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Comprehensive Assessment 2

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Model Effective Uses of Knowledge

PART 1:

I understand that Fielding was founded for the purpose of, with the vision of, providing advanced education for “mid-career professionals.” As such, I would expect the typical Fielding student to be well-established in their “field.” To be well-established in a field requires that there be a well-defined field to begin with. For example, many of the students I’ve met at Fielding are “Organization Development” consultants. To become a consultant in a field assumes having achieved a certain level of expertise and credibility, and having gained some fluency with prevailing theories and practices in that field. And even though a respected scholar-practitioner like Robert Marshak (2009) would assert that the boundaries of what exactly constitutes “Organization Development” may be blurred, nevertheless, there is a coherent body of literature that serves to demarcate what is *in* the field and what is not. Within this body of literature, scholars engage in conversation that further defines the field and helps to provide ever-increasing differentiation– and thus clarity– to the nuanced variation of terms and concepts, theories and practices that are utilized by practitioners in the field.

In the “cocktail party” metaphor favored by Fielding faculty Keith Melville, there is at one side of the room a conversation underway among a coterie of participants who identify

themselves with the designation “Organization Development” – and surrounding them will be a host of other conversations by scholar and practitioners identifying with those particular “fields.”

I open this second Comprehensive Assessment essay in this way because I perceive the purpose of this essay is to prepare students for their pending dissertation by helping them to articulate how they may position themselves so that their dissertation may become a real contribution to their “field.” Yet, what if I was to say that I don’t have a field; or rather, the purpose of my academic trajectory has been to define a *new* field, a *meta*-field, a field of fields? That is to say, in Dr. Melville’s cocktail party I have not identified with any of the conversations as being my own; instead, my purpose has been, like a butterfly, to flitter from conversation to conversation and hone in on that knowledge or perspective which may be useful in defining or contributing to – *re-contextualizing* – the *meta*-conversation in the room. And what is this meta-conversation to which all the various academic disciplines and all the various professional practices are now referring? The meta-conversation could be reframed as the following question:

How are we ever going to make the human presence on planet Earth ‘sustainable?’

This is not a question that can be answered in the “physicists” conversation, nor can it be adequately addressed in the “policy and foreign relations” conversation, and not even the “Organization Development” conversation will be able to give it full justice – no, this question is so all-encompassing that it would be better to place it in the center of the room, thus making it the ‘whole’ to which all the various partial conversations may contribute. Indeed, it could be argued that the human presence on planet Earth is growing so tenuous that to continue bantering in self-contained disciplinary conversations is becoming insular and downright trivial.

Such are the premises from which I have approached the educational trajectory that is culminating with my Fielding dissertation. And before I begin the actual purpose of this essay – listed as “modeling effective uses of knowledge” – I should introduce another qualifier:

Since most students at Fielding are “mid-career professionals,” this implies that there probably has been some time since they were in the active student mode; that is, the typical pattern may look like this: 1) go to university and obtain a couple of degrees while still relatively young; 2) work in a career for an extended period; until 3) attend Fielding to get a Ph.D. to advance career potentials and demonstrate mastery in the field. Once again, I feel like an exception: I did not entertain university seriously until I was 35 years old, and I have been a full-time student ever since. Considering that I am now 52, that means I have been a full-time student *for the past 17 years*. Sure, one could say I have become a ‘professional student,’ but there is more to it than that: my self-chosen career has been *to provide an academic precedent for the meta-conversation*.

I have been very fortunate in this regard, and a glance at my CV will validate: Through five years in a self-designed B.A. at Fairhaven College, I created the world’s first ever formal degree devoted to the emerging concept of “Ecovillage Design” – a broadly multidisciplinary proto-curriculum I entitled “Village Design: Ekistics for the 21st Century.” Then, through four years in a self-designed M.A. in Whole Systems Design at Antioch University Seattle, I explored the concept of “Sustainable Community Design” from numerous interdisciplinary angles. By the time I arrived at Fielding, then, I had already been a full-time student working on the meta-conversation for *nine consecutive years*. The wonderful flexibility and self-responsibility afforded at Fielding has allowed me to continue this project unabated. Through Fielding, I have

been able to deepen and expand my exploration considerably, and have experienced a variety of opportunities to ground (or test) my exploration in professional practice.

