

CONFLICT AND GROUP DEVELOPMENT IN A YOUNG
ALTERNATIVE COMMUNITY:
ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH IN A WELSH ECOVILLAGE

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This is a translation of my MA dissertation written in Dutch for an MA in Sociology, Ghent University – the research was conducted at Lammas ecovillage, Pembrokeshire, Wales, during the summer of 2016.

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This is a translation in which I tried to mainly elaborate chapters that are more constituent for the research focus, setup and analysis, and less on the chapters with general or well-known information (by the residents). This means I briefly give highlights of the introduction and methodology, whereas I give a comprehensive (word by word) translation of the literature review and the research results. The bibliography is comprehensive as well, so readers know which works were used to write the literature review and in developing the research framework. I hope to give back to the Lammas community in this way and to spread my work more widely.

I am happy to answer any further questions and needs for clarification. Feedback is highly appreciated (see contact details at the end of this summary).

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Abstract

Ecovillages are alternative communities centred on self-sufficiency and a sustainable lifestyle. They develop bottom-up and offer an alternative to mainstream society, which residents experience as disruptive to the environment and social cohesion. These communities form small-scale societies, who also encounter conflicts. The development of an ecovillage into a stable, and functional community with strong social cohesion requires a long process whereby a number of crucial stages need to be completed. These stages are often characterised by conflict. The past has shown that in most of these communities, conflicts lead to a dysfunctional working, in turn leading to the disintegration of the group.

In this research, I focus on the role of conflict on the group development process. Based on Tuckman's group development model, I try to understand how conflicts arise, their features, and what this entails for group development. This thesis is researched with ethnographic methods, at Lammas, a young ecovillage in Wales set up in 2009. Based on participating observation and semi-structured interviews, the results are as follows: conflicts originated in external structural features and incompatible values and ideals. Different parties were formed in which the positions of the residents can be distinguished by their investment in the conflict and their willingness to compromise. On the one hand, positions in the conflicts become consolidated and on the other hand, a withdrawal from the community occurs. Because no positive group culture was created, with mechanisms to deal with conflicts, the group comes to a standstill and there is no further group development.

By placing conflict in a broader context and understanding the processes by which the members give meaning to conflict, I tried to explain the deeper causes of conflict and how these influence the further development of a group.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Ecovillage residents share strong values about the environment and social structures, which they try to realise by means of sustainable development on social, ecological, cultural and economic levels, within an intentional community. Ecovillages experience conflict, as is the case in every social grouping. To develop as a group, the residents have to go through several stages, after which they become a functional group with an efficient and effective working. Conflicts are an essential element in this evolution. These critical stages can make or break a group. I research a young ecovillage in Wales, set up 7 years ago. The central research questions are:

- How do conflicts arise (antecedents, external circumstances, causes)?
- What are the features of these conflicts?
- What effect do conflicts have on members of the group (perception, reaction) and thus on the further evolution of the group? Is this functional?

Ecovillages seek to offer a bottom-up holistic alternative for the destructive, unsustainable and disengaged mainstream societies and are therefore “an effective, accessible way to combat the degradation of our social, ecological and spiritual environments” (GEN, 2016). However residents of ecovillages are also confronted with every day, human issues. Social and interpersonal problems occur in all social groupings, but are an even bigger challenge for intentional communities, because of their lack of legitimacy and institutionalisation (Kanter, 1972b). They have to construct their own identity and organisation, and have to find other solutions for such challenges, in a different manner from mainstream society, which can rely on existing patterns. Because of the strong cohesion and mutual dependence of the group, conflict can't be avoided and to shun dissent has negative consequences. Conflict threatens the stability of an intentional community and recovery can take some years (Sargisson, 2003). However, conflict is also the driving force behind dynamics and progress. It is a fundamental element of group interaction (Chidambaram & Bostrom, 1997). The residents develop as a group, which, according to previous research and literature, involves escalations of conflict. When a group succeeds in effectively dealing with conflict, it matures. Thus, conflict can be functional.

The focus of this study is the role of conflict in the development process of the residents as a group. The research is conducted in a relatively new ecovillage in Wales, which was created in 2009 and is as such still developing. We take a closer look at conflicts and the links with the group development

process, hence also the continued development of the ecovillage. This is achieved by means of resident interviews and participating observation.

Importance of this study:

- Intentional communities are in fact micro-societies and so ideal subjects to research social processes and movements. How a non-conventional community reaches an effective functioning can be applied to other contexts.
- Ecovillages are “Islands of a possible future” (von Lüpke, 2012, p. 76). New insights into their problems and successes could help spread their pioneering ideas for cultural, economical and ecological transformations.

Firstly, I will give a short overview of the discussed matters regarding intentional communities and ecovillages. Then in the second chapter the concepts and framework of this study – group development and conflict - are explained in a literature review, and how this study contributes to theoretical development of conflict in ecovillages. I briefly discuss the methodology of this research in chapter 3. In chapter 4, the results are discussed. Finally, I reach a conclusion in chapter 5.

1.1 Intentional communities

What are intentional communities? Definitions and criteria, see Kanter, 1972a; Meijering et al., 2006; Sargent, 1994; Shenker, 2011.

1.2 Ecovillages

- Global context that gave rise to ecovillages: social and environmental degradation, neoliberal economic system, anti-globalisation and back-to-the-land movement;
- Definition (Gilman & Gilman, 1991);
- Ecovillages as alternative models and educational centres for social change + integration in mainstream society;
- Development of the concept by the Gaia Trust, the Gilman-report, history of the Global Ecovillage Network.

Chapter 2: Literature review

2.1 Group development

Groups develop over time. When a group assembles and works together, the nature and personality of a group changes (Tuckman, 1965). Sometimes these changes can make the group more coherent and productive, but sometimes groups can become dysfunctional.

Group development is defined as a change through time in the internal structures, processes and culture of a group (Sarri & Galinsky, 1974). Three dimensions of group development are to be distinguished: (1) social organisation of the group (i.e. the group structure, patterns of roles and statuses, such as changes in the power structure during the different stages of development); (2) activities, tasks and operative processes of the group, such as the evolution of decision-making processes through time ; (3) the group culture, namely the norms (members' expectations of each other), values and shared goals. These dimensions of group development change in the course of time and certain patterns can be identified in these changes.

There are many different models of group development that are thoroughly discussed and classified in academic literature, such as linear, cyclical and non-sequential models (Chidambaram & Bostrom, 1997; Mennecke, Hoffer, & Wynne, 1992; Smith, 2001; Wheelan & Hochberger, 1996). Each model explains group development in a different way, by interpreting underlying factors or by distinguishing development patterns. The time periods in which a distinct series of activities takes place, are categorised as stages or phases of group development (Miller, 2003). The ultimate objective is a functioning group (Wheelan, 2005).

Tuckman's (1965) model was used for this dissertation. His linear model is the best known and most referred to group development model in organisational literature (Miller, 2003). Since the publication of his work, researchers have disputed, altered and fine-tuned his work, but the fundamental principles of his work still influence theoretical developments in this field of study (Kirk-Lawlor & Allred, 2016).

Although using a linear, hierarchical model entails some constraints – as it will never grasp the complexity of a development process – it is a good starting point to observe a group, and to find explanations for the development process.

Tuckman's model claims that, over time, group development follows four hierarchical stages: forming, storming, norming and performing (a fifth stage was later added: adjourning). Each stage

must be successfully completed to achieve efficient group functioning. This model focusses on two realms of group development: task and interpersonal. The way members acted and related to one another was considered group-structure or pertaining to the interpersonal realm; the content of the interaction, as related to the task, was referred to as the task-activity realm.

Tuckman claims that both realms are important for members, during all stages. The model describes these two realms throughout all five stages.

Forming: members are insecure and anxious about their roles, who will lead them and what the group goals are. In this stage, they try to orientate. In the interpersonal realm Tuckman speaks of 'testing and dependence' in the group structure. The members try to find which interpersonal behaviours are acceptable in the group. For this, they are dependent on a leader, a strong member, or existing norms and structures, which can give them guidelines and support in this new and unstructured situation. In the task-activity realm there is 'orientation to task'. Members try to clearly define the task and how the group should use their own experience to fulfil this task. They also have to choose which information is necessary and how they obtain it. By orienting to the task, the group establishes ground rules and tests the boundaries for interpersonal and task behaviours.

Storming: the second stage represents a time of intergroup conflict. Individuals try to position themselves in the power structure; subgroups arise. Many groups get stuck in this phase because of power politics turning into rebellion. In general, this stage generates many emotional responses, in reaction to the discrepancies. Thus, in terms of the interpersonal realm, there is 'intragroup conflict'. Hostility is a way to express individuality and to resist the formation of a group structure. Members resist moving into unknown areas of interpersonal relations and seek to retain security. Tuckman says: "The lack of unity is an outstanding feature of this phase. There are characteristic key issues that polarize the group and boil down to the conflict over progression into the "unknown" of interpersonal relations or regression to the security of earlier dependence." (1965, p. 386). On the other hand, in terms of the "task realm" there is an 'emotional response to task demands'. Members react emotionally as a means of resistance, because individuals have their own personal preferences to the demands of the task.

