Striving Intentionalities: Vision and Practice in Cloughjordan Eco-village

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Abstract: Eco-villages are intentional communities whose ultimate purpose is to provide alternative ways of living that are locally rooted, self-reliant, socially supportive, and ecologically sustainable. The issues that hinder these communities from realizing their vision and aspirations are the main draw of this study. Grounded in a six-month fieldwork, the present inquiry focuses on a particular intentional community project which is still at an early stage of implementation—Cloughjordan Eco-village (CEV). Accordingly, the forthcoming analysis and discussion endeavours, on the one, to grasp and interpret CEV's vision in the light of the intentional communalism canon and different currents of green thinking and, on the other, to identify and comprehend some of the issues that have been challenging the translation of the enterprise's aspirations into practice.

Keywords: eco-villages, intentional communalism, sustainable living, green thinking, alternative vs. mainstream, structural conditioning.

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Foreword

The topic of this thesis came up incidentally. In fact, the reason which had first brought me into Cloughjordan had not been the eco-village itself but my internship arrangement with The Foundation for the Economics of Sustainability (FEASTA[i]), an Irish think-tank based in Dublin at that time[ii]. There, I was expected to collaborate with Bruce Darrell, a Canadian researcher living in Ireland and whose work mainly focuses on the development of resilient food systems and food sovereignty[iii]. It was short before the start of the internship that Bruce had suggested me to stay in Cloughjordan, for both his empirical work and home are nested in the eco-village.

During the initial weeks and along the integration process in the eco-settlement, my focus was to understand how to fit in the on-going research endeavours carried on by Bruce and FEASTA, and—equally important—how could I use that experience in articulation with a Human Ecology (HE) frames of reference. In the meantime, and since I was living in an "eco-village," I couldn't help myself to feel stung by the place as I was trying to understand what the eco-villagers had in common with each other and where was the project heading at. I remember, particularly, to becoming stuck with questions such as "what makes this eco-village *eco*?" or "can this project shed hope to some of the ecological and social afflictions of today's world?" As time went by, not only had such interrogations ramified into many others but I had also realised that they were greatly enlightened by a HE standpoint. As a result, it was before long that my research focus had been re-directed towards the eco-village, its purpose, and its everyday practice. By then, I had also realised that the methodological approach had chosen me and not the other way around—I was living there, at the heart of my subject. I was a participant observer.

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[i] http://www.feasta.org/

[ii] In the meanwhile, FEASTA's main office has been moved into Cloughjordan Eco-village.

[iii] In order to know more about Bruce's work I suggest the following link:
http://www.feasta.org/2009/06/10/bruce-darrell-%E2%80%93-the-future-of-our-food-supply/

Acknowledgements

List of Abbreviations

CCF – Cloughjordan Community Farm

CEV – Cloughjordan Eco-village

CSA – Community Supported Farm

FEASTA – The Foundation for the Economics of Sustainability

GEN – Global Village Network

HE – Human Ecology

SPIL – Sustainable Projects Ireland Ltd

VERT – Village Education Research and Training

VSM – Viable Systems Model

1. Introduction

1.1 Topic

Amidst socially disruptive and environmentally destructive industrial societies in our intensely interacting world, eco-villages and other sustainable-oriented intentional communities strive to implement their vision, namely, an alternative way of living that is more humane, egalitarian and ecologically sustainable. To this context, vision is best understood as a projection of what the future will or could be like. Accordingly, eco-villages follow in the visionary tracks toward local sovereignty, self-reliance, non-hierarchical governance, ecologically sustainable living and meaningful human relationships (Dawson 2006). This vision of a "better" world—which goes well beyond the reach of the ordinary sight within the wider society—underpins the utopian function which intentional communities enact; that is, they create spaces in which one can think differently about the world, thus confronting boundaries and offering political critique to the status quo that is sustained by the mainstream arena (Sargisson 2000; 2007).

However, the translation of intentionality into *being*—that is, the implementation of a vision—is complicated by multiple factors that blur the line between "alternative" and "mainstream" practice. For instance, Fox (1990) emphasises the existence of an elemental, dualistic variety of *environmentalisms* within the environmental movement and the eco-philosophical debate—the one is eco-centric and implies a fundamental, deep change on how humans relate to the world; the other, dominating over the first and pervading much of the movement, is imbued with an instrumental view over nature, supported by dominant institutions (e.g., science, technology, economics), and thus, to a great extent, in harmony with what the mainstream holds. Relatedly, the fact that there are different rationalities at play within an overarching *green thinking* calls into question basic precepts of intentional communalism—for example, that of communards' shared vision and like-mindedness (see e.g., Miller 2010)—in that they become relativized, and thus,

more difficult to grasp. What is more, intentional communities do not stem up out from a void; per contra, they are enacted in relation and along the dominant culture of their milieu, which in turn provides both structural constrains and opportunities to their development (Ergas 2010)—the extent to which dominant institutions (e.g. private ownership) pervade and inform intentional communities depends on the latter's choices and ability to remove themselves further-way from what is established and sustained by the larger society.

Having said that—and given that eco-villages, in particular, embrace the mission to push the larger society toward a more socially just and ecologically sustainable living—it then becomes relevant to inquire (1) the different rationalities and green thinking approaches at play and how they inform eco-settlements' aspirations; additionally, (2) the articulation between practice and vision, that is, how the presence of different rationalities, reliance (or not) on dominant institutions, and broader structural context affect the realisation of eco-settlements' aspirations.

This study touches upon these issues but in relation to a particular eco-village—Cloughjordan Eco-village (CEV)—which is still at an early, developmental stage. Accordingly—and drawing upon a six-month fieldwork in CEV—I analyse and interpret CEV's aspirations and discuss experienced difficulties in translating vision into practice; that is, how diverse understandings among membership, structural conditioning, and other external factors have been affecting the project and, thus, challenging its developmental stage.

1.2 Research Questions

In accordance to what is said above, this study is driven by the following questions:

(1)   *What is CEV's vision consisted of and how to interpret it in the light of the intentional communalism canon and different approaches to green thinking?*

(2)   How has CEV's vision been translated into practice in its developmental stage? What factors have been challenging CEV's practice and the implementation of its aspirations?

1.3   Purpose and Relevance of the Study

As it is said above, eco-villages are intentional communities that, following in the footsteps of alternative ways of living, aim to counteract dominant rationalities and social practices that lead to environmental and social deterioration. Additionally, it is also said that due to the existence of different strains of green thinking and eventual proximity to dominant institutions, the distinction between *mainstream* and *alternative* becomes, somehow, elusive. By analysing and discussing these issues in relation to a particular eco-village, this study aims to provide grounded insights on how (1) certain currents of *environmentalism* may prevail and override others; (2) how distinct views amongst membership may disturb the cohesiveness of the group and, thus, the drive of the communal enterprise; and (3) how the proximity to dominant institutions and structural conditioning may affect project's aspirations.

Despite the fact that the eco-village movement has increasingly become complex and multifarious—that is, the degree to which eco-villages may differ from each other is fairly high, thus, turning generalizations inherently contingent—the insights that this study may bring about, I believe, are of relevance for present and future eco-villages or other intentional communities. Accordingly, the issues which this study pertains to not only cut across most of the movement's spectrum, but are also heavily implicated in the enterprises' (in)ability to realise their aspirations; such issues become ever more important to comprehend and be aware of in the present day, that is, when the eco-village movement—putting much of its emphasis on engaging with and influence the wider society toward ecological and social sustainability—is, unavoidably, closer to dominant cultures and institutions.

In order to learn more about these matters, the rest of this thesis unfolds as follows: the next chapter, "Methodological Approach," gives an account on my

experience and fieldwork in CEV, the methods supporting the inquiry, and a brief discussion on the virtues and limitations of the latter. The next chapter "Theoretical Frames of Reference," acquaints the reader with theories, ideas and concepts relevant to the analysis and discussion that is to follow. Preceding the analysis and discussion, "CEV: A Snapshot," offers a view over the various aspects that CEV is comprised of, as well as a brief historical contextualization of the project since its inception. The following chapter, "Analysis and Discussion," addresses the research questions raised above; in so doing, it first analyses and interprets CEV's vision and thereafter discusses the practicalities and challenges CEV has been facing so far. At last, the study concludes with "Final Remarks."

2. Methodological Approach

The methodological approach of this study is in the tradition of fieldwork and ethnographic research methods. Accordingly, it comprises six months of participant observation in CEV, from mid-July 2012 through mid-January 2013. Moreover, the upcoming discussion is substantiated by in-depth interviews I had conducted to eco-villagers, as well as by the analysis of CEV's memoranda and other text materials available to the wider public. While interview analysis mainly informs the discussion on CEV's practice, text analysis informs, first and foremost, the discussion about CEV's vision. My fieldwork insights and first-hand knowledge about CEV, it goes without saying, are immanent throughout all discussion.

2.1 Participant Observation

My participation in the eco-village everyday life had been diverse and multifaceted. CEV is an eventful place and I had engaged in the on-going activities as much as my

time and disposition would me allow to—be that community meals, celebration of special dates, festivals, courses and workshops[1], guest talks, vernissages[2], ancient rituals[3], etc. For instance, I had taken a two-week permaculture design course together with some eco-villagers and other participants from outside Cloughjordan. The engagement with the eco-village life had also been a significant source of learning as it had offered me different hands-on experiences. For example, I worked part-time in Cloughjordan Wood-Fired Bakery[4], which is located inside CEV and run by an eco-villager. Moreover, I happened to, occasionally, help villagers with their work-in-progress and self-building endeavours (e.g., building a dry stone wall, mixing cob, gardening, etc.).

If anything, this participatory approach had facilitated the blending-in process between me and the community. From a fieldwork perspective such blending-in is much desirable given the trust and rapport it prompts between the researcher and his/her subject of inquiry. Accordingly, Sjöberg (2011: 166) asserts that "in ethnographic research closeness to the studied people is a prerogative." As a matter of fact, and for most of the time, I would be oblivious of my role as *participant observant*, so casual had become my everyday life in CEV. Likewise, I do believe that eco-villagers and people around me started, at some point, to see me more as Pedro and less as a researcher conducting fieldwork. Relatefly, this sense of familiarity allowed eco-villagers to be more spontaneous whenever I would be about.

Despite the advantages that stem from closeness between researcher and his/her subject I would, at times, feel concerned of losing critical distance by fully engaging in CEV's everyday life. In this sense, I had felt difficulties to find a balance between a committed participation and a more distant observation. In other words, it had been challenging for me to be there and to do things, and simultaneously to

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[1] E.g., crafts, alternative medicine, permaculture, organic gardening, etc.

[2] Cloughjordan has increasingly become a hub for artists of all various kinds, e.g. writers, painters, illustrators, pottery makers, sculptors, etc.

[3] E.g., circle dancing, earth singing, among others.

[4] http://www.cloughjordanwoodfiredbakery.com/

keep a fair dose of "cold" reflectiveness and critical insight. Clifford (1988: 34) sharply touches upon these delicate dialectics between closeness and distance when he writes that "'participant observation' serves as short hand for a continuous tacking between the 'inside' and the 'outside' of events: on one hand grasping the sense of specific occurrences and gestures empathically, on the other stepping back to situate these meaning in wider contexts." One way I had found in dealing with the dialectics between closeness and distance was to keep the routine of, every other day, writing down my thoughts on events and situations that would had caught my attention. Those moments of reflectiveness had helped me to sort out thoughts and to keep my mind clearer.