What I have discovered is that the meta-conversation needs a context; that is, ‘sustainability’ needs a practical, everyday, commonsense, real-life setting – what the phenomenologist Husserl (1954/1970) termed the “lifeworld” (*Lebenswelt*) – for it to become meaningful. In other words, a *theoretical* sustainability won’t do anybody any good – although theory certainly has its place, as in the synthesis of disciplines. Even then, theory needs to be followed by practical application to test if it’s truly ‘sustainable.’ What’s more, this context in which to practice sustainability needs to be a *human* scale (Sale, 1980), the scale where people can meet in face-to-face conversation, where people can interact corporeally with a specific environment – or better yet, a specific *ecology*. What I am saying is that to speak of “global sustainability” is vague and vacuous – where would be the points of intervention? Indeed, it could be argued that the more entrenched becomes the concept of “global economy” the more unsustainable everything becomes. Even to speak at the scale of “national” sustainability – as with charts and diagrams and projected figures of particular nation-states – is an abstraction far removed from the scale in which sustainability needs to be implemented. I understand that there are huge (can we say ‘monstrous’?) interstate and transnational entities that want to control the conversation – especially select major banks – and I will continue to assert that these are a big part of the problem.

So what *is* the most appropriate or productive scale in which to frame the meta-conversation of sustainability? I have attempted to demonstrate that in my 17-year educational exploration: The over-arching theme has been and continues to be “Sustainable Community Design and Development.”(Please pause for a moment and allow the sublimity of this phrase to

register in your subconscious. What sort of vision appears in your mind's eye?) From an academic perspective, which subjects would be pertinent to inform this theme? The answer: just about everything – from physics to plumbing and all points in between! By placing Sustainable Community Design and Development at the center, we may go from conversation to conversation at the cocktail party and glean that which may be most beneficial to our project – and there is probably not a single conversation in the room that could not offer something useful.

Yet we must be discriminative. For example, say we approach the “Psychology” conversation. Psychology is such a vast domain that there surely will be many sub-conversations to choose from. We notice that “Jungian” Psychology has some very interesting perspectives. The concept of “archetype,” for instance, could be very useful when designing a sustainable community. Then we hear about “Gestalt” Psychology, and on some intuitive level this feels right. When we understand that part of sustainability involves putting back together a world that centuries of “reductionism” has torn asunder, then we detect inherent value in the work of scholars who are attempting to articulate what it is like to perceive the world in terms of “wholes.” So we investigate and become familiar with some Gestalt Psychology – though we would never regard ourselves as “Gestalt Psychologists.” Then we overhear the “Behaviorists” sub-conversation, and right away something does not feel right. As we listen closer we discover that these scholars are speaking in terms of “mechanistic” metaphors and are conducting experiments on “subjects” in laboratories. Noooo, this type of behavior could never lead to sustainability. Mechanistic metaphors have contributed to de-humanizing the world and sanctioning the soulless efficiency of corporatism and fascism – so we disregard any more input from “Behaviorist Psychology.”

In a similar manner, we meander over to the “Geology” conversation. There are far fewer sub-conversations underway here; yet, once again, with the goals of our over-arching Project in mind, we must be discriminative. It may be very interesting to learn about Pangaea and the subduction occurring out on the continental shelf – and this knowledge certainly helps us to appreciate the amazing dynamism of our living Earth – yet for a Sustainable Community Design and Development our concerns are more immediate, more *human* scale. We will need to learn how to interpret the *local* geologic profile of our specific home place. For example, where are the most fertile topsoils? We would never want to build on top of these precious reserves; instead, we will want to lay our foundations in solid subsurface conditions. Is there any possibility of digging down to obtain a geothermal energy source? What is the status of any aquifers in the region? As before, we would never consider ourselves to be “Geologists,” yet we will have gleaned some very useful information by listening in on the Geology conversation.

I won’t belabor this stream of thought; yet I hope I have been able to illustrate my essential point. By placing “Sustainable Community Design and Development” at the center of my education, virtually every field recognized as a discrete conversation by an educated group of scholars *or* practitioners – or, in those rare cases, by accomplished *scholar-practitioners* – will have selective relevance. This phenomenon brings a special challenge to the current essay, for I am being asked to:

- Describe how your work engages, or might engage, the community of scholars

The immediate question becomes: “Which community of scholars?” If I identified myself as an “Organization Development” consultant, for example, then the community to address would be quite apparent. As it is, I think it would be possible to engage a *variety* of associated communities of scholars.

I am further asked to describe:

- How your work engages, or might engage, the practice of practitioners in your field

Again I could respond: “What is my field?” for there is no established academic or professional precedent – no degrees yet offered in Sustainable Community Design and Development and no one being contracted to undertake such work (even though this could very well be the most important work of all!).

