

Camphill Ecovillages

Presentation for the International Communal Studies Association Conference 2001

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During the 1930s a group of intellectuals began meeting regularly in Vienna. They were inspired by Anthroposophy, the teachings of Rudolf Steiner, and how these could be put into practice in the fields of health and education. Because these people were to create one of the largest communal living organisations in the modern world, it would be appropriate to record the names of some of these founders: Karl and Tilla Konig, Alice and Peter Roth, Anke and Thomas Weihs, Trude Amann, Barbara Lipsker, Marie Korach, Carlo Pietzner, and Alex Baum.

As the political situation in Europe became more threatening, they decided they had to move. France, Cyprus and Ireland were all considered in their turn, but the Anschluss in 1938, when Nazi Germany invaded Austria, forced their hand. Intellectuals and Jews could no longer stay in Vienna and for a while they were dispersed throughout Europe. Karl Konig went to London, and stayed in contact with the rest of the group while he looked for a place where they could gather once more. This remarkable group of people came together again near Aberdeen, to continue with their work.

They moved to Kirkton House in the Dee Valley in the beginning of 1939 and began taking in handicapped children. When the Second World War started some months later, the group was registered as enemy aliens and all the men were interned on the Isle of Man. The women carried on and a larger house was found and they moved there to Camphill House on June 1st 1940. A few months later the men returned, and the community then comprised of some 30 people of which just less than half were handicapped children. It was then understood to be the first private institution for such children in the country. The founders saw themselves as political refugees working with social refugees.

During the 1940s, the community grew by acquiring additional houses and properties in the Dee Valley: Heathcote House, and Newton Dee Estate with 170 acres. By 1949 there were 180 children living in 5 houses, and a Camphill Seminar Course was begun for young people who wanted to learn about Curative Education.

The 1950s saw the Camphill Movement grow and develop, reaching out to England, Ireland, Germany, Holland, South Africa and the United States. For the first decade and a half the work of the Camphill Houses was centered round educating and caring for handicapped children. In the early 1950s, Konig began to think about more extended communities, based on work in farms, gardens, and workshops, where handicapped adults would live together with co workers in extended family situations. This was first put into practice at the Botton Estate in 1954, a property given to the Camphill Movement by the Macmillan family, and the first Camphill Village as we know it today was established. Botton Village created a model which has been the basis for Camphill for nearly half a century. Today, Botton contains well over 300 residents in four clusters spread throughout the valley leading up to the North York Moors.

The 1960s saw this change from schools for children to villages for adults happening throughout the Camphill Schools, and a consolidation and reorganisation of the Camphill Movement. It was divided into 6 regions, and Camphill House in Scotland was no longer the headquarters, but of course remained a focal point. During this decade villages were established in Norway and in Germany.

During the decade of the 1970s new villages were founded in Finland, France, Brazil and Botswana. Eurythmy schools were established in England and the education of co-workers was strengthened through the publication of books and periodicals, and an increasing acceptance of Curative Education and Social Therapy as a serious profession. Social Therapy can be seen as a way of creating situations where handicapped people and others (so called normal!) can exercise their educational potential in society. Karl Konig died in 1966 and did not live to see the establishment of the Austrian Camphill Village Liebenfels in 1976, which marked a return to the country which the original founders had left in 1938.

By the end of the 1980s the Camphill Movement consisted of over 70 communities in a dozen or more countries. During this decade most of the founders had passed away, and the movement had come of age, being run by 2nd or even 3rd generation co-workers. New developments were taking place in care for the elderly, and the setting up of the first urban communities. Government regulations, outside consultancy and the question of professional staff qualifications became increasingly relevant, and brought the movement closer to the «establishment». During this time, care for the mentally handicapped by state institutions became more enlightened, and the pioneering work done by the Camphill Communities began to make itself felt, at least in those western European countries where the movement was well developed. The «establishment» also came closer to Camphill,

With the fall of the Berlin Wall, and the collapse of the Eastern European and Soviet Communist regimes, a vigorous expansion eastwards took place. These were to a large extent the result of contacts and initiatives from the Norwegian Camphill Movement. In Norway the first village was established in 1966 at Vidarasen and by the beginning of the 90s the community had grown to about 150 persons, with five other villages spread throughout the south of the country, each one with between 30 and 60 inhabitants. They had established broad cultural and social contacts, and a solid economic base. When the possibility of establishing eastern villages arose there were many who were in a strong position to take up the challenge. During the 90s villages were established at Pachla in Estonia, Woitowcka in Poland, Svetlana in Russia and Rozkalni in Latvia. Another village is now being established in Czechia and there is talk about possibilities in Siberia and Kazan. Altogether a total of nearly 100 people are living in these places.

