

# Community's Shadow

Examining Community Isolation in LA Eco-village

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# Table of Contents

Abstract	<b>3</b>
Introduction	<b>4</b>
Investigating the Dark Side of Community	4
Intentional Communities	6
Ecovillages	7
Key Concepts	<b>10</b>
Defining Utopianism	10
Ideological Clustering and Migration	12
Defining Isolationism	13
Background	<b>15</b>
The Utopian Visions of Los Angeles	15
LA Eco-village	16
Methodology	<b>18</b>
Procedure & Results	<b>19</b>
Participant Observation	19
Demographic Analysis	28
Content Analysis	30
Discussion	<b>36</b>
Conclusions on LAEV	36
Broader Implications	39
Further Research	41
Bibliography	<b>42</b>
Content Analysis Resources	<b>47</b>

# Abstract

Community formation is widely regarded as a positive force which should be cultivated and strengthened by community members in a group. However, the negative consequences of an extremely tight-knit community are often ignored; strong communities rooted in certain characteristics or ideologies may have a potential to withdraw from larger society, leading to intergroup discrimination and a refusal for outside communication. This disconnect from other groups can lead to heightened polarization, misunderstanding, and lack of consensus. To address this phenomena, I ask: *can community be isolating?* I examine this question in the context of intentional communities, groups formed from a shared utopian vision. These communities have the potential to act as “islands”, isolated from surrounding communities. My study was situated in Los Angeles Eco-village, where I deploy three methodologies: participant observation, demographic analysis, and content analysis. My findings suggest that, in contrast to many intentional communities, LA Ecovillage has a unique opportunity to affect the city of Los Angeles and interact with outsiders. Community engagement and inclusivity of diversity present a powerful way to mitigate isolation, all while preserving the community members’ goals and ideals.

# Introduction

## Investigating the Dark Side of Community

Community is a facet of human society which has been studied in numerous contexts ranging a wide span of disciplines. Given its broad applicability, the term is complex and difficult to define. Generally speaking, community can be encapsulated under five categories, some of which may overlap: community as locality, as a group sharing common characteristics which may or may not be localized, as individuals tied together by neighborliness or kinship, as individuals who share a sense of belonging, and/or as a manifestation of shared experiences (Finnegan 1994).

In general, community tends to be regarded favorably in the academic sphere. Having only small social support networks has been linked to increased mortality rates and mental health concerns (Pernice-Duca 2012), while other works discuss the benefits of structuring cities in ways that encourage social cohesion, and in extension, create trust, political engagement, and social engagement (Leyden 2003). How a space is structured may have the ability to either increase communal cohesion (Trudeau 2013), or, in some cases, decrease social participation among residents (Srinivasan 2003).

The majority of scholarly works have ignored the potential darker consequences of community. Communities built entirely on group identity can be particularly dangerous. The concentration of like-minded peoples to certain regions may prevent contact across groups with different values. This lack of communication is at times associated with prejudice, dehumanization of those without shared values, and a profound lack of understanding of another party (Motyl 2014). Different communities may come in conflict due to the belief that

their adversaries work to undermine their own core beliefs, when in reality, each side may not be attacking the other but is more likely trying to realize their own utopian goals for society (Chambers 2006). Despite this reality, conflicts between tight communities have real consequences when no common ground is able to be attained and communication is avoided.

The community paradox can be observed on American terrain, where community formation is starting to be determined by our values and lifestyles. The main perpetrator of this phenomena is the increasingly polarized political landscape of the United States. Evidence suggests that “there are deep divisions between Democrats and Republicans, between red state voters and blue state voters, and between religious voters and secular voters” (Abromowitz 2005). As Americans have moved over the past three decades, “they have clustered in communities of sameness” and the motives which determined their final location are now inherently political decisions (Bishop 2008). The results of this fractured environment are best described by Bishop:

“...balkanized communities whose inhabitants find other Americans to be culturally incomprehensible; a growing intolerance for political differences that has made national consensus impossible; and politics so polarized that Congress is stymied and elections are no longer just contests over policies, but bitter choices between ways of life.” (2008)

Without a wide variety of diversity, whether it be racial, cultural, or ideological, separated communities may be missing important opportunities to learn, communicate, and to enact real change. The potential for the formation of ideological bubbles within communities and a refusal to reach outside one’s community has led me to my framing question: *can community be isolating?* In order to investigate this notion, I plan to focus on intentional communities, in particular, eco-villages. Intentional communities offer a unique perspective on this question by representing a heightened form of casual communities, given the fact that they are *intentional*. These communities come together with a specific purpose and specific value systems. By

examining community in perhaps its most explicit form, I will investigate whether or not communities can successfully balance diversity and internal identity, thus avoiding isolation.

## Intentional Communities

Intentional communities offer an interesting lens through which to examine this question. An intentional community is defined as a group of individuals who share like-minded goals and ideals, and who use their planned living spaces to test or enact these shared ideals. This term is intentionally broad, and thus encompasses many types of groups; monasteries, communes, eco-villages, and squatter camps can all be considered intentional communities. Yet, these communities are often faced with the predicament of being incredibly exclusive or accessible to only certain demographics. Intentional communities have a tendency to be made up primarily of the white, middle class (Sanford 2017) and may unintentionally exclude non-white and lower-class members (Aguilar 2015). Feelings of frustration or displacement as a result of the dominant ideologies in the greater region often cause intentional communities to withdraw from mainstream society and close off from other communities. It is not uncommon for intentional communities to move to rural areas in order to best realize their goals, thus avoiding influence from other groups whose utopian visions of space may not align with their own (Meijering 2007).

In a study by Jade Aguilar (2015), three different intentional communities are shown to consist of strong, shared values which are “based on dominant race and class ideologies” and which, when lived, have “unintended and negative consequences for racial minorities and members from lower-class backgrounds” . An individual’s values can be directly reflective of a person’s class standing, race, and background, yet many intentional communities do not make room for differences which may make fully abiding to certain ideologies impossible.

Interestingly, though these intentional communities “strongly promote their commitment to race and class diversity among their membership in their public image”, Aguilar finds that community composition is primarily white and middle-class (2015). Additionally, members blame the absence of demographic diversity on a lack of interest among lower-class individuals and racial minorities. Rather than working to encourage and accept these groups, these particular communities show resistance to difference. As one community member states, “We are unlikely to get agreement to change our ways in order to be acceptable to new people. They are expected to change their standards instead” (Aguilar 2015). The responsibility to be inclusive is redirected from the community and onto those who may not have the means to commit fully to the values of the group.

Aguilar’s study is just a drop in the puddle of the vast amount of literature describing the isolating potential of intentional communities. Other examples discuss how intentional communities can be intimidating for a newcomer to approach. Because a community’s mindset can be significantly different than that of mainstream society, an individual must often acclimate to a community in order to gain entry. Individuals seeking to join an intentional community must at first stand at the periphery, where they learn about how the community functions before being granted the privilege of full engagement (Pineda 2011). By having a high vetting process and learning curve, intentional communities run the risk of discluding those who may be interested, but who are intimidated by the entry process (Farkas 2017).

## Ecovillages

Ecovillages may act as one form of intentional community in which isolation can be circumvented as a result of having utopian ideals which demand public participation. Ecovillages offer an alternative utopian perspective to that of growth and development. Ecovillages are



intentional communities which are defined by their environmental ideals and whose members pursue a lifestyle which is low-impact. Typically, the utopian vision of an ecovillage is far different from the vision of the larger urban area. Some values that tend to be endorsed and enacted on by an ecovillage are mixed land use, walkable spaces, social cohesion, and the harmless integration of humans into the environment.

