

Utopia Inc.

End inequality and climate change by
building Utopias as impact investments



SHARPHILL

Unaffordable housing. Billionaires getting richer by the day. Healthy food becoming too expensive even for working citizens to afford. Gentrification and inequality. Long working hours at meaningless jobs. Personal debt. Loneliness. Climate change. This is the world today. But what if there was a solution to it all?

Sharphills mission is to build modern, sustainable “*ecotopias*” that give us the freedom and happiness we all deserve, while preserving our favorite planet.

The solution is to create a new collaborative movement for sustainable housing that builds rent-free wonders of ingenuity. Beautiful, micro-communities that can produce most of their own food and energy while running their own worker-owned co-ops. Because every individual who has their basic needs met without demand for reciprocation or payment, are not under someone else’s power. They are free to fulfill themselves, do good for other people and stop consuming for the sake of it.

“Moving into a sustainable community should be as easy as leasing an apartment. But nearly rent-free.”

On a daily basis I hear of people who want to escape the rat race and build their own ecovillage from scratch, with no experience, capital or detailed plan. But planning, building and establishing communities is a very complicated process that can and should be accelerated by a professional team that has both the expertise in eco-friendly architecture, local building codes and a strong network of resources, volunteers and capital to pay for all the necessary installations.

This white paper outlines how such a movement would look like and how these communities should be designed in order to thrive and replicate themselves.

Let’s build the future, together!

/ Daniel Nikolajsen, The Swedish Inventor behind Sharphill.org

Background

The philosophy behind this proposal is borrowed from Solarpunk^[1]. It is a movement in speculative fiction, art and activism that seeks to answer and embody the question; “what does a sustainable civilization look like, and how can we get there?”

The current system of capitalism forces people to compete against each other for limited resources. It's built in such a way that those with resources will achieve faster growth than those without because of the compounding effect, resulting in spiraling wealth, rising inequality and social issues^[2].

The main culprit that fuels this status quo, are the rising costs of basic necessities like housing, food, water and energy. Private landlords, governments and corporations make it expensive just to live, and lock up people in an endless loop of meaningless work and overconsumption by creating *artificial scarcity*. Or as I call it - “slavery”. Instead, we must leverage the system in our favor to buy back these essential assets and make them available to those that can make direct use of them. Then we will create abundance and freedom instead of reliance.

It's also a lot more resilient and decentralized than today's concept of “winner takes it all”. It relies less on handouts from the government and is a lot more off-grid and capable in situations like war, drought or natural disasters.

The systems and the motivation needed for this transition are already present in most established and democratic nations and a lot of people are successfully living in co-housing or ecovillages, but mostly isolated and with little ambition of expansion. As individuals, they also do not have economies of scale, the required know-how or the capital needed to turn their existing visions into proper Utopias. By applying blended financing with the business strategy of mergers & acquisitions, we believe that an exponential growth of affordable and sustainable villages can be achieved.

Leaps of faith

These are assumptions necessary or helpful for the transition...

- A large number of people are unhappy with how we live or work under capitalism, and the political passiveness against its effects on climate change^[3].
- Blended finance in the form of private equity, public grants, funds, crowdfunding, subsidies, volunteer work and economies of scale could drastically cut retrofitting costs of housing compared to commercial projects.
- Due to climate change; politicians and authorities are willing to give more wiggle-room than usual when it comes to social experiments, building codes, laissez-faire (barter) or sharing of resources.
- There are people willing to work as volunteers and help renovate or develop new communities in exchange for food, accommodation, experience and goodwill.
- There are people willing to give up on a “normal” life and well-paid job in order to live in a simpler and sustainable community, often in a rural/suburban setting. They value this utopian way of living higher, even at the risk of long-term failure or diminished pension funds.
- It is possible to keep a budget where housing can be offered to the tenants mostly rent-free, as long as the foundation or the property itself provides the means of making a profit to pay for costs like utilities or property taxes. It can be anything from renting out vacation stays to selling carbon credits.
- In-house production of building materials and acquisitions of manufacturers can create economies of scale that cut material costs in half or more.

Main objectives

1. Turnkey and rent-free housing

Moving into a sustainable community should be as easy as leasing an apartment. Hence, the goal is to build modern housing communities of high quality at bargain rates, with the help of clever financing, logistics and volunteers from organizations like WWOOF, HelpX, European Solidarity Corps etc.

