

Challenging Growth Society
-A study of eco-villages as a strategy towards a
sustainable de-growth society

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Abstract

Environmental degradation, increasing social problems and the mounting stress that we are witnessing in our societies today, strongly indicate that we find our system in a state of crisis. De-growth presents an extensive critique of growth society claiming that a change on all levels is necessary. It aims its critique at the hegemony of growth and development saying that it is necessary to focus on social and ecological values to reach a healthier society.

This paper investigates eco-villages and the eco-village movement as one possible strategy towards a sustainable society. The terms ideology and utopia are central for the study, where the difference and tension between ideology on the theoretical and practical level is of great interest. By first comparing the ideology of de-growth with the ideology of the eco-village movement on the theoretical level, and then comparing the theory to what is practised in the eco-villages, our purpose is to investigate to what extent eco-village ideology and practice in Sweden can form a part of the realisation of an ecologically and socially sustainable society according to the de-growth ideology. Our research is based on qualitative research methods, written sources and empirical information from qualitative, semi-structured interviews. We studied three villages in the region Västra Götaland in Sweden.

We have come to the conclusion that the two ideologies have many similarities on the theoretical level, with the largest difference being in the emphasis on the spiritual dimension in the eco-village movement, which is not emphasised within de-growth ideology. It has been hard to realise the utopia in practice. The three villages we visited have been much like any other Swedish rural village, much dependent on growth society. To become a stronger force of influence they need to be more organised and connected to each other and create bioregions to make local trade and production possible. The eco-villages are still in the process of improving and learning sustainable solutions, ecological as well as social, and they are all aiming at a simpler and more sustainable lifestyle. They serve as important examples to learn from and be inspired by, and when the time is ripe they might provide us with important experience.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Environmental degradation, increasing social problems and the mounting stress that we are witnessing in our societies today, strongly indicate that our system is in a state of crisis, and is neither sustainable nor fulfilling. We have known for a long time that our lifestyle is not ecologically or socially sustainable, any more than our economic system is stable, and it is becoming ever more evident, not least with the current financial crisis. Still, those who are gaining from this system, based on growth and development, are doing their best to maintain it intact and ignore warning signals of the poor condition of the population and environment. The critique of growth society and development is not new, it was strong not least from the late 1960s to the 1980s. Once again, perhaps as a response to the current parlous state of the world, this critique is spreading with renewed force in several parts of the world.

De-growth, that is economic contraction or downscaling, is used as a slogan and is influenced by ecological economics and post-development theory. It was created by radical critics of growth theory to bring to the fore the necessity of freeing everybody from the actual economic model and to get rid of the unrealistic logic of endless growth. The growth critics wished to create the outline of alternative projects championing politics of post-development. Their aim was to create a socially and ecologically sustainable society, in which people can live better, work and consume less. A society where less is more (Latouche 2009:17, Martínez-Alier 2008:39). Hence a new social movement of sustainable de-growth was started in France in the 1990s and has spread to other countries such as Italy, Spain and Belgium, among others.

The eco-village movement shares the critique of the growth society with de-growth advocates. This movement is fairly big in Sweden, consisting of about 25 eco-villages (Berg 2009-06-23), who are striving to put in practice a simpler lifestyle. The theoretical aspects of the movement are universally applicable and there is a global eco-village network trying to promote the settling of sustainable local alternatives.

Since the eco-village movement can be seen as objecting to growth, we will in this paper investigate the ideology of the eco-village movement in theory as well as in practice. We will then compare it to de-growth ideology in order to analyse the creation of eco-villages as examples of a possible way towards a more sustainable society.

1.2 The authors' perspective

We strongly believe that this kind of change in society, including changes in policies, values and practices in line with de-growth ideology, is necessary and at the same time very much wanted. Therefore, since alternative discourses which challenge hegemonic growth and development discourse are neglected in scientific and public debate, we find it is of great importance to raise these questions. Thus we believe that it is both interesting and of great value to investigate already existing examples of alternatives put in practice in Sweden in order to discuss the difficulties in creating a sustainable alternative to the growth society. Deriving from this introduction to our paper, the purpose and research questions are as follows:

1.3 Purpose and research questions

The aim of this paper is to investigate to what extent eco-village ideology and practice in Sweden can form a part of the realisation of an ecologically and socially sustainable society according to the de-growth ideology.

In order to reach our purpose we will answer the following research questions:

- What are the main features of de-growth ideology and eco-village ideology, and to what extent do they agree with or differ from each other?
- What is the ideology of the eco-villages in practice and what is achieved in practice? (By ideology in practice we mean the visions and goals held by the people in the eco-villages in our case studies.)
- To what extent do the ideologies of the eco-villages in practice agree with the ideology of de-growth and the eco-village movement?
- What are the difficulties in realising a sustainable society?

1.3.1 Research delimitation

In our study of eco-villages we are only considering intentional villages in the north, and not those indigenous traditional villages that might in several ways live up to the same definition. In our case studies we have done research on three villages in a rural environment. Eco-villages can however also be created in urban environments and this might imply different conditions and problems.

Furthermore the de-growth ideology is not striving towards a single model approach, hence this study on eco-villages should be seen as a discussion on what the eco-villages in Sweden can achieve, and if it is a possible way towards a sustainable society. It should not however be forgotten that this is to be seen as one of many alternative ways towards a socially and ecologically sustainable society, since many existing examples of alternative ways are discussed within de-growth ideology.

2. Theory

We will in this chapter present our theoretical basis. We do not use a specific theory for our analysis, instead we base our study on the terms 'ideology' and 'utopia'.

2.1 Definition of ideology

Ideology is a term which has been used and criticised in many different ways. According to Terry Eagleton (1994:1-2), the term has a whole range of meanings and not all of them are compatible with each other. The various definitions range from being ideas, or even false ideas which legitimate a dominant political power, to being the conjunction of discourse and power, among others. Our understanding and use of the term ideology in this paper is based on a rather wide definition which defines ideology as a system of ideas and values.

The Swedish social scientist Stig-Björn Ljunggren (2008:12-13) describes ideology as a system of ideas and values, which represents what the society should look like. Ljunggren describes ideology as consisting of three parts. First of all ideologies describe reality, they tell us about how the world is constituted. However a particular description of reality is chosen due to certain values which are held to be important within a certain ideological view. This leads us to the second part of ideologies, that they consist of values, which tells us about what the world *should* look like. The third and last part logically represents the answer to the question of what we should do in order to reach the desired society; in other words normative recommendations about what should be done, a programme of action.

When speaking of ideologies, we often think of the major political parties, however according to Sverker Sörlin (2004:429), ideology does not have to refer only to the political ideologies; the media, the sports movement or even a hospital can be said to have their own ideology. Furthermore he says that ideologies function as guides; they require a context and an explanation of what the world looks like, which we can identify with.

According to Sven-Eric Liedman, ideology will always depend on the context which it stems from and from which it is being interpreted. Everything can be said to have an ideology because every human act is based on values, ideas and understandings. Ideology is made up of both visions and actions, and there is a constant dialogue between theory and practice.

Ideology influences practice and practice influences ideology (Liedman 1989:12).

Sörlin holds that ideological thinking is different from, for example, philosophical thinking since ideological thinking is strongly dependent on reality, i.e. that the ideas work in practice (2004:430). On the other hand since ideologies represent an ideal vision of a better state of the world, they might never be fully realised in practice. This leads us to another term of importance to this paper, namely utopias.

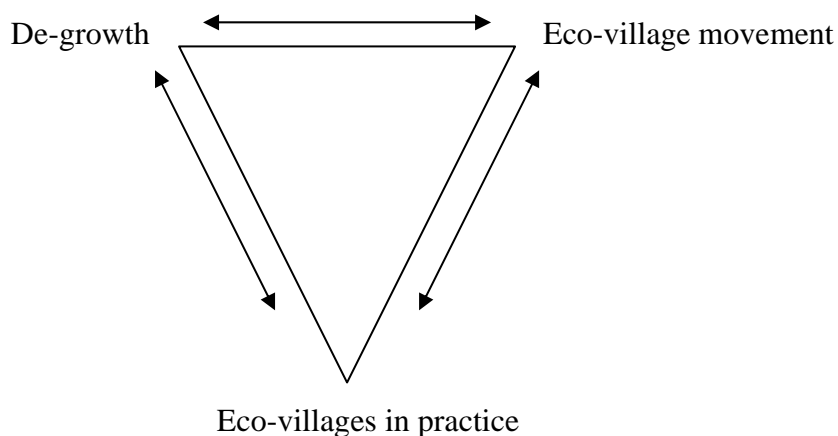
2.2 Definition of utopia and the tension between theory and practice

Ljunggren makes a distinction between utopias and visions, where utopias are dreams far removed from reality, and visions are explained as pictures of the future rooted in the ongoing social development. He continues by making a distinction between two types of visions; visions which are aiming for a society which is different from the current one, and visions of principles, meaning that certain rules or principles should be followed (2008:241, 321). Mats Friberg argues (Friberg, Galtung 1986:17) that what is utopian today could be realistic tomorrow. Thus what is to be seen as realistic or utopian is subjective, since the term is often used in a negative meaning so as to ban any radical suggestion of reforms. Friberg therefore argues that the term should be interpreted as: *“a vision of the future, which is defined as unrealistic by someone, normally by the establishment”* (our translation). Utopias could then be considered as necessary in order to achieve social change. Following Friberg’s reasoning, our understanding of utopias is a conjunction of Ljunggren’s interpretation of a utopia, and a vision which opts for social change, i.e. we understand utopia and vision as having the same meaning, where the difference is subjective.

Accordingly the second part – the utopian part of ideologies – is not to be understood as strictly abstract or impossible to realise, rather it can be said that ideologies exist on different levels; an abstract theoretical or utopian level, and a practical level among practitioners. Theory does not count for all the practical circumstances, therefore there is a difference and tension between these levels, between the abstract and the concrete. Therefore, what is of great importance to our research is not whether an ideology is true or false, it is rather this difference and tension between theory and practice.

Procedure

As a first step in this research we want to examine the ways in which the ideological basis of the eco-village movement is connected to de-growth ideology on a theoretical level. The next step is to investigate the ideology of the eco-villages on the practical level. This is where we present our three case studies. We do this because we assume that the ideology will differ when put into practice, underlining the importance of the tension between ideology on the theoretical level and on the practical level. We aim to investigate what is happening in practice and what is not. Thus the eco-village movement is not a unified movement and so the visionary goals and strategies of each eco-village might vary. In analysing our case studies with the ideology of de-growth and the eco-village movement we will be discussing the difficulties of the ideological realisation in practice and moreover discuss whether the creation of eco-villages is a possible way towards the realisation of an ecological and socially sustainable society according to the de-growth ideology.



The triangle visualises our theoretical outline explained above.

In our analysis we will use the circle of the eight Rs¹ presented by Serge Latouche as possible steps towards a de-growth society. We use the circle of Rs to answer our first research question by analysing the extent to which the ideology of the eco-village movement agrees with the ideology of de-growth. When answering the remaining research questions, we first present our case studies and then analyse them with the Rs of Latouche, as well as with the three important aspects of eco-villages presented by the eco-village movement, namely the social, ecological and spiritual dimensions².

