



UiT The Arctic University of Norway

Faculty of Humanities, Social Science, and Education

Peace and Conflict Transformation

Everyday Peace in the Ecovillage: Unity and Strength through Diversity

Allison Van Roekel

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This work is dedicated to all the ecovillage members across the globe pioneering peaceful and equitable environments for all beings to thrive.

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Abstract:

Peace and conflict studies can benefit from studying small, ordinary, peaceful communities, in contrast to focusing on outlier events of violence, conflict and war. As a peace from below approach, the ecovillage model offers insights on how ordinary people innovate new ways to build and sustain peace within a microcosm of society, focusing intensely on the local. The aim of this research is to compare the everyday peace practices in two ecovillages, one in the United States and one in Ghana, how aspects of class, culture and race affect these practices, and what transformations can be seen toward positive peace as a result.

Through nine semi-structured interviews with ecovillage members, similar everyday peace practices were discovered. Key findings suggest that in both ecovillages, developing social cohesion through a clearly stated purpose and meaningful daily social interactions, is most fundamental, while dialogue is the most versatile and transformational practice for deepening understanding and promoting peace. Embracing diversity as a benefit for all, helps to transcend histories of oppression and create unity. Narratives revealed stories of transformation of improved financial stability, personal development and unifying relations between groups.

Key Words: Ecovillage, Peace from Below, Everyday Peace, Conflict, Positive Peace

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1. Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Aim of the Study

Ordinary is significant. Small is beautiful. The field of peace and conflict studies has an increasing appreciation for the wisdom and knowledge of local and indigenous peacemaking approaches. On the micro level, regular people in everyday life practice peace all over the globe and are rarely noticed. Attention is much more often given to the outlier events of violence, conflict and war. Peace and conflict studies was born out of the suffering from such events, to understand what causes them and how to prevent them from reoccurring. But after decades of heavy focuses on top down international interventions into areas of conflict, there is a growing understanding that ordinary people living peacefully, whether they exist in a generally peaceful or conflict affected area, have a genius to the way they conduct their everyday peace within their own unique contexts.

Most ordinary people living peacefully in close proximity, have a loose connection to one another, anonymously passing each other by in daily life, and in conflict affected areas even purposely avoiding interaction. The focus of this study is on those who live intentionally together, in small communities called the “ecovillage”. Like a microcosm of larger society, these individuals come together to build a holistic, communal way of life based on similar purpose and values of sustainability. Existing all over the globe, ecovillage communities stand in resistance to national and international systems that create inequality and harm the environment and instead focus on local systems, seeking to live in harmony with others, and with nature. Diversity is also valued, and cultures are embraced, at least in theory, by its members. This research is about how ecovillage members practice peace in daily life to prevent and deescalate potential conflict, particularly when they embody a community with members from diverse backgrounds.

Originally, the intention of the project was to test the ecovillage model as an effective example of everyday peace, a concept developed to identify how ordinary local people practice peace in daily life (Mac Ginty, 2014), particularly in areas with racially oppressive histories. But in the process of exploration, it was discovered that everyday peace as a continuous process, need not be evaluated as a result of this project. Rather, discovering the stories and perspectives of the individuals was enough in itself to offer insights. Another discovery was recognizing how racially oppressive histories are unique to different individuals and ethnic groups and do not exist in a vacuum. They are intersectional, and are

affected by other diverse factors such as class, gender and culture. For this reason, the focus was broadened toward the aspects of diversity that came about in the data as important to the individuals, in the quest to create equitable and peaceful societies.

1.2 Motivation

My motivation for this research project stems from two meaningful personal experiences. The first was joining an artist activist group after the 2016 election of President Donald J. Trump. The group was seeking to lift voices of women of all colors, particularly in response to the rhetoric from the Trump campaign that heightened tensions around race, immigration and refugees. The dialogue among the leadership of the activist group was tense between black and white members as they sought to understand the complexity of the American racial landscape and the deep misunderstandings within it. Unfortunately, I felt troubled by the sometimes destructive, and frequently emotionally charged dialogue containing confusing usage of undefined terms and rhetoric that emphasized what divides black and white members rather than what unites us. I eventually quit attending meetings due to my lack of racial stress stamina, having never been exposed to this overt challenge to my racial bias and privilege. This left me seeking more answers on how local citizens can bridge the cultural divides between black and white people and create a more constructive dialogue.

The second motivational experience was spending five weeks volunteering at an ecovillage in Switzerland in 2019. In this place, I experienced a new type of open communication, where feelings are honored and processing your emotions was not a sign of weakness, but rather a respected and necessary sign of growth. All points of view were welcomed and cultural expression and contribution was encouraged. The many ways the ecovillage offered spaces, both figuratively and literally, to connect with myself, with others and with nature provided a healing environment for me.

Driven by these experiences, I began to explore ecovillage communities and the strategies they employ to create peaceful societies. Knowing that the ecovillage in Switzerland was part of the Global Ecovillage Network (GEN), a self-identifying network where ecovillages can present their profile on the website and participate in a global movement with others, my investigation began with their educational materials. I was inspired when I discovered how much peacebuilding is mentioned in the educational materials. At this point, I knew that researching the practices of these intentional communities could identify their innovative approaches as well as the challenges they encounter by embracing a diverse membership.

1.3 Problem Statement

The peacebuilding aspect of the ecovillage movement, combined with the motivational experiences mentioned, led to asking what can be learned from intentionally diverse ecovillages as a bottom up peace approach.

Ecovillages have been the subject of social researchers in past decades, but most recently with the growing consensus of climate change urgency, focus has been on the technical ecological sustainability practices, pulling attention away from the importance of social and cultural sustainability aspects, including peacebuilding skills, such as conflict resolution, collaboration and culture preservation. This is short-sighted, considering the most common motivation of ecovillage members to join are social in nature. In addition, recent findings from ecovillage research claim the social relationship aspect is essential for the movement to succeed (Hong & Vicdan, 2016; Losardo, 2016). This leaves a gap of current research regarding social aspects of the ways ecovillages approach sustainable peace. The ecovillage as a model of peace from below approaches is also underdeveloped within the peace and conflict studies field. Due to their openness and desire to contribute as demonstration projects, this growing movement is ripe with opportunity to explore innovations to creating and sustaining peace.

Positioning this paper was a challenge due to the fact that it was not motivated by war, violent conflict, or conflict-affected areas, and very few concepts and theories within the peace and conflict studies field led toward understanding generally peaceful societies. Peace studies is critiqued for historically having more focus on researching negative peace, the absence and reduction of war, conflict and physical violence than on positive peace, the negation of structural violence and creation of environments that meet human basic needs and fulfill their potential (Gleditsch, et al., 2014). The field of peace studies is often located and focused on areas of violent conflict and war and the interventions for these areas by powerful wealthy nations into developing nations. This research seeks to highlight the importance of also studying communities that are generally peaceful, though no community is void of some level of conflict. Everyday Peace, as a concept, was embraced in this research because it focuses on the small, the local, and the habitual ways that peace is maintained throughout the world (Mac Ginty, 2014). This is significant because empowering individuals, even on a small scale, contributes to the community peace as a whole. Another reason to study peaceful communities is because maintaining this peace is a process, as community members change, bringing new cultures, ideas and backgrounds. Peace must be continually promoted, as a

peaceful society can lose their intentions for peace. Their peacebuilding skills can weaken leading to a breakdown of peaceful practice, potentially ending with violence and destruction. It should not be taken for granted that the absence of violence and war is an indicator of the presence of peacebuilding skills.

Another gap in knowledge, is the application of the concept of everyday peace in the global north. It was originally developed by observing people in the context of deeply divided societies, often in the global south. Studying ecovillages situated in societies with challenges of different cultures interacting, and sometimes clashing, in the global north and the global south comparatively, has potential to provide useful subject matter to see how the values they collectively hold play out in reality in such different contexts. This knowledge can continue to demonstrate the need for context specific studies of peacebuilding on the micro level in order to inform peace operations.

1.4 Research Objectives

The main objective of this study was to explore the concept of everyday peace within a positive peace framework of two ecovillages situated in very different global and cultural contexts. It sought to discover what can be learned from their daily intentional, communal approach to peacebuilding in contexts that are generally peaceful, their attitudes toward conflict in general, and how they prevent and deescalate conflict when it occurs. In particular, because the chosen case studies intentionally embrace membership from diverse backgrounds, this research also aims to investigate how aspects of diversity such as class, culture and race effect their everyday peace practices or how they are perceived by the members. Special attention was given to local and indigenous wisdom that is shared, and how it is unique within the two settings. The last objective, was to explore the ecovillage members as local agents of transformation, standing in resistance to systems that create inequality and obstacles for development. This was achieved by inquiring about transformations that have taken place because of the ecovillage practices, either in the personal lives of individual members, or between groups, or in the broader community they are situated in.

1.5 Research Questions

In order to achieve these objectives, these research questions guided the direction of this project:

What are the everyday practices deployed by ecovillage members to avoid and deescalate potential conflict?

How are these practices effected by the diverse backgrounds of their membership in terms of class, culture and race?

What transformations can be seen from these practices toward a positive peace?

1.6 Outline for Thesis

This thesis contains eight chapters.

Chapter one orients this project with its original aim and motivation. The problem statement, the objectives of the study and the research questions are explained, as well as the why this research is important.

Chapter two first gives a historical background of the ecovillage movement, its motivations and development, as well as a review of research that has been conducted with it. Then, a contextual background is given for each of the case studies chosen for this project.

Chapter three provides a conceptual framework, explaining the choices for the concepts being operationalized in this research, and how they apply to the unique setting of the ecovillage.

Chapter four first gives an overview of the research design, methods chosen for data collection and analysis, and details of the process of these methods. Reflection on the part of the researcher, as well as ethical considerations and limitations are also shared.

Chapter five begins with a comparative analysis of the conflict cultures within the two case studies. Then, it provides an in-depth description of the themes identified by the data analysis of the everyday peace practices of the ecovillages.

Chapter six analyzes the ways aspects of class, culture and race affect the everyday peace practices in terms of how they are used, and how they are perceived by the participants.

Chapter seven provides narrative analysis of the transformations shared by participants of their personal lives, lives of others they have observed, and the community as a whole toward a positive peace.

Chapter eight concludes this thesis with a summary of key findings, implications for policy and practice, and a description of emergent issues that could be considered for future research.

Chapter 2 Historical and Contextual Background

In this section, I will provide the background to understand the origins, the development and the international role of the ecovillage movement. Each of the case studies are members of GEN, so the value system, mission and work of this network needs to be understood. Then, I will describe the context of each of the case studies chosen, including their unique geography, history and structural frameworks. How and why they were chosen will be covered in the methodology chapter.

2.1 The Ecovillage Movement: A Quiet Resistance

The Ecovillage movement and its focus can be seen as the community-oriented part of the *alter*-globalization or *anti*-globalization movement. It formed as a resistance to the negative consequences of under-regulated neoliberal and free market dominance that leads to exploitation of nature and increasing inequality from an ecological, economic, social and cultural perspective. With a decentralized genesis, its roots can be traced back to various experimental communitarian lifestyles in the 1960's and 1970's. Some were a result of counterculture movements in Western societies around issues of inequality such as civil rights, human sexual liberty, and protesting military operations, like the Vietnam War (Losardo, 2016). Others are traced back to innovations of co-housing developments in Denmark, seeking to make a more affordable way of living. (Jackson, 2004) Simultaneously, the movement was deeply connected with the early warnings given by environmental scientists and the birth of the sustainability movement. One of the most influential of these early works, was a book called *The Limits to Growth* (1974), a product of an interdisciplinary M.I.T. team led by Dennis Meadows. As the author summarizes, “if the present growth trends continue unchanged, the limits of growth on this planet will be reached sometime within the next hundred years” (Meadows, p.23). This warning was ignored by much of society because economic growth was booming for the wealthy, and appeared to be limitless, but it was a synergistic message alongside the ecovillage movement.

In contrast to many visible anti-globalization activists who protest in the streets, ecovillages are described more like a “quiet revolution” made up of spread out microcosms with a whole systems approach as an alternative to the capitalistic global systems (Jackson, 2004). They are small communities, between twenty to a couple thousand inhabitants. They can have urban, township and rural contexts. In the urban and township settings, ecovillages seek to make city life more sustainable or transition an existing village into an intentional sustainable

community, while the rural ecovillages seek to return to a simpler life in the countryside, ultimately creating new communities from the ground up. Renau (2018) uses the term “neo-rural” to describe this sector of the movement where individuals voluntarily leave their place of origin to create a new experimental community project.

The various intentional communities around the world in all their forms became a more formal and normative movement in 1995 with a key event, when Findhorn Community hosted a conference called, “Ecovillages and Sustainable Communities” which drew so much interest they had to turn away hundreds of potential participants. It was after this conference that the common term “ecovillage” was adopted by participants, and the Global Ecovillage Network was founded (Global Ecovillage Network (GEN), n.d.). GEN’s operational definition for ecovillage became:

An intentional, traditional or urban community that is consciously designing its pathway through locally owned, participatory processes, and aiming to address the Ecovillage Principles in the four areas of regeneration (social, culture, ecology, economy into a whole systems design) (GEN, n.d.).

Even though this formalization has developed and there is a stated definition, this does not mean the experiences of ecovillages are monolithic. Each ecovillage is unique in size, geography, levels of diversity in terms of class, gender, ethnicity or race, and also which values they tend to live out with emphasis. As GEN’s member base grows in geography, these values begin to look even more unique, taking into account cultural, ethnic and economic differences in these contexts. According to GEN’s 2019 Annual Report, currently, the network contains over 400 ecovillage communities, with five geographical regions called GEN Europe, GENNA (North America), GEN Africa, GENOA (Oceania and Asia) and CASA LATINA (Latin America). There is also a youth movement called NEXTGEN. Each of these regions appoint representatives in GEN’s General Assembly and Board of Trustees. Together, the GEN Board and General Assembly oversee its strategic direction and finances. It is funded with three main sources: Funded projects (50.1%), Social Entrepreneurship (9%), and Donations and Grants, a majority coming from the Gaia Trust (40.9%) (GEN, 2019). The Gaia Trust was developed to support more sustainable and spiritual futures, and chose to heavily invest in GEN for “...it felt that the ecovillage concept of building community goes to the very heart of the global crisis”. Calling upon each of us to make the imperative changes to our lifestyles, they acknowledge, “Ecovillagers are doing this very thing through personal

commitment, in spite of having very few resources and no help from their governments” (Gaia Trust, n.d.)

GEN’s influence has grown into a normative organization, legitimizing what is considered an ecovillage, versus other types of intentional communities. As it grows in number and influence, the organization has potential to diffuse its value system and ideals into many contexts. This is one reason why they are becoming of more interest to researchers from various disciplines, as the next section will outline.

2.2 Ecovillages as Living Laboratories

Though this movement is a quiet revolution, often unnoticed, GEN invites spectators to observe them as experimental demonstrations describing their member ecovillages as “living laboratories pioneering beautiful alternatives and innovative solutions”, (GEN, n.d.). Many social science researchers have approached the ecovillage to examine their validity as models to follow for sustainable living, and how successful and transferable their practices are (Wagner, 2012). Ecovillages are often experimenting on the cutting edge of sustainable practices with less restraints, due to their small scale. Nonetheless, as Hong & Vicdan (2016) point out in their exploration of the ecovillage, they can be construed and criticized as utopian, heterotopian, or manifestations of escapism. Upon deeper examination, they found that their lived experiences are wrought with tensions between their ideals and actual reality. Though they may idealize a harmonious lifestyle, it is clearly not easy to implement. As Cleary (2017) found in researching an Australian ecovillage, often members experience disillusionment when their romantic ideals and expectations are not met.

Ecovillages in rural settings idealize certain aspects of ancient and rural life from the past, seeking a simpler life, getting back to nature, hence the label “escapist”. But according to Losardo, (2016) from her ethnographic study of ecovillages, they should not be considered “idealist enclaves out of touch with reality”, but rather, communities that simultaneously practice ancient and traditional ways of life, but in a modern context with modern concerns. (p. 48). With their activism, they should not be generalized as passive but rather actively building and constructing their alternative lifestyle each day. Although they invite spectators, data analysis from this research will show tensions between privacy and security needs of the membership and allowing themselves to be observed by outsiders.