Norming: typical for the third stage is openness to other members. In the interpersonal realm there is 'group cohesion development': group members accept each other's idiosyncrasies and express personal opinions. The group becomes an entity, as members develop in-group feeling and seek to maintain and perpetuate the group. Roles and norms are established. For task-activities there is an 'open exchange of relevant interpretations', meaning that members exchange interpretations of information. Task conflicts are avoided in an effort to insure harmony.

Performing: in this last stage a ‘functional role relatedness’ occurs on the interpersonal level. The group now becomes a problem-solving instrument, because members adapt and play roles that enhance the task activities. The group structure is supportive of task performance. In the task realm there is an ‘emergence of solutions’: members work together in a constructive way to fulfil the task. Energy that was invested in the group structure before, is now dedicated to the task. Roles become flexible and functional, and group energy is channelled into the task.

Later, a fifth stage was added: *adjourning*. The group finishes the task and its existence comes to a close.

Although there are a lot of different models of group development, they all emphasise critical periods in the existence of a group (Chidambaram & Bostrom, 1997). These critical periods determine the further evolution and actually become milestones in group development process. These periods influence the nature of future group activities and can strengthen or break the group. Of the many different phases observed by researchers in group development, a phase of conflict may be the turning point for a functional group (Rybak & Brown, 1997). This is also the case in Tuckman’s model: successful negotiation of conflicts (typical of the second phase) is crucial to achieve this stage of productive interaction.

2.2 Conflict

Social organisation entails *the* potential of social conflict (Mack, 1965). The existing conflict literature is extensive (Wall & Callister, 1995). Conflict has many definitions, of which a lot are problematic and only focus on a part of the conflict process (De Dreu, 2010). Conflict can be defined as “the experience between or among parties that their goals or interests are incompatible or in opposition” (Korsgaard, Jeong, Mahony & Pitariu, 2008, p. 1224). This definition comprises beliefs and perceptions of conflict, behavioural changes and affective reactions to conflict. Incompatible goals and interests are at the root of conflict. Conflict can occur between more than two parties and between individuals as well as groups.

However, these definitions only indicate the antecedents of conflict, not what conflict actually is (Barki & Hartwick, 2004). Conflict is “[...] a process that *begins* when an individual or group perceives differences and opposition between itself and another individual or group about interests and resources, beliefs, values or practices that matter to them” (De Dreu & Gelfand, 2008, p. 6). Perceiving a conflict is only the beginning, it’s not about what conflict actually is. Bartos and Wehr (2002) define conflict as behaviour: “[...] conflict is defined here as a situation in which actors use

conflict behaviour against each other to attain incompatible goals and/or to express their hostility” (Bartos & Wehr, 2002, p. 13). ‘Conflict behaviour’ is every behaviour that helps a party to reach a goal that is incompatible with that of the opponent or behaviour that expresses hostility towards the other. This behaviour can be rational and irrational as well.

Conflict is a consequence of three types of causally linked factors (Korsgaard et al., 2008): conflicts arise in a specific set of circumstances, such as interdependence, goal compatibility or role differences, that predispose individuals to conflict: this is the input (1). These inputs lead to behavioural events that trigger a sense-making process in the group members. This involves a “naming and blaming” process by the affected members or those party to the event, to determine the significance of the event and to recognize it as an infraction or violation. This is then assigned to the other that has violated the norms or inflicted hurt (2). This inference process leads to the affective, cognitive, and behavioural manifestations of conflict (3).

2.2.1 Intragroup conflict

Research on intragroup conflict developed relatively independently of existing theories about individual and dyadic conflict (Korsgaard et al., 2008). Literature on this theme mainly focuses on a framework that distinguishes different types of conflict. Group conflict can be divided into three types or dimensions: relationship conflict (1) exists when there are interpersonal incompatibilities among group members, which typically includes tension, animosity, and annoyance among members within a group; task conflict (2) exists when there are disagreements among group members about the content of the tasks being performed, including different viewpoints, ideas, and opinions; process conflict (3) exists when disagreement arises about the assignment of duties and the distribution of resources (Behfar, Mannix, Peterson & Trochim, 2011).

These types of conflict have a different impact on group functioning and end results. It might seem paradoxical, but conflict can have a negative, as well as a positive effect on individuals, groups and organisations (Bradley, Anderson, Baur, & Klotz, 2015; De Wit, Greer, & Jehn, 2012; Gil et al., 2005). This can be explained by different dimensions of conflict. On the one hand, task conflicts have rather positive effects for group functioning, because they encourage members to tackle diverse aspects of task problems and hence get better results (Jehn, 1995). On the other hand, relationship and process conflicts have a rather negative effect on groups. Process conflicts are associated with lower levels of group morale and decreased productivity (Jehn, 1997). In this dimension, the group focuses on abilities of group member and not on the content and quality of the task. Relationship conflicts lead to anxiousness and hostility between the members, which makes them withdraw (Jehn, 1995). The

optimal profile for a group that performs well is: moderate task conflicts, no relationship conflicts and little or no process conflicts. The existing group norms should consider task conflict as acceptable and which can be fixed with few negative emotions (Jehn, 1997). This sort of 'conflict configuration' is conducive to a positive outcome.

There are a number of problems with this typology of conflict. The most obvious difficulty is the research sample: these articles are largely based on research in management teams and company work groups. Is this comparable with a group of people that come together to make decisions about their environment and lifestyle, but also are neighbours and dependent of each other to survive? Although this kind of literature provides interesting insights, one should be wary of generalizations that might not be applicable to the research field of ecovillages. Moreover, as Korsgaard et al. (2008) indicate, it is questionable whether these concepts can be significantly distinguished from each other. Task, process and relationship conflicts overlap in empirical measures. Furthermore the effects of the different conflict types are negligible if we separate them analytically. Finally, research shows that task and relationship conflict are not necessarily different types but a process, so they are time related. Task conflict then escalates into relationship conflict.

It is better to determine the underlying causes of conflict as an alternative for the typology that instead underpins the consequences (Korsgaard et al., 2008). A useful theoretical framework is provided by De Dreu and Gelfland (2008): contextual features create a certain interdependence and different goals and interests, which influences social interactions between group members. This then could lead to conflict. In this context, which is based on social interdependence, the three most important causes of conflict originate: scarce resources (a), the search for maintaining and promoting a positive view of the self (b), and a desire to hold consensually shared and socially validated opinions and beliefs (c). These can then lead to respectively process, relationship and task conflict (previous typology).

a) Resources are scarce and finite in every group or organisation. Availability, distribution and access to these resources is the main cause of conflict, i.e. *resource conflicts*. Because of the interdependence between individuals, the group and coordinating organisation in which it exists, conflicts about access and distribution of resources arise. Conflict can become manifest in two ways: either because individuals or groups try to pursue their own interests and in doing so harm the collective interests. This then escalates from latent interest conflicts to apparent resource conflicts. Or, resource conflicts arise because of hasty suspicions, misunderstandings or incomplete information, this kind of conflict originates in a lack of trust in the other group members.

b) Aiming to maintain and promote a positive view of the self is a second cause of conflict. The self-concept can be decomposed into individual and group level components, which could lead to conflict when destabilized. This happens because in the process of developing, maintaining and restoring a positive self-view, members deliberately or inadvertently hurt the positive self-view of others: there's a lot of exposure to (latent or manifest) ego-threat in a group or organization. This need for a positive identity causes *value or ideological conflicts*. Ideologically based disputes (e.g. involving societal issues) are conflicts in which one or more parties represent – or believe they represent – deeper ideological values. Value-related conflicts (e.g. issues concerning morality or “right and wrong”) are conflicts in which one or more parties defend or promote their personal or group identity in terms of moral issues, social standing and reputation, likeability and so on. It is difficult to find a compromise in this kind of conflict, as opposed to resource conflicts.

c) the desire to hold consensually shared and socially validated opinions and beliefs can give rise to *socio-cognitive conflict of understanding*. This type of conflict concerns issues about intellectual and judgmental problems. Intellectual issues have correct solutions according to commonly accepted standards (e.g. the most efficient procedure). By contrast, judgmental issues have no correct solution and are a matter of taste (e.g. should efficiency be the prevailing criterion in selecting a procedure). These divergent viewpoints regarding socio-cognitive conflict create cognitive dissonance that needs to be resolved, by either persuading the opponent or changing one's own perspective or opinion, by integrating opposing viewpoints or by dissolving the relationship. This third type is based on three fundamental assumptions: firstly, it is assumed that people are motivated to hold accurate perceptions and insights about themselves, about others, and about the non-social world around them, including their tasks. Secondly, it is assumed that people have limited rationality and lack both relevant information and information-processing capacities. Therefore different people develop distinct, diverging insights, beliefs, and understandings of otherwise identical objects of perception. Thirdly, it is assumed that people seek cognitive consistency and social validation of their beliefs, insights, and understandings, and that divergence vis-à-vis other's perceptions, insights, and understandings creates tension that needs to be resolved.

