International Communal Studies Association (ICSA)

# BULLETIN # 69 November 2021

## The ICSA Newsletter

International Communal Studies Association (ICSA)

# *Experience Danish Communalism at ICSA 2022!*

**As the world slowly moves back to health, we are thrilled to invite you to experience Danish communalism, either in person or virtually, at our 2022 triennial conference.**

**We will gather from July 14-16, 2022, at the beautiful Audonicon Conference Center (https://audonicon.dk/) in Skanderborg, Denmark, for presentations and works on the theme of "Co-Creating Community: Evolving Models of Intentional Community." The conference itself will be fully hybrid, allowing participants to present papers and attend sessions whether they are at the Audonicon or connecting via the internet. Both before and after the conference we will have tours of contemporary communities in Denmark, focusing on communities near Skanderborg and Aarhus on July 12, and those in the Copenhagen area on July 17-18.**

**Our conference theme expresses a core truth: no community is an island. Communes and intentional communities continually evolve, not only in relationship to the larger society but also through dialogue and encounter with one another. Communities learn from one another, seek to correct one another's mistakes, and sometimes even try to resurrect long-dormant forms of shared living. The co-founders of ICSA, Yaacov Oved and Don Pitzer, called attention to this aspect of communitarianism both in their scholarship and in their dialogue with one another, and subsequent scholars such as Josh Lockyer have traced trajectories of communal co-evolution right up to the present day. Our conference will explore communities that integrate aspects of multiple communal traditions and those that have transformed a single tradition in response to new challenges. And as always, we will include some presentations that address aspects of communalism not directly related to the theme.**



**Few places are better suited for exploring this theme than Denmark. Many of us are familiar with Denmark's role in birthing the cohousing movement, which has grown to include hundreds of communities, some radically countercultural and others fully mainstream. More than a century before the rise of cohousing, Danish educators created a network of "folk high schools," which are residential schools that offer immersive learning experiences without formal requirements or examinations. The folk school network, which is still thriving, has inspired many other communal impulses both in Denmark and around the world; in the United States, it provided vital training for activists in the civil rights movement. Denmark also has a lively ecovillage scene, as well as spiritual and therapeutic intentional communities.**

**Many of the communities we will visit during our pre- and post-conference tours exemplify our conference theme. The Hertha community, home to our leading conference hosts, blends elements of the Camphill and cohousing traditions: at its heart is a therapeutic community supporting adults with intellectual disabilities, and surrounding them are households for people who are not vocationally connected to the care work but who appreciate the rhythms of therapeutic community life (see www.hertha.dk for more information on Hertha!). We will have more information about the other tour communities in upcoming issues of this bulletin, so stay tuned!**

**Conference registration will be available via a new ICSA website around January 1. To make the conference as accessible as possible, we will offer multiple fee levels. In person conference registration (including meals) will be 400 euros, with discounts available for students, low-income, and income-sharing participants as well as those who register before February 1. (There will be additional charges for housing and for the pre- and post-conference tours.) The virtual conference fee will be 125 euros for those with professional incomes and 50 euros for students, low-income, and income-sharing participants. All participants will also be required to purchase a three-year ICSA membership on a sliding fee scale from 50 to 200 euros. Depending on the number of people who register, we may also be able to make some scholarship support available.**



**Look to our newsletter for additional conference information in the months ahead. Right now, we hope to receive your proposals for workshops and presentations. As an inclusive organization, we seek proposals from all sorts of people: people living in community who wish to share the wisdom of their life experience, university-based researchers, independent scholars, roving communitarians, and more! We can accept proposals for 20-minute papers, panels with multiple presenters, interactive workshops, and artistic events. The proposal deadline is DECEMBER 1, the call for papers is attached to this mail and proposals should be sent to Dan McKanan at dmckanan@hds.harvard.edu .**

**We look forward to seeing you in Skanderborg—or online!**

**Dan McKanan**
**ICSA Co-Chair and Program Committee Chair**

International Communal Studies Association (ICSA)

# *ICSA 2022 Conference Venue*

**The upcoming ICSA conference will take place at Audonicon, Skanderborg in Denmark.**
**www.audonicon.dk**

**The hand drawn map (see below) illustrates how to get to Audonicon plus indicates the places to visit during the preconference (1-4 near Aarhus) and the post conference (1-5 around Copenhagen).**

**The Pre-conference will include visits to the following communities:**
**1. Grobund, Ebeltoft**
**2. Friland**
**3. Andelssamfundet I Hjortshøj**
**4. Hertha Levefællesskab**

**The Post-conference will include some of the following communities:**
**1. Dyssekilde**
**2. Svanholm Gods**
**3. Munksøgaard, Roskilde**
**5. Permatopia**



**The easiest way to get to Audonicon, Skanderborg in Denmark from abroad is to arrive by plane to *Copenhagen Airport*. Here at the airport you enter a *train for Aarhus* (3½ hour).**
**The price for a one-way ticket is about 67 Euro.**
**Get off the train at Skanderborg (20 min before arriving Aarhus).**
**Take a Cab (TAXI) to Audonicon (2,5 km - 5 min by car).**
**(Accommodation will be arranged at nearby hotels. More about this later.)**