Yet, lest the assessor should believe I have painted myself into a corner, I can admit that I have pressed this point if only to maximize the tension, a tension that will serve to vivify or bring into stark relief the coming resolution. The truth is, I *have* been traversing a unique trajectory – visionary perhaps, anticipatory, idealistic – and so my pending dissertation may very well assume these same characteristics. In order to prepare for this dissertation and achieve the goals of the present essay – which I understand to be aligning with a particular tradition (not quite yet “field”) so that my dissertation may contribute substantive knowledge *to* this tradition – let me step back a bit and survey a few of those sources in which some attempt has been made to realize the sort of multidisciplinary synthesis I have been describing here, as reified in my education, and directed toward the goal of articulating a Sustainable Community Design and Development. The following are meant to serve as exemplars; there is no pretense of presenting a formal accounting.

Lewis Mumford was a prolific scholar-writer who relentlessly railed against the deleterious effects of “the machine” on modern settlement patterning and society in general. On the flip side, Mumford exalted “organic” settlement patterning and its effect on the social order. This mechanistic/organic distinction is fundamental to comprehend when preparing for the design and

development of *sustainable* settlements. In his impressive compendium *The City in History* (1961), Mumford exemplifies the medieval ‘town’ as the model to emulate. And while deep interdisciplinary scholarship is evidenced throughout his writings – especially as he deftly interweaves Psychological, Sociological, and Anthropological considerations into his critique of city development through history – there is no indication that he ever thought about *practicing* his convictions. We are left with a few pointed jabs at the planning profession yet no coherent proposal for bringing forth the envisioned ‘organic medieval’ pattern in the current era. Here’s another reason why I assert there may be a “tradition” to reference, yet no real “field” to work with.

More recently, a pair of visionary architects from the Bay Area – Sim Van der Ryn and Peter Calthorpe – forwarded a groundbreaking proposal in their *Sustainable Communities: A New Design Synthesis for Cities, Suburbs, Towns* (1986). It will be very instructive to quote from the Foreword:

What must count for knowledge in the design of sustainable culture is *ecology* – a balanced connection and adaptive fit between the products of the human mind and the processes of nature [added emphasis].

While this recognition that ecology and attunement with natural processes is intrinsic to any discussion about ‘sustainability’ can be traced back to the fervent period of conceptual gestation that was the late 1960s and early 1970s, *Sustainable Communities* was the first attempt (of which I am aware) by practicing, professional architects to integrate this understanding as a “design synthesis.” Thus, we are no longer speaking solely in the theoretical language of broad principles but applying this understanding to actual projects. For example, the authors highlight their Case Study: Marin Solar Village.

Unfortunately, despite its brilliant demonstration of ecological design principles, Marin Solar Village was never built. There is still a *biiiiig* gap between visionary design ideas and financing realities. The sober truth is, opportunities to actually witness a real ‘sustainable community’ project manifest in 3-D physical form is very rare – which makes the various ‘ecovillage’ models that have managed to pop up around the globe that much more extraordinary. I think Sim Van der Ryn is still teaching courses at UC Berkeley and disseminating these lofty ideals while Peter Calthorpe went on to make quite a name for himself (and a tidy bundle) by championing the “New Urbanism” vision through his firm based in San Francisco. In his 1993 book, *The Next American Metropolis: Ecology, Community, and the American Dream*, Calthorpe explains:

[*Sustainable Communities*] was the beginning of an effort to define the form and technologies of communities which could be environmentally benign, economically efficient, and socially robust. It was a first attempt to integrate many disciplines in order to define alternatives for urban, suburban, and new growth conditions.

Although that work defined the environmental and technical basis of sustainable communities, it failed to incorporate the “urbanism” which makes communities socially vibrant and alive [from Acknowledgements].

It’s important to cite the examples of Van der Ryn and Calthorpe because it seems that the responsibility for “designing sustainable communities” has been given to the architects. In fact, it’s become almost predictable: when I meet someone for the first time and reveal that my interest is in “designing sustainable communities,” the reply will be, “Oh, are you an architect?” No, I am not an architect, though knowledge of architecture is very important for what I do – just as is knowledge of numerous other “fields.” Of course we can expect architects to get the job,

however, because they are trained to be “design professionals,” and this is stature to aspire to – though I would argue that architects are generally not provided with the broad multidisciplinary education that would enable them to *be* effective designers of sustainable community. What’s more, architects are trained and acculturated – as a reflection of the hyper-egoism of our isolated individual society – to think in terms of isolated, individual buildings, not necessarily *assemblages* of buildings (with their associated streetscapes, plazas, parks, public venues, renewable energy systems, etc.) and much less about the encompassing ecology. In that sense, Van der Ryn and Calthorpe were an exception; in their younger days they pursued an ideal yet altered course when reality set in.

