

WSD Independent Study Contract
"Living Systems Theory"
Winter 2000
Student: E.C. Mare
Evaluator: Elaine Jessen, M.A.

Learning Intentions

This course is intended to provide the student with the opportunity for a full immersion in Living Systems Theory. The student will be exposed to various interlaced writings on the subject in order to gain a comprehensive, in-depth, graduate level understanding of the nature of Living Systems. This course, and the reading materials chosen, are designed to accommodate Village Designers in particular with foundational knowledge for their task of designing human settlements in harmony with Nature, as Living Systems embedded within Larger Living Systems and comprised of smaller Living Systems.

Learning Goals

Specifically, the student will be able to describe, design, speak and write about Ecovillages as Living Systems. No curriculum has yet approached this specific inquiry to the depth of potential available, and this work needs to be done. The goal is to gain full access to the vocabulary, language, and concepts of Living Systems Theory so that they may be applied to the work of a Village Design. The student will be able to contrast and compare unsustainable settlement patterns with sustainable settlement patterns: sustainable settlement patterns clearly will be demonstrated to be Living Systems and unsustainable settlement patterns will not meet these criteria, relegating them more to their description as Mechanical Systems, and thus prone to entropy.

Learning Activities

The student will read some of the world's most thorough investigations of Living Systems Theory by some of its most accomplished and dedicated theorists:

- 1) *Living Systems* by James Miller
- 2) *Design for Evolution* by Erich Jantsch
- 3) *The Self-Organizing Universe* by Erich Jantsch
- 4) *The Logic of Living Systems* by Francois Jacob
- 5) *Gaia: A New Way of Knowing* edited by William Irwin Thompson
- 6) *Gaia: the Human Journey from Chaos to Cosmos* by Elisabet Sahtouris
- 7) *Autopoiesis: The Realization of the Living* by Humberto Maturana

The student will take detailed notes while reading these selections, always scanning for specific vocabulary, language, and/or concepts that can be directly applied to a discussion or conceptualization of the design of sustainable human settlements at village scale. The student also will be in communication with the evaluator to receive feedback as new insights or possibilities arise.

Demonstration of Learning

Upon completion of this study, the student will produce a comprehensive, detailed paper describing Ecovillages as Living Systems, embedded within larger Living Systems and comprised of smaller Living Systems, asserting that for human settlements to be sustainable they must be modeled upon natural Living Systems. The paper will serve as the initial outline for a chapter in the eventual book: *Fundamentals of Village Design*. The paper will be sent to the educational arm of the Global Ecovillage Network for peer review.

Evaluation of Learning

- Production of 30-page paper describing sustainable villages as living systems
- Response from peer review