During the 1970s and 80s, after a great deal of media attention in the 60s, large numbers of alternative communities were formed in the countries in which Camphill was operating. The relationship between these and the Camphill Communities would form an extremely interesting field of study, but falls somewhat outside the scope of this presentation. I have a strong feeling that many of the features which attracted people to alternative communities can be found in the Camphill Network, and will come back to this when I come to sum up.

Throughout the world today there are about 100 Camphill Communities in over 20 countries. They are organised into seven regions, and a number of magazines and newsletters keep information flowing between them. Regular meetings are held within the regions, and there is a great deal of internal movement of co-workers and residents from one community to another. There is a strong element of internationalism, and even in my own small community of about forty people we counted thirteen different nations represented at a recent cultural gathering. In addition to the communities that are formal members of Camphill, there is a good deal of contact with similar communities, especially those that are also inspired by Anthroposophy and working with handicapped people.

The group that established themselves at Camphill House in 1939 were attempting to put the ideals of Anthroposophy into practice. This is a Spiritual Science based on the books and lectures given by Rudolf Steiner from about 1900 until his death in 1925. Anthroposophy proposes the physical world as a development and outgrowth of the spiritual world, and presents a scientific method of analyzing this spiritual world. Anthroposophy was in turn inspired by Theosophy, eastern mysticism and the traditions of Gnosticism, the Rosicrucians, the Alchemists and the world view expressed by Goethe.

Steiner's lectures and books had encouraged people in many professions to develop their fields according to the Anthroposophical world view. The most well known today are probably the Waldorf Steiner schools in the educational field, and Bio Dynamic agriculture. These concern themselves with the soul development of the child, and the spiritual aspects of soil and plant growth respectively. In addition, a great deal of work has been done in the fields of architecture, art, music, dance, health, nutrition and such technical developments as waste water treatment and food quality analysis.

The social aspects of Anthroposophy are most developed within the Camphill Villages, where the threefold division of society is regarded as a basic tool for modelling the life and structure of the community. This threefolding was presented by Steiner in lectures during the last part of the First World War and the years that followed. He based his thoughts on his study of the development of European society over the preceding centuries. In England, he saw the industrial revolution as the modernisation of economic life, leading to demands for fraternity, the development of trade unionism and labor party politics. In France under the French Revolution he saw a change in the legal life leading to demands for equality, and in Middle Europe (later unified to become Germany) changes in the spiritual life leading to demands for liberty.

Steiner traced how these three great ideals, of Fraternity, Equality and Liberty had been corrupted by the rise of nationalism and the development of the centralised nation state. König further traced how this led to the insanity of Nazism, fascism and state communism after Steiner's death. This threefolding was presented by Steiner as a way of rebuilding Europe after the disaster of the First World War, but his ideas did not gain credence, and the ideas were largely dormant until taken up by König in building up the Camphill communities in the 1940s and 50s. König took as his starting point the Anthroposophical idea of the spiritual basis of life on earth:

"A state, a people, a community, a village or a town is not merely the sum total of all the people living there but... is a higher organism. It does not consist of flesh and blood, however, but is created and formed by soul and spiritual powers."

Karl König, lecture at Fohrenbühl, 29th of March 1964.

It is the analysis of this spiritual organism that concerns me here, and I would like to present it from a number of angles:

Spiritual	Legal	Economic
Creed	Judiciary	Goods
Education	Police	Production
Art	Laws	Distribution
Research		Trading
Capital		

The slogans of the French Revolution

Liberty	Equality	Fraternity
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The three legged stool (Findhorn Conference 1995)

Individual	Social	Ecological
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The three pillars of Camphill

Comenius	Zinzendorf	Owen
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As a mirror of the the plant world

Root	Leaf	Flower
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The development of the human being (first three years)

Thinking	Speaking Feeling process	Walking Metabolic limbssystem Will process
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Rosicrucians, Alchemists, Paracelsus – processes of nature

Salt process	Mercury process	Sulphur process
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These three spheres are always with us, they are not determinants of how we should or might behave, but an attempt to make sense of our every day lives and how we come together as human beings. One of the insights of this "Social Anthroposophy" is that we are at heart social creatures, indeed, it would be impossible to think of ourselves as cut off from the rest of humanity. The few examples we have had of individuals reared in the wild by animals and having had no contact with other human beings

show us that though they might physically be human, they have very few of the features which we use to differentiate between animals and human beings.

We worship and philosophise, educate, create music and art in the **spiritual sphere**. Here we need our freedom to develop ourselves.

We decide amongst ourselves, who is right and who is wrong in the **sphere of laws** and rights, and need to regard ourselves as equals, with equal rights.