Another source worth mentioning in this effort to align myself with a “tradition” for the purposes of this essay is the exemplary work of Judy and Michael Corbett of “Village Homes” in Davis, California. The Corbetts were able to design and build a model of sustainable community touted as “one of the best examples of multifunction sustainable development in the world” (Corbett & Corbett, 2000, p. x). Their book *Designing Sustainable Communities* (2000) describes the design and development process and the almost miraculous way they were able to get the project through zoning and other legal obstacles. Michael Corbett, by the way, is not a scholar *or* an architect but rather a businessman and a developer. A lesson here might be: if you really want to see a sustainable community built, don’t bother with schooling!

While there is a vast literature from which I could have drawn emphasizing various aspects of Sustainable Community Design and Development, from this angle or that, these three sources were chosen because they are influential syntheses – and besides, two of them actually contain in their titles the phrase *Sustainable Communities*. Of these sources, one is by a distinguished

scholar who made no pretense of applying his knowledge to practice; one is by a couple of innovative practitioners who recognized the value of interdisciplinary research yet who were compelled to emphasize either one pole or the other (in order to ‘make a living’); and lastly, one is by a practitioner who made no pretense at all about a scholarly approach. With this background, I would now like to return to two of the questions being addressed in this second Comprehensive Assessment essay:

- Describe how your work engages, or might engage, the community of scholars
- Describe how your work engages, or might engage, the practice of practitioners in your field

Perhaps by now I have substantiated the claim that there is no established “field” to which I may contribute. We could say instead there has been a “tradition,” a certain way of thinking about human settlements that is seeking to find expression in our day – and there have been precedents, initial attempts at shaping ‘that’ which wants to come into being (such as my degree programs). So let’s begin from there.

A couple of weeks ago, I attended a workshop sponsored by the Urban Land Institute on the 51st floor of the tower at 2 Union Plaza in downtown Seattle. The title of the workshop was “Integrative Design,” and the presenters were two innovative architects from the East Coast. In the audience were a variety of “practitioners:” other architects, mechanical engineers, project managers, developers, contractors, owners, etc. – everybody you would need to assemble to design and construct a building like the tower at 2 Union Plaza. (I didn’t check but I doubt there were any scholars there).

The workshop was very instructive. The East Coast architects were energetic, enthusiastic, and really knew their stuff. For them, Integrative Design is a process whereby all

the various specialists on a big building project will meet together, in an iterative fashion, so that they may coordinate their efforts – that’s it! The architects also showed Case Studies: the two that caught my attention were at the scale of a “school” and another at the scale of a “watershed” – in other words, *design assemblages*. When I asked them about “community scale,” they responded by re-mentioning how important it is to get all the stakeholders together – yet it was apparent by the evasive tone that they didn’t have any Case Studies at community scale.

The reason that I include this story in my essay is because these architects went on raving about how Integrative Design is at the threshold of a new era, and how it’s going to revolutionize the way design and building is done in the USA – and everybody in the audience seemed to agree. I had to chuckle, however, with pleasant surprise, because I have been entertaining many of these thoughts and concepts for years! For example, it was just 10 years ago that I graduated with an M.A. in Whole Systems Design and 20 years ago that I took my first Permaculture Design Course (the presenters even showed a slide from the *Permaculture Designer’s Manual*). These design disciplines already contain the principles expounded as “Integrative Design” – in fact, I’ve organized my whole life around these principles!

This may sound like an AHA moment – and it was! I’m starting to realize that I’ve been immersed in school for so long that I’ve not been sensitive to developments in the professional world. I could assert, and with some authority, that the design professionals are beginning to catch up – so this must be a wonderful time to prepare a dissertation. Perhaps it won’t be too much longer before the design professionals – and all those practitioners represented at that workshop – will be ready to begin thinking in terms of a wholistic “Sustainable Community Design and Development”? In that sense, the subject matter of my dissertation may be able to ‘seed’ these professions with ideas and concepts to prepare them for this next stage of

evolutionary development. In that way, I may engage both the community of scholars *and* the community of practitioners in what might be considered an “emerging” field.

