

Course Description
Fairhaven College
Spring 2001

Ecovillage Design

This class will be presented as a practicum of advanced human ecology skills applied at the scale of the “ecovillage.” We will assume the role of a simulated professional design team whose task is to create a world-class Ecovillage Demonstration Site – home to a fully-accredited “Sustainable Living” degree program. Our simulated client? Western Washington University. The proposed site? The Outback Farm.

Ecovillage Design is an extremely complex, multidisciplinary art form whose purpose is to create full-featured human settlements ecologically integrated into the natural world – sustainable by definition. An actual project will take many years to become established, and is never entirely completed. For these reasons, our class will be *process*-oriented rather than *goal*-oriented; that is, we will be concentrating on setting up conditions conducive to a free-flowing, fully-participative, truly collective group design scenario, where every member of the team can contribute equally their talents to the unfolding design. Leadership roles are de-emphasized in this scenario and the wisdom of the “collective mind” is brought to the fore. This makes for much better design – more thorough and complete, and more appropriate at the complex scale of the ecovillage.

Once the group is thinking and working like a design team, and has defined the parameters of the project, we will move on to the actual ecological design work. This means collecting, measuring, and recording a variety of environmental data and indicators from the site, then transposing this information onto a collection of many maps and models. Our primary tool for synthesizing all the information into a useful, analyzable, coherent whole will be the famous “transparency overlay” technique formulated by Ian McHarg.¹

By the end of the quarter, we will have an evolving working list of all the elements to be included in the Ecovillage Demonstration Site, their optimal placement within the landscape, including beneficial interrelationships between elements, and a prioritization time-line for their successive organic unfoldment. All this work will be displayed on professional quality charts and maps that can be presented to decision makers – including the university planning department.

The intention is for the student to be able to re-enact this design process at some later time, at any scale, in a context of their choosing. This particular course may need to be presented consecutively to keep the design process alive.

¹ McHarg, Ian (1969) *Design With Nature*. John Wiley & Sons, Inc.; New York