2.2   Interviewing and Text Analysis

I conducted interviews towards the last phase of the internship, from mid-November 2012 through mid-January 2013. The rationale behind doing it at a later stage was that my mind would be best matured on the topics I would want to touch upon. Also, it meant that I had had enough time to develop trust with people involved in the project and, therefore, I would feel comfortably to approach them. Furthermore, I believe to have captured a rich sample that is representative of the existing diversity in CEV as to views and understandings of different topics that are relevant to this inquiry.

The choice for semi-structured interviews is due to the fact that they are more conversational and less an interrogatory. In that sense, they normally proportionate a spontaneous atmosphere whereby the interviewee feels comfortable in speaking his/her own mind. The conversational genre had also given me the flexibility to adapt and re-shape the interview as it was happening. For instance, it would allow me to detour from the script in case I would find it relevant to pull out some off-the-script thread brought up by the interviewee.

The interview script is divided into 5 lines of inquiry[5]: the first section pertains to "life questions" (i.e., walks of life, main motivations to join CEV, etc.); the second section approaches vision, shared values and purpose of the eco-village, thus attempting to grasp interviewees' understandings of it; the third section explores the topics of governance and consensus decision-making approach of CEV; finally, the fourth section deals with interviewee's understandings on sustainable living and on the ways he/she sees the eco-village enacting sustainable living.

In total I conducted nineteen interviews (seventeen of which were digitally recorded). Of these, I had fully transcribed eight by selecting those I considered most relevant to feed in the upcoming discussion. The remaining interviews had been accessed through notes taken down while they were taking place.

As mentioned above, in addition to interview analysis, I had also analysed CEV's memoranda, website, and other free stand publications available to the wider public. I don't follow any particular methodology to analyse the mentioned text materials but my own interpretation/contextualization of it.

2.3   Fieldwork: Virtues and Limitations

As described above, my fieldwork experience in CEV gained me a considerable degree of familiarity with the eco-villagers and other people in Cloughjordan. Such familiarity is desirable in that, and using Emerson's (2011: 13) words, it opens the possibility to a "privileged access to the meanings that infuse the daily life and activities of those studied." During my stay in Cloughjordan, this "privileged access" had become apparent through a deep level of integration in the eco-village, meaning that my student/research's aura had started to dissolve into a casual co-existence with the people around.

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[5] The interview's original script is reproduced in "Appendix 1."

Despite its advantages, methodological approaches close to fieldwork tradition have, too, their own vulnerabilities. Much of the criticism that has been addressed to fieldwork and participant observation relates to participative descriptive bias which raises, subsequently, issues pertaining to the validity of the research. For instance, and as Kirby (2006: 364) notices, "one reason that positivism has vanquished challengers in social science is that it holds up to standards . . . by which consensus can be reached on what is 'good work.'" Yet, and in defence of fieldwork, I would argue that "objective" standards, so worshipped in the positivist canons, are neglectful of the fact that all knowledge is produced and situated in time and space, thus begging for contextualization (see e.g., Haraway 1988). Relatedly, situatedness of knowledge becomes more apparent when the studied phenomena relate to the social world, which is the case of fieldwork in general and this case-study in particular. Thus, the charge of "weak" validity posed to fieldwork loses its relevance if one understands the fieldworker as a situated subject and, therefore, accept that the social world itself fails to hold to objectiveness.

Considering the above, when researchers in general, fieldworkers in particular, cannot escape from their own personal bias, then what really becomes pertinent for scientific scrutiny is how transparent the researcher is in relation to his/her own worldviews and how these affect his/her inquiry process and work. As Sjöberg (2011: 163, 165) contends, "it becomes clear that in ethnographic research, the researcher him/herself plays a major part in the process of building knowledge of a group of people," and therefore, "to disclose the whole studying process is at the heart of ethnographic research."

The upcoming discussion goes without saying that my interpretation of CEV's vision and understandings on how it has been translated into practice are modulated by my own bias, which is apparent and owned; thus, I don't claim my study to be objective or value-free. Accordingly, this research endeavour is not as much concerned in describing what is "really" happening in CEV as it is in looking at it in a coloured light—an *interpretation* that only attempts to bring about a small contribution toward richer understandings.

3. Theoretical Frames of Reference

This chapter aims to acquaint the reader with relevant ideas and concepts that inform the upcoming discussion. The theories and concepts hereby presented do not fit in a single, neat frame of reference; that is, the lenses through which I look upon the topic are kaleidoscopically coloured after a HE holistic approach that widens the analytical scope to embrace the complexities of the social world. In so doing, HE approach is committed to integrate "separate" perspectives into broaden understandings, thus encouraging the breakdown of traditional disciplinary boundaries.

Following in HE footsteps, what follows is a theoretical blend that weaves together various authors and theories, attempting to bring about an insightful theoretical toolbox to illuminate the forthcoming analysis and discussion.

3.1 Intentional Communalism

Being that this study pertains to an eco-village and its intentionality, it then becomes pertinent to look closer into the concept of intentional communalism. What follows is a definitional sampling drawn from scholars and other observers over the past five decades:

> An utopian colony… consist of a group of people who are attempting to establish a new social pattern based upon a vision of the ideal society and who have withdrawn themselves from the community at large to embody that vision in experimental form. The purpose is usually to create a model which other colonies and eventually mankind in general will follow. (Robert Hine[6] quoted in Sargent 1994, 30)

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[6] The author's quote is taken from Robert Hine's book "California´s Utopian Colonies," published in 1953 by San Marino: Huntington Library.

A small society, voluntarily separated from the world, striving after perfection in its institutions, sharing many things in common, and relying upon imitation for the spread of its system. (Arthur Bestor[7] quoted in Miller 2010, 1)

A group of five or more adults and their children, if any, who come from more than one nuclear family and who have chosen to live together to enhance their shared values or for some other agreed purpose. (Sargent 1994, 15)

An 'intentional community' is a group of people who have chosen to live together with a common purpose, working cooperatively to create a lifestyle that reflects their shared core values. The people may live together on a piece of rural land, in a suburban home, or in an urban neighbourhood, and they may share a single residence or live in a cluster of dwellings. (Geoph Kozeny[8] quoted in Miller 2010, 4)

Intentional communities are strange places, full of dreams, hopes, and disappointments as groups of individuals work collectively to realize a better life. In order to pursue their vision of good life, these groups require space (in which to experiment), individual security, and group coherence. (Lucy Sargisson 2007, 396)

Communal societies are small, voluntarily social units, partly isolated and insulated from the general society in which their members intentionally share an ideology, an economic union, and a lifestyle and attempt to implement their ideal systems-social, economic, governmental, religious, philosophical, ecological, and sustainable-often in hopes that their utopian vision will be realized worldwide by divine aid or human effort. (Pitzer 2009, 15)

Although the foregoing definitions may vary slightly in the way they conceptualize intentional communities (the historic time-span in which the above definitions were given comprises more than fifty years), they consistently allude to few key features: (1) the purpose and vision of a better life; (2) voluntary withdrawal from the wider society; (3) a fair degree of shared values among members; (4) physical proximity; and (5) some degree of resource commonality. These, then,

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[7] The author's quote is taken from Arthur Bestor's book "Backwoods Utopias: The sectarian origins and the Owenite Phase of Communitarian Socialism in America, 1663-1829," published in 1970 (second edition) by University of Pennsylvania Press.

[8] The author's quote is taken from the Intentional Communities website, http://www.ic.org/pnp/cdir/1995/01kozenzy.php (accessed on 11/18/2008)

become important parameters to hold in mind whenever intentional communalism is being addressed—the way one is more or less strict in setting up the above mentioned parameters will determine how inclusive/exclusive the concept becomes. For instance, if the parameters are set supplely, the resultant concept spans a wide variety of groups (e.g., communes, eco-villages, student cooperatives, land co-ops, co-housing groups, monasteries, ashrams, kibbutzim, farming collectives, among others). However, if the parameters are set too rigidly, many of the above examples may be left outside. For instance, definitions that put too much emphasis on community of property may leave out communities such as the Amish—who share values, economic resources and a vision of a "better" way of living, but typically do not live in common or in clustered housing (Miller 2010, 8). As a matter of fact, if community of property is taken too strictly, it then wipes out almost all contemporary intentional communities; as with any definition, if defined either too generally or too specifically, *intentional community* chances to become analytically useless (Sargent 1994, 14). Above all, what falls into the intentional communalism category depends on the choices taken along the process of crafting a definition; those choices in turn depend on what kind of conceptual tool one is looking for, according to the analytical goals—intentional communalism, thus, becomes not a matter of whether or not but one of degree.

3.2   Intentional Communities as Utopias

Thomas More had coined the term *Utopia* back in the 1500s and after an etymological pun—the "good place" (*eutopos*) that is "no place" (*outopos*). Ever since, the concept had dominantly been construed as something essentially fictive that mainly relates to the literature genre; something impossibly idyllic, existing only in one's imagination; something disconnected with reality, impractical and thus politically impotent. This is not, however, the case for "alternative" interpretations of *utopianism*, where the concept is looked upon in a rather pragmatic light becoming pliable as to be expressed in a multitude of forms. Accordingly, Sargisson (2000, 1-

12) rejects notions that translate utopianism as the creation of *heaven-on-earth* paradises that, social and politically, are but sterile. Instead, the author argues for the case of an utopianism that is essentially "transgressive," one with transformative powers and with political implications:

> Transgressive utopianism is the product of an approach to utopian thinking that does not insist upon utopia as a blueprint: utopia as the inscription of perfection. . . . It has subversive and transformative potential. . . . It is wild, unruly, rule breaking thought that is politically driven and that expresses a profound discontent with the political present. . . . It is, above all, resistant to closure and it celebrates process over product. (ibid, 3-4)

In this line of thought, utopianism is always in relation to the existing reality, that is, it is rooted in discontent and disaffection with the present. Relatedly, it offers a place—the "good place"—from whence it is possible to confront established boundaries; thus, its "subversive potential." Contrarily to a perfect plan, it is essentially something on-the-move, work-in-progress, ever unfinished, ever evolving. Such tentative dimension broadens the conceptual reaches of utopia toward pragmatic expressions of social experimentation, namely, intentional communalism. Accordingly, and asserting intentional communities as utopian expressions, Sargent (1994, 18) lucidly writes that:

> Writers communicate their dreams by writing them down and publishing them, however poor the writing may sometimes be; communards communicate their dreams by trying to put them into practice, however tentative, unsuccessful, or limited that practice may be. (ibid)

Following this "experimental" vein of utopianism, the foregoing key features of intentional communalism—namely, a vision of a better life and voluntary withdrawal from the wider society—can be said to enact an essential utopian function; that is, they create an estranged place—critically distant from the mainstream—where social creativity takes root and established boundaries are confronted. As Sargisson (2007, 393) has it, "Distanced, remote and strange, utopias

variously interrogate the now from an imaginary good place, and estrangement permits this interrogation."

3.3 Contemporary Intentional Communalism

To be sure, intentional communalism is not a recent phenomenon; according to Schehr (1997: 26), it can be traced back to the pre-Christian era—between the years 100 BC and AD 100—when sectarians from Roman Palestine, seeing their Judaic cultural and religious legacy being threatened by the Roman Empire, had withdrawn to communal living. Later on—with the Christianity expansion over the European continent—a wave of monastic communalism had surged, for example, the Celtic monasticism following St. Patrick's mission in Ireland. Additionally, more waves of intentional communalism had appeared in the West, particularly in America; from the advent of the English colonial settlements of the seventeenth century, to the emerging millenarian groups, to the socialist utopias of the nineteenth century inspired by revolutionaries such as Robert Owen and Charles Fourier (see e.g., Pitzer 2007).