**The aerial photo (below) shows Hertha Community in the center of the photo next to the old village, Herskind. Founded in 1996 Hertha has just celebrated 25 years jubilee - and a fully developed vision.**

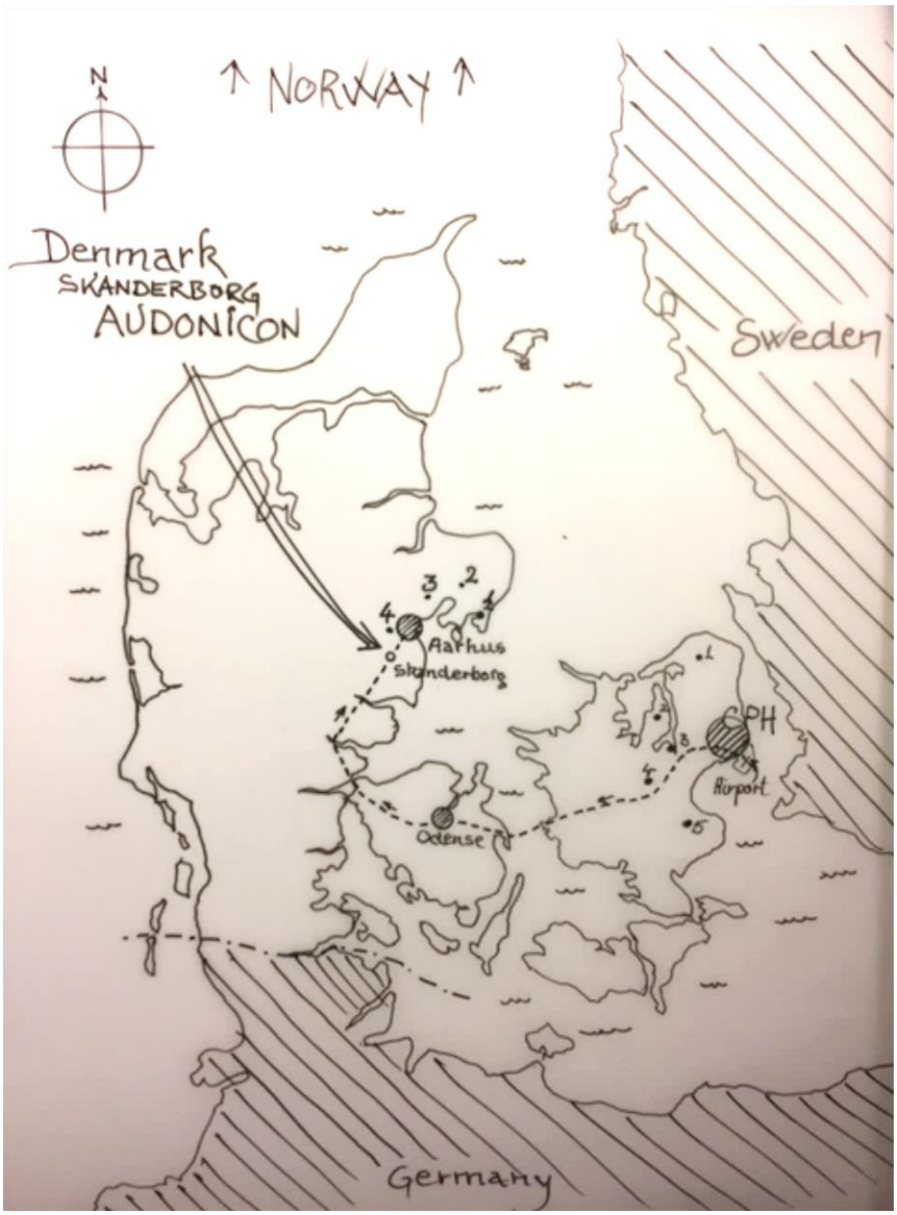
**The challenge is to create a vision for the next 25 years. We are all together 150 people out of whom 30 are disabled adults.**

**On our website is a short video about our community or have a look at the pictures from our jubilee:**
**https://www.hertha.dk/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/2021_276_okt_enkeltsidetB5_a_web.pdf**

**Ole Uggerby, Hertha**
**on behalf of the local team**

**Hertha Intentional Community**

**Directions: how to get to Audonicon plus indicates the places to visit during the preconference (1-4 near Aarhus) and the post conference (1-5 around Copenhagen).**



***Audonicon is a building that houses various anthroposophical activities, such as Waldorf Teacher Education, anthroposophical painting and eurythmic courses as well as artistic performances and lectures, etc.***

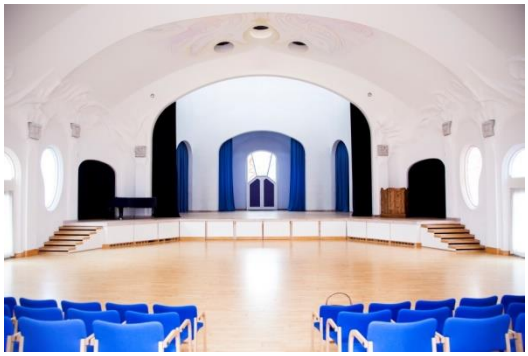
***Audonicon was built in the period 1984-1989 and consists of a conference/theater hall, 2 auditoriums, a music room, an atelier, library, book store and a number of smaller rooms.***