Despite all of their efforts to create alternative lifestyles, another area of tension stems from issues concerning class and elitism which are present within their modern contexts. For example, in order to create neo-rural communities, capital must be available to rent or purchase land, and this is only available to those with assets. After recent reflections upon class dynamics within the American “Dancing Rabbit Ecovillage”, Adkins (2018) noted concerns and questions including whether they impose white middle-class norms upon new members, such as how they handle conflict and express emotions. Other findings suggest that those who have a lower income are denied some of the luxuries other members have, such as the ability to take a vacation when the community feels claustrophobic, or shop at farmer’s markets because they do not accept food stamps. People of color in their setting also live with fear of interacting with the broader community, especially the police, because it is predominately white (Adkins, 2018). Mychajluk (2017) concludes that the power inequalities in the ecovillage undermine the sustainability lifestyle and resistance to capitalism and consumerism. Problems with class and inequality within the idealistic ecovillage community demonstrates two challenges. First, unless the community creates their own economic system, which some have achieved, they are not impenetrable to the systemic issues from their broader contexts. Second, sometimes class is developed in its own unique way within an ecovillage, although maybe not intentionally. This explains Hong and Vicdan’s (2016) conclusion that ecovillages have the characteristics of a utopian-heterotopian doublet, with tensions between their ideals and reality, but by processing them, innovate new technologies.

Concerns around elitism are also exacerbated when investigating the growing practice of GEN’s top down development into conflict affected areas, particularly in global south settings, which the next section will explore.

2.3 Intersection of Ecovillages and Peace Studies

Due to the multidimensional aspect of the ecovillage to solve modern issues, peace and conflict studies has intersected with the movement in research and practice. Partnerships between peace practitioners and academics have developed theoretical frameworks to communicate the intersection of these dimensions and peace work. This collaboration is encouraged by Esteves (2018), appealing to “transdisciplinary collaboration among scholars, practitioners and public institutions in the development of synergistic models of peace education that are multipliable, but context-sensitive” (Abstract).

In particular, ecovillages are of interest in diffusing models for peace education and as international peacebuilding agents. Peace education scholars view the ecovillage as a new place for an informal, practical “hands on” learning experience to teach solutions of social and natural regeneration. Verhagen (2014) promotes the idea that peace studies can use sustainable communities, including ecovillages, as a lens for envisioning and planning for a culture of peace, diagnose obstructions to it and prescribe solutions.

The Global Ecovillage Network as peace consultants is also being explored by peace scholars. A study of GEN’s influence in 2015 would suggest that the movement struggles to gain significance in the political realm for funding and policy change around sustainability (Kunze & Avelino, 2015). In more recent years, however, GEN’s Annual report shows evidence that its influence is gaining more traction with a pilot initiative called the “Ecovillage Development Program”, with the purpose of teaching an “ecovillage approach” to post-conflict and impoverished areas, and to consult national governments as well as other stakeholders how to implement the Sustainable Development Goals (GEN, 2019).

GEN is featured on the Partnership Platform on the Sustainable Development Goals UN website with clearly stated intentions of working together with “governments, UN agencies, businesses and other stakeholders to join us in developing and using an ecovillage approach to eradicate poverty, restore the natural environment, and ensure that all people’s basic human needs can be met” (United Nations, n.d.). The timeline of deliverables suggests it is active, but has not been updated in over four years, and no reporting has been accomplished.

This international role has prompted interdisciplinary researchers such as Esteves (2018) to investigate GEN’s contribution to theory as international peacebuilding agents in diffusing the ecovillage model into post-conflict construction, crisis response, and as a solution for internally displaced persons. In researching the first ecovillage construction in Palestine, for example, in partnership with Tamera ecovillage of Portugal, findings suggest that implementing the whole systems design faces many difficulties in communities facing recurring conflict, but even so, ecovillages can still be “agents of diffusion of regenerative technologies and strategic frames” (Conclusions, para. 2).

The interplay of top down, and bottom up approaches to the ecovillage model can cause some conceptual problems in studying the phenomenon. Though individual ecovillages are small, grassroots movements, GEN’s adoption and advocacy around the SDGs, and Human Rights,

and consultancy work could be seen as resembling liberal peacebuilding, installing universal values developed by elite across the globe. It is important to note, however, that GEN's roots advocate for peace from below approaches, understanding the importance of context-specific nuances in implementing the core values of regeneration, appreciating the autonomy of individual ecovillages, stating it "envision[s] a world of empowered citizens and communities, designing and implementing their own pathways to a sustainable future" (GEN, n.d.). A common theme within their stated mission, vision and goals is an emphasis on local approaches to the economy, decision-making, as well as preserving culture. (GEN, n.d.).

The focus of this project is on how individual ecovillages exhibit values and practices of peacebuilding. For example, in GEN's educational materials, a set of design cards meant to stimulate users to explore its holistic approach, include peacebuilding skills as part of social regeneration including: nurturing diversity, and creating an equitable and fair environment for all including access to health, healing and wellbeing, practicing conflict facilitation proactively, nonviolent communication, collaborative leadership and participatory decision-making (GEN, n.d.).

The daily work of these skills in practice must continue to be studied and understood as GEN's influence spreads into new areas, especially post-conflict re-construction. Studying ecovillages in peaceful settings is paramount if they are to consider diffusing it into other settings, as well as appreciating how these practices look vastly different based on its context, the history of the community, and its members. It is also important to recognize the need for reflection within the movement concerning issues around equity, social justice and diversity in which there is very little research to be found. The connection between the microcosms and macro level partnerships must be fostered, lest the movement lose sight of its origins. The two case studies being examined in this project offer such insights mentioned here and will be outlined in this next section.

2.4 Case Studies

Because this project has a comparative case analysis design, this section provides a contextual overview of the two case study sites, including their history, mission, and demographic makeup. Some dynamics of the broader context in which they are located will also be highlighted to appreciate the alternatives they offer to those who join.

2.4.1 Obribibini Peace Complex (OPC), Ghana

OPC is both a Swiss and Ghana based NGO, located in a small beach resort and fishing village called Busua in the Ahanta West District of the Western region of Ghana, and also leases farmland in Mankessim, approximately 144 kilometers west of Busua, in the Central region of Ghana. The organization was born out of a serendipitous joining of two journeys between a Swiss man who had spent many years living and studying in Ghana, and a local Ghanaian, who both envisioned a deeper, more meaningful interaction between white people and black people. This is reflected in the name chosen for the complex, “Obrobibini”, explained as a unity between words from the local dialect meaning, ‘white man’ and ‘black man’. Being a tourist destination because of its beautiful beaches, Busua attracts many people for holiday vacations, mostly European, and is a well-known hot spot for avid surfers. But the interaction between local people and visitors has not always been peaceful, as there are latent conflicts that are harboring beneath the surface that come to light through sometimes violent interaction. The two visionaries sought to transform this reoccurring pattern. This vision for unity, combined with a passion for sustainable practices, gave birth to the OPC concept. By 2017, the idea became a tangible project with the first land purchase in March of that year.

Their vision is now to “live in peace and harmony with fellow human beings and nature, regardless of ethnic origin, gender, age or religion” (Obribibini Peace Complex (OPC), n.d.). OPC envisions itself as a training center for people of all cultures and all economic backgrounds to have the ability to reach their full potential. Its main mechanism for this vision is training their members and visitors in sustainable agriculture, although they also concentrate in topics such as healthy nutrition and sports, herbal medicine, natural hygiene, waste recycling and renewable energy.

Their membership consists of both locals and foreigners with varying levels of engagement. The approximately twenty local members come from various regions of Ghana with a few exceptions from nearby countries, and are employed by the project as workers in construction, agriculture and one who supports the crew as a chef. Two local members also serve on the Executive Board that make high level decisions. The foreign members support the project in varying ways. The CEO, a Swiss man, is in Busua full-time, apart from periodic trips back to Switzerland, while others have traveled to Busua annually for consecutive years, staying for a

few months at a time to volunteer, conduct research, or intern. Prior to Covid restrictions, on average, approximately one hundred local visitors and one hundred foreign visit per year for short stays and about five volunteers, interns and students would come to work between two to four months at a time. Other foreign members offer support from a distance through donations, serving on the managing board or by offering transferrable talents such as web design, etc. Others follow the project and provide emotional support, encouragement and promote the project.

Though they are still in the early stages of building the training center, their progress is increasing rapidly as they employ more members and gain more supporters. They are not a fully integrated communal system yet, as there is enough infrastructure for members to choose to sleep on site, but currently most of the time, they stay in the nearby small village of Busua, where they interact during their time off and on the weekends.

The OPC project has potential to reverse inequalities and damage done to the agricultural economy of Ghana, albeit on a small scale. Under-development in sub-Saharan Africa is a recognized problem by Ritzer (2011), as the globalization of agricultural relations of production have served to disadvantage countries in the global south. An independent review of the World Bank's assistance to agriculture in sub-Saharan Africa, also found a significant lack of investment for decades by international donors including the World Bank (Independent Evaluation Group, 2006). This neglect has caused a brain drain of rural areas toward the urban areas (Ritzer, 2011). This project could renew passion and interest in agriculture for young Ghanaians, who are drawn to the financial prospects of studying other fields, such as law or medicine.

From a financial perspective, OPC can be viewed as a sustainable development project, where funds flow largely from donations and collections from Switzerland into the developing nation of Ghana. Foreign investments into farmland in Ghana is nothing new, but often the acquisition of land is on a large scale for the purposes of industrial farming and biofuel production, without the consent of local people, causing dislocation, dispossession and infringement on human rights (Schoneveld, 2017).

In contrast, OPC operates on a very small scale in direct partnership with local people and invites them to participate on an executive level empowering them to make decisions that will be in the best interest of those who inhabit the land. The clearly stated goal of the farm in

Mankessim becoming financially independent will allow for the dependency on Swiss funds to lessen and for OPC to replicate the model in another location. The three financial pillars of OPC are donations and collections, membership fees and funds from public foundations.

In terms of diversity, there is a clear class distinction between the local area, which on the OPC web-site it described as “a poor fishing village”, and those who come from areas of wealth to volunteer and support the project. Due to the project being in its initial building stage, the skills needed are professions dominated by men in Ghanaian culture. For this reason, the member employees are all men, except for one woman who cleans and prepares meals for the crew. Culturally, Busua is a diverse place due to flows of African migrants who move for employment opportunities and tourism, in which OPC has become an increasing influence. OPC members are Ghanaians from different ethnic groups, that include the local Ahanta tribe, but also those who have migrated from the eastern region. The remnants from colonial influences are still present, both in language and religion, creating a mix of local Traditional practices with Christianity and Islamic practices. This also creates a pluralistic environment with a hybrid of leadership and governance authorities.

This section presented the context for the case study of the Obribibini Peace Complex in Busua, Ghana. The next section will give the contextual background for the case study it will be compared with in the United States.

2.4.2 Los Angeles Eco-Village (LAEV), United States

The Los Angeles Eco-village is situated within the most densely populated neighborhood in the United States, in the north end of Wilshire Center/Koreatown and in East Hollywood in the city of Los Angeles. The birth of Los Angeles Ecovillage hales from a backdrop of two significant events; the LA Riots in April 1992, and two of the largest earthquakes in California’s history, in June of that same year. These two events caused the real estate values to plummet, which opened up opportunity for new ownership to take over the three buildings which make up today’s Los Angeles Ecovillage Neighborhood. Technically, three non-profit organizations work collectively to provide the cohousing opportunity. The Cooperative Resources and Services Project (CRSP), and the Beverly-Vermont Community Land Trust, first purchased the three buildings, bringing fifty units of the neighborhood housing under community control. Though the two blocks owned by CRSP have approximately 500 people living there, a smaller group of about forty people moved there to create the ecovillage, intentionally to “demonstrate processes for achieving lower environmental impacts while

raising the quality of community life” (Los Angeles Eco-Village (LAEV), n.d.). A resident organized limited equity housing cooperative, Urban Soil-Tierra Urbana (USTU), was formed and acquired two of the buildings from CRSP in 2012. (LAEV, n.d.)

A limited equity housing cooperative means that the buildings and land have been removed from the speculative real estate market, which in turn limits the resale value, providing permanently affordable housing for low to moderate income households. Operating under a federal safe harbor law, to qualify for a 501c3 status, 75% of the members residing there must be low income, which means 80% below the area medium annual income, which would be approximately \$12,500. This ensures that the function of the communal interest is actually enabling people who would otherwise not be able to afford living in the neighborhood.

This is significant when looking at the challenges of the broader community, because the cost of living in Los Angeles is increasingly inaccessible to lower to middle class people, which has exacerbated a long time battle with homelessness in LA since the 1980’s. To illustrate the homelessness crisis, the 2020 almanac shows in Table A, that the Metro LA county, the service planning area of the broader Los Angeles county that LAEV belongs to, has a total population of 1,287,782 people, and has the largest number of homeless individuals by a significant amount compared to all other planning areas with 17,121 individuals (Los Angeles Almanac, 2020).

Year	Antelope Valley (SPA 1)	San Fernando Valley (SPA 2)	San Gabriel Valley (SPA 3)	Metro LA (SPA 4)	West LA (SPA 5)	South LA (SPA 6)	East LA County (SPA 7)	South Bay/ Harbor (SPA 8)
2020	4,755	9,277	5,082	17,121	6,009	13,012	4,586	6,594

Note: From “Homelessness in los angeles county, california. (2020). Retrieved from Homeless in Los Angeles County, California (laalmanac.com)

According to a recent NPR podcast, homelessness has been on the rise in the last few years, and the reasons for this problem are multi-faceted and affect the black population disproportionately:

On top of high rents and a shortage of affordable housing, the Homeless Services Authority points to stagnant wages and systemic racism that affect housing, health care, justice and economic policies as major contributors to the crisis. The agency reports that black people make up only 8% of the total population but 34% of people experiencing homelessness in LA County. (Scott, 2021)

Creating an equitable and safe environment for everyone is a key task for LAEV. From its origins, the founder has had an explicit desire to create a racially diverse community. The goals of diversity are even more in focus for LAEV recently, with the heightened tensions within the American context due to the death of George Floyd, and the prominence of the recent Black Lives Matter protests, calling for new dialogue around racial justice within the United States. With the Rodney King riots in the rearview mirror, this community has had tensions around police brutality toward black residents for a long time. The desire to be intentionally racially diverse, in this setting, means finding ways to elevate the dialogue around these tensions and create a safe environment for people of color.

Ecovillages in urban settings are the most likely candidates within the United States to face diversity more directly, and more frequently than in rural settings, which is one reason why their demonstration is significant to learn from.

Another way that the neighborhood is effected in its broader context is the lack of green spaces, a unique challenge urban spaces face. With very few accessible public parks nearby and a large freeway running adjacent, the ability for people to be in touch with nature is minimal, let alone to grow their own food. This is another form of injustice, as areas with more green spaces are only accessible to those with more assets. To combat this problem, members of LAEV have their own courtyard with a community garden, where individuals can grow food, which is very appealing to potential members, and has been a motivation by some to join. The Beverly-Vermont Community Land Trust also has an agreement with the L.A. Unified School District to develop and provide programming for place based learning in a one-quarter acre site in the LAEV neighborhood. This helps to achieve their goals of permaculture, reconciling humans with natural processes.

This chapter laid out the historical development of the ecovillage movement as a whole, and the two ecovillage case studies. The unique contexts of each case study was also described to better understand their challenges and their approaches to peace. The next chapter will outline the conceptual framework in which this project sought to investigate these challenges and their daily practices that develop their desired peaceful societies.

Chapter 3 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this project began with the core concept of everyday peace to examine and explore it in a new setting, the ecovillage, conceptualized here as a “positive peace environment”. In order to answer the research questions, a background of the concept of everyday peace is presented followed by a conceptualization of conflict. This leads to the way in which the conflicts within the ecovillages are transformed through their everyday practices. In order to identify the transformation toward positive peace, then follows a discussion of what constitutes a positive peace environment, particularly in the perspective of the ecovillage members.

3.1 Everyday Peace

Everyday Peace is conceptualized in this project as a continual process of intentional practices by ecovillage members to create and maintain a positive peace environment. The origins of the concept of everyday peace was born out of the local turn in peace studies, criticizing top down peace interventions that have become commonplace in the international system. The local turn critiques the liberal peacebuilding approach, in which western liberal templates of peace design are imposed upon a developing country, often underestimating the agency and wisdom of local people to create peace in their own contexts. With this local turn, interest in the everyday practices by local, ordinary people who navigate the tensions within a conflict affected area emerged. Mac Ginty (2014) defines everyday peace as “the practices and norms deployed by individuals and groups in deeply divided societies to avoid and minimize conflict” (p.553). The concept has been largely applied to these contexts, describing the way people in divided societies have routinized social practices that are not spoken, that are known without a rulebook (Mac Ginty, 2014). People in these conflict affected areas have an awareness and a genius to how they can keep peace, navigating unsafe spaces. These practices can serve to avoid conflict and participate in norms of social order so as not to draw attention to oneself. In more proactive ways, everyday peace can move beyond mere acts of coping within a divided society, toward a type of diplomacy or even activism that negotiates the development of a more improved environment, creating transformation (Mac Ginty, 2014, p.560).