Contemporary intentional communities—sustainability-oriented communities in particular—embody the legacy from past waves of communal experimentation. For instance, Dawson (2006, 15-16) establishes a link between the monastic values of self-resilience, frugality, and spiritualism with those immanent in eco-villages; the same goes, he argues, in relation to the 1960s Youth Movement expressions of anti-greed, anti-violence and anti-war. Accordingly, Lockyer's (2009) *transformative utopianism* asserts that contemporary intentional communalism builds upon past experiments:

> Transformative utopianism is the idea that utopianism can be most productively understood as a potentially transformative process . . . that stretches across networks of individuals and communities dispersed in space and time. . . . Although it is not unique to this historical era, we are seeing this process of transformative utopianism play out in the new wave of ecovillages and sustainability-oriented intentional communities that has

become so prominent since the mid-1990s. It is a process by which these new communities are building on the successes and failures of previous intentional communities. (ibid, 1-2)

Thus, the achievements of past communal experiments do not vanish whenever they fail to hold their physical integrity in place. Instead, such realisations (e.g., new models of social practice or fragments of it) affect the wider society and, in that way, they remain alive only to feed in new experimentation.

Deeming intentional communalism as being inserted in broader social movements, Schehr (1997: 46) writes that contemporary intentional communities differ from their predecessors in that (1) they are typically non-hierarchical and often apply consensus decision making models; (2) they use psychologically sophisticated methods to deal and overcome conflicts within the group in a non-violent way; (3) they don't restraint themselves to utilise modern technology, that is, they do not epitomise a "back-to-the-basics" philosophy; (4) they are not as restrict as to demand high levels of community of property; (5) there is a strong drive towards economic self-sufficiency (e.g., CSAs, grow-your-own, local currencies, among others); (6) there is a commitment to non-violence, race and gender equality and peace. Lastly, (7) being inserted in broader social movements, there is a strong sense of mission to engage and influence the wider society. Accordingly, Crossley (1999) refers to communal experiments as "working utopias" which, he reckons, are in relation to something larger: "[working utopias] play a central role in the reproduction and advancement of movements. . . . [They] extend and reproduce networks, generate new forms of knowledge and practice, and serve, to some extent, as 'proof' of the validity of movements claims" (ibid, 809).

3.4 Environmental Movement and Eco-villages

Eco-villages, too, are situated within a larger movement, the *environmental movement* which, from the 1960s on, had sprung in response to an ever more apparent environmental and social deterioration—consequence of unprecedented levels of

productivism coupled with an increasingly globalised economy. Relatedly, to the rise of awareness of socio-environmental problems much had contributed landmark publications such as Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* in 1962 or *Limits to Growth*—a report commissioned by the Club of Rome and published in 1972 (see e.g. Fox[9] 1995).

Despite its unifying label, the environmental movement is comprised by a wide range of initiatives and different actors—from grass root organizations, to NGOs, to Governmental Agencies, to multilateral organizations, and so on—and it is all but monolithic on its approaches. According to Fox (ibid, 22-35), various thinkers within the eco-philosophical debate (e.g., Leo Marx, Donald Worster, Theodore Roszak, Murray Bookchin, among others) had developed dual, essential typologies of green thinking currents. Bearing with Fox—and although each of these typologies have non-generalising particularities and a rationale of its own— they all hinge on an elemental, dualistic attribute, that is, an anthropocentric vs. an eco-centric approach to the environmental crisis (these approaches had become popularly known as "shallow ecology" vs. "deep ecology[10]"). Hence, on the one, the kind of *environmentalism* that is bound to an instrumental view of the natural world (i.e., usefulness of nature to human beings) and, thus, focusing on the preservation and rationalisation of natural resources. On the other, an approach of environmentalism that calls for a fundamental reorientation in the way human beings relate to the natural world—a reorientation that is deep and philosophical in its nature. While the first postulates humans as superior and detached from the natural world, the second strives to reposition humans as being part of nature—not separate or above it—attempting, therefore, to dissolve a human-nature dualistic perception which overrides a more holistic, eco-centric view:

> Ecology stands at a critical cross-roads. It is, too, to become another anthropocentric technique of more efficient manipulation, a matter of enlightened self-interest and expert, long-range resource budgeting? Or will

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[9] Warwick Fox provides, in his book *Toward a Transpersonal Ecology*, a comprehensive historical account on environmental movement.

[10] After the Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess and his *work* within the Eco-philosophy realms.

it meet the nature mystics on their own terms and so recognize that we are to embrace nature as it indeed it were a beloved person in whom, as in ourselves, something sacred dwells? . . . The question remains open: which will ecology be, the last of old sciences or the first of the new? (Theodore Roszak[11] cited in Fox 1995, 27)

Fox (2005, 22-35) gives, indeed, an elucidative account on the deep historic roots of anthropocentrism—from Judeo-Christian traditions to the period of the Enlightenment and birth of modern science—and on how it pervades western thinking in general, even those realms that pertain to ecological thinking. Martinez-Alier (2002, 5-10), too, reflects upon dominant environmental approaches—those under the labels of *eco-efficiency* and *ecological modernization*—as not calling into question fundamental precepts that inform human-environment interactions in the west and feed an insatiable quest toward "progress" and economic growth:

> This . . . current of the environmental movement [ecological modernization] is concerned about the whole economy. It often defends economic growth, though not at any cost. It believes in 'sustainable development', in 'ecological modernization', in the wise use of resources. It is concerned with . . . the sustainable management of natural resources, and not so much with the intrinsic values of nature. (ibid, 5)

According to such currents of environmentalism, it then becomes possible to—through technological progress and rational use of resources—dematerialise the economy and, thus, reconcile it with sound environment (ibid, 10). As a result, dominant institutions that underpin the established rationale—such as science, technology and economy—are not only preserved but constitute the wheels on which such environmentalism moves forward. Relatedly, Bryant and Goodman (2004) give an account on how nature conservationism becomes underpinned by representational practices, namely, that of "alternative" consumption (e.g., organic, fair trade products). Accordingly—in a westernized "commodity culture"—consumption is given as means for environmental action and, consequently, nature

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[11] Original source: Theodore Roszak. 1973. *Where the Wasteland Ends: Politics and Transcendence in Post-Industrial Society*. Londan: Faber and Faber.

conservationism becomes popularly *commodified*—as a result, entrenched lifestyles and socio-cultural traits are reinforced.

The appearance of sustainable-oriented intentional communities—namely, eco-villages—is closely related to the environmental movement, that is, they sprung as response to social deterioration and ecological predicament. In a study on the eco-village Ithaca in New York state, Kirby (2003: 327) points out that the "the realization of [Ithaca's] ecovillage project offered a solution to two pressing problems, . . . a perceived loss of community, and an accelerating damage to the environment."

The term *eco-village* was formally coined by Robert and Diane Gilman in the early 1990s, upon the elaboration of a report commissioned by Gaia Trust and entitled "Eco-villages and Sustainable Communities". Robert Gilman's (1991) own definition of eco-village is as follows:

> A human scale full-feature settlement in which human activities are harmlessly integrated into the natural world in a way that is supportive of healthy human development and can be successfully continued into the indefinite future. (ibid)

In this early conception, eco-villages are defined in a rather self-contained fashion—a human-scale, ecologically quasi-perfect model to be emulated and taken on elsewhere; a sustainable and harmonious comprehensible microcosm of the whole society:

> *Human scale* refers to a size in which people are able to know and be known by others in the community. . . . *Full featured settlement* is one in which all the major functions of normal living – residence, food provision, manufacture, leisure, social life and commerce – are plainly present and in balanced proportions . . . *In which human activities are harmlessly integrated into the natural world* . . . [conveys] the ideal of equality between humans and other forms of life, so that humans do not attempt to dominate over nature but rather find their place within it. . . . *In a way that is supportive of healthy human development* . . . [refers to] a balanced and integrated development of all aspects of human life – physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual. . . . *And that can be successfully continued into the indefinite future* . . . [corresponds to] the sustainability

principle [which] forces a kind of honesty on eco-villagers. Without it, it would be easy . . . in the short term to create human-scale communities that *seemed* to be harmoniously integrated into nature . . . but in fact were in some not-so-visible way living off the capital accumulated in other parts of society. (ibid)

In the meanwhile—from the early 1990s to this day—countless eco-villages experiments have sprouted to form a vast network across the world (as it is the case of GEN[12]). Like the environmental movement, the eco-village concept had grown in complexity as eco-villages had developed multifariously to form a movement of its own. In a Schumacher briefing on eco-villages, Dowsan (2006) grapples with the diversity and multi-dimensionality of the phenomenon, endeavouring to hold coherence to the concept. In so doing, the author (ibid: 38) enumerates key features associated to the movement which are embraced in different degrees by different eco-villages across the word—(1) the design of low carbon social settlements; (2) the focus on resilience and on the local economy (resilience in its ecological sense, that is, the ability of a system to absorb external shocks and adapt to different circumstances while retaining essential functions and structures[13]); (3) the production of organic local food; (4) social inclusion and adoption of participatory forms of local governance; (5) peace activism and international solidarity and (6) holism philosophy. As Dawson (2006: 65) writes,

> Ecovillages are pioneering new models on multiple fronts. One is struck by how often they are in the vanguard in introducing new technologies or models—organic agriculture, CSAs, building techniques, mixed special needs and non-special needs groups, community currencies, solar technologies, biological waste-water treatment plants and so on—that subsequently become more widely adopted in society at large.

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[12] Global Ecovillages Network (GEN) is a major platform through which eco-villages across the world can share experiences, knowledge and learn from each other; for more information visit GEN's website at http://gen.ecovillage.org/

[13] Resilience is not only a central concept to eco-villages but also to other related movements such as "Transition Towns" (see e.g., Hopkins 2008).

Acknowledging the complexity and multiple guises of the phenomenon (i.e., eco-villages vary greatly in size and scale; can sit in urban or rural areas; can embrace, or not, religion and spirituality; some are high tech while others opt for radical simplification; some are built from scratch while others are a continuation of pre-existing villages) Dawson (ibid) goes on to craft a definition that updates the concept of eco-village according to the actual phenomena:

> 'Private citizens' initiatives in which the communitarian impulse is of central importance, that are seeking to win back some measure of control over community resources, that have a strong shared values base (often referred to as 'spirituality'), and that act as centres of research, demonstration and (in most cases) training. (ibid, 36)

One fundamental aspect in which the above definition is distinct from Gilman's relates to the recognition and emphasis on the interactive dimension between eco-village and wider society (i.e., eco-villages as role models and centres of research and demonstration). Indeed, Dawson conveys a more outward approach to the concept which is in line with the distinctive features of contemporary intentional communities pointed out by Schehr (1997: 46), namely, their sense of mission to—as part of broader movements—engage with and influence the wider society.

