The Ecovillage of Sieben Linden

Marcus Andreas

Summary

The ecovillage "Sieben Linden," established in 1997, practices an ecologically sustainable lifestyle embedded within mainstream Western society. Today, the settlement covers eighty hectares and has 120 residents, who see their project as an example and experiment in the development of an alternative, sustainable way of life. Aside from sociological and ecological aspects such as a degree of self-sufficiency and sustainable building practices, the concept of an (intentional) "community" lies at the center of this project. A number of democratic decision-making forms exist in the village, consensus being the community's ideal: their motto is "unity in diversity." Sieben Linden is an active member of the Global Ecovillage Network.

Sieben Linden is considered a classical example of an ecovillage. Within Europe, this project is especially rare given that today, it is almost impossible to establish a village anew. Although the cooperative formally belongs to the town of Poppau (municipality of Beetzendorf), its founders were able to construct the village "independent from pre-existing structures."

The idea for this specific ecovillage originated in 1980 in the course of the anti-nuclear resistance at Gorleben, where an ad-hoc village emerged ["Hüttendorf" der "Freien Republik Wendland"] which lasted for 33 days - but left an inspirational mark for several people who then tried to achieve something similar, more lasting. Comparable ecovillage-ideas started to develop in the 1970s in the USA and Denmark at the time, which finally led to the emergence of the Global Ecovillage Network (GEN) in the 1990s – the update of the old dream to live in harmony with man and nature. It took until 1997, until pioneers in trailers moved into today's site of *Sieben Linden*. Since its foundation, the area has increased from 25 to 80 hectares and has attracted more than 120 residents. The habitants are mostly organized into "neighborhoods" that live in a total of eight straw and clay buildings, for which the ecovillage is famous. The village plans to expand the total number of residents from 250 to 300—thereby maintaining a not too complex structure.

Andreas, Marcus. "The Ecovillage of Sieben Linden." Environment & Society Portal, *Arcadia* (2012), no. 15. Rachel Carson Center for Environment and Society. https://doi.org/10.5282/rcc/3917.
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The 'Strohpolis' house in the ecovillage of *Sieben Linden* - Europe's largest house made out of bales of straw

Photo by Freundeskreis Ökodorf e.V.
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Sieben Linden sees itself as an example and experiment in the development of an alternative and sustainable way of life. Aside from sociological and ecological aspects, such as a high degree of self-sufficiency and sustainable building practices, the concept of an (intentional) "community" lies at the center of this project. The residents rely on diverse democratic decision-making practices, in which the wish for consensus still pervades. Its motto is: "Unity in diversity." - although diversity in this case still means mostly white middle-class people.

According to a study conducted by the University of Kassel, *Sieben Linden's* carbon dioxide footprint is less than one-third of the German average. On several occasions, the ecovillage has been distinguished for its efforts towards sustainability, and the media regularly report on the village's activities. The stream of national and international visitors to the site represents an important financial basis for the village. Basically, the economic sustainability of the ecovillage depends very much on its status as a showcase for sustainability. The inclusion in the region is less influential.

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View of the ecovillage Sieben Linden

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Sieben Linden is an active member of the GEN, and in the past few years, the village has engaged in an increasing number of cooperative activities with other initiatives. Together, these projects demonstrate the possibility of an ecologically sustainable lifestyle without reducing the quality of life in the context of a Western society. Thus, *Sieben Linden* represents a specific "Culture of Sustainability" which, however, depends on strong ties to the rest of society in both social and economic terms.

Arcadia Collection:
Global Environmental Movements

Further readings:

- Andreas, Marcus and Felix Wagner (eds.) "Realizing Utopia: Ecovillage Endeavors and Academic Approaches ." Special issue, *RCC Perspectives* 8 (2012).
- Bates, Albert. "Ecovillages". In K. Christensen & D. Levinson (Eds.): *Encyclopedia of community. From the village to the virtual world*, Vol. 2. London: Sage, 2003.
- Dawson, Jonathan. *Ecovillages: New Frontiers for Sustainability*. Totnes: Green Books, 2006.
- Freundeskreis Ökodorf e.V. *Sieben Linden. Lebensentwurf und Realität. Visionen, Alltag, Gemeinschaft, Ökologie, Ökonomie und Spiritualität. Eine Textsammlung.* Ökodorf Sieben Linden, Poppau: Freundeskreis Ökodorf e.V., 2007.

Andreas, Marcus. "The Ecovillage of Sieben Linden." Environment & Society Portal, *Arcadia* (2012), no. 15. Rachel Carson Center for Environment and Society. https://doi.org/10.5282/rcc/3917.
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- Simon, Karl-Heinz et al. *Zusammenfassender Endbericht zum Vorhaben »Gemeinschaftliche Lebens- und Wirtschaftsweisen und ihre Umweltrelavanz«*. Kassel: Universität Kassel, 2004.

Related links:

- Website of the ecovillage Sieben Linden (en)
  http://www.siebenlinden.de/index.php
- Website of the Global Ecovillage Networks (GEN) Europe
  http://www.gen-europe.org
- Gilman, Robert 1991. The Eco-village Challenge, in Living Together (IC 29):
  http://www.context.org/iclib/ic29/gilman1/

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Websites linked in image captions:

- https://siebenlinden.org/en/ecovillage-2/sieben-linden/
- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:EcovilaSiebenLinden.JPG

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Marcus Andreas studied educational sciences and social and cultural anthropology at LMU Munich. He received his MA in 2007. During the period 2008-2009 Marcus helped to set up and manage the inter- and transdisciplinary working group Research in Community e.V. for research into projects of civic engagement for sustainability, for which the team was acknowledged as an official project of the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development 2005-2014. 2009-2013, he worked as a Research Associate at the Rachel Carson Center for Environment and Society. Marcus is currently writing his Ph.D. thesis about ecovillages, with "Sieben Linden" being his main research site.