2. Exponential replication

It's imperative that the number of ecotopias expand in order to make the lifestyle available to a larger population. Most of the profits earned - mostly from things like renting out vacation stays, selling goods or fresh produce - would be used to buy up even more property to eventually reshape the world's entire housing market.

3. Mobility

Once a member, you should be allowed to move freely between facilities for travel, work or permanent residency in order to find a fit for your desired lifestyle either as a permanent resident or as what is sometimes referred to as a “solarpunk nomad”. Each facility would eventually offer different resources and become somewhat specialized in certain areas or have specific co-ops or objectives of interest.

4. Equity, self-reliance and sustainability

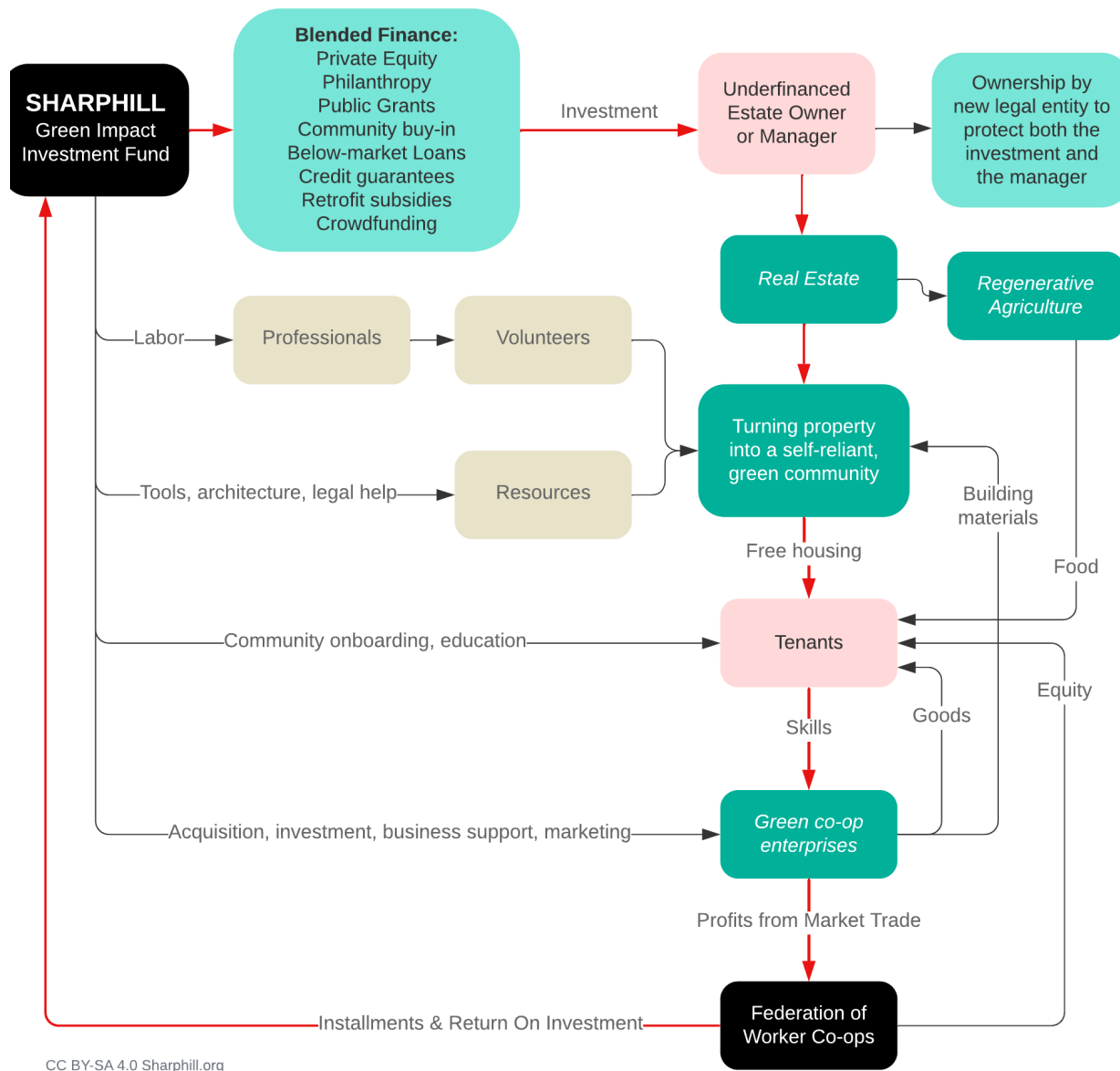
Each facility should be mostly self-sufficient on green produce and all their energy needs, but also get basic necessities from green co-operatives operated within the communities. They should have access to their own repair shop, library, car pool and various forms of recreation just like any community, albeit on a smaller scale. By removing unnecessary work, daily commutes and consumption from the equation, we can live sustainably and possibly even reverse climate change.