The interaction between eco-villages and wider society is, however, subjected to dialectical forces and issues of power; thus, the very notion of a microcosmic eco-paradise being erected while kept hermetically sealed-off from the "outer reality" should, at best, be called upon question. To start with, the fact that eco-villages are, somehow, inserted in and interacting with the larger society (more so when influencing the latter becomes a major goal) means that they are inherently informed and conditioned by the rationalities and codes of their milieu. Relatedly, while discussing her fieldwork in an urban eco-village, Ergas (2010) gives an account on how the community alternative aspirations had to enter negotiation with a dominant institutional-set, and how that would condition the whole project's aspirations. Additionally—as there are distinct rationalities underpinning different current of environmentalism (Fox 1994), some of which dominant and imbued with

anthropocentric tones and other mainstream precepts—what constitutes a microcosmic eco-paradise becomes in the understanding of the commentator. Accordingly, being well aware of certain dominant currents of green thinking, Dawson (2006) writes that,

> Our roots [eco-village's] . . . lie less in the machines and techniques that we have developed, than in the vision of the simpler, more just and caring society, organized along community lines and built on holistic values of spiritual, emotional, and ecological literacy. This is a much harder sell to the mainstream than wind turbines and eco-architecture."

Eco-villages' intents and aspirations, then, cannot escape in coming to terms with issues of power and rationality; that is, *who* and *what* defines what is *green* and what is *not*? How come certain rationalities succeed in informing *concepts* while others are kept at bay? Relatedly, and drawing upon the intellectual tradition of Machiavelli, Nietzsche and Foucault, Flyvbjerg (1998, 227) proposes that "rationality is context-dependent, the context of rationality is power, and power blurs the dividing line between rationality and rationalization."

4. Cloughjordan Eco-village: a Snapshot

Cloughjordan Eco-village[14]—a member of Global Network[15] (GEN)—is an eco-settlement and the first of its kind in Ireland. From the outset, back in 1999, its fundamental purpose is to develop a model of sustainable, democratic and resilient community and, subsequently, to become a learning centre whence other individuals and entities can learn from[16]. Accordingly, green building, eco-design, renewable energy, organic food, edible landscape, community development, and inclusive decision-making processes, are all important dimensions that comprise the

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[14] http://www.thevillage.ie/

[15] http://gen.ecovillage.org/

[16] In accordance to CEV's "Memorandum of Association."

enterprise's aspirations. Moreover, CEV's development plan comprehends a residential area for 130 homes, community buildings, retail spaces, live-work units, farmland, community gardens, woodlands, and wild-life corridors. The project is coordinated by Sustainable Projects Irelands Ltd (SPIL)—a not-for-profit development organization equipped with educational charity status and democratically managed by its membership. Relatedly, all eco-villagers are members of SPIL, and anyone new joining the project automatically becomes its member.

At an earlier stage, from 1999 to 2005, the energies were directed towards the conceptual development of the project (e.g., design, scale, location, legal research, etc.), the promotion and marketing of the concept, the expansion of its membership base, and the securitization of funding backup (e.g. winning the support of sponsors and financial institutions) (Castro 2011, 127). In 2005, after final decision regarding the eco-village site location had been reached, the acquisition process of sixty-seven acres of land in Cloughjordan town—situated at the heart of the town, off the main street (see figures 1 and 2 in the appendix 2)—was completed and planning permission for the development of the project granted (ibid: 129), thus enabling the beginning of CEV's physical development.

Cloughjordan is a heritage town located well into the Irish midlands, and on the root between Dublin and Limerick. With approximately 450 inhabitants, its origins go back to the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries when Ireland was still under Norman Lordship. Like many other towns in Ireland and elsewhere, and mainly due to the drive of global forces toward ever more urbanized societies, Cloughjordan had endured a significant socio-economic contraction over last couple of decades as well as the loss of its folklore.

According to Castro (2011, 131-144), CEV had endured a fair degree of instability since its inception. Among several turbulent episodes, there had been negotiation issues pertaining to the site purchasing process; flawed estimation of infrastructure's costs with subsequent onus to member's financial commitments and defrauded expectations; and several set-backs pertaining to on-going development works, mainly due to non-accordance with official regulations and plans. Following

this string of unfortunate events, the prices of the sites had gone up significantly, thus, causing widespread discontent and discredit among membership; such had triggered membership withdrawals which in turn had damaged the project's finances and CEV's credibility before investors and financial institutions. Around the same time, the Celtic Tiger economy had gone bust and the financial crisis was becoming apparent with real estate sector starting to stagnate and property prices going off a cliff. The Irish economic downturn had furthered, even more, members' difficulties to abide by the financial terms of the project and, as a result, some more were forced to drop out. Consequently, SPIL finances had deteriorated, that is, the organization had experience increased difficulties to service its debt.

Despite the mentioned hurdles and setbacks, the project had contrived to move on and, by the end of 2009, the first tranche of houses were ready to lodge the first eco-villagers moving in (Martin 2010). This also meant that the basic infrastructure and amenities (e.g. water, electricity, central district heating, main roads and paths, etc.) were in place by then. Because the operations and management of the site had grown more complex, two subsidiaries had split off from SPIL—Oxpark, which is in charge of monitoring on-going works and building (e.g., health and safety, material specifications, site access, etc.); and the Service Company, which is responsible for providing basic services to dwellings (e.g., house heating) as well as to maintain basic infrastructure (e.g., water pipes).

As of the second half of 2012, the number of occupied households amounted to forty-five. Besides the residential area, the area dedicated to farmland started to be explored by a Community Supported Agriculture scheme (CSA), namely, Cloughjordan Community Farm[17] (CCF); amenities such as communal gardens had also been made available, although the number of members effectively using them is, as of 2012-13, fairly low. Furthermore, around seventeen thousand trees had recently been planted into the woodland's destined area. Although most community buildings and other shared facilities are yet to be built, by the time I left

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[17] Know more at http://www.cloughjordancommunityfarm.ie/

Cloughjordan—in the end January 2013—an enterprise centre had been inaugurated and a building providing retail and light industry was well on its way.

Besides SPIL and its subsidiaries, there are several other entities that are, somehow, connected to the eco-village enterprise and whose activities link directly to the topics of sustainable community and local resilience. As referred above, there is a CSA growing local, organic food and run by eco-village members. Another example is RED Gardens[18], a research endeavour that specialises on local food systems and food resilience, and whose research activities are developed within the eco-village premises. Additionally, Cultivate[19], is an educational organization that brings people from outside Cloughjordan into CEV for hand-on courses on topics such as *community living*, *local resilience* or *permaculture design*. Finally, as before mentioned, the new enterprise centre—a workspace dedicated to eco-entrepreneurship, thus, providing flexible and affordable mixed-use office space, industrial workshop units and other amenities.

Despite CEV's envisioned resilient community and local livelihoods, and despite the fact that some of the above entities may create few jobs, as of today, the majority of eco-villagers are either retired, unemployed, or commute to part-time/full time jobs elsewhere. Only a minority had already established their businesses within CEV or Cloughjordan town. Examples are "Django[20]," a 32-bed hostel co-owned by SPIL or the Cloughjordan Wood-Fired Bakery mentioned before.

What is more, CEV's design and development has been informed by the "Ecological Charter," a document that sets targets and standards pertaining to energy use, solid waste management, water management, land-use, construction materials, etc. As to individual behaviour and lifestyle, the document does not go beyond ecological guiding principles. Moreover, CEV's community hasn't established any formal mechanism to assess prospective new members' value-set or commitment/alignment to CEV's ethos. Thus, new members are admitted only on

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[18] http://redgardens.org/

[19] http://www.cultivate.ie/

[20] http://www.djangoshostel.com/

the basis of their willingness to join the project and their capacity to conform to the legal and financial terms of the admission.

CEV has adopted an inclusive democratic approach and all its members are encouraged to actively engage in the community issues, whether that be making decisions or take part in the on-going development and maintenance efforts. Accordingly, decisions are taken by multi-level consensus. The governance model that facilitates this democratic and participatory approach is based on Viable Systems Models (VSM), a systems thinking approach that deals with organizational complexity in a self-organising fashion (Espinosa and Walker 2013). According to VSM principles, SPIL's governance model comprises *primary activities* (e.g., land use group, sales, and VERT[21]) which are nuclear to the enterprise development and activity; and *support activities* that facilitate the coordination between the primary groups and set strategic goals for the whole enterprise. Following the *consensus* approach, major decisions and issues are discussed at members' meeting which takes place every month.

5. Analysis and Discussion

In this chapter I discuss CEV's vision and practice according to the main topic and research questions thus:

(1)   *What is CEV's vision consisted of and how to interpret it in the light of the intentional communalism canon and different approaches to green thinking?*

(2)   *How has CEV's vision been translated into practice in its developmental stage? What factors have been challenging CEV's practice and the implementation of its vision?*

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[21] Village Education Research and Training

The following analysis and discussion are informed by my fieldwork in CEV; text analysis of CEV's memoranda and promotional/informational texts; and interviews to CEV's members.

5.1 Vision

Vision, as previously written, is a critical attribute of intentional communalism in that it creates conceptual spaces that enact the utopian function of thinking differently about the world; thus, challenging paradigms, breaking rules, and stretching the limits the possible (Sargisson 2000). In that way, vision bears transformative, subversive powers; being critical of the existing reality, it informs and guides the everyday practice toward an alternative living. Correspondently, it then becomes relevant to investigate into CEV's vision in order to understand the kind of critique it conveys and which established boundaries it attempts to confront.

There is not, to my knowledge, any official statement of CEV's vision whatsoever. One possible reason for this is that CEV's vision is multi-dimensional, thus, too complex to fit into a neat statement. There are, however, various documents and sources—SPIL memoranda, CEV's website, and free-stand publications—whereupon it is possible to grasp different aspects of CEV's vision and, hence, to reach a fair idea of what it is comprised of. For instance, in SPIL's Memorandum of Association, article two, it is stated that,

> The main object for which the Company is established is to create and manage a sustainable village in Ireland (hereinafter called "the village"). The village will serve as a model for sustainable living into the 21st century and will serve as an education, enterprise, research and service resource for all. The company will demonstrate a socially, economically and ecologically viable community that will promote its work and findings through a variety of media and educational programs developed by the company. (Allen et al. 1999)

The above quote clearly emphasis the "sustainable living" dimension of the project. Additionally, the expression "socially, economically and ecologically viable

community" touches upon the different communal aspect of the project necessary to achieve a viable community and holistic living. Lastly, the assertion that the project "serve as a role model for sustainable living into 21st," clearly implies that CEV envisions "sustainable living" not only within its boundaries but also aims to be a role model whence the wider society can draw inspiration toward a more sustainable living. Moreover, the memorandum of association goes on listing the subsidiary objects of SPIL:

> [i] To minimise pollution to the air, water and land.
>
> [ii] To demonstrate a new approach to rural regeneration.
>
> [iii] To maximise the potential for earning a living both inside and outside the village, by facilitating systems whereby people can create local and sustainable work.
>
> [iv] To provide for the cultural, artistic and non-material needs of the residents of the village and surrounding community. (ibid)

The listed points take the vision of a sustainable and viable community a step further by elaborating on what such entails. In so doing, it emphasises a communal living that minimises the impact on the surrounding environment while, at the same time, endeavouring to be a source of inspiration to the rural area in which the eco-settlement is inserted. Additionally, it envisions a communal living that provides not only a robust local economy—from which people can draw livelihoods—but also provides beyond material needs. Similarly, these aspects of sustainable community living are reinforced by SPIL's subscribed definition of *eco-village* which is stated in CEV's website[22]:

> Ecovillages are urban or rural communities of people who strive to integrate a supportive social environment with a low impact way of life. To achieve this, they integrate various aspects of ecological design,

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[22] Under the tab "What are Eco-Villages?" http://www.thevillage.ie/ (accessed on March 20th, 2013).

permaculture, ecological building, green production, alternative energy, community building practices and much more.

