



Report on GEN-Europe Activities 2011

Introduction

GEN Europe has seen a lot of growth in the past year. Many new projects have been started and we have come a long way towards achieving our goal of diversifying sources of funding: While Gaia Trust continues to give much appreciated financial support to GEN, we have run projects financed by the EU Grundtvig program, Lush Cosmetics and the German Foreign Ministry. The membership fees and conference fees continue to be another important source of income.

Supporting the emergence of GEN Africa has remained central to our activities. Several of the projects we run are increasing our networking efforts in various parts of the continent: The Congo Conference, the Orissa EDE, (having several Africans among the participants served to initiate South-South exchange across continents), the Sieben Linden EDE, the North Africa Project, and finally, the Senegal EDE. All these were funded through GEN-Europe.

A significant achievement was the launch of a new GEN Europe website in October 2010 and the launch of a new GEN-Africa website in October 2011. We reached out to youth by creating a youth meeting parallel to the conference in Tamera and found various ways to strengthen the GEN grassroots: Grundtvig Workshops, financial support for member's projects and, at the heart of our networking activities, the GEN-Europe Ecovillage Conference and General Assembly, again with the possibility to apply for Grundtvig grants for some of us.

Activities and Projects

Ecovillages and Sustainable Living Conference

The Conference brought together many of the leading practitioners of ecovillage community living throughout Europe and Africa for a week of inspiration, training and networking activities at Tamera, a healing biotope in the Alentejo region of Portugal. The 160 participants came from 33 countries as far as Russia, Israel, Kenya, the Congo, Senegal, Ireland, Australia, the USA and Canada. The conference was followed by the General Assembly of GEN Europe.



Youth Meeting 'Students of Sustainability'

Dreaming and celebrating are as important as planning and doing, in order to make our dreams come true, says the Australian project consultant John Croft, who came to share the Dragon Dreaming process during the GEN-conference for the 3rd year in a row. Thank you, John!



One of these projects is the youth network NEXT GEN. From the 7th to the 11th of July over 40 young people from different ecovillages were planning, celebrating and dreaming their future. But that is not the only thing that is special about this youth group. We already have a lot of ideas for different spin off projects, such as building a system for education of young people who live in ecovillages, through which they can learn from other ecovillages and share their knowledge with the present youth group. We have the idea to hold annual meetings for like-minded young people, so that they can share their dreams and start new projects.



Grundtvig Learning Partnership 'Transition to Resilience Training'

The two-year Grundtvig Learning Partnership is coming to an end in July 2011, while the collaboration around this will continue. Transition2Resilience brought together the experience of some of the leading trainers and organisations in the field of sustainability education (GEN Europe, the Transition Network, the Permaculture Academy, the Hub-network, Centre for Human Emergence-NL, Cultivate Ireland, Damanhur, Sieben Linden and Findhorn Foundation) to build a 2 year learning journey for change makers.



The LP has been chosen as 'Exemplary' by the German National Agency. For more information, a brochure can be found at <http://transition2resilience.org/content/contact-details>. A multilateral partnership application will be submitted in February 2012 to run pilot courses.

Ecovillages Project

An extensive EU-funded collaboration project with the name ECOVILLAGES, recently started operations and will run for a three-year period 2011-2013. It focuses on a survey of ecovillages around the Baltic Sea with a view to promoting ecovillages as innovative sustainable rural development.

During the project, various approaches, problems and methods of starting and developing ecovillages in areas such as eco-technologies, eco-practices like agriculture/garden and social community building will be documented and toolkits for ecovillage initiators developed.



The project is funded by the EU Baltic Sea Region Programme (Interreg) with 1.46 M EUR, dubbed a flagship of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region and awarded the status of Baltic 21 Lighthouse project by the Council of Baltic Sea States. GEN Europe has become an Associate Partner of the project and will benefit directly by strengthening its presence in Northern Europe.