¹ See chapter 5.3.

² See chapter 6.2.

3. Method and material

3.1.1 Qualitative method

Our research is based on qualitative research methods, with its roots in hermeneutics. In order to answer our first research question we will use written sources on de-growth and the eco-village movement. In order to answer the remaining research questions we will use three case studies from which we derive our empirical information using qualitative, semi-structured interviews. Our research is thus of an inductive and interpretative nature. The purpose of using these methods is not to reach any absolute truths or find a universal model, but to reach a deeper knowledge of our study subjects (Halvorsen 1989:35). According to Grant McCracken (1988:21), qualitative methods are most useful when they are used to discover how the respondent understands the world. Since our research is focused on ideology and social change, we need to get closer to the respondents in order to reach a deeper understanding.

3.2 Material

3.2.1 Material on the ideology of de-growth

We attended a conference in Barcelona in March 2009, where some of the leading theorists in de-growth ideology were gathered. From this conference we obtained not only information from the seminars but also ideas and literature for further reading on the subject. Among others attending the conference was Serge Latouche, whose strategy towards a de-growth society we will use in our analysis.

Another important source of information has been an extensive document consisting of the research contributions from the first international conference on de-growth: “The International Conference on Economic De-Growth for Ecological Sustainability and Social Equity”, held in Paris in April 2008. This document contains an overview of the many research fields represented in de-growth, and scientists from all over the world with widely different inputs have contributed material.

3.2.2 Material on the ideology of the eco-village movement

We have concentrated our research of the theoretical background of the eco-village movement on three different sources for definitions of the term eco-village provided by GEN, Gaia Trust and Folke Günther. For information we have mainly used the homepages of GEN and Gaia

Trust, and Günther's booklet on eco-villages from 1989. The definitions serve as an attempt to gather the general ideas and thoughts behind the term eco-village, and what such a village strives towards and holds as its main motivation. This is of great importance when understanding the ideological links between de-growth and the eco-villages. Along with these three sources, a doctoral thesis written by Martha Norbeck has been of great use for background information and inspiration. Norbeck has done extensive research on nine Swedish eco-villages as well as gathering general information from Gaia Trust, GEN and Folke Günther. The thesis was written in 2004 and does not include any of the villages presented in this paper.

3.3 Qualitative case studies

In order to answer our second research question we studied three eco-villages in Sweden and we used semi-structured interviews. In addition to this, we also consulted written material such as articles and the villages' homepages where possible. We interviewed two people from each village. However due to the fact that Skärkäll does not have a homepage, we performed an additional group interview with three residents of the village in order to get a coherent historical background. The group interview was of an informal character with practical questions regarding the village and its history. Each interview lasted approximately one to two hours. We used the same questionnaire³ for the three eco-villages, but since the interviews were semi-structured, the conversations came to focus on somewhat different themes. This technique was used since we had fairly little information and ideas about the villages and wanted to be open to what the interviewees themselves regarded as essential about the village (McCracken 1988:16). To respect the privacy and anonymity of the respondents, we have chosen to give each respondent a number instead of using their real names.

3.3.1 Sample

As case studies we chose three villages in the same geographical area. We believe it is essential to interview the respondents in their physical environment, since this helps us to reach a deeper understanding of the context and of the respondents themselves. Furthermore, we find our prevailing understanding of the context (meaning its geographical, cultural and

³ See appendix 1

political aspects) to be of great importance to reach the deeper understanding needed to fulfil the purpose of this research.

We chose the three villages of Skärkäll, Rydebacke and Lilla Krossekärr, which are situated in the Swedish region Västra Götaland. Skärkäll and Rydebacke have existed longer than Lilla Krossekärr, as both of them were founded in the late 1980s. Lilla Krossekärr is a fairly recent project from 2000. We made this strategic sample of villages since we believe that the time aspect might affect the outcome of the projects. In choosing people to interview we also made a strategic sample, choosing people with knowledge and experience of the village, and who have had contact with, or have lived in, the villages for a considerable period of time. To reach our purpose and obtain the information needed to do this we mixed informant and respondent interviews. For the sake of clarity, however, we will use only the term respondent. The respondents were contacted by email addresses obtained from the villages' homepages, and in Skärkäll through other contacts. We contacted the villages in writing asking for people who were interested, well informed about the village, and willing to do an interview. This process was necessary to respect the residents' own privacy, although it made our sample somewhat limited.

3.4 Discussion of method and material

3.4.1 Reliability and validity

Qualitative research is often criticised as having a lower reliability than quantitative research. The reliability (meaning the lack of random and unsystematic mistakes) in our case studies will be lower than in a quantitative study since we have used semi-structured interviews to gather information, and our classification of data will be rather unsystematic (Essiason et al. 2007:67). Therefore, using semi-structured interviews makes the analytical part slightly more complicated, since we received somewhat different sorts of information from the respondents. On the other hand we believe that this could be valuable to our research since perspectives and thoughts we did not address from the beginning were brought to light. Another advantage in using informal interviews is that the respondent is not forced into thinking in a certain way. This was of great importance to our research since we were investigating abstract phenomena that are highly dependent on personal perceptions. In qualitative research the investigator serves as an "instrument" when collecting and analysing data, meaning that the investigator uses his/her own imagination, experiences and intellect (McCracken 1988:16). Consequently,

this gives us a somewhat subjective result since our analysis stems, in part, from our personal interpretations and comparisons. As mentioned above, we chose study objects within our own cultural context, which implies less critical distance. On the other hand, it also enabled the intimate understanding that is needed in qualitative research. However, we studied written material before the interviews, which gave us an opportunity to create some critical distance from our respondents (McCracken 1988:22, 32).

We chose to perform a small number of interviews in order to use more examples (case studies). In qualitative research there is a need to work for a longer period of time with fewer people, rather than more superficially with many (ibid. 1988:17). We are interested in the general picture and the reasons for the creation of the village, as well as the information about the present situation. We therefore tried to avoid personal questions. In doing a group interview as mentioned above we wanted to compensate for the fact that Skärkäll does not have a homepage, and we wanted to obtain correct background information regarding the village. A group interview can however lead to somewhat different answers and to less open respondents than an individual interview would. We have taken this into account and used the group interview mainly for questions of an informational character.

The differences in opinion between the people in the villages affect the internal validity of our study. By acknowledging these differences we have been careful not to make generalisations. Nevertheless, we still believe that there are some general patterns that can be discovered and analysed with the de-growth ideology and the ideology of the eco-village movement.

Furthermore the contextual dependency of the case studies restrains us from generalizing the information we obtain from interviews to a wider extent. It can only partly be applied to other eco-villages, that is in the Swedish context. This lowers the external validity (Essiason et al 2007:64, Halvorsen 1992:41).

3.4.2 Discussion of material on de-growth

Since de-growth is a very broad, interdisciplinary theoretical field it is somewhat problematic to present a fair synopsis. We are very much aware of the fact that there is disagreement on certain issues within the field and we have as far as possible tried to highlight the existing disputes in the discussions in this paper. However it would be impossible to present all the perspectives within the field, therefore it is important to emphasise that we have made some inevitable decisions about what to present in this paper and what to omit. On the other hand, we do believe that we have overcome the problems of bias to some extent, since we have used

research articles put together from the first international conference on the subject held in Paris in April 2008.

3.4.3 Discussion of material on the eco-village ideology

We have limited our research by choosing only three sources of information on the eco-village ideology. None of the villages that we researched are connected to the global eco-village network but they are familiar with it, as well as being familiar with Folke Günther and Gaia Trust. By presenting only these sources we do not want to say that they are the only sources for definitions or that the aspects presented give an absolute picture of the eco-village movement. GEN and Gaia Trust are, however, the main initiators of the eco-village movement and provide a lot of information about eco-villages on a global level. Günther has been very active in the Swedish environmental discussion and he is well known within the eco-village movement. His booklet written in 1989 has become something of a classic in eco-village discussion in Sweden.

There is another definition of eco-villages often used in the Swedish context, provided by the Swedish Board of Housing, Building and Planning (Boverket). We have chosen not to present this definition or the criterion proposed since it is of a more practical character and does not discuss the ideological aspect of an eco-village. Therefore it does not help us to fulfil the purpose of this paper.

4. Background to de-growth

4.1 Definition of terms

Growth society- When speaking of growth society we refer to a society with a market economy based on growth, meaning industrialised society outside the eco-villages.

Growth- when speaking of growth we refer to *material* growth, which means the increased use of resources and energy.

Sustainability- we adopt the same definition used by the ecological footprint analysis⁴, that a sustainable society is a society that does not consume more resources than nature can produce, or discharge more waste than can be absorbed by nature. Furthermore, a sustainable lifestyle is a lifestyle possible for everyone on the planet, and a way of living that does not neglect other people or future generations' equal opportunities.

4.2 Historical view of the theoretical field of de-growth

The term *decróissance*, French for de-growth, originates from the translation of the work of Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen, with the original title “The Entropy Law and the Economic Process” (De-growth Conference 2008h:39). De-growth is a theoretical field, which originates from various disciplines and theorists. The basis of de-growth thinking consists of social and ecological criticism of economics, specifically criticism of development and growth. In the late sixties, de-growth was defined by the following, among others; André Gorz – an Austrian-French social philosopher and journalist who was one of the first theorists within political ecology, Ivan Illich – an Austrian philosopher and critic of society, and Cornelius Castoriadis – a Greek-French philosopher, economist and psychoanalyst (Latouche 2009:22, NOW-CCB 2009). These theorists questioned consumer society and its imaginary bases of progress, science and technology, because of the failure of growth in the South and the loss of concern in the North. This theoretical critique has led to the search for a post-development paradigm (Latouche 2009:22).

⁴ See chapter 4.3.3 for more information on the Ecological Footprint Analysis

The Nordic countries have long been important actors in promoting sustainable practices and emphasizing environmentally friendly techniques. The environmental movement was very strong in these countries not least in the 1970s. The first international conference on environmental issues was organised in Stockholm in 1972 (Norbeck 2004:22). In 1987 came the Brundtland Report, initiated by the Norwegian Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland, which became the starting point for the widely used expression “sustainable development”. These initiatives were to a certain degree in line with modern de-growth ideology. However the expression “sustainable development” is as much discussed and criticised within de-growth ideology as it is accepted and incorporated in the economic system⁵. In 1992 a larger international environmental conference was held in Rio de Janeiro in Brazil. From this conference came the initiative Agenda 21 - a programme emphasizing local initiatives in each country.

Along with the social critique of growth society, environmental concern has grown strong in the southern parts of Europe as well. The theoretical contributions within de-growth thinking have multiplied during the last few years, mainly in France, by authors such as Serge Latouche – doctor in philosophy and political science; Francois Schneider – co-founder of the website Research and De-growth, and Vincent Cheynet and Paul Ariès – important thinkers in the area of de-growth in France. Mauro Bonaiuti from Italy is also worth mentioning. As mentioned above an international conference on de-growth was held in Paris in May 2008, where 130 scientists and civil society members from all over the world participated. This was the first attempt to gather practical and theoretical experiences within de-growth thinking and the term was made a common denominator internationally (The Conference on De-growth, 2008a:5).

