# Chapter 11

# Transitioning to Sustainable Living

## Chapter Overview

The examples of transitional, sustainable living found in this chapter are just that—examples of what can be done. No one model is the correct or right one. The connection between them all is a desire to live differently than the consumer lifestyle and mindset. The recognition that people have moved too far from who they are and how they wish to live as a community, and to do so in a way that is truly sustainable, has been the impetus for many sustainable living experiments worldwide. A look at the Intentional Community website is an eye-opening and encouraging look at how so many people have recognized that the way they were brought up to live is not the kind of life that they obviously desire (FIC 2011). This website serves the growing Intentional Communities movement, providing resources for starting a community, how to find an intentional community home or neighborhood, advice about living in such a community, and tips on creating more community in one’s personal life. Humans are hardwired to relate to each other. Some countries have many forms of intentional communities, while others are just beginning their experiments. The number of developed countries that now have large numbers of intentional communities is a strong indication of how modern consumer living is not meeting core needs. Australia has over 81 intentional communities of one form or another, New Zealand has 26, Canada has 146, the United Kingdom has 99, the European Union (excluding U.K.) has 78, and the United States has a whopping 1,790 throughout all 50 states (FIC 2011).

People all over the world know that a better way of living exists. They all know intuitively that something is wrong with the current consumer lifestyle, but they don’t readily see another model of what can be. The models in this chapter are just a few examples of what is possible. To attract people to change, whatever transplants the consumer model must be at least as exciting. As you can see from the examples in this chapter, living a life that is happier, healthier, and more connected to people as a new form of wealth *is* that exciting.

## Vocabulary Terms

Agenda 21

biodynamic fertilizer

bioorganic gardening

consensus

crofting

earth friendly

ecohostel

ecotourism

ecovillages

energy descent action plan

gorse dunes

green building

intentional community

LEED standards

Leopoldian land ethic

Living Machine

localized farming

net exporter

new urbanism

permaculture

photovoltaic energy cells

post-oil world

relocalization

self-sustaining

solar-thermal

suburbanism

transition

transitional community

## Terms With Definitions

**Agenda 21—**A comprehensive global-to-local set of plans that focus on reducing human impact on the environment. It was formulated at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, June 3-14, 1992, and signed by 178 nations.

**biodynamic fertilizer—**A mix of organic mulch that enhances the soil to provide the right nutrients for the specific crops being grown.

**bioorganic gardening—**Local gardening that concentrates on the organic aspects of the soil and varied biodiverse species that develop good root structures that enhance soil quality.

**consensus—**Reaching general agreement of the majority.

**crofting—**A livelihood of growing crops in a small parcel of enclosed land that usually houses the crofters’ dwelling, typical of Scotland and Ireland in remote rural setting.

**earth friendly—**Describes processes that use natural systems or local resources that do not create pollution or degrade the environment.

**ecohostel—**Travel accommodations that reduce their impact on the environment by using sustainable techniques such as renewable energy, energy efficient systems and lights, solar thermal heating, recycling facilities, biodegradable products, and so on.

**ecotourism—**Broad term to describe tourist areas that emphasize low impact (on environment) travel rather than mass tourism. Generally, ecotourism includes more education about the area being visited with specific emphasis on benefits of conservation of natural systems and cultural commons of human cultures.

**ecovillages—**Tend to be more rural communities that are developing a sustainable living environment.

**energy descent action plan—**Where communities are making intentional efforts to plan for relocalized energy and local food. Usually it is a response to predicted future fossil fuel energy shocks and shortages.

**gorse dunes—**A spiny, dense evergreen shrub with yellow flowers that thrives in rocky and sandy soils such as beach dune areas.

**green building—**Building that uses sustainability concepts to be more earth friendly.

**intentional community—**Community where residents have consensually decided to pursue principles of sustainable living for a better community.

**LEED standards—Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design is an internationally-recognized green building certification system that rates the** design, construction, operations, and maintenance **of earth-friendly buildings.**

**Leopoldian land ethic—**An ethic proposed by Aldo Leopold that emphasizes the role of the natural world in human well-being. Leopold stated that for a healthier environment, land rights must be considered ethically equivalent to human rights in order to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community.

**Living Machine—**A biological wastewater treatment system that mimics the cleansing functions of natural wetlands by using a series of plant beds and algal treatment ponds.

**localized farming—**Where a local farmer primarily sells crops to local customers such as through farmers markets or CSAs rather than mass export markets.

**net exporter—**Where more of a resource is created than is used. When an energy generation system generates more energy than it needs, it can feed the extra energy into the energy grid system for others to use.

**new urbanism—**The building or restoration of diverse mixed-use communities that allow residents access to all resources and facilities that are within walking distance of home.

**permaculture—**An approach to designing human settlements and agricultural systems that mimic systems found in the natural world.

**photovoltaic energy cells—**Panels that convert solar radiation directly into usable electricity.

**post-oil world**—A recognition that oil is a limited resource and that human systems must prepare for a world where it no longer is available.

**relocalization—**An approach to creating local community energy and food systems that are not reliant on outside imports.

**self-sustaining—**Systems that are able to maintain themselves indefinitely. Often refers to sustainable communities that can meet all their own basic needs for living.

**solar-thermal—**Generally a process of using solar radiation to directly, or indirectly through thermal transfer, heat water for human living needs.

**suburbanism—**A way of living in smaller communities that exist outside a city or town. Generally denotes one that is a car culture.

**transition—**Where there is a movement, development, or evolution from one kind of form, stage, or style to another.

**transitional community—**A community that intentionally is making an effort to move from a business-as-usual style of living to a more sustainable living style.

## Extended Learning Activity

Design a community in which you would like to live. Describe the attributes that your community would have that would classify it as a transitional community. Describe some characteristics of your community that make it a place that people want to live in. Be sure to include the quad stack model in your design and describe how the model is used.

## Research and Response Questions

1. Research the difference in attitudes or overall well-being between people that live in a sustainable community or one with similar values and a current standard community. You will need to read the primary literature to answer this question.
2. Research the factors that encourage people to make changes in their lifestyle to live more sustainably. How are they different from those that do not act? For example, do they live near natural areas, do they live on a farm or ranch, or did they learn to value nature from their parents? You will need to read the primary literature to answer this question.

## Web Links

[The CADISPA Trust](http://www.cadispa.org/)

[Cloughjordan Ecovillage](http://www.thevillage.ie/)

[Consensus decision making](http://www.seedsforchange.org.uk/free/consensus)

[Findhorn Foundation](http://www.findhorn.org/)

[Global Ecovillage Network Europe](http://www.gen-europe.org/)

[Institute for Sustainable Communities](http://www.iscvt.org/)

[Intentional Communities](http://www.ic.org/)

[Kinsale (transition culture)](http://transitionculture.org/wp-content/uploads/KinsaleEnergyDescentActionPlan.pdf)

[Partnership for Sustainable Communities](http://www.sustainablecommunities.gov/)

[Stapleton, Denver](http://www.stapletondenver.com/)

[Sustainable Communities Online](http://www.sustainable.org/)

[Sustainable Maleny](http://www.sustainablemaleny.org/)

[Torri Superiore](http://www.torri-superiore.org/index.php?s=home&p=benvenuto&l=en)