2.2.2 Conflict and group development

Conflict shouldn't lose its significance because of the negative connotation (Schellenberg, 1996). Conflict is an important part of every society and daily interaction: it stimulates new ideas, promotes social change and defines relationships in groups and personal identity... Conflict drives creativity, knowledge and innovation and improves effectivity and quality of the decision-making process of

group (De Dreu, 2008). To understand the positive functions of conflict one has to take into account the different levels of social reality and the time element. Conflict on the group level can influence group processes and results, but also individual well-being and satisfaction, and on the organisational level the stability and reputation of the organisation. Positive effects on one level can have negative effects on the other. Thus, positive functional conflict is hard to determine when researched over time. Immediate positive outcomes can harm groups on the long term. Positive conflict can have negative consequences on other levels or through time, hence the benefits don't make up for the costs. Examples of these costs are: time and money lost to conflict management; new agreements between two negotiating parties which present a disadvantage for other concerned group members; the impact on the wellbeing and health of the members.

From the discussion of the group development models above, it seems a conflict phase is crucial and essential for a group to fully develop. This means conflict has a positive effect. Namely, the creation of a group that functions well and thus reaches its goals. However, this is the more optimistic outcome of group development. De Dreu (2008) and Jehn (1995, 1997), among others, state that a specific configuration of circumstances and group features is the prerequisite for conflict to result in a positive outcome. Completing the different phases, hence also the conflictual phase, can make groups equally dysfunctional (Tuckman, 1965).

2.2.3 Conflict in ecovillages

Hollick and Connelly wrote: "While green technologies are very important, the dominant issues are human ones. The greatest challenge for most ecovillages is learning to live and work together in harmony" (Ashlock, 2010, p. 56). Conflict is an evident consequence of social interaction, also in ecovillages. Christian (2003) published a complete handbook, "Creating a Life Together", based on her own experiences and research. This step-by-step book for creating an intentional community (IC), states that to be successful, an IC has to build in a lot of rules, structures and social mechanisms. This is how an IC can be part of the "successful ten percent" (Christian, 2003, p. xv). Ninety percent of the IC's are never created, due to: lack of funding, the right piece of land not being found or perishing by conflict. The initiatives that make it and eventually create an IC, often collapse because of 'structural conflict'. These are problems that emerge because the founding members didn't introduce clear procedures (like decision making processes) and postponed important decisions, causing gaps and shortcomings in the organisational structure.

Even though it is acknowledged that conflict is a central factor for the stability and the survival rate of the group, it is often considered a secondary issue in the IC and ecovillage literature. Many social

processes were extensively explored in this literature: the relationship between members, the individual in the collective, goal achievement... (Wagner, 2012). Conflict, on the other hand, is often treated as an element of the social processes that are investigated, as an incidental consequence of the discussed topics, not as the focal point of research. For example, tensions arising from diverging expectations and visions, which is at the expense of social cohesion (Mychajluk, 2014); frustrations because of a lack of commitment from members or the homogenizing influence of the community that repressed individual needs, opinions and ideas (Holleman & Colombijn, 2011); or the collapse of groups because of the diversity in visions (Campos, 2013).

These are topics specific to social interaction and with conflict as an evident consequence. The deeper causes of conflict are overlooked and rarely placed in a broader context. This is the problem: the foundations of conflict and its consequences - functional or not - are not questioned and are not placed in a bigger picture.

With this work, I hope to offer insights in the context and antecedents of conflict and in the roles of different actors, and to link this to the group development model. Groups develop in several phases, some of which are critical periods that determine the further course of the group. Conflict is the focal point of these periods. During what Tuckman calls the 'storming'-phase, it is crucial to become a functional group, but it can also break the group. Thus, conflict can be something positive under specific circumstances.

This research investigates a group (the residents of an ecovillage) with the following research questions:

- How do the conflicts arise (antecedents, external circumstances, causes)?
- What are the features of these conflicts?
- What effect do the conflicts have on the members of the group (perception, reaction) and thus on the subsequent evolution of the group? Is it functional?

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Qualitative research

Qualitative research places the researcher in the world. Social settings and phenomena are better understood by interpreting the meanings people give to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Qualitative research revolves around exploration and description of social processes and has an interpretative nature (Singleton, McAllister, Straits & Straits, 1988). The researcher has a direct contact with the reality of the participants and can have an in depth understanding of meanings, interpretations, symbols and processes of social settings from a 'native' point of view.

The qualitative methods utilised for the present research, focused on conflict and group development, give insights into the incentives of the respondents and the factors that drive their interpretation of social interactions. Moreover the researcher can build trust with the participants, which is important for a complex and sensitive subject such as conflict. To understand the processes and actions in the context of daily life in the ecovillage, qualitative research is the best way to achieve *thick description* (Mortelmans, 2013). By trying to understand the participants' social reality, an in-depth analysis of the nature and dynamics of conflict can be attained.

3.2 Sample

- Outline of the ecovillage population and the wider community
- My research-role: participant observation, while volunteering + in-depth interviews
- 13 interviews

3.3 Negotiating access to the setting

- Selecting and contacting IC's through the Fellowship of Intentional Communities and Diggers & Dreamers
- First contact with residents, research agreements
- Personal and social barriers to full information

3.4 Data collection

- Participant observation – two research periods of three weeks
- Meeting the residents, understanding the community context and Lammas; volunteering

- In-depth interviews with a semi-structured list of topics and questions, based on sensitizing concepts from literature and adjusted throughout systematic data collecting and analysis.
- Explaining the dissertation shift and adjustment to the circumstances and challenges in the ecovillage at that time
- Interview settings (environment, interruptions, participant cooperation, length)
- Observation through volunteering and official documents (applications, management plans, rules); consulting mainstream media; challenges in research as a participant observer

3.5 Data analysis

Throughout the research process, Glaser & Strauss's Grounded Theory (or the Constant Comparative Method) were utilised. This entails a constant interplay between data collection and data analysis in an inductive way. Data is gathered and processed in a cyclical way, which means that results of consecutive analysis periods are repeatedly compared with each other. This procedure enables the researcher to gradually adapt the focus while still collecting data.

This approach has an inductive nature because categories, concepts and theories come forward from the empirical material and are not determined in advance. Rather, the researcher is guided by 'sensitizing concepts' through the research, which can be used afterwards for data analysis. These concepts emerge from the literature review and sensitize the researcher on important concepts, which could help answer the research questions (Mortelmans, 2013). They make the researcher more aware of certain features of social interaction and specific settings (Bowen, 2006). It helps to assess what is relevant and what isn't, while observing and interviewing. These concepts changed and were narrowed down throughout the research with Grounded Theory.

3.6 Ethics

- Informed consent
- Privacy – anonymity and confidentiality
- "Avoiding harm, doing good, seeking justice" (Israel, 2015).
- Neutrality, sensitive information and ethical challenges

Chapter 4: Results

This chapter discusses the research results of the Lammas ecovillage. The societal and legal context of Lammas is broached first, namely the framework in which the ecovillage was created and how this influenced the organization and structure. The different motivations of the residents for living in an ecovillage are also addressed. Then, the ecovillage's evolution is sketched from the early years until now and the social context in which the conflicts originated, namely the social relations and the cohesion between residents. Subsequently, the most prevalent conflicts and perceptions and reactions of the residents are discussed. Then, this is linked to the specific context and the development stage of Lammas. Lastly, I aim to answer the research questions and reach a conclusion.

4.1 An introduction to Lammas

- Definition of low impact development
- Policy 52 (OPD): context and criteria
- Lammas as a blueprint, alternative model and learning/information centre for LID and OPD
- Application process
- Nine objectives for Lammas (Tir Y Gafel) from the management plan

4.1.1 Organisation

- Lammas Low Impact Living Initiatives Ltd and its goals, mission statement and role in the ecovillage
- 76 acres, plots and common areas, Hub, water and energy
- Leases

4.1.2 Governance

- Lammas Ltd: Membership, shares
- Annual General Meeting, voting, committee
- Responsibilities of Lammas committee
- Monitoring reports

4.1.3 First impressions

My first impression of the group was that there is a physical but also a social separation between the residents: it is not a community in which people work together or share meals. Every family has their own home and plot to make a living. There are areas for common use, but, socially, everyone is focused on their own household and livelihood. Lammas should be seen as an assortment of houses, where a group of people live the same lifestyle and share some resources, i.e. energy and water. Of course, ties exist between residents, but most see Lammas rather as a group and speak of 'neighbours'. This was their intention though: Lammas chose a village structure, where no one is forced to interact with others and each household can live completely autonomous.