Perhaps there’s room to disclose here briefly what I wish to introduce as subject matter for my dissertation – and this is going way beyond what an Integrative Design might imagine at the moment. I still have one more paper to write as coursework before my dissertation. This paper will be entitled: “Towards a Neurophenomenology of Settlement Morphology.” There’s been some fascinating work done recently with advances in brain imaging techniques. Some of the results are finding their way into books with titles like: *The Architect’s Brain* (2011), *Architecture and the Brain* (2007), and *Brain Landscape* (2009) – there is even an “Academy of Neuroscience for Architecture.” Anyone who has been stunned by the awe-inspiring beauty upon, say, entering Chartres cathedral, will understand intuitively that the built environment can affect us psychologically. Well, recent brain imaging techniques are able to verify this at the neurological level.

And yet, as can be expected, the architects are still thinking in terms of individual buildings: how individual buildings affect people psychologically. I wish to assert again that this solipsistic phenomenon is a consequence of a highly individualistic culture – ‘culture’ here pertaining to both the greater society and the sub-culture of architecture; that is, individual isolated egos designing individual isolated building – and both failing to take account of the vital role of *context*. It is this context that I want to address: how does the *context* in which people live affect them psychologically?

I’ve been indelibly marked by the joyful experience of walking through villages in Tuscany and the Provence. Previously, I’ve characterized the experience as “a gentle massage

for the nervous system.” After learning some phenomenology, I’ve been able to describe the experience from the perspective of ‘direct perception:’ the sense of anticipation as one moves around a flowing curve; the sudden joy upon discovering that a fountain has been placed at a strategic line-of-sight; the gradual unfoldment of detail as one approaches a sacred building through the townscape; the occasional glimpse of distant vistas through side-street openings, etc. Such a context is a real pleasure to participate in, psychologically and socially – and what is happening neurologically?

I can compare this experience with moving through the downtown grid of a major metropolis (Seattle is the one I am most familiar with). Sure it’s loud and unpleasant, full of jarring vibrations and expressionless faces, yet what about the spatial arrangement? What is happening neurologically as one moves about the square geometric abstraction? Perhaps “moves about” is being a bit generous: isn’t it more like a feeling of being channeled through hall-like corridors? I’ve described it as a “digital” experience: you walk down the sidewalk until you arrive at a corner. There you have two choices: either to proceed straight ahead or to make a 90 degree turn, like a robot. Ninety-degrees is a stressful aspect: people approaching the corner from different directions are often on a collision course.

If we take these two examples, then, the organic village pattern and the machine-like city pattern, we can hypothesize that people living inside these disparate morphologies will display distinct neurological patterning over time – and with this distinct neurological patterning will come different worldviews, perhaps contrary perspectives on the perceived limits of human potential and the meaning of life, and even dissimilar mind-body relationships. As Maturana and Varela (1998) put it: “organism and environment co-evolve in a history of structural coupling.”

The above is what I mean by the phrase “Towards a Neurophenomenology of Settlement Morphology.” This imagery will be the entry point into my dissertation.

I want to approach the task by postulating that effective designers of sustainable community will exhibit neurological patterning reflective of the fractal geometry of Nature, isomorphic to the sort of organic patterning of a Tuscan village. We don’t need to conduct an fMRI brain scan to discover if this is so; we can recognize it in their work. And, what’s most important, we can *educate* for the desired outcomes: educate here means more than relaying information, it means *purposely shaping the neurological patterning, through desired synaptic connections, so as to perceive wholistically and design organically from a position of whole body awareness*. We will want to influence the sensorimotor connections through body movement exercises and hand-eye coordination tasks; we will want to heighten appreciation for beauty, as a feeling tone, through engaging in a variety of artistic playfulness with multiple media; we will want to maximize the linkage across cerebral hemispheres; we will want to influence the ‘cognitive maps’ in the parietal lobe by imprinting it with living geometries, which are sometimes called “sacred geometries;” we will want to enliven the senses – which J.J. Gibson (1966) refers to as active “perceptual systems” – so that subtle nuances in landscapes may be optimally perceived and assessed; we will want to increase somatosensory sensitiveness so that the whole mind-body system becomes alive with vibrant interconnectivity; etc. In short, I want to frame “sustainable community design” as a *yogic* activity.

You’ll find that this approach is very different than that taken in modern architectural programs. Harry Mallgrave, who wrote *The Architect’s Brain* (2011), laments that there are students today who can get a degree without ever having made a single hand drawing. All the work is done now on computer programs. I would call this a ‘bodiless’ experience: sitting in a

chair under fluorescent lights perfunctorily clicking a mouse while producing the design for a single building with generic (because strictly limited to what's in the program) materials, proportions, and effects, etc. How are these architectural graduates ever going to learn how to design sustainable communities? That's why for my dissertation project I have proposed to design and present a multi-dimensional Design Studio highlighting and engaging all the faculties mentioned above. Afterwards, participants will be interviewed according to a Phenomenography protocol in order to record and evaluate the various qualitative ways the event was experienced. Would this be an indication of "modeling effective uses of knowledge?"