5. Political change

The movement and its financial powers would also be used for lobbying of politicians to change laws and building codes. Fewer workers would also mean less taxes, eventually forcing governments to prioritize their spending.

Sharphill organizational overview

The red line simulates a continuous loop that creates new communities.



Investment fund & Co-op Federation - These two entities are the central foundations holding the initiative together and creates a reinforcing feedback loop.

Real Estate - These can range from small RV-camps or community gardens up to large, multi-story apartment buildings. But most often it is an ecovillage in a suburban setting with adjacent land for on-site food production.

Impact Investment Fund

To really create societal change and not just a few isolated projects, it's necessary to leverage capitalism in order to grow as fast as any global corporation, but with a sustainable agenda. This is often called "social investing" or "impact investing". Sharphill hopes to create such a fund, using blended finance and trendy imperatives to attract new forms of capital and minimize financial costs.

Blended finance

The norm in mid-size housing development has been either a single investor or to take loans or credits. This simplifies administration but often adds high expectations on profit margins or interest rates. Also an investor will require a profit long after the initial investment has been repaid.

Blended finance instead uses a small share of high-stake private equity only as a catalyst to minimize risk to other potential investors. Investment from a "big name" can also make the project seem more attractive or secure in the eyes of other smaller investors, banks or credit institutes.

The initial private equity can either come from investors, but best would be crowdfunding from individual citizens or a donation from a philanthropist who would not demand any interest or returns.

Acquisitions of Real Estate

Compared to normal consolidations that merge entire companies, the Sharphill model mostly acquires property. Since real estate has an actual and often increasing value on the market, the risk to investors is minimal.

However the investment fund won't own the actual properties itself, but instead eventually turn them over to a new legal entity in the form of a foundation or land trust in order to protect its ownership long-term. In most countries, tax laws are also more favorable to these than to regular businesses.

Examples of alternative development

Tjörn Egnahemsfabriken (co-building example)

On Tjörn, an island off the west-coast of Sweden, there's a civil movement dedicated to help people co-build houses. They have been successful in testing methods to make everyday people design and even build their own homes in collaboration with architects, construction workers and volunteers. This has resulted in amazing solutions closely bonded to the actual needs and wants of its users.

The downside to this project is that it has had little focus on the actual affordability of the homes built. But it's a beacon of hope, and a very good process of construction based upon the work of Argentine architect Rodolfo Livingston that developed the Cuban concept of "community architects", where citizens have public access to a designer just like they would have access to healthcare or education.

<https://tjorn.egnahemsfabriken.se/>

Svartlamon Trondheim

In Trondheim, Norway, an old working-class area has been transformed with many wooden buildings designed and co-built by the residents, and mostly with reused building materials. Two of Svartlamon's newly built residential buildings have cost as little as 20% of what it otherwise costs to build housing in Norway^[10]. The buildings are owned by a foundation, and the homes rented by the residents cost approx NKR5500 (525€) a month, around 60% of what local rental apartments otherwise would cost.

This shows that a different form of both construction and ownership is possible, and that costs can be drastically reduced. With more inexpensive land (other than Trondheim which is the fourth biggest city in Norway) or simply by renovating instead of building from scratch, the starting costs could be reduced even further. With more eco-friendly and off-grid systems for sewage, water and energy the monthly rent would most likely be reduced substantially.

<https://svartlamon.org/>

Legal entities for ownership

A legal entity is a person or an organization that, according to local laws, has the right to own property, take loans, sign agreements or perform other legal activities. It is important that the legal entities have been wisely designed in order to protect all the individual community members and owners from liability^[4].