These local everyday actions are independent of national or international structures and peace operations, sometimes as a resistance to their inability to solve their problems. For example, Richmond’s study on mobility and peace show how mobile persons find agency in resistance

to the immobility of the state processes (Richmond, 2019). In much the same way, this research identifies ecovillage members as agents of change and transformation, in resistance to national and international systems that are not sustainable to peaceful living, working toward building a positive peace environment through their own local agencies and creativity. Even more importantly, ecovillage members are viewed as the experts on what peace entails for their community. They can be situated as what Firchow calls, small “p” peacebuilding organizations because their focus is on long term transformative processes and building harmonious relationships with normative goals of peace (Firchow, 2018). Though Firchow’s small “p” peacebuilding refers to organizations that focus primarily on conflict prevention, resolution and reconciliation, this is only one aspect of various ways the ecovillage approaches peace within their whole systems design. They promote norms of peace through creating equitable institutions, inclusive and participatory consensus-decision making, nurturing diversity, and access to education and health for all, as well (GEN, n.d.).

3.2 Everyday Peace Indicators

Top down peace operations have prescriptive measurements to determine the level of peace in a conflict area or post-conflict area, as their funding would demand in order to prove the investment was worthwhile. The concept of everyday peace has been applied as an evaluative tool called “Everyday Peace Indicators” to complement existing evaluation measures in peace operations. Mac Ginty (2013) proposes empowering local people to determine their own indicators of peace within their community as an alternative to international actors. One important finding in conducting Everyday Peace Indicators Research, is that indicators will look different depending how far removed a community is from violent conflict, either temporally or spatially. The meanings locals give to definitions of peace will differ in their contexts. Firchow (2018) applies Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs, a motivational theory in psychology comprising a pyramid of human needs depicted as hierarchical levels to understanding these differences. At the bottom of the pyramid are basic needs such as physiological safety, security, belonging and self-esteem. As a person’s needs are met on the base level, they can be motivated toward growth needs such as self-actualization and transcendence (Maslow, 1970). Firchow (2018) explains how this is similar to peace indicators, “As people become temporally removed from conflict and preoccupations with imminent security threats subside, they can turn their attention to more social and material issues” (p.122). For example, in communities with high security threats, a peace indicator may be something that represents negative peace, being able to do a normal daily chore or

activity without danger, such as “walking freely at night”. Whereas, communities further removed from such threats, will have indicators more in the positive peace territory of having access to basic needs such as “children attend school when it is in session” and “development of infrastructure” (Firchow, 2018, pp.112-114).

This finding can help researchers and various actors in peace operations understand that people living in generally peaceful societies, will define what peace means differently than those with conflict in their recent past. The ecovillages being investigated in this research are not situated in deeply divided societies, on the brink of direct violence, necessarily. Rather, because of the diverse backgrounds of their membership, they experience latent tensions from oppressive histories of their broader contexts, sometimes far in the past, that have potential to surface in conflict between individuals or groups through an event or interaction. They also experience tensions that arise from living closely and more intimately than the typical neighborhood on a daily basis, both in terms of carrying out their mission as well as in sharing physical spaces. But on the whole, they experience low levels of violence and security threats. These factors will inform their indicators of what peace looks like for them.

Even when a group of diverse but like-minded individuals come together to create peace intentionally in the ecovillage, with an explicit rulebook in some cases, there are unspoken rules and norms, that they practice on a daily basis to navigate their conflict landscape. This research is driven to uncover both the explicit and the hidden practices, and the challenges associated with them, that even willing participants face in creating and sustaining peace.

3.3 Conflict

To more deeply understand the everyday peace practices in the environment of the case studies, it is important to conceptualize conflict and violence, and the relationship between the two. In the broadest sense, Galtung (1975) defined conflict as incompatible goal states, in which the “realization of one goal will exclude, wholly or partly, the realization of the other”, and can be either a latent incompatibility, or manifest by expressed behaviors and attitudes (pp. 78-79), which can at times become violent. Violence here, refers to ways in which physical or psychological harm is being inflicted either through direct acts, or less visible forms through structures that deny people access to their needs to thrive (Galtung, 1975).

If conflict is defined as Galtung suggests, as incompatible goal states, one might conclude that conflict is ubiquitous and inevitable. People could be in conflict on varying levels virtually all

the time. Some might even say the only community without conflict is to be found in a cemetery (Brunk, 2012, p. 14). Normative attitudes in any given society toward conflict depends on normative attitudes toward violence, and the degree to which the two are interconnected. Galtung defines conflict and violence separately, but in a relationship, where conflict generates an energy, that then needs to be channeled constructively (Galtung, 1975). Bonta (1996), however, in a study of peaceful societies around the world, defined conflict where incompatibilities and contradiction between people “produce interpersonal antagonism and, at times, hostile encounters” (p. 405). This definition integrates conflict with antagonism and hostility implying more chance of violence as a result. Because the case studies in Bonta’s research do not accept any form of violence as normal, his operational definition of conflict would then also be unacceptable to them. Conflict then, as a whole, is seen as an outlier event and would not be considered as normal, desirable or productive.

Much of western approaches, however, take a generally positive attitude toward conflict, viewing it not as a problem, or even a bad occurrence. Georg Simmel’s social theory on conflict, for example, considers conflict as inevitable, pervasive and has an important function to “maintain the basis of integration into social forms” (Turner, 1975, p. 620) Society depends on the varying levels of aversion, compassion and indifference between individual interactions, as a continual process of maintaining the social order and groups they belong to. Conflict, is seen here, even when accompanied by antagonism, hostility and violence, as having a purpose as an integrative force, stabilizing social groups (Simmel, 1964). Brunk (2012), agreeing with Keashly and Warters, takes the utility of conflict even further, as a cause of many good things, useful “for fostering creative solutions to problems, facilitating personal and social change, and maintaining personal and social identities” and can even be exciting and fun (p.19).

Other western approaches, are preoccupied with ways to prevent, resolve and transform conflict, seeking to understand the causes, and create better conditions. Peace education, takes a strong normative stance, teaching a philosophy of nonviolence and empowers people with the skills to handle conflict in a nonviolent manner as an alternative. Though conflict may be pervasive, Reardon (as cited in Harris, 2012) argued that violence and warfare should be considered a pathology, and like a disease, the causes should be eliminated.

To understand everyday peace in this project, one must recognize the ecovillages’ attitude around conflict and violence. As Galtung (1996) highlights, culture plays a role in how

conflict, as well as violence is perceived and legitimized and therefore in Chapter 4, a description of the cultures of conflict of each case study will be described in depth, to illuminate their norms and perceptions. The framework for this research views conflict as an incompatibility of goals, interests or needs, and a potential tool for growth and transformation. Here, conflict is considered a normal and natural part of social life with autonomous individuals coming together. Conflict is separated in definition from violence and antagonism, but parties can have clearly opposing agendas. How conflict is approached, either with violence or nonviolence, is a separate act, and may be influenced by the ecovillage's normative value system and how successfully they promote it. Conflict as a tool, is explored within these contexts, as a necessary part of the process of growth and deeper understanding toward a positive peace. The knowledge gained can and should help prevent unnecessary conflicts in the future. The way conflicts are approached by ecovillage members will illuminate whether the outcome will produce conflict prevention and positive transformation or not.

3.4 Transformation toward Positive Peace

Though peace studies has taken little notice of the ecovillage movement in depth, conflict resolution within the ecovillage, a key practice of peacebuilding, has been an area of interest within sociological research. Mychajluk (2017), for example, discovered transformative social competencies in a Canadian ecovillage that served to move from a competitive, individualistic capitalistic society, toward a cooperative, egalitarian, consensus style of living. Norms of non-violence are continually fostered by the community, and their specific practices of conflict resolution aid individual's skills to approach conflict with less fear. Chaves, et al. (2015), investigated deep learning in a Colombian ecovillage, that comes from intentional reflective processes described as a natural circular journey of "life, death, and rebirth", suggesting the community's acceptance of the natural outcome of social processes, including conflict (p. 30).

The important contribution of this everyday peace framework as a transformative process is to identify what desired outcome these practices are moving the ecovillage toward. What are they striving for, from a peace perspective? Building upon the idea of positive peace, this project focuses on the conditions in which peace can flourish within the ecovillage, creating a positive peace environment. It acknowledges that even in the absence of direct violence, there can be other forms of violence, such as structural or cultural, that need to be addressed

in order for people to thrive. Structural violence, being violence without an actor, in which the power to make decisions about the distribution of resources is unevenly distributed (Galtung, 1975), and then cultural violence, being the use of symbolism of a particular culture to legitimize this uneven distribution. (Galtung, 1990). Beyond negation of violence, in one of Galtung's most idealistic statements, he proposes that any environment can be considered unpeaceful as long as "human beings are being influenced so that their actual (physical) and mental realizations are below their potential realization" (Galtung, 1975 p.110) Therefore, in a preventative sense, positive peace assumes if the right structures are present, people can develop without limitations. Positive peace is criticized similarly to ecovillages for their utopian ideals, suggesting we only have achieved peace in a perfect utopia (Brunk, 2012). From the perspective of this research project, the idealism of the ecovillage, as a positive peace environment, only poses a problem if one views it as a static outcome. There is no perfect outcome and there is no perfect ecovillage. Positive peace is a constant creative process toward these ideals that produce new technologies and practices from which we can learn. The everyday peace practices must be addressing power dynamics and this is ideally an ongoing, upwardly mobile processual development. The assumption is that if this is happening, continual indicators should be visible both of an absence of violence, and the presence of equity and personal development. This is particularly relevant in the two case studies due to their intentional blending of cultures, and the potential power dynamics associated with a diversity of class and race.

Like the Everyday Peace Indicators project, one way to answer the research questions is to look for indicators of peace and narratives of transformation from the perspective of the members. Though this research does not attempt, nor does it have the scope to explicitly measure the peace in the ecovillage, as the Everyday Peace Indicators project can do, interview questions were designed to uncover these perspectives through interviews.

This chapter provided a conceptual framework in which to investigate the everyday peace processes of two ecovillages, comparatively. The concepts selected help identify the approaches to this investigation. Everyday peace is conceptualized as an ongoing process performed by ecovillage members to create and maintain a positive peace environment. As a bottom up peacebuilding approach, the ecovillage members are seen as agents of change, employing local wisdom conducive to their contexts. Conflict within the ecovillage is conceptualized as a normal part of daily life, and even a necessary tool for learning. Transformation from these learnings move the community toward better conditions where

conflicts are prevented and obstacles to development are removed. As they create their positive peace environment, the perspectives and narratives of the ecovillage members can provide insight into their own indicators of peace within their contexts, providing useful comparative data between the two case studies. The next chapter describes the orientation of the research design, methodology, and reflections regarding ethics, role of the researcher and power dynamics involved in the research process.

Chapter 4 Methodology

This research aims to investigate the everyday peace practices of intentionally diverse ecovillage communities using these research questions:

1. What are the everyday peace practices deployed by ecovillage members to avoid and deescalate potential conflict?
2. How are these practices effected by the diverse backgrounds of their membership in terms of class, culture and race?
3. What transformations can be seen toward a positive peace environment as a result of these practices?

This chapter seeks to explain the approach, the design and the specific steps to answering these research questions.

4.1 Research Design

The purpose of this research is exploratory in that everyday peace, as a relatively new concept, has not been applied to this context before. A qualitative research design is appropriate in this case because it sought to deepen the understanding of a phenomena in a particular context, rather than to generalize findings (Bryman, 2016). As a comparative case study approach, the way everyday peace is conducted, as well as the transformative results of these practices are compared in the context of two settings. The process had both a deductive and inductive interplay between the conceptual framework and the data collected. Because the concept of everyday peace was chosen prior to data collection and had a guiding role in my design, there was a deductive element to approaching the data. Though no hypotheses are presented or confirmed, the everyday peace concept is being scrutinized in a new setting, not to prove the validity of the concept but to explore it. Qualitative research design allows for the conceptual framework to also develop out of the data collected, by relating the everyday peace concept to the experiences of the members of the two ecovillages, adding knowledge to what is already known. The main goal, in contrast to quantitative designs is to gain the point of view of the participants, not the researcher (Bryman, 2016).

To enter into this process, this research is positioned on a constructivist ontological perspective and an interpretive epistemology. Constructivist theory argues that social phenomena is in a continual process of being produced by the actors involved, which also includes the researcher (Bryman, 2016). This approach to understanding reality, lends itself

toward interpretive epistemology as the knowledge is understood as subjective from the view of the actors involved. Everyday peace is created and practiced by the ecovillage communities collaboratively, attaching meaning to their lived experiences through a continual process. As stated by Bryman (2016), describing the nature of qualitative research, "...unlike the objects of the natural sciences, the objects of the social sciences—the people—are capable of attributing meaning to their environment." (p. 393). Because this project explores conflicts that may stem from personal and collective identities, the values and beliefs of individuals are honored and it is acknowledged that the subjective experiences of participants are shaped by the historical, social, and situational context in which they occur. This leads to my choice of method.

4.2 Data Collection Methods

To understand and see through the eyes of the individual members, the method of choice for this project was semi-structured interviews. Units of analysis were the individual ecovillage member's narrative of their own experiences within the case study, as well as their observations of the everyday functions of the community as a whole. The semi-structured interview method provided direction with an interview guide (See Appendix A), but also allowed for flexibility both for the researcher and the respondent. For the respondent, this allowed them to share more than what was asked directly and attach any meanings and stories they desire. For the researcher, this flexibility gave space to respond with spontaneous questions to follow up more deeply on a phenomenon mentioned by the participant. Starting with a guide was important in doing a case study comparison, to ensure that a similar approach was taken with each participant regardless of which ecovillage they belonged to (Silverman, 2013). Keeping the same verbiage was a challenge due to the fact that, according to one participant, the word "conflict" is likely to be interpreted as violence in Ghana, and encouraged the use of a different word like, "misunderstandings". This made it difficult to know if what was being asked is indeed what the participant interpreted it to mean in the different contexts. This required what Hoglund & Oberg (2011) calls empathy, and skillful reflective listening, "to understand the speaker's feelings and perspective" (p.137). The interview guide was also slightly customized to members with different positions within the ecovillage. The CEO in Ghana was asked more specific questions regarding the early development of the ecovillage, and in LAEV, a participant was asked about his role and experiences on the Conflict Resolution Team.

In social research, semi-structured interviews are a tool to discover meanings through thick descriptions and narrative. Thick description is the concept in social research that expands the data being obtained from mere factual information into a deeper understanding and interpretation of what is being said or done by the subject being studied. Denzin (1989) describes the thick description:

It presents detail, context, emotion, and the webs of social relationships that join persons to one another. Thick description evokes emotionality and self-feelings. It inserts history into experience. It establishes the significance of an experience, or the sequence of events, for the person or persons in question. In thick description, the voices, feelings, actions, and meanings of interacting individuals are heard. (p. 83)

Within the thick description, similarly, the meanings of individuals' narratives unfold through the plot of their stories. Elliot (2011) stresses the three key features of narrative as chronological, meaningful and social. The chronological events of the story can give a causal interpretation, which explains how the event had meaning to the individual. This is important to appreciate the reason the event is being shared by the participant and how they see this is as significant. The process by which the narrator and the researcher work together to interpret the meaning is social in nature. These features of narrative were weaved into the interview guide in order to understand more deeply the motivations and the values of the ecovillage members, such as why they joined the community, what kind of transformations have occurred in their ability to handle conflicts since joining, and what their social life means to them in this new context. The interview guide was divided into four sections designed to collect these narratives and meanings: Joining the Ecovillage, Daily life, Foundational Values, and Advice for Others.

Certain documents and web-sites were useful to this project to understand the nature of the ecovillage movement, as well as the unique context of ecovillage communities. As mentioned in Chapter 1, through the initial investigation into the research questions, the Global Ecovillage Network (GEN), was discovered, including the explicit mention of peacebuilding practices in their values of regeneration. For this reason, the search for case studies began with the profile descriptions of individual ecovillages that are GEN members.

This led to the use of the GEN web-site and "Design Cards", an educational tool meant for users to explore the holistic model of the ecovillage. These materials provided guidance on the GEN's intentions, how they instruct others, as well as an overview of their current projects. Once case studies were chosen, their web-sites, annual reports and other

organizational documents such as funding requests and by-laws, were also used to supplement data collected through interviews. This data provided foundational knowledge of their mission statements, value systems, non-profit or NGO status, and other operational functions that helped understand each ecovillage's approach to everyday peace.