***Audonicon was designed by Holger Mellerup in cooperation with Leif Hansen and Olav Skovsted. It was built for private funds and is owned and managed by "Højskoleforeningen for Rudolf Steiner Pædagogik".***

***Audonicon was built as an attempt to realize Rudolf Steiner's architectural impulse.***

***The intention was to create a building where functionality, environment and artististic design are a unity with details growing organically from each other as the metamorphosis laws in nature.***

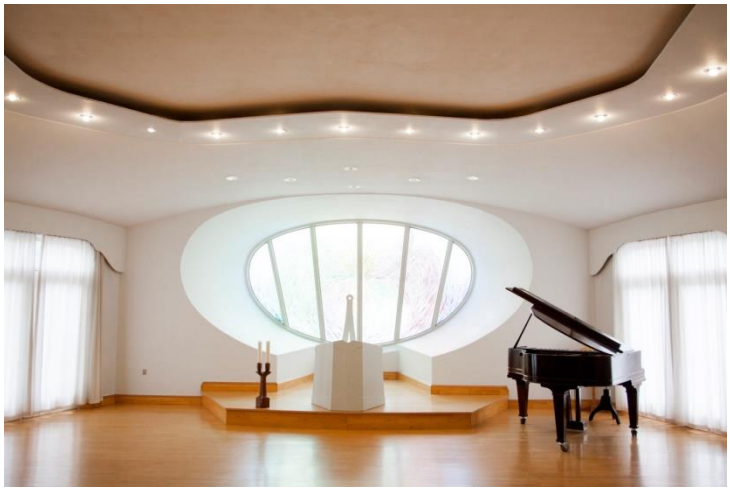
**Some photos from Audicon:**



**Main hall & seating**

**Library**





**Music room**

International Communal Studies Association (ICSA)

*Review by Crystal Byrd Farmer*

# *Camphill and the Future*: Another Look

**Camphill and the Future: Spirituality and Disability in an Evolving Communal Movement**
***By Dan McKanan***
**University of California Press, 2020, 250 pages. Available for download or purchase at www.ucpress.edu/book/9780520344082/camphill-and-the-future**

**Dan McKanan's new book, *Camphill and the Future*, is an in-depth look at the history of Camphill communities, intentional communities centered around providing education and employment for people with disabilities. The communities are spread throughout Europe and the US as schools, rural residential communities, and urban workshops. Camphill was started by Karl König, who followed an esoteric, vaguely Christian philosophy called Anthroposophy that also inspired Waldorf schools.**

**As part of writing this review, I attended Camphill's online research conference in November 2020 and spoke with Dan personally. Last year I spent a few days at Camphill Village USA in Copake, New York, during the International Communal Studies Association Conference. I stayed in a house with residents of the village and visited two other Camphill sites during the conference. As a woman with disabilities, parent of a child with autism, and educator at a school for children with disabilities, I was deeply interested in the experience of those with disabilities at Camphill. We are a long way from the mental hospitals of the 20th century, and intentional communities are a unique way to "mainstream" people with disabilities into the world. Dan takes an honest look at Camphill's approach, pointing out the successes as well as areas that could be improved.**



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**As a religious studies scholar, Dan describes Anthroposophy in detail to help us understand the spiritual life of Camphill communities. He respectfully details the way Anthroposophy influences farming practices, medicine, and engagement with the outside world, but it appeared to me that Anthroposophy is not in step with modern science. The villagers, as they call the people with disabilities, are often the most devoted to the rituals connected to Anthroposophy—for example, attending weekly church services. The coworkers, the people who support the villagers, are now largely short-term visitors or paid employees, so they don't necessarily engage with Anthroposophy the same way that earlier generations of coworkers did. The inner community of people who devote time to studying and discussing Anthroposophy is smaller and at some Camphills no longer exists.**

**Dan also gives a good analysis of how generational differences influence the growth and decline of the movement. The first Camphills were founded by Austrian refugees from World War I who wanted to recreate a rich cultural and spiritual life in Scotland. Generations that followed were more affluent and willing to try new things, which led to growth in the number of communities. The majority of the leadership now are baby boomers who struggle to compete with modern social care agencies that emphasize freedom of choice and interaction with the wider community. Parents of children with disabilities have more community-based options, and children with less profound disabilities don't need to be sent away to get the support they need. Gen Xers and millennials are less attracted to life at Camphill as long-term coworkers because they are philosophically different from baby boomers and less likely to make a lifelong commitment to one community. Dan uses Heartbeet Lifesharing as an example of a diverse community led by young adults that successfully integrates Anthroposophy and modern life in a way that is attractive to young people.**



**All intentional communities are built with a vision. König believed that creating an open space for work and spiritual reflection would give people the freedom they needed to meet their potential. In reality, Camphill communities can be restrictive in their work and living conditions. Originally all the communities were income-sharing and required coworkers to live on site, but many communities have moved to paying salaries and allowing coworkers to live nearby. Most of the communities are on large, rural farms, though some are located in small towns and engaged with the larger community. The work that villagers and coworkers do mostly involves traditional arts like woodworking and weaving along with biodynamic farming.**