The UNs 1948 [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#) states in article 17

- 1. Everyone has the right to own property alone as well as in association with others.*
- 2. No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his property.*

Foundation

The actual ownership of real-estate and buildings should eventually belong to foundations, to ensure that property by itself is not used for market speculation or individual profit. If a community dissolves, the property would be offered to another community or simply to the first person to come and actually use it. But for ease of startup or for smaller communities, private ownership might also work.

The available legal entities sometimes vary from one country to another, so they need to be established in close cooperation with a lawyer.

Worker-owned Cooperative

Worker cooperatives are the encouraged entity for “companies” run by community members. “A cooperative is an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly owned and democratically-controlled enterprise” [Wikipedia].

Also, all co-ops invested in by Sharphill should be consolidated into a federation [example: Mondragon in Spain] for efficiency and cohesion.

Acquisition strategy

The acquisition strategy is a business skill and often a corporate secret that is essential to success in any merger. This is the outline for such a method, but it should be continuously evaluated and improved for maximum impact.

1. Securing private equity

The first step is to secure basic unmarked funding from an investor or philanthropist.

2. Onboarding of manager

Through marketing and other channels, an appropriate community manager is chosen, evaluated and educated on responsibilities and opportunities of the project.

3. Property search profile

Together a search profile of requirements are established like price, location, type etc.

4. Search process

The profile can be matched against both listed or unlisted objects.

5. Letter of intent

The manager and perhaps also the property owner are given a letter of intent that states exactly what is expected and intended by the transaction. This is to ensure the commitment by the founder, and also to show interest to the seller so it does not fall to another bidder too early. The cultural transition is closely discussed with the founder to prevent cold feet.

6. Financial valuation & SWOT

Risks and possibilities are evaluated using a SWOT-analysis. Today's numbers on income from leases, utilities or maintenance costs, estimated sales price and assets (onsite timber etc) are all included into a full financial valuation.

7. Planning & design

The property is surveyed in order to create a plan. Architectural sketches and mockups can be created to convey the plan to investors, tenants or city council.

8. Budget

A complete project plan and budget is compiled, and a bidding-roof decided.

9. Due diligence

External factors like local regulations, zoning permits, neighboring properties, environmental impact are all investigated and accessed. City council is contacted to get advance notice on building permits and similar requirements.

10. Tenant search

Simultaneously, promotion can start. Potential tenants can sign up in advance to show their interest, which will help further when securing the last funding.

11. Securing of funds

A priority list of funders are contacted in order to get the best deal with the lowest rates.

12. Final negotiation and closing

The estimated bid from the letter of intent is now negotiated via real-estate agents until a final sum is agreed upon. Generally any bids on real estate are not binding until a contract is signed. The founder first signs an agreement with the fund and the fund then signs the deed to the property.

13. Construction or retrofitting

As soon as possible, the property is renovated or developed by a network of volunteers, staff and professional contractors.

14. Integration & onboarding

The property is integrated in the Sharphill management system, in close cooperation with the manager. Tenants write a lease and social contract with the manager and are then educated on the Sharphill culture via streamlined onboarding processes.

15. Business development

The manager is responsible for developing the sources of income that will pay for the investment, but has all the help needed from business consultants within Sharphill. The tenants are also included in this process and encouraged to join or start their own co-ops. Existing companies of value to the Sharphill infrastructure can also be acquired and turned into co-ops and employment for its tenants.

16. Federation consolidation

Manager-run cooperatives are all consolidated in a single federation, and other tenant-run initiatives can join voluntarily.

17. Restructuring after installments

Properties that have been repaid are then restructured and ownership transferred to a standalone foundation or community trust reducing rental costs further for its tenants, except some mandatory service fees for using the Sharphill Management System. The worker co-ops in the federation continue to funnel some of its profits back to the investment fund.

18. Evaluation, optimization, ongoing collaboration

The process must always be optimized or adjusted to changing factors. Full transparency is required for all parts of the value chain and statistics shared across the organization. Every project is audited both during and after its completion.

Sharphill management system

Each community should have a responsible manager, who in turn should have access to a digital management system to keep track of all responsibilities and run the facility as painlessly and effectively as possible. This set of tools should also be available to co-ops and projects started within the community.

Open source

Since Sharphill wants to be as replicable as possible for the greater good, the system should be open source and free to use for anyone. But a hosted SaaS-version should be maintained online for Sharphill communities to use without any installation or technical skills. Advanced business features should be highly automated and easy to understand without formal education.