It is important to note the limitation of such documents and that they were used only as supplementary to the data from the interviews conducted. These documents are static, often intended for recruitment of either membership or funding support, whereas the practices of GEN, and the individual ecovillages are processual. Atkinson and Coffey (as cited in Bryman 2016, p. 560) suggests researchers view documents as having a "distinct level of 'reality' in their own right". The analysis mostly sought to understand the case study's intentions through these documents, whereas data from interviews reveals the way members view their actual experiences.

Field notes were also obtained by participating in an online zoom community meeting with LAEV. The role of the researcher in the meeting was as a guest, allowing participation in icebreaker activities, and as a presenter on the research topic. The purpose of joining the meeting was to recruit participants, however, it also allowed observation of how this mechanism is intentionally used to build peace and engage the members. These field notes were used in analysis to supplement and compare to interview transcripts where participants described the use of weekly meetings.

4.3 Sampling

The case study selection utilized non-random, generic purposive sampling method because the research sought to observe a specific phenomenon. (Silverman, 2013). Also, the ecovillage members of GEN vary in size, focus, contexts, and longevity warranting careful selection.

There were three key criteria underpinning the ecovillages chosen as case studies for this research to narrow down the large variety of options within GEN. First, the ecovillages should exhibit the values of the Global Ecovillage Network, with whom they are members. Second, ecovillages must have acknowledged their intention to be diverse communities, particularly in terms of class, culture and race with a desire to create an equitable environment. Third, in order for the ecovillages to be intentionally diverse, they need to, in

fact, have a diverse membership. There were two steps taken to determine whether these criteria could be fairly applied to these chosen ecovillages.

The first step was to examine the profiles on the GEN database, then the individual web-sites for descriptions, photos or stories that represent the values of GEN and their diverse membership. Another source was a published article by the founder of the Los Angeles Eco-Village from 2012, which shared the challenges they face with diversity, including her reflections which was a determinate for me to reach out.

Second, an online introduction interview with a key leader from each ecovillage was conducted to make sure both parties felt that the ecovillage was a match for the research. Initially, the process took about three months, viewing over one hundred profiles. It was difficult to find verbiage of explicit diversity of race or class in the ecovillage profiles, particularly in the North American and European settings, where the majority of members are white middle class (Dias et al., 2017). Also, many ecovillages had outdated profiles with defunct contact information, or were living too far “off-grid” for contact. Five out of approximately a dozen communities contacted, replied with interest. One respondent, from northern Cameroon, had been a flourishing ecovillage, but because of recent violent outbreak had to flee and disband, a common problem of access in peace research (Hoglund & Oberg, 2011). Another case study in South Africa was of interest for the project, and after an interview seemed likely to partner, but communication stopped for an unknown reason.

4.3.1 Chosen Case Studies

Eventually, two case studies were chosen based on the selection criteria for comparison mentioned earlier in this chapter. The project intended to compare the case of a newly forming ecovillage, with a more established community, and also to compare an ecovillage set in the Global South to one set in the Global North. In light of the recent unrest caused by events in the U.S. around racial conflict, specifically the death of George Floyd, and the growing Black Lives Matter movement, the research sought to gain perspectives from an American ecovillage experience. Therefore, a comparative analysis was conducted with the Obrobibini Peace Complex (OPC), located in a fishing village on the coast of Ghana, with the LA Eco-village situated in the most racially diverse urban area of Los Angeles, California. These two case studies were chosen because of their explicitly stated intentions of creating inclusive and equitable environments with individuals and families that are from diverse

backgrounds. The reader is reminded that the unique demographics and missions of each case study are described in depth in Chapter 2.

4.4 Data Collection: Interviewing Process

I began my research in June 2020 and completed the last interview in January 2021. The process followed GEN's web-site for researchers, making sure I cooperated with their guidelines. A visit to the ecovillage in person was recommended by GEN, but due to the travel restrictions imposed as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, this was not possible. I reported my research intentions to GEN's administration around this type of endeavor through an email provided on their web-site. At the end of my project, my findings were sent to GEN for their records. The awareness that the results of this project will be shared with the GEN community, and be available in public spaces, required reflection on what could be potentially harmful to any participants. This was taken into account in the writing process.

4.4.1 Recruitment

The two ecovillages were asked permission to conduct research. This was done by contacting the key leaders of each ecovillage via email to request an online video introduction or phone call to determine whether we were a good fit for the project. At OPC, the CEO was able to make this decision for the community, to which he agreed. At LA Eco-village, a phone call with a key leader was conducted. She gave access to propose the project during one of their weekly community meetings through Zoom, and then members decided if they wanted to participate.

Once permission was granted, recruitment of participants began through one of two purposive methods. The first method was to choose participants that come from diverse backgrounds, particularly race, since this type of diversity was expressed as very important by each ecovillage. This method sought to "maximize the reliability and validity of the results" by representing a variety of perspectives (Hoglund & Oberg, 2011). The second method was to ask the key leader if they had anyone they recommended as good subjects for the research questions. Reasons the CEO at OPC chose specific subjects were based on their experiences of conflict within the ecovillage, their leadership role in creating the ecovillage, and to include both white and black participants. He then asked them directly if they would be willing to be interviewed. All participants at OPC were recruited this way. No participants declined, however, he states honestly, that there was no way to be sure they didn't want to decline because in Ghanaian culture, it is rude to say no, and particularly inappropriate to your boss.

At LAEV, diversity representation was not possible with only three interviews. The leader recommended that I interview someone who serves on the “Conflict Resolution Team”, then provided the contact information for this person. The second method I used at LAEV to recruit participants was an open invitation to all ecovillage members. Two participants came forward and volunteered through this method.

All participants were given the information letter prior to committing to participation and gave their signature by printing the document, signing it and emailing me either a photo or scanned signed copy. The letters were stored in the same way other data, mentioned in detail below. (See Appendix B)

Once participants had agreed to be interviewed, appointments for interviews were scheduled and conducted through Zoom, recorded and then securely stored through the password protected external hard drive. Interviews were then transcribed by the researcher with the help of an interpreter, when needed.

4.4.2 Participants

Nine participants were interviewed, six from Obrobibini Peace Complex, three from LA Eco-village, as identified in Table A below. Pseudonyms were assigned in order to anonymize their identity, and will be used in the analysis section. Each participant was asked about their age and how long they had been a member of the ecovillage. The majority of participants were young to middle-aged adults, with an average age of 33. Age can potentially have an influence on the perspectives, particularly around conflicts or issues concerning race or ethnicity, due to cultural shifts in the last several decades. One might speculate that older participants may not be as open-minded to diversity, however, this project did not find that to be the case. Instead, it was discovered that the diversity of experiences of the older participants was part of their motivation to be part of such a community. The longevity of their time within the community was a more important contribution, as they have seen the development and witnessed more conflicts, as well as peace processes over the span of their membership. Gender was not an emphasis in this project, so was not included in the table. However, it was noted that OPC has only one local female member, who serves as a chef. The reason is cultural, because construction work is not typical for a female in Ghana. The gender imbalance is acknowledged by the leadership and when the development of the project is more culturally suitable for female employees, this dynamic will change. The female member

was interviewed, but when asked, she indicated that gender was not an important factor for her in terms of everyday peace practices.

Table A					
<i>Participant Demographics</i>					
Code	Pseudonym	Age	Race	Nationality	Years in Ecovillage
OPC1	James	34	Unidentified	Swiss	3
OPC2	David	36	Black	Ghanaian	1 1/2
OPC3	Steven	33	Human	African (Ghanaian)	3
OPC4	Robert	32	Black	Burkinese	1 1/2
OPC5	Linda	26	Black	Ghanaian	1
OPC6	Andrew	24	White	Swiss	2
LAEV1	Margaret	70	Unidentified	American	22
LAEV2	Jennifer	39	Unidentified	Colombian-American	7
LAEV3	Mark	35	White	Irish-American/Easter European Jewish	5

Note. Participants are identified from Obrobibini Peace Complex as OPC (1-6); and from LA Eco-village as LAEV (1-3).

4.5 Reflexivity

There are several points of reflexivity important to consider in this project. First, because it centers on diverse communities where culture, race and class potentially play a role in their lived experiences, the researcher, as a white person who appears white physically, from a middle-class background, could not possibly fully understand the experiences of a person who has experienced discrimination, violence or aggression because of these factors. Reflective listening was a crucial skill employed so as not to make any assumptions or even potential judgments about the life experiences of participants.

Second, it is easier to understand contexts in which we personally identify, therefore the researcher being American made LAEV easier to understand than the OPC ecovillage. For example, initially, asking participants directly if they identified as a specific race or

nationality was not considered. Interviews began in the Ghanaian context, with an assumption they would identify as either black or white based on whether they were from an African country or from Switzerland. The name, “Obribibini” meaning “white man, black man” reinforced the assumption that they would identify as one of those. This resulted in overlooking the potential complexities of racial identity in the Ghanaian context and for this reason, participants were retro-actively asked how they identify their race. The assumptions were incorrect, proved by the fact that the two executives that lead OPC do not identify as black or white. Steven responded by identifying as “Human race”, James as “N.A.” (OPC1, OPC3). In the Los Angeles context, however, there was a native instinct to ask participants how they identify their race, knowing the complexity of the immigrant society combined with current emotional tension around racial identity due to the Black Lives Matter protests. Assumptions were correct, as two of the participants, Margaret and Jennifer, did not identify with a specific race (LAEV1, LAEV2).

Third, as an academic researcher, it is important to appreciate that this approach to investigating a social phenomenon was created from a western perspective. The investigation included learning about “Traditional” Ghanaian conflict resolution techniques that have been practiced in Ghana for a very long time by indigenous people. (See Chapter 5 for more information on this) It is important to stay objective in observation. Though traditional methods have gained more attention and respect by international peace actors in the last few decades, Mac Ginty (2008) warns of assuming that traditional and / or indigenous methods are equated with “good” or “a higher normative value”, but rather should be scrutinized just as any other technique. (p. 149).

Last, prior to beginning the Master’s program, the researcher volunteered at a GEN ecovillage in 2019, located in a small village in Switzerland, and therefore had some experience of the ethos in which GEN members live by and what it looks like in practice. This creates potential bias toward understanding the Swiss, highly organized approaches to peace processes. Also because the experience of the Swiss ecovillage was positive, and had a meaningful effect on the researcher, reflexivity must be practiced not to be biased toward the concept of the ecovillage as a whole. Each ecovillage is contextually different in terms of location, diversity, focuses, etc. The experiences of the researcher must not be projected onto the case studies.

4.6 Ethical Considerations

This section provides reflections on important ethical considerations in the process of this research, with the goal of doing all that is possible to treat all involved with care, and avoid harm to them. Hoglund & Oberg (2011) warns that in peace research we must consider “possible consequences the research may bring” and reminds us that the researcher’s “golden rule is to do no harm” (p. 141)

4.6.1 Trustworthiness

Trust was built prior to interviews through the introduction interviews with leaders, earning their endorsement, which helped with recruitment of other participants. At the beginning of the online interview, a brief time was allotted to make sure the participants understood the purpose of the project and their rights, and also to build rapport. In the Ghanaian context, having a Ghanaian colleague present on my end also helped build trust and ensure clear communication between parties. After transcribing the interviews, respondent validation was used by giving all participants the option to read the transcripts from their interview and provide either corrections or retractions of anything they did not want to be used in the project.

4.6.2 Sample Size

Both ecovillages are small communities, which means it is virtually impossible for the data to be completely anonymous. Members were likely aware of who participated in the research and those who read the published report will likely be familiar with narratives from the data, and be able to identify who was sharing their perspective. For this reason, great consideration was taken on the way information was expressed in the findings so as not to potentially exacerbate any ongoing conflicts, or to cause problems for any participants, particularly those who might be vulnerable.

4.6.3 Power Dynamics

An additional ethical concern within the OPC case study was the hierarchical structure of the ecovillage. The ecovillage is technically a nongovernmental organization with a CEO and employees. This can pose a limitation because, as mentioned, in Ghanaian culture, it is not appropriate to question or criticize someone who is your superior. This cultural factor is potentially exacerbated by the fact that the CEO is a white man from Switzerland, and without the financial support from Switzerland, this ecovillage could not exist. This may lead to two potential concerns. First, employees may have felt obligated to participate, even though it was

presented as optional, for fear of being viewed as non-compliant. Second, employees may have felt a risk in sharing anything that could be perceived as negative, and may not be forthcoming about any conflicts or experiences that might make the NGO look bad. This concern was shared with the CEP, and he was asked not to be near the participants during interviews to overhear, with exception to one in order for him to provide French translation.

Another power dynamic in this study to consider, is the way researchers are perceived by ordinary people as “important, official, or having power over them”, and particularly in the aforementioned cultural dynamic in Ghana of respecting authority, this is crucial (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p.102). Because of this powerful position, careful reflection was given not to exploit participants by being respectful during interviews, not to push for information from them, to listen for their intentions, and to treat them as this research intends to, as agents of peace in their own right.

4.7 Limitations and Challenges

The most significant limitation was not being able to conduct in-person observations to study everyday behaviors due to the coronavirus situation. Ecovillages, as holistic, communal lifestyles are best understood through some level of observation. One way to overcome this challenge was to be streamed online into a meeting. This was achieved, as mentioned earlier, in the LEAV context, and though there were plans to do this in OPC, this was not achieved due to internet connection problems.

Another challenge was language barriers. English-speaking ecovillages were chosen because it is the native tongue of the researcher. Eventually translators were used anyway, because some local participants in Ghana at the Obribibini Peace Complex had accents that were difficult to understand for the researcher and some participants were able to give better “thick descriptions” in Twi or in French than in English. The translator for interviews in Twi was a fellow peace scholar in Norway, who sat in-person with the researcher during interviews, to build rapport. The Twi translator also helped to transcribe the interviews for accuracy. For the interview in French, the CEO of the OPC ecovillage translated into English.

4.8 Data Analysis Methods

The analysis began with reading through transcripts from interviews and coding similar content into categories, and then consolidating them to broader themes. This process was assisted by the use of Nvivo. First, using thematic analysis, the focus was on identifying the

ecovillage's everyday peace practices. Specific themes emerged of practices that were used in the participants' stories, especially when a conflict was shared. The themes of everyday practices that emerged are used in both ecovillages in significant ways. The comparison identified the way practices were used in the different contexts, and how diversity of culture, class and race played a factor in their uses. To understand the meanings around these diverse backgrounds of the participants, context was very important in comparing the two ecovillages.

Narrative analysis as a second method, sought out the stories shared by participants to unfold the temporal, chronological aspects of their assimilation process, daily life, and stories of conflict transformation they have witnessed or experienced firsthand. To help these narratives unfold, a matrix was used that read from left to right: the practice used, the specific way it was used, the source of the conflict it was applied to, which ecovillage this occurred in, level of conflict (Intrapersonal, Interpersonal, Intragroup, Intergroup), the effectiveness of the use of the practice (including comments by the participants), and transformations as a result of the practice in changing either beliefs, attitudes, relationships and/or removal of structural conditions in order to create a positive peace.

The analysis sought to understand the meaning of stories by asking 'What has happened? How do they make sense of what has happened and to what effect?' With the investigative theme around class, culture and race, it was particularly important to understand the purpose of their stories and how they perceive the meaning of the events that have occurred. If there has been change of attitudes, beliefs or actions around race relations, for example, understanding the chronology of events can help to understand where members see the turning point of change. For example, if an event happened, and then change took place (or did not take place), analysis sought to show how these are inter-connected in the view of the individuals. Building an intentional community is a process and narrative analysis allowed participants to express their ongoing reflection as it grows and develops.

Triangulation is a third method, by combining the significant themes with the meaning from the lived narratives of the ecovillage members. This allows for a specificity in understanding the experiences of ecovillage members as they seek a positive peace environment.

This chapter detailed the research design and approach to this project. The data collection and analysis methods were explained as a way to investigate the research questions. Each decision

in conducting research deserves reflexivity, and this chapter highlighted the areas that need reflection on the part of the researcher, including ethical considerations, the power dynamics involved for both the researcher and among the participants. Limitations and challenges of this project were also outlined for transparency. The next chapter will present the analysis of the data collected.

Chapter 5 Everyday Peace Practices

This project sought to investigate the ways in which intentionally diverse ecovillage communities practice everyday peace. The data collection was aimed at discovering the member's lived experiences and their perspectives on how their everyday peace practice transforms their community toward a positive peace environment.

Data collected through interviews were supplemented with secondary documents directly relating to the case studies. After coding the data, and using thematic analysis from the transcriptions of the participants, this project identified themes of everyday peace practices as Social Cohesion, Boundary-Making, Yielding, Dialogue and Inner Peace.

This chapter will first present a comparative analysis of the conflict culture of each case study to help understand the practices in their contexts. A presentation of each everyday peace practice theme will follow with examples of its uses. Chapter 5 will present more depth about the particular ways that diverse backgrounds including class, culture and race have an effect on the ways the practices are used and how ecovillage members perceive them. Chapter 6 will then provide discussion around the transformational impact of the practices toward a positive peace environment.