4.3 The scientific critique of growth society

4.3.1 Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen and the bio-economics

Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen was the first to present de-growth as an inevitable conclusion, drawn from the fundamental laws of nature. His work, so called bio-economics, is an alternative to the orthodox economy. Georgescu-Roegen attempts to connect the economy with the rest of the natural and social sciences, by deriving his theoretical conclusions from

⁵ See chapter 4.3.4 on post-development theory.

physics, specifically from the fields of thermodynamics and biology. The laws of thermodynamics were developed in detail by Georgescu-Roegen in the 1970s and are fundamental for his critique of the economy (Daly 1996:171). Today the field of bio-economics is called ecological economy.

The economics of the last fifty years has to a great extent been devoted to economic growth, which in practice has meant the growth of gross national product, GNP. There is no agreement within macroeconomics of a possible economic limit, at which the costs of production of further growth becomes greater than the benefits. In standard economic theory, the macroeconomy is not seen as a part of anything larger, rather it is the whole and this means that it can grow forever (ibid. 1996:27). However according to Georgescu-Roegen, the economic system is not isolated, but is rather a part of a larger whole - the biosphere - and is dependent on its limits of usable energy and matter (De-growth Conference 2008f:270, Martínez-Alier 2009).

The laws of thermodynamics

Thermodynamics is the study of the nature of energy and its conversion into work and heat. There are two types of energy; energy that can be used by humans (energy with high exergy and low entropy) and energy which cannot be used by humans (with low exergy and high entropy).

The first law of thermodynamics says that the amount of energy in the universe is constant, meaning that energy can neither be created nor destroyed, just transformed. The second law, “the entropy law” says that the entropy in an isolated system is constantly increasing, meaning that the quality of a certain amount of energy diminishes every time it is used, (the entropy increases, exergy decreases) Georgescu-Roegen claims that the two first laws of thermodynamics are also true when it comes to matter, which means that usable matter is constantly transforming into unusable matter (Daly 1996:29-30).

This means that humans, as well as any other living organism is dependent on energy and matter which is constantly degrading. However we do not know when the Earth’s usable energy and matter will be used up, because that depends on us. All living organisms accelerate the degradation of energy and matter, and our growth model is the champion of this process. It is the shortest path to reach total exhaustion of the resources of our planet. The entropy law leaves us with only one option; to drastically reduce our consumption of energy and matter and to respect the limits of the biosphere.

Knowing that the usable matter in a closed system like the Earth is constantly diminishing, it is impossible to recycle enough to overcome the problem with shortage of natural resources. We can only recycle usable matter in a state which is no longer usable for us (used paper, broken glass, outdated industrial components, etc.), but we cannot recycle the matter which has been forever lost in the process. Thus the processes of recycling itself also contribute to further loss of energy and matter. Overall this means that the cost of any activity is always higher than the product and all economic activity result in a deficit (Mosangini 2007).

Georgescu-Roegen further argues that in the past the societies lived off solar flow and the evolution existed of slow adaptations of our “endosomatic organs” (heart, lungs, etc.), which run on solar energy. The evolution of the industrialised societies has instead shifted to rapid adaptations of our “exosomatic organs ” (cars, airplanes, etc.), which depend on limited natural resources. He further argues that the uneven ownership of exosomatic organs and the natural resources from which they are made is the root of social conflict in industrial societies (Daly 1996:30).

4.3.2 The rebound effect

Growth objectors question the function of technological and efficiency solutions in our economies without de-growth policies, due to the rebound effect. This means that the potential savings that could be made through technology are more or less set off by changes in our behaviour. For example, if time is saved due to inventions of rapid transport, the amount of time saved is often used to travel further (De-growth Conference 2008d:29-30).

Choosing (or avoiding) an ecological product or service could instead create limits on consumption and create a rebound effect. Energy efficiency is still important, but it ought to go hand in hand with a de-growing economy. Francois Schneider (ibid:32) explains that rebound strategies consist of identifying and favouring solutions that do not create new needs. This means investing in techniques and services which favour human cooperation, such as local sharing, reuse, compost, renewable energy, public transport etc.

4.3.3 The Ecological Footprint Analysis

The ecological footprint analysis, presented by Wackernagel and Rees in 1996, calculates resource consumption and waste accumulation (Wackernagel, Rees 1996:3). Just like the theories of bio-economics, the analysis proceeds from a different perspective than that of the growth society in viewing humans as a part of nature and dependent on its well-being. In

calculating the total land needed for an individual's resource use and waste discharge, including the full life-cycles of crops, meat, goods, services and energy use, the ecological footprint tool helps us visualise to what extent we are over-consuming in relation to the surface of the earth as well as the consequences of our current trends (ibid:23). Today humanity uses 1.3 planets to provide the resources we use and to absorb our waste, meaning that it now takes the Earth one year and four months to regenerate what we use in a year (The Global Footprint Network 2009). However, the tool of ecological footprint is in many ways simplified to make it more accessible and it should be combined with other tools and indexes.

This analysis is strongly connected to concerns of environmental justice and global equity. The ecological footprint analysis shows that the wealthier nations are using a far greater share of the environmental resources. The level of consumption and growth in industrialised countries is only possible due to the low consumption of the poorer nations. Moreover, the economic activity of the wealthier countries creates adverse environmental impacts, which are predominantly inflicted on the poorer nations. What is called for is a rejection of the economic growth model and to gear the global and national economies into paths of right-sizing, which means reaching a sustainable level. The right-sizing of poorer countries means a sustainable *increase* in consumption of the poorer part of the population, which might mean a slight increase in production. However redistribution of income within and between nations should be the main focus of this process (De-growth Conference 2008b:317-318).

4.3.4 Post-development theory

De-growth also finds some of its theoretical contributions in post-development theory. Post-development refers to the possibility of looking at a reality beyond that of development and growth (Escobar 1997:6). Majid Rahnema (1997:379) explains development as an ideology that was born in the North in order to meet the needs of the dominant powers in their search for a more appropriate tool for their economic and geopolitical expansion. Rahnema further claims that; *“the ideology helped a dying an obsolete colonialism to transform itself into an aggressive – even sometimes an attractive – instrument able to recapture lost ground.”* (ibid:379). The countries in the South were for a long time seen as “underdeveloped”, because of their low GNP. Thus, the degree of a country's civilisation was determined by its level of production (Sachs 1999:73).

The contributions of the French theorist Serge Latouche represent this critique. Latouche's thesis is that the liberal perception of human nature, “the homo economicus”, which refers to

humans as rational actors driven by self-interest, is contingent. By this, Latouche means that this concept of human nature is dependent on its representation of the world and of history (De-growth Conference 2008g:27). This means that in order to seek possibilities and create alternatives, we need to reinvent or rediscover our nature. As Latouche puts it; “...*to prevent the other world, the one we call our desired world, from being like the one in which we live, it is time to decolonise our imaginary.*” (Latouche 2009:21, our translation).

Furthermore many growth objectors argue that development is so closely linked to growth that it cannot be separated from it. By using an oxymoron as sustainable development any real critique of the growth society is impossible, instead it prevents us from moving beyond the development paradigm (Martínez-Alier 2002:20, Latouche 2004:46). Thus, as Blackwell and Seabrook put it, industrial society deprives sustainability of its meaning because what it should mean is not taking from the earth, from the world, from society, from each other, from life, more than we give back. Conversely, when industrial society itself uses the phrase, it means the sustaining of itself, no matter what the cost (in Rahnema et al.1997:380).

“*Development has been, and still is, the westernisation of the world*” (Latouche 1998, our translation). Therefore according to Latouche (ibid), a post-development project needs to be plural - a synthesis between the lost traditions of the ones excluded by the development project, and the modernity which is inaccessible to them.

5. The ideology of the de-growth movement

5.1 The utopian goals of de-growth

“What if the very idea of growth – accumulating riches, destroying the environment and worsening social inequality – is a trap? Maybe we need to aim to create a society based on quality not quantity, on cooperation and not competition.” (Latouche 2003:1).

De-growth is about questioning the market’s control of nature and human relations, and rejects the belief in growth as the solution to avoid crisis, in order to imagine a future, beyond that of growth. According to Latouche (2009:44), all the political parties, both left and right, have based their politics on growth, therefore the necessary change cannot come from within the current political parties. Hence, there is a need for something much more radical: *“a cultural revolution, neither more nor less.”* (Latouche 2007:2). He explains the political de-growth project as, *“a utopia, that is, a generator of hope and dreams. However it is not about getting lost in the unreal, it is rather a question of exploring the possible objectives to put in practice.”* (Latouche 2009:44, our translation). De-growth is defined as *“a voluntary transition towards a just, participatory, and ecologically sustainable society.”* (The Conference on De-growth 2008b:318).

From the logic of economic growth towards a de-growth society

According to Latouche (2003:2), de-growth is not to be understood as negative growth. Negative growth in a growth society only leads to unemployment, reduction in social-welfare expenditure and cultural activities, something that the current economic crisis has proven. He argues (2009:16) that de-growth is only possible in a de-growth society, that is in a society based on a different logic.

André Gorz states that the growth society based on consumption is dependent on three main elements: publicity, credit and obsolescence. Publicity constantly creates new needs, it makes us wish for the things we do not have and to look down on the things we do have.

Furthermore, credit and the logic of the capital system is all about profiting no matter what the cost may be in human lives or environmental degradation. This logic is based on making consumption our lifestyle, by limiting the durability of products in order to continue the endless circle of demand and production (Gorz 1995 in Latouche 2009:26-30, Little 1996:70). Latouche confirms (2009:30) that this is how we find ourselves addicted to consumption and

growth, as well as to work, which leads to stress, over-consumption of anti-depressants and general ill-health. Thus, whole industries develop and produce nothing more than consolation products, to cajole people into continuing with this system and lifestyle.

If growth were to automatically generate well-being, we should be living in a paradise by now, if we think in terms of growth rates. On the contrary, it seriously threatens the well-being of people and nature, both now and for future generations (ibid:32).

Not very surprisingly, recent research has shown that subjective well-being is not dependent on changes in income and consumption, because past a certain level of income, the increases in life satisfaction decrease rapidly as income rises. Other factors such as social activities, sense of community, participation in cultural life and meaningful work are of much greater importance than that of income (The Conference on De-growth 2008e:236-37).

5.2 The strategies of the de-growth project

5.2.1 Voluntary simplicity

The message to be spread by the de-growth ideology is based on the idea formulated by Ivan Illich, ‘to do more and better with less’, also articulated by Gorz as ‘less is more’. This means making people responsible citizens in a voluntary manner (Latouche 2009:73). In order to accomplish this, it is necessary to consider a lifestyle referred to as “voluntary simplicity” within de-growth. This is about a transformation of how we perceive the world and our needs.

