

## **The Changing Space for Civil Society**

MAECENATA STIFTUNG

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### **Folie 1 (Wave)**

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### **Changes through the Logic of Civil Society**

I am sure you are familiar with the phrase: "There is nothing permanent except change."

I can definitely attest to that.

### **Folie 2 (Changes)**

My generation has witnessed several radical changes in the world, which nobody could have preconceived: the USSR falling apart, the Berlin Wall coming down, Nelson Mandela being released from prison and becoming president of the former apartheid regime in South Africa, and a number of years later another coloured statesman became even the president of the United States. And in Germany we have a first female chancellor.

### **Folie 3 (Backlash)**

We are momentary in difficult situations in many countries - when I read the publication of the Heinrich Böll Foundation about the development and trends of democratization and even more the study on the ploys of FATF (Financial Action Task Force) by Ben Hayes, published by Brot für die Welt I lost hope for a moment and thought maybe it is really better to duck and cover at present.

But sometimes it is good to take a small step back from our daily business, take a breath and look at the whole picture.

When I was a child I learned at school at the subject civics: „the family is the nucleus of democracy, in Germany and many other countries this can't be true anymore due to the changes in society. I would like to shed light on the case that the emancipated individual is the nucleus of democracy. We were never that informed or able to get information as today, every single one of us, but this also gives us responsibility. And with better education and access to digital media (with all its negative side effects) this is the case more less everywhere.

### **Folie 4 (Colour revolutions)**

Effects of this have already be seen in many countries were spontaneous demonstrations and gatherings led into more organized forms of protest like the so called colour revolutions:

2003: Rose revolution in Georgia

2004: Orange revolution in Ukraine

2005: Cedar revolution in Lebanon

2005. Tulip revolution in Kirghizia

2007. Safron revolution in Myanmar

2010/11: Jasmin revolution in Tunisia

Most of these protests caused backlashes of the existing systems and only history can tell if they really initiated change.

Other effects have been that single people with a vision started initiatives with some friends and like minded people – look at the stories of nowadays big NGOs, just to name some:

### **Folie 5 (Changemakers)**

**Greenpeace:** founded in Canada in 1971 by 12 people with a boat, to stop an American nuclear weapon test. Today Greenpeace has more than 3 million members worldwide.

**Attac:** founded in Paris 1998, going back on an idea of the journalist Ignazio Romanet, has 90000 members today and is active in 50 countries.

**Foodwatch:** founded in 2002 by former Greenpeace executive director Thilo Bode in Berlin, 35000 members and donors today.

**Stop TTIP:** Alliance of 500 smaller European organizations.

**Mehr Demokratie:** founded 1988 by a handful of Green politicians and other interested activists has now more than 10 000 members.

**Umweltinstitut München** founded in 1986 directly after the Chernobyl catastrophe by some committed citizens and scientists has around 7000 members today.

**Pulse of Europe** a pro-European initiative founded in Frankfurt 2016 by a idealistic couple, is active in 11 European countries today.

Philosophies and movements like **Degrowth**, **Deep Ecology** and **Convivialism** are making their impact on our time.

And more recently:

On April 22<sup>nd</sup> 2017, the **March for Science** took place in reaction on endangering conditions in Turkey, Hungary, the US and others.

In 520 cities, worldwide with hundreds of thousands of people (in Washington alone 40000). Venerable University members, students and many others protested on the streets together for the freedom of science. Many people marched on the street that did this the last time in the late 60ties.

On May 6<sup>th</sup>, thousands of Polish Citizens followed the call of the opposition to participate in the **March for Freedom** to protect democracy.

So, the attempts to shrink democratic spaces will not be unanswered. In many countries people resist attempts to cut their rights back even under endangering conditions.

Just some days ago, on Victory Day the main Russian national Holiday, thousands of people have been taking part in **anti-corruption rallies** in Moscow and St Petersburg - hundreds were arrested.

The Zeitgeist, the spirit of the age, cannot be put back into the bottle.