Meeting the different families on their plots, I realised there was a different atmosphere on each plot. They differ by, firstly, the geological features: some plots are on a slope; others on flat terrain, requiring another layout. Secondly, residents shape their plot according to their own needs and personality, resulting in diverse dwellings, annexes and gardens. All buildings are low impact and so mostly built from natural, local and/or recycled materials. I observed the use of timber, cob, straw bale, lime, sheep wool and slate, among others.

A few families host volunteers for a few weeks at a time, some for months or even years. Most plots don't have a finished (main) house. Most families were still building their house, living in a temporary building or caravans. Even though I knew this, I did not expect it to this extent, 7 years after the start of the ecovillage.

My experience of the ecovillage was that each plot is a whole system by itself, with a different design, each in a different stage, with or without volunteers, a different focus in terms of production and materials... They form an autonomous system, interlinked with the other plots, but existing in their own 'bubble', much like concentric circles expanding outwards while maintaining a clear distinction between the private and public sphere.

4.1.4 Residents and motivations

All the respondents had carefully construed answers, many insights to offer and critical input. They question themselves about who they are, what they do, why they do it and what the ecovillage means to them. During the interviews, they managed quite well in passing on their worldview. Every one of them has a strong personality and clear opinions, which seems important before participating in a project like Lammas. The motivations for living in an ecovillage and leading this lifestyle vary

between the residents. They reflect their initial expectations and ideals and how these can lead to conflict.

The different motivations show that it concerns more than just sustainability and self-sufficiency. About half of the residents indicated that they value their independence and freedom most: 'whatever it is, I'm choosing it'. The emphasis varies from not having a superior, 'not really answering to anybody', to self-development, 'to design my life pattern to suit me'.

Not having a mortgage is also a strong driving force. This lifestyle's affordability is an appealing alternative for what is seen as 'a death grip', namely an enormous loan that would control their whole life: 'I'm not dependent on external factors that I have no control over'.

This element of freedom is important to understand the incentives of some residents when conflicts arise. They want to detach themselves from any imposed structures and don't want to experience pressure or control from above. At the same time, for most respondents, the element of community is an important motivation. They refer to 'a sense of community' or 'enjoying being part of something bigger than myself', but also 'like-minded people'. The practical benefits attracted them as well. Infrastructure like electricity is more advantageous and qualitative when it's shared with other people. Furthermore, networks and businesses are easier to establish this way.

On the one hand, there is the urge to be part of something, on the other hand to be autonomous and free from imposed structures. For some, the organisation in which they now live (coordinated by Lamma Ltd) symbolizes the limitations they tried to get away from in the first place. Because of this, there now is a lot of tension between the residents, which will be discussed later.

Living in the ecovillage is also a way of creating one's own valuable lifestyle, away from the hindrances of mainstream society, a 'very precarious' and 'a degrading system'. Some speak of shielding themselves from the forces of this system, namely '[being] insulated, not isolated, but insulated from mainstream economics' and 'buffer[ing] myself from [...] the external world'. With every choice they make, they feel as though they are confronted with the destructive logics of our society. Setting up an independent alternative system felt like a way to change this:

I was contributing to the degradation of the system I lived in. And I was really enthusiastic or passionate about flipping that and about actually contributing positively. (Respondent 2)

Above all, a deep connection with the natural world seems to be an important incentive. About half of the residents mentioned a sense of connection to the world around them. They choose and control their relation to the world and their environment:

All my input and outputs of my life and livelihood I directly touch. (Respondent 8)

Living in an ecovillage gives them the possibility to be one with nature, something that gives them a sense of fulfilment 'I feel a sense of nourishment [...] from my soul', and unity 'I don't want to live off the land, I want to live with the land'. From the interviews and the work with the residents, I noticed that they often speak of taking care of the earth, mother nature and especially rehabilitating their land. They want to make the soil healthy again, productive and biodiverse. Their task is one of nurturing. They feel responsible for their piece of land.

Most residents wish for their children to have a good childhood, with freedom, namely: 'free from advertising, from media, from the pressures of the modern world' but also safety: 'they can run around and play and I don't have to think where they are and that it isn't dangerous'. This motivation reflects what is important to them, they also want for their children.

4.1.5 Evolution of the ecovillage: development in the first years

The first years of the ecovillage were defining for the residents, in creating a sense of community, which is evident in the interviews. The first conflicts emerged in this context and influence the group processes to this day. For some residents, these original conflicts are still important for their daily contacts and perception of the group. We discuss the development of the ecovillage from the early years up till now, and the elements that were important to the residents and how this has influenced the relationships.

The numbers on the website reflect the huge amount of work the residents invested in restoring the ecosystem and biodiversity of the area, planting trees and hedges, digging out ponds, setting up polytunnels and gardens... The windswept, bare sheep fields were transformed into fertile, productive land. Depending on the calculations, land based activity in the Lammas community provides for 74 to 92% of its household needs¹.

Developing the land and building on it was not an easy task and remains challenging. Progress was much slower than expected, even for residents with experience in Low Impact Development:

All of us expected to have our homes built within three years, 2012 was a target we set ourselves. And none of us (laughs) none of us has managed to actually do that. (Respondent 7)

¹ Numbers from the 2015 Tir-y-Gafel Annual Monitoring Report

The harsh, wet Welsh climate, a lack of knowledge, but also time spent on community buildings and infrastructure were identified as causes for the delay. The residents divide their time between producing food, raising their children, some teach course or have a job outside of the ecovillage.

Furthermore, they experienced a lot of resistance from the government, which instilled a lot of fear in the community in case they did not reach the planning targets - each household has to provide for at least 75% of their household needs from land based activity. There was a real fear they would lose their planning permission and be fined by the government if they could not reach the goals within the 5 year term. It's still unclear to the respondents what this 75% actually means, it's 'dodgy accounting', with expressions such as 'how does this relate to anything that's real, in any way?'. One can comply with this subjective requirement in many different ways, so it does not make sense in this context. It shows how the government cannot cope with an alternative framework and still tries to translate everything in numbers. The project is only evaluated in a profit-oriented way, because, to the government, this is, according to a resident, 'proving it's economically viable [...] that's the thing that means failure or not failure to them'. It should actually be about 'ecological and social resilience', and less about profitability.

The perceived threat was further strengthened by a court case with which some residents were confronted, even after having obtained planning permission. It turned out that building regulations were separate from Policy 52, something they had no knowledge of or received no information on. This convinced them even more that their fate lied in the hands of the government. Planning officers made regular visits to follow up the progress, which the residents perceived as intimidating. When the residents sent out the monitoring report after the first 5 years - with their progress and achieved goals - they never received an answer from the government. This was 'a massive relief' for them and now they feel more at ease with the government.

Meanwhile, this pressure has had a big impact on the residents individually, but also as a group. Everyone was busy with their own plot, which led some to think that there is no sense of community at Lammas, someone even spoke about the 'survival of the fittest'. Because the 75% were calculated for all Lammas residents as a whole, the less productive plots stayed out of trouble, because the most productive plots could raise the numbers. Most respondents look down on these lowest performers, as they are the ones endangering the project and even giving it a bad name.

I do feel responsibility towards the project, I feel a degree of pride around what's been achieved. [...] To be shown a plot like that when actually there are much better examples of what we can manage, what can happen. [...] we do have a public face, we do have people

coming from all over the world and we need to be doing what we said we were going to do.
(Respondent 6)

The frustration with the least productive residents results from the fear of being penalized by the government. The whole community would then be punished, and Lammas as an organisation would have to deal with the specific residents. This would mean that, under pressure from the government, the residents would have to evaluate each other's progress, because they constitute the Lammas organisation. This hypothetical situation produced a lot of insecurity and stress. Residents did not know what to expect. As the government never replied, they have a feeling it won't interfere again.

4.1.6 Partial Conclusion

Lammas originated from a new opportunity to create an alternative, sustainable model in a legal and legitimate way. It aims to be a pioneer, a blueprint for similar projects. LID (Low Impact Development) is supported by the ecovillage with guidelines and rules implemented by the chosen committee. The residents live with their families on their own individual plots, forming autonomous systems. Their diverse motivations are based on freedom and self-determination, but also a sense of community. The first years in the ecovillage were difficult. More precisely, the pressure from the government created tensions and divided the group.

The interactions between the residents are influenced by the legal demands of the government. In this initial stage, they focused on norms and structures, because these determined their survival. They interact with other residents within this framework, in which they depend on each other. As a consequence, they judge each other in this context. In the beginning they were mainly concentrating on the official goals. This impacts the relationships between residents and their perceptions of each other. It shows that external factors or actors are important to understand the bigger picture of conflict.