GEN at UN DPI Conference

Macaco Tamerice (GEN), Ana Rhodes (Findhorn), Gerd (Transition Training) and May East (Gaia Education) joined as a team the UN DPI Conference in Bonn which is the prime annual event of NGOs in association with the United Nations. The conference's theme in preparation for Rio+20 was Sustainable Societies Responsive Citizens.

Their workshop "Designing the Transition to Sustainable Societies: the Role of Education in Engaging Citizens" received a lot of attention and many visitors.

GEN used the opportunity to make the organisation visible, contribute to the final manifesto and co-created a joint strategy to Rio+20.



Grundtvig Workshops

These workshops are fully funded by the EU, including participants travel and subsistence costs as well as organization and facilitation. GEN Europe has been running two of these during the course of the year, and two more to come:

- Permaculture Design Course, May 2011
- Cooperative Games and Circle Dances, July 2011
- Communicate Yourself!, November 2011
- Ways to sustainable Living, May 2012

Communicate Yourself! Workshop, November 2011



This intensive workshop was held from the 27th of November until the 4th of December in Sieben Linden. Participants from 18 countries were perfecting their communication skills, shared their ideas and practiced to facilitate and harvest group conversations. The program contained a lot of exercises and gave useful tools to help community building in the future. The participants stayed in contact after the course to help each other's project the best they can.

Development of GEN-Africa

Congo Conference

How to develop a sustainable society in the Democratic Republic of Congo? The conference was held from the 11th until the 13th of May 2011, in Kinshasa, addressing issues of sustainable development and permaculture in the DR Congo. This conference brought together representatives from the Ministry of Environment, Nature Conservation and Tourism, the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of communications and media.

Also in attendance were representatives from the IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature), civil society including indigenous Pygmy leaders, international NGOs, local NGOs, the United Nations and international experts.



North Africa Project

This is a project financed by the German foreign Ministry under the title ‘Supporting the emergence of ecovillage strategies for climate change adaptation and stability in the region’. This comes as an important recognition of the work of GEN. Ecovillage strategies, which involve the transition to resilience of large networks of traditional villages, can inspire whole regions or countries to work with civil engagement for human security and environmental protection.

The project will run from May to December 2011 and involves support for the set-up of a GEN-Africa website with an updated database of projects and resources, funding for 10 participants from Northern Africa to travel to an Ecovillage Design Education taking place in Senegal in October/November 2011 and funding for an Ecovillage Conference to be held in Sekem, Egypt in November 2011. GEN-Europe is receiving 69.000,00 € for this work.

New Website Launched

A new website has been launched and is available at <http://gen-africa.org/>.

This is another step in the process of the emergence of GEN-Africa as an independent national network, supported by GEN-Europe.

Michael Kigozi as the webmaster is collecting and publishing ecovillage news from the continent and can be contacted at contact@gen-africa.org



EDE Sieben Linden



The EDE in Sieben Linden has always served as an event for international networking and exchange, with a special focus on inviting experienced grassroots activists from Africa. This year was one of celebration, as the German Foreign Ministry stepped in to fund the participation of 14 Africans. Many follow-up projects are emerging across Africa.

Egypt Conference at Sekem



On the weekend of 18-22 November, 2011 over sixty Africans from many different countries and backgrounds, gathered at the farm site of SEKEM, a model for sustainable business development located about sixty kilometers from Cairo, Egypt.

The Ecovillage Conference, subtitled “Empowering Communities for Sustainable Development in Northern Africa” was sponsored by the German Foreign Ministry as part of the Northern Africa project. Most conference attendees came from the targeted Northern African countries and received full funding to attend, including their flights to Egypt.





The conference consisted of a tour of SEKEM, presentations from a range of attendees about existing initiatives in Africa and a variety of workshops. Themes ranged from growing the GEN Africa network, to a tour and examination of subsurface soil irrigation practices at SEKEM. The conference concluded with a joyous celebration of music and dance performed by attendees, representing the cultural traditions of their respective countries.



Overall, the Ecovillage Conference appears to have been a great success, with both the conference facilitators and the host site of SEKEM receiving a great amount of appreciation.