Convivial and autonomous societies

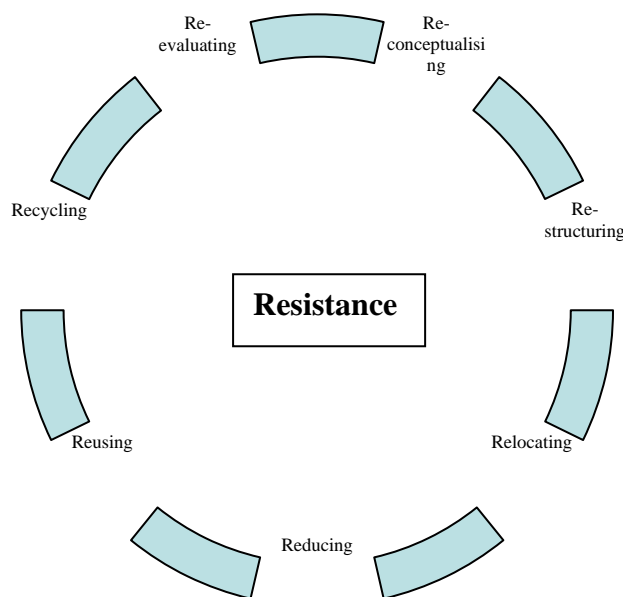
Latouche explains de-growth as the construction of *convivial* and *autonomous* societies (Latouche 2009:44). *Conviviality* is understood by Illich (in Espejo 2009) as an option between the duality of “having” and “being”; the society of production is about having, a convivial society is about being. The convivial society of Illich is therefore conscious of its limits and is created by individuals who rethink what is really important and necessary about their needs. Schneider (The Conference on De-growth 2008d:32-33) holds that the consciousness described by Illich could also help reducing the rebound effects. However, Schneider believes that limits need to be agreed on by participatory processes of cooperation. This is why the creation of a participatory and direct democracy is necessary for the movement (Espejo 2009). In a convivial society, the lost links needs to be re-established, meaning the restoration and creation of local networks where people are more connected to

the neighbourhood, instead of being dependent on industrial zones and huge supermarkets. (Illich in Latouche 2009:62).

What is meant by *autonomy*, according to Castoriadis, is; “*the project of a society in which all citizens have an equal, effective chance to participate in the society’s legislation, government, jurisdiction and, finally, institution.*” (Castoriadis 2005 in The Conference on De-growth 2008f:270). This is an answer to the need of the numerous social movements, which are fighting for the defence and shared management of resources and common goods. Castoriadis (1977) claims that the values represented in our contemporary society are incompatible with such autonomy. He believes that values are intrinsically connected to culture and that values are created within society, at the core of its foundation and representation. Hence he argues that it is impossible to speak about social change without analysing culture. This means, by using the words of Latouche, that there is a need for a decolonisation of the imaginary. However in order to spread the idea of voluntary simplicity, the crucial point lies in convincing people that de-growth is not just necessary, but also in their own best interests.

5.3 The circle of the eight Rs

Latouche has tried to summarise some possible ways of how to reach the necessary change towards a de-growth society. This is done graphically in the so-called “circle of the Rs”, which was first presented at the NGO forum at the 1992 United Nations Earth summit in Rio de Janeiro (Latouche 2003:3). The eight Rs stand for: Re-evaluating, Re-conceptualising, Restructuring, Redistributing, Relocating, Reducing, Reusing and Recycling.



Re-evaluating means reconsidering and changing the dominant values in today’s society. The dominant materialistic view requires the pursuit of money and power, whatever the costs might be. Hence cooperation should replace competition and egoism, and we should choose the pleasure of enjoyment instead of obsession with work, local instead of global, autonomy instead of heteronomy, and to think in terms of what is reasonable instead of rational (Latouche 2009:46). This is the society based more on solidarity and conviviality as described by Illich. In line with Castoriadis, Latouche (ibid:46-47) holds this to be essential because we cannot imagine a society of de-growth, if the individuals of society behave according to the lifestyles and norms of the society of consumption. Above all we ought to respect nature and recognise human submission to it.

Along with the change of values comes a different worldview. **Re-conceptualising** means to redefine or reconsider the dimensions of for example the concepts of poverty and wealth and shortage and abundance (ibid:48). According to Astrid Matthey, people's aspirations regarding wealth and consumption are an important factor to facilitate the acceptance of minimised consumption. People's feelings of loss are greater if their aspirations are far from being fulfilled. If the perception of wealth were redefined in society as a whole it would help people to moderate their aspirations in terms of material achievements, and to decrease people's sense of loss and disappointment (De-growth Conference 2008c:234).

Restructuring means adapting production and social relations to the change in values. (Latouche 2009:48-49). The restructuring of social relations is to be understood as **redistribution** of wealth, both between the richer and the poorer nations, as well as within societies. Latouche argues that the ecological debt to the people in the South is not to be paid by donations, but by eradicating exploitation of the poorer nations. Hence the principal arena for ecological adjustment is in the North (Sachs 1999:87). Latouche suggests that the ecological footprint could be used as an indicator of fair redistribution (Latouche 2009:49-50).

Relocating refers to the shift from global production to local production, meaning that goods necessary for the needs of the people should be produced locally. All decision-making that could be made locally within economics, politics and culture should be made locally (Latouche 2009:51). Hence this implies a relocation of democratic decision-making and a re-establishment of the lost links in society towards a relationship of conviviality.

Reducing means primarily a reduction of the impact on the biosphere, created by our ways of production and consumption. We have to reduce our ecological footprint, which includes reducing the amount of travelling, and to learn to enjoy slowness and cherish our local territory (ibid:52). Finally we need to reduce the amount of working hours and get rid of the addiction to work, which is the main supporter of growth society.

Reusing and **recycling** means, as mentioned earlier, reducing the amount of waste and stopping planned obsolescence. There is a need for initiatives which involve companies in this direction, but what is missing is the political will (ibid:55).

This circle of Rs is not to be understood as an agenda, and the timeline is to be created during practical experience, in conjunction with the theory. This is what Latouche means when he speaks about the Rs as steps: *“in practice - fortunately - these steps constantly collide and interact with each other, which makes it possible to predict change in a progressive manner, managing transitions that are not taken into account by the theoretical scheme.”* (Latouche 2009:45, our translation). In each and every one of these Rs, or actions, we find another R – that of **resistance** (ibid:58).

Levels of resistance

Paul Ariès (in Mosangini 2007:6) distinguishes three levels of resistance where the de-growth movement needs to act. The first one is at the level of personal resistance (voluntary simplicity). The second is that of collective alternatives which allow the invention of new forms of lifestyles that can be generalised. The third is the political level of resistance, meaning debates and collective decision-making.

5.4 De-growth as a local utopian project

Relocating is understood as a central pillar within de-growth and reintroduces the old formula of the ecologists; “think globally, act locally” (Latouche 2007:1). According to Latouche (2006:4), these suggestions of an alternative society are only possible via a utopian project, the construction of an alternative society. This utopia involves global thinking but the realisation of it should start in the local context.

Bioregions

Something that has united several authors is the idea of bioregions (among others Raimon Panikkar and Murray Bookchin (Latouche 2006:6, 2007:3)). Such a region could be more or less rural or urban. A bioregion consists of a collection of ecologically sustainable local and territorial systems, and could include of a city of cities or a city of villages. Paul Ariès (in Latouche 2007) points out the importance of cultural diversity; *“We should not only preserve the variety of regional seeds, but also that of the diverse ways of being in the world.”* Furthermore, relocating should first mean to reach alimentary self-sufficiency and then economic and financial self-sufficiency. However, the self-sufficiency would not have to be complete, it could still be possible to trade/exchange goods between regions, given that this exchange is mutual and not based on the logic of productivism. Self-sufficiency in renewable

energy should also be achieved, according to the regional environmental potential. Thus local shops and businesses ought to replace large supermarkets, since these larger businesses have squeezed out the small local ones and thereby destroyed much of the social network. Economic decision making needs to be done regionally and a bioregional currency is needed (Latouche 2009:63-65).

Overall, regionalisation would mean greater sustainable production and consumption, less transport, less dependency on multinationals and credits and above all less vulnerability. Regionalising and reinserting the economy into the local system would help to save the environment, which after all is the bedrock of the economy.

Bottom-up change

Latouche (2007) further holds that the realisation of local democratic initiatives is more realistic than that of a global democracy. Hence he believes that the changes need to come from below, because it would be impossible to overthrow frontally the domination of capital and the economic powers. Thus Castoriadis, among others, holds (in Latouche 2009:119) that there is a need for a democratic project if ecology is not to be used by authoritarian regimes as a neo-fascist ideology. Thus Latouche (2006:6) claims that cultural diversity is the only way to achieve a peaceful coexistence.

5.5 Summary of the de-growth ideology

The objectives of the de-growth ideology is a socially and environmentally sustainable society, which cannot be reached by technical solutions, but by political or personal ones. However there is also need for profound philosophical and cultural changes of our societies. The supporters of de-growth criticise the strict economic and monetary values which dominate our societies, the ones that turn people and nature into the pawns of business. The great challenge of the de-growth project is to learn to produce value and happiness under the limitations of material and energy consumption, and to spread the idea of voluntary simplicity. The question, however, is not about creating one concrete alternative society, de-growth is about breaking away from the kind of life and society which is incompatible with the limits of our planet, in order to find new ways of social and economic organisation and socialisation.

Latouche has summarised some possible ways as to how to achieve this necessary change in his circle of the eight Rs. Relocating, which constitutes one of these Rs, is a central pillar within de-growth. There is a need for relocation in order to create convivial and autonomous societies which are ecologically sustainable. The creation of bioregions seems to be a possible way towards these de-growth societies, where people are more connected to the local and to each other. Hence the utopia of de-growth involves global thinking but the realisation of it should start from below, in the local context, where what Latouche calls a real democracy of the cultures can flourish.

6. The ideology of the eco-village movement

6.1 The eco-village movement

The eco-village movement and the founding of many eco-villages in Sweden is an offspring of the intentional communities and revolutionary environment of the 1960s, which were based on much the same critique towards growth society and the economic system. However the eco-village movement is organised through concrete actions and has over the years spread globally (Norbeck 1994:21-23). In Sweden, the first attempt at an eco-village was made as a project at the University of Gothenburg in 1974. This theoretical project then inspired the founding of the first Swedish eco-village, “Välsviken” outside of Karlstad. The village was never completed, but it was a starting point for the Swedish eco-village movement (Norbeck 1994:23-24).

6.1.1 The Global Eco-village Network and Gaia Trust

One of the most cited and globally known definitions of an eco-village comes from Gaia Trust and the Global Eco-village Network, GEN (GEN homepage 2009-06-02). Gaia Trust, a global network active within the eco-village movement, was created in 1987 with the ambition of providing good examples of “*what it means to live in harmony with nature in a sustainable and spiritually-satisfying way in a technologically-advanced society...*” (Jackson R. in Norbeck 1994:12). Gaia Trust has the philosophy that the planet is, and should be regarded as, a living organism (Jackson H. 1998). It is closely connected to GEN, since Gaia Trust is the main initiator of the global network. Gaia Trust requested Diane and Robert Gillman to research and list the best eco-village practices in the world which could be a common base on which the scattered networks of eco-villages could grow and cooperate. The report was finished 1991 and became the inspiration and motivation for the creation of GEN 1995. The Global Network used the definition of an eco-village proposed by the Gillmans, “*...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*” (GEN homepage, Jackson H. 1998).

Human scale incorporates the social part of the term and means that an eco-village should be small enough to allow all the residents the possibility of knowing each other by name. The size is suggested to be in the range of 50 to 200 people (Norbeck 2004:12-13). This creates security for the residents and the feeling of belonging.