PART 2:

Part 1 of this Comprehensive Assessment essay was an exploratory effort by a doctoral student to situate himself within a "field" so that his upcoming dissertation may be a real contribution to that field. It was discovered, in the course of a meandering thought process, that no well-defined field yet exists that can accommodate the specific knowledge expected to be produced by the dissertation – where "field" here is understood to be a distinct community of scholar-practitioners working collectively and professionally toward the resolution of some particular problem or fulfillment of some particular purpose, as defined in its literature. Instead, it was proposed that it would be more accurate to say that the upcoming dissertation will be an effort at contributing to an established "tradition" – the difference being that participants in a "field" are getting paid (!) while those in a "tradition" are more interested in establishing, sustaining, or embellishing a precedent or standard, often altruistically.

With that in mind, I can assert that the tradition to which I am contributing may be called "Sustainable Community Design." Sustainable Community Design cannot be a field because

there are no academic programs graduating Sustainable Community Designers nor are there professional firms winning contracts for Sustainable Community Design projects. In Part 1, I demonstrated that there have been ongoing attempts to give this tradition definition – on either one side or the other of the scholar-practitioner divide – yet no real sustained (or sustainable) effort that could result in professional practice. In this second part of the essay, then, I will situate myself in the Sustainable Community Design tradition with enough definition to provide a context which may not only accommodate my dissertation but may, in fact, outline an emerging field.

Standing back and looking objectively at my contribution to the tradition, it is clear that my greatest benefaction has come through *education*. As mentioned in Part 1, I have been a full-time student for *eighteen consecutive years*. This time was invested in three separate degree programs that can be characterized as self-designed, self-motivated, progressive and interdisciplinary – in other words, this wasn't typical sit-in-a-classroom-and-receive-deposits-of-information type of education; no, it was active and exploratory. From the very beginning and continuing until this day I have combined independent studies, classroom experiences, workshops and seminars, community service, strategic travel, disciplined spiritual practice, and applied components to the academic work. This smorgasbord of learning was never random or capricious: Since these activities were constituent to degree programs, they fit into an overall design with stated goals. In effect, it could be asserted that I have been setting a precedent for what exactly does constitute a comprehensive education in the tradition of Sustainable Community Design.

Quite early in the process, I reasoned that the spirited phrase “Sustainable Community” was too amorphous, too readily applied to almost any good intention, to be the basis of an

articulated academic program. In other words, “sustainability” needs a specific context in which to be practiced; likewise, “community” needs a certain scale in which to become meaningful. The reasons for needing this delimitation become apparent when noticing that people sometimes speak, for example, in terms of “global” sustainability or in phrases like “the elderly community” of a nation. This range of context, this scale, loses manageability in coherent design scenarios. Since I began my educational quest, I have noticed a lot more people are ready to talk about – even champion – “Sustainable Community,” yet they often seem to be approaching it from a vague feeling-sense of recognizing *that* is the direction to move without fully understanding how to get there, or what’s all involved. Similarly, developers and corporations now seem to be scrambling to advertise how “green” they have become even though their underlying thought structures and motivations, habits and patterns, may have remained unchanged. The point is that “Sustainable Community” can easily slide into so much well-intentioned though naïve rhetoric, with too many diverse potential applications, to become the foundation of a focused degree program – or so I reasoned.

It would have been in the second year of my formal education, 1995 to be exact, when the Global Ecovillage Network (GEN) was established (Jackson & Svensson, 2002). I considered this to be a major breakthrough: the “ecovillage” was obviously the prototypical context for designing and nurturing “Sustainable Community” (Context Institute, 1991). I devoted my five-year, self-designed Bachelor’s degree to schematizing and completing a proto-curriculum for this emerging “field” Ecovillage Design, the world’s first such attempt. I traveled to several of the world’s prominent ecovillages to take courses and workshops and learn from the people who were actually making it happen. I sustained these relationships over time such that when GEN was ready to establish their educational arm, in 2004, I was invited to the first meeting. Perhaps

because I was a doctoral student, I was asked to be the Curriculum Coordinator during the production of the Ecovillage Design Education (EDE) curriculum, and eventually was enlisted to assume the title of Program Development Coordinator. In this latter role, I edited an on-line version of the curriculum, produced a textbook, and co-facilitated several design courses at various locations around the globe. In these design courses, I introduced the practice of presenting a Design Studio as the culmination of the course, wherein students could apply all they'd learned to actual ecovillage site design scenarios.

