



ARGENTINA CULTURAL EXCHANGE

About GAIA Ecovillage

BACKGROUND

Asociación Gaia is a non profit association, founded in December 1992. Its founding mission is the promotion of sustainable societies, mainly by creating human settlements based on the practice of Permaculture systems and methods.

The origin of this project comes from the voice of Gaia. It is our own voice and impels us to wake up from the dream in which the system has submerged us. This is how we have proposed to develop small human settlements, based in communitarian, ecological and spiritual principles: Ecovillages. Residents and transitory inhabitants live in an environment that is in total harmony with nature and the evolutionary process of life. This does not deny reality, on the contrary, it connects us with a huge network of people who are also working to lead the world.

The project encourages work as a communal ritual. It is a space to contact our innerself, to create and collaborate with Gaia's process. Our deep aim at the EcoVillage is service, oriented toward generating real solutions for the global crisis and for an impoverished society like Argentina's. This is why these Eco-Villages will be neither places to run away from society nor to set up small Edens. They will be places that will function as living laboratories (*lavore et ore*), an attempt to transform the links with each other, with work and with life itself.

The supporting pillars of the Eco-Village follow these principles: coexistence, harmony, participation, democracy and tolerance. The Eco-Village aspires to be a center of integration with the bio-region in which it is settled. Each Eco-Village is open to interchange with each other, so that we can help one another in different aspects, such as food, service, construction, alternative energy, etc.

Eco-Villages are not intended to be closed and self sufficient systems. For example, we are co-dependant on material elements and scientific, technical and cultural knowledge. Each Eco-Village is autonomous in its decisions regarding the organization of tasks. The local administration of houses, productive activities and common spaces is organised and administrated by the inhabitants themselves. At the same time, there is a co-operating spirit linking the different Eco-Villages. Special emphasis is placed on the development of habits and minimising the existence of rules, since these narrow our minds.

Our intention is to provide a basis for group security based on solidarity, as opposed to the competition that destroys human bonds.

THE ECO-VILLAGE PROJECT

Since 1996, the first Ecovillage project has been developed on a 20 hectares' site in a rural area near Buenos Aires.

The buildings on the land had been used for a milk processing plant, until they were abandoned 30 years ago. The first steps were to restore part of these buildings in order to settle down and start to define the complete restoration of the big buildings and the general design of the village, with an integrated energy system.

We are also re-foresting with autoctonous trees, starting an organic vegetable garden and generating economic resources with some micro-enterprises and creating new ones.

There is a small group already established, and we have a growing group of collaborators that visit us every week. In addition, we are receiving a lot of visitors and interested parties whose input and recognition has helped us to clarify our vision and re-enforce the importance and need for this sustainable living model. We are introducing ideas and concepts which are new to this part of the world, and as there are very few other models, it is a great challenge to pioneer this project which is currently only understood and accepted by a handful of people.

We have founded the Permaculture Institute of Argentina and are currently involved in a world- wide Living and Learning Center project. Through these entities we carry out our main educational programs. We are also very focused on networking. For that reason, we participated in the creation of the G.E.N. (Global Eco-village Network) in 1995 and have been very active members since then. We are the South American node of the network.

We see Permaculture as an innovative tool to achieve the creation of permanent societies based on sustainable principles. We believe that Latin America is a fertile land to develop new techniques for a sustainable life style. The challenge is to learn and spread them, always making local adaptations. Out of this vision arose the initiative of convoking the 1st Latin American Permaculture Congress (march 2000), to strengthen the bonds among regional permaculturists, to offer a forum for the exchange of information and to organize mutual support within the Southern region. www.gaia.org.ar