4.2 Conflicts

It was clear from the interviews that conflict is a defining part of ecovillage life and strongly impacts the residents. Most answers to my questions about limitations and challenges to life in the ecovillage were simply 'individuals', 'people' or 'human relationships'. This part describes the conflicts, more precisely, the social context in which they originate and the topics that create division/rifts. This part answers the research questions concerning the characteristics and antecedents of conflict.

4.2.1 Social cohesion in the ecovillage

A few characteristics of the ecovillage and the group are important for the social relations between residents and the sense of unity. The setting and goals were consciously chosen, but meanwhile, the ecovillage has evolved differently than some expected, even though it's in line with the original idea.

Village structure

The residents explicitly chose a village structure. Some are happy with the outcome, because they like their autonomy, others miss a sense of community. Most of the respondents are pleased with the design of the ecovillage: they value their autonomy highly ('own piece of land' or 'my own space') and at the same time having the possibility of a 'community'. This is what attracted them in the first place: the opportunity of being independent, while living around like-minded people and the advantage of shared infrastructure. Two respondents commented that they would have preferred to share more, for example, working and eating together, because '[they are] all kind of struggling on [their] little plots'. A few respondents would also have liked to share more, but in the end they're glad it is not the case, since the shared infrastructure they have now (electricity, water, Hub, roads) already creates conflict.

Sense of community

Despite the layout of the ecovillage, the group does not really form one community. Rather, loose ties exist between the residents. There are also subgroups, namely those that get along well and help each other out now and then. Respondents said in the interviews that there are no strong ties between them and there is little sense of community.

There is no social network of support. Only what you create yourself. (Respondent 13)

A resident described the social structure to a group of visitors as 'a loose group of householders on a low impact project'. One of the residents was quoted as saying in a meeting, 'are we a group?'. Even though the structure of the ecovillage matches with the general expectations, residents expected stronger ties and social support. There is a lot of individualism, despite the shared infrastructure.

The residents explain this lack of group feeling in different ways. Everyone is busy with their own family and plot; being self-sufficient takes a lot of time and energy: 'we haven't had time to invest in being a community'. Some think all will be well and it is only a matter of time. Now that more people are settled, there is more time and space to work on the social aspects of the ecovillage: 'lots more

harmonious and good beneficial links will happen', it's part of the process and 'it's still a long way from fulfilling true human potential'.

A few others thought it was wrong to assume that relationships would just work. According to them, 'an ecosystem is not equal to a people system'. It needed active investment from the get-go, but now it's too late. The community is 'fragmented to its roots'. It's difficult to remediate when 'none of us actually want to see each other' and 'people don't want to come to the same events anymore'.

I do think we're failing in social cohesion and I, you know if, if the revolution is anything, it's not the built environment, it's the social one. (Respondent 3)

Collective goal

When asked if they, as a community, have a collective goal, remarkably few residents could answer this. Surely, there are general goals, linked to Lammas as an organisation, like living ecologically and being self-sufficient, but other than that the residents don't know what binds them, as a group. The goals which were officially recorded were 'a good starting place', because 'the goal itself is very much tied to the goals of the project'. However these goals were imposed by the government and so, by the Lammas organisation ('we don't have any *agreed* aims or goals'). The collective is centred on this: if someone isn't doing well in terms of these aims, they are discredited as a whole. There is co-dependency for survival, which makes them – on the group level – judgemental towards each other and focused on these goals alone. This is experienced by some as alienating, because numbers seem to be the only representation of them as a group.

In contrast, the group never defined any goals *as a community*. There was no consideration or broader vision than the goals defined by the organisation. Residents knew they were going to be part of a community but it was never clearly defined. Now the ecovillage has reached the official targets, this question seems even more pressing. Which way will they choose from here? Who do they want to be, what do they want to represent? There is no clear group identity, on the one hand because there's not much that connects them (every plot is independent) and there aren't a lot of commitments, on the other hand because there isn't a clear vision for the social aspect. The lack of identification as a group can be illustrated with a quote from a resident:

I facilitated a meeting one time, and we were trying to, and I do mean trying, to create a statement of commonality, which was something like "we are nine smallholders", or "nine smallholdings", "eco smallholdings in West-Wales" or "One Planet-", [...] I said "well let's chop this up, let's start with: we are and then the next bit and we'll take a temperature check

on each level, see who's with it", so the first bit I said is "we are!" every hand goes way up (laughs), "we are!", there's no way there's no ambiguity in the temperature check. Everything else I said, um, nine smallholdings "uuuh..."(unenthusiastic tone) [...] "we are" (raises hand, laughs), that's it. [...] what I heard as a common goal is "being".

These difficulties show the differing world views, ideals and expectations the residents hold and how these contrast with the project they joined. More precisely, the absence of strong social ties is a big disappointment for some residents. These oppositions might result from a lack of clear agreements and shared visions. It could be linked to the conflicts that are discussed in the next part.

4.2.2 The meetings

The meetings, as part of Lammas Low Impact Initiatives Limited, were repeatedly brought up by the residents in the interviews. As the place and context in which conflicts originate, are negotiated and sometimes also escalate. What happens there and the way in which it happens, influences or influenced strongly the perception of others, their wellbeing and sense of unity. This is where the organisation penetrates daily life: there is no distinction between work, life and community. There are no different levels or separate groups of people; the role in the organisation is not distinguishable from the role in the community. No respondent made this distinction in the interviews. From what they said it seemed the interactions in the context of the organisation have a major impact on the community.

The residents used the following adjectives to describe the meetings: 'frustrating', 'dysfunctional', 'stressful', 'stuck', 'not constructive', 'exhausting'. About half the respondents says feeling very upset after a meeting and even reports physical symptoms such as high blood pressure, headaches and exhaustion. They anonymously agree that the organisation is stuck.

We are in a locked-up situation and it isn't going anywhere (Respondent 11)

Although the meetings are meant for managing Lammas, shared land and infrastructure, respondents feel decisions are rarely made – nor about everyday matters, nor about drastic proposals. On the one hand this is because there isn't a clear decision making procedure², on the

² Initially there was majority voting, but this evolved to a culture of consensus. Respondents reported they felt that decisions weren't implemented or blocked when consensus wasn't reached. However, not everyone needs to agree to reach consensus. It means that the best decision is made for the group and not necessarily for the individual, based on a shared feeling or vision (Metcalf, 2012).

other hand the respondents feel the same discussions and personal problems come up in the meetings. In case there was a decision, it's rarely implemented. As a consequence, most residents do what they feel is right and decide by themselves. Their own initiatives are not necessarily collectively approved or supported. Another consequence is that few residents still attend the meetings. Two third of the residents don't take part in decision making anymore.

4.2.3 The Big Discussion: Lammas Low Impact Initiatives Limited versus Tir Y Gafel

From the very beginning of my research it was clear that there is one main topic dividing the residents. Discussions exists from the start of the ecovillage and so has been going on for years: 'it manifests, well since the very first day really, over and over'. It's a strong undercurrent in the meetings that resurfaces every now and then. It seems, from the accounts of the different parties, there is a strong need to sort out this dispute. It still forms the base for all discussions arising now: it has become a kind of reference frame.

The discussion is about the organisation 'Lammas Low Impact Initiatives Limited' (LLIIL), so the cooperative. It's registered as a 'Society' and so has (legally binding) rules. Tir Y Gafel, the land where the ecovillage is located, is owned by LLIIL. Leases for each plot are tied to this Society. This means residents are 'leaseholders' or 'tenants' and Lammas (LIIL) is the 'landlord'.

Initially I had difficulties to understand the terminology, scope of the problem and the different significations. Why do some speak about Lammas in this way? What bothers the residents so much that it's been leading to conflicts for this long? Why is it so important? Why hasn't it been settled? It also felt very paradoxical, because all the residents *are* Lammas. If 'Lammas' imposes something, it's because they (or a part of them) chose to do so.

What is Lammas?

The interviews showed the respondents have different visions about what Lammas, the organisation, is. The residents have differing meanings for what it is, what it does and what it should do.

Part of the respondents (4/13) speak of Lammas as if it's an entity above them. I named them the *reformists*. They use the expression 'landlord'. They also make the distinction between 'Lammas' and 'Tir Y Gafel'. When they talk about the ecovillage, they say Tir Y Gafel. When they talk about the Organisation, it's Lammas. They describe this organisation as something alien, it's a creation that's not their own: 'fictional Lammas landlord'. They're conscious it's the collective forming Lammas, but

they think it's a stifling, imposed structure because it doesn't represent the interests of the group. The reformists deem the logic of the structure unfit to represent them all equally and rightfully. They think they're *stuck* in a structure that forces them to pursue certain goals. It's an organization that only imposes things but doesn't give anything back to them. They think legally binding rules are important for an organisation, but they believe the goals of Lammas don't favour them as residents. This perpetuates their feeling that Lammas is a separate entity that doesn't warrant their interests, or only represents a part of their interests.