Often, ecovillages continue to engage in the surrounding community by welcoming and educating outsiders (Meijering 2012), as well as by occasionally being situated in urban spaces where they must adhere to city laws and building codes. They are considered “fourth-wave” intentional communities, meaning that ecovillages are more likely to engage with the dominant culture and reach outside of their immediate community in order to spur social change (Ergas 2010). However, many critics of intentional communities believe that ecovillages have the potential of becoming “islands” (Marcus 2013), isolated from the rest of the community on behalf of their beliefs and preferred ways of living.

Takis Fotopoulos is one critic who is highly skeptical of the power ecovillages have to incite social change and reach beyond their boundaries. Fotopoulos states,

“To my mind, moving out of society and ‘doing our own thing’ in villages, communes, etc., outside the political and economic arena (as many of the ecovillagers in the North do) does not have any potential either to change the institutional framework or to create a massive consciousness for systemic change” (2000).

In this instance, ecovillages are viewed as a lifestyle strategy, which, according to Fotopoulos, are aimed “mostly at securing survival WITHIN the existing society, rather than at replacing it” (2000). Fotopoulos believes that change can not be attained without radical action, and does not view the emergence of ecovillages as radicalism. Rather, he views ecovillages as highly

individualistic communities which primarily influence only “people who have already solved their survival problems and now worry about the quality of life and their spirituality” (Fotopoulos 2000). Thus, from his perspective, the appeal of ecovillages is reserved for a specific group of people (middle-class, liberal, and white), and the formation of these communities does nothing to address issues of struggle beyond an individual sphere.

Fotopoulos makes a fair point about the potential for ecovillages to isolate themselves by withdrawing from dominant systems and by only attracting certain types of individuals. Yet, I argue that when diversity, outreach, and local involvement are kept in mind, ecovillages can successfully remain connected to greater society and may thus be able to inspire change. For the remainder of this thesis, I will examine if ecovillages can be internally diverse and accessible, as well as externally influential and inclusive. Before diving into an examination of Los Angeles Ecovillage, my site of study, I will first lay out important concepts which will guide the remaining discussion.

## Key Concepts

### Defining Utopianism

From an ideological standpoint, it is difficult to discuss the goals of a community without incorporating the concept of utopianism. Utopianism is defined as “the quest to achieve the best possible human settlement...operating within the context of certain established principles” (Besel 2013). According to Lewis Mumford, cities in particular have been structured in an attempt to capture utopian visions even in ancient civilizations (Mumford 1965). However, what is considered to be utopia changes based on time, place, and perspective. In addition, it is often

those who are most powerful who get to determine the overall outcomes of development within the city. The way in which a city uses space can influence community dynamics. Every city must delegate between diverse interests, each with conceptions of how a city should function, feel, and appear. These ideas create utopias, images of an ideal society formed by each group's goals and interests.

As an example, in our modern American urban spaces, it is theorized that "the political and economic essence" of any powerful group within the city is growth (Molotch 1976). Put more simply, most cities will be structured with expansion in mind based on the resources of those who are powerful. The utopian vision of those who have the social and political means to affect the outcomes of the city are likely to be primarily focused on development. Alternatively, landscapes may be structured by the communities of the people who inhabit them based on what characteristics are deemed to be the most desirable.

It is also important to address utopia's history as an isolating, a polarized, or in extreme cases, an evil force. One example of the malevolent potential of utopian thought can be found in the mind of Pol Pot, leader of the Khmer Rouge revolution which culminated in the Cambodian genocide in order to fulfill his conceptions of an ideal reality. Pol Pot's vision sought to transform Cambodia "...into an inferno of revolutionary change where, certainly, old ideas and those who refused to abandon them would perish in flames, but from which Cambodia itself would emerge, strengthened and purified, as a paragon of communist virtue" (Short 2007). This example serves to show how "one man's vision of purity resulted in genocide", and how such visions can be used to "manipulate other's worst instincts" (Jurkiewicz 2015). As evidenced by the resulting horrors which transpired in Cambodia, utopias rooted in intolerance, violence, and extremism have the potential to spur unspeakable terror.

As applied to intentional communities, a particular group's ideologies are often used as a blueprint of what their own ideal world would look like. By forming a community, the group believes that their visions "can and should be created in...the here-and-now" (Sargisson 2012). This can prove difficult in a world in which different utopias clash; at times, only one reality may be enforced, often leading to a sense of frustration and resentment towards what one may call the mainstream utopian vision, or rather, the values that are prioritized in a particular context by those in power.

As a result, community members may conclude that the only way to attain aspects of their desired utopia on the ground is by retreating to a remote location and refusing to participate in society (Dias 2017). Or, more dangerously, an intentional community may succumb to forming prejudices against anyone who is an outside who they believe to be tainting their perfected vision of the world. However, utopia does not necessarily have to reflect escapism. According to Bossy (2014), the utopian discourse of a group includes practices which "need to be an attempt to create here and now at least some of the features of this utopian discourse, in the hope of a spread in the rest of society." Thus, an intentional community need not completely disconnect from other communities in order to live out their values in reality. Furthermore, if a community wishes to influence society, the best path of action may be to avoid separation and rather become active participants not only within their own community, but also reaching outside of it. This concept will be further investigated in the context of ecovillages.

## Ideological Clustering and Migration

Understanding isolation in community means understanding the state of community in modern terms. In our current day and age, community formation is changing. While it is not uncommon for a community to be based on some level of commonalities, the necessity of having similar identities and possessing a discomfort or disdain for difference has heightened. The phenomena of ideological clustering and migration has emerged in the past few decades, in which individuals tend to move and reside in communities which reflect shared ideologies and values (Bishop 2008). Regions subject to ideological clustering become meccas of like-minded thoughts and lifestyles.

Traditionally, communities tend to consist of individuals who share similarities, whether that be race, ethnicity, political or religious beliefs, lifestyle preferences, or a mix of these characteristics. Yet, in the pursuit of identity, a community may intentionally or unintentionally delegate who is allowed to participate. In particular, American communities are built on a historical foundation of othering particular types of peoples in order to establish identity. For example, one needs only to look at the stereotypes surrounding suburbs, sprawling single-family home neighborhoods which are commonly associated with close communal bonds between neighbors. From its conception, the idealized suburb has traditionally excluded people of color, gays, and lower-class families (Coon 2013). Community formation in suburbs is thus, in part, reliant on the intentional disclusion of certain types of people who were deemed unfit by the values of the suburban community.

Today, the prevalence of ideological clustering reveals just how much our values still affect who our neighbors are and how we decide to define our community. This is particularly relevant when discussing the political makeup of different regions in the United States. Research has found that strong liberals and strong conservatives are more likely to migrate to communities which reflect their own values. According to the study, "80% of participants living in

ideologically misfit communities moved, whereas only about 50% of participants living in ideologically fit communities did so” (Motyl 2014), suggesting that communities are becoming more homogenous, and thus more isolated from those who display difference.

## Defining Isolationism

Isolation is a term which is difficult to define, due to the numerous factors which may define a community as “isolationist.” To name a few, characteristics of isolation can be physical, political, social, ideological, cultural, and racial. For the purposes of this report, I have decided to examine factors of level of political involvement, interactions outside of the community, ideological diversity, physical location, and demographic diversity to determine whether LA Eco-village functions as an isolationist community.