Proposed features of the system

- Public website
- User management
- Financial overview
- Contact list and e-mail
- Calendar with task lists and reminders
 - Business report dates
 - Service intervals
 - Contract renewal dates
- Contracts database
- Legal templates
- Accounting tools
 - Digital documents storage
 - Bank statement API
 - Reports
 - Budgeting
 - Invoicing
 - Payroll management
 - Annual accounts
- Time tracking tools
- Meeting protocols or notes
- Resource database of suppliers, products & offers
- Marketplace for goods
- Knowledge base and chatbot
- Automated updates and backups

Notes on community design

Every project is unique and the exact design must be carefully designed each time to make it as inexpensive and sustainable as possible. But here are some general ideas and mindsets that can make a great community even better...

The social contract

Just like we need to align the vision to get collective action, we also need to align the actual people involved in the communities. For the operation to run smoothly, you would need to conform to certain guidelines and also adjust your personal expectations and goals. Building a career or even a family would look very different in this setting.

The first step of anyone joining a community would be getting to know the vision. It could be reading up on the philosophy, visiting or even staying as a guest on a property. And when you are sure that this lifestyle change is something you want, you can apply to fill an empty spot. It's then up to the community itself to do interviews or invite the applicant, possibly following some proven guidelines set forth by themselves or a central foundation.

Since availability would be limited at first and communities rather small and intimate, this process would be necessary. But when communities take on the form of small towns with plenty of vacant space, the process would be much less tedious and personal.

If the applicant seems like a good fit for the community and the community a good fit for the applicant, it is time to sign both a legally binding agreement ("lease") and lastly a social contract. The first is to protect all parties involved and conform to the existing national requirements of a tenant.

Secondly, the written social contract is not legally binding but gives a sense of accountability on how you should conform in order to be of use to the community or the world.

Sociocracy decision making method

For the vast majority of human history, people made group decisions through consensus. Instead of a single leader dictating the solution, it is the product of long deliberation by the entire group. Every group member should be involved in the process. It can last for minutes or even months, entailing discussions, disagreements and compromises. The goal of the process is to find a solution that everyone can live with, even if it is somewhat imperfect. It is one of the best alternatives for decision making in smaller communities or co-ops.

If you want to know more, I recommend reading the whitepaper on how the “N Street Consensus method” works wonders in a small cohousing community:

<https://l.cohousing.org/n-st-consensus.pdf>

Communities, not cities

It is important that the ecovillages are not too large, in order for the inhabitants to be able to form strong social bonds and a sense of belonging. This is also important since they should all be directly involved in the governing of their community. The proposed maximum is 150 individuals, which is often called Dunbar's number^[5]. It is a suggested cognitive limit to the number of people with whom one can maintain stable social relationships, according to British anthropologist Robin Dunbar. But the actual number would often be much smaller, since the local capacity for production should decide the population in order to minimize the need for external trade. And the land needed to support even 50 people would be quite large even with more efficient permaculture methods.

This smaller scale contradicts most of the current megalomaniac projects designed by billionaires at the moment, like Telosa in the USA and NEOM in Saudi Arabia. Even if many communities could be located bordering each other like in a dense city or village, they should still be organized in these smaller self-governing “tribes”.

Expulsion policy and conflict resolution

Expect people to be people. Conflict and disagreements are perfectly normal, but in a close-knit community it must be resolved differently than it would living in a regular

neighborhood. You can't just ignore each other forever. The community is like a big family that needs to both live and work together, and with an established method for communication and conflict resolution^[6] it will make life a lot easier. However, sometimes a disagreement takes on bigger proportions and turns into violence, bullying or other truly bad behavior that the group can't accept. And how these matters should be handled needs to be agreed upon in an expulsion policy^[7]. Team building and regularly training the members on communication should also be an important part of the collective task.

Passivhaus

Buildings must be very energy efficient to minimize the need for heating or cooling. They should be built or retrofitted with extra thick insulation (approx 30-40cm) in similar ways as a "passive house" ^[8]. Insulation made from flax or hemp can naturally buffer fluctuations in moisture to prevent mold removing the need for plastic vapor barriers. Greenhouses and earth cellars can be dug down to make use of geothermal energy to be able to grow or store large quantities of fresh produce year round.