Another part of the respondents (3/13) sees Lammas as an instrument, a structure they can *use*, referring to 'a tool', 'a framework' or 'a vehicle to allow individuals and groups to achieve or to set some goals'. I named them the *conventionalists*. There is a strong opposition to the vision which they call separatist and a certain astonishment about the issue: 'Who the fuck is Lammas? (laughs) [...] It's everybody in the room, talking right now'. To them, it's very simple: they *are* Lammas. It's a structure that helped them create an ecovillage and will help them spread the idea, with legal support:

It's not a cooperation! It's a benign organization that has happened to secure 76 acres of land, [...] it's secured, this land for this purpose, for a thousand years. That is AWESOME.
(Respondent 9)

Irrespective of what the organisation looks like, the residents give content to the structure themselves, according to the conventionalists. Changing the organisation won't solve much, because in the end it's about everyday issues: 'the question's still going to be: who's fixing the trackway? And when and how much is it gonna cost?'

The remaining residents are, as a respondent defined them, the *middle ground people*. They try to stay uninvolved and mostly aloof. They want whichever outcome is best for everyone. They were usually involved in the meetings before, supporting the reformist or conventionalist ideas, but felt it was too negative or frustrating to further invest in them.

These differing views on what Lammas is, manifest in four main issues about which the two opposing groups, reformist and conventionalist, have most disagreement.

1. Membership

The feeling that Lammas is something separate from the group of residents, is reinforced by the membership system. One can be a member of Lammas when they're a 'shareholder', having contributed a share of 50 pounds or more. These members can vote for new committee members on the Annual General Meeting or be a candidate themselves.

[...] we have 322 members of Lammas at the moment, because you can go online and tick a box on a website that one person who lives here has created, and become a member by paying 50 pounds and a paypal fee [...] So there are 322 members who have the right to vote in the AGM. (Respondent 10)

This can lead to situations in which people, who don't live at Tir Y Gafel³, are committee members and so can make changes to the ecovillage. This would be suitable for the bigger aspirations of Lammas, namely 'to establish a flourishing network of low impact projects', so to involve outsiders. Though practically, more local matters are discussed in the committee meetings: everyday issues and management concerning Tir Y Gafel residents.

The fact that outsiders can make decisions that could affect life in the ecovillage (Tir Y Gafel), feels very threatening and inappropriate to the reformists. For them, this creates a distance between the residents of Tir Y Gafel and Lammas: '320 people worldwide, how can that be us?'. This could be easily solved: 'the place needs to be managed by the 9 FOR the 9'. However other residents don't have this view and are more flexible about involving 'the wider community'.

2. Social forum

Lammas' mission is "[to] develop, research, promote, demonstrate and educate as to how low impact development can play a valuable role in the move forward toward a more sustainable society". The reformists think it's only a 'landlord' that imposes things but isn't really responsible for them: 'the Lammas committee doesn't have any remit to look after us'. There is no social forum to discuss their own needs and problems, apart from the Lammas meetings. They see those meetings as a place to discuss matters regarding the ecovillage as a whole, but not to come together as a group and invest in relationships. There is no representation of the residents and their needs, there is no network to support each other as a group: 'we could get together and discuss our livelihoods and who might need help'.

Although Lammas was designed from the very beginning to be 9 independent plots, as said before some respondents feel disappointed about the social ties and thought there would be more gatherings and sense of community. According to them there is not enough investment of others and the ecovillage isn't socially sustainable. There should be more 'institutionalisation' of social structures, so a conscious creation of relationships and community, which is more significant than a Hub-pub night every now and then.

³ More specifically, these committee members are people that are strongly involved with Lammas and/or have a LID project as well.

3. Representation of residents and attendance in meetings

The forum that does exist, the Lammas committee, does have restrictions: members need to have enough votes to be elected. A resident shares their concern:

We've had some really difficult times where people haven't been voted on, like actual residents of the community and they haven't even been voted on! That seems a bit crazy, and then you have a shareholder who doesn't live here who has been voted on. (Respondent 5)

If a member is not elected for the committee, he or she can still attend meetings, although very few do. At the time of my research the committee had 7 members, of which 5 Tir Y Gafel residents, 1 local resident and 1 non-elected member, but a respondent said there was a year when only 4 people were on the board. It's difficult to get everyone together and for some respondents this makes them feel isolated and lonely, as if there's no interest in collective wellbeing.

4. Leases and shared areas

The whole discussion about the Lammas organisation also regards the shared spaces and infrastructure: who has access, right of use and entitlement to the revenues of this infrastructure⁴. Residents disagree about what's written in the lease contracts and how these can be interpreted. The reformists believe they own 1/9th of all shared areas, because this is written in the leases: 'There were 9 people [families] who paid for the land underneath the Hub building'.

They also think the community, or people that are part of 'Lammas', should remain limited in size. They want to keep it small because they're convinced certain rights are reserved to Tir Y Gafel residents. It's not fair that others can make use of infrastructure without any accountability (responsibility and share in costs), like for the Hub, paths and roads.

They can do what they want [at Lammas]. But when they go home, they may call the decisions. I don't make the decisions here. (Respondent 13)

It's a grey area because these situations haven't been sorted out legally, or if they have, other residents seem to apply the rules loosely. Non-residents use the spaces the reformists see as part of their property.

Reformists see the reluctance of other residents about sorting out Lammas, the leases and agreements as 'hippie-fog' or 'denying it's a company'. They think clear rules and legal protection is important.

⁴ The Hub can be rented out and the hydro-turbine earns 'FiTs payments' from the government

Lammas is sort of being run as it's a bunch of hippies living in a field, but it's got the uniform of a corporate body (Respondent 10)

The conventionalists are incomprehensive about this legalistic approach of what Lammas is, the shared spaces and separation from the broader community. They think 'community' is broad and flexible, they want to involve and integrate as many people as possible. They understand there's a need for some rules, but don't want so many barriers. These respondents feel a kind of reformation won't change much:

It is like exchanging one sharp knife for another sharp knife. (Respondent 2)

To them, it's about reality and not what's written on paper.

4.2.4 Partial Conclusion

From the discussed matters it seems there are no clear agreements and ideals differ strongly. Residents don't have a agreed vision on what the ecovillage actually is and what it should become. Because there is no clear procedure to vote and they don't agree about everyday management and which path it should choose, decisions are easily dismissed as illegitimate. There's no shared vision and consensus is hard to obtain, so unilateral decisions are often made. This means maintenance and management often lack support from the whole group: 'it's kind of whoever does something, does it and then if somebody complained, woops, it's already done'. There are no clear agreements about who has a right to what and how resources should be distributed and managed.

These are examples of resource conflicts and ideological/value conflicts, which are based in what Christian (2003) calls 'structural conflict'. The organisational structure is unclear and decision making procedures are not agreed upon and implemented. Partly this can be traced back to the contradictory expectations and ideals. Because this wasn't sorted out from the beginning, no shared visions and interests have been created which could help the group overcome this problem. These oppositions have now lead to relationship conflicts. The group doesn't have a shared identity and therefore hasn't created a positive group culture with shared meanings, values, procedures and goals.

4.3 Perceptions and reactions from the residents

These conflicts divide the community. Some residents choose sides, others prefer neutrality. The respondents seem to feel there isn't really one, united group. Subgroups were formed and some

residents haven't spoken to each other in years. Because of the design of the ecovillage, each household can be autonomous and there's no mandatory social activities, so the meetings are the only (institutionalized) possibility for interaction with the whole group. Thus it's a cycle in which different elements reinforce each other. Next I discuss the perceptions of the residents, how they deal with conflict and which possible solutions were attempted in the past. In this way, I try to assess the effect of the conflicts on the residents and so the further evolution of the group and the ecovillage.

4.3.1 Perceptions of conflicts

The respondents explained the problematic organization in different ways. The middle ground people and the conventionalists have similar analyses and particularly see patterns, speaking about 'personalities', 'stories', 'roles' or 'dynamics'. They seem to imply this behaviour is part of the identity of the reformists: it's the way in which they give meaning to their role in the ecovillage. They explain it with personal problems and because these people are struggling: 'it's a way of deflecting the energy away from the fact that they're just not actually [being productive]'. Conflicts now happen to be about the cooperation and the leases, but it could have been about any other subject. They think the problems are their own creation, a reality that has to be confirmed and strengthened: 'making things to be a problem' and by doing this, not thinking about anybody else's problems. According to the conventionalists, there is no bigger picture:

It feeds them to feel that they are isolated and on their own and unsupported [...] They don't want to be taken out of that place, they feel comfortable in that place (Respondent 6)

There's no real intention to change something, 'problems without solutions'. That's why some respondents even speak of an 'ego fest', because personal problems are prioritized to the common good. There is no recognition of other people's issues and by the everlasting discussions, the community is overlooked because 'there is no conversation' and 'it's all about personality and opinion and ego'. It's difficult to make progress and move forward when meetings regularly get stuck: 'all the past and grievances comes up'. Respondents say it happens repeatedly that a whole meeting is lost to people discussing the same subjects again and again, what most see as 'take up 90% of the talking time' and 'hijack meetings'.