Communities formed based on identity are likely to be entangled with both lifestyle preferences and political ideology. These characteristics are further “...attributed to still more deeply rooted covariates, such as material interests, formative experiences, and fundamental cultural values, which in turn might be traced to demographic traits, such as cohort, schooling, gender, ethnicity, or socioeconomic background” (DellaPosta 2015). Social and demographic isolation could arise from a community’s intentional or unintentional recruitment of members pertaining to certain characteristics. This may be evidenced by a proliferation of members of a certain race, income status, gender, or age.

Isolation defined as an “absence of relation” implies how a community reaches outside of its boundaries to other actors (Aldous 2008). Communities may have strong internal bonds and connections at the expense of external relationships. A lack of connections to the outside world can prevent a community from encouraging inclusivity as said community becomes too engrossed in its own dynamics.

When discussing isolation in reference to an urban setting, it is important to consider racial, ethnic, and class isolation. Los Angeles is a city in which these categories are vital due to how the development of the urban landscape has created particular distribution patterns of certain demographics. As Katz describes,

“After World War II, African Americans created what has been called the nation’s ‘first large suburban ghetto’ in South Central Los Angeles. In East Los Angeles, poor Mexicans live in detached, single-family, ranch style homes more characteristic of suburbs than cities. The ethnic clusters known as Koreatown, Little Saigon, and a new Chinatown are distinctively suburban in population density and housing styles. At the same time, freeways, airports, and manufacturing corridors separate the suburbs populated by middle and upper-income white workers in Orange, Ventura, and western Los Angeles County from South Central and East Los Angeles,” (Katz 2011).

This example also displays why one must take a critical lens when examining isolationism.

Though Los Angeles may be considered “diverse” based solely on statistics, the distribution of communities suggests that groups may be more separate in interaction and location than implied by the data.

## Background

### The Utopian Visions of Los Angeles

Understanding the emergence of LA Eco-village requires understanding the context; the Los Angeles urban landscape and how communities were and are currently affected by its development. Los Angeles is a city that is simultaneously a center of utopia and dystopia at once. It has sustained the image of the quintessential California dream and yet has come to be more susceptible to downward mobility than any other American city (Davis 1990). This can, in part, be blamed on the city’s urban planning scheme, which has continued to be focused primarily on development. Development started to boom in the early 20th century and

unchecked growth has led to “a proliferation of free-standing single family homes”, also known as sprawl, and “the highest car ownership per capita in the country” (Leaver 2013). In 2006, it was reported that commuters lost 93 hours per year as a result of traffic delays, and this number is expected to double in the next decade (Davis 1990). Additionally, despite massive efforts in the 1990s to increase public transportation resources, mass transit only accounts for one out of fifty trips in the region (Davis 1990). Consequently, the low-density built environment of the Los Angeles urban sprawl leads to an increase in energy consumption and air pollution, a loss of undeveloped land, and a waning sense of community (Ewing 1997, Glynn 1981). Urban sprawl has pushed development further and further outward in Southern California, but little space remains to continue to build.

Interestingly, Los Angeles as a whole is both diverse and segregated. Although statistics of the Los Angeles area seem to suggest diversity, the region tends to exist in a state of resegregation, where white, middle and upper class regions flourish, and poor regions continue to struggle and are pushed further into poverty. According Davis (1990), since the 1980s, affluence has almost tripled while poverty has increased by a third. Those considered to be in the middle class have collapsed by half (Davis 1990). In the 1990s, a mass exodus out of the city of nearly 200,000 white residents occurred, as a result of real-estate inflation, recession, fear of crime, and the incentive of “golf-centered utopias” in Arizona and Nevada (Davis 1990). This event is also evidence of the sorting process behind ideological migration. The makeup of Southern California was changing to become more liberal and immigrant and was no longer serving the needs of religious conservatism.

In response to inequalities, Los Angeles has historically been a hub for both community formation and social justice. The formation of gangs, notorious to LA, is only one example of the





alarmed and disturbed when riots and fires broke out less than half a block away from her home in downtown Los Angeles. Long before the LA Riots, Arkin was already cultivating plans for a low-impact community. In 1983, a non-profit group led by Arkin, known as the Cooperative Resources and Services Project (CRSP), had settled on a landfill site within the city to build their vision. However, Arkin realized that her own community was suffering, and rather than fund a multi-million dollar project which would build from the ground up, Arkin “decided we needed to retrofit this neighborhood instead” (Downton 2002). At the time the CRSP purchased three forty-unit apartment buildings on Bimini Place, “as many as half of the units were unoccupied and/or legally uninhabitable” (Boyer 2014). After investing in the necessary reparations, nearly all of the complex is occupied today. By maintaining a utopian vision which contradicts the unhealthy urban patterns propagated by urban sprawl, LAEV yearns for a reality where the world’s cities can be reshaped (Downton 2002).

Today, the LAEV acts as a center of sustainable community development within the context of the city of Los Angeles, as well as an educational resource for the surrounding community through tours, workshops, and public involvement. The community of between 30 and 40 neighbors claims to be “raising the quality of community life” while lowering “environmental impacts, and expanding public awareness about more sustainable urban living” (LA Ecovillage). Significantly, the LAEV also devotes a large part of their message to diversity, evidenced by Arkin’s proposal for five areas of diversity by which the ecovillage should live by: ethnicity, gender, generational, household composition, and income (Arkin 2012). By investigating the inner and outer workings of the community and by keeping the vision of diversity heralded by the community in mind, I will use my research to address my focus

question: *how does LA Ecovillage prevent isolation from other communities within the city and beyond?*

In particular, LAEV provides a unique context in which to examine this query. By explicitly incorporating diversity into the community's mission statement, the eco-village has already sought to address the previously discussed inclusivity issues faced by many intentional communities across the world, in which white, middle-class individuals seem to overwhelm the populations of such groups. Further, by situating itself within a city rather than on a rural landscape, LAEV possesses exceptional outreach potential given its proximity to the large population of Los Angeles.

Through this investigation, I argue that LA Ecovillage is in a unique position to affect the city of Los Angeles and interact with outsiders beyond the boundaries of the city through community engagement, inclusivity, and social activism. These strategies present powerful techniques which mitigate isolation all while preserving the community members' goals and ideals.

## Methodology

### Participant Observation

My first methodological approach will consist of visiting LAEV in an attempt to ground the data obtained from the other methodologies within my study. By using participant observation, I aim to embody the principles of the method, including "fitting in, 'active seeing', short-term memory, informal interviewing, recording detailed notes, and, perhaps, most importantly,

patience” (DeWalt 2011). I will attend one of the monthly tours held by LAEV and will engage in dialogues with members and leaders, specifically founder Lois Arkin, within the community, as well as observe the inner and outer workings of the ecovillage. In doing so, I hope to build on previous findings and gain an insider’s perspective of the community.

## Demographics Analysis

The second of my methodologies will be a demographic study in which I will compare LA Ecovillage demographics with those of the greater region of Koreatown, and with those of Los Angeles as a whole. I used methods inspired by a study produced on gay and lesbian populations in the United States, in which previously existing and accessible data sources were used to draw conclusions (Black 2000). I will identify any similarities or differences regarding socioeconomic status, race, and gender, and whether or not LA Eco-village is composed only of individuals of certain demographic characteristics by using census data. This methodology intends to examine if those living in LAEV reflect either demographic inclusiveness, evidenced by a diverse population, or exclusiveness, in which results would indicate a prevalence of a particular type of person.

## Media Analysis

My third and final approach will be a media analysis, in which I will employ the method as a “...research technique for making inferences by systematically and objectively identifying specified characteristics within text” (Macnamara 2005). It will consist of collecting and analyzing news pieces written over the years which discuss the LA Ecovillage. The material will be read thoroughly in order to determine actors outside of the community who influence or are influenced by the ecovillage, and what level of impact each has on the other. In addition, I will

catalogue words which may suggest either accessibility or isolation. In doing so, whether LAEV is isolated or integrated with the city and other communities may become more evident. Further, this approach aims to provide an outside perspective of the influence LAEV has within the city of Los Angeles.