A Full featured settlement is a society which can fulfil the needs of its citizens. It does not mean total self-sufficiency, but rather a society that can provide work, food, education and goods, such as tools and basic materials. GEN emphasises the possibilities of trade and cooperation between eco-villages which are geographically connected, which means that they envisage some specialisation in the villages (Norbeck 2004:12-13, GEN homepage). Hence they promote the creation of bioregions. A bioregion is here explained as a geographical area where several eco-villages are connected and constitute a larger body.

Healthy human development means the importance of mental, physical and spiritual health both at an individual as well at a community level. In focusing on values such as spiritual development, community, cooperation and preventive health care instead of material accumulation and competition, the people in the community will be able to grow both as individuals and as a collective.

The last part of the definition concerning the ability of eco-villages to *successfully be continued into the indefinite future* emphasises the importance of sustainability from a long-term perspective. The way of living in eco-villages should be possible for everyone on the planet (Norbeck 1994:13).

GEN aims to encourage sustainable villages and settlements around the world with the vision of: “...a planet of diverse cultures of all life united in creating communities in harmony with each other and the Earth, while meeting the needs of this and future generations” (GEN homepage). By giving the people a local context and the opportunity to influence and act politically it aims to bring people closer to each other and to nature, reconnecting them to their land and becoming an alternative to environmental degradation and over-consumption (Jackson H. 1998).

6.1.2 Folke Günther

Another definition and criterion comes from the Swedish system ecologist Folke Günther. He points to problems in modern society of ill-health of both people and nature, and the excessive use of resources. He argues that eco-village living is a solution to these problems. Günther emphasises the recycling of nutrients, preventing harmful emissions to lakes and waters. Setting the focus on eco-cycles⁶ means creating and obtaining sustainable eco-systems through the recycling of nutrients. The eco-villages should be sustainable from a long term perspective and sustainability should be assured for larger parts of the Earth’s population as

⁶ from the Swedish word *kretslopp* translation Norbeck M. 1998:13

well as for future generations (Günther 1989:14). To achieve this, a community must fulfil some basic conditions and obtain certain resilience. These basic conditions are, according to Günther, *energy independence*, *technological independence*, *social stability* and *ecological elasticity*. *Social stability* is obtained by keeping the community small, with a population of around 100 to 200 people. People of all ages should be represented to give the village a dynamic social life and a healthy demography. It is necessary for the village to share a common understanding and respect for other people and democracy. This prevents people from being excluded or neglected by the decision-making body (Günther 1989:18).

Technological independence means that people in the village should specialise in different trades. However some chores need to be done collectively for the sense of community and belonging. Technical devices should be simple enough so that the residents in the village know how to use and repair them.

Ecological elasticity signifies resilience in the system. There needs to be a diversity of crops, animal-life and vegetation, so that nature has the ability to adjust according to climate changes and other disturbances.

6.2 The shared vision of an eco-village

The definitions above should not be regarded as absolute definitions of what an eco-village is. Since the structure and function of each eco-village is much dependent on the local context, the term will have different meanings, both theoretically and practically, in different cultures and communities (Jacksson H. 1998). However, from the definitions presented, a few main characteristics can be found. The utopian vision of an eco-village can be divided into three dimensions: the social, the ecological, and the spiritual dimensions. Even if one of the three may be more important in the initial stage, an eco-village needs to look to all three dimensions in order to realise full sustainability (Jackson R. 2004).

6.2.1 The social dimension

The social dimension looks to the size of the village to make sure that that all residents feel empowered and safe. All residents should feel included in the decision-making process having the possibility to influence the way society is being managed. The community provides a sense of belonging and is a place where people feel supported and responsible to their neighbours (Günther 1989 & Jackson H. 1998). Günther speaks of this as *social stability* and GEN as *human scale*. The community should integrate marginal groups where everyone is

given the opportunity to live a complete life regardless of age. Because of the limited size of the village and the emphasis on local production, cars are not vital and can, if needed at all, be parked outside the village (Gaia Trust Webpage). In the creation of bioregions, goods and services not provided by one village can be provided nearby in one of the neighbouring eco-villages. This further minimizes the use and need for cars and transport systems which increases the sense of tranquillity and security in the village by slowing down the pace.

6.2.2 The ecological dimension

The ecological dimension envisions a society in harmony with nature, where nature plays an important part of the physical and psychological health of the eco-village residents. This does not mean that an eco-village cannot be located in a metropolitan area. However, if it is, it is of great importance to introduce nature and plants to the urban environment. The ecological aspect emphasises the importance of eco-cycles and sustainable use of resources. The villages should strive to produce as much food as possible, and the building materials should be mainly local and ecologically produced. Eco-cycle design also signifies recycling of nutrients. In using the theory of the ecological footprint, living in an eco-village should mean not using more resources than is sustainable, given their reasonable distribution. This includes having energy systems adapted to the local context and minimising the use of fossil fuels. Regarding these aspects, eco-villages share a respect for nature in protecting biological diversity (Gaia Trust homepage, Jackson H. 1998:10).

6.2.3 The spiritual dimension

With the change of values, towards inner spiritual development instead of material accumulation and competition, residents will feel more complete and satisfied as individuals. Instead of producing and consuming material goods, people will engage in arts, dancing, music, praying and celebrations (Gaia Trust webpage).

6.2.4 The utopian goals of the eco-village movement

The ideology and the vision provided serve as guidelines or goals for the movement. The aim of the eco-village ideology is to promote a stronger involvement and commitment on the individual as well as on the collective level. In letting the residents and local environment decide the outline of the organisation of the village, the community will become adjusted to its inhabitants and to the environment and local context, creating a harmony with nature and people. In regarding these aspects, the eco- villages aim to obtain sustainability and social and

environmental well-being. The long-term goal is to influence change in society. In doing so, the hope is to solve some of the problems which exist in our society today, such as environmental degradation, fossil fuel dependency, segregation, and human illnesses created by stress, depression and the feeling of anonymity. The change will signify a bottom-up revolution, where individuals themselves choose to live a simpler life not only because the scarcity of resources demands it, but because it will add value to and enrich their lives. The revolution will therefore be voluntary and calm, resulting in a peaceful transition towards an alternative society.

7. Analysis

7.1 Comparing the ideologies of de-growth and the eco-village movement

In this chapter we will compare the two ideologies in order to answer our first research question – ‘What are the main features of de-growth ideology and eco-village ideology, and to what extent do they agree with or differ from each other’?

We will analyse and compare the ideologies according to the circle of the eight Rs.

Re-evaluating and re-conceptualising

De-growth, as well as the eco-village movement, want to create alternatives to our stressed society and the economic system based on mass consumption. In terms of strategies, they both stress the need for change of values and lifestyles.

Spirituality is an important pillar for the eco-village movement, something that the de-growth ideology does not mention. However **re-conceptualising** and conviviality is expressed by de-growth, which means developing the inner self instead of focusing on material accumulation and competition. In a convivial society, being is more important than having, and there is need for consciousness about the limits of society. According to the eco-village definition, spirituality is also understood as being a part of nature, to realise that there is a need for limits in order to live in harmony with nature, which we are very much dependant upon. Thus de-growth shares the vision that nature and the biosphere constitute a greater system which humans are dependent on and have to respect. It is however clear that spirituality, interpreted as a greater force which could help unite people and nature, and emphasised by the eco-village movement, is not expressed within de-growth.

Furthermore what de-growth ideology speaks of as convivial societies could be compared to what Gaia trust speaks of as “human scale”, a society which stresses the sense of community and where people know each other. Ivan Illich’s convivial society points in the same direction and tells us that we need to find the lost links in society and create new social networks where cooperation is favoured instead of competition.

Redistributing

There is a close link between de-growth and eco-village ideology when it comes to ecological sustainability and the concern of nature and future generations, speaking in terms of the

ecological footprint. They share the opinion that the lifestyle of western society today is unsustainable and based on an unequal share of resource extraction and use. Hence they both aim at creating solidarity societies based on equality in terms of resource use, even though the eco-village movement does not emphasise global politics and unequal exchange as de-growth ideology does.

Relocating and restructuring

Both ideologies argue that downscaling and relocation is of great importance in order to reach sustainable societies, meaning a shift from global to local production. When it comes to strategies, de-growth ideology as well as the ideology of the eco-village movement suggest the restructuring to local self-sufficient communities, defined by GEN as a “full-featured settlement”, which could be linked together to form bioregions.

Participatory democracy is something central for de-growth as well as for the eco-villages. De-growth speaks about autonomous societies where all citizens have an equal chance to participate in decision-making when it comes to management of resources and common goods. The eco-village movement also underlines the necessity of giving people political influence in order to bring them closer to each other and to nature.

Reducing, reusing and recycling

This means primarily reducing the impact on the biosphere of the effects of our production and consumption. This is something that the eco-village movement intends to do both in their focus on eco-cycles and a simpler lifestyle. Furthermore there is an agreement on the fact that a reduction of working hours is needed.

Resistance

De-growth ideology is about social change based on a range of diverse individual and collective actions and policies. The ideology of the eco-village movement is an example which stresses the individual as well as the collective possibility of change. In promoting simpler lifestyles – voluntary simplicity – the eco-village ideology seeks to influence the individual’s resistance, and also on the collective level by building communities, where social movements are to be seen as an important force towards change. Through the creation of GEN, as well as the building of alternatives to growth society, resistance on the political level is also present.

Cultural diversity

Furthermore, the eco-village movement is an example of the slogan expressed within de-growth; “think globally, act locally”. The aspect of cultural diversity is expressed in GEN’s vision, meaning that it is the local context and people which shape the organisational structure of the village.

Conclusion

De-growth ideology and the ideology of the eco-village movement are similar in most aspects. They both envision a socially and ecologically sustainable society. We find the largest difference between the two concerning the spiritual aspect. Spirituality is something highly present and important in the eco-village movement. It is partly this spiritual force that, according to the eco-village movement, will motivate people and form the glue to bind them together to lead a simpler life. The spiritual aspect could to a certain extent be understood as the conviviality expressed in de-growth ideology.

Another difference between the two ideologies lies in the R of redistribution. The eco-village movement focuses mainly on smaller local communities and bioregions without further discussing larger global trade relations or global justice aspects. This difference lies not in opinions or in ideology per se, but rather at the level the two ideologies place their emphasis. De-growth and the eco-village movement do not intend to shape a universal model in addition to the economic model based on growth and development. They hold the same view of the importance of dialogue between theory and practice, where theory functions as a guideline, but without becoming strict dogma.

7.2 Case studies

In this chapter we will present our three case studies. We will present the ideological basis on which the villages were created as well as the actual situation in each village in order to answer our second research question – ‘What is the ideology of the eco-villages in practice and what is achieved in practice’?

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world. Indeed it is the only thing that ever has”- (Margaret Mead in Jackson H. 1998).

7.2.1 The eco- and atelier village Skärkäll

Our visit to Skärkäll took place on a sunny spring day in April. It was quiet, and a couple of horses and one or two of the residents could be seen. Skärkäll eco- and atelier village is located in a valley, close to Gerlesborg's school of art in the municipality of Tanum. The valley is surrounded by trees and located in a rural, sparsely populated area.

