

## **Abstract:**

### **Eco-villages - Ecological economics in practice?**

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The continuing development of crisis of our time, "in money, energy, education, health, water, soil, climate, politics, the environment, and more" (Eisenstein 2013) stress both economic and social systems in addition to serious environmental disturbance. The more degraded ecosystems become the greater is the risk that these systems will be pushed over the edge. These problems demand for a change, and these change needs to be done on both structural and individual level.

In mainstream economics, competition has a central standing as regulating principle. Distinguished scholars in economics, from Adam Smith to Milton Friedman have been arguing that competition is necessary to promote efficiency and wealth. They look at competition as a natural state of affairs in a hostile market environment, assuming aggressive individuals motivated by their self-interest.

According to Lindner; "We (...) live in historically unprecedented times of risk, but also in historically unprecedented times of opportunity" (Lindner 2012, p. xxv). Instead of reducing negative symptoms within mainstream economics, ecological economics must strengthen the focused on how to develop structures and systems that on the one side prevent the accelerating negative symptoms to develop, and on the other side lead to local societies with high quality of life within a sustainable nature and a healthy economy. Ecological economics must have a strengthened focus on changes on both individual and systems level aiming to reduce the causes behind the negative symptoms.

To exemplify these changing processes we penetrate on the development of Hurdal eco-village in Norway. On a general level, eco-villages offer a radically different example of how people and communities based on cooperation help in the transition to a more sustainable future. Eco-villages are an initiative looking for more sustainable ways of living, and promote innovative solutions in response to climate change, pollution, resource shortages and social problems that people face. Eco-

villages foster a culture of mutual respect, sharing, inclusiveness, positive intent, and fair energy exchange. Eco-villages are communities that integrate a healthy social environment with very resource-intensive lifestyles.

Eco-villages represent one of the most interesting and complete models for ecological economics in practise. Eco-village principles aim to combine healthy socio-cultural systems with individual well-being, while using nature in a sustainable way. We argue that eco-villages are examples of a potent kind of community that unite life in small, supportive, healthy communities and a sustainable path for economic development. Aesthetics, intellectual life, art and culture are a prerequisite for and part of ecological economics in practise.

To compare practise in Hurdal eco-village with some of the principles in ecological economics we, following Ingebrigtsen and Jakobsen (2007) ask questions amongst the following sectors:

1. Culture

- To what degree are there possibilities in the eco-village to create a vibrant and creative cultural and aesthetic dimension?
- Does the eco-village affect and change the structures of the surrounding society?

2. Economy:

- Are there established infrastructures that encourage production, processing and distribution of organic food within the eco-village?
- Does the eco – village lead to a more sustainable consumption pattern?

3. Nature

- Is the eco – village integrated with the surrounding nature in a way that leads to sustainable development?

These questions will help us to look into how the eco-villages lead to a development on the following levels:

4. Individual development;

- i. To what degree are there established infrastructures that facilitate activities that nurture personal growth and development?

5. Structural development;

- i. To what degree, are there in Hurdal eco-village established structures that give opportunity to engage in different projects and interest groups?
- ii. To what degree are the residents in the eco-village invited to participate in processes that make it possible for everyone to have influence of development?

Concluding remarks,

We argue that eco-villages based on life-enhancing cooperation have much in common with the main principles in ecological economics but a thorough investigation of the practice of eco-villages are necessary to determine whether this is the case or some discrepancies should be elaborated and further development is necessary.