## Procedure & Results

### Participant Observation

My participant observation can be broken up into two distinct sections: a tour in which I was able to observe the built environment, community, and practices of LAEV, and a conversation I had with founder Lois Arkin at the end of the tour. The entirety of the tour allowed me to ground my previous research by observing first-hand how the ecovillage functions within the city of Los Angeles. I was particularly vigilante in recording instances of outside involvement, diversity, and accessibility which frequently entered conversation in both the tour and my interaction with Lois.

#### Touring LAEV

On December 30th, 2016, I embarked on my journey to LAEV. In the spirit of the ecovillage's commitment to public transit, I decided I would rely on the Los Angeles Metro system to navigate the city, and within an hour or so, I exited the Vermont/Beverly station, walking along the sidewalks of the Koreatown neighborhood until I found myself on Bimini Place, the home of the ecovillage I have been remotely studying for several months. I approached the gates, which were adorned with ceramic art pieces and vines. A window unlatched from above.

“Are you here for the tour?,” shouted a friendly and enthusiastic voice. In almost no time, the window relatched, and the same voice greeted me face to face at the gate. I was introduced to none other than the founder of LAEV, Lois Arkin, and she welcomed me into the main lobby of the apartment complex. I informed her of my intentions for the tour, of my academic background, and of my thesis topic. Lois seemed excited to answer my questions, but before I could delve into my own inquiries, fellow tour participants began to arrive.

Those interested in the ecovillage were a diverse group with varied interests and different reasons for attending. However, as I would have expected, a common trait of environmental consciousness proliferated among the tour participants. As we sat in the main lobby and each gave an introduction of who we are and why we came, many mentioned their previous pursuits for a low-impact existence within their own homes or endeavours. For example, one woman who came to the tour alone created a company for non-toxic cleaning products. Another woman, named Lotta, took interest in my research, and shared that her uncles had created communes and that she wanted to create something as well. Throughout the conversation, participants mentioned environmentally-friendly alternatives to urban living that they had previous exposure to, such as tiny houses and permaculture.

Interestingly, another common trait I observed was the prevalence of families with children who were attending the tour. There was a total of five kids among around ten or so adults, and parents expressed a desire for community in a what they believed to be an otherwise impersonal city. A prioritization for human connection and a low-impact lifestyle drew the majority of those in the room to LAEV.

After our introductions, Lois introduced us to Questa, a mid-twenties woman who would be leading our tour and who had moved into the ecovillage within the last year. We were led through the different areas of the complex, including an open and shared courtyard, a garden

space, a community meeting room, a newly attained auto-shop, and a room entirely packed with bikes from ecovillage residents. All the while, both Lois and our tour guide delivered important insights on what LAEV means to the surrounding neighbors, and even more, to Los Angeles as a whole.

Before beginning our tour, Lois explained some of the principle values that the ecovillage was built upon, one of which was the concept of permaculture. A textbook definition of permaculture principles defines them as “an approach to designing human settlements and agricultural systems that mimic the relationships found in natural ecologies”. This way of thinking insists that we can be less reliant on industrial systems by possessing the knowledge and tools to form self-sufficient environments and societies. However, the LAEV definition of permaculture seemed to move past the previously stated one by including a heavy emphasis on connections. These connections were not only natural and organic, rooted within the physical landscape, but also were between those within the community *and* outside the community.

LAEV makes dedication to areas beyond the confines of the ecovillage clear. Even during its conception, the neighborhood was taken into account. Before plans for LAEV became a reality, Lois spent time connecting to those in the neighborhood. She mentioned that neighbors were always involved in the planning, and at first, most conversations were centered around concern about crime in the neighborhood. However, as neighbors became familiar with each other and the general neighborhood, something amazing happened. Crime was no longer the ultimate priority around neighborhood planning. Lois attributes this success to what she refers to as “positive gossip”: spreading good information about other people rather than withdrawing from those surrounding you. As members of the community began to know their neighbors, they were able to relegate their worries about crime to the background, and could thus work on community building and neighborhood improvement.

LAEV does, indeed, seem to garner generally positive attitudes both to and from those who are outsiders. The community has made efforts to be open to neighbors, organizations, and the greater city. For example, just outside of the main apartment building is the White House Place Learning Garden, which was created specifically as a resource for the children attending the eight different schools within walking distance of the ecovillage. Non-members even still live within the apartment complexes owned by LAEV. Lois explained that no one was ever required to move out of the apartment building when it was designated as the space to build the ecovillage. Despite a few residents being in contentious relationships with the LAEV community, rent is kept consistent among members and non-members. Rather than “othering” itself from the greater neighborhood, LAEV becomes a positive force and influence even for those who are not members through direct and consistent engagement.

These connections move outside of the realm of the surrounding neighborhood and further into the city as well. During the tour, there was an emphasis on the many instances in which positive relationships with city officials and authorities were necessary and encouraged among members. These connections can again be traced back to the beginning of LAEV. In the early stages of its formation, Lois reached out to city authorities, and LAEV was written into LA’s urban plan, thus allowing it to be supported by public policy. Perhaps because of these advances, Lois is an especially strong advocate for forming positive relationships with those in charge of the city. For example, she holds close political alliances with the mayor, who signed off on a project to open up the street in front of the ecovillage in order to function as a communal space.

There exists an interesting mix of the individual and the communal within the LAEV community, which spurs further connections beyond the boundaries of the neighborhood block. Most LAEV members do not work in the ecovillage; rather, members tend to work in places



across the city, returning to LAEV in order to cultivate particularly close communal bonds. Even projects founded within the ecovillage have refused to stay isolated to only community members.

The Bicycle Kitchen, for example, is a non-profit bicycle organization which sprung out of the spare kitchen in the first floor of the main lobby. Creator Jimmy Lizama realized that bicycles offered a powerful mode of transportation to those who either could not afford cars or who wanted to rely less on environmentally harmful transportation. Making his intentions clear, he states, "I want to help working-class people who want to go to the market on their bikes instead of driving 10 miles to go to a store" (Balzar 2004). Since its conception, the Bicycle Kitchen has grown to encourage bicycle culture in an automobile-centric city like Los Angeles. By holding various workshops and programs, one of which is focused on youth outreach, the Bicycle Kitchen shows a profound devotion to helping communities beyond the ecovillage.

Another backbone value by which LAEV was built upon is that of permanent affordability. The ecovillage employs a revolving loan system through the Cooperative Resources & Service Project (CRSP), founded by Lois Arkin, in order to continue to retrofit and expand the community. Known as the Ecological Revolving Loan Fund (ELF), the system works by responsibly managing loans from investors which will be repaid within a period of 18 months, 3 years, 5 years, or 10 years. By relying on these investments for renovations and other upkeep, rents can be kept lower over time. The CRSP also serves an important role as a support system for those wishing to create their own ecological communities, who can take out loans through ELF instead of relying on loans through banks.

On the tour, Questa led us through the doors of a small apartment on the ground floor of the complex. The single bedroom apartment originally was found in a "near slum-like condition", but was rehabilitated with local and recycled materials into a quaint but pleasant residential

space. Most importantly, the apartment's rent was a mere \$550 per month; about half the price of similar units in the surrounding area. I found this commitment to low rent prices shocking and inspiring, especially in a city where rent is climbing higher and higher in the face of an increasing urban population and poorly planned built environment.