Despite recognizing that the reformists have been saying the same things for years in the meetings, it's not clear to the others what they actually want and why they want it:

Whatever experience they're having now [...] that's what they're achieving (Respondent 8)

These respondents have a strong feeling of not understanding those that want to change the organisational structure. It's not clear to them what exactly bothers them and why: 'I have NO clue, I've never been able to unpick it'.

The reformists however feel they're undermined and their opinions are ignored. According to them, there's a lot of individualism and reluctance to listen to other opinions. They have a strong feeling their voice isn't equal to other's: 'I'm not important, so what I say isn't important'. Therefore they think their interests aren't defended. They project this feeling especially on one resident, who, according to them, runs everything without consulting the committee, 'he runs the show'⁵. They accuse the other residents in the meetings of favouritism. Therefore they feel ignored and in disadvantage and so at the bottom of 'a pecking order'. They feel like they are at the side-lines and speak about 'scapegoating' and 'we're the baddies'.

It's striking that both groups each strongly focus on one particular person, which they both see as the driving force behind the counterparty. In this way, the opposing interests, opinions and values are projected on the scapegoat or 'baddy'.

4.3.2 Reactions to conflicts and effect on group

The general trend among the residents, as a consequence of conflict, is a reduced investment in the group or the common good. Before, few residents attended the meetings, now it seems even the perseverant residents, especially the conventionalists, will give up soon: 'just can't be bothered anymore', 'this is it, I'm done'.

On the one hand, conventionalists and middle ground people feel a lot of frustration and say they don't have the patience anymore. Almost all of them said they just listen and listen, and have been doing this for years, but nothing seems to change. Residents take a step back because they feel their investment of time and energy isn't worth it anymore.

There's less of an audience for it. There's less of support for it, for a long time there was. [...] but when that same behaviour just keeps being repeated over and over and over again with no change, in spite of UNBELIEVABLE amounts of human attention and input, then people tend to lose interest. (Respondent 9)

⁵ According to the reformists, he chooses how Lammas is represented in the media, to visitors, he idealizes challenges, controls emails and the website... This perceived misrepresentation and undemocratic approach makes them feel like there's an imposed definition of Lammas with which they have to comply although they don't identify with it.

On the other hand reformists express a strong feeling, paradoxically, that they aren't listened to: people still don't hear', 'I'm bored of saying it', 'there's no conversation here' and 'off the radar'.

Conventionalists think it's unclear what the reformists actually want, because it seems they don't want to accept any solution. So they feel it's all about ego, with a lack of effort to understand or compromise with different standpoints or worldviews:

*He's not able to really see or take on mine. I have to keep putting myself into his framework
(Respondent 8)*

The middle ground people seem to imply they trust whichever outcome, because the (more involved) others will make the right decisions. They're satisfied as long as this happens in everyone's favour. Two respondents who were involved in the committee before, now even say the organisation doesn't make decisions that affect them anyway. So it's not worth their time and energy anymore, as they feel they don't have any influence in the meetings. Two other respondents note that in the end it's only 'the people with problems' going to the meetings.

Generally speaking there is a lot of individualism in the ecovillage (but we could ask ourselves what came first: conflict or individualism). On the one hand, this shows in the lack of cohesion between residents, which makes some feel isolated and not much supported. On the other hand this is affirmed by the lack of agreement in the committee, therefore impelling some residents to take matters into their own hands. Furthermore residents mainly organize events, courses or businesses on their own, so rarely through Lammas, or as a community. In that way, there are no constraints or any compromises.

We're cultivating our own smaller community within a broader community and that smaller community is a community that we're choosing, consciously (Respondent 9)

Another consequence is that subgroups emerge, in which working together is experienced as enjoyable and successful in reaching goals. So conflicts are not solved as a group, which means conflict doesn't help to strengthen one united group, rather subgroups form.

4.3.3 Attempts to mediation

From the early years residents recognise the organisation is stuck and progress is very slow with a lot of discussion and drama. There were efforts to get everyone together, address these persistent issues and resolve them together, sometimes with help from a mediator. This was also the case during this research: a procedure was started to involve a mediator in the process of restructuring

the organisation. Also some residents followed courses to learn to communicate better and make decisions more efficiently.

Unfortunately these efforts seem to be unsuccessful, at least long-term. According to some residents it just affirmed there are problems, it brought more of the same: the same discussions were held again, past grievances were brought up and some people take up all the speaking time. Although there was enthusiasm from the whole community to make it work, they became disillusioned. A respondent summarizes: 'the very old dynamics were just at play there'. It's an experience re-affirming itself, whereby every time there's less and less possibilities to make amends because 'the positions are hardening all the time'. Residents don't want to invest anymore because they know what the most likely outcome is.

However residents don't seem to lose hope and leave it at that. A few residents mention a period of reflection. Lammas now just carries on as it is ('bumbling along'), but they think changes will happen sooner or later. Some evaluate if this is the life they want and may make plans to leave. This can possibly be because the primary goals are accomplished: the 75% were attained, so what now? What purpose does life at the ecovillage have, now the hardest times are over? Some note new residents will join the ecovillage in the near future, they could change the dynamics of the community.

4.3.4 Partial Conclusion

Because of the different meanings about what the ecovillage and the organisation are or should be, different groups emerged (reformists, conventionalists and middle ground people). They perceive each other in different ways and they link this with various causes. There's a clear in-group/out-group thinking: the 'other' (the opponent) is seen as a problem case and individualist, or a person that has a lot of power and only uses it to defend their own interests. Thus there's a stereotyping of each other, whereby the other is reduced to a certain role, a story. This is especially projected on one person of each group (reformists and conventionalists) to which power is assigned to make all decisions behind the scenes or to block progress. Interaction within the organisation is about recurring themes and frequently leads to emotional statements that seem to be driven by hostility and distrust. Because the residents are stuck in the same story and stay in their 'role', conflict is consolidated and seems to be in a downwards spiral, in spite of the efforts to resolve it. Subgroups emerged and there is a lot of individualism. Most residents withdraw from interaction, a few further strengthen their position. So the group doesn't develop as a whole to a functional group with a shared vision and clearly defined goals.

4.4 Answering the research questions and linking literature

In this part the findings will be linked with the relevant concepts from the literature review and the research questions. This will then lead to the conclusion in the next chapter.

First and second research questions

How do the conflicts arise (antecedents, external circumstances, causes)?

What are the features of these conflicts?

In terms of group development the ecovillage is situated in the storming-stage of Tuckman's typology. In the first stage, forming, there was especially an orientation and focus on the predetermined goals linked to the Lammas organisation and hence the government. In short, to provide at least 75% of household needs from land based activity. In this stage there was a strong uncertainty about the outcome of the project and there were frustrations and accusations about those who were less productive. There was already division of the group, which manifested further in the next stage. There was also an orientation of the residents to 'stronger members', which were stereotyped in the two most defined groups (reformists and conventionalist): for each of the groups the other leader is the 'baddy'. In this first stage it already appeared some residents don't recognise existing structures or don't identify with them, because they represent goals alien to them.

The storming stage is characterised with a lot of conflict. We could say in this case it was built up in the previous stage and originated in external structural features. As noted before in the literature chapter, individuals try to find their place in the power structure in the storming stage, which leads to subgroups developing. Politics turn into rebellion. Emotions run high, which is a typical reaction to discrepancies in this stage. The case of Lammas fits this typology. The group is polarised and different subgroups emerged or became more established. Residents took a stand and feel they're stuck in certain power dynamics.

They explain the opposing group's power in different ways: on the one hand the reformists think it's about authority and the appropriation of power, grounded in an unclear structure that allows decisions without everyone's consent. On the other hand the conventionalists think the opponent creates power by blocking decisions, which is also based in an unclear decision making process.

The conflicts are about interpretations of (legal) structures and goals, thus how goals are reached and which instruments should be used for this. However, it's also about what the identity of the group is. This is illustrated by the absence of a collective goal. There are also no collectively shared

meanings of norms and structures. This conflict is based on a fundamentally different sense of purpose and interpretation of the concept 'Lammas' and 'community', which is driven by the different values and goals of the residents, but also by a need for social validation of their own opinion and vision. This is partially caused by the role of the government in the creation of Lammas: criteria and guidelines were imposed bottom-up, which created an uncertain environment but also a framework that felt impersonal and alienating to them. This was experienced by some residents like a constraint to their own interests and also restrict them in giving their own meaning to Lammas. These conflicts are based on what Christian (2003) calls 'structural conflict'. The organisational structure is unclear and the decision making procedures haven't been consensually agreed upon and implemented. There are no clear visions, procedures and agreements. This is why there's no collective goal, no common direction the residents can orientate to. This seems to be the most important reason conflict emerged and sustained at Lammas.