**Many people would willingly choose a more traditional rural life for the sake of community, but at Camphill its largest constituency isn't the one making that choice. Can an intentional community be intentional if people are placed there by the government or their parents? Once they're placed, long-term coworkers, not the people with disabilities themselves, make decisions about housing, meals, and support workers.**

**Instead of full-fledged jobs with complete responsibilities, the villagers rotate through jobs such as digging holes, cutting wood, or stocking shelves. Two of the people with disabilities described in the book had roles as "assistant" and "deputy" based on their interest in "real" work performed by non-disabled people. Dan told me of the rare instance where people with disabilities managed a workshop,**



**but that is usually done by coworkers. The coworkers also speak for them when it comes to community life and reporting to government agencies. It was not clear that there was a process for villagers to express concerns and leave if they wanted to. (Dan described a process where coworkers could receive some "leaving money" upon departure; if there were a similar process for villagers I believe he would have mentioned it.)**

**In this way, Camphill is both a model for radical inclusivity and, I believe, an outdated and potentially harmful environment for people with disabilities. Dan revealed these views, which in my experience are harmful, in direct quotes from the coworkers. One said, "Normal people have problems to see *(sic)* other people. The guys with learning disabilities, at the moment they see you, they know how you are….They don't want you hiding yourself." Another said, "Maybe they are handicapped, maybe they don't talk so well or walk so well, maybe they need a lot of help, but what can I learn? What do they teach me about the joy of life, about being present…?"**

**To me, their comments portray people with disabilities as magical beings with a special insight into the world instead of humans who want to interact with the world in all its complexities and difficulties. By viewing them as either less than or more than human, coworkers ignore their very human desires and requests. In the book, Dan talked about the dismay coworkers expressed when villagers chose to buy a TV to furnish a new recreation room. Coworkers were similarly resistant to government requests to provide more choices—for instance, at meal times. It's true the people with disabilities have meaningful work and healthy relationships at Camphill, but, without agency, they are just at another form of an institution—"pleasant asylums," as one interviewee called it.**

**A movement that started as a revolutionary way to care for people with disabilities should be more open to input from the largest segment of its community. Dan mainly interviewed coworkers, so his book may not have had a clear perspective from children and adults with disabilities. None of the previous histories of Camphill records their voices either. People with disabilities were more visible at the online conference, but very little time was taken to let them express their thoughts.**

**I found it significant that I rarely interacted with people with disabilities while I was at Camphill Copake. I met the ones who lived in the house I stayed in, but no one at the house invited us to sit and chat (due to my own difficulties with social communication, I may have missed signals of their openness to do so). We spent hours in the coffee shop waiting for vans and dinner, but the only people I conversed with were other conference goers and our extremely busy host. We went to other buildings only when escorted by coworkers as part of a tour or conference activity. It's possible that, like many communities, they wanted to avoid disrupting community life during the conference, but I was struck by the absence of the group of people that the community was supposedly centered around.**



**(The Editor informs me that his experience in the house he stayed at was quite different from mine—he felt included and welcome, and he also interacted with other villagers before, during, and after the conference. He also noted villagers' participation in some of the panels he attended, and felt it significant. This was not, however, my own experience of the place.)**

**I work at Gastonia Freedom School, an Agile Learning Center for children with disabilities. Our children have intellectual and developmental disabilities. Some don't have spoken language, some can't tie their shoes, and most of them will never live on their own as adults. And yet we give them the freedom to determine how to spend 90 percent of their day. Do they ever choose deeply engaging and thoughtful activities? Not often. More often, they watch silly videos on YouTube, make art projects of dubious merit, and stalk up and down the hallway. We provide them a safe space to be themselves, but we also prepare them to live as independently as they can as adults. No**

**matter how they communicate, we can listen to what they want to achieve and help them get there.**

**If we can do this with children and teenagers, Camphill can do it with their residents.**

**Dan describes how the modern disability rights movement has challenged Camphill communities to do more to empower its residents, and it is clear that some communities are moving in that direction on the local level. The Mount Cohousing, a new cohousing community that is part of an established Camphill, allows residents with disabilities to decide where they want to live and to co-chair community meetings. Another community has created a form of income sharing not just among the coworkers, but among everyone who is a part of the community. However, there is no agreement that people with disabilities should serve as leaders within the larger movement.**



**In the book and at the conference, the coworkers expressed doubt that the villagers want or care to engage. It would require significant effort to help those who don't use**

**verbal communication or with cognitive disabilities to take on leadership responsibilities, but Camphill coworkers clearly have the experience to support this work if they believed it important.**

**Dan has great insights about the Camphill movement in particular, but the book is also helpful for other intentional communities. He discusses how communities led by charismatic leaders can successfully transition leadership to a new generation, how cooperation with government authorities can help a community thrive, and how private ownership models like cohousing can be adapted in ways that are still supportive of what Camphill calls "lifesharing."**

**The clearest insight for me was how the needs of previous generations of communitarians are not the same for younger generations. Communities that continue to operate on an isolationist model of moral superiority are not going to grow as fast as communities that recognize the interrelatedness of the entire world and focus on inclusion of all forms of diversity. Camphill has elements of both types, and its leaders are keenly aware of their need to evolve to survive in the 21st century.**