The above text adds to the previous passages specific ways in which the minimisation of the environmental impact is effected (e.g., "ecological design," "permaculture," "ecological building," "green production," among others). The definition goes on enumerating the means by which an eco-village grows and evolves, some of which I hereon quote[23]:

- Recognising and relating to the needs of the local community;

- Sharing common resources and providing mutual aid;

- Providing work by fostering ecological business ideas;

- Fostering cultural education;

- Growing food as much as possible;

- Supporting organic food production;

- Creating homes out of local materials where possible;

- Using village based renewable energy systems;

- Protecting biodiversity;

- Preserving clean soil, water and air through proper energy and waste management.

Clearly, a *co-operative community* is central to the concept of eco-village which CEV embraces; the same for the creation and development of a local and sustainable economy, that is, an economy with no detrimental effects to the environment (or at least the ecological negative impacts are minimised as much as possible). The goal of local food sufficiency and organic produce is, too, highlighted, as it is the objective of achieving energetic autonomy through local renewable sources. Lastly, the concern with surrounding nature and its preservation is expressed through concerns about biodiversity protection and waste management.

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[23] Same source as last quote.

The following quote is also taken from CEV's website and it focuses on the concept of resilience[24]:

> For these uncertain times we need a new approach. We have to build our capacity to be able to handle unexpected changes. We, and our communities, need to be more than simply sustainable, we need to be regenerative and to build the capacity not only to absorb shocks . . . but to evolve with them. In a word, we need to be resilient. If sustainability is about survival, resilience is about being able to overcome the unexpected, to adapt and to thrive.

Resilience, as mentioned elsewhere herein, is a concept borrowed from Ecology and it refers to the ability of a system to absorb external shocks and adapt to different circumstances while retaining essential functions and structures (see e.g., Hopkins 2008). Translating this concept into social practice means essentially the same, that is, a community is resilient if it has the capacity to endure shocks coming from the outside and through broader systems (e.g., energy supply shortage, food supply shortage, etc.). It follows, then, that a resilient community entails a generous degree of self-reliance and local autonomy—both of which are achieved if basic needs (e.g., shelter, food, energy, etc.) become predominantly provided by tapping into local resources and skills. Hence, *scale* (i.e., *local scale*) is nuclear to the concepts of resilience and self-reliance; and well apparent in the eco-village's aims for growing local food, developing local sources of renewable energy, using local materials to build dwellings, among others. The following passage belongs to a CEV's promotional brochure[25]:

> We are already pioneering in the way homes have been built and in the way our buildings are heated. Our vision for job creation through access to live-work units and collaborative workspaces, supported by our state of the art fibre optic Village Area Network which provides broadband and telephone services is groundbreaking. These innovative features are attracting people

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[24] Under the tab "Sustainability and Resilience." http://www.thevillage.ie/ (accessed on March 20th, 2013).

[25] From a free-stand publication produced by SPIL and published in 2012.

to locate here to help new forms and structures for building vibrant and resilient communities everywhere. . . . The ecovillage is working to build a resilient and low-carbon economy, sustained by local companies, food producers, green enterprises, eco-tourism, social entrepreneurs and strategic partners. This is fostered through a philosophy of cooperation and strong support for local businesses.

The last excerpt illustrates the prominent role played by innovation, businesses and technology in building up a resilient and environmental-friendly community. Thus, it becomes apparent that CEV embraces a *progressive* rather than a *back- to-the-basics* approach. What is more, a clear emphasis is put on job creation and on building up the local economy by attracting new people into the project. Such call for a vibrant, local economy is underpinned by an expansive and innovative entrepreneurial spirit—one that begs for ingenuity and innovative projects/ideas— all feeding into an envisioned resilient web made up of various collaborative entities.

Another document where to seek understanding about CEV's vision is the "Ecological Charter" which, as mentioned previously[26], is the design manual of the eco-village. In so being, this document sets out the guidelines for CEV's design and development in order to reduce the impact of the project on the natural environment. Additionally, it is also suggestive of social practice and behaviour that is conducive to sustainable living. The following excerpts are taken from an introductory subsection entitled "Charter Principles":

> **Energy efficiency:** all buildings will follow the principle of low impact and high performance design, improving the efficiency of the whole building. . . . **Renewable energy:** the environmental impact of the development can be greatly reduced by supplying the community needs from renewable means. . . . **Water management:** the use of potable water should be limited to drinking, cooking and dishwashing purposes. . . . **Transport:** the Village will encourage the use of public transport, cap-pooling, community car schemes. . . . **Social & Community:** shared facilities, such as collective laundry and transport, will be favoured. . . . **Biodiversity:** all areas of the site will be developed to foster diverse habitats in ways that encourage biodiversity. . . . **Yield:** Obtaining a yield (especially food but also including fodder, energy, material, craft, etc.) from all areas of the site will be an important consideration. . . . **Localization:** anything that we import from

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[26] See Chapter "Cloughjordan Eco-village: a Snapshot."

beyond the local area, whether food, materials or energy, will have an externalised ecological cost. Producing or sourcing locally will reduce our wider ecological footprint. **Fertility and Nutrient Cycling:** Landscape, farm, garden and organic domestic waste will be composted on site, for the use of fertiliser. (Martin 2007)

As the first three quoted excerpts imply, CEV envisions an energetically efficient design of the estate's infrastructure that—coupled with renewable sources of energy and rational use of resources—minimises the impact of the eco-settlement on the environment. Similarly, biodiversity is a concern that is deliberately addressed by the eco-village's plan and design. Moreover, there is a clear emphasis on communal sharing (e.g., car-pooling, shared communal facilities, etc.), indicating a communal co-operative ethos and reinforcing resource-use rationalisation. Lastly, taking into consideration resilience and low-carbon footprint goals, the document reiterates the relevance of providing subsistence means by tapping into the local resources; thus, obtaining a yield from the site becomes a must.

After this brief analysis what, then, can be said about CEV's vision? As mentioned above, CEV's vision is multifaceted and comprises various dimensions which I hereon attempt to wrap up in four main points:

1. *Environmental Preservation:* a low carbon community whereby, through the use of green technologies, eco-design and rational use of resources, human life is carried on with minimum possible disturbance to biodiversity and to the environment.

2. *Local Resourcefulness and Innovative Economy:* a resourceful place where living needs are predominantly provided locally and where community is sustained by a flourishing, vibrant and innovative local economy in which various entities—local companies, green enterprises, social entrepreneurs, among others—prompt up a local, resilient system.

3. *Supportive Community:* a co-operative social environment that provides beyond material needs (e.g. emotional support, cultural expression, education, etc.) and which adopted model of governance is non-hierarchical, inclusive and, hence, highly democratic.

4. *Learning Centre for Sustainable Living:* a role model for sustainable and resilient community that acts as a learning centre, thus, passing on its acquired skills and knowledge to the wider society. In this sense, CEV's vision transcends its own boundaries.

Clearly, *conservationist* and *ecological modernization* approaches to green thinking are present in CEV's vision. Such is apparent in the first and second points above in which—along with community and local economic development—the minimisation of the eco-settlement's impact on the environment is conceived through technological contrivance and a rational use of resources. Moreover, though the concern with local environment (e.g., biodiversity) is implicit throughout the analysed materials, the focal point clearly is *community development;* the latter—well acknowledged in the foregoing quotations—is only made possible by a healthy and functional life-supporting system, that is, a sound environment. Yet, the explicit recognition of natural world's intrinsic value, human-nature meaningful interactions, or human-nature oneness—irrespective of community development affairs—remains marginal to CEV's discourse. To be sure, the above does not mean that this eco-village's aspirations can be reduced to ecological modernization and conservationist categories; instead, it only acknowledges that those strains of green thinking pervade and inform much of CEV's vision, and possibly that they override alternative approaches that are more eco-centric oriented[27].

What is more, CEV's reliance on technological innovation—a corner stone to ecological modernization approach—to move forward into creating a sustainable community is, I believe, in contradiction with CEV's aspirations; or at least it bears

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[27] More on different currents of green thinking in the foregoing chapter "Theoretical Frames of Reference."

the potential to be so. Arguably, in the envisioned decentralized, egalitarian and human-scale polities/economies, basic precepts of the current scientific-technological complex would fail to hold in place—for instance, traits such as global scale operations, capital-intensiveness, and profit-driven mechanisms of innovation would, comprehensively, fade away. In the absence of those traits, the logic of innovation, production, distribution and maintenance of science and technology would be radically different than it is as of today. Therefore, the paradigmatic change that CEV's vision entails (and bearing in mind that CEV's vision transcends CEV's boundaries) would possibly erode some of the foundations on which it sits on. Following this train of thought, the more weight CEV puts on technological contrivance to realise its vision, the more elusive its vision becomes.

Despite its fair dose of ecological modernization and respective contradictions, CEV's vision is, I argue, fairly challenging thus enacting the utopian function mentioned before. Accordingly, by envisioning supportive, self-reliant local communities—where among other things food and energy is provided by tapping into local resources—it confronts what is practiced in the wider society, that is, centralized supply chains and widespread vulnerability; by adopting a participatory and inclusive approach to decision making, it calls into question apparent shortcomings of representative democracy; by aspiring to strong relational bonds between members in a wholesome, co-operative and supportive community, it critically opposes social deterioration and widespread alienation in the mainstream society; by conceptualizing a vibrant and thriving local economy in sound harmony with its environment, it transgresses centralised and capitalist socio-economic praxis.

By weaving together all foregoing aspects, one can say that CEV's vision it is fairly daring, challenging, and confronting established boundaries immanent within the larger society. What is more, given that CEV's ultimate purpose is to become a role model and learning centre for sustainable living means that the vision of a resilient community transcends CEV's own boundaries—radiating good practices and ecological principles toward sustainable and resilient living lies at the heart of CEV's mission. Such visionary encompassment of the larger society is well in line with Dawson's (2006) definition of eco-village as well as with Schehr's (1997)

association between contemporary intentional communities and broader social movements[28].

Despite the extremely relevant role that a vision plays in an intentional community, it alone does not provide what it takes to achieve communitarian aspirations and main goals—its implementation must be attempted and the practicalities of everyday life endured. Relatedly, the developmental phase which CEV is at has, indeed, proved to be quite challenging. For instance, not all members share the exactly same understanding of CEV's vision, nor do they focus evenly on its various dimensions; in a published article, a member of the eco-village writes:

> Our ecovillage aspires to create a place where it will be much easier to live sustainably than in conventional housing. There is no compulsion to be 'deep green' or to interpret sustainability as a back-to-basics existence. Our aim is to reconcile modern comfort and convenience with a more sustainable lifestyle. (Martin 2010)

Although this passage reflects, to some extent, aspects of CEV's vision above discussed, it is not warranted that all eco-villagers in Cloughjordan would subscribe it. Such differences among CEV's membership are not only apparent but also complicate the developmental stage which the enterprise is currently undergoing—I touch upon this and other related issues below.

5.2 Practice

So far I have analysed CEV's vision and the different dimensions it is comprised of. Indeed, vision plays a fundamental role to CEV's enterprise—that of providing a critical gaze upon the mainstream society, thus beaconing actions, attitudes and decisions toward the realisation of a "better" living. However, if anything, my fieldwork experience in Cloughjordan indicates me that the *road* toward the

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[28] See chapter "Theoretical Frames of Reference."

enterprise's aspirations—practice on the *real* terrain—presents various challenges, some of which unanticipated, therefore making sinuous the way toward vision.

