# eurotopia book review

If the compilers don't remember why 'eurotopia' is written with a lower case 'e', surely we can't be expected to relate to it as anything other than sloppy grammar?!

I love judging a book by its cover. Probably because it's something I was told not to do from a very young age. I see it as a form of rebellion – like teaching my daughter to blow raspberries and having soup for breakfast. The 2014 edition of the eurotopia Directory of Communities and Ecovillages in Europe landed in my postbox and my first impressions were: homemade, chatty and informal. The 1996 first edition was made with recycled paper and, although over the years the production of this resource is supported by a large team of people, including not an insignificant number of volunteers, it still has that recycled-y and grey-y feel to it. It's low-tech – not quite made on a Gestetner – but it could've been. So old-school is this directory, that it is not even available online. For many of us, if something has no online presence, then it doesn't really exist, (turning on its head the notion that the online is the virtual, and the thing that you can hold in your hand is the actual.) The reason we are given for this is that if they gave away the information for free, they'd not be able to fund the work for compiling the database, and anyway, they are quite fond of the written word.
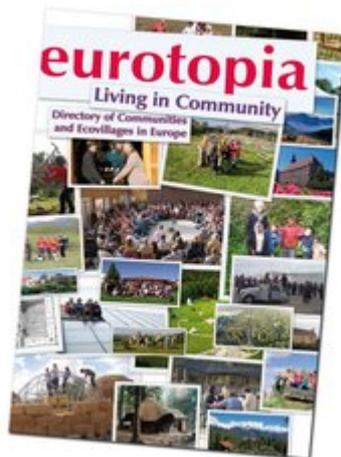
Following the introductory pleasantries, Diana Leafe Christian is rolled out to lecture us about the influence of intentional communities on the wider society – she name-drops the usual suspects: Findhorn, The Farm, Niederkaufungen and Crystal Waters. As overviews go, she does a decent enough job.

What I most like from the forty or so pages before we get to the actual directory, is the interview with Dieter Halbach, a community consultant from Sieben Linden. He presents us with tips for successful community building, from someone who has been there and done that. Great stuff!

The next article is about the interface between researchers and the communities which they study. It is a nice piece, and reminds me a lot of the dilemmas I encounter as a board member of ICSA (The International Communal Studies Association). My feeling from the last few conferences is that our organisation is increasingly becoming a fertile meeting ground for both academics and communards.

Next up, the ramblings of the editor –

his personal epiphanies of his six years living in community. I'm afraid that the less said about this the better.

What follows are more pages written by the editor, starting with a much more interesting piece by him, recalling the various editorial dilemmas he faced in terms of who to include and who not to include in the directory. He recalls an amusing request from an equestrian centre with just one permanent human resident, which described itself as a multi-species community! This article includes a rather serious passage, describing the choice not to publish the communities of the Twelve Tribes, due to the practice of violence within their communities.

Before we get to the listings itself, we are presented with definitions of community and some stats. There are a total of 429 communities published, with a massive 160 of them in Germany alone. The fact that the book is first and foremost a German-language publication (with intermittent versions in English), and is put together in Germany by (mostly) Germans, it is somewhat inevitable that its network of contacts, and subsequently the finished product, reflects this bias.

Further number crunching shows that 330 communities contain at least seven people. Taking away the two biggest communities (one in Russia and one in the Netherlands that can boast 7,400 people between them) the average number of people per community is only 38. In addition, more than 60% of community residents work on-site.

If you're looking for a book featuring

the most wonderfully useless table I've ever seen, pick up your copy of eurotopia and hastily turn to pages 44 and 45. The table purports to show how many communities should exist in any given country. It takes the number of communities listed in the directory by country, and compares it to the total population of that country. An overall average is calculated (0.4 communities per 1 million Europeans) and then this number is used to determine how many communities should exist in each country based on this average and the total population of that country. The stunning conclusion is that all but 8 European countries should have less than 10 communities. Priceless!

As for the directory itself, contact details, a description, date of establishment, demography and more, are provided for each community, including some pretty funky symbols used for the key. To be fair, if you are looking to discover and visit intentional communities in Europe, this is as good as exists, anywhere.

Having said that, my major disappointment is that only two Israeli communities feature in the directory (and Israel doesn't appear at all in the aforementioned table). I know that the directory depends on communities actually sending information to the directory, but when I can literally name twice as many Israeli intentional communities than even the number of German entries, the research has fallen short somewhat.

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