I chronicle these experiences for my assessors in the effort to situate myself within the ongoing tradition of Sustainable Community Design. I use above the phrase “emerging “field” of Ecovillage Design” rather loosely; for, although we did create a curriculum and even though there are continuing educational courses, there does not exist anywhere active professional practitioners of Ecovillage Design – and I doubt there ever will be. Finally, I describe all this in the past tense because I am no longer participating with the educational arm of the Global Ecovillage Network. I was very enthusiastic about the ecovillage vision for many years – going so far as to hail it as the “ecovillage solution” – yet have grown critical for a number of reasons:

- 1) The ecovillage is routinely regarded as an expression of “alternative culture,” often associated with “back to the land movement” or even more acutely “hippie commune.” GEN, which is based in Europe, has a distinctly “New Age” version of this alternative characterization. I have come to believe that this alternative characterization will forever keep the ecovillage marginalized, never adopted as a “mainstream” solution; and the ecovillage enthusiasts seem to reinforce this marginalization by emphasizing their separateness from – even at times animosity toward – “mainstream” culture.

- 2) GEN takes pride in positioning the ecovillage as a “grassroots” effort, such that the ideal is for each ecovillage to be produced entirely by the people who will be living there. This may be an attractive ideal – and it may actually have been possible in a few scattered cases during the ebullient 1960s and early 1970s – yet today’s development climate is highly regulatory and very expensive. This is especially true for developments that are attempting to introduce ecological, technological, economic or social innovations: any feature that is not already explicitly covered by an established municipal code will need to be walked through the regulatory process step by step, and each of these steps accrues substantial additional cost. Thus, anybody these days proposing an “ecovillage” as a model of sustainable community development will need to have very deep pockets (and a sympathetic City Council) – so this is hardly a widespread “grassroots” effort.
- 3) Another point of critique comes from the education itself: Ecovillage enthusiasts tend to disparage traditional university education and any value it may have. Thus, while the EDE curriculum may embody some very useful and innovative knowledge and practice, it tends to stand isolated from the majority of people for whom it could have real transformative benefit. What results is a sort of “preaching to the choir” phenomenon of inter-subcultural dialogue that never gets a chance to expand and include ever more meaningful scenarios. I know from experience, having navigated now three progressive and highly rewarding degree programs, that there *does* exist opportunities to explore, refine, and formalize innovative solutions at the university level. Therefore, with the EDE, I would have hoped more for some form of partnership.

And so, while previously I would have considered my work with the Global Ecovillage Network to be my outstanding contribution to the tradition of Sustainable Community Design (as exemplified by devoting my KA*708 – Human Learning and Motivation study to the production of the EDE curriculum), I must now, as I approach my dissertation, relegate that work to a sub-category. Where, then, in the context of this Comprehensive Assessment, do I situate myself in the enduring tradition?

It may have been prescient: Even though I set out, in the enthusiasm of the day, to have my self-designed B.A. be the world's first formal degree devoted explicitly to Ecovillage Design, I decided to entitle the piece *Village Design: Ekistics for the 21st Century*. This turned out to be a good move; for, by using the more-inclusive, even primordial, title “village,” I have not limited myself to the alternative sub-cultural dialogue but have remained open to more universal and far-reaching trends. For example, for my KA*703 study I wrote a book-length treatise entitled *The Urban Village: Synergy of Ecology and Urbanism*, an explication of Sustainable Community Design directed specifically to the planning profession. Even more foundational, in 2002 I set up a non-profit with the name Village Design Institute. I am positioning the organization to be able to provide education, design, and consultation services at the four applications: Ecovillage, Urban Village, Traditional Village, and Suburban Village – all along it has been the village *scale* which has been most important, with all that implies.

Based on this level of both scholar and practitioner commitment, sustained over such a wide span of my life, it may be fair to propose that I have, in fact, been establishing a new field – Village Design – and that would make this my most significant contribution to the tradition of Sustainable Community Design. Of course, consistent with the usage in this essay, I will only be able to validate if it is in fact a “field” by looking in hindsight; that is, if I have been able to

sustain professional practice as a Village Designer, then maybe I have indeed established a field. Or maybe it can only be considered a field if other people are also making sustainable living from this work? In any case, this is how I wish to situate myself for the purpose of this Comprehensive Assessment essay leading up to the delivery of my dissertation.