Micro factories

Co-ops and local production will be a crucial part of each community. It should be focused on basic necessities and care both for the community itself and the local market. The objective is to make the community as self-reliant as possible and mandatory work should always be kept to a minimum. That's why open source designs and professional help to build microfactories should be available. These could sometimes be as small as a refrigerator, or as large as a small building and produce anything from soap to building materials.

Composting toilets and biological water treatment

Nothing is more insane than flushing the toilet with pure drinking water, and then mixing it with greywater from the kitchen or shower before sending it in pipes to a sewage plant across town. Instead, buildings should preferably have modern,

urine-separating composting toilets. They smell almost nothing and all excrements can be composted or diluted and later used for fertilization.

Greywater from showers or laundry has very little biological contamination and needs only moderate treatment, which is why housing should have a separate greywater sewage system and be reunited with nature through infiltration in the ground or water ponds where microbes can purify it naturally. All of this requires a miniscule amount of energy and resources compared to traditional plumbing, reducing cost and environmental impact. But, in many cities it is today mandatory to be connected and pay for city sewers even if they are not required or used.

Long-term cost always considered

While commercial housing developers often try to minimize upfront costs for appliances, plumbing etc, Sharphill should always opt for durability, repairability and long-term cost. Even if it entails a larger initial investment, it is better for the environment and the tenants in the long run. Low-tech (but still modern) is also advised because it requires less complicated repairs or use of rare-earth minerals. Locally sourced is also better than global trade.

Diverse and inclusive

Most smaller communities are often very uniform in regards to age or nationality. It might be fun to live with a group of like-minded people of similar age, often in their thirties, but when opening up to members of different variations or backgrounds it encourages both growth and experience. Diversified skills or mindsets make the tribe more resilient and innovative. Communicate that you are open to people from all stages of life, and embrace diversity.

Zero waste shops

Larger communities can run their own farmers market in the form of “zero waste shop” or “bulk shops” where produce (preferably from local producers) is sold weight-based. A pawn system is used for containers or bags that you bring back and re-fill to minimize container waste and costs.

Third places

One thing that separates a Sharphill residence from regular flats, are the well-intended architecture and large number of “third places”. It refers to the social surroundings that are separate from the two usual social environments of home ("first place") and the workplace ("second place"). Examples of third places include cafes, bars, libraries, gyms, hackerspaces, parks, theaters. Basically places for recreation, creativity and social interaction without any demands or expectations. Today most of these places are commercial and come with a hefty price-tag, which makes it even more important to offer free alternatives. Especially if the community is located rurally and focuses on sustainability rather than large payrolls.

A group mission!

Each community should have a clear mission or higher purpose. This would make it easier to find like-minded members and do actual work towards self-fulfillment and good for human civilization. Perhaps invent the best solar panel in the world or teach permaculture to the world. This higher purpose will act like a glue that holds the community together and makes it worth it to keep fighting even when interpersonal relationships or life take a toll. However, *religion* must never be the main purpose of any community, even if spirituality and self-improvement in general is encouraged.

Possible sources of income

In order for communities to be entirely self-reliant and rent-free, they need to have sources of income that can pay for utilities, property tax and installments.

Parking spots

Many places are in need of parking space. Near beaches, towns or stadiums. Some communities could easily profit from this with very little labor.

RV parking

Campervans and recreational vehicles are becoming increasingly popular, and seek simple parking spots preferably with simple utilities like electricity for charging, drinking water and sewage treatment for wastewater.

Glamping or vacation stays

Rent out glamping tents, rooms or cabins to tourists.

Timber, firewood, christmas trees or biochar

Wood has many uses and especially biochar (charcoal) can be very profitable and even be certified and sold as carbon offset.

Fresh produce, honey, maple syrup, nursery

Any surplus of vegetables and produce can be sold on farmers markets or local shops.

Sell trees as carbon reducers

Replant barren land with trees or shrubs, sold as carbon offset credits to eco-minded organizations and perhaps combine with fruit-trees for dual purposes.

Restaurant or café

Ecovillagers often cook together, so why not offer locals or visitors to dine with you.

Tours or events

City-folks love to pay for tours on homesteads, farms or gardens.

Courses and workshops

Pottery, permaculture or perhaps accounting. Combine profit with societal change whenever possible.

Influencer

Depict the unique lifestyle or architecture in a subscription-based blog or vlog.

Public grants

There are many millions donated to community projects by public grants. Perhaps run projects integrating immigrants into society or learning new skills.