EDE Senegal

The EDE in Senegal finally took place from November 23 to December 22, 2011. Congratulations to the Senegalese team for setting up the first EDE in Africa!! 25 participants came from Senegal, the neighbouring countries (Burkina Faso and Gambia), but also from Ghana, Congo, Egypt, Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco. The course visited both ecovillages that have been part of GEN-Senegal for many years, and one of the villages newly developed as part of the Senegalese government's strategy to transition 14 000 traditional villages to ecovillages. So far, the government agency have worked with 3 villages, 25 more villages are being started on in 2012. The strategy is an interesting one, which brings up many questions around the fruitful marriage of top-down and bottom-up approaches. Kosha Joubert had the interesting opportunity to meet with the Minister of Ecovillages.



Orissa EDE

Back in 2007 John George of THREAD, Orissa, India took part in the first EDE in Sieben Linden, Germany. He brought with him news and inspiring images of a women's movement: women taking an oath over fire as they step into leadership – pledging to safeguard their communities, their forests, their children; climbing on tables and pitching speeches to each other.



We hatched a dream to bring the EDE to Orissa in order to further empower the Orissa Nari Samaj women's movement and explore the possibility of recognizing their villages as ecovillages. Four years passed before this dream came true.





From January 29 – February 27 2011, 33 participants met with a facilitation team of 8 (half Indian) to embark on a journey of mutual learning. Besides John George, 4 more members of the Nari Samaj had participated in the EDE in Sieben Linden – making for a strong and committed holding team. Now, we offered 11 places to participants from Nari Samaj. Among the participants were 14 village network leaders from India, but also from Cambodia, Vietnam and Brazil. Others travelled from Congo, South Africa, Thailand, USA, Finland and Serbia to join.

A strong emphasis was put on participatory learning (eliciting the wisdom present in the group), experiential learning and the exchange of best practice. The idea of establishing ‘pilot ecovillages’, which serve as centres of inspiration to wider village networks was applauded and will be put into practice not only within Orissa, but across India and in parts of Africa.

Organisation

Changes in GEN Europe staff and council

Kosha Joubert, who stepped down as GEN-Europe president in November 2010 in order to take up a staff position, was elected to serve as president of GEN-International in October 2011.

Two new volunteers have started working in the Sieben Linden office – Jonathan Klodt and Daniel Zimmermann from Hungary.

Jonathan is responsible for general email support, bookkeeping and other administrative duties as well as working on the conference planning, design, website updates and IT infrastructure as well as other projects, e.g. trade between ecovillages.

Daniel is volunteering within an European Voluntary Service (EVS) scheme. As the representative of the Hungarian GEN-National Network he is responsible for parts of the conference planning, workshop administration and the youth movement within GEN-Europe.

Also, Ethan Hirsch-Tauber has been working for GEN-Europe in Findhorn alongside Kosha for two months supporting her with the Egypt Conference and the Senegal EDE.

Membership

The number of members has been steadily increasing over the last years. GEN Europe now has 47 full members (ecovillages and National Ecovillage Networks) plus 100 supportive members (individuals and organisations). There seems to be a lot of interest in the work GEN does in the general public, there have been a lot more new members this year than in previous years.

General Assembly

The General Assembly of members took place July 12-13 in Tamera, Portugal. The rapid growth of the organisation led to a lot of questions, while opening new possibilities. ‘Office multiplication instead of office transition’ sums it up: decentralized growth that allows many more people to be directly involved, especially through running projects.



It was decided that the core office will remain in Sieben Linden until 2014 instead of 2012.

Next year's meeting will be held at the Eco-Valley Foundation, Hungary, during the second week of July.

GEN-Ambassadors and National Networks

A process has been designed to make it possible for individuals to apply to become a GEN-Ambassador in their country. If successful, this process leads to more outreach opportunities and the establishment of new national networks. For more information visit <http://gen-europe.org/join-us/get-involved/index.htm>

We would like to thank everyone who made all these projects in 2011 possible. It is great to have your support and we look forward to an exciting year 2012.

Your GEN-Europe Team