Relatedly, this part of the discussion addresses the issue of how CEV's vision has been translated into practice so far, focusing on the bumps that had appeared along the road—internal and external, circumstantial and structural—and how they might disturb, even detract, CEV's practice from its visionary tracks. Possibly, such bumps—and its effects—might be amplified by the fact that CEV is still at an initial stage of its life; that is, its principles and foundations are not deep-rooted yet, thus making the enterprise more vulnerable to be shaken by adversity. Focusing on these issues, the following discussion draws upon my participant observation as well as on interviews to CEV's members[29].

5.2.1 Common Ground?

Despite the fact that expressions such as "sustainable living" or "community" bear much currency in CEV—leaving the impression of a solid *common ground*—there are, among the eco-villagers, distinct ways in which those same expressions are interpreted and, thus, making the common ground somehow elusive and difficult to grasp. Such plurality of understandings—which co-exist within a believed common purpose and aspirations—only attests the fact that basic attributes of intentional communalism, for instance, "like-mindedness," are but a matter of degree[30]. Arguably, a diversity of *minds*—that is, different rationalities, values, perspectives, skills, and knowledges at play—is positive in that, for example, in strengthens community's ability to respond to adversities, thus increasing its resilience. Accordingly, many eco-villagers in Cloughjordan would back up such view. However, a diversity of minds also bears the potential to deteriorate the "glue" that

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[29] All interviews were confidential; the real names of the interviewees are, thus, withheld by mutual agreement.

[30] See chapter "Theoretical Frames of Reference."

holds a community together by affecting the sense of common purpose. Relatedly, Gilman (1991) reckons that:

> To deal with all . . . challenges the members of the eco-village need something that holds them together, some basis of shared values and vision that can provide a 'glue.' Developing and maintaining this glue is yet another level of challenge which will raise questions such as: what is the appropriate interplay of unity and diversity? (ibid)

It follows, then, that there is a point at which *unity* and *diversity* find a balance, that is, when diversity harmoniously co-habit within an over-arching sense of common purpose. Even if in CEV the existence of multiple vantage points is, generally, looked upon as something desirable, the attrition amongst its membership is apparent:

> I think that the common ground is that people do want to live in community. I also think common ground is that we all probably find it challenging in that people's definition of community infers sometimes that it is harmonious. But of course it isn't… which, is a beauty in itself because it means that we're being challenged in different ways all the time. (Isabel, 28th November)

> Common ground of the project is the desire to have a good community, 'a better way of living.' But the spectrum of that way of living, what constitutes better way of living, is fairly diverse. . . . I thought that it [the enterprise] would be way more radical, more experimental. . . . But there are some people who use the eco-village as a vehicle to do something different whereas other people use it as a nice place to live in. (Ricardo, 4th December 2012)

Possibly, an aspect that partly underpins existent divergences is that different members focus on different dimensions of CEV. By and large, the eco-villagers I had met are, first and foremost, driven by the *community* dimension of the project; even if relevant, the strictly environmental and sustainability realms of it are relegated to a second plan:

> I say 'community' as larger than the eco-village 'intentional community'… almost leaving aside the specific environmental remit of SPIL. It is the

community of people that we're engaging and living with which is first and foremost. There could be people very committed to the environment but they wouldn't be necessarily people we could relate to or engage with. (Thomas, 28th November)

The attraction for coming here was that I would have a community that would be doing the same thing as me… everyone would start from the scratch. That was the attraction… coming into a community that was not established as opposed to have to fit in something already established. (Sofia, 28th November 2012)

On the other side of the spectrum, members place the focus on the political dimension and educational charity status of the project; that is, these members share a strong sense of mission to engage with the wider society and to influence it toward increased levels of environmental sustainability:

There were people who bought in without realising that this was an educational charity. . . . We are providing services to other people through the provision of services to ourselves. (Ricardo, 4th December 2012)

Moreover, to those who focus on the political dimension, SPIL's educational mission is a fundamental aspect of the enterprise—both inwardly and outwardly; that is, the learning process that eco-villagers are themselves enduring can and should be shared with the wider society. Thus—and since influencing the larger society towards sustainable living appears as CEV's ultimate goal—advocators of CEV's educational mission take the communication of enterprise's experience, achievements, and orientational principles as a fundamental dimension of the project:

The project was more than just building a sustainable community. It was interpreting that, communicating that. This involves deeper research and becoming an educational charity. (Nicholas, 3rd December 2012)

Yet, other members would interpret the educational dimension of CEV, first and foremost, inwardly. In so doing, their focus and energies are mostly channelled into the community in order to, for instance, keep up with basic aspirations of the project that are yet to be achieved (e.g., communal spaces and

shared amenities). Accordingly, these members would rather refer to the hard work that building a community from ground-zero entails as well as to all the hurdles, setbacks, and others difficulties they (and the enterprise as a whole) have been through ever since; moreover—in the face of an apparent scarcity of time, commitment, and community resources—they emphasise how much is left to be done:

> Charitable status was not the selling point. It seems at the moment is being pushed. I am not sure of what is that about. The educational status, to me, means that we learn how to start the community from scratch… and that's a big challenge; to come here and start from scratch. And to me is what the learning is about. It is not about learning courses. . . . Somehow the courses are separate from what we're doing here. We are teaching things that we are not doing ourselves yet. (Sofia, 28th November 2012)

Some other members even dismiss altogether CEV's potential in being a role model for sustainable living:

> When the eco village was thought, more than twelve years ago, people were not recycling, people were not composting, people were not growing their own. Now people all over the country are doing the same things we are doing here in the sustainable line. (Zetta, 21st November 2012)

Substantial amongst CEV's contentions appears to be different understandings of the *sustainability* concept. Overall, environmental concern in CEV is expressed through an emphasis on energy efficiency, consumption ethics (e.g. food miles, organic produce, fair-trade, etc.) and rational use of resources. Accordingly, virtually all members in CEV prefer local and organic over industrial-based produce, mind recycling, and try to minimise waste in their everyday lives:

> I would be more aware of conserving energy. I use my bike. I don't use the car as much when I am here. I love the idea of getting the produce from the land, when I can, not having to go to the supermarket all the time. And again I am shopping locally on the village. . . . I live how I believe and eco as I can afford to be because living ecologically is expensive, you know? . . . (Zetta, 21st November 2012)

Some members, however, take *sustainability* a step further by associating it with the concept of *local resilience* (or even dismissing it altogether in favour of the latter). Accordingly, it is hardly possible to conceive sustainability without addressing the imperative of a local, mutually-supportive, self-reliant, and cohesive community; hence, for these members, community and sustainable living are inextricably coupled:

> More and more I use resilience, which is more about changing our system to cope with the changes that are happening. . . It is transformational rather than incremental. Adapting rather than mitigate. . . Talking about sustainability on the individual levels is putting it as small increments, 'I can change my lighbulb.' (Nicholas, 3rd December 2013)

> Sustainable living is an entirely obsolete definition; it is defunct and it has been hijacked by other interests. . . . I am more concerned about adaptability and resilience. . . . For example, using fossil fuels to change the landscape so that in the future we don't have to use fossil fuels. (Ricardo, 4th December 2012)

Despite the benefits that stem from a multi-perspectival membership, diversity is not cost-free—namely, it entails more potential for attrition and, consequently, it demands more negotiation among eco-villagers in order to make decisions and to move on with the project. Therefore, the decision-making process becomes more complex and time consuming; more so in CEV's case where the decision-making approach officially adopted is *consensus*. Although its unique potential to develop and maintain the community cohesive, proponents of this approach argue that, in order for consensus to work properly, there has to be an unconditional commitment by the membership to reach unanimous decisions. Accordingly, those involved in the process must strive to understand each other's point of view and be ready to compromise. In this sense, consensus is a collective learning journey where initial individual ideas and understandings around a topic, no matter how distinct they are, evolve towards a unitive understanding. This, however, is not the way consensus seems to be working for the time being:

My view is that we need to adopt consensus decision making as the only process to arriving at decisions. We should endeavour to reach consensus. . . . A commitment to consensus is exactly that… that a group commit to reach a decision by consensus which means to collectively reach a decision. Creating a decision. This means that there is no blocking. You cannot block, because you're committed to take a decision. And we haven't adopted this definition of consensus yet. (Lucas, 25th November 2012)

People are using consensus as a veto and obstructing other people with deeper intents. (Fredrik, 26th 2012)

There are, however, those who find consensus approach inappropriate if, for example, it is applied to all situations. These members also reject the imperative to reach unanimity and stand for their right to oppose:

I think people can't accept 'we don't want that.' We can't compromise in everything. . . . They don't agree with having a vote, you see? I would still have consensus but it certainly doesn't work in every situation. More practicality is needed; we are great on idealism. (Gabriela, 10th December 2012)

I don't really understand consensus. I am not sure about it at all. It has been working to my advantage because I had been able to oppose decisions which I wouldn't agree with. . . . Consensus wasn't reached [referring to a particular issue that had been put into discussion on a members' meeting] but there was a pressure put on those who opposed like: 'you're being rigid,' 'you´re not being flexible,' and so on… which was quite insulting because I put a lot of thought in it. (Sofia, 28th November 2012)

In spite of its potential, consensus seems to be especially problematic when combined with stark divisions within the membership on any given topic. The crucial point is whether stark divisions can, in the future, be surmounted by higher levels of commitment and belief in the consensus approach, or whether certain matters remain irreconcilable no matter what. If time proves the latter to be the case, CEV might be forced to abandon consensus in favour of, for example, democratic vote—lest the paralysation of on-going processes and respective detrimental effects over the whole project.

5.2.2 Structural Conditioning

An aspect that had conditioned—and still does—the unfolding of CEV's enterprise relates to its set-up model, namely, to issues of property, ownership, financing, and membership access. Relatedly, to cope with expenses associated with site purchase, among others, SPIL had incurred into debt in order to fund the enterprise. Following that, the service of the debt relies on the proceedings from incoming eco-villagers who, in the process of becoming a member of SPIL, invest in a site or an apartment in the eco-village.