Co-operative manufacturing

There are many products needed for the expansion of the movement. It's the perfect opportunity for communities to build small-scale manufacturing of building materials, farming tools or necessities like organic soap or textiles.

Daycare or nursing home

Do good for the adjacent community by running the best daycare possible in a setting that gives strength and peace.

Cat or dog boarding house

When people travel or work they sometimes need help taking care of their loved pets, which can cost a lot of money.

Donations

Even after the community is established, donations can be a source of income if it is involved in preservation, aid or projects for common good.

This is how YOU can start the revolution!

Besides copying the entire organizational structure, there are many small starting points for this transition. It should be a process that *anyone* could join, no matter if you're an individual or a global foundation...

Educate yourself and others

It's important to tell everyone why and how change can go about. Spread this whitepaper or simply tell people that a better world *is* possible by changing how we live. Because technological innovations itself will *not* solve all of our problems.

Choose a better education

Most people choose education based on levels of income. Don't get caught in this trap often bestowed upon you by parents or relatives. Instead make sure to choose education that doesn't get you caught in debt and that has a real value to the world. Become a builder, nurse, architect, farmer or environmentalist.

Vote

If you don't vote you have no saying. Elect the change that you want to see.

Protest and lobby

When potentially damaging policies are about to be passed, it is OUR responsibility to take to the streets and protest. Politicians can be either lazy, stupid or greedy and would sooner or later create irreversible damage unless we keep them on track.

Sharing economy

You might not see them on the streets, but even in decent economies there are many people suffering silently. They sometimes fall in-between chairs causing them to lose their welfare or simply are too caught up in debt to be able to keep up with their bills. You can help by donating clothes, food or money to local charities. Open a seed swap at your local library, or a "library of things" that can lend stuff like sporting equipment, power tools or camping equipment.

Sign up for volunteer work

There are many initiatives already present where your labor can make a difference. Sign up for volunteer work directly at an appropriate foundation, or via platforms like WWOOF, HelpX, Worldpackers, Workaway, Working traveller etc. You can help out for a few days or weeks on vacation, or perhaps sell most of your belongings and travel the world in a campervan as a true nomad.

Invite volunteers to your farm

Even if you don't really need the help, you could invite volunteers to help you. It would open new possibilities for you, but also encourage the ecosystem where people can travel and work like nomads. Pass on your farming skills to the world.

Align your existing community

Existing co-ops and ecovillages need to understand how important they are, and where in this ecosystem they belong. When they know this, it is easier to find out what they need to do in order to be an active part of the green transition. Start by explaining this model to your group, and then align your values towards expansion and collaboration.

Architects for sensible design

As a designer, you are responsible for creating spaces and products that are sustainable and socially just, including both production methods, transports and materials. Most of all when designing homes, the total cost of living is the main factor to keep at a minimum, and needs to be taken seriously in every project.

Become a community founder

A property owner who has enough land or resources to share, could for example allow a group of people to use the land. In return the owner would get to be part of a community, get help to maintain the property, obtain fresh produce and other goods. The landowner might not have the capital or knowledge himself to do anything with the property and in this way can leverage other peoples' skills or resources.

Sign up for co-housing or co-living

Current projects can only get as big as their crowd. By following on social media or showing your interest in coliving and more sensible housing, traction will follow.

Hardware store offering sustainable/repurposed materials

The availability of better building materials like hemp insulation, friendlier paints, repurposed materials and second-hand, composting toilets, small-scale anaerobic digesters for biogas production etc. are important for both existing builders and new initiatives to be able to find the best and most affordable alternatives.

Support or donate to existing communities

The viability of existing ecovillages are important for many reasons. Find local ecovillages, cohousing, homesteading or permaculture projects on platforms like Patreon, Reddit or Sharphill.org and support in whatever way possible.

Create open source projects

For a world not relying on corporations and cash flow to fulfill our needs, we require knowledge and tools to be free. Code budgeting apps or marketplaces that are open source and free to use for all, or design hardware [example: opensourceecology.org]

Urban backyard agriculture

You don't need to cater to all human needs at once. In the city and suburbs there are a large amount of private gardens and courtyards that are completely unused. It would be the perfect setting to start a co-op or business of urban agriculture. The founder simply signs a lease with many local homeowners, and then plants crops suitable for each property.