5.1 Conflict Cultures

In both case studies, long standing ecovillage members who have heavily influenced its development expressed an approach to conflict as an opportunity for transformation and learning. Their attitude of accepting conflict as normal and necessary to community development gives way to both systematic and spontaneous practices that play out in daily life. Margaret, who has been part of LAEV for twenty-two years shared, “conflict can be useful in terms of growth and...I think it's also important for a community to experience a conflict arising and then having it move to a better...you know, to evolve to a better situation” (LAEV1, 16.10.2020).

James, one of the founders of OPC shares a similar view when confronted with something either unpleasant or a person who has wronged him in some way, “you are the one shaping your own reality, so you can decide what to do with every kind of situation.” He continues regarding a specific conflict he experienced, “The nonconventional way is that he's an enlightened being. He appears in an aspect for me to learn something, to guide me,” (OPC1, 17.09.2020).

How these attitudes toward conflict are shaped in daily life is different in the two contexts partially due to their differences in global north and south position, their longevity, and their urban versus rural settings. In the global north, within the United States, the approach leans toward a bureaucratic way of preventing and responding to conflict, creating rules and agreements to communicate the norms expected of its members. Americans tend to legislate, or protect themselves from conflict through putting agreements into writing. The urban setting, which is in a densely populated area, also makes issues of security and equitable sharing of physical spaces, a greater concern than in the OPC setting, which is often addressed formally through their agreements and policies.

Another cultural dynamic shared by Mark, who serves on their Conflict Resolution Team, is a view of the community as “conflict-avoidant”, like a group of turtles, with their heads inside their shells (Interview LAEV3, 28.01.2021). He shares the potential of this type of culture to cause members to withdraw when they sense a conflict may be rising. This might be all the more reason to have systems and agreements in place to flesh out what might be going on inside the community. Jennifer, another LAEV member shares a view that “every personality is a galaxy”, and therefore appreciates that bringing together these galaxies is a very complicated thing but approaches it as interesting, not problematic (Interview LAEV2, 18.01.2021). These views reflect a respect for the reasons conflict can happen and take a positive view of it, though there may be some reluctance within the community in practice to address it.

In the OPC context, the dynamics are more like two currents coming into one stream, because there is more of a polarity of cultures between Swiss/European and Ghanaian. In the broader context surrounding the ecovillage, several participants, of both Swiss and Ghanaian origins, describe cultural norms of jealousy, corruption, cheating and stealing. These actions may be, in part, due to systemic problems that local people face in terms of poverty and resource scarcity. Unemployment is a problem for locals, particularly for young people. In 2020, Ghana faced 12% youth unemployment and more than 50% underemployment, both higher than overall unemployment rates in Sub-Saharan African countries, a concern highlighted by the most recent World Bank report (The World Bank, 2020). OPC members express a desire to help meet the basic needs of locals through employment, and then develop alternative ways of interacting, particularly between people of different cultures.

Within this context, there are several styles of approaching conflict all within one community. The two executive level members interviewed, one Swiss and one Ghanaian, share a compassionate approach toward their members' needs, seeking understanding, and typically address conflict directly. They spoke openly of the conflicts they have seen in the ecovillage. In contrast, several members shared conflict stories in which Ghanaians had gossiped behind the back of the person they had a problem with, and in some cases formed groups against this person. The norm was not to deal directly with the person. Some other Ghanaian members were also less willing to admit there are conflicts that take place within, or less willing to talk about them openly in the interviews. One participant, even with much prompting, insisted he has not had any misunderstandings or conflicts because he understands the purpose of OPC. (OPC2, 19.09.2020). This appeared to be in comparison to what he sees in the broader context, though there is evidence from other participants that they do, indeed experience some misunderstandings and conflicts within their community. Another explanation could be how he perceives the meaning of the term "conflict" or "misunderstanding". He may think of direct violence or hostility, versus an incompatibility of ideas, goals or interests. More detail on this dynamic will be shared in the next chapter taking into account the sociocultural backgrounds and the way in which this explains the conflict culture dynamics.

Being a newly forming ecovillage, the norms are still developing in OPC, so one could conclude that they may become more bureaucratic down the road, but it is hard to imagine even after a long existence that this approach would make sense in the Ghanaian culture. They are less likely to need to see their agreements on paper. Most aspects that are put into writing are for the benefit of Swiss members, and to continue to solicit financial support.

This introduction described the unique conflict cultures of the two case studies and can be used as a lens to understand the themes and their uses. The remainder of this chapter will present each everyday practice and its uses within the two ecovillages.

5.2 Social Cohesion

Social Cohesion, as used in this research, refers to practices that bind the individuals into an intentional community, with a common purpose, vision and values. This also refers to various forms of daily interactions members practice that show their care for one another.

5.3.1 Common Purpose and Common Experiences

Social cohesion is first developed through common vision, purpose and value systems. When a person joins the ecovillage, they are becoming a part of the overall purpose of the organization. Ecovillages are a resistance movement against unsustainable global systems and their purpose toward a more ideal sustainable life is a fundamental glue that holds them together. Members that join ecovillages typically leave their previous lives to be part of something meaningful, social and creative. Even still, bringing together unique individuals makes cohesiveness a challenge. As Margaret said, “I think you want to be clear on what your values are and your vision for your community because...it’s like, you might want to have differences of viewpoint, but you wanna be on the same page about what you’re doing” (Interview LAEV1, 16.10.2020). This mutual understanding and commitment to the common vision keeps them working through differences to grow and develop.

Both communities share their visions, mission statements and values on their web-sites and in their reports as non-profit and NGO entities. On the ground, these bonding statements are in a continual process of communication and reflection on what they mean in practice. For this reason, social cohesion is also practiced through relational activities that create the “community glue” to help them stay connected to one another relationally, making dialogue and conflict resolution more accessible. As Mark states:

A number of people related to the conflict resolution committee have coined the term, like, ‘community glue’, to do activities that essentially make it easier for people to connect and um, for the purposes of creating more commonality, common experiences...so that when it does come to conflict, there’s enough common ground that it actually makes it more possible for people to broach the conflict and then come to resolution” (Interview LAEV3, 28.01.2021).

In LAEV, these activities are fostered by their close proximity living conditions within apartment buildings and also through creating communal spaces, including a courtyard, workspace for woodworking and artistry, communal kitchen and dining room. They involve routinized mealtimes, bike rides, volunteering and working on committees together. A high interaction day for an ecovillage member will often make use of many of these spaces, where varying levels of connection will take place spontaneously, both through casual conversation but also through an activity such as teaching a new skill to another member.

Margaret shares how much she misses these activities since Covid has made it more difficult, “...in the potlucks it’s a very informal socializing and you catch up what’s happening in

people's personal lives, you could talk about politics or whatever...I miss having the potlucks for that reason" (Interview LAEV1, 16.10.2020). She also mentions that these mealtimes are important not for just socializing, but for individual members to practice taking initiative, since the first to show up makes decisions about the way that meal will be set up. Initiative is a desirable characteristic of the community and is supported. When members reach out to start a project or form a new work group with a purpose in mind, it brings individuals together face to face and bonds them.

In OPC, the social cohesion takes place in the daily life through working side by side as they build the infrastructure, as well as during their breaks at mealtimes and socializing on the weekends in town. One of the Executive members, Steven, mentions the importance of connecting with people living in the nearby town, Busua, both those employed by OPC and those who are not, by playing sports with them and spending time socializing on the weekends. He desires a relationship like a brother or sister with them, "I would always want to be like them. Be among them, not to be exceptionalized...with them, joke with them," (Interview OPC3, 14.01.2021). This community glue strengthens his influence from a relational place, instead of status.

Sharing the arts and culture with one another is a way to build a bridge for the "Obribibini" concept, "white man, black man" coming together, and has been practiced for many years for tourists, but now with the intention for deeper connection. One participant, Robert, who emigrated from Burkina Faso, enjoys performing his music and comedy for others; his former job before conflict caused him to flee. Andrew shares how some of the members wanted to "build this community vibe, like we met every evening, of course spend a lot of time enjoying the evening smoking, and sometimes a little bit of partying, and all back together and get something to eat, and sit to fire and before you go to sleep" (OPC6, 22.09.2020).

Though some of these daily interactions seem banal, mundane or ordinary, they might be the most foundational thing ecovillages can do to prevent conflict, or at least prevent protracted conflict. The key sign of this social cohesion in LAEV given by Mark is "curiosity in other's well-being", engaging one another with an "openness to share in...their process" with intention to connect and care. In OPC, James and Linda mention that for them, a sign of peace in OPC is a joyful atmosphere, people laughing and exchanging over lunch, communicating while they work and a general happiness state (OPC5, 24.10.2020 & OPC1, 31.07.2020). Even with fair and equitable structures in place, without these socially cohesive practices, the conflict transformational tools can fail, either because they are not utilized, or the needed trust

has broken down for them to be effective. Mark describes that the decision-making process gets “gummed up” when the social cohesion is fragmented.

Someone brings an issue that is somewhat contentious and we can’t talk through the problem. And then we don’t...we either don’t come to a resolution, like it loses steam, we don’t vote on it, it comes up again in a different way, and it never gets like, really addressed, or there’s just like open conflict (LAEV3, 28.01.2021).

The community was not what he expected in terms of cohesiveness. Because the members live independent lives, earning their living outside the community as opposed to ecovillage models, like OPC, that create a way of earning a living within the site itself, and though there are many projects that are taking place, they are not fully cohesive as one larger mission (LAEV3, 28.01.2021). There are many examples given, however, within the LAEV model where members are actively taking initiative and exercising their autonomy within the model toward projects that are important to them and the ecovillage gives them a platform and social support to do so. In an individualistic American society, this can be a very attractive feature. For Jennifer, gaining support for her initiatives was one of her main motivations for joining (LAEV2, 18.01.2021).

5.3 Boundary-Making

Like a supportive practice to social cohesion, boundaries are dividing lines established by the ecovillages as a preventative tool to protect them from threats to their peace ideals. They give form to these ideals through membership, codes of conduct, and protection of their space.

5.3.1 Membership

Membership is a clear boundary, a gatekeeping process, where the ecovillage and prospective members are essentially choosing each other in a contractual relationship. In a preventative sense, the membership is a way of establishing a community that is compatible based on their values and purpose. The idea is that if you attract the right people from the start, you will have a more peaceful and resilient community. As a result of membership, a person receives benefits that have the potential to transform their lives in a multidimensional way. This is one of the motivations stated by the narratives within the interviews. They seek a better life, financially, personally, ecologically and communally. The continual practice of acquiring new membership, maintaining needs of membership, and peacefully exiting membership is not simple. By its nature, it is both inclusive and exclusive, and therefore has potential to create new conflict.

In Ghana their local membership can be defined by employment, but there is also a slightly blurry line between the members and the villagers of Busua, the nearest town, since members of OPC live and stay in town, fostering frequent daily interactions. The gatekeeping process at this stage for OPC entails having the right skills for their infrastructure development over similar value systems or other criteria. New members are exposed to the ideals of the community, and now belong to it, and receive its benefits. The membership from abroad, mostly Swiss, apply online and are approved by the board to be a part of the membership. This is not as much about gatekeeping as it is attracting those who want to support and contribute on many different levels at this stage.

The inclusive and exclusive nature of membership can cause more conflicts to arise. Since membership is based on possessing a specific skill, some members may not see the full vision right away, and cause disharmony with those who do. Andrew felt as the team grew, there were more from “outside” or “not really part of OPC” even though they were technically employed by the organization (OPC6, 22.09.2020). The “in” and “out” nature of membership also becomes a more sensitive issue in a diverse community, where rejection or acceptance into the membership can create jealousy. OPC is quickly becoming one of the main sources of employment in the small surrounding community, and with resource scarcity as an issue, having the right skills or not to join at this juncture can make an enormous difference on a person’s quality of life. From a positive peace perspective, the gateway of employment creates a structural barrier for women, since in the rural Ghanaian culture, these jobs would not be appropriate. This is not unnoticed by James, “The gender balance is a problem and I’m really trying hard, thinking hard and talking hard, how we can come away from this situation. It might be...in a phase in the project where, it’s not time for the women to really come in... the roles here are pretty fixed” (OPC1, 31.97.2020). With time, as their development enters new phases, their membership gatekeeping process may depend less on construction laborers, and have the opportunity for other ways to be a part of the ecovillage experience.

In LAEV, the membership gatekeeping process is more comprehensive and lasts longer, approximately, 12 months. It is based on values and intuition, over any particular skillset, though contribution is a desirable characteristic. According to Margaret, the processes of acquiring a new member was created as a preventative measure to increase retention, something they learned from other communities as a best practice. Longevity of membership would be the sign that this mechanism is doing its job. As Margaret explains, it is a good sign

to her that “We haven’t had anyone for quite some time, like, moving away because they were unhappy being here” (LAEV1, 16.10.2020).

The formal three stage process allows for a lot of space and time for a potential conflict, but likewise allows for both the inquiring new person and the community to make an informed decision about whether they should join the community. It allows the honeymoon stage to fade and see the reality of what living in the community is like. Like a test, a prospective member joins the social activities and are assigned a designated liaison community member to guide them.

Though the criteria the community is looking for is admittedly ambiguous, one major theme for membership gatekeeping is a person’s attitude toward conflict. As part of the three phase process, once the community has “greenlighted” the prospective member, an interview will take place in which the community will ask questions, the most common being, “How do you handle conflict?” It is a running joke that this will always be asked (LAEV3, 28.01.2021). Other questions tend to be around contribution that the member wants to bring in terms of interests, possible projects, etc.

Their processes being more rigid can make selection a challenge. Intragroup disagreements arise around how strict rules and agreements should be and in which cases to make exceptions without it being unfair to the community as a whole. The challenge of having things in writing is how static it appears, which does not reflect the processual nature of social phenomenon, including membership. Intragroup disagreements occur on whether to bend the rule or stand firm. On one occasion when this caused a conflict for Jennifer, she stated that she felt she was being treated as a “second class citizen” because she had exceptional circumstances during the process of becoming a new member. For her, it was important to state her resistance to their rigidity, but ultimately decided to accept it because she wanted to be a member. Now, having been in the community longer, she can see the need and the function of the agreements to “avoid difficulties” (LAEV2, 18.01.2021).

5.3.2 Code of Conduct

As mentioned, the conflict resolution culture in LAEV is very organized and uses a bureaucratic approach to prevention through the use of by-laws and agreements. These are often born out of conflict, and the desire to prevent its reoccurrence (LAEV1, 16.10.2020). It communicates a conflict transformation story, where members agree to processes and

guidelines that will create the desired conduct for peace. This story sometimes is lost as time passes, so conflict can still arise when an exception to the rule is needed.

Creating boundaries around unwanted behavior from within the community is a continuous everyday peace practice. They hold the community accountable to their articulated values and expectations of peaceful practices, such as non-violent communication. In more interpersonal and spontaneous ways, it can be as simple as saying, “This is not ok with me.” And giving yourself permission to withdraw. In one case, the email communication around an issue of sharing garden space was getting aggressive and made Jennifer uncomfortable. She confronted the behavior and set a boundary, removing herself from the email chain and requesting members to speak to her in person if they wanted to address the issue further (LAEV2, 18.01.2021). It transformed the communication, and members apologized to her for their aggressiveness.

In the OPC setting, interpersonal boundaries are made as they are needed and as conflicts arise, usually addressed verbally. Since it is a work site, often leaders will need to manage unwanted behaviors. On one occasion, an employee showed up drunk to the worksite, and this was a clearly unacceptable situation, in which a boundary had to be made. James in dealing with this situation, calmed himself, then addressed the issue by communicating that there would be consequences if this happened again. Dialogue through mediation is the more common practice deployed in the OPC setting to communicate unwanted behaviors, described in more depth later in this chapter.

5.3.3 Security

Another reason for the boundary making practice is for the safety and security of the members, but this is more relevant in LAEV since they are living more communally than OPC. Because of the substantial homelessness in Los Angeles, and LAEV being in such a densely populated area, there had been incidents of homeless people sleeping in their garden space. This caused a single mother living on the first floor of one of the buildings to feel insecure. As a result, the community transformed their garden space to be “less inviting” to the homeless by replacing benches with a planter for a passion fruit vine, and planting cactus in the garden. Another way LAEV creates a soft boundary for the security of their members is by limiting their amount of exposure to the public, which will be described in more detail in Chapter 7.

5.4 Yielding to the Local

Members most commonly use this practice in circumstances when migrating into a new country or culture where the individual has an acceptance that the culture they are entering has its own history and customs, and they are the foreigner. Since they are not the “local”, they recognize that though they may protest aspects of the culture or dislike it, they exercise patience with the way things are and surrender to what is happening instead of confronting or forcing change.