Third research question

What effect do the conflicts have on the members of the group (perception, reaction) and thus on the further evolution of the group? Is this functional?

A general trend among the residents, irrespective of their opinion or vision, is that they view conflicts that are actually about practical issues, as conflicts about personal issues or personality. A possible explanation may be that the different groups don't understand each other's motivations and worldviews. In consequence strong hostility and distrust arise. Everyone is carried away in this power dynamic: conflicts aren't only about their own vision anymore, but are sustained by perceptions of 'the other' and personal dynamics. Another explanation could be that residents live in an environment where there's no distinction between work and community. This entails a strong emotional involvement on which other residents have a strong influence.

Some distinctive positions in the conflict are observed among the respondents, based on two dimensions: compromise and investment (figure 1). Compromise means the willingness of residents to compromise, to obtain a solution everyone agrees to. Investment means the residents seem to invest a lot in conflict, to defend their own standpoint or to resolve it, mainly in the meetings. These are roles they have in the conflict and the organisation, but are also roles that others assign to them.

		Investment	
		Low	High
Compromise	Low	Subgroups	Invariables = Reformists
	High	Reconcilers = Middle ground people	Mediators = conventionalists

Figure 1: typology of roles in conflict

The invariables sustain conflict and their position is immovable⁶. In the Lammas case, the reformists fit this typology. Mediators actively try to solve conflict, this is the role of the conventionalists. The middle ground people are the reconcilers: they accept decisions as long as this is beneficial for the community. Among them some are ‘ex-mediators’, who changed position through the years. There’s no individuals fitting ‘low compromise, low investment’, but on a different level subgroups fit this role. There is development within subgroups because they consist of likeminded residents with their own shared goals, taking initiative together. There’s a few possible outcomes if this situation is further consolidated: some mediators and reconcilers could evolve to a position of low compromise and high investment, becoming ‘invariables’. It’s also possible the different groups will only defend and implement their own interests which will lead to a further alienation from the group.

In the context of group development at Lammas, the reformists and conventionalists seem to be stuck in a dynamic obstructing further development: recurrent patterns are observed in the different groups, whereby they increasingly defend their positions and in doing so also consolidate them.

⁶ It’s very important to note that this is a typology, so it doesn’t fit reality perfectly. There may be situations and issues in which the distinction between the different positions isn’t so clear, or even switched. I based this typology on the main conflict, namely the Lammas organisation and structure. Also, as I stated in the previous paragraph, these are roles taken in the conflict, but also roles attributed to them by others. So the position on the two dimensions of investment and compromise is influenced by perceptions of respondents.

Residents seem stuck in a cyclical, self-strengthening process. There is a strong in-group/out-group thinking. There's a certain stereotyping of other residents, where the notion of 'the other' is constructed through their position in the conflict. At the same time there's a strengthening trend of withdrawal of individuals and a diminished investment in community, also for those who are still involved at this time. The only ones who seem to persevere, are the reformists and one of the conventionalists. So a part of the residents is withdrawing and a few consolidate their position.

Because the Lammas organisation is the only instrument used for gathering the community, there are no [formal] meetings apart from this structure. The interactions of the group as a whole only have meaning within the framework and decision procedures of the organisation. Thus the group is defined by what it officially is in the organisation and this influences the residents' perception. This is sustained by the absence of a collective goal, there is no shared, consensual idea of them as a community.

Because of withdrawal and individualisation, residents make their own choices and so implement decisions not necessarily in line with what the community wants. They only work together in subgroups and some small initiatives are created, apart from the bigger ecovillage idea, to avoid conflict. In consequence the group doesn't develop as a whole anymore, but only in subgroups with their own interpretations and goals. On the one hand there's less investment in community and resolving conflicts, on the other hand positions in conflicts strengthen. Therefore group identity now only revolves around these issues and so there's little identification with others. Thus no positive, productive group culture was created with shared meanings, values, procedures and goals: norms and values collide, residents are stuck in their role in the group and there are no collective, agreed goals anymore for the community. This is why the group has no strong framework in which it can successfully develop, hence evolve to a functional group. Such a situation leads to dysfunction of a group, but also to dysfunction of the group development process because it comes to a halt.

Whether a group reaches a deadlock during the storming stage or not, might be explained by the type of conflict experienced in this stage. Although these conflicts are about structural features of the organisation, they have a strong personal aspect in a situation like Lammas. Issues are often related to position in the group and have a big impact on personal life because they occur in the community. Conflicts about values and scarce resources are more probable to turn into relationship conflicts in such a situation. As mentioned in the literature review, relationship conflict has a negative impact on group functioning. Maybe the odds of efficient and functional development depend on the type of conflict in the different development phases.

Chapter 5: conclusion

With this research I want to contribute to literature about conflicts in contemporary alternative communities. Conflict was approached from the perspective that it's a crucial factor in group development process, which according to Tuckman can make or break a group. The ultimate goal was to find if conflict is whether functional or not for the development of a stable, functional group. The research questions were:

- How do the conflicts arise (antecedents, external circumstances, causes)?
- What are the features of these conflicts?
- What effect do the conflicts have on the members of the group (perception, reaction) and thus on the further evolution of the group? Is this functional?

This research was conducted in a young ecovillage in Wales, which established 7 years ago. I used an ethnographic method, based on participant observation and semi-structured interviews.

5.1 Theoretical insights

The findings show conflicts at Lammas originate in external structural features and different values and ideals. Because no clear visions, procedures and guidelines were agreed upon from the start, there aren't shared meanings and collective goals. This led to different groups with a strong hostility and distrust towards one another. There are a few distinguishable positions among the residents which form a typology based on two dimensions; compromise and investment in conflicts: the invariables, reconcilers and mediators. At Lammas, these are respectively reformists, middle ground people and conventionalists. There's a strong in-group/out-group thinking between these different groups. Conflict at Lammas is a dynamic process in which recurrent patterns in the group lead on the one hand to consolidation of positions, but on the other hand also to withdrawal and formation of subgroups. This conflict seems to be stuck because no positive, productive group culture was created. Thus conflict isn't functional in this case because it led to a standstill of the group. Furthermore mediation is difficult because the original conflicts grew into relationship conflicts and there are no procedures or mechanisms to attain a constructive solution.

Results of this research are innovative for different reasons: it contributes to literature about conflict in ecovillages, a subject rarely chosen as a central focus in the context of intentional communities (1); conflict is placed in a broader context and there's an attempt to understand the underlying causes (2); it shows how group members construct meaning and how this influences behaviour (3); different

types of conflict which might arise when an ecovillage is founded are discussed, the possible consequences for the group development process are explained (4); the importance of external features for group development are elucidated, as is the case for organisation and goals (5).

5.2 Research limitations and suggestions for future research in the ecovillage movement

Some limitations of this study must be remembered. The specific research context and circumstances require some consideration. Different research questions would likely have led to a different analysis, because conflict is strongly linked to the ecovillage's specific circumstances. It's also important to recognize this analysis is strongly based on the residents' point of views, on their accounts of reality. In addition I did not interview all residents for different reasons. Furthermore my research was limited in time: it's a 6 week-snapshot, spread over 2 months. I haven't experienced what happened before and after my research. I don't know yet if a stable, functional group will develop. For these reasons caution is needed about using generalizations and causal links in other contexts.

These findings offer some possibilities and new directions for future research. More research should be conducted about conflict and group development in different contexts, so findings and causes could be more generalized. Most group and conflict research happens in management teams and working groups of companies. There should be more research contexts like this one: Lammas is an egalitarian organisation without leaders, in addition what happens in the group has a big impact on private life. Furthermore the linear vision of Tuckman is too constraining: development from one to the next stage doesn't necessarily mean there is less conflict in the group. There should be more research about conflict in later stages, even when the group is fully functional, to understand how a successful group develops and resolves conflict as something positive. Also different types of conflict could be linked to a functional or dysfunctional development, it's shown in this research but should be confirmed in other situations. Finally there should be more investment in longitudinal research on the evolution of groups and which role conflict has in this evolution.

I have a few suggestions for ecovillages and the broader movement of intentional communities: my findings showed clear agreements are important for group functioning and development. When all residents agree, a group can face challenges and crisis better. This case shows goals based on common, sustainable ideals aren't sufficient. Just because these goals have been reached, doesn't mean there's a happy group. Freedom isn't necessarily good: because there aren't any commitments in the ecovillage, conflict easily divides the group. There should be conscious investment in social

support, cohesion and conflict management. To achieve this clear rules should be established beforehand, based on a shared vision of all. These rules should be correctly implemented by building in strong mechanisms.

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This is a comprehensive list of all the articles and books that were cited and used in the original dissertation. If you want to consult a source, I recommend using <https://scholar.google.com>. If you cannot open an article or book (as some are hidden or protected), you're welcome to send me an email and I will try to provide it to you.

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