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## Who is Community? **Confessions of the Editor** by Michael Würfel

When the technical processes work and all the addresses of potentially existing communities have been written to, when the backlog of erroneous e-mail and postal addresses have been worked through and the first 100 replies have been entered into the database, I eventually reach the point where I get to click through e.g. 167 data sets and tick the ones "to be published in the 2014 directory". We actually state that we will include any self-descriptions from communities that convincingly describe themselves as a community. We publish a much shorter text from anyone who is not a community, but might be interesting for our readers, in the "useful addresses" category. In theory, that sounds easy.

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Selbstdarst.teil veröff.:	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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(Öko-)Siedlungen veröff.:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

In practice, the creases on my forehead deepen as I scroll through the data. I'll admit: I have an image of the communities I like to read about in the eurotopia index. Open-minded, undogmatic, at least 7 people, with a funny text, I like that. However, many other groups fulfil the definition of "community" and are therefore included without hesitation, even when we receive rather theoretical or flamboyant texts, which glorify a theory but don't give any insights into communal life (happens occasionally).

I accept that: We (as in we, the editorial office, and you, the readers) can be happy that "eurotopia" is seen and used as a resource by so many (different!) groups. And the results of my survey of about 100 eurotopia readers at the end of 2012 were clear: all community descriptions should have a place in the eurotopia index – exactly as they were written. So far so good, but what do we do with groups, for instance, who organise their living space communally but don't really intensively live in community? Private finance, no communal property, no communal decision-making, hardly any overlap except for the odd BBQ party, which you join on a purely voluntary basis. In principle I do consider that to be worthy of presentation – but is eurotopia the correct medium for them? And will English readers be interested in a community directory that describes a German suburban settlement that may have won an architectural prize for their residential estate, but who don't have much to offer on the communal level? And where do you draw the line between something like that, between co-housing and community? And if the people who have submitted the description consider this to be a community, don't I simply have to print it; haven't I said that the groups can determine that themselves?

Further stumbling blocks are projects that are colourful, hospitable, multi-faceted, lively and ecologically active – but are simply not communities. Surely these are addresses that would interest a lot of our readers, and often you can live and work with them for a certain amount of time (whereby you somehow experience community life too). These are prime examples of "useful addresses", of course. But because the makers of such

projects are often on a big mission, they send long and comprehensive self-descriptions before I can stop them, and they don't hesitate to classify themselves as communities. I've even been told that should the project description be shortened, it may not be published in *eurotopia* at all. Of course I've accepted: in that case, let's drop it. However, I know that the "to be published in 2014" box was ticked for similar projects. And of course that isn't fair.

In principle I don't have a choice but to throw those kinds of addresses out of the community section. Just like the projects run by lone warriors, which ABSOLUTELY have to be published in each edition, even if it's obvious that nobody can stand it there for very long. So someone owns several hectares of land in the Spanish mountains, describes himself as a community and "wants to grow", but remains a single person. For decades. That just isn't a community, even if you can go WWOOFing there and the baby donkeys are absolutely adorable. But what makes it a "real" community? Shouldn't there be at least 3 adults – maybe 4 as a buffer? Two people are "just" a couple, with or without love affair. On the other hand, we don't want to be closed to exciting initiatives in the making. And if they're not so overambitious to want to turn the two existing adults into a giant ecovillage, but want a maximum of 6 people, that's somehow good too. And maybe realistic.

So I slowly ease myself into a certain clarity about who gets to appear in the next *eurotopia* Directory – lots of addresses are a good thing. But they should be community addresses. For co-housing projects and settlements, as well as communities in the establishment phase, we've decided to put clear symbols in front of their names and to publish the descriptions in the main section. But every time I think I've found a clear trajectory, something unexpected turns up, like that urban network of acquaintances whose members have the cheek to describe themselves as a community ("just not under one roof"). On the other hand, they've been around for a long time, and the idea is somehow charming too. And it gets my tick for publication in the main section. Just like the odd "sustainable project", which strictly speaking just consists of one family, plus guests. This honour is not bestowed on the equestrian centre with just one permanent human resident, which describes itself as a multi-species community. I keep pondering what simple criteria unmistakably identifies a group as a community. Is it caravans dotted around the place? Barefooted adults? A colourful collection of mugs in the kitchen cupboard? A certain lack of clarity about who the kids that roam around together actually belong to? I'd be pleased to hear further suggestions.

In one case I finally decided against publication. It was about the community of the Twelve Tribes in Klosterzimmern. In many ways this group seemed to be a prime example of communal living, and visitors have indeed told me lots of good things about the Twelve Tribes. When rumours came up about children being abused there, I initially put it down to media malevolence, which alternative ways of living often come up against. After further conversations and research, I have come to realise that their children really do receive a form of corporal punishment as part of their education. A programme by the German TV channel RTL showed hidden camera footage. The programme itself elicited great resistance in me (I felt it contained unspeakably hypocritical mock concern), but the Twelve Tribes do not describe the footage as fake. When I checked with Klosterzimmern

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I received the following explanation:

We do not abuse our children. But we set them right when they take the wrong path. (...) We are talking about educational measures with a vision, with a goal for young people. It's not about hitting a child when you're frustrated with him/her. That's mean and we do not condone it. To hit and scream at children, to be angry with them, hurts their souls. This damage doesn't go away in a hurry. That's abuse and we do not condone it.

You can talk to our children and young adults about it. They talk about how discipline has strengthened their personalities, has helped them to become better people, to love their neighbours. They don't feel any kind of rejection towards their parents. On the contrary: You should hear them yourself! They are thankful to their parents.

Even if the parents of the Twelve Tribes are of the opinion that they are acting correctly, I consider the (uninvited) execution of violence against other community members to be absolutely unacceptable. When not all the members live together voluntarily (intentionally), we (eurotopia) don't consider it to be a community that we want to showcase and promote. Any use of violence, especially against children (who constantly live in dependence of the adults), destroys the possibility of talking about voluntary co-habitation. So we are not publishing the self-description of the Klosterzimmern community, and also not the ones of other Twelve Tribes Communities since none of them clearly distanced themselves from the abovementioned "educational" practices (I could give them only one chance to do that, though, via email, shortly before publishing the book). We are publishing the description of the world-wide network of the Twelve Tribes Communities with a corresponding remark. Because we don't want to give them a sweeping sentence for something that seems to be commonly accepted at Klosterzimmern, and because we think it's sensible to present these groups as existing communities. It doesn't help anybody if groups that are somewhat extreme in certain aspects are simply ignored in an overview of the community scene.

At this point may it be said that we didn't receive any data of other (alleged) communities that went unpublished due to ideological doubts. In particular, no obviously right-wing groups responded to us. The results of the following statistics indicate that community culture doesn't actually go well with ideologies that disrespect people. 



*Photo of/provided by: Twelve Tribes Community Communauté de Sus in Sus-Navarrenx, France*