In two cases in which participants immigrated into a new country, both experienced turbulence during integration. For Jennifer in LAEV, it was an ideological difference that caused intrapersonal conflict for her, coming from the communal culture of Colombia into the highly individualistic American context. The approach of other members toward sharing space and resources seemed strange to her and counter-culture to her way of life. Neighbors charging for extra storage space for something as small as a suitcase and asking to sign a liability release form to borrow a moped seemed like foreign ideas to her. She eventually accepted this as a cultural difference but chose not to take them up on their offers. On reflection, Jennifer sees that this can have its benefits in this type of society, even though it still feels strange to her (LAEV2, 18.01.2021). In the case of Robert in OPC, emigrating from a nearby African country into Ghana, cultural barriers caused trouble for his integration into the ecovillage. As a result, he determined that acceptance of Accra culture, “the way they are” including their “rules and regulations” was the best route toward peace with the community and also has begun learning the operational language they use (OPC4, 14.01.2021).

Two Swiss participants, James and Andrew, express the way they used yielding as a practice of patience and respect coming into the Ghanaian context. In general, they speak of the obvious difference of building construction projects in Switzerland and in Ghana. A person from a country with a more developed infrastructure and economy can’t expect the project to run in a similar way:

...coming from Switzerland, where everything seems to be organized, working well, mostly you live your life according to your plan...So, turn everything around what I just said and you’re in Ghana. So, if I always lost my temper when things didn’t go according to plan, I would be crazy a long time (OPC1, 31.07.2020).

...in Africa, it is so different, everything takes so much longer. Okay, so that was my expectation, mostly about work, about how to build a house, and here (Switzerland) you can call and they bring you wood and there you need to, like the first month, I was just waiting for wood (OPC6, 22.09.2020).

Among OPC participants, there is a deep respect for the wisdom of the local. This in itself, is an important aspect of their everyday peace. Many of the Ghanaians have come from other regions as well, and therefore have different tribal ancestry, with different cultures and dialects. They also know how it feels to come into the village and not be considered the “local” in some respect. The most common piece of advice offered by OPC participants to someone wanting to start a similar project, was to find someone you can trust who is local and understands the culture. For example, knowing how to navigate the issues around corruption and cheating in Ghana is a wisdom that a foreigner may not have. In one incident at OPC, an early partnership with a local man taught James a lesson in patience. After discovering this person was trying to cheat them, it was tempting to cut ties immediately, but another Ghanaian partner had the wisdom to know waiting was the right move. Acceptance of this behavior in the short term allowed them to still get what they needed for the project from him, but proceed with more caution. Eventually the man in question created enough of his own problems with another NGO that he was chased out of town by the village (OPC1, 17.09.2021).

In another conflict, local wisdom helped Steven practice a yielding approach in order to “take the high road” being faced with a serious accusation of performing a traditional ritual without proper authority, which he did not do. Typically this would be resolved through mediation by the Traditional Chief. He chose another option which was to just accept the accusation and take the fall out. In this case, choosing to yield to the accusation deescalated the conflict, and helped him to avoid what could have been disastrous consequences. The accuser has not shown up again since.

Yielding is useful but may not function to transform the situation itself, or at least not at that time. It even potentially prolongs the conflict resolution if the person continues to feel an incompatibility with the culture. It is a continuous practice of submission and surrender without losing one’s own identity. The tensions continue to exist and in some cases, there are some remnants of judgment toward the local culture. But, some of these contradictions may be transformed or resolved through another mechanism down the road, such as the storage space issue mentioned by Jennifer, which is now being examined as part of an investigation into fair distribution of space and rental rates.

5.5 Dialogue: Opening Lines of Communication

Dialogue has been defined as:

A process of genuine interaction through which human beings listen to each other deeply enough to be changed by what they learn. Each makes a serious effort to take other's concerns into her or his own picture even when disagreement persists. No participant gives up her or his identity, but each recognizes enough of the other's valid human claims that he or she will act differently toward the other. (Pruitt & Thomas, 2007)

In both settings, there are many examples in which the ecovillage brings issues to light, to create transparency and useful dialogue. When there is a place to bring concerns and it is ritualized and routinized, it functions like a pressure valve to release tensions that may have been kept internally and could fester. It is the most frequently used, most versatile and highly effective tool to transform conflicts that arise from varying sources, and on many different levels.

5.5.1 Education

Education is valued in both sites to bring forth an important and relevant topic and create meaningful dialogue. Their values that contrast mainstream culture provides a need for continuous sharing of alternative approaches to living. For example, OPC as an eco-tourism site, at this point has a main educational purpose around sustainable agricultural practices and waste management. It is a demonstration project for visitors and employees to learn on the job. At this stage of development, there are no educational activities around peacebuilding activities per se. They are more “caught than taught”, and shared through example, though this is part of the vision for the future.

Educational workshops are a practice in LAEV that covers a range of topics. Most recently, for example, due to past conflicts around race and the increased focus on racism in the U.S. after George Floyd's death, the community has been undergoing educational workshops around racial justice and its relation to climate, highlighting the intersection of inequality issues between social and ecological dimensions.

5.5.2 Mediation

Mediation is used in both contexts, but in very different ways. LAEV, using a formal approach, has a committee, the “Conflict Resolution Team” that goes through extensive training to provide this service, mostly to help with interpersonal level conflicts. Because of its formality as a service provided by facilitators, there is a procedure to using it, which members need to request. It takes a common western approach, by using neutral facilitators to help two willing participants achieve what they want to achieve. It may be used to see each

other's perspectives, or may be more in the realm of problem-solving and resolution. Mark, a member of the Conflict Resolution Team shared what success looks like, "If a mediator can establish a line of communication, something positive has occurred" (LAEV3, 28.01.2021). It may or may not lead to a lasting resolution, but the two involved in the conflict are now empowered to communicate as a result.

Even though Mark has facilitated successful mediations in the past, he questions whether the Conflict Resolution Team is robust enough to meet the needs of the community, and has strong enough presence and reputation for it to be used at its fullest potential. One could speculate that its formality is part of the reason it is underutilized, whereas if more members felt they could use it spontaneously or casually, maybe it would be used more frequently. Other reasons Mark shared include that there needs to be a range of facilitators, and that there is an inherent issue of bias of facilitators since they may have opinions about the conflict, being a member of the community. (LAEV3, 28.01.2021). He shares of a current membership acquisition conflict, in which members disagree about whether a prospective member who is in the process of joining is a good fit. One member, who brought this prospective member in, is doing all they can to try to make it possible for him to join. To Mark, this issue should be brought to the team, but instead those involved are just avoiding the problem. Members may be practicing avoidance because it is awkward, but also maybe because the membership process itself will likely work this conflict out. But in the meantime, since the process is slow and drawn out, many members have already formed opinions about this new person and the conflict remains latent but is definitely there.

Mediation at OPC is less formal, used frequently by different members when needed, and because of the diversity of the community, it is used in different forms. Culturally, in Ghana, mediation is used in the form of a third party who is a parent, or another respected elder, which may be an Assemblyman or assistant to the Traditional Chief to speak on behalf of someone who has wronged another. The person who is the offender is sometimes removed from the dialogue or they go together and the elder does the advocating for resolution. It is used for significant conflicts, and sometimes involve family members.

Traditional mediation through a Chief is a local practice used to resolve a particular kind of conflict through arbitration. The arbitration produces a win-lose outcome. Because OPC includes people of all religions, faiths and traditions, understanding this practice is important. As in the conflict aforementioned where arbitration could have been utilized due to the

accusation made against Steven, if he had come out as the “loser”, it could have had consequences that were harmful to his reputation and standing in the community.

A direct style of mediation is often used in daily life at OPC as a management tool by the executive leadership. Because this context is an organization with a clear hierarchy, the leadership most often becomes the mediator. Examples were shared by participants in leadership, in which they saw a problem, or a problem was brought to them, and they spoke one on one with parties involved directly in order to understand the situation, and then brought the concern out into the open to resolve it and prevent it from happening again. Steven explains why it is important to do it this way, stating, “if you call them all together like that, they will fight in your face. By approaching them separately, and you approach this one separately, then they are aware you are now driving them at peace” (OPC3, 14.01.2021).

James shares his opinion that the indirect form of local mediation often leaves conflicts unresolved, and the arbitration mediation done by Traditional Chiefs, having a win-lose outcome, is harmful to those who are on the losing end (OPC1, 31.07.2020). It is, however, evident from the interviews that when someone with authority, either an executive leader or an elder is involved, there is higher chance of success overall. As explained by a Ghanaian participant, David, it is important in the Ghanaian culture to send someone who is respected.

When you see someone older than you, you do respect. For that person, you cannot open your mouth, you can't just open your mouth, you speak to him any how, no.... I can go by myself, but he or she will not be comfortable but if I go with such a people like this, with me, she or he will be ok because they know that I brought an important person. This one I cannot disobey (OPC2, 19.09.2020).

On the other hand, the more direct mediation style may be having a normative effect, as it has been welcomed by some Ghanaian members. In one case, Linda, who works as a chef had a conflict of cultural difference when she tried to prepare vegetarian food for all of the employees in order to accommodate European guests, but found that the black employees were upset with this choice because it is their custom to eat meat. They talked behind her back about this and did not come forward to address this with her directly. This was upsetting to her, and the conflict was resolved through mediation with the help of James, who gave her the chance to speak in a weekly meeting. She found this very empowering and now handles her conflicts directly.

Sometimes, mediation is not enough to create the necessary dialogue. What it does, however, is open the line of communication that often will lead to another step for resolution. For

example, several conflicts that were mediated eventually were brought to a community meeting and a resolution or agreement was made as a result.

5.5.3 Weekly Community Meetings

In both contexts weekly meetings are like a net to catch the hanging concerns or thoughts from community members that need to be addressed. Weekly meetings are a place to connect, reflect, problem-solve, make decisions, practice nonviolent communication, learn from one another and train new facilitators. All members have a right and opportunity to speak and to contribute to the agenda. Because they are so integral to the peace of the ecovillage, the practice of facilitating them well is in constant revision both to address most current concerns, but to continually improve its effectiveness.

In LAEV, the weekly meetings are highly organized, yet playful, with a written agenda they work through together, and with facilitators who have been trained specifically for this task. From observation, some key aspects were identified. The use of several ground rules intend to create the safest and most inclusive environment possible. Examples include the basics of nonviolent communication stating, “Emotions are ok, aggression is not ok” and “humor is welcome” (22.09.2020). Then, there were particular sensitivities toward creating space for all to speak by attending to needs for interpretation, and by installing a speaking order, providing a hierarchy of identities that were given first rights to speak. People who have had oppressive histories, such as indigenous, people of color or non-cis are given the first opportunities to speak. Because voices of many oppressed people are often unheard or dismissed, this is meant to transform this dynamic, by intentionally making space for them. A recent addition is opportunity at the end of the meeting for members to offer evaluation for the facilitator on the success of the meeting, or to other members who did not exemplify the kind of behavior they are seeking to achieve.

In OPC, the weekly meetings are a newer practice, and in many ways counter-culture. First, they are becoming more formal and structured with the agendas, which has been viewed positively by the members interviewed. Second, they are designed to break down the hierarchy. Like LAEV, these meetings are key to creating an inclusive environment and providing a space for all to be heard. As James explains, “we talk about our challenges also about our successes and see how we can help each other to overcome them and capitalize on our successes and build a better world together” (OPC1, 17.09.2020). They begin with a prayer, by a Ghanaian volunteer, typically Christian, followed by each team, who work in different areas of the agriculture, sharing what is happening in their area of work. Someone is

designated to share some teaching each week as well. It is a place for sharing wisdom of all kinds, including trade, but also virtues they would like to see practiced among the community, such as respecting one another. They will then review how they have done with this virtue the following week.

In both contexts, these meetings are in a continual process toward an ideal group dialogue, to create inclusive participation, and to meet the various needs of the community.

5.6 Inner Peace: Compassion for Self and for Others

The last everyday peace practices discovered in the analysis is inner peace, defined here as transcendence that is achieved by compassion for self and compassion for others. From an intrapersonal perspective, inner peace is used to create a space for self-caring, preparing for interactions with others and allows for the individual to detach from the issues around them and connect with themselves, as well as a higher consciousness in the moment, depending on the individual's belief system. In so doing, this helps them control their emotional responses to others and exhibit the best version of themselves, and therefore be the best community member they can be. There are several examples where participants share their practice of waiting to respond to others, pausing to connect with oneself and finding inner peace in their own unique ways. As a daily practice, self-control and inner peace helps individuals to respond from a calmer demeanor and prevent unnecessary conflicts with others or deescalate them.

In one example, James talks about before approaching an interpersonal conflict, taking time for inner peace so as not to respond out of anger. "So, first and foremost, inner peace. Ok, this is the way the situation presents itself. Does it make sense to get angry? No, it doesn't help anyone, neither me, nor the other person, ok is this a patience blessing, opportunity to train my patience?" (OPC1, 31.07.2020). David shares the wisdom to wait a day or two before going to someone you have wronged, to allow you both to calm down (OPC2, 22.01.2021). For Linda, she emphasizes controlling oneself, and waiting to react and explain later what wasn't favorable or they could do better (OPC5, 24.10.2020).

Jennifer shares how she creates a "cocoon" to take care of herself in solitude and then engage and participate in community when she really wants to, stating, "If I am able to take care of myself, I am being the most responsible community member I can." Her inner peace is not just about compassion for herself, but desire to be a positive contributor to community.

Knowing her own needs helps her prepare to do that. “I think it’s so important to know who you are and what works for you, because otherwise you’re always going to be like, kind of, pleasing everybody else and not really knowing what’s actually working for you. And that’s the best way to get inner peace in my mind” (LAEV2, 18.01.2021).

Similar to the idea of inner peace as a form of self-care, Mark shares his idea of “personal sustainability”, which he refers to as, “what the interface is of ecological practices and personal wellness and personal care and healing” (LAEV3, 28.01.2021).

In the examples participants shared, they spoke mostly of their own practice of inner peace, but as mentioned in OPC, weekly meetings open with a prayer, which is an inner peace practice, and on one occasion, they came together for a National Day of Prayer in response to Covid, which was initiated by the Ghanaian President.

In this chapter, themes of everyday peace practices in the two case studies were presented. Their unique conflict cultures and contexts show different approaches to the use of these practices, yet based on very similar concepts of the ecovillage model. The following chapter will deepen the understanding of how the diversity within each context plays a role in the way the practices are implemented or perceived by the participants.

Chapter 6 Diversity Dimensions

The case studies were specifically chosen for their value of diversity and to examine the ways their everyday peace practices are affected by their diverse backgrounds, particularly class, culture and race. James shares that, “Diversity has a big potential for unity, harmony but also for conflict.’ (OPC1, 31.07.2020). Diversity brings harmony and peace when members transcend their histories and discover the benefits of knowledge sharing with one another for the sake of development. The environment has to become a safe and inclusive place where people are treated as equals for this to happen. Diversity can bring conflict when cultural differences clash in incompatible ways, but even this is not necessarily a bad thing, if the community can work through their differences and learn from one another’s point of view. When conflicts involving class or race are present, the everyday practices are put to the test, as the complexity of overcoming past trauma and oppression, and affirming identities can sometimes draw even more attention to it. This chapter presents a few of the ways the diversity of class, culture and race affect the peace processes of the ecovillages.

6.1 Dependency in OPC

Creating a positive peace environment means removing structural or cultural power imbalances. As a development project, with money flowing in from Switzerland, OPC creates an asymmetrical structure and therefore, the dependency relationship trickles down between its Swiss and Ghanaian members. As explained in the background, the area in which OPC is situated lacks employment opportunities outside of tourism. The economic dependence on white tourists and NGOs has a long history prior to OPC coming into existence. David shares how when he moved to Busua with his father at a young age from another region of Ghana, he noticed that the community itself had no industry to support it, other than tourism from white people. He goes on to share that OPC is different than other NGOs who have exacerbated this problem by coming and going, without working directly with local people and living among them (OPC2, 29.09.2020).

Even though they live among and work directly with local people, the interpersonal effect of the dependency relationship has been visible and created some conflict within OPC. The nature of this dependency relationship has potential to create a sense of entitlement by both parties in that those who have more wealth expect those they are “helping” to be thankful for their presence and contribution, and those receiving the help then expect gifts from their counterparts. This dynamic breaks down other peace practices, and causes conflict between

individuals. The language reflected in the 2019 annual report of one Swiss member's support of OPC reflects the ideals of going to Africa to "help" with their problems. This point is not to question his genuineness and love for fellow OPC members, which is also clearly evident in the ways he talks about the meaningful time he spent with them daily to "share joys and sorrows, to eat together, laugh", but to examine the effect of positioning the relationship of a Swiss member as a helper to a Ghanaian member (OPC, 2019). And language choices may be for the purpose of trying to appeal to donors. If they don't explain that Busua is "poor" and needs their "help", maybe people would not feel the need to donate. The point here, is that if the project is truly considered an equal cultural exchange and unity of white and black, the language could reflect this better.