**Intentional communities could be a shining example of how people with disabilities can live their lives to the fullest among people who view them as human and not charity cases. A close-knit, cooperative community is an ideal environment for everyone to lead in their strengths while being supported in their weaknesses. As König said but may have not perfectly practiced, "You are grown-up people trying to make your living together, somehow, because none of you can make your living individually." I look forward to seeing how Camphill's future unfolds.**



*Crystal Byrd Farmer speaks and writes about ways communities can be more welcoming to people of all kinds of backgrounds. She serves as a board member with the Foundation for Intentional Communities and on the Editorial Review Board for* Communities*. Her book* The Token: Common Sense Ideas for Increasing Diversity in Your Organization *is out now (see excerpts in* Communities *#188).*

***Credits:** We thank* **Crystal** *Byrd Farmer for permission to reprint this article which first appeared in Communities #190, Spring 2021: [https://www.gen-us.net/communities/](https://www.gen-us.net/communities/)*

International Communal Studies Association (ICSA)

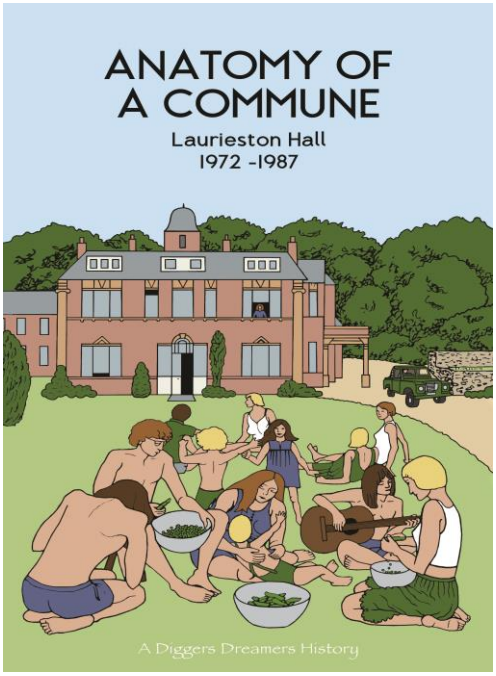
**Review *by Bill Metcalf***

# Communal Memories

## Anatomy of a Commune

***Edited by Dave Treanor***

**Diggers and Dreamers, London, 2020, 361 pages, www.diggersanddreamers.org.uk/shop/anatomy-of-a-commune-laurieston-hall-1972-1987**






**Situated near Castle Douglas in southwest Scotland, Laurieston Hall, the commune being anatomised in this book, started 49 years ago, and is now home to 23 people.**

**The main building was constructed in 1896-7 as a grand mansion with an estimated 65 rooms, including a massive kitchen, billiard room, etc. During WWII the building became a hospital, then a nursing home, before a group of would-be communards bought it in 1972. As well as the main building there is a large, walled-garden, stables and other farm buildings. One member, Penny, recalls, "The house is so well built and holds so much character in its fireplaces, windows, doors, taps, toilets and bathroom fittings." Hanna, however, remembers, "This nonsensical building housed huge echoing rooms laid out like dorms, and far flung so-called 'living spaces' joined together by cold, linoleum-lined corridors. … This ghastly, ghostly, oversized dwelling was to be our new home."**

**While in North America and Australasia, most contemporary intentional communities have been established on large blocks of rural land, in the United Kingdom it has been more common to repurpose grand old homes, often including farm land, walled gardens, and numerous outbuildings. The advantage of this is that people can move in straight away and start living communally because there will already be a huge kitchen, lounge and dining areas, plus many bedrooms. The disadvantage is that people are often thrown together, intensively, with little background or training in communalism, and often with inadequate social skills.**

**As well as Laurieston Hall, UK has many other "grand-house" intentional communities such as Beech Hill, Birchwood Hall, Bowden House, Braziers, Canon Frome Court, Crabapple, Dol-Llys Hall, Hengrave Hall, Manjushri Institute, Monkton Wyld, Newbold House, Old Hall, Postlip Hall, and Redfield. Of these, Laurieston Hall is one of the oldest, has arguably managed the best, and is almost certainly the best known and recorded. Preceding *Anatomy of a Commune*, in 2019 Mike Read published *Mix Café* also about Laurieston Hall, but limited to its truly communal phase of 1972-77.**

**Why do people write about their communal adventures? Is it to tell the world how wonderful—or dreadful—is communal living? Is it to tell their side, to justify their actions after a group is torn apart by conflict? There are many accounts of the ups and downs of communal living, but *Anatomy of a Commune* is one of the best.**



***Anatomy of a Commune* consists of 37 short chapters, each written by a current or ex-member. Some are quite factual and objective while others are subjective; some are impressionistic, others descriptive; some are positive and celebratory, others are almost apologetic. Lesley found "it was hard to settle on who I was writing my contribution to this book for; for myself, for my children and grandchildren, for present and past residents, for the interested reader after publication?"**