The only potential isolating system or behavior I observed during my visit was the ecovillage's membership process. Becoming a part of the community means you must perform certain weekly and monthly responsibilities, including attending at least one meeting, one community work party, and one community dinner per month. However, according to Lois, much more is expected in order to be an incorporated individual. In order to be certain that an individual would "fit in", the membership process has become very stringent and time consuming. In total, membership takes six months which consist of a tour, a questionnaire, attendance at Monday night meetings, working with a designated community member to guide you, and culminates with consensus that you would make a good part of the community according to every member of LAEV. Thus, steep membership process may create some inaccessibility due to time demands and may prove to be discouraging to those who could be a good fit for the community. To some extent, this strict procedure is understandable. As Lois explained, "The older a community is, the tighter entrance becomes." According to Lois, this is a reflection on bad experiences with members who were accepted before this process existed who did not fit or contribute to the community despite prior claims.

### A Conversation with Lois Arkin

After the tour had ended and fellow visitors had dispersed, I had the opportunity to speak one on one with founder Lois Arkin about how the ecovillage works, both internally and

externally. In our rather informal interview, I made my first priority to discuss how demographic diversity was handled within the community.

Lois made evident that ensuring fair access based on demographic identity was necessary in not only within LAEV, but also within other intentional communities. From its birth, the ecovillage stressed the maintenance of five areas of diversity: ethnicity, gender, generational, household composition, and income. The community is incredibly accommodating to members of all genders, yet Lois remarked that some older generations must get accustomed to the language. As previously noted, a commitment to permanently affordable units ensures that the community remains affordable to members of all economic backgrounds.

As of now, Lois reports that community is composed of about 50% white residents and 50% POC members. However, there is some contention over these numbers. According to Lois, many within the community feel that the ethnic makeup of the ecovillage should better reflect the surrounding Koreatown community, which is mostly comprised of Hispanic and Asian individuals. However, Lois struggles with this notion. She questioned, “How do you encourage and maintain diversity if certain people move in with more frequency?”, echoing the concerns of many ecovillages across the world who are prone to attracting mostly white, middle-class members.

I then asked Lois about how the ecovillage interacts with other regions of the neighborhood and city. When the LAEV was first formed, Lois expressed that she knew everyone in the community. However, as the neighborhood expanded and changed over time, Lois now approximates that around half of about 500 people living within the two blocks surrounding LAEV know about its existence. Regardless of whether or not they know exactly what the apartment complexes represent, Lois reports that neighbors see the communal action happening within the community and still reach out for help and resources.

In one particularly powerful example, Lois described a situation in which a “nasty” landlord was illegally raising the rent in an apartment complex consisting of a particular ethnic group, exploiting people of color who may not have been able to fully consent or react to certain changes due to language barriers or a lack of trust in city authorities. According to Lois’s account, the tenants came to the doorsteps of the ecovillage for help. Within a week, LAEV got together with a tenant attorney and held meetings with neighbors within the communal spaces of their apartment complex in order to safely formulate a plan of action.

After all was said and done, the unethical landlords sold the buildings and rent was once again reduced. According to Lois, “The landlord had so many building violations that they were put in the REAP program.” The Rent Escrow Account Program (REAP) resolves unsafe and persistent health and safety conditions found in rentals within LA. In this case, assisting neighbors who were not even members of the ecovillage positively impacted both the livelihood of those neighbors and also the built environment of a poorly managed urban landscape.

Many individuals who are members of LAEV are incredibly proactive in organizations both locally and internationally. The nature of the LAEV community does not prevent or discourage members from pursuing outside interests or jobs due to overexertion within communal projects, which I argue allows the ecovillage to be far less isolated than communities which focus too heavily on self-sufficiency.

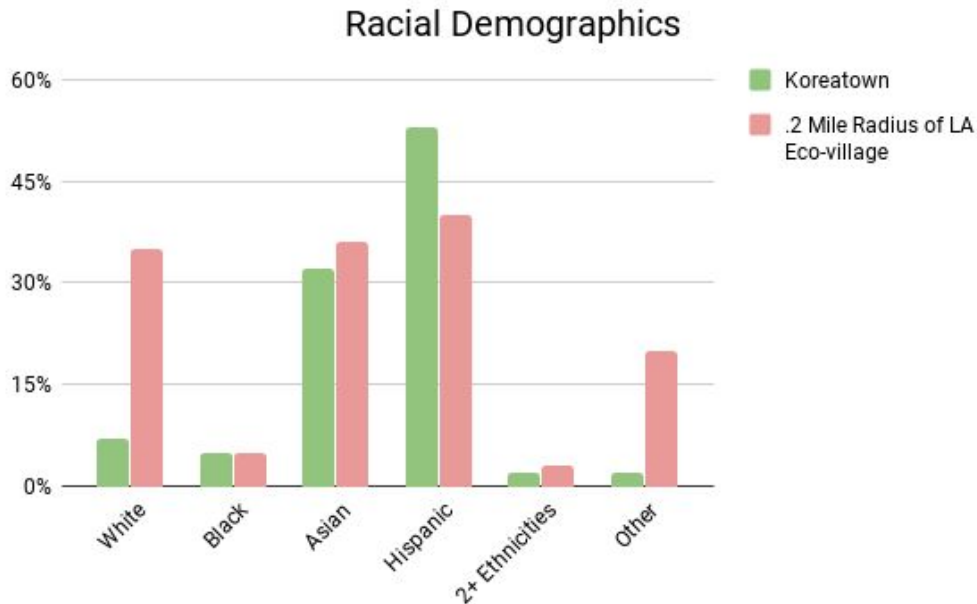
Lois referred to an endless list of influential individuals who are making a difference within the community, LA, and beyond. Joe Linton, editor of Streets Blog LA, lives in the complex and is an advocate for a pedestrian and bike friendly city. As mentioned previously, Jimmy, creator of the Bicycle Kitchen, has continued to hold monthly fundraisers and still spurs bike activism across the Los Angeles area and beyond.

The ecovillage has become a site for the organization of gender rights groups, local youth centers, and others looking to make a difference in the city. Kill Radio, a radical radio station, meets here routinely, and is made up of “a group of 50+ activists, journalists, and DJ’s” who are dedicated to promoting social and economic justice through the media. Lois also mentioned holding meetings for the LA Tenants Union, self-described as “a diverse, tenant-led movement fighting for the human right to housing for all.” LAEV displays incredible dedication and integration regarding social, economic, and environmental issues around the city, allowing members to navigate beyond internally focused action.

## Demographic Analysis

In order to effectively understand whether LAEV is isolated from the perspective of diversity, it is necessary to examine demographic data within the ecovillage community and the greater region of Koreatown. By using census data, I was able to successfully attain racial and income demographics for a .2 mile radius of LAEV and for Koreatown as a whole.

