



Ecological Dwelling: Eco Villages in Mexico

Brombin A*

Postdoctoral Scholarship Program, Scholar of the Institute of Anthropological, Mexico

***Corresponding author:** Alice Brombin, Postdoctoral Scholarship Program. Scholar of the Institute of Anthropological, National Autonomous University of Mexico, Mexico, Tel: +39 3407885098; Email: alice.brombin@gmail.com

Short Communication

Volume 6 Issue 2

Received Date: July 10, 2023

Published Date: July 27, 2023

DOI: [10.23880/aeoj-16000211](https://doi.org/10.23880/aeoj-16000211)

Abstract

Eco villages are intentional and experimental communities embracing ecological values that aim to regenerate social and natural environments through a sustainable communal living. In Mexico this phenomenon represents a way to criticize the current unequal economic system, claiming the right to achieve self-sufficiency and food sovereignty, sharing this commitment with other social movements such as La via Campesina. Moreover, in the Mexican context ecovillages represent a neo-reality community process, linking practices of sustainability with native cosmologies and indigenous belief systems and in particular with the concept of “Buen vivir”.

Keywords: Eco Villages; Sustainability; New Social Movements; Ethnography; Mexico

Introduction

I love the garden, I don't know why. I still can't believe that there was no grass here, nothing was able to grow; but now I realize that you can make it, and that it is simple. My heart opened up. I was a cold person, very mental; of course I was used to say loving is nice, but now I really feel it, especially when I spend a lot of time alone, in silence: I feel a real connection with trees, I talk with them. I feel this connection! not always of course, but there are moments in which I feel that they perceive me and I perceive them, as we were part of a whole, as we were a family. This is something I never experienced in the city. I remember the magic of watching a tree that sprouts of a tiny seed. I believed that I would not have been able to see the trees we planted grow. It took years, but yes, this happened, and it opened my heart up. And finally, understanding that we are a whole, that we are in a breeding ground... our mind creates a lot of divides, puts many labels, and separates. [...] I believe that this is the way: we must respect nature and do not think that we can cut a tree just because we feel like doing it, or dig a place just

to make money, because what is at stake is not nature, she recreates herself, rather, humanity is at stake. (Sabina, 65 years old, Teopantli Kalpulli Eco village, Jalisco, Mexico)

If humanity is at stake, what is the path that human beings should take to make their coexistence in the world more sustainable?

The global ecological crisis we are facing in its multiple dimensions, environmental, social, economic and cultural, is telling us that we cannot escape this question anymore. Eco villages and similar kinds of ecological living aim at being a response, proposing new paradigms to dwell on earth, and new possibilities of coexistence with many different “others” who cannot remain invisible anymore.

The experiences of ecological living presented in this chapter are intimately linked to my personal drive as an anthropologist of thinking about what humanity is becoming, and to developing an anthropocentric paradigm of social

action - building a bio-centric approach that confers dignity to the multiplicity of relations bonding together humans and not-human beings. The public debate on climate change and related ecological concerns frequently addresses the topic of environmental changes with a nostalgic attitude, as if something was irreparably lost. My ethnographic experience of Eco villages in different parts of the world taught me that what we lost is not a pristine or authentic nature, nor a mythological foundational frame to give meaning to our presence in this world. What we lost is the ability to imagine humans as creative agents not just by virtue of their rational and logical thinking, but also for their ability to feel, perceive, and experience the world [1]. This possibility does not ultimately follow an utilitarian logic, but rather an aesthetic unifying principle that enables humans to recover the beauty of our daily interactions with the landscapes, the environments and the other living systems around us. This is what the initial quote expresses: a feeling of being in connection that helps hearts to open up.