**The advantage of having many people contribute to such a book is that all sides get presented, all aspects covered, all flavours sampled. The disadvantage is that there may be little overall narrative, and a reader, having finished, might know much about many small events but little about the macro, communal story. With *Anatomy of a Commune*, the editor manages to weave these disparate stories together to give the reader a reasonably clear, overall understanding.**

**Laurieston Hall began as a commune with full sharing of ownership, income, and expenses. Open relationships were common, childcare was shared, as was work and responsibility—with many attendant problems. Dave recalls, "we pooled our income and expenses into one big kitty. Nobody was paid or required to do anything they did not want to. … The revolution of everyday life meant every aspect of our lives was open to question, including the nuclear family. Traditional roles of breadwinner, cook, and home-maker were now shared within the commune."**

**This idealistic, radical commune phase soon ran into problems of poor financial management, lack of clear governance, and the realisation that while everyone agreed to live as a commune, most did not appreciate the almost-inevitable problems, or agree how to make this a comfortable, or at least not unbearable, social reality.**

**One of the key issues in the formation of Laurieston Hall, as with many intentional communities, was the inherent contradiction between what I distinguish in my research as "in order to" and "because of" motivations. Briefly, "in order to" people are wanting to achieve some positive outcome, some pseudo-utopian ideal, while "because of" people are wanting to escape some problems or issues. For most "in order to" people, communal living is their very best option—for most "because of" people it is often the least bad of their options. Cheryl reflects this dichotomy: "I found living in a large communal group fraught with complex invisible tensions. … Some came to Laurieston to find a place to grow and to 'change,' while others came to escape society."**

**Stuart had idealistic, "in order to" motivations: "I had an idea…that we could change the world for the better by providing a self-sustainable and viable commercial enterprise within the consumer-capitalist system." Cheryl joined Laurieston Hall because it "appeared to be at the forefront of political change, feminism and community building."**



**A good example of "because of" motivation is Jonathan's memory: "We were refugees escaping persecution by the nuclear family and the consumer society and imperialism and the military-industrial complex and patriarchy, but we didn't know what we wanted except in a nebulous sense."**

**The Laurieston Hall children from the communal era recall: "growing up at Laurieston Hall was fantastic. … [It] allowed for idiosyncratic upbringing, shaped by each kid's own parental influences in the wider, open, encouraging atmosphere" (Joel); "You never really knew when your mum might surprise you with a lesbian encounter, or your mum's ex partner got into an awkward threesome" (Hannah); "In a sense we were raised not just by our parents, but also by the whole community" (Tam); "climbing on various adults who all seemed to love me, had time for me, were happy to tell me stories. … Childhood at the Hall felt so free, nurturing, fulfilling and multi-generational" (Josie).**

**By 1980, Laurieston Hall was in social disarray and serious financial straits and, in spite of their high ideals, communards were separating into smaller groups, some just to nuclear families. Rather than allow this social experiment of radical communalism to collapse, they decided to re-establish themselves as a housing cooperative in which every adult paid the same rent regardless of the space they occupied or how many children. It was at about this time when I first visited Laurieston Hall while doing research.**

**In this less-communal guise, Laurieston Hall continues to prosper in 2021, with 20 adults and three children.**

**There are many funny quotes such as Catriona's sad memory, "The only time I ever asked a visitor to sleep with me, he agreed but said that since he was in therapy, he was not supposed to have sex with anyone, and also, he needed his dog to stay with him. So, we went to sleep together, but nothing more—and the dog pissed on my bed. Kind of discouraging, that." One communal child, Maya, recalls, "we made friends with the local kids and sometimes even invited them back home. This could be quite tricky if it was a hot summer's day and there were naked communards podding peas on the lawn. Or if it was Gay Men's Week with 40 naked gay men sunbathing on the lawn." Yet another child, Hannah, recalls, "Lizzie's giant vagina painting on the first-floor landing is a comical and painful memory for me; particularly on one rare occasion when I brought home someone from school (never did that again!)."**

**Looking back from 2020, residents conclude: "I think Laurieston's biggest contribution has been in daring to believe in a positive view of human nature. … it's communities like Laurieston which aspire to the good in human nature that allow us the best chance of getting closer to that ideal" (Tam); "Laurieston Hall…was undeniably hard but I stayed and in the end I'm glad I did. It has been 45 years since we arrived in 1975, an extraordinary length of time. … Life continues to be full, interesting and challenging" (Lesley); "I can't imagine living alone as a family again. This feels far more natural, I'm sure we humans are meant to live in tribes" (Josie); "I feel I owe my fellow communards an apology for how difficult I must have been to live with" (Linda).**



**In conclusion, how do we assess Laurieston Hall's almost half century of existence? Do we regard them as *yet another* communal failure given that in spite of their high ideals of living as a fully-fledged commune, that phase lasted only a few years? Their attempts to escape "persecution by the nuclear family" seems to have morphed into a celebration of the nuclear family. If Laurieston Hall formed as "a struggle between radical commune versus the bourgeois nuclear family"—then the bourgeois nuclear family has clearly won.**

**If we measure Laurieston Hall in 2021 by the founders' aims—then fail it has!**

**On the other hand, we could see Laurieston Hall as having successfully navigated the model of Developmental Communalism as enunciated by Professor Don Pitzer in the 1980s. Perhaps we can best understand Laurieston Hall as being a great success because members have been able to adapt to changing conditions. Instead of collapsing when radical communalism failed, members developed other social forms and, 49 years later, this intentional community thrives.**