We work, produce, buy and sell in the **economic sphere**, and need the fellowship (brotherhood and sisterhood) of looking after each other, not necessarily as equals, for clearly, some have more capacity and some have greater needs.

We have seen how the three slogans of the French Revolution fit into this threefolding, each one being the appropriate condition for a specific sphere. At the conference which launched the Global Ecovillage Network (GEN) at Findhorn in 1995, it was suggested that a healthy ecovillage rested upon three legs, and that it was the balance between the three which gave the community its stability and sustainability. These three «legs», the **individual**, the **social** and the **ecological** also represent a path of development, from the individual outwards, to our fellow individuals, and ultimately to the world surrounding us. As can be seen from the table above, they also fit in with the threefolding.

Konig was very inspired by three figures from history, and has often referred to them as the «Three Pillars of Camphill». Johann Comenius (1592 - 1670) was convinced that peace and understanding between people would be the result of a greater wisdom that individuals could strive for, and that this be based on a regard for the spiritual nature of others. Ludwig Zinzendorf (1700 - 1760) was instrumental in forming the Moravian Brotherhood, and was convinced that community was vital in ones search for Christianity and a deeper spiritual life. This connection with the Moravian Brotherhood gives Camphill a link with todays Bruderhof and Hutterites. Robert Owen (1771 - 1858) is perhaps better known to those who have studied the growth of labour ideologies and social reform over the last two hundred years. He founded a series of communities in which members received no wages, and which have had a great deal of importance in inspiring other social innovations. These three personalities illustrate in a human way the three spheres of society, and often form the objects of study in order to deepen our understanding.

Finding patterns in the natural world, and using these to illustrate, explain and design our own needs is a process well known to those of us who use Permaculture as a design technique. Applying the same exercise to the structure and development of the human being can lead to greater insights into the social sphere. Karl Konig developed this in some depths in his lectures in 1964, and this has formed the basis for a great deal of study work within the Camphill world. It is quite usual for the villages to have extended study sessions, and work through texts in order to arrive at a greater understanding. This has the effect of raising consciousness on social issues, and ensuring that as the social dynamics create a continuous series of changes, these take place within a certain framework. For those who want to immerse themselves deeper into these speculations, Konig gives a good starting point with the alchemical processes of salt, mercury and sulphur. There is no doubt that further discussions and meditations will inspire yet deeper insights.

In the sphere of economics it is interesting to see how Anthroposophy and Marxism come close to each other, bearing in mind Marx's vision of a future society where each would produce according to his or her capability, and be rewarded according to his or her needs. This is a principle which has been taken up by the Kibbutz Movement, and has for most of its history and for most of its communities been one of the central pillars of its ideology. Anthroposophy has always distanced itself from the socialist tradition, emphasizing a more spiritual world view, and eschewing dialectical materialism. However, in the economic sphere there is no doubt that we can see a strong convergence between these two streams as ideology and philosophy are put into practice. To quote:

“In a community of people working together, the well being of the community is greater the less the individual worker claims for himself the proceeds of the work he has done and the more he makes these over to his fellow workers. Similarly he allows his own needs to be met out of the work done by others.” Rudolf Steiner. The Fundamental Social Law.

How do these ideals work out in practice, in the everyday life of a Camphill Village? Within the Camphill Communities most of us live in large extended families, co-workers (both long term people with their families, and young temporary volunteers) and villagers (mentally handicapped or otherwise in need of help), sharing our lives, our meals, our living rooms and bathrooms. There may be as many as fifteen people or more gathered round the dining table three times a day. Each house has its own budget, and is run more or less autonomously by a couple of responsible co-workers, the house father and house mother. In the morning and the afternoon everyone goes to work, in a variety of workplaces. In my community at Solborg Camphill Village in Norway we have a bio-dynamic farm, extensive vegetable gardens, a bakery, a weavery, a large forest for timber and firewood, herb growing and drying, and have just begun a cheese making workshop. Other villages have workshops which produce pottery, candles, dolls or wooden toys. I have eaten meals where the table came from the carpentry shop, the table cloth from the weavery, the plates and cups from the pottery, the candles (which are lit at every meal) from the candle shop, and virtually all the food is produced by the village, bread, milk products, jams, vegetables, herb teas, honey, meat and meat products. This self sufficiency is not an end in itself, but rather a way of saving money, and ensuring that each person is employed doing something that is useful to the village, seen and felt to be doing so. In many cases in mainstream society, mentally handicapped people are peripheralised and "looked after" and so denied an active and useful role. In the world of Camphill, every person has something to contribute, and feels self-worth even when fetching the milk or laying the table.

