

WSD Independent Study Contract

“Ecovillage Economics”

Summer 2000

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Credits: 3

Learning Intentions

This course is designed to provide a basis in alternative economic thinking, with a particular focus on “ecological economics,” so that the student may begin advancing theoretical models specifically focused on economics at “village” scale.

The current macroeconomic model, and its inevitable global end-state, will be critically evaluated, and its weaknesses and presuppositions exposed. An examination of the correlation between macroeconomic thinking and a mechanistic worldview will result, with implications drawn as to the kind of society that both creates and is created by such an economic system.

With the understanding gained by exposure to alternative economic models, and in particular the theories of “ecological economics,” issues of sustainability will be discussed. Sustainable economics will be understood to be an economics that can be continued into the indefinite future. The student will be prepared to begin conceptualizing and making distinctions between economies of scale: globe, nation-state, bioregion, city, town, village, hamlet, camp, family, etc. and evaluating each of these system levels for its compatibility with meeting the goals of sustainability.

Finally, the goals of the “ecovillage” vision will be presented, and the village scale will be chosen from the hierarchy of economies to be the scale from which sustainability can be most effectively managed. Traditional village economic patterns will be presented, and a synthesis will be formed combining selected, sustainable traditional patterns with selected, life-promoting advances of the Industrial and Information Ages. The specific context for the synthesis will be the 21st century “ecovillage,” and the culmination of learning will be the detailed, theoretical formulation of an ecovillage economics.

Learning Goals

- 1) Become familiar with the fundamental ecological economic concepts of promotion of negentropy, enhancement of net primary production (NPP), and preservation of natural capital.

- 2) Define, at village scale, specific economic practices designed to achieve the above conditions.
- 3) Discuss the nature and role of economics in a bio-centric oriented society devoted to the quality, beautification, and long-term viability of all life, in contrast to the nature and role of economics in a mechanistic-oriented society dedicated to rationality, materialism, control of Nature, and short-term gain for individual egos.
- 4) Brainstorm all essential economic functions needed for a proposed, hypothetical, 21st century ecological village to maintain self-reliance. Postulate the optimal population of such a settlement and delineate specialization of tasks.
- 5) Theorize on concepts of carrying capacity and economies of scale, adjusting the minimum population number if light manufacturing capabilities, including advanced computer and communication technologies, were included. How could these capabilities be made more effective by integrating the work of numerous ecovillages at a bioregional scale, or clustering ecovillages together in a trans-urban fabric?
- 6) Describe in detail the fundamental relationship between an ecovillage – that is, a truly sustainable settlement – and its surrounding ecosystem. Inventory all the economic services provided if this surrounding ecosystem were, for example, sustainably managed agroforestry land.
- 7) Describe alternatives to national, federal currency, including: community- and region-based currencies, complementary currencies, barter and exchange systems, tokens, proposed 'gift' economies, and a value system based on the promotion of ecological economic goals.

Learning Activities

Read:

- 1) *Small is Beautiful* by E.F. Schumacher
- 2) *Paradigms in Progress* by Hazel Henderson
- 3) *For the Common Good* by Herman Daly & John Cobb
- 4) *Ecological Economics* edited by Rajaram Krishnan
- 5) *Forest Gardening: Towards a Forest Economy* by Robert A de J Hart
- 6) *Natural Capitalism: The Next Industrial Revolution* by Paul Hawken et al.
- 7) *Steady-State Economics* by Herman Daly
- 8) *The Post-Corporate World: Life after Capitalism* by David Korten
- 9) *The Ecology of Commerce* by Paul Hawken

The student will take detailed notes while reading these books, looking for specific suggestions or strategies to include in a proposed "ecovillage economics."

Demonstration of Learning

A 30-page paper will be written describing in detail a theoretical economic system for a proposed, hypothetical, sustainable, self-reliant, bio-centrally oriented, 21st century "ecovillage," elucidating the philosophy, value system, organization, activities, practices, principles, and goals of such a system.

Evaluation of Learning

- Critical review of paper by evaluator
- Discussion with evaluator and faculty at AUS of steps that can be taken in the immediate present, based on current economic realities, using the current economic system, to help finance and establish a fully functioning ecological village in the Cascadian bioregion