As an illustration on the micro level, a conflict arose out of jealousy when Andrew was supporting some people in Busua who were not members of OPC with services, and offering them food. A member of OPC was jealous of this but it only came to light through another person. Andrew tried to address this directly, but the other man never took him up on this offer and the situation got worse and remained unresolved. The historical relationship of dependency between white and black people creates a power dynamic in this relationship that likely makes the dialogue more difficult for the Ghanaian member. As James described, "The ones (conflicts) between black and white are much more subtle, hidden...the blacks are not able to express them, but they are there, very deep, hidden" (OPC1, 31.07.2020). This could be explained as a cultural norm, as James later explains that Ghanaians "don't directly approach each other" (OPC1, 31.07.2020), but also could be explained by the fact that they need white people to cooperate with them to survive.

Ultimately, the Swiss member was left disheartened and angry, stating,

Then he just never comes and it's like getting worse and worse, and yeah...he didn't look into my eyes, kind of...In the end, I was just...yeah, I also lost my mind at some point and was just like, 'yeah, fuck off!'. Like, I tried so many times and you can't sometimes. And I will not just give you money so you are happy (OPC6, 22.09.2020).

This conflict is much bigger than one white man and one black man, and demonstrates how difficult it is to transform conflict that stems from structural asymmetry on the macro level. The nature of latent tensions caused by structural violence are harder to address on the micro-level, because structural violence does not have one actor to point the blame on, and therefore aggressions can be misdirected out of frustration. The black member involved in this conflict was not interviewed, so it was not possible to get his perspective.

According to James, concerns between white people and black people are more latent, but conflicts between black people are more “on the table” (OPC1, 31.07.2020). Black participants see the benefit of white people, but data suggests that not all have the same attitude toward other black members necessarily. One of the members was having conflict with a group of other members. To protect him and to deescalate the conflict, James continually moves him between worksites where he sees the least opportunity for this to continue. The conflict is cultural, since this member comes from another country, doesn’t speak their language, and does not “behave like a Ghanaian” (OPC1, 31.07.2020). This is a deep level relational conflict, which may stem from cultural difference alone, but it is possible that his low status, and different knowledge and offerings from his background are not as valued by locals as white people. This conflict will require a transformation of the attitudes toward this member which will take time and effort.

Another example includes how a subculture of the local community are viewed unfavorably. The group, called “Rastafarians”, are followers of a decentralized religious movement originating in Jamaica, and are typically recognized by their long dreadlocks. Their way of life is not embraced by other Ghanaians. Wearing dreadlocks alone can cause you to be seen unfavorably with or without following the Rastafarian lifestyle. But in OPC, this is not the case. In fact, for Steven, this is an indicator of peace that he is able to wear his dreadlocks without judgment (OPC3, 14.01.2021).

As a newly forming sustainable development project, the community must take a long view to overcome the socioeconomic, racial and cultural challenges they face. Similar to Firchow (2018), James utilizes Maslow’s “Hierarchy of Needs” as a lens to explain the stages of development necessary for the transformation they desire toward inner peace. Right on the landing page of the website it reads in bold letters “Obrobibini Peace Complex: For More Inner Peace” (Opc.org, n.d.). This is the ultimate goal. The first step, however, is establishing sustainable farming and employment which will allow the community members to have the stability needed to address deeper psychological, emotional or spiritual concerns and conflicts. He also mentions that you don’t attract funding with “inner peace, yoga and meditation”, like you do for “sustainable education” (OPC1, 17.09.2020).

With the goals of the organization in mind, and with a more sympathetic analysis, one could say that the power possessed through the Swiss funding is being used in a positive way, even if it is creating a dependency in the short term. Brunk (2012) points out that some peace

thinkers, such as Socrates, Jesus and the Buddha, have proposed that power doesn't always have to be violent or harmful, but can be used, "to organize persons and groups into cooperative enterprises for the accomplishment of social goals" (p. 20). And as Dias et al. (2017) stated, in her analysis of different ecovillage approaches in different parts of the world that in the Global South, when facing issues of resource scarcity NGO funding "many times this is the most viable form of developing an ecovillage" (p. 86).

For all involved with OPC, the question will remain: until the farm is self-sustaining without Swiss money supporting them, and a hierarchy within that represents this dynamic, will they really know how deeply their relationships have transformed the chasm between white and black people beyond the transactional exchange? Chapter 7 will offer more insights in this question.

6.2 Legislating Equity in LAEV

LEAV continually maintains a balancing act of maintaining a diversity of class, culture and race. In taking a legislative approach, inequalities can be avoided and addressed, but it can also exacerbate sensitive issues around identity.

As mentioned in the background, LAEV is considered low-income housing, which means the majority of their members have to be low-income when they join, but a minority of members are not. With this class differentiation within the community, members need to reflect on fair distribution of its resources in order to develop a positive peace environment. In a recent investigation, prompted by one of its members around the cost per square footage, they found that there was indeed, an unfair practice in place, although not intentional. The committee found that some more highly educated members living in one building, with higher income levels were being charged close to half as much as other members. This shows that even within an intentionally diverse ecovillage, negligence of issues around class can happen, and therefore it is important to practice this kind of investigation. This finding prompted the community to reflect on such questions as, "Who's benefiting and why? Are we complicit with inequality by not being intentional about how we set rental rates?" (LAEV3, 28.01.2021). This instance emphasizes the importance of their members being encouraged to ask reflective questions, and take initiative when they see a need to address. Without this member asking the question, likely this inequality would have remained latent. Undoubtedly some new policies will be an outcome from this investigation to correct the problem.

On the other hand, the rule-based approach to creating equity can exacerbate intrapersonal conflict around racial identities. One example of this is their approach to controlling the racial diversity in their community membership. Because diversity is a value, they use a quota of fifty percent white members, and fifty percent people of color. At first, this rule created some problems in the membership process. In their eagerness to diversify, it was tempting to reduce the criteria for inviting a prospective member into the community on their skin color. In an article called “Diversity Issues in Los Angeles Eco-Village”, the founding member explains, “...we accepted several persons of color more for their ethnicity than anything else. The subsequent problems resulting from that bias were divisive, expensive, and destructive to the community” (Arkin, 2012, p.16). As the author explains, in one case, a divisive clique had formed around one of the black members who accused her of being racist, creating a two year long conflict before the woman chose to leave, with a lot of financial help from the community. Though that was painful, the author shares that she has reflected on her own racism since this accusation, so it was a learning experience. In another case, the community failed to do a background check in their enthusiasm to invite in a new person of color, who turned out to be a rent-scam artist (Arkin, 2012).

Another example, is the ground rule mentioned in Chapter 4 of the speaking order in weekly meetings. Both of these approaches seek to create the structures for positive peace through social justice, but Jennifer articulates the very complex nature of trying to both acknowledge and embrace racial diversity without reducing people to their skin tone. For her it is an ongoing intrapersonal conflict that these processes intensify:

I have some experience around this because I’m very much aware that these things systematically have been working for a long time and been in place and arbitrarily setting up the way we live and yet I don’t necessarily believe that the race should be the reason why things happen because that is exactly the reason the bad things are happening...So when someone says, Oh I really want so and so to move in because they are black, I’m thinking I just don’t think that that should be the reason. I mean, I would like to be able to see this person as a human being and not because she’s, he’s black or whatever they are that they automatically have more of a...doors open to do things. And as I am saying this, I’m also thinking...But, there is also a need here to balance out the imbalance that we have been experiencing. So, for me, it’s a little bit of a conflict inside of myself. But I personally try not to be defined or be given a special treatment because I’m a woman or I’m Latina, or I’m an immigrant or I am whatever it is that I am. I just don’t think that’s right, it doesn’t sit right with me. And so when, not too long ago, it was proposed to do a speaking order in our meetings, favoring that um...you know, the first people that spoke are of indigenous descent, then it was women, then it was da da da. And I was thinking, what is this hierarchy? How...I am not

even sure how I am supposed to identify myself. I know I have some indigenous in me, I'm from Latin America, of course! I have some black in me, there were African slaves that came there. And I'm a woman, I'm an immigrant. I have no idea how to position myself here. This is very confusing, I just have a question, I just want to be able to ask it or share a comment without having to think about whether this is my moment of the hierarchy to say something or not. So, I have a difficult time with this, personally. And as I will repeat, at the same time recognizing the need to balance out the imbalances we have been experiencing. So, I just I'm not sure how to address this without feeling so icky as it sometimes feels. (LAEV2, 18.01.2021)

This also leads to a question regarding those who do not identify with race at all, which includes two of the participants that were interviewed. Who decides in what category they fall, how they are “counted” and how this is considered if they are a prospective member? Even with these complexities, it is evident that LAEV desires to create the most inclusive environment for all people, and particularly to raise up voices that have been neglected.

Latest developments at LEAV have been to decentralize leadership around gatekeeping processes like membership, and creating more teams, such as the Racial Justice Committee whose purpose is “to promote racial justice locally in a way that can be replicated in communities everywhere” (B. July, personal communication, February 21, 2021). These processes have led to more people of color in leadership roles. (Arkin, 2012) The question for LAEV may continue to be, how do we attract a diverse membership for the right reasons? What obstacles remain within our community that make us either attractive or not, or more importantly, safe for people to want to join? And then, once they belong to the membership, how do we continue to make space for all to have a fair chance to share their voice and their story?

Overcoming issues of inequality from structural or cultural violence on the macro level, such as unaffordable housing, unemployment, resource scarcity or segregated populations, is an ongoing challenge that requires much reflection for both ecovillages. In the next chapter, evidence from the data will be presented as to how the efforts, even with their flaws, have indeed brought transformation to the individual members, and had an effect on the community as a whole toward positive peace.

Chapter 7 Transformations toward Positive Peace

This chapter will discuss how the participants describe transformations from their perspective toward positive peace. As mentioned in chapter 3, the assumption is that if the ecovillage is continually transforming toward positive peace, there should be visible signs of both an absence of violence and the presence of equity and personal development as well. Participants were also asked about what they consider to be indicators of peace, unique to their context. Analysis includes narratives in which members express stories of how they have benefited personally from the ecovillage experience, observed this in others, or how the community as a whole has developed toward an environment for all to thrive equally.

7.1 Nurturing Human Potential

Human potential being nurtured is a sign that the ecovillage is continually moving toward a positive peace environment. One way that benefits of membership have had a positive effect is the personal development and the financial stability of the members interviewed. As mentioned in Chapters 3 & 6, when applying the motivational theory of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, once members have financial burdens lifted from their previous lives, they are able to grow, develop their skills, find more meaning and purpose, and develop inner peace.

Because of a lack of employment opportunities in rural areas of Ghana, one of the most common narratives of transformation within OPC is due to gainful employment as a member. This has had multiple positive effects on members' lives. Linda shared how her husband had moved from another region of Ghana to work with OPC, while she stayed behind with their three year old son to continue working as a shoe salesperson. On a visit to OPC to see her husband, the CEO saw her talents in a much needed area, preparing daily meals for the members, and she was hired (OPC5, 24.10.2020). This not only provided her with employment, but it reunited her family.

Steven shared the emotional transformation he witnesses, from despair to joy when he interviews and then hires someone.

So, I know when a person wants employment, the way he comes, the way he speaks, and you see the vim in his voice, you feel the pain of the person from there. And after the person has been employed, you can also see it because they are singing and working, and they're jumping up and down, so you feel 'Oh, okay, so I also impacted something' (OPC3, 14.01.2021).

This opportunity allows a person to feel a sense of security and hope for their future. Due to the problem of the unemployment in the area, Linda expresses that for her, an indicator of peace, is “young people having work, having something to do” (OPC5, 24.10.2020).

After a divorce, joining LAEV gave Jennifer the support she needed financially, which empowered her to work on her creative projects that don’t immediately generate income. She was also able to pursue projects around sustainability practices that she couldn’t do as easily on her own with more vigor. Jennifer also expresses her appreciation for having access to a garden, a rare privilege in her neighborhood, and adds that for her, an indicator of peace is an abundant garden with lots of food (LAEV2, 18.01.2021).

The experiences within the ecovillages have also helped many members to contribute their talents, and develop new skills. When joining in the earlier stages of LAEV, Margaret had brought many skills from other cooperatives in areas such as “financial management...organizational structures, how organizations function”, one of her motivations for joining (LAEV1, 16.10.2020). LAEV has given her a place to practice those skills and have a large part in molding and shaping the systems and processes to what it is today. She shared about seeing a repetitive pattern of people gaining facilitation skills and confidence, shyness toward speaking up more. She describes, “...people are aware they are transforming and they realize this is uh, something has allowed them to grow and um, you know... I think this is like a key feature of what we’re doing” (LAEV1, 16.10.2020).

Robert, having had a difficult time integrating into a new country because of language barriers, is developing his ability to communicate by learning the local dialect, and therefore it is not surprising that for him, an indicator of peace is clarity of communication on his working team, where everyone knows what the expectations are (OPC4, 14.01.2021).

Steven shares how because of his job at OPC, where he has to travel to new places and meet new people, he has learned to communicate more effectively and “really make my points clear”, and have the confidence to approach “people definitely I would never think of approaching.” He has also developed his skills as a mechanic and speaks of the satisfaction of this growth. “It’s very nice to see yourself doing stuff you’ve never been doing, with my skills too.” It has allowed him to dream even bigger of what is possible for him, stating, “I feel like, if I stay long at OPC I can even fly the plane, that’s what I think” (OPC3, 14.01.2021).

For others, the ecovillage has given them a new sense of home, belonging and commitment to a place. James speaks of how Busua had become a meaningful place for resting and recharging prior to OPC coming into existence. “So basically I did a lot of meditation when I was here in Busua and a lot of inspiration came through this going into that silent space, from where a lot of ideas can come” (OPC1, 31.07.2020) It was this practice of inner peace in Busua, along with some serendipitous meetings, that led to the vision of OPC.

For those who spend partial time in Europe, and partial time in Ghana, OPC is like a second home with another family. “I already miss it. I think I’m kind of building up a little bit my second home there, and with OPC, I’m sure connected, I love it and almost there from the beginning, yeah just what we are doing, yeah, I love it” (OPC6, 22.09.2020).

Mark, along with his wife had been traveling for a few years prior to joining LAEV. For his family, being accepted into the ecovillage as a new member meant “putting down roots” (LAEV3, 28.01.2021). This is important for everyday peace because being rooted means consistency in the community, and a commitment to its development. Now, Mark offers his talents, energy and ideas to this place and his family has become a part of the community glue.

7.2 Unity and Strength through Diversity

GEN’s phrase “Unity and Strength through Diversity”, stated as part of their description of social regeneration was an interesting value to inquire about regarding aspects of diversity affecting everyday peace practices. GEN describes the meaning of this phrase as, “Ecovillages often provide a sense of belonging through community relationships, common projects, shared goals, and social processes, but do not demand that everyone is the same” (GEN, n.d.) Each participant was asked what this phrase means to them. The data revealed that this value in practice plays a significant role in transforming attitudes, behaviors and relationships by viewing diversity as a tremendous benefit personally and collectively. Jennifer describes how based on ideas from biology and permaculture, “to have any system be really resilient and sustain...it needs to be diverse” (LAEV2, 18.01.2021). When all of the ecovillage members embraces diversity, the greater purpose that binds them together helps them to transcend conflicts based on histories of oppression and cultural difference. It transforms from a mindset of “what has been done to us” to “what can we do together now?” with the purpose of doing something greater than what they can on their own. The two case studies share the many benefits from exchanging knowledge with one another on how to

build, problem-solve, communicate, parenting styles, various kinds of information, tools, ideas, and perspectives. Margaret and Jennifer describe these diverse experiences as “enriching” (LAEV1, 16.10.2020, LAEV2, 18.01.2021).

In a similar way to “Unity and Strength through Diversity”, the name, “Obribibini” has a powerful meaning to the members at OPC. David describes what it means to him, and the transformative effect of the idea, and how it has changed local mindsets:

Like, to become and love the whites and the blacks. Because before, some years ago, we think that no, the whites come in and cheat us. We tried to stay away from them. We tried to stay away from the whites. We try to stay away and have our own because some years ago they have been cheating us for so many years. But it’s not like this, we are all one. That would be very good for us to come, both the black and white to come together and do something together (OPC2, 19.09.2020).