The village has from the beginning been closely connected to Gerlesborg's school of art. The planning of Skärkäll started in 1989 with the motivation of providing a cheap, resourceful environment for creative people (Lanne 2006). There was a lot of activity around the school at this time and people from different fields of science, art and other interests came to the area. News of the village spread fast.

The economic association, that came to be the base of Skärkäll, was founded in 1991. It took five years to develop the building plan for the project. The respondents stated that the process of making a local plan was protracted, requiring a lot of work, discussions, and a great deal of patience and effort. But it was a process which allowed the residents to get to know each other on a deeper level. As one of the respondents expressed it; "*The process led to new insights about human nature*" (Skärkäll 5, our translation). In the centre of the valley, there is a barn and a red cottage. Originally, the residents planned on making the barn a communal house with activities and workshops, as well as a place to hold meetings and parties. This has not happened and today it is mostly used for storage. The cottage is being used as a preliminary house for newcomers and for visits. The criterion was set from the beginning that those moving in to the village were to be creative people. Today, nine households are living in Skärkäll year round. Some of them work in the neighbouring communities and others work from home or live on governmental support such as social security or pensions (Skärkäll 1, 2, 3).

There is a co-op connected to the village called Bottnafjordens cooperative. Not all the villagers are members and not all members live in the village, but the idea at the beginning was to provide the village with local, organic produce every day, in the spirit of the motto "Food, Meetings, Possibilities, and more" (Bottnafjorden co-op homepage, our translation).

The Ideology of Skärkäll

The purpose of the village was, as mentioned, to create a cheap environment for artists. The ecological aspect of living with a small ecological footprint was soon added to this and came to form the base for the village. The idea was to build a community based on values such as

solidarity, justice, and respect for other people and for nature (Skärkäll 4, 5). All land was to be owned and managed collectively. Self-sufficiency was one of the basic ideas, and there was land put aside for farming, and the surrounding woods would provide fuel for heating. Skärkäll 4 and 5 viewed the project in the beginning as “...*a step into the future*”, and they believed eco-villages would become the norm, rather than an alternative way of living. The people interviewed all agree that the motivation for living in Skärkäll is based on the search for a sustainable alternative to mainstream society. Skärkäll 3 explains it like this, “*In general, the people moving here are self-aware with the desire to minimise their costs. There is a balance between the artistic and the ecological aspects. They walk hand in hand*” (Skärkäll 3, our translation).

The Ideology in practice

Some of the people we talk to show great disappointment in how the ideological aspects have been realised, or as they say, not been realised (Skärkäll 4, 5). We noticed during our interviews a great difference in ideological motivation, not so much in beliefs as in the strength of commitment. The strong principal motivations have faded, and today there is a problem within the association, since no-one wants to take on the organisational responsibility (Skärkäll 1, 4, 5). At times the differences in ideology and motivation have caused conflicts. Some of the people no longer speak to each other, certain subjects are being avoided and the village meetings often end in tensions (Skärkäll 1, 3, 4, 5). None of the interviewed felt that the village has turned out the way they thought or wanted, and often the process of living together has been harder and more time-consuming than they had imagined. As one of the residents put it: “*The fact that not much is happening with the collective has disappointed many people. At the same time, it is a place with many different individual visions and this is problematic.*” (Skärkäll 1, our translation).

The idea of the land being under collective ownership was one of the things that was hard to put into practice. One reason for this is that many members had to own their lots to be able to take out bank loans to build their houses. Today only one household is renting their land. Even if some communal activities continue, the collective is something that has become less apparent with time. According to one of the residents; “*Life came in between. There is just no time for it*” (Skärkäll 1, our translation). The use of cars is also something that has changed over time. Today most households have their own car and commute to work in the surrounding societies, which contradicts the original idea of a community without cars.

All houses have urine separating toilets and the village has its own sewage system that was designed with dams to filter greywater. Faeces is used as compost to a small extent on the cultivations, and the urine is collected. Suggestions have been made to build wind power stations in order to become self-sufficient in energy, but this has not been developed further due to lack of funds and difficulties in agreeing on the plans. A few of the houses have solar panels and a part of the heating is done with wood from the surrounding forest. All the households except for one are connected to the power distribution grid of Tanum. The majority of the houses are connected to internet and the village is by no means cut off from the rest of society. Skärkäll 1, 2, and 3 believe that it is not possible to live outside society today, as it was before. But as Skärkäll 3 put it *“There are however certain qualities we want to keep here, such as wildlife, flora and fauna and clean air”* (Skärkäll 3, our translation). *“Especially the tranquillity and silence”* (Skärkäll 2). Another aspect that the interviewed feel is important and which characterises Skärkäll is the feeling of security. *“We do not lock any doors here, the feeling of security is important.”* (Skärkäll 1, our translation). *“People know each other and feel comfortable visiting each other spontaneously, I very seldom feel lonely, even though I live alone.”* (Skärkäll 2, our translation).

A couple of attempts have been made with larger scale cultivations but these projects have not been successful and have been put to rest due to lack of commitment and time (Skärkäll 1, 5). There is however a wide interest in farming in the village and many households have their own kitchen garden and cultivate vegetables for the household (Skärkäll 1, 5). There seems to be hope and desire for an increased self-sufficiency regarding cultivation and energy production.



*A house in Skärkäll,
photo taken by the authors*

7.2.2 Rydebacke

The eco-village Rydebacke lies about forty kilometres east of Gothenburg, in the municipality of Ubbhult. Located in a forest area close to a larger lake, the village is in a peaceful setting, well hidden and surrounded by trees. Nearby you can see the cows grazing from the neighbouring farm Gunnargård. Rydebacke is the home of about 30-40 people and it is well visited by media, tourists, students and people from other eco-villages. The economic association Linden, one of the three associations that make up the organisational part of the village, was founded in 1991 and had at that time four members. This small group of people had the idea of creating an ecological community close to Gothenburg. It turned out to be hard to find suitable land close to the city, and when the land in Ubbhult was found they decided to stay and build the village in cooperation with the farm Gunnargård (Rydebacke homepage). The idea of the eco-village was not well received by all neighbours and the group had problems getting permits to build and settle down. These problems resulted in increased costs, among other things. It was decided that a new road had to be built which turned out to be an expensive and time-consuming procedure. The road was finished in 1995 and then the building process could start.



*A house in Rydebacke,
photo taken by the authors*

The ideology of Rydebacke

The principal idea was much like an eco-village described by Folke Gunther. In working together with a farm, the ambition was to create an eco-cycle system in order to reduce the ecological footprint. This would be done by the farm providing food to the village and the village returning urine and faeces from the households back to the soil as nutrients. According to one of the residents, there were never any thoughts of total self-sufficiency (Rydebacke 2)

as many people in the village had jobs in the city that they planned to keep. However, some of the residents had the motivation to produce and act locally. In order to become less vulnerable as a village and more ecologically sustainable, plans to become more self-sufficient in electricity by using wind power were put forward (Rydebacke 2). The desire to strengthen democratic rule in the village was also very much present, as were, to a certain degree, plans to develop the village spiritually.

Independent thought and the possibility to act as an individual have been important from the beginning, even though some of the residents had a stronger ambition than others to grow as a collective. According to Rydebacke 2, even though a common ideology or political basis may not have been explicitly stated, setting the good example of sustainable living and developing democracy has been influential on society as a whole. The residents shared from the beginning the criticism of mainstream economics and growth society. They also shared an interest and commitment to the environment, even if this commitment was directed in different ways.

The ideology in practice

Among the villagers, recollections of the prevailing ideology at the moment of foundation are markedly different, and it is therefore hard to say which original ambitions have been realised and which have not. Some view the village as a successful project that has fulfilled its ambitions. Others regard the project as a failure and feel disappointed at the way things have turned out (Rydebacke 1, 2). The respondents stated that the shared interest in, and care for, the environment had faded throughout the years through lack of motivation. However, in general the people moving in have an environmental interest and the collective ethos is still present. The residents know each other and feel safe in the neighbourhood. The majority participate in collective activities, such as work on the common property and, to a lesser extent, on the farm. However, for those commuting to the distant city, there is a price to pay, both in terms of wasted hours, and environmental degradation.

Decision-making in the village is done by majority voting. There is an agreement to respect everyone's opinion and consider them as far as possible. According to the respondents, this works more or less like the method of consensus (Rydebacke 1, 2).

The residents have attempted to develop and use a local currency, called the "Rydisar". The idea was that the village would exchange goods and services with the farm, in order to become less dependent upon the common currency and economic system. This did not work

since they were never able to get the circulation needed in the system, where everyone functioned as both providers and consumers contributing to the circulation of the “money” (Rydebacke 1).

The ambition of creating a closed local eco-cycle with Gunnargård farm has partly been achieved. The system is not entirely closed, but the farmer removes the raw sewage from Rydebacke and most of the people in the village buy vegetables and milk from the farm. There are many aspirations for a more sustainable and self-sufficient lifestyle but the residents seem to have difficulties in finding the time to pursue these dreams. According to Rydebacke 2, everyone could do more, but noted that a different lifestyle would be required to achieve these dreams. Many ideas and projects such as greater dedication to the farm, as well as developing a local trade market, remain as just hopes and dreams. *“The ideological side of the project, to build an alternative society and a network of alternative villages was more active in the beginning, today everyone is busy with their private lives. This can be regarded as a failure, or one can just accept that achieving personal dreams of marrying and settling down are stronger.”* (Rydebacke 2, our translation). Despite this, the respondents felt that it was easier to realise their ecological ideas and be more environmentally conscious in Rydebacke than in the rest of society. They concurred that it was a relief to live in the village and not to have to defend their actions or environmental commitment as they would feel obliged to do in the city. In the village, the residents inspire each other to use ecological techniques and practices (Rydebacke 1, 2).

On the question whether they regard their eco-village as a sustainable alternative to the growth society, the people we interviewed are not sure. Rydebacke 1 responded: *“It is a good alternative since it opens up the debate. It cannot be seen, however, as a driving force to a more sustainable society in general.”* (our translation).

7.2.3 The eco- village in Lilla Krossekärr

The eco-village in Lilla Krossekärr is one of the more recently founded eco-villages in Sweden. It is located on Orust, an island on the west coast, in a beautiful hilly setting with the houses looking down over an open landscape towards a lake. The village is flanked by pine and spruce forest, and there is an abundance of meadows and pastures. Its south-facing position allows both protection from the wind, and the possibility of using solar power. The land is suitable for cultivation and pasture, while the surrounding forest provides material for building and energy. The nearby lake provides both fish and fresh water, and could also be

used for recreational purposes. In general, the area has the perfect conditions for self-sufficiency. Lilla Krossekärr 1 stated that it was the beauty and great features of the place that kept people in the project through the long struggle and many conflicts during the planning process.

Today there are 14 households in the village, out of a planned total of 17. The decision that the house lots would be sold and owned privately, and that the farming land and pastures would be collectively owned, was taken early.