Two major implications stem from the above financial rationale. The one relates to sales pressure, that is, the project is dependent on selling sites in order to pay back its creditors. The other is that—since SPIL membership implies private ownership—it is not enough, in order to join the project, to share similar ideas and interests about resilient community and sustainable living—one has also to be financially able to afford it. Understandably, the very fact that the project hasn't been able to get around the predatory price system of the formal economy constitutes a serious limitation to the development of the enterprise—it potentially excludes members with skills, knowledge and experience that otherwise would be able to give input and boost CEV's aspirations:

> The concept of people buying a site and build their own house or apartment was very much stuck in the old mind-set. . . . There was only a minority of the general public that could join. . . . A model based on selling sites and people getting mortgages is not really very useful. (Lucas, 25th November 2012)

> A big proportion of the kind of people that merely wants to live in the country were able to come in here, more than those who want to change the world. . . . This happened because of socio-economic circumstances or either because where people stand within their own lives. (Ricardo, 4th December 2012)

Indeed, the fact that CEV hasn't found its way around private ownership makes the project less daring in that it is in accord with a corner-stone institution—private property—which underpins much of mainstream rationalities as well as

social and ecological predicaments that CEV aspires to counter. The paradox then becomes apparent—CEV's enterprise conveys a vision of an alternative way of living although it runs on, somewhat, mainstream tracks; that is, it is supported by mainstream institutions such as debt money or private ownership. Inevitably, then, the project is subjected to a structural conditioning and it loses some of its potential to create a distant space where one can think differently about the world. As a matter of fact, I had myself felt difficulties to articulate, on one hand, CEV's goal to become a role model for sustainable and community sound living and, on the other, the fact that only a minority of the general public can afford to take a share in the enterprise. Following my intrigue, I had confronted some of my interviewees with this apparent paradox, asking them if they would think about CEV as replicable to a larger scale and, hence, able to shed some light onto the environmental and social afflictions of the contemporary world:

> I have to agree with them [the question was: "what would you answer be if someone would assert CEV as an example of sustainable-living *commodification*?"]. Because you need money to come to this project. It is an uncomfortable fact but it is a fact. (Isabel, 28th November 2012)

> I wouln't say 'replicable' is the right word. But people can take and learn different lessons from our example. (Lucas, 25th November 2012)

> Even if we are a minority, it is better some than none. . . . Unless you live in a caravan or in a tent you need some money. . . . I go back to Schumacher maxim 'small is beautiful'. I am aware that small is better than nothing. (Gabriela, 10th December Cloughjordan)

More than once I had been told that, given the pretension to reach out to the wider society, CEV was conceived in proximity to the mainstream; in that way, "ordinary" people wouldn't feel intimidated by it and the potential for engagement with the wider society would be heightened. In this line of reasoning, then, familiarity with mainstream amplifies project's influence over the larger society. However, and as it has been supported by this discussion so far, the proximity to mainstream may, sometimes, undercut CEV's potential to provide an *alternative*

model of approaching society; moreover, it can numb project's aspirations and refract its intentionality. A trade-off, then, becomes apparent—CEV heightens its chances to drive a wedge in the larger society at the cost of turning itself vulnerable to be gobbled up by the latter:

> We are a continuation of capitalism if you like. It is not a radical approach. This is not a bunch of anarchists. We are close to the mainstream and that can be dangerous in that we can get stuck in the same paradigm. But underneath it we have some more radical members and actually what we try to do is more radical than what it comes across. (Nicholas, 3rd December 2012)

The fact that some aspects of CEV are in relative proximity to the mainstream (e.g., membership coupled to private ownership) becomes more understandable when put in historical perspective. Accordingly, the project had been thought and conceived in the late 1990s, at the heights of the so called Celtic Tiger—a period of great prosperity and rapid economic growth. Under such zeitgeist, that is, a time of unprecedented levels of wealth and unbounded optimism in the future, sales dependency or predatory prices would not be much of an issue and—apparently—those factors were not taken into consideration by the time CEV was projected. This, I argue, is illustrative of how the broader context—economic and social climate—have informed and shaped the project. Yet, much has changed ever since Ireland's financial throes had come about, less than a decade later the eco-village had been thought. Consequently, with the advent of the Irish economic downturn, the effects of the exposure to a predatory price system were greatly amplified; for instance, many members couldn't bear anymore the financials exigencies that CEV membership entailed and were forced to drop out the project[31]. Waves of withdrawals coupled with increasing sales pressure had possibly impacted the ethos of the project:

> To some extent, as it is right now, the project reflects the mainstream. Only those who could afford site's high prices and highly insulated houses could

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[31] See Chapter "Cloughjordan Eco-village: a Snapshot."

effectively move in the eco-village. . . . I don't see people living smaller. (Elisa, 23rd November)

The ethos of the original project was to show Ireland a different way of living. . . . I find diversity positive; but the fact that I am one of the most radical people in the site bothers me. I think the mind-set should be expanded. In that way I would like to see more diversity. (Ricardo 4th December 2012)

As suggested by the last quote, the problem may not remain so much in the *diversity of minds* as it may in the gravitational centre of CEV's ethos. Relatedly, I had always been awed by the fact that most of CEV's members are middle-class, many of them with an urban background, and the dominant age interval falls within the 40-49 and 50-59 years-old brackets. Moreover, a considerable part of the CEV's residents are couples rearing small children and holding conventional jobs in the formal economy, outside Cloughjordan. In the following quote a member expresses what she considers to be central in CEV:

I believe that people who want to come here do want to have a different life. They want a place maybe for their children to grow safely and in walking distance from the school… that is the beginning of the community aspect. It is the central core. And people like young families can be the main draw if they have possibilities to afford the place. (Sofia, 28th November 2012)

What is more, the fact that SPIL has endured withdrawals from potential investors coupled with the compulsory service of its debt had led the project to financial straits and, subsequently, magnified site-sales pressure. The latter is, for example, manifested in the way the project is presented to prospective buyers. I had been present in diverse occasions where potential investors (e.g., visitors participating in a CEV's weekend experience, or in a seminar) were given guided tours and introduced to CEV. In these presentations—I argue—the eco-village would be portrayed not without a slant towards its achievements and aspirational virtues. While it is true that CEV's feats amounts to something that is already impressing (e.g., over 30 high performance houses, a CSA scheme in place, a district heating system powered by renewable sources, among others), it is also a fact that

the community had been struggling hard while enduring various challenges and setbacks (e.g., time/resource constraints to maintain and develop further infrastructure, contentious topics and important difficulties getting stuck by lack of consensus, members drop-outs, SPIL's debt and financial straits, among others), and—most relevantly—crucial aspects of its vision are yet to be realised (e.g., self-reliant community). Yet again, it is my belief that CEV's marketing discursive practice hinges on CEV achievements and on its aspirational goals, while failing to give a down-to-the-earth account on what it takes to pursue and achieve those same aspirations—that is, the hurdles, financial difficulties, mistakes, contentions and setbacks that the project had been through and all that probably is yet to come:

> Money is really tight here. Money is very tight. And people are disagreeing that you should have service charge and things like that. We can't afford lighting for instance. . . . There is a huge amount of work still to do. We can't afford to build a community building even though that was what I sign up for. . . . It is incredible expensive to live here. When I joined I didn't know that we would have to pay all this… we have to pay for service charge, for the district heating, the community development charge… that it a lot of money. And then I had to pay for Oxpark and then it turned out that I had to pay to north Tipperary council. Not anything to do with the site but the roads and the lights in the bigger area. (Sofia, 28th November 2012)

> It is a project that has been marred or hindered by delays, by the economy… and by certain issues on the site, by incompetence, by… overthinking. Actually that has been the problem. It is all too big. . . . the overall concept went so big that actually almost destroyed it. (Lars, 26th November)

5.2.3 Moving Forward by Restoring a Sense of Common Purpose

Unquestionably, CEV has been through various hurdles and challenges: from contentious understandings among members on elemental concepts that underpin CEV's purpose (e.g., how sustainability is interpreted); to the difficulties posed by inclusive decision-making processes; to the project set-up model (e.g., scale, debt-based funding, private ownership, etc.), structural conditioning, and subsequent

exposure to the knock-on effects from the Irish economic downturn (members withdrawals, financial strangling, etc.); to committed mistakes and various setbacks endured. Indeed, all this has been disturbing CEV's developmental stage, hence, partly affecting the realisation of its original aspirations.

However impairing these difficulties might be, it is also true that CEV has contrived to endure them, and not without achieving remarkable feats which, to be sure, go well beyond mainstream ecological approaches (e.g., that of rational use of resources and energetic efficiency). For instance, it is thanks to the initiative, knowledge and skills of some of CEV's members that CCF, a CSA scheme, is in place. Being still at an initial stage of development, this CSA runs not without facing its issues and difficulties, as one would naturally expect from any start-up enterprise. Yet, local dwellers are increasingly becoming ever more appreciative of good-quality, local produce, and their food-habits more attuned to seasonality—this applies not only to members living in the eco-village but also to the wider Cloughjordan community and beyond. Moreover, not only is CEV contributing to (re)attune Cloughjordan to local food but it is also helping to revitalise a town that, over the past couple decades, had suffered from the generalised exodus from the country toward urban centres and, subsequently, undergone socio-economic deterioration:

> There are positive ripple effects [from the presence of CEV in Cloughjordan]. . . . We have two primary schools. Usually primary schools have to struggle to keep their numbers and teachers. Here they have expanded. Then of course all shops and businesses are happy with more customers and visitors coming in. (Isabel, 28th November)

Recently, Cloughjordan won, for the second time in a row, the Green Community Award (a prize at the national level). This remarkable achievement would hardly be possible without the contribution and inputs that CEV has given to Cloughjordan, nor without the so far successful blending-in with the wider community[32]. Another area in which CEV has shown dynamism relates to the

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[32] Eco-villagers actively participate in the affairs of the wider community through the involvement in organizations such as the Cloughjordan Heritage Group or Cloughjordan Development Council; also through the participation in various recreational activities and the organization of cultural events.

educational mission of the enterprise. Accordingly, various educational entities (e.g., VERT, Cultivate, among others) have been organizing courses and workshops on *permaculture design*, *natural building*, *organic gardening*, among other green-living related topics. Additionally, CEV is, on a regular basis, visited by university staff and students that come from all over the country in order to see, experience and learn about *eco-villages*.

Most importantly, CEV has revealed commitment toward the aspirations that it self-proposed to achieve; for instance, as of the end of 2012, one of the issues that CEV's agenda is concerned with is to find ways around the exclusionary price system that enterprise had got into:

> A lot would depend on how we develop the rest of the site. . . . I am hoping that we will now be able to develop other ways that this community can be a useful model for other people. (Lucas, 25th November 2012)

Accordingly, being members aware of how detrimental the *selling sites* model has been to the project, alternative strategies to attract people are being discussed, namely, co-housing, low-cost building, low budget accommodation for transient dwellers, among others. Furthermore, few eco-villagers were taking into members' meeting the discussion about the possibility to decouple SPIL's membership from ownership by, for example, separating CEV's residential realm from CEV's educational realm:

> There is, right now, this problem where membership is tied up to ownership. But hopefully it will come soon another type of membership. (Nicholas, 3rd December 2012)

Such decoupling would, hopefully, attract different people into the project—thus importing additional energy, skills, and knowledge—that otherwise couldn't afford to become members of SPIL. These future plans were, however, meeting considerable opposition by eco-villagers who don't agree with egalitarian status among members with different levels of financial commitment to the project.

As a matter of fact, this particular contentious issue might constitute an instance where stark divisions among membership make consensus approach challenging, thus, putting to probation some of CEV's cherished principles.

Amongst all difficulties and uncertainties CEV's has been facing, one thing poses no doubt—the task of building a sustainable and resilient community from scratch is gigantic (let alone the intent to influence and reach out to the larger society). Critical to that task is a good sense of vision, that is, a reasonable common understanding of what the project is all about; *reasonable* because the presence of different stand points, unavoidable and important as it is, demands a compromise between unity and diversity. Although critical, a good sense of vision alone is not enough to concretise the aspirational goals; commitment and perseverance are also necessary to make it happen. Most relevantly perhaps, building a sustainable and resilient community requires co-operation and dialogue between members as well as humbleness in generous doses—the kind that opens the gates toward tolerance, mutual respect and mutual learning:

> For me having that spectrum and diversity and the challenge of bringing people together is the richness of the learning experience here in Cloughjordan. I love it. I love that challenge. I now start to understand it. Before I'd get angry, frustrated… I'd start to speak louder. . . I am trying to use empathy and trying to understand the point of view of that other person. . . . There's maturity involved in understanding points of view. (Nicholas, 3rd December 2012)

The openness for dialoguing and understanding the other is not only essential in bridging differences toward a unitive vision, but it is also needed to adapt strategies, aspirations, expectations, and even ultimate goals to evolving circumstances in order to keep a vital sense of a common purpose. Relatedly, CEV's enterprise has been an eventful journey along which various things have changed and fracturing difficulties have emerged. Only with a firm commitment to overcome divergences is possible hold the group cohesiveness and to reach to a lucid sense of

collective vision and purpose—thence, the vision becomes more graspable, more doable. There might be little way to go around these communal exigencies.