In addition to the work branches, there are the houses to be run, washing, cooking and cleaning. This is considered work, just as important as production, and the occupation of "housewife" or "house mother" is as vital to the well being of the community as any other profession. Everyone has a workplace, and each contributes something useful to the running of the village, according to his or her capability. Within this sphere no money changes hands, and work is seen to be something that is freely given within the fellowship, recognising that some people have higher capabilities than others.

The farms and gardens in Camphill Villages are always bio dynamic, producing food of the highest quality while nurturing both soil and wildlife. Generally the organic waste from the kitchens is composted, usually by a village compost set up. Horse transport is quite common, being very efficient and low cost at a village scale. Villages in England have pioneered waste water treatment using ponds, reedbeds and «Flow Form» water cascades. These are now standard in the Norwegian villages, and throughout Camphill worldwide. Buildings, both communal halls and chapels, and the usually large residential houses, are largely constructed out of natural materials, and avoid the use of poisons and plastics as much as possible. However, there is still much to be done in the raising of consciousness, and in building, transport, recycling and energy use.

It is for this reason that the **Bridge Building School** was started at Solborg Camphill in Norway. The idea of the bridge was fundamental. On the deepest level, we want to create **a bridge between the heart and the hand**, between the world of spirit, where ideas arise and creativity is stimulated, and the world of materials, where our hands fashion our surroundings with a variety of tools and materials. We also strive to create **a bridge between east and west**, between young Norwegian people and their counterparts in eastern Europe, Latvia and Russia. Recognising that Camphill Villages are ecovillages, we want to create a link between the rising ecological consciousness and life as lived in Camphill by teaching Permaculture and creating strong links with the Norwegian Ecovillage Association, «Kilden». Our main educational program is a five month course in ecological building, focusing on straw bale construction. This program was first offered in the year 2000, and twelve students spent two months in Rozkalni Village in Latvia, building a strawbale house, and incorporating many other ecological features such as a «kakel» heat retaining wood stove, passive solar heating, mud and log walls and earthen floors. The program is being offered again this year, and the focus will now be on a small strawbale family house needed at the Waldorf School connected to Svetlana Village in Russia. In 2002 the course will be expanded to a full ten months, and in cooperation with the Norwegian Clay and Straw Building Association there will be a great deal of emphasis upon practical ecological building training.

In addition to this, short courses for co workers and villagers are breaking new ground, providing a serious educational element to village life. During the first months of this year about a hundred people have attended courses at the Bridge Building School, in Introduction Courses for young coworkers, Story Telling for Villagers, Permaculture, and professional training for Curative Education and Social Therapy. This part of the School will be developed and expanded in the future, to include bio dynamic farming, nutrition and other subjects. As the Camphill Movement matures into the new century, internal changes are taking place, partly as a response to changes in the outside society, and partly as a result

of internal dynamics. The Bridge Building School sees itself as **a bridge between the past and the future** also, and offers a place where change can be looked at and discussed by co workers and other interested parties. Some of these changes will be concerned with the world of ideas, and these will in turn be translated into physical changes in house building or workshop construction.

I have called this presentation Camphill Ecovillages with a good reason. Within the Global Ecovillage Network, Camphill Villages have taken a very low profile, and also here, within the ICOSA, this is the first time that I know of that there has been a presentation of the Camphill Network. This network is an attempt to build an alternative to mainstream society, based upon deep thinking and a serious analysis of society's faults and how they might be repaired.

I would suggest that Camphill Villages are communes or intentional communities in the classic sense, attempts to deliberately create an alternative to mainstream society, and influence that society positively by these attempts. I would also suggest that these communities are true ecovillages, and would score higher on the GEN profile, both socially and ecologically, than many ecovillages within the GEN network. Many of the characteristics which attract people to alternative communities and to ecovillages feature in the Camphill communities. There is a great deal of self sufficiency, we eat home grown, organic food, to a great extent we recycle, compost and treat our own waste, and we attempt to integrate a spiritual world view into our everyday lives. We strive to create fellowship in our economic life, and a flexible equality into our social sphere. In short, we offer an alternative way of life. As we respond to changes in our surrounding society, we question the way we do things, are willing to experiment with new ideas, and are in need of new people. I would like to close this presentation by opening a discussion on how there can be more integration between established ecovillages, alternative communities and the Camphill network.

Sources

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Jan Martin Bang grew up in England where he was active in the Cooperative and Trade Union Movements in the 70's. He moved to Israel in 1984 and was a kibbutz member for 16 years. Since 1993 he worked on environmental projects within the Kibbutz Movement. This took him on extensive travels within the region, teaching Permaculture courses and visiting ecovillages in Egypt, Turkey, Cyprus and the Palestinian areas. He has now moved to Solborg Camphill Village with his family, and is part of the teaching team at the Bridge Building School.