Embracing diversity also means practicing inner peace and compassion for oneself and others which transform or even transcend the conflicts stemming from oppressive histories.

Compassion toward oneself empowers a person to transform a conflict by simply choosing a different view, attitude or behavior. Compassion toward others transcends beyond skin color, stereotypes and histories that can fixate a person’s understanding of another.

Steven shares a remarkable progression in attitude toward white people from his childhood to the present, in which he transforms from idolizing them, to feeling sadness from learning of past oppression, to a compassionate, caring posture toward white people coming to the area:

See, in our culture here, we use strangers to build cities. Like, we use strangers to build our villages. And then, if you have been in Ghana before, the kids they see the white people, there’s kind of a joy. Everybody wants to be like, yeah...close to white people, close to white people until I grew up to some extent and I learned a bit of history and I was a bit, like, kind of sad about the story of the impact that white people had on us. But, in a way, I saw it like, they also have to survive and we also have to agree to take care of them in that way. And in that exchange they also have to kind of, pay back. That is now, my sense of white people now (OPC3, 14.01.2021).

This “pay back” may refer to the exchange of knowledge or more literally, the funding from the development project. James mentions that one view of this “pay back” can even be the way white tourists are often purposely overcharged by locals (OPC1, 31.07.2020), and although everyone ultimately gets what they want in this exchange, it is not the transformation OPC seems to hope to achieve.

Some other examples were shared by participants in OPC on the impact they have seen in the mindsets of the broader community due to their efforts. David shares how he has seen violence decrease toward tourists and how to him this is an indicator of peace:

Before when they see the white they just grab them and try to take all the money. But now that is going down, its going down...That's why I say...because of the project they are changing their minds, before it was terrible. It was worse, it was worse.
(OPC2, 19.09.2020)

Steven speaks of the way their demonstration has transformed the attitudes and beliefs of young Ghanaians. One way is in helping those who didn't view agriculture as a desirable career path, see the possibilities of this now. There is also a group of local young men, called "the Beach Boys" who spend their time trying to have sexual relations with young white tourists that he mentions are beginning to see what a deeper, more meaningful relationship with white people can look like. This is significant because some white tourist volunteers were driven away because of the "Beach Boys" (OPC3, 14.01.2021).

In terms of influence on the broader community, LAEV has to balance concerns of security of their membership being in a densely populated urban area. Their website states that many people living in the buildings do not know that LAEV is right in their midst (LAEV, n.d.). They do have regular visitors and site tours, but not in large quantities, with only a handful at a time, approximately once a month (prior to Covid). Their need for security in a city that experiences violence and has large quantities of homeless people has led to a slight incompatibility with their goal as a demonstration project. The community has to manage the amount of "pull" they can create without jeopardizing the safety and privacy of their members. Opportunities have been offered to the community for documentaries, for example, but they chose not to participate, though there were differences of opinion.

Even still, the fact that this ecovillage was found in the investigation of this research through a publication shows that their message is still having influence. Their position in the global north, as a uniquely diverse demonstration, will continue to produce creative approaches to equity. As Margaret expressed, an indicator of peace at LAEV is members "feeling safe from assumptions or micro-aggressions" (LAEV1, 16.10.2020), and as they discover how to create that safe environment within the tense American racial landscape, they can offer insights to peace and conflict studies. Perhaps through the growing network of GEN and its influence, they will continue to grow their influence as well.

This chapter highlighted the ways in which the personal lives, as well as the communities are being transformed through the experience of the ecovillage toward a positive peace. Their improved financial situations provides room for deeper levels of transformation through human development. The unifying messaging of “unity and strength through diversity” and the continual promotion of this value has a transformative effect on the larger community, most notably within the polarized groups of white and black people in OPC. Both of these case studies offer opportunities to discover how the everyday practices of the ecovillage members can have a transformative affect.

Chapter 8 Conclusion

This chapter offers a summary of the key findings of this research with reflections on potential offerings to peace scholars, peace practitioners and policymakers.

8.1 Summary of Key Findings

This project sought to discover the everyday peace practices of two intentionally diverse ecovillages set in very different contexts, investigating the ways in which these practices are affected by their diversity, and how they have a transformative effect toward a positive peace environment. The research questions used to investigate this aim included: What everyday practices do the ecovillage members use to avoid, deescalate or transform conflict? How are these practices affected by their diverse backgrounds in terms of class, culture or race? What transformations can be seen toward a positive peace environment?

Ecovillages are small, generally peaceful microcosms of society that can innovate new practices as they bypass national and international systems by focusing intensely on the local. The everyday peace practices have been discussed in length, and ultimately, it was found that overall, in both case studies, social cohesion through a clearly stated purpose and meaningful daily social interactions is a fundamental everyday peace practice. Even with the right technical and structural conditions in place, without it, other important peace processes break down. Dialogue in various forms, is the most versatile, and widely used transformational tool to deepen understanding and resolve conflicts on many levels. Yielding to the local and Boundary-Making have their utility to prevent and deescalate conflict, but only marginally transform conflict toward a more improved situation. Membership, as a boundary, can create new kinds of conflicts and problems and exacerbate issues of resource scarcity and racial tension. Inner peace and compassion for oneself and for others has a transcendent effect, elevating members beyond stereotypes, histories of oppression and skin color.

The two case studies embrace diversity and purposely bring people from different backgrounds together to heal past oppressions and to exchange knowledge and culture for mutual benefit, but it is a continual process that requires constant reflection. “Unity and Strength through Diversity” represents a value and an attitude of embracing differences with the purpose of doing something even greater together. The message of “Obrobibini”, the coming together of “white man” and “black man”, has a growing unifying effect in OPC, deepening the relationship between white and black people, yet the dependent nature of the

relationship between Ghanaian and Swiss makes evaluating the level of this transformation more difficult. Interpersonal conflicts still occur as a result of the long history of dependency. As the project becomes more self-sustaining on the local level, deeper levels of transformation can take place for members in terms of meeting their own needs, as well as equalizing the relationship between white and black people. Because of their presence, transformation can be seen in the broader context, including decreases in violence toward white tourists, and sustainable practices becoming of interest, including young Ghanaian visitors who are seeing the potential of sustainable farming as a career.

In LAEV, formal agreements clarify expectations, but the continual process of creating community glue is the key to those agreements lasting. As a generally conflict-avoidant community, it is significant for transformation that members gain support to take initiatives for projects and committees that are meaningful to them, and develop various kinds of facilitation skills such as nonviolent communication, conflict resolution and meeting facilitation that develop agency and a culture that approaches conflict with confidence. In approaching equity for all, their formal, legislative approach can cause some intrapersonal stress on some members because identities are complex, intersectional and bring long histories with them. For those who do not fall neatly into categories, a more nuanced approach is needed. Dialogue around the complexities of identity would be an important use of this everyday peace practice to continue to bring more understanding.

8.2 Implications for Policy or Practice

Peace practitioners, ecovillages, and policymakers can take note of the advice given by research participants in doing similar projects. Most important, is patience in developing social cohesion for such a project. They advise to take your time, find the right local people who can be trusted and trust you, to co-create and promote peace. Listen, then listen, then listen some more, to local people's ideas of what peace is for them.

This research reminds practitioners utilizing liberal peacebuilding approaches, funded by foreign donors, that measuring another community's peace is only necessary because of intervention and the need to legitimize financial investment. Local people can benefit from measurements as well, but it should be for their benefit, to develop and enhance what peace means in their context. The EPI project approach gives them this opportunity. Also, in the process of soliciting funding, reporting to funders and other communications, language depicting a dependency relationship between interventionists and local people should be

replaced with verbiage that acknowledges the agency and wisdom of local populations and their contribution to the global efforts toward peace.

The different contexts from the case studies can offer insights for implementation of peace initiatives as well. From OPC, we can learn that in pluralistic settings with different leaderships as well as religions and cultures, normative approaches to peace need to be very collaborative and inclusive. Also because of the history of interventions and financial dependency on external funding in rural areas, the goal should be to empower local ownership as soon as possible. The ecovillage model can be a useful approach for sustainable development in areas like these, giving great care and commitment to the local inclusion of the decision-making processes, as well as the creation of the peace culture around the development project.

In highly developed countries like the United States, we can learn that formal agreements are normal to many who grow up there, but to some who immigrate, it can be a foreign concept. The tension between individualistic ideology of American culture and the communal concept of the ecovillage can make a challenging balance to strike with this model. Though formal agreements can help to navigate this tension and prevent conflict, it is also important to revisit social ideas put into these static forms since in practice they are more complex, processual and organic than it might appear on paper.

8.3 Emergent Issues for Further Research

Some emergent issues could be further explored in the interest of this project. First, peaceful societies, even microcosms like the ecovillage, have significance in the peace and conflict transformation field as they make social change through quiet resistance. That being said, issues around diversity are necessary to investigate within the ecovillage milieu, particularly in terms of the approaches to equity within the movement in addressing race, gender, class, to name a few. The movement in North American and European contexts struggles to incorporate diversity into their communities, potentially showing that the movement does not feel like a welcome and/or safe environment to some people, which calls for reflection.

A second area of potential further research is the relationship between peace education and the ecovillage movement. Originally, critical peace education was going to be applied to this research because concepts of peace are taught formally and informally within GEN Educational services, as well as within each ecovillage. Though it was not in the scope of this

project to include this analysis, further development within the context of this movement would also be recommended. In relation, how peace education intersects with individual members' religious views of peace is another emergent issue from this project in the case of OPC, where the CEO is a practicing Buddhist. Understanding how the principles of Buddhism is applied in a pluralistic society, as well as in a sustainable development project is an area that this research did not have the scope to embrace. As peace operations often have normative approaches by foreigners coming into other cultures, this could provide insights as to the way religious views of peace can play a role.

Last, Everyday Peace Indicators could be a useful tool for ecovillages to further develop their language around their peace goals. On the micro level, individual ecovillages could use this tool to strengthen the way they blend cultures and include the different perspectives that make up their community. The EPI project applied in the ecovillage setting could provide contextual information that would help GEN in their post-conflict reconstruction consultations to avoid some of the trappings of liberal peacebuilding. As GEN continues to consult in diffusing the ecovillage model, peace scholars could explore this as a hybrid peace approach, relating the individuals on the ground to GEN's normative consultancy.

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Appendix A

Interview Guide

Interview Guide

Personal Information: Name: Age: Number of years as ecovillage member:

Joining the ecovillage:

- Describe your life (what you were doing) prior to the ecovillage.
- What first attracted you to the ecovillage?
- What was the process of joining the ecovillage like for you?

Daily Life

- Please describe a typical day for you in the ecovillage. What do you do, who do you interact with, etc.?
- Have there been any cultural misunderstandings since you joined? What tools did you use to resolve the conflict? What kind of resolution was reached?
- What are some actions you take to keep peace with others in your ecovillage?
- To you, what are the everyday signs (indicators) that the ecovillage is peaceful and harmonious?

Foundational Values

- What does sustainability mean to you? Is this important to you, if so, why?
- What does the phrase ‘unity and strength through diversity’ mean to you?
- How do you share and celebrate the diversity of the ecovillage membership?
- How has the ecovillage experience changed your understanding of members from different backgrounds?

Advice for others:

- What advice would you give to others who are learning how to build peace in an intentionally diverse ecovillage?

Appendix B

Information Letter

Are you interested in taking part in the research project?

“Everyday Peace in the Ecovillage: Building Unity through Diversity”

1 This is an inquiry about participation in a research project where the main purpose is: to explore the concept of everyday peace within a positive peace framework inside an ecovillage. **In this letter, we will give you information about the purpose of the project and what your participation will involve.**

Purpose of the project

The purpose of this project is discover ways in which ecovillage members practice forms of “everyday peace”, which refers to behaviors and norms that keep conflict from escalating and create a peaceful, sustainable community environment. In particular, I want to investigate how ecovillages formed in countries with histories of racial and economic oppression practice overcoming racial divisions within society through everyday peace. Are ecovillages an effective example of an alternative way to build and sustain peace in the midst of deeply divided societies with racially oppressive histories?

The scope of the project is comparing two ecovillages and their everyday practices through interviews with a minimum of three members from each. The project’s objective is to learn from intentional communities ways to create sustainable everyday peace, both from their successes and failures, and contribute findings to the field of Peace Education. Research questions include:

1. What are the everyday practices deployed by ecovillage members to avoid and deescalate potential conflict?
2. How do they use this practice?
3. What sort of implication do these practices have to obtain positive peace?

Who is responsible for the research project?

UiT The Arctic University of Norway is the institution responsible for the project. The researcher will also follow the guidelines provided by the Global Ecovillage Network.

Why are you being asked to participate?

Participants for research have been chosen based on membership to ecovillages of interest. The ecovillage has been chosen because it fits the criteria of the desired research environment. One case criteria is a newly formed ecovillage, still in the forming stages of building their culture together. The other case study will be one that is a more established ecovillage that has been in existence for at least 3 years. Individual criteria is over the age of 18. If you consent to participate in this project, I will indirectly collect data about your racial or ethnic heritage, your philosophical, political and religious beliefs if it is relevant to your views around unity and peace, via your membership in the ecovillage.

What does participation involve for you?

If you chose to take part in the project, this will involve that you schedule time with me for an online video interview. It will take approximately 60 minutes. The interview will be semi-structured, meaning some questions are planned, but depending on your answers, I will ask follow up questions to gain a deeper understanding. Planned interview questions will include subjects involving your daily experiences regarding cultural conflicts that arise, how your community views conflict, and how you and your community overcome racial divisions of your country and promote unity through diversity, formally and informally. The interview will be conducted as a video conference, or by phone, depending on your capacity. The interview will be recorded, so I can transcribe accurately what was shared. By consenting to participate in this project, you agree to provide data about your racial and/or ethnic heritage, as well as any philosophical, political, and religious beliefs that are relevant to your views around unity and peace, via your membership in the ecovillage. Due to the social aspect of the research, particularly regarding conflict, you may be mentioned by other participants but I will ask interviewees not to use real names.

Participation is voluntary

Participation in the project is voluntary. If you chose to participate, you can withdraw your consent at any time without giving a reason. All information about you will be anonymous. There will be no negative consequences for you if you chose not to participate or later decide to withdraw.

Your personal privacy – how we will store and use your personal data

We will only use your personal data for the purpose(s) specified in this information letter. We will process your personal data confidentially and in accordance with data protection legislation (the General Data Protection Regulation and Personal Data Act).

- My supervisor and I will be the only people that will have access to the personal data. Measures I will take to ensure that no unauthorized persons are able to access the personal data of my research, include:
 - Replacing your name and contact details with a code.
 - Storing information with a password protected external hard drive.

I will also make the findings of my research available to the Global Ecovillage Network, per its request on the research protocol page of the website. GEN also requires that I set up a profile and share my work on Researchgate. I will not share your personal information and I will anonymize your identity in my writing, but it is possible that members in your ecovillage and the Global Ecovillage Network will recognize you, based on descriptions from your story. For this reason, once I have transcribed our interview, you will be given a copy so you can confirm its accuracy and make requests to further anonymize or even remove any of the data.

What will happen to your personal data at the end of the research project?

The project will end July 1, 2021. I will store your data until July 1, 2021 and then it will be destroyed. You will receive notification in case of any changes related to this date. I am only collecting your personal data for the purpose of this research and cannot use it in any future research without your consent.

Your rights

So long as you can be identified in the collected data, you have the right to:

- access the personal data that is being processed about you
- request that your personal data is deleted
- request that incorrect personal data about you is corrected/rectified
- to receive a copy of your personal data (data portability)
- send a complaint to the Data Protection Officer or The Norwegian Data Protection Authority regarding the processing of your personal data

What gives us the right to process your personal data?

I will process your personal data based on your consent.

Based on an agreement with UiT The Arctic University of Norway, NSD – The Norwegian Centre for Research Data AS has assessed that the processing of personal data in this project is in accordance with data protection legislation.

Where can I find out more?

If you have questions about the project, or want to exercise your rights, contact:

- UiT The Arctic University of Norway via Allison Van Roekel (student): aro126@uit.no; ph. +47 98458917 or Mohammad Salehin (Supervisor): mohammad.salehin@uit.no; ph. +47 77646812.
- Our Data Protection Officer: Joakim Bakkevold: personvernombud@uit.no ; ph. +47 776 46 322 and +47 976 915 78
- NSD – The Norwegian Centre for Research Data AS, by email: (personverntjenester@nsd.no) or by telephone: +47 55 58 21 17.

Yours sincerely,

Project Leader

Student (if applicable)

(Researcher/supervisor)

Consent form

I have received and understood information about the project “Everyday Peace in the Ecovillage” and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I give consent:

☐ to participate in an online interview.

I give consent for my personal data to be processed until the end date of the project, approx. July 1, 2021.

(Signed by participant, date)