**So is Laurieston Hall a great success or a dramatic failure? I am unsure.**

**I suggest you read *Anatomy of a Commune* and decide.**

***Dr. Bill Metcalf, of Griffith University and University of Queensland, Australia, has been involved in, and studying, intentional communities during his long academic career. He is the author of numerous scholarly and popular articles plus seven books about intentional communities. He is Past President of the International Communal Studies Association, on the Editorial Board of* Communal Societies *journal, and has been* Communities *magazine's International correspondent for many years.***

***Credits: We thank Dr. Bill Metcalf for permission to reprint this article which first appeared in Communities #191, Summer 2021: https://www.gen-us.net/communities/***

*Lauriston Hall, Scotland, 2008*

International Communal Studies Association (ICSA)

# Kibbutz in the city? The healing mission of Israel's new communes

**Dina Kraft**

*Nir Sabo (left), Hyla Kemeny, and Harel Felder, all members of urban kibbutzim, meet on the roof of an urban kibbutz in Beersheba, Israel. Messrs. Sabo and Felder grew up in Tel Aviv suburbs, while Ms. Kemeny is an immigrant from Canada.*

**The youthful man in cutoff shorts and sandals punches in the security code of a nondescript apartment building in the center of this desert city, bounds up its three flights of stairs, and announces, "This is our kibbutz."**



**It's a jarring declaration for anyone familiar with Israel's iconic kibbutzim – the verdant, mostly agricultural socialist cooperatives that helped pioneer pre-state Israel and define the country's borders.**

**Yet in this so-called urban kibbutz, 16 members live here in four apartments, including members with children; another 14 members live in another building nearby, and a smattering live in apartments in the neighborhood. Members share not only living space, but some of their possessions, and pool their incomes.**

## WHY WE WROTE THIS

***Old model, new mission: With a modern pioneering zeal and a passion for social justice, young Israelis are reimagining the kibbutz, planting scores of collectives in disadvantaged neighborhoods around the country.***

**They also share a modern mission: building a rich communal life for themselves, and doing so in a low-income, underserved urban setting in Israel's so-called periphery**

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**with the goal of improving life for local residents, specifically through education.**

**"It's important for me to live a life that is full of meaning and feel like I'm doing something to make a difference, and this is the place where I'm doing that. It's also important that I take these dreams and try to fulfill them together with friends," says the cutoff-clad Nir Sabo, who helped found this kibbutz in 2005.**

**In the past two decades, some 220 urban cooperatives have been established across Israel, some in the form of kibbutzim and communes with shared economies, others in the shape of individuals or families who are economically independent but live in the same apartment buildings or neighborhoods and see themselves as a unit.**

## Impact on society

**While the cooperatives take different forms, they all share a mission as activists committed to improving the education, social welfare, and social justice of the cities and towns where they live. In 2006 an umbrella organization called Eretz-Ir was formed to help support the cooperatives and encourage new ones in the name of promoting social change.**



Dina Kraft

***Ella Orion (left) and Bella Alexandrov, members of the Kama group, an urban collective in Beersheba, sit in Ms. Orion's apartment in the city. On the floor is art utilized in a ceremony that the group created for its children starting grade school.***

**This growing trend extends beyond Israel's Jewish majority. There are also cooperatives made up of Arab citizens and Druze, and others with both Jewish and Arab members. There are also cooperatives made up specifically of young Ethiopian Jews.**

**These cooperative communities are most often located in what are called development towns, far from the economic and cultural heart of central Israel. Considered something of the country's backwater, these towns are not an obvious draw for educated young people. But those joining these cooperatives in growing numbers say they are choosing to live in these neighborhoods and towns precisely because that is where they can have the most impact on Israeli society.**

**Gabe Exler emigrated from Chicago nine years ago with his wife and moved directly to Beersheba, where they were founders of a liberal religious community focused on civic engagement that includes immigrants like themselves and native Israelis.**

**"What I learned is that being here gives people a feeling they are part of something meaningful," he says. "I think people are also searching for a community they can connect with – to celebrate in times of joy and be comforted with during times of sorrow – and in major urban centers you see loneliness and depression creeping in," he says.**



## A kibbutz for Millennials

**Mr. Sabo, who grew up in the Tel Aviv suburb of Kiryat Ono, walks across his kibbutz building's sprawling roof deck, which is lined with potted plants growing herbs and tomatoes – perhaps the only nod to the original kibbutz movement's origins as an ideology rooted in not just communal, egalitarian living but working the land. On the deck are scattered picnic tables and chairs where group members like him – graduates of one of Israel's largest youth movements – gather sometimes late into the night discussing ideas and educational projects they have underway in the city.**

***These intense, often ideological discussions would be familiar to the country's original halutzim – the Hebrew word for pioneers – who over a century ago laid the groundwork for creating what became the State of Israel. They were the generation who founded the first kibbutzim – envisioned as utopias of egalitarianism and social justice – and serve as inspiration for Mr. Sabo and his friends as they strive today to foster a more humanist, democratic Israel.***