## Racial Demographics



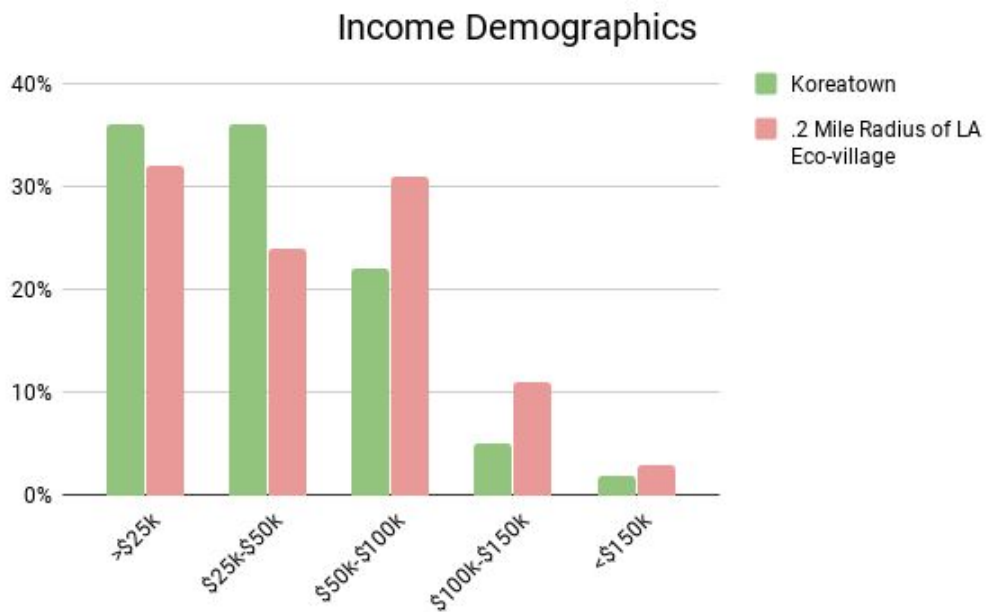
**Fig. 1.1** The chart above shows a comparison of the racial demographics of LAEV and Koreatown, indicating a much higher percentage of white residents within a .2 mile radius of the eco-village.

Comparing the differences in racial makeup between LAEV and the greater region revealed a few interesting results, which can be examined in figure 1.1. Within the .2 mile radius, 35% of residents were white, compared to a mere 5% in all of Koreatown. As a result, there were fewer Hispanic residents directly near or within the ecovillage. There was also a higher incidence of other ethnicities within the radius of LAEV, with around 20% of residents versus only 2% in the greater region.

This data appears to be consistent with the prior methodology. According to founder Lois Arkin, “I thought 50 percent persons of color and 50 percent white was a good balance, since that approximately reflected the census numbers during the past decade in the City of Los Angeles” (Arkin 2012). Arkin continues, explaining that “several in the LAEV community strongly

felt that 50 percent was much too low for persons of color, since it was not representative of the neighborhood demographics” (Arkin 2012). The higher prevalence of white residents within the .2 mile radius of LAEV in contrast to the demographic results for Koreatown as a whole reflects the concerns of the community cited in this instance.

### Income Demographics



**Fig. 1.2** The chart above shows a comparison of the income demographics of LAEV and Koreatown. Data is relatively similar, except for a higher occurrence of income between \$50k-\$150k in and near LAEV.

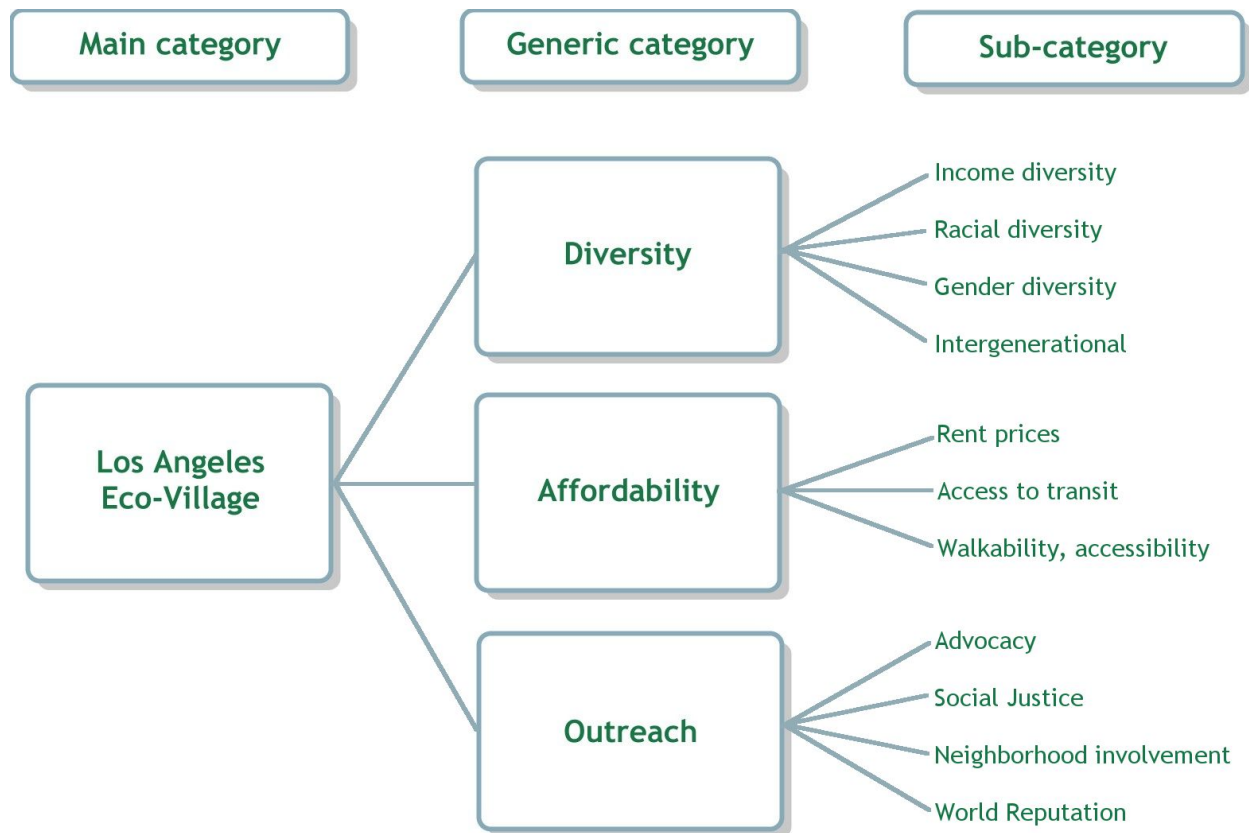
In addition to compiling demographic data for the racial composition of LAEV and Koreatown, I also considered the income demographics of both regions. Figure 1.2 displays a comparison of different income ranges, spanning from under \$25,000 a year up to over \$150,000. The results show a greater prevalence of those making between \$50,000 and \$150,000 within a .2 mile radius of LAEV when juxtaposed against the entire Koreatown area.

Near the ecovillage, around 15% more individuals fit into this range. Otherwise, the amount of residents making under \$25,000 a month was relatively consistent between the two regions. In both, those who fit into this income range still make up the majority of the population. Though it can not be definitively proven, this may be a reflection of the attempts LAEV has made to prevent gentrification and ensure fair rents for poor residents.

## Content Analysis

It is necessary to collect multiple perspectives of the inclusiveness of LAEV in order to best understand how the intentional community functions as a part of the larger city. In order to emulate an outsider's perspective, I will employ interpretive content analysis, "a procedure by which one makes inferences about sources and receivers [of communication] from evidence in messages they exchange" (Osgood 1959). I collected a total of 17 sources to conduct this methodology, which consist of news articles, podcasts, and videos. These sources were gathered through intensive and frequent Google searches under the news category for the terms "LA Eco-village", "LAEV", and "Los Angeles Eco-village".





**Fig. 1.3** Three categories emerge from media pertaining to Los Angeles Eco-Village. The subcategories show different themes which indicated the presence of generic categories in a given source.

By analyzing each source in depth, I collected phrases and terms which dictated levels of isolation or interconnectivity. By reviewing the data, I identified three persistent themes within the majority of sources referring to LAEV: diversity, affordability, and outreach. As displayed in figure 1.3, these three categories are indicated as present or absent in a given source based on references to the themes found in the sub-category column.