And what exactly is a Village Design? I have a favorite slide-show I've assembled which shows how compulsive and utterly random this potent word "village" gets used: Shopping centers and apartment complexes may be labeled "villages." Many businesses like to add "village" to their name; for example, here in my home town of Bellingham we have a Village Books, a Village Lighting, and a Village Veterinary – not to mention the Village School and the Village Pub – yet there is no sight of a real village anywhere. Many single-use, residential subdivisions sport the title "Village," and I'm sure you can think of a few near where you live. While driving with my brother from Encinitas to Temecula one day, we passed a stretch of road where the so-called subdivision villages weren't even named: they simply appeared in a row as Village I through Village VI.

I speculate that there is deeply subliminal meaning to this word "village." All of us, no matter our heritage, have ancestors who lived out their lives in real villages – the *original* perennial sustainable communities. Mumford (1961) waxes poetic when describing the village as a container for maternal concerns, as if a Great Mother itself. Residents in a real village have roots, security, and a sense of belonging that those of us living in newly colonized countries can only imagine (Critchfield, 1983) – and this is perhaps its ubiquitous appeal. The North American continent, as a prime example, was settled in a mad rush of development, spurred on by "manifest destiny," that completely bypassed the organic village stage (Kunstler, 1993). What we are left with is a random, incoherent assembly of abstract grids and sterile suburbs, neither of

which have any relationship to their underlying ecologies. In these lifeless abstractions people grow alienated, lacking meaningful connection to the spirit of place (Casey, 2009). Under these conditions, there must be a pitiful sense of completion, of yearning fulfilled, when driving to a shopping center with a name like Palomar Village – even though the shopping center has no resemblance whatsoever to an authentic village.

In two papers I wrote during my coursework at Fielding (Mare, 2007, 2008) I explored the phenomenon of Peak Oil and its relationship with settlement patterning. It doesn't take a scholar to realize that the random, incoherent settlement patterning of North America – at urban, suburban, exurban, and rural scales – is highly energy dependent, especially in its reliance on oil for transportation. During the coming anticipated period of “energy descent,” as oil becomes scarcer and ever more expensive, the entire settlement patterning of North America will prove to be increasingly dysfunctional. My non-profit Village Design Institute claims that at this point a pervasive retrofit and re-structuring will be required *at village scale*. Thus, the protracted metropolises get reorganized into agglomerations of urban villages, the vast stretches of ethereal suburbs locate centers that can become the nuclei for suburban villages, and dispersed rural towns get re-modeled along the compact pattern of the traditional village. Does this sound like the emergence of a new field?

I purposely saved the ecovillage for last, for I believe it still has a role: Instead of being simply a refuge or outpost for rebellious alternative types, the ecovillage becomes a “research, training, and demonstration site for sustainable living in community.” Every population center of 50,000 or more will need one of these demonstration sites because therein is where various sustainable systems are deployed, tested, modified, and, most importantly, *integrated with one another* before being distributed to the public at large. By “sustainable systems” I mean

technological, structural, social, ecological, horticultural, energetic, economic, and even somatic assemblages that are integrated with one another into applicable coherent ensembles. Since each ecovillage is genetically site-specific and place-based, it will be developing unique sets of coherent ensembles for a particular bioregion. The residents of the bioregion, then, may come to the demonstration site to witness how everything is connected. The residents of the ecovillage may go out to teach people how to design and build villages.

These ecovillage demonstration sites will be inherently educational centers – yet there’s no reason to limit the education to the development of sustainable systems. What if these ecovillages assume the role that the monasteries played during the early Medieval period; that is, recording and storing the knowledge generated from a previous era of cultural fluorescence? This may set the stage for the introduction of what Burneko (2010) calls “communities of contemplative scholars.” These scholars will be uniquely situated to pore through the intellectual heritage of the previous era looking for what went wrong and how the existence may be improved during the next cycle. These scholars will produce a body of writings that may become as ‘seeds’ for the germination, when the time is right, of a new culture: the planetarization of consciousness within an eco-humanitarian ideal (Rudhyar, 1970).

This is an evolutionary project, so I would strongly insist that these ecovillage demonstration sites also become yoga centers – where yoga here refers to the various mind-body practices that have been designed to facilitate and encourage conscious evolution. This would be the “Integral Yoga” expounded by Sri Aurobindo, who explains:

For it is a Gnostic way of dynamic living that must be the fulfilled divine life on earth, a way of living that develops higher instruments of world-knowledge and world-action for

the dynamisation of consciousness in the physical existence and takes up and transforms the values of a world of material nature (2000, p. 1019).

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