**Mr. Sabo's kibbutz is one of 16 in the Dror Israel movement, the organization for adult graduates of a large socialist-oriented youth movement called HaNoar HaOved VeHaLomed, Hebrew for The Working and Studying Youth, that was founded in 1924. Their work focuses on education in local schools, but also with at-risk youth and vocational training for adults.**

**"The founders, the *halutzim*, they are our heroes," says Gilad Perry, a leader of Dror Israel and himself a member of an educational kibbutz. "But the question of today's young generation is what does it mean to be a pioneering Zionist today? … It is not draining a swamp, or settling the land. It's something else. But it is drawn from the same basic idea for being responsible for your life, for your country's life, and more broadly, for humanity."**

## Sense of belonging

**"Today's kibbutzim are very good places to live in, they have nice swimming pools, nice living standards, this is great," says Mr. Perry. "But if you are talking about … pioneering today, it is done in the neighborhoods, in the schools, in renewing a sense of what it means to belong to a society, a nation."**

**Someone who joins an urban kibbutz, he says, does this "because they feel a strong sense of belonging and attachment – their personal life and life as part of a society are one."**



**About 30 miles from Beersheba, near the border with Gaza, is Sderot, the most frequent target in the country for Hamas rockets. Its urban kibbutz is also run by Dror Israel.**

**Harel Felder, who grew up in Hod Hasharon, outside Tel Aviv, has been a member for nine years. It took time for his parents to understand this was his life, and despite the rocket attacks, and the town's struggling economy, and living with nine housemates – this was and will continue to be his home.**

**"I feel like this is where I am working for the future of my friends and the future of my country," he says.**

## Different models, same goal

**In a high-rise apartment building in Beersheba lives the "Kama" group, a community that was established 17 years ago. It has evolved from young single people living in**

**various apartments to 15 families with young children living on several floors of the building and in a few homes nearby.**

**The adults work mostly as educators or social workers. Sabbath dinners are eaten together, there are weekly meetings to discuss issues and update each other on their lives, members created their own ceremonies to welcome children born into the community and celebrate the start of elementary school, and they all contribute to an emergency fund for members who find themselves in need.**

**Among their civic projects was the establishment of Beersheba's first cooperative nursery school.**

**Bella Alexandrov, a trained social worker, describes herself as someone who never planned to live in Beersheba after arriving there from Latvia as an 8-year-old. She still remembers the shock when her family moved into one of its poorer neighborhoods.**

**"I thought about Israel as a place where bananas and coconuts fell from the trees, and I arrived and saw an ugly neighborhood with drug addicts and trash in the streets and I did all I could to leave," she says.**

**But a few years ago she heard about Kama, and after sharing a Friday night Shabbat meal she became intrigued, ended up joining, and eventually took over as director for Eretz-Ir, the urban collectives umbrella. Recently it has been focusing on how to develop employment in periphery areas.**



**"There is momentum, people are seeking communities, and the state understands the importance of having a strong periphery, so more state money is being allotted to these initiatives," she says.**

**For her, being part of Kama is deeply fulfilling. "We talk about leadership, about social change, but being a member gave me a feeling of connection I never had before."**

***Credit: This article first appeared in C.A.L.L. #47, Winter 2020 - Communities at Large Letter Intentional Communities Desk: [http://communa.org.il/index.php/en/](http://communa.org.il/index.php/en/)***

International Communal Studies Association (ICSA)

**The Intentional Communities Desk (ICD)** is a contact body connecting a wide variety of communities the world over - kibbutzim, ecovillages, co-housing, housing co-ops, spiritual communities etc etc.

The desk was established way back in 1976 and our modest headquarters are situated at the Yad Tabenkin Institute, on the outskirts of Tel Aviv, Israel.

Our magazine C.A.L.L. (Communities At Large Letter), is published twice a year, and includes articles and letters and other materials sent to us by communities from around the world. In addition, Kol is our Hebrew publication, published once a year.

The members of the Desk - our committee - all live in intentional communities, both rural and urban. Almost all of our work is voluntary and the few who are paid receive very little for their labour.

Today, we are supported by the Yad Tabenkin Institute, where the archives and the research and reference library are situated. Yad Tabenkin is home to one of the most significant and comprehensive, if not *the* most significant and comprehensive, collections of publications and books about intentional communities in the world. This material is at the disposal of researchers, students and anyone who is interested. The material is in the process of being digitized in order that it may be accessed remotely.



The lCD initiates meetings with members of communities from Israel and abroad. Our members also attend international communities conferences in order to connect with the wider communal scene.

We have both a website ( *http://communa.org.il/index.php/en/)* and active social media accounts on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

We are a Registered NGO, so are legally permitted to receive tax-free donations. (Even a modest sum will be very welcome!)

Do feel free to contact us!

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***Communities - Life in Cooperative Culture, #191, Summer 2021; #192, Fall 2021;***
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***GEN - Gen Europe Global Ecovillage - event updates etc.***
***Fran Whitlock fran@gen-europe.org ; www.gen-europe.org;***

***Revista Iberoamericana de Autogestion y Accion Communal***
***RIDAA 76 – 77; ISSN 0212 – 7687***
***Professor Antonio Colomer Viadel ancovia@urb.upv.es***

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