## Diversity

The theme of diversity was prevalent in a significant 50% of examined sources. By diversity, I am referring primarily to income diversity, racial diversity, gender diversity, and age

diversity. Through my analysis, media sources reveal that LAEV appears to incorporate many types of individuals, regardless of their demographic.

Some statements appear as goals in which the ecovillage orients itself; for example, in a podcast interview, Lois Arkin remarks, “We want our intentional community to be diverse in so many ways” (Peterson 2016). In another interview, Lois Arkin expresses her desire for LAEV to set an example by being a location “...where we might demonstrate that a very diverse community can get along” (Villanueva 2013). These statements display an open-acknowledgement and encouragement for diversity, both as a way to enrich the community itself and to serve as a precedent for those on the outside.

In one particularly interesting example from *El País*, a popular Spanish newspaper website, an article discusses racial diversity within LAEV at length by examining the personal experiences of Hispanic women living in the community. These memoirs seem to reflect more than a shallow incorporation of diversity, and rather a profound acceptance. Ana, a Colombian member of the ecovillage, explains how many of the practices within the community mirror those of her childhood:

“When I was little, I remember that my neighbors at some festivities shared food with us and we talked to the people on the block; that’s something that one does not normally see in the United States, but here I have found it.” (Lugo 2017)

The article concludes by stating that the most identifying factor of the ecovillage is diversity, and that “the only thing they are not different in is the environmentalist spirit and the political ideology”(Lugo 2017). These shared characteristics reportedly do not close off members from opposing perspectives; rather, members display “a willingness to adapt to people at different world views” (Villanueva 2013). Other sources parallel this observation. One article, written by an author who had spent 9 months touring various ecovillages, described LAEV as “...the most ethnically diverse community” she had visited (Litfin).

## Affordability

LAEV specifically addresses affordability specifically on the community's website, making a commitment "to provide permanently affordable housing for low to moderate income households" (LA Eco-village). This foundational principle of the ecovillage is prevalent within the material examined. The media analysis reveals that 56% of the sources reviewed make reference to affordability in terms of rent prices, accessibility, and walkability.

In general, most sources do not provide in depth accounts of the affordability of the ecovillage's apartment units. Rather, cheap rents are seen as an intrinsic characteristic of LAEV. One article references the community's management of "50 units of permanently affordable housing", and reports plans to convert a newly claimed auto-shop into "20 permanently affordable co-housing units and 10 small green retail and commercial co-op spaces" (Wattenhofer 2016). Another article, from realtor.com, discusses the potential some intentional communities may offer for those looking for lower rent prices. LAEV is shown as an economically viable example, with the article bringing attention to the community's rent prices, "which range from just \$500 to \$1,200 a month" in a city where median rents for similar units are approaching \$2,000 (Trapasso 2016).

Other sources discuss the opportunity that the ecovillage's location brings for affordable and environmentally conscious transportation options. One article suggests that the ecovillage perpetuates "a culture of getting around by bike, walking, and transit" (Linton 2016). In a Vimeo video series on the ecovillage, LAEV is described as "...one of the best places to be if you're transit dependent" (Hart 2015). Various references to the walkability and bike-ability to and from the ecovillage suggest that LAEV is affordable from multiple dimensions.

Interestingly, for LAEV, affordability is also intertwined with social justice and advocacy. One article points to the ecovillage's commitment to permanently affordable housing as a fight against "gentrification that has made the again-popular inner-city neighborhoods unaffordable for the working and middle classes" (Villanueva 2013). A video exploring LAEV explains that the "land is owned by a trust, which means there is no outside landlord who can jack up the rent" (KCET 2016), revealing the prevalence of unethical practices surrounding rent in the city which were previously examined in my conversation with Lois. Thus, affordability in these sources is interpreted as both an economic advantage and also as a powerful way to fight against harmful urban practices which disproportionately affect marginalized individuals.

## Outreach

The category containing the greatest number of resources pertaining to its subject was that of outreach. Around 69% of the media sources examined revealed references to action done within LAEV which was intended to move outside the sphere of the ecovillage and influence either the greater city or the world. Important indicators of outreach within these sources included advocacy, social justice, general neighborhood involvement, and the ecovillage's worldwide reputation.

The majority of the sources suggest that LAEV has taken real actions towards incorporating outsiders into the ecovillage process. Outreach becomes a duty of the community to serve as both an influencer and a change-maker. One particularly common topic within the sources was the White House Place Learning Garden, an ecovillage owned plot of land which has been dedicated to teaching children in the surrounding area about nature and gardening. Many articles imply the magnitude of influence this garden may have, explaining how it offers "...the opportunity to work with kids from the eight public schools within walking distance"

(Peterson 2016). Referring to the garden, one video states, “Many of the children in LA don’t have access to a place...where there is nature, and plants, and a certain level of freedom” (Hart).

Neighborhood commitment is clearly a priority. A video attached to one article contains statements such as, “Part of who we are is to be of service to our neighbors”, and pushes the idea to “start with your neighbors” in order to help the community as a whole (Litfin). When the ecovillage was planting its roots, an article explains how founder Lois Arkin and other members of the cooperative spent time “walking up and down the street, meeting neighbors, introducing neighbors to one another, planting fruit trees and little gardens with the neighborhood kids” (Villanueva 2013). Neighbors were never excluded from the process; rather, they were integrated.

LAEV appears to move outside of the neighborhood as well. LAEV has been influential to the greater city through a sustained devotion to social justice and advocacy. Bicycle advocacy in particular is frequently mentioned in relation to LAEV. As one article states, “the Bicycle Kitchen, the Los Angeles County Bicycle Coalition, and CicLAVia got their initial start from LAEV members” and have expanded bicycle culture in Los Angeles (Villanueva 2013). Other articles refer to the meetings LAEV hosts for social justice groups formed within and outside the community, as well as the how the ecovillage has “participated in different movements” throughout the city (Lugo 2017).

The reputation of LAEV has reportedly reached beyond Los Angeles and into a greater global context. Many articles refer to LAEV using terms and phrases such as “far-reaching” (Hart), “worldwide reputation” (Q2 Healing 2008), and “internationally renowned” (Villanueva 2013). A video cites LAEV’s participation in the Global Ecovillage Network, which is dedicated to creating better neighborhoods across the globe (Litfin). These various sources together suggest

a narrative in which LAEV is able to transcend its boundaries on many different scales, moving from the neighborhood, to the city, and, finally, to the world.

## Discussion

### Conclusions on LAEV

These various methodologies which critically examine whether the LA Eco-village community is isolated or inclusive have revealed LAEV's impressive efforts towards outreach, diversity, and fostering a reputation within the city of Los Angeles and beyond. LAEV is entangled in the larger Koreatown community, both as an inspiration and an important neighborhood resource, working to create healthier lives even for those who are not official ecovillagers, such as by providing a gardening space for children in the surrounding schools or by advocating for bicycle-use around the city.

A dedication to inclusivity for individuals who are non-white and/or working class helps to differentiate this community from other intentional communities, which are frequently accused of only attracting or advertising to white, middle-class individuals. In this way, LAEV sharply contrasts with intentional communities in "which members absolve themselves of the responsibility for increasing diversity" and blame the underrepresented groups for lack of interest (Aguilar 2015). Rather, LAEV takes the initiative upon their own community to remain conscious, self-reflective, and active in ensuring diversity.