The ideology of Lilla Krossekärr

The history of Lilla Krossekärr started around the year 2000 with four people coming together discussing and envisioning an alternative to the society of consumption. The motivation was to create the best of societies (Lilla Krossekärr 2), a community that was ecologically responsible, that developed democracy, and was a revolutionary force to change society as a whole. The village was to provide community living, while respecting the residents' privacy. There were many ideological motivations for joining the project in Lilla Krossekärr, but the core group shared a sceptical view of the economic system. Even though this was not something they regularly discussed, it was something that formed an ideological glue that kept them united. From the very beginning, there was a strong motivation to be an outreaching village that would influence mainstream society through workshops and media, and by setting a good example (Lilla Krossekärr 2).

The ideology in practice

At the beginning all decisions in the village were made with the method of consensus. This method was in fact used as an instrument of power, where a few people used their veto power to block every decision which did not follow their personal agenda. The disagreement concerning consensus almost ruined the project. In the end the group decided to shift to the method of majority decisions, which is the method used today (Lilla Krossekärr 1, 2).

The idea of reducing costs and living self-sufficiently was strong from the beginning, as the residents would not be dependent on paid work. This would allow time to work in the garden, develop the common areas, and still leave time to enjoy life and prosper as individuals and as a community. However, the strong regulations set by the municipality of Orust meant that the residents had to plan carefully to develop systems that were one hundred percent eco-cycle

adjusted. A new road also had to be built which required more resources, time and money than planned. The resultant rising costs caused the departure of some of the people; some feared it would turn out to be just another suburb with economically privileged people, while others left because of the lack of funds or ability and will to borrow. The ideas of self sufficiency seem to have differed between the people in the village. In the end, most of the residents took out loans to buy their land and to build on it, which made it impossible for them not to take paid work while they paid off the loans. Combined with the time-consuming building process of the private houses, little time was left to contribute and care for the common areas and activities. The ideological ideas and motivation seem to have been much stronger and much more outspoken in the planning process than in practice. According to Lilla Krossekärr 2, there was a stronger *us* as being a revolutionary force to change the society in the beginning. The unifying political vision of the project has close to disappeared.

However, a smaller permaculture project is being realised and there are plans for small scale farming. The market garden is still to be implemented as are the communal sauna, the barn and a common dock. The possibility of working in the village has not happened, and it is not something that the respondents envisage in the near future. Some regard this as a failure since it means that the village will be dependent on commuting, and that self sufficiency cannot be achieved. Even though some express the wish to work more in the village and follow through with their dreams of cultivating and realising social projects, they are not willing to give up their regular jobs, even if they did have the chance to do it.

The people we interviewed had different views on many things in the village, but they shared the hope that once the houses are built, people will have more time to care for the common good instead of the private. They also regarded the project as a good example of an eco-village and of a sustainable society. Even if they admitted that there was still a lot to be done, they believe they have succeeded in creating a community where people know each other and help each other to minimise their resource use with an eco-cycle adjusted, environmentally friendly system (Lilla Krossekärr 1, 2).



*View from the hill in Lilla krossekärr,
photo taken by the authors*

7.3 Comparing the theoretical ideologies with practice

In this chapter we will compare and discuss eco-village practice with the ideology of de-growth and the eco-village movement. This will answer our third research question – ‘To what extent do the ideologies of the eco-villages in practice agree with the ideology of de-growth and the eco-village movement’? And our fourth research question – ‘What are the difficulties in realising a sustainable society’?

We will in this analysis use the Rs of Latouche as well as the three important aspects of eco-villages presented by the eco-village movement the social- ecological -and spiritual dimension.

In the previous chapter, we reached the conclusions that the two ideologies have a lot in common. Therefore, when speaking about the ideology of de-growth and the ideology of the eco-village movement, we will from now on refer to them as the theoretical ideologies.

7.3.1 The social dimension

The eco-villages we studied all share the aim of creating alternatives to growth society by creating a simpler, communal way of living which promotes harmony between people and with nature. They share the same critical view of the economic system and growth society as

the theoretical ideologies. Even if this is not the primary motivation for everyone living in the eco-villages, it is something that permeates the lifestyle chosen by the residents and the organisation of the villages. These ideas are expressed clearly, and the principle of “less is more” is of great importance to the theoretical ideologies as well as in practice.

However, the eco-village residents are strongly influenced by the values dominating growth society, such as individualism and competition, which makes it difficult to settle down in a community where the opposite values are emphasised. The different bases on which the villages have been created, where sharing, democracy and cooperation are important features, have resulted in time consuming processes in developing socially functional systems, in order to reach an acceptable balance between the collective and the private. These processes have been marred by conflicts.

In order to avoid conflicts or as a result of unresolved conflicts, it seems that the collective aspects have been given less importance resulting in a stronger sense of individualism than intended from the beginning in all the three of the studied villages. Private life, daily worries, the time consuming process of building a house and the commuting back and forth to work leave little time for the collective. It was emphasised in all three eco-villages that the collective should not be a burden and they are therefore very careful not to set any regulations or rules which force people to participate in discussions or work.

There was however a frustration expressed in all three eco-villages about how little the ideological values were discussed and how few of the communal plans actually came to fruition. Since Lilla Krossekärr is fairly new and in the process of construction, there is still hope that this will change with time, when private practical issues have been taken care of. However the same hope exists in Rydebacke and Skärkäll, even though they have existed for more than ten years longer than Lilla Krossekärr.

The weakness of the collective can be seen as a setback when viewed from the perspective of the two theoretical ideologies since they emphasise communality and cooperation as important factors in order to build an alternative society. Therefore, this is something which is expected to increase human well-being, instead of creating conflicts and quarrel.

Democracy

The villages studied are small-scale communities with the opportunities to develop a participative democracy, where the residents feel empowered and included in the decision-making and organisation of the village. This has been the principal thought in all three of

them. In Lilla Krossekärr, the model of consensus was shown to be dysfunctional since it granted a few people the power to abuse the system. As one of the villagers in Lilla Krossekärr put it; *"a consensus model could only work in a group consisting of only collaborative and humble people, but such a group does not exist...it is a utopia...it collides with people in reality"* (Krossekärr 1, our translation). All three villages are today using decision by majority, even though with great care not to disrespect a resident's right to be heard.

In general, the villagers seem satisfied with the way their democratic system functions today, but it is something that they have had to work hard on and have put a lot of effort into. According to Lilla Krossekärr 1, *"Democracy is a ripening process, it requires people to know, understand and listen to each other."* (our translation). As a consequence, when new people have settled down in all three villages, it has been quite hard and tiring to negotiate the ideological standpoints over and over again (Skärkäll 2).

However in sharing difficulties, handling conflicts, debating and discussing, the villages have reached democratic systems suited to them, and adjusted to the residents and to the locality, something emphasised in the theoretical ideologies. However, the villages have in many ways turned out to be more or less like any other rural Swedish village, and some of the residents are to a certain extent people wanting no more than the good life in the country, without any real desire for social change.

Takis Fotopolus, a political philosopher and economist, argues that the eco-village examples are too scattered and without any political programme. He claims that we can hardly speak of it as a movement which could grow into a powerful force, and further states that the eco-villages are not to be seen as a way towards social change (Fotopoulos 2002). The villages do not strive to cut themselves off from the rest of society but rather to create an alternative within it. This then hinders radical change since being a part of a society also means having to follow the regulations and standards postulated by it. On the other hand, the fact that the eco-villages are not completely isolated does not have to be necessarily negative for the eco-village movement. In being incorporated in the rest of society the ideas and practices can be spread more easily.

Ted Trainer, an academic in favour of the eco-village movement, argues, in line with de-growth ideology, that in order to spread the idea of voluntary simplicity, people need to become more aware of the need for simpler lifestyles. Hence, the importance of spreading

information and convincing people that our unsustainable lifestyles are impossible. He holds that the only way to do this is by setting examples (Trainer 2002). This might be so, because it would probably be easier for people to act if there were tangible alternatives presented and not just critique. However not even all those living in eco-villages seem to be convinced of the importance of *radical* changes in lifestyle.

From the beginning, the idea in all three of the villages was to live more self-sufficiently in order to keep their living costs down. This would free time to work in the garden, cultivate food, develop the common areas and leave time to enjoy life and prosper as individuals and as a community. But with the costs of land rising due to the infrastructure needed, as well as the costs of the construction of houses, the residents were forced to take out bank loans.

Therefore, many are tied to monthly payments, which mean they are dependent on having a paid job and then commuting what are sometimes considerable distances. This leaves little time to concentrate on those values which inspired them in the first place. This time issue is a problem expressed in all three villages. Furthermore the problem with bank loans also meant some had to leave Lilla Krossekärr at an early stage which caused a loss of diversity of people in the village. In Skärkäll all but one lot are privately owned, despite the original idea of the collective ownership of land. In Rydebacke, it was decided from the beginning that all house lots were to be privately owned. Today the villages are highly dependent on the rest of society. However it is important to point out that there are still people who express the will to engage more in becoming self-sufficient in order to reduce their working-hours and the dependency on growth society.

7.3.2 The spiritual dimension

A characteristic emphasised by the eco-village movement is that of spirituality. However none of the three villages takes a clear spiritual standpoint. In practice, spirituality appears to be something that the residents have discussed from time to time but it has never had any greater influence on daily life or the organisation of the village. It can however be argued that spiritual values are to some extent kept and promoted among the residents through their closeness to nature.

The **re-evaluating** and **re-conceptualising** emphasised in de-growth ideology can also be said to be partly realised in practice. Many of the residents emphasise social values instead of material accumulation. As Lilla Krossekärr 1 expresses it, "*If there is quality of life, there is no need to buy stuff. Quality of life, the feeling of safety, working in one place and cultivating*

minimises the need for unnecessary stuff...you consume less if you feel better” (our translation). This could be compared to conviviality expressed within de-growth ideology. Skärkäll 1 further argues that the possibility of creating a home and being a part of the organisation of the community enables people to live out their dreams.

7.3.3 The ecological dimension

The three villages no longer regard themselves as having expertise in ecological construction or ecological engineering techniques, even if, to some extent, they have eco-cycle systems (Rydebacke 1, 2, Lilla Krossekärr 1). They do not produce as much food locally as they could and there is little chance that the villages could be even close to self-sufficient in terms of food supply, due to lack of general interest. Some people grow food crops in their own gardens and may intend to do it on a larger scale in the future. On the other hand the eco-village residents strive to consume mainly locally produced food and goods. Furthermore, there is no self-sufficiency in energy supply, even if some people, in Skärkäll for example, are still hoping to build a wind power station in the future. The dependency on cars is considered a problem for many of the residents.

Although the villages are far from self-sufficient, there is an awareness of the importance of reducing the human impact on nature. However, there is no agreement as to the extent of this reduction. The villages have reduced their ecological impact in several ways despite not being perfectly environmentally sustainable. Therefore, the three villages are striving for a lifestyle which includes the three of the Rs in Latouche’s circle, being **recycling, reusing and reducing**.

The creation of bioregions

Another important aspect is that there is hardly any networking or exchange of ideas between the eco-villages. They all regard themselves as individual projects pursuing their own ideas and none of them regard themselves as a part of a larger movement. Instead of creating what the theoretical ideologies call bioregions, the villages today are highly dependent on the growth society on almost all levels. Therefore, the villages do not fully live up to the R of **relocating**, meaning, in the eco-village ideology, creating a “full featured settlement”. For this to be possible there is a need for a greater structural change of society as a whole. This is also true for the Rs of **restructuring** and **redistributing**, since the chance of fulfilling these Rs is limited for the eco-villages without the creation of bioregions.

