

Contribution to the short paper session

Title: Bridging the gap of less sustainable lifestyles in society – members of permaculture coined communities and their role as change agents towards the Great Transition

Long Abstract

Finding ways of living sustainably seems like a reasonable task to solve, but it has not been satisfactory solved so far - especially not for society in general - as can be shown in rising crises¹. Besides changing the light bulb, eating organic food and using a pedelec bicycles instead of the car (which will still be standing in the own garage) what is really leading to a sustainable lifestyle? There are technically-oriented concepts like “blue economy”² or “cradle-to-cradle”³ which are very welcome by players in the economy. They focus on changing the ways of production of goods or building of houses, but there is no discussion in this context about the high rate of product consumption in general. One question is why do people want to consume instead of reuse and recycle? And what is needed to convince or even better to inspire people to invent new ways of economy? People in several communities are key drivers and have the potential to be change agents such as in eco-villages, in transition town initiatives and at the PermaKulturRaum⁴. Findings show that different aspects of motivation are responsible for the founding of eco-related communities. For example members of the PermaKulturRaum are students who founded in 2011 the project at the University of Göttingen. After learning more about the concept of the ecological footprint they realized the high impact of their own ecological footprint although they tried hard to reduce it. They asked representatives of the university to help them not just to learn that mankind’s impact is destroying the natural resources

¹ Nachhaltigkeit im Anthropozän (Sustainability in the anthropocene). Nova Acta Leopoldina NF 117, Nr. 398, 31–40 (2013), Klaus Töpfer

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Integrating digital economy and green economy: opportunities for sustainable development. Theoretical and Empirical Researches in Urban Management. Volume 6, Issue 1 / February 2011. Carmen Nadia Ciocoiu

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Cradle To Cradle® criteria for the built environment. *Ekonomiaz* N.o 75, 3.er cuatrimestre, 2010. Douglas Mulhall and Michael Braungart

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but also to give them an experimental space to learn and collect experiences for living a sustainable, sensible lifestyle. Out of this idea the project was born. It will last for at least 20 years with varying participants and ECTS points for related courses. The students live there for several months, get inspired by permaculture in their garden design and do other skill-sharing workshops. Their task is to learn how to live in harmony with the planet's natural cycles while fulfilling their own needs. The credo is: Get back to your roots using modern knowledge. Given that the human race is the reason for the geological era "anthropocene" it could be challenging to continue to transform the world while cooperating with its natural cycles instead of against them ("be beneficial" as Prof. Michael Braungart would say).

Since the beginning the author has accompanied the group of students - finding out about their ideas and social innovations about staying confident and providing for oneself without today's customary abundance. This research will also include findings from the "transition town" movement⁵ in Germany and other permaculturally influenced groups (e.g. eco-villages in Germany). Assuming people in such networks are the "change agents"⁶ and key drivers of diversity in a sustainable lifestyle my paper will contribute to the research of discovering the characteristics of people finding new ways to live in balance with nature. How do they spread their insights? What do they need to increase their influence in society? How can these ideas be combined and promulgated outside this movement? The WBGU proposes to strengthen the change agents, also known as pioneers of change which are important for initiation of a change process in the society. This paper wants to bring more insights about the people behind the role model. The methodology consists of qualitative interviews with the application of an exploratory and semi-structured survey with the aid of a questionnaire. These research methods allow an adequate possibility for exploring this emerging movement of people actively applying permaculture for their sustainable lifestyle design.

⁵ Transitioning communities: community, participation and the Transition Town movement. *Community Dev J* (2011) 46 (4): 558-572. Phil Connors