Philanthropic donation

Are you rich? There is an increasing group of private investors that have decided on philanthropy, to donate their money to social projects often without any demand for returns. This could be the starting point of a much larger and more organized ecosystem right from the start. So if you want to build a better future, reach out!

Frequently asked questions

How would this be able to stop spiraling personal wealth?

Co-ops share profit between all workers instead of funneling it to a single owner. And when people get most of what they need, the want for shopping would decrease. People's spending would also be more responsible when they pay because they want to and not because they are forced by artificial scarcity or peer pressure.

How is this any different from a regular co-operative?

Normal co-ops don't change the setting, just the ownership. By focusing on a bigger picture and building a utopian setting around it, people's expectations and ambitions would change towards something more meaningful.

Why should ownership be turned over to a foundation?

If the citizens owned a stake in the land it would decrease their mobility and freedom, but also possibly create inequality or market speculation when property or leases could be sold for personal profit. A foundation would also protect the long-term perseverance of the community and maintain the original values even when old and new members come and go.

Why would communities donate profits to people they don't know?

At first they would be obligated to pay back the initial investment by a legal agreement like any investment. But people choosing co-housing or co-living alternatives are often both idealistic and pragmatic. They would like a better world for all, but understand that the only accepted currency of power is money. With outside help and investments to build more intelligent co-ops, they would get leverage to do better for themselves and later also the outside world. It's simply a matter of a win-win-situation.

Wouldn't greed or jealousy prevent this from working?

The discussion of greed often comes up when proposing solidarity. But it is the circumstance that creates human behavior like greed or jealousy. Greed is not necessarily a matter of possession but that of competition. And this model can be a safe and rewarding outlet for ambition without affecting others negatively.

Risk assessment

Taxes

In some countries you need to pay a yearly tax only for the ownership of real estate. The current levels are generally 0.5-1% of the property valuation, but most often with a cap. If income taxes eventually drop due to an increased amount of de-growth, politicians might raise the property tax in a desperate act to save public funding. But for the ecotopian communities it's essential to put your vote or effort towards removal of property taxes.

When exchanging goods/services directly against other goods/services, they should generally also be taxed for. But most countries look between the fingers on this, and whenever possible you should vote for legislation against taxation on laissez-faire.

Building codes

Already, the cost and requirements of building codes make it very hard to build inexpensively and even sustainably. Using reclaimed materials or construction methods other than the norm gives much pushback. It's essential to promote relief from these policies.

Mandatory utilities

City councils often have the right to force landowners to connect their properties to sewage systems, electricity or pay for garbage disposal. It can cost tens of thousands of dollars in connection fees, no matter how much or even if you use them at all. This is one reason to opt for rural real estates where utilities are too far away to be forced upon you, so you are free to stay off-grid. But each community should have savings for the unforeseen.

Natural disasters

Climate change; our biggest self-made threat in human history is upon us. Before building anything at all, a local risk assessment must be made and appropriate measures taken beforehand. Is the area prone to flooding, fires or drought?

Conflict or war

War is a tool of states, not people. Individuals can do little to stop it, except protesting and voting for peace. When larger injustice occurs it is everybody's responsibility to take to the streets in peaceful protest. When not weighed down by normal working hours, it would be easier to take the time for such activities. But if true war were to happen, it's important to stand to protect against authoritarians; foreign or domestic.

Regulation of volunteer work or minimum wages

Communities rely heavily on volunteers, and especially in co-ops it is hard to draw a distinct line of what is work and what is volunteer work. The concept of minimum wages can be good to prevent exploitation, but it's very important that it does not affect volunteers or worker cooperatives. As with all these regulatory threats, the best is to inform your politicians and lobby heavily against everything that could pose a threat.

Hostile takeovers

Careful design of legal entities is important to prevent exploitation or hostile takeovers. Legal advisors should be included early in the process.

Squatting

Individuals can "squat" or take possession of a property and then refuse to leave. Removing them can sometimes be a complicated legal process during which time the squatters can trash, vandalize or simply neglect the property. This is why it's important to write proper agreements beforehand.

Abandoned projects

Conflict or poor management can cause projects to be abandoned without notice. Keeping a replacement list and financial buffer for unforeseen costs can get the project up and running again without delays.

Resources

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4. Legal structures for Intentional Communities in the United States
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5. Dunbar’s number & community size
Phil Levin 2022-10-31
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6. Guidelines: conflict management in intentional communities
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7. The First Policy - Expulsion
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