possibly member-exchange programs to connect different communities from around the world.

## Recommendations

### Investing in communication, facilitation, and conflict resolution skills

The importance of having experienced and skilled individuals involved in these social practices cannot be understated. As Christian (2003) notes with consensus and

sociocracy, using these practices without proper knowledge of how to conduct them can be frustrating and damaging for new intentional communities or groups using them. Even communities with experienced members could benefit from holding courses or recruiting trainers on these practices, such as for facilitation and mediation, to inform newcomers and to strengthen and expand the skills of long-term members. I would suggest that investing not only into trainings and information about these practices is essential but that the investment of time through the participation of members is crucial for their success in sustaining the relationships that make up the community.

#### Buddy system

Another important feature at La'akea was that each farm supporter was connected with a long-term member to guide them in their stay. This kind of buddy system was helpful to not only familiarize newcomers with the land and the specifics of the living arrangements but also seemed to create a connection and relationship between the “buddies” that from my experience helped me feel at home. Lost Valley was developing a similar process that had support from the current membership. I would recommend this buddy system to other communities where an experienced community member guides and answer the questions of a new resident. It may prove additionally beneficial if there are monthly to weekly check-ins with other community members to make sure there is good communication between the “buddies” or to see if another member of the community would be a better fit as the newcomers point person.

### Revisioning

Residents of Lost Valley commented on the importance of having the revisioning retreat to measure if the founding mission statement still serves and aligns with the present community. This brought up a lot of logistical issues that haven't been solved over the years. It allowed the opportunity for multiple community members to express where they could use more support and where responsibilities could be shared more cohesively and collectively. Meaning that jobs or roles could be divided to many people instead of one or two. The use of revisioning is especially helpful for the many communities whose membership has evolved and changed throughout their existence. From the insights from this research, the practice of revisioning retreats could be beneficial for communities to check-in with their current alignment to their stated visions and mission statements.

### Future Research

Through the course of this research I identified various subjects that could be the focus of future research such as cross-pollination of intentional community member, issues of diversity, sweat equity as contribution, and inter-generational sustainability. The cross-pollination of members appeared valuable for knowledge exchanges among different communities. This was apparent when two members of Lost Valley came to live at La'akea and when they returned to Lost Valley, brought back with them inspiration from participating in heart shares and the Network For a New Culture winter camp. This

knowledge transfer could be explored more by interviewing resident of intentional communities about their connection and knowledge exchanges with other communities. As a project this could explore how resident exchange programs may influence these communities.

There was recognition by residents that these communities were not as diverse as they desired. This is likely an issue of accessibility and cultural differences as noted by Farmer (2018). To inquire into why certain types of diversity (class, race, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, age) are lacking in these communities both perspectives of residents in these communities, and especially, individuals from outside these communities from different backgrounds should be interviewed. Since, these communities through their visions promote diversity it will likely continue to be a topic of discussion.

Younger residents of these communities expressed that a form of sweat equity would more easily allow them to stay in their communities as compared to financial contribution alone. For communities with an older population this would not only diversify the age range of their community but also provide labor for maintenance, agriculture, projects, and events. Research into this topic could examine how members of intentional communities feel about the idea of sweat equity for buy-ins or rent to estimate the possibility of such an exchange.

Lastly, one challenge identified in interviews at La'akea and other communities visited was how to keep the community inter-generational. Besides the one community in Australia most communities had not made much progress in solving this problem. Interviews or surveys could be conducted at intentional communities to ask residents how

they can address this issue and to spark community conversation. For these communities to be truly sustainable they need to seriously consider how they can sustain being inter-generational.

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