This vision that is neither naive nor assumed, is at the core of contemporary social and anthropological theory. The work of post-human scholars, Eco feminists, and multispecies ethnographers [2-5], just to mention some of the currents of thought that I consider particularly fascinating, focuses on the urgency of taking seriously spheres of our lives that have been overshadowed for a long time in the western world, like those associated with emotions, body, poetry, arts, and more in general, what is related to our sensory and perceptual experience. With this respect, many anthropologists and social scientists encourage us to think enthusiastically about the emergence of new hybrid, nomadic, multiple, perceptive, embodied, collective, situated and resilient subjectivities [5,6]. The lifestyle embraced by Eco villages reflects the same vision.

This chapter presents these particular kinds of eco-communities, to demonstrate how the effort to put in practice new forms of sustainable dwelling results in individual and collective experiences in which relatedness and interdependence emerge as the turning points for a more balanced, fulfilling and ecological existence on our planet.

Poetical Dwelling

If we go back to the Greek etymology of the word ecology we immediately reconnect its meaning to idea of familiarity, care, sacredness and closeness implied in the concept of *oikos* that we are used to translating as home. This vision is in line with the thought of the anthropologist Tim Ingold [6,7] who points out the home is not just the place in which people live, rather, it is a stratified microcosm, home represents the ways humans' dwell in nature and the ways in which nature dwells in human environments [8]. Ingold returning

to phenomenology, introduces the concept of dwelling as a foundational principle of our "being in the world". In contrast with a dualistic approach that assumes the idea of a unique singular nature as a pre-existing thing, something out there that we can use, control and measure, something separated from our bodies and our intentions, Ingold [9] encourages us to think beyond one environment, one nature to a multiplicity of interconnected processes that produce who we are and that we contribute to create. Dwelling is then a process of "leucopoiesis" in which human beings create systematically new environments that are the result of perceptions and imaginations. These places can be seen as inner and external landscapes, and are defined as "magical places" referring to the symbolic qualities that sustain human activity. Therefore, what characterizes human existence is a multiplicity of different points of view of nature implying different tonalities and specific perceptual modalities which can never be traced back to a unitary vision. For this reason the form of our living can only be known through the emotions that it arouses. Here the aesthetic principle comes into play; the sensorial, perceptual and emotional ability to experience the world [8]. Aesthetics is understood not just theoretically but as a practice of living that lets the connections and relationships between things emerge, recognizing the fundamental unity of subject and object.

This perspective, that binds together the concepts of aesthetics and dwelling, is based on the centrality attributed to the senses and is directly connected to body and bodily experience, since the body is a bridge between the internal and the external world. The body operates through sensation and aesthetically mediates the relationship between us and the world, in this way the original meaning of aesthetics as the site of perception is reaffirmed. This approach is adopted by Eco villages that can be defined as aesthetic communities [10]. When the aesthetic experience is embodied and therefore performed, we move from subjectivity to enter a collective dimension where the personal and the social blend. On this premise, if earth is our domestic environment, humans are called to be part of a "earth household". This is a concept familiar to Latin American Cosmo visions, particularly those of indigenous communities that have a systemic view of life and do not perceive nature as something static, but as a living entity. The basis of this vision is the idea of "being in the world" as a process of becoming in which humans and non-humans beings co-create each-other and co-evolve. Therefore, in order to be sustainable a human community should not interfere with the natural ability of ecosystems in sustaining life; recognizing and preserving the mutual interdependence between human beings and other ecological communities [6]. Expresses a similar thought referring to indigenous societies, presented as human collectives embracing a bio-centric approach in opposition to western anthropocentrism:

"It is to accord priority to the Western metaphysics of the alienation of humanity from nature, and to use our disengagement as the standard against which to judge their engagement. Faced with an ecological crisis whose roots lie in this disengagement, in the separation of human agency and social responsibility from the sphere of our direct involvement with the non-human environment, it surely behaves us to reverse this order of priority. I began with the point that while both humans and animals have histories of their mutual relations, only humans narrate such histories. But to construct a narrative, one must already dwell in the world and, in the dwelling, enter into relationships with its constituents, both human and non-human. I am suggesting that we rewrite the history of human-animal relations, taking this condition of active engagement, of being-in-the-world, as our starting point. We might speak of it as a history of human concern with animals, insofar as this notion conveys a caring, attentive regard, a 'being with'. And I am suggesting that those who are 'with' animals in their day-to-day lives, most notably hunters and herdsman, can offer us some of the best possible indications of how we might proceed" [6].