The presence of LAEV in Los Angeles differs greatly from that of other ecovillages which have been examined with isolationism in mind. For example, Sieben Linden, an ecovillage in Altmark, Germany, is a community which attempted to balance both self-sufficiency and

outreach in order to avoid being seen as an “island” (Marcus 2013). However, as the rural ecovillage states on its own website:

“...the ecovillage by no means wants to be an island, yet it often fails to avoid the characteristics of an island. When we are busy with everyday events, when our heads are full of our own social issues, some time can pass before the ‘outside’ world becomes relevant again .” (Marcus 2013)

Despite Sieben Linden’s genuine desire to create change by influencing both outsiders near the ecovillage and those throughout the world, outreach initiatives have been, for the most part, unsuccessful. A lack of communication seems to prevail within this study; one individual in the ecovillage remarks, “I don’t even know what to talk about with people from the Altmark,” and concludes that it is unnecessary for the ecovillage to become more integrated since it is already autonomous (Marcus 2013).

LAEV has approached its communications with neighbors in a radically different manner. As previously mentioned, neighbors were always included in the process even when the ecovillage was first being planned. Sieben Linden, on the other hand, “did not grow organically, even on these green fields; rather, it was established” (Marcus 2013). When it was first established, Sieben Linden’s primary concern was preoccupied with space rather than with forming strong bonds with other surrounding communities. All the while, Sieben Linden’s so-called “self-sufficiency” relies on a steady income from outsiders to achieve “economic and social holism” (Marcus 2013). In contrast, LAEV does not take outsiders for granted; rather, the ecovillage works specifically to assist and understand outsiders. Community members are not afraid, and are encouraged, to rely on help from the city or to engage in dialogues with city officials. In doing so, LAEV avoids falling into the category of an isolated, self-sufficient island.

Despite these differences, we must still address the question: can a community which is rooted in diversity and outreach still exhibit isolationist behaviors? As supported by my study of LAEV, I would argue that every community must experience occasional levels of separation in

order to remain a cohesive unit with specific goals and interests, and in order for the group to not lose itself within the greater population. For an intentional community, estrangement from the outside world is, at times, necessary so that “its members can more easily focus on their collective vision and internal dynamics” (Sargisson 2007). Processes of internal self-reflection must occur in order to make decisions, settle conflict, and to avoid burnout.

This concept is reflected in LAEV in several ways. For one, the community is not open to unplanned tours. A stream of unexpected outsiders would likely disorient communal life, rendering the space unproductive for the ecovillage’s utopian goals and plans. Similarly, membership processes are stringent and require large time investments from those who wish to join the community. Rather than viewing this practice as isolating, it is simply a matter of ensuring that those who join the community are willing to participate and further communal goals. Someone is a “good fit” not based on race, gender, or class, but on how they can contribute to the community. The true indicators of isolation occur when an intentional community is unwilling to facilitate communication with outsiders as a whole. Intentional communities who come to form strong negative attitudes about outsiders are unlikely to reach outside of their designated spaces. According to Sargisson (2007), “any group that feels besieged or beleaguered can become defensive and increasingly hostile towards its critics”, resulting in further withdrawal from outside communication as non-members begin to be viewed as enemies by community insiders.

LAEV combats the tradition of escapism seen in many intentional communities by rejecting an insider/outsider approach which works to other those who are not members. The few instances in which LAEV may act in ways which indicate isolationism are easily mitigated by deliberate actions towards outreach, social justice, and inclusivity. Many ecovillages try to incorporate at least some degree of outside communication, yet rural ecovillages tend to have



more difficulty in maintaining these connections. The remote location of Dancing Rabbit Ecovillage in Missouri, for example, makes job opportunities scarce and most members remain on the ecovillage property (Beck 2016). Though the community holds educational programs for visitors in order to bring in income and spread their message of sustainability, outreach beyond these efforts is very limited.

In contrast, LAEV prioritizes the incorporation of the neighborhood and city as part of their utopian vision of what LAEV should represent. As Sargisson (2007) suggests, “total estrangement negates the critical utopian function of these groups”. In other words, if ecovillages, as utopian projects, wish to make a difference in the world, they must exert effort in being connected to outsiders. If too much energy is spent on inward action, the ecovillage will be more likely to withdraw. More lax community requirements allow LAEV members to dedicate energy both within and outside of the ecovillage, thus opening up the community to outsiders and simultaneously building the image of the community as a resource rather than as a socially isolated fortress.

## Broader implications

The potential for intentional communities to become isolated emerges from basic community dynamics which can be seen both within these communities and also beyond them into greater spheres of mainstream society. “Ideological totalism”, the overwhelming incorporation of only particular values or ideals, can drive estrangement from the outside world in the case of any community (Sargisson 2007). According to one study, perception of the existence of an ingroup and outgroup is sufficient for intergroup discrimination to occur; additionally, intergroup behavior has been shown to be more discriminatory and competitive than that of interpersonal behavior (Tajfel 2010). As a result, group polarization heightens as

individuals in their respective groups isolate themselves from outsiders with opinions or characteristics which may differ from their own.

This idea is urgent to consider in the face of political and social polarization in the United States. Over the last century, populations in the United States have increasingly been clustering into “lifestyle enclaves” in which political and ideological perspectives are directly correlated to individual consumption, aesthetic, and moral patterns (DellaPosta 2015). Nonpartisan lifestyle choices have become almost synonymous with an individual’s party and values. Characteristics of the in-group and out-group can be attributed to stereotypes: DellaPosta offers the example of the “latte liberal” versus the “bird-hunting conservative” (2015). Thus, groups become isolated from each other on a higher level than just political identification; group divisions are deeply rooted from an intermingling of many different characteristics. Just as an intentional community may suffer internally from a lack of outside communication and support, polarization across the United States’ political landscape makes addressing issues which desperately require bipartisan support nearly impossible.

In the case of the United States, perhaps encouragement for political diversity beyond the two-party system could help address the view of “politics as warfare”, in which issues are constantly re-litigated and never fully resolved (Persily 2015). One suggestion to accomplish this feat is a structural change, where voter turnout is increased by getting rid of closed primaries, disempowering “ideologically driven factions” within parties and thus rewarding moderation and compromise rather than punishing it (Persily 2015). However, I argue that polarization must still be addressed partly at a local level. Institutional changes must be matched with individual changes. In this case, exposure to those with diverse political opinions who have become empowered by the removal of closed primaries may encourage ideological diversity and compromise.

Communities must learn to internally reflect on their own dynamics, and their own propensities to isolation. While it is reasonable, and perhaps even vital, for estrangement to occur at some level within a community, this separation must be monitored in order to prevent a total slip into isolationism. There must be a middle ground between differences in order to prevent the formation of an “other”. Perhaps one final solution to this problem could be the brave act of temporarily departing from the comfort of those who think, look, and act like us in order to more effectively communicate with those who we do not understand. If we are to avoid the potential evils of totalistic utopian thought and of extreme ideological polarization, encouragement and acceptance of diversity as manifested through our active efforts is a necessary factor which must be enacted upon.

## Further research

Further research which would expand upon this study could address either ecovillages, intentional communities, or more mainstream communities. Additional studies on ecovillages conducted with isolation in mind could help determine whether LAEV is truly unique in its inclusivity. These studies could also determine which factors most impact a community’s ability to be diverse, to participate in outreach, and to stay involved in the surrounding region. For example, is physical location the most important characteristic, or is accessibility more reliant on the community’s view of outsiders? Studies in this vein would grant a broader understanding of how ecovillages interact with or influence those outside of the community’s internal walls.

Another route of research is examining the United States political context due to heightened polarization. Similarly, one could ask, what factors contribute most to intergroup discrimination between communities guided by their political allegiances? It is incredibly important to better understand how deeply entrenched the moral and political divides are within this country so that we can learn how to mitigate these differences.

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