Civil society is in a constant state of flux, movements become established and integrated into mainstream - even established market players, some become obsolete and disappear. Other Movements become important, rise and inspire many people. Like the movement of intentional communities, related groups and philosophies, my subject of research.

If given the option, many people would prefer a living situation less isolated than what most of us experience today. The human being seems to have a natural preference for living in community.

### **Folie 6 (Ecovillages Beginnings)**

Since about 40 years a growing number of individuals, small groups and families dream of escaping a culture of increasingly felt consumerism and exploitation. For some this leads to the next steps and they take action to create an intentional community and found a cohousing project or ecovillage.

With my research project, I want to find out, if and how our mainstream society can benefit from the results of the experiments of the Ecovillage movement, how we can all live a happier and more wholesome life based on cooperation and sustainability.

What is an Intentional Community?

„A group of people who have chosen to live together with a common purpose, working cooperatively to create a lifestyle that reflects their shared values”

(Fellowship for Intentional Community)

The concept of ecovillages is known since the late 1980s: in the USA, the first Utopian settlements begun by Hippies, in Germany it started with some initiatives loosely connected to the aftermath of the extra - parliamentary opposition and student's movement in the late 1960ties and 70ties.

Until some time ago, intentional communities understood themselves as counter-models to the cultural mainstream and encapsulated from society. Today there is more willingness in the communities to open up to society as well as for society to interact with communities, looking for alternatives and solutions for some of the challenges of our time.

### **Folie 7(Ecovillages today)**

Around 500 ecovillages worldwide are members of the Global Ecovillage Network, but there are perhaps more than 1000. In addition, there are movements like Sarvodaya in Indonesia with 1800 villages, more then 300+ transition towns and hundreds of green-focused cohousing communities.

All these places and projects can be seen as laboratories and experiments for a more liveable, regenerative and humanly connected future.

Ecovillages are not necessarily rural, some projects like Los Angeles Ecovillage, Le Case in San Diego or Avalon in Detroit exist in an urban context. These urban communities have nonetheless their focus on environmental sustainability with solar energy, grey water systems, living roofs and composting toilets.

Kosha Joubert, from Global Ecovillage Network says:

"Each community must become a sustainable community to meet the global challenges".

So, in a way all this is just a beginning, example and model for all of us, as we have to see ourselves more as stewards of our habitat again and even think about regeneration instead of sustainability.

But the most important work these communities do for all of us, is to develop new ways to communicate and make decisions as a group. All of them had to learn that it is not enough to have good intentions, the structures have to be different: tools like nonviolent communication, talking stick, consensus decisions, sociocracy, and forum help to develop more consciousness on the way to all leadership,

### **Folie 8 (Worldmap GEN)**

The Global Ecovillage Network is also politically active and has consultative status with UN ECOSOC since 2000, is represented at regular briefings at UN headquarters and participated in the Conference on Sustainable Development in Rio 2012

You might think: what a luxury problem/solution for the North, but there are examples in Ghana, Senegal and India where traditional villages transition into sustainable ecovillages and enhance the life of their residents, with permaculture, reforestation programs, solar power plants and water management solutions. The network gives also a great chance to exchange knowledge and experience. For example, with China: there is a network called SEN (Sunshine Ecovillage Network) and GEN had trainings arranged for government representatives, where officials expressed interest in exploring the transition of 70 of the most beautiful traditional villages in China.

Ross Jackson, founder of Gaia Trust, points out: the ecovillage movement "unites North and South in a common agenda that cuts across all cultural, racial, and religious differences. It is a remarkable fact that the builders of ecovillages often have more in common with each other than with their respective local cultures, no matter where they come from. A common, global vision is emerging that has the power to change the world."

### **Folie 9 (Ängsbacka)**

This year's European Ecovillage Conference in Ängsbacka has the subtitle Living the future today: Solidarity, Resilience and Hope

All of us that we are here in this room, are changemakers - we want to make the world a little better - everybody in their own way. There are many efforts that try to split movements in good and bad – depending on our political behaviour. So, solidarity and resilience are very important in this time and that we don't lose hope.

If you have the time and interest - join us at the conference in Ängsbacka – maybe I see you there.