8. Final conclusions

By comparing the two theoretical ideologies with each other using the Rs formulated by Latouche, we have answered our first research question – *‘What are the main features of de-growth ideology and eco-village ideology, and to what extent do they agree with or differ from each other’?* We have seen that eco-village ideology has many features in common with de-growth ideology and corresponds well to the strategies proposed. They share the same utopian vision and goal of a sustainable, healthy planet and society. Some differences can be found in the aspect of spirituality highly emphasised by the eco-village movement.

In studying real examples of eco-village living, we have answered our second research question – *‘To what extent do the ideologies of the eco-villages in practice agree with the ideology of de-growth and the eco-village movement’?* In doing so we have learnt that there are great differences between the ideological visions on the theoretical level and on the practical one. The spiritual dimension discussed above has not been a factor of real importance in any of the villages visited. Even though there is some personal interest, it is not something that the residents share with each other. It is however hard to say if the villages would be more or less successful or different if the spiritual aspect had been more emphasised.

Our assumption that the difference in time between the creation of the three villages would result in significant differences, has been shown to be wrong. We found similar patterns in all the villages, even though Lilla Krossekärr is still in its initial phase. However, it could be argued that all the villages are still under construction as it is an ongoing process.

In practice, however, the ideologies have changed over time in the villages. In the beginning, the ideological beliefs were very similar to the theoretical ideologies, all striving towards the same goal, along similar lines to Latouche’s eight Rs. In their aim for minimal resource use, they practice the Rs of reducing, recycling and reusing. When it comes to their motivation for a change of values they aim to implement the R of re-evaluating, as well as the R of re-locating in their emphasis on local production and consumption. They still draw critical comparisons with growth society in their attempts to realise utopian projects of sustainability and harmony between people, as well as between people and nature. These initiatives represent examples of voluntary simplicity and local, participatory democracy.

In the presentation of our case studies we have also answered our third research question – ‘*What are the difficulties in realising a sustainable society*’? It has been shown that, realizing these dreams and plans mentioned above in practice, has turned out to be hard. Reaching ecological and social sustainability takes time and work. A difference in strategies and long term goals results in compromises, which makes it very hard to implement radical reforms, such as becoming more self-sufficient and less dependent on growth society. Thus some of the residents do not even opt for real social change and the villages are in many ways no different from any other average rural village. They do however use fewer resources, at least in some ways, and they feel safe in the neighbourhood and help each other out, something that is not so common in other villages or cities. On the other hand, due to the dependence on growth society, the time and will needed to develop the initial ideas is hard to find. The residents end up living much of a split life with one foot in the eco-village and one in main society, wanting to live in one but not wanting or being able to separate from the other. The lack of autonomy and cooperation between the eco-villages and the inability or lack of interest in creating bioregions mean that the villages cannot, thus far, be seen as a bottom up revolution, as pictured by the ideological visions. They are rather to be understood as examples of voluntary simplicity, a possible alternative lifestyle, which is sustainable to a great extent, however far from complete. Therefore the villages can be seen as examples to learn from, teaching us what is important when striving towards a sustainable lifestyle. We believe that it is important that alternative projects do not completely cut themselves off from society. What should be promoted is rather a continuous dialogue with the growth society in order to promote change and setting good examples by the way of living. As Rydebacke 2 puts it, “*One should not underestimate the power of the example.*” (our translation).

However if we are to consider the eco-villages as examples that might be used as learning experiences, it would help if the political will to spread the knowledge existed in the villages. According to the people we interviewed, there are no such activities. Even though it might have been the original plan, it has been left to one side. Eco-villages have received some attention in Swedish media, but most of it has been about the technical performances in ecological engineering (Rundkvist 2009:1), something that the growth society is adapting without hesitation. The incorporation of eco-village practices in a modern economic system could easily result in absorption, where some of the ideas of sustainability are reinforced, leaving the more radical part of the project harmlessly undermined.

In order to avoid the villages becoming little more than dormitory communities, jobs need to be created by putting greater emphasis on self-sufficiency and active life in the villages. It seems there is a great possibility for this to be developed in all three villages, yet the will and conviction are lacking. We believe this to be a very human factor; it is not easy to change lifestyle completely, because it might involve the feeling of being an outsider, when you cut yourself off from activities and ways of being considered as “normal” in society. The norms of society are very much inculcated in each and every one of us and not easily rejected. This is also true when it comes to the problems of collectiveness; we are born and raised in a society based on individualism and competition and this is not something that can be changed by a simple stroke of magic. This might be why the villages have gone through so many conflicts, which has led to a faded ambition of collectiveness.

Latouche as well as Castoriadis argue that in order to change society it is necessary to look at the cultural aspects. They argue that a society can only change when it adopts a different set of values. The eco-villages can be seen as examples of collectives striving towards social systems based on different values. However this change results in collision, between people as well as within people, which can be hard to manage.

The practice of eco-villages can be understood as an attempt to live up to the utopian picture of a sustainable, ecologically healthy society, influenced by de-growth and eco-village ideology. It is only natural that the practice will differ from the utopia, since the utopian vision does not include all aspects of practical implementation. In keeping and nurturing the utopia while learning from experience, reality can come closer to the utopian ideal. Bearing in mind the lack of alternative lifestyles, in times of crisis this utopia may come to serve as a possible strategy and a solution to the problems of society. According to Friberg, our choices in times of crisis are dependent on how prepared we are, and even the most radical utopias can become reality. When enough people see the utopia as a solution to their problems, the utopia can become reality (Friberg, Galtung 1986:28). This is why it is important that alternatives such as eco-villages exist, and that they hold on to their utopian vision. This vision is given life by putting it into practice, in the same way that life is also inspired by the visions.

However the resistance to growth society must be present on all levels: the individual, collective, as well as the political. Resistance is needed in different forms, represented by

several alternative strategies. We have studied eco-villages as one example out of many. They cannot by themselves constitute a sufficient strategy towards a de-growth society.

Both de-growth and eco-village ideology argues that a bottom-up revolution, consisting of local, democratic alternatives, is more realistic than confronting the economic system head-on. Thus it facilitates a serene transition towards a stable and healthy society. Ted Trainer (2002) further argues that the time is not ripe for the eco-village movement to confront the economic system, because the eco-villages are still in the process of experimenting. He argues that this process will take time, but it is necessary because it cannot be done in any other way than by learning from experience. Instead of being judgemental and rejecting any attempts which do not fully live up to the utopian picture, we should learn from both the positive and negative aspects in order to continue the important dialogue between theory and practice.

Moreover, if values are to be changed by social interaction, there is also a need for a continuous dialogue between people. People will continue to have differing opinions and ideas, and therefore the development of collaborative and social skills might help to cooperate better. This may in turn reduce the pain of depending more on people than on inanimate objects. Carrying out the difficult task of a cultural revolution takes time, to paraphrase Latouche. We might not have all the time in the world, but by encouraging experiences we might spread the word faster than we know.

As we mentioned in the introduction to this paper we have seen catastrophes caused by growth society, in forms of the environmental crisis as well as the current economic crisis. Along with the discontent followed by the economic crisis, extremist forces are gaining more support. As several de-growth theorists hold, there is a need for a convivial and democratic project if ecology is not to be used by authoritarian regimes as a neo-fascist ideology. However even though humanity is facing hard times, these catastrophes might bring something positive along, as explained by Latouche: *“The pedagogy of catastrophes boosts the necessary change of the imaginary, which is fundamental for the resurgence and triumph of alternatives.”* (2004:87, our translation).

Hence, popular discontent can also be turned into constructive action, persuading people of the possibility of a world beyond that of growth and development. In these circumstances, the eco-villages might provide genuinely important learning experiences.

Further research

In order to come to more general conclusions, it would be of interest to investigate more examples of eco-villages and in different cultural contexts. Eco-villages also need to be created in urban environments, transforming our current metropolitan areas to sustainable units. Eco-village living in urban environments might mean different opportunities and difficulties, which is why it is interesting to do further research on this issue. Another important aspect is that of conflict resolution. The villages we have studied have all had problems with collaboration and conflicts. To create functional and healthy societies it is necessary to develop good conflict resolution skills. More research is necessary to find functioning methods for the villages to overcome these issues. Thus research on villages which emphasise the spiritual dimension might be of interest, in order to investigate whether this dimension might play an important role in the functioning and well-being of the villages.

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Interviews

Skärkäll 1, 2, 3, 4, 5

Krossekärr 1,2

Rydebacke 1,2

Appendix

Questionnaire

Name, age

1. Time in the village

- When did you move here?
- Why?

2. Occupation?

- Working/retired/other?
- How much do you work?

3. What were the initial thoughts behind the creation of the village?

- Does the village have a shared vision/goal?
- What is the village striving towards?
- Has this changed over time?

4. We have read about different definitions and criterions of eco-villages at Gaia Trust, Boverket and Folke Günther

- Have you heard about them?
- Is it something you have used in the creational process of the village?
- Have you used any other criterion or definitions?

5. How did the project start and what has the process been like?

- Problems/obstacles?

6. What have the reactions from the people in the surrounding area been like, during and after the creation of the village?

7. What is the relation with the municipal council like?

- Positive/negative?
- Changed?

8. How are decisions made in the village?

- Has there been any problems concerning decision making?

9. Do you have a shared strategy to solve conflicts if these were to occur?

10. Are there any set criterions of who can become a member of the village?

- On what basis?
- How many? Upper limit? Why?

11. Is self-sufficiency something that you strive towards?

- Is it possible?

To what extent is the village self-sufficient?

- Energy/electric power
- Sewer system/water
- Food: How much is produced locally and how much is bought locally produced? Are there any mutual guidelines of how the food should be produced?
- Common agriculture, private plots? Worked by farmers from other communities?
- Work?
- Reparations of machines and other equipment?
- Recycling?

12. According to several definitions of eco-villages the importance of eco-cycles is emphasised, is this something you try to promote in this village?

13. How is the social life organised?

- In what ways do people help each other out?
- Child-care?
- Work in the garden, tending the land?
- Cooking together?

14. Are there any general ideas about the amount of working hours, is it something that you have discussed in the village?

- What were the initial thoughts concerning this issue?

- Have these ideas been realised?

15. In general, how many commute to work and how many work in the village?

16. What is your opinion about the mainstream belief in growth and development?

- Is there a shared opinion regarding this issue in the village?

17. What are the greatest differences in your life now compared to what it was like before you moved to this village?

18. Is there something that has turned out differently from what you had expected it to?

- Is there any general opinion about this in the village?

19. Do you consider it easier to live more ecologically in this village?

- If so, why?

20. What possibilities do you see in the future of this village?

- Development?

21. Do this village have any contacts with other village?

- If so, how?

22. Are you connected to the global eco-village network (GEN)?

23. Do you regard eco-villages to be a sustainable alternative to growth society?

24. What possibilities do you see for eco-villages in general and in the future?

25. Are there any general ambitions to spread the knowledge from the eco-village and this type of lifestyle?

- Are there any strategies for how this could be done?

26. Are there other ways of living that could complement or replace the eco-villages?