

Community's Shadow

Examining Community Isolation in LA Eco-Village

Can community be isolating? Does the ideology and built environment of LA Ecovillage isolate community members from outsiders?

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Introduction investigating the dark side of community

The majority of scholarly work has addressed community formation from a purely positive perspective, ignoring potential negative effects. 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 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). As observed on American terrain, community formation patterns have led to less diverse communities over the past three decades as Americans moved based on preferences which have an inherently political edge (Bishop 2008).

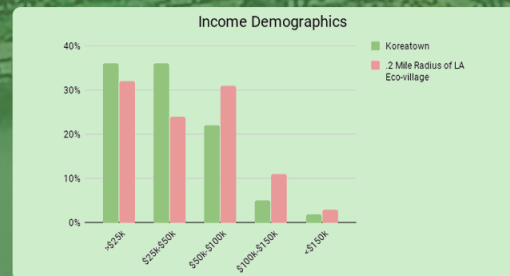
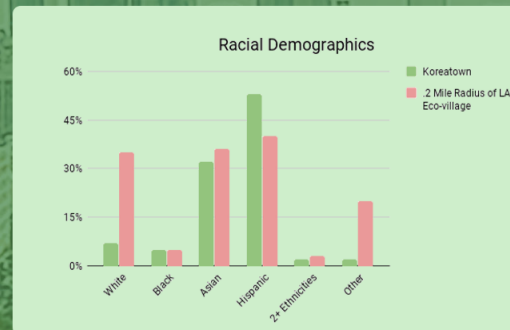
Los Angeles Eco-village (LAEV)

- Intentional community located three miles from downtown L.A in Koreatown.
- A center of sustainable community development and an education resource for the surrounding community through tours, workshops, and public involvement
- Claims to be "raising the quality of community life" while lowering "environmental impacts, and expanding public awareness about more sustainable urban living" (LA Ecovillage).
- Goal to provide affordable housing for low-income individuals and a mission to encourage diversity within the community.

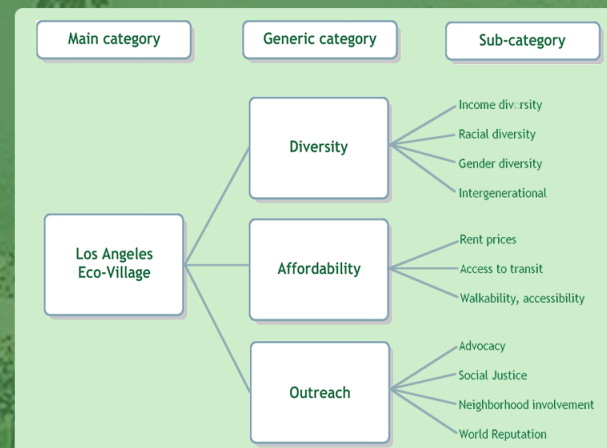
Methodology

1. **Participant Observation** toured the eco-village and conducted interviews
2. **Demographics Analysis** used Census data to compare demographics
3. **Content Analysis** analyzed sources referencing "LA Eco-Village"

Results



Content Analysis



Participant Observation

- Built upon **"five areas of diversity"**: ethnicity, gender, generational, household composition, and income.
- **"Positive gossip"**: spreading positive information about other people rather than withdrawing from the neighborhood
- **White House Place Learning Garden**: created as a resource for schools surrounding ecovillage.
- Steep membership process: "The **older** a community is, the **tighter** entrance becomes."

Conclusions

- LAEV displays impressive efforts towards outreach, diversity, and in fostering a reputation within the city and beyond.
- Compared to Sieben Linden, an ecovillage in Germany, LAEV excels in outgroup communication. Outreach programs in Sieben Linden have been relatively unsuccessful; as one member states, "I don't even know what to talk about with people from the Altmark" (Marcus 2013).
- LAEV still maintains a necessary divide from the greater LA area in order to remain cohesive.
- 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).

Broader Implications

Any community can succumb to isolation. Although isolation can be reflective and necessary, some forms are more insidious than others. For example, "ideological totalism", the overwhelming incorporation of only particular values or ideals, can drive estrangement based on disdain for the outgroup (Sargisson 2007). Isolation along these lines can, however, be mitigated through community outreach and efforts towards diversity.

References: Bishop, Bill. n.d. The Big Sort: Why the Clustering of Like-Minded America is tearing us apart. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.
Marcus, Andreas. "Must Utopia Be an Island? Positioning an Ecovillage within its Region." *Social Sciences Quarterly*, no. 4 (October 2013): 9-18.
Motyl, Matt. 2014. "How Ideological Migration Geographically Segregates Groups." *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 51 (Supplement C): 1-14.
"Reinventing how we live in the city" laecovillage.org.
Sargisson, Lucy 2007. "Strange Places: Estrangement, Utopianism, and Intentional Communities." *Utopian Studies* 18 (3): 393-424.