6. Concluding Remarks

Being concerned with intentionality in practice this study focuses on a particular intentional community project—Cloughjordan Eco-village (CEV). Accordingly, and informed by a six-month fieldwork in CEV, the foregoing analysis is two-fold: on the one, it endeavours to grasp CEV's vision and to interpret it in the light of intentional communalism canon and distinct currents of green thinking; on the other, it looks into how that vision has been translated into practice, focusing on the hindering issues endured so far and respective effects to the drive of the project.

      CEV´s vision, the forgoing analysis holds, portrays a social arrangement that is locally rooted, self-reliant, non-hierarchical, ecologically sustainable, and sustained by meaningful human relationships. Being manifestly estranged from the mainstream, that vision provides critique to the status quo and, thus, it creates an alternative place whence one can dream of and follow in the footsteps of a "better" way of living. Additionally, since the enterprise's ultimate purpose is to influence the wider society toward socially and ecologically sound living, CEV's aspirations transcend the eco-settlement boundaries.

      However "alternative" CEV's vision may be, the enterprise aspirations are also, to a considerable extent, pervaded by dominant strains green thinking, namely, by *ecological modernization* and *conservationist* approaches. Being the latter in accord with mainstream institutions that sustain much of the social and ecological predicaments—the ones CEV attempts to counteract—some degree of contradiction, then, becomes apparent; the extent to which *alternative* outcomes that are inscribed in CEV's vision can be affected or even co-opted by mainstream institutions depends on the degree to which CEV's *environmentalism* is, now and in the future, to rely on dominant currents of green thinking. Above all, the presence of different environmental approaches within CEV's vision, as well as their

respective weights, constitute an utterly important issue in that it determines much of the direction of the whole enterprise; in that sense it also calls for further discussion among its membership.

With regard to the practical realm, CEV's developmental stage has been disturbed by various factors. For instance, the fact that different eco-villagers hold different understandings on the enterprise's mission and related nuclear concepts (e.g., sustainability) has been a source of contention and, consequently, it has been diverting energies into conflict resolution, delaying on-going processes and decisions and, most importantly, dissolving a clearer sense of vision. Again, this membership's dissonance calls for further discussion and dialogue toward the re-equation of a sound balance between plurality and unity—one that reconciles diversity with a unitive sense of common purpose.

What is more, the project set-up model and relative proximity to mainstream institutions have been conditioning the enterprise's aspirations. Indeed, the fact that CEV's membership implies private ownership has been subjecting the project to a predatory price mechanism and, hence, blocking the incoming of potential members that fully subscribe to various aspects of the enterprise's vision and who could, otherwise, contribute to help CEV achieving its goals. Adding to this, because the enterprise is locked into the repayment of its debt to financial institutions and other investors makes it site-sales dependent, lest financial deterioration of the project; this becomes more of an issue in the context of the Irish economic downturn that had played out early in CEV's development stage. Altogether, these factors prompt up a structural conditioning that impedes the enterprise to tackle its aspirations more effectively; as a matter of fact, some members reckon that it had even subverted the community ethos as well as refracted the original intent of the enterprise.

Despite all the adversity, CEV has also achieved quite impressive feats in a relatively short period of time. Moreover, it has managed to endure various difficulties, showing therefore a good dose of determination which has brought the

enterprise to where it stands right now; yet, much more of that determination seems to be needed. Indeed, as of today, some of the discussed conditioning which CEV is grappling with poses no small challenge, so much so that the enterprise finds itself at a crossroads—either it finds the way around the obstacles and toward the realisation of a self-reliant, sustainable community; or it succumbs to internal divisiveness and structural conditioning, and only to become something else other than what is originally intended to. To a great extent, the enterprise's ability to avoid the latter hinges on its membership commitment to—through dialogue and openness to learn from each other's point of view—mend major contentious fissures that are corroding a sense of common purpose. If the latter is re-established, the project naturally increases its ability to respond and adapt its strategies to the present circumstances and, therefore, averting to fall out from its visionary tracks. In other words, the ability to discuss and work issues through and to maintain the group together around a common purpose renders the "dream" more achievable.

The more is known about the various factors that affect the intentionality of eco-villagers and other intentional communities, the more competent the latter become in anticipating and dealing with adversity. Accordingly, if present and future intentional enterprises are better equipped to face and overcome adversity, then, they increase their capacity to concretise their goals, including that of pointing out *what* is "wrong" with the world and offering alternatives; thus, pushing it into a "better" place to live in. This study gives, I hope, a small contribution toward that end, that is, to raise awareness and understanding of potential hurdles that come along with implementation of intentional projects so that those enterprises become more effective in tackling their aspirations and realising their vision.

What is more, the fact that contemporary intentional communities play such a fundamental role in our societies is reason enough to motivate further research within this field of inquiry. In the particular case of eco-villages, reasons that motivate continued research are, at least, two-fold: on the one, the ecological crisis and pressing environmental issues of this day; on the other, the fact that the

eco-village movement has been in rapid expansion over the last couple of decades and, thus, the existence of many guises within this genre of intentional communalism. I would, then, suggest further case-studies in a parallel line of inquiry as this one, leading toward a more comprehensive understanding of the topic raised herein.

Appendix 1 - CEV in Images

Figure 1
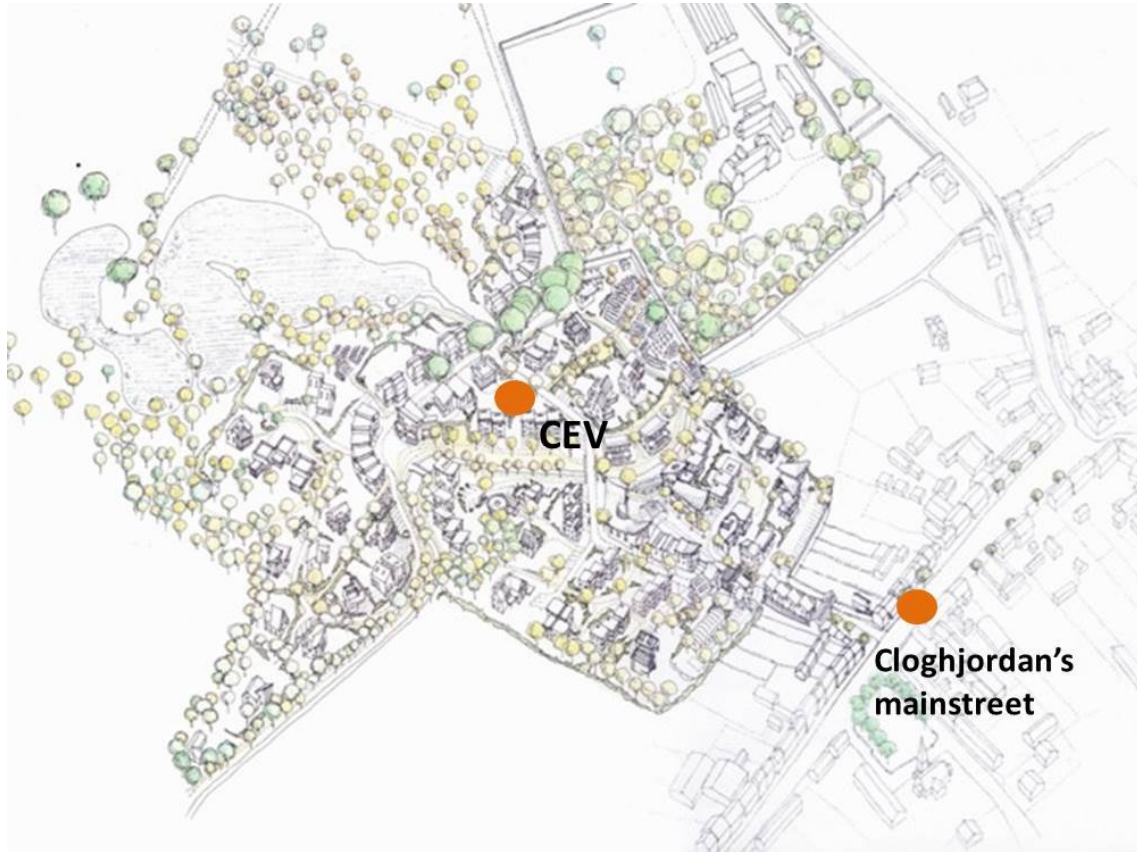
Caption: a visual projection of CEV at a future, developed stage. Courtesy of Davie Philips, member of SPIL. (Tags added by the author.)

Figure 2

Caption: a satellite photo of Cloughjordan as of 2011. Courtesy of Bruce Darrel, member of SPIL. (Tags added by the author.)

Figure 3

Caption: view to CEV's residential area. Photo shot by the author in November 2012.

Figure 4

Caption: participants of a permaculture design course during a talk given by Bruce Darrel (in the centre). Photo shot by the author in August 2012.

Figure 4

Caption: view of CEV's farmland (cultivated by Cloughjordan Community Farm). Photo shot by the author in August 2012.

Figure 5

Caption: jam session in CEV's main square, during community meal in the outdoor. Photo shot by the author in August 2012.

Appendix 2 - Interview's Script

// Life Questions

- Age; nationality; household; occupation; level of schooling.

- Walks of life and events that brought you up here.

- For how long have you been living in the eco-village?

- What were the motivations/expectations for moving in?

- Have those expectations been met ever since you became a member?

// Shared Vision, Values and Purpose of the Eco-village

- What are, in your understanding, the shared values and mission of this eco-village?

- What does living in this intentional community means to you?

- Do the mentioned values/vision form a common ground to which the villagers abide?

- Do you think, as of today, that these values are much different from those held by larger society?

- Do you think that a mechanism to assess would-be villagers' commitment the eco-village ethos would be useful?

- To what extent do you think that this project is living up to its purpose, i.e. an educational role-model for a sustainable and community sound way of living for the 21st century?

- Would you think that this endeavor sheds light on possible solutions to solve complex problems of our global world, e.g. environmental depletion or social inequality?

- How do you think does the wider community perceive this project?

// Community Ethos and Governance

- Would you say that the community ethos has been impinging on your individual freedom? Do you feel peer pressure to behave in certain ways?

- Would you pass judgment on your neighbor's lifestyle regarding particular attitudes that don't comply with community ethos or general ecological principles?

- What do you have to say about VSM and the adopted governance model in general?

- Are you taking on any role in any of the primary groups? How does the community deal with members that apparently don't contribute/participate in the enterprise development?

- How do you see the consensual decision-making approach adopted by the eco-village? Do you agree with consensus approach?

// Sustainable Living and Related Understandings

- What does *sustainable living* mean to you? In what ways are you living up to your understanding of sustainable living?

- What are the crucial elements that enact sustainable living?

- In what ways does this eco-village enacts sustainable living? and how does it differ from the larger society in that respect?

- What is that the eco-village is not doing and should be doing to enact sustainable living?

- Can you live sustainably on your own? Can you extricate yourself from the collective?

- Have your habits and routines changed ever since you've become a member of this eco-village? In which ways?

- How seriously do you take the possibilities of peak oil and eminent systemic collapse? Would you say that different perceptions on that is a source of divisiveness to this community?

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