The failure of the relationship between "us" and the environment reveals itself in the constant exploitation of non-human creatures for our benefit and in the tendency of relegating them to a domain of nature separated from that of human society. For many non-western people, and indeed for many people who are only nominally part of "western societies", relationships with humans are not so different from relationships with other entities, both types are characterized by mutual trust rather than domination and exploitation [11]. This is possible when we recognize that we dwell on earth in specific relational contexts by virtue of our practical involvement in the world. This way of interacting with the natural environment, according with a vitalistic logic, is one of the most significant traits characterizing what is called "Buen Vivir" referring to the specific form of dwelling that defines indigenous Latin American cosmopolites [12-14].

Ecovillages as Alternative Experiences of "Buen Vivir"?

The Eco village movement is a growing social phenomenon, the presence of several networks such as the Global Eco village Network (GEN) and the Council of Sustainable Settlements of Latin America, reflects the transnational dimension of these experiences [15-17], who analyzed the Eco village movement in Latin America defined it as an alternative experience of "Buen Vivir" on the idea that the world is a living and interconnected organism endowed with intentionality and intelligence; the consensus method adopted as decision-making processes and community understood in terms of self-reliance.

These are all elements that Eco villages share with native cosmologies [18,19]. Eco villages are often understood as a "counter-migratory", "back to the land" movements that try to signify indigenous and peasant ways of life, proposing a communitarian lifestyle, producing and consuming locally with the commitment to organic collective agriculture, and pursuing the ultimate goal to preserve and protect nature.

According to these studies, Eco villages contrast with the tendency of urban migration, considered as the most distinct symbol of the western capitalist model of life [20-22]. These experiences of return to the land are not limited to practices of subsistence, such as organic agriculture, but extend to the search for a renewed relationship between human beings and the natural world, with the ultimate goal of experiencing life in a fulfilling way [18]. Eco villages can thus be considered as a new social movement contrasting neoliberal development and the economic logic of unlimited growth, sharing some funding values with the Latin American approach to Buen Vivir. According with post development literature, the concept of growth is very central in the conception of human wellbeing, since it creates dysfunctional and unequal societies in which we are no longer [23]. With this respect, from an ecological approach [24] the concept of Buen Vivir can be defined as "an endogenous alternative to neoliberal development that provides the opportunity to understand, define and satisfy the real needs of communities, instigating bottom-up change" [25]. In particular, Buen Vivir meant here as a collective practice of living, focuses on communal wellbeing defined as a combination of social, economic, environmental, cultural, and political conditions identified by individuals and their communities as essential for them to flourish and fulfill their potential Wiseman and Brasher (2008:358). As many authors point out where wellbeing under Buen Vivir is innovative for sustainability is "that environmental wellbeing is also required, practiced by behavior and beliefs and guaranteed by the Rights of Nature" [25,26].

For a better understanding of the lifestyle proposed by Eco villages and to show its similarities with indigenous forms of dwelling, it is useful to summarize some of the main characteristics of Andean Buen Vivir. Victor Pinto provides the following description:

"In the Andean world, life does not take place just in time and space, but occurs and develops in Pacha, which includes time and space. Pacha is the miniature microcosm where the Andean man lives; it is the social and natural community where life develops, including all its deities (Huacas), its Apus, animals and the living and ever-changing nature. The Andean worldview is immanent to the natural world, nothing is projected outside, and nothing acts on it from the outside. In the Andean world there is no supernatural [...] nothing is

transcendent. The Andean world is sensitive, perceptible, patent and evident. The Andean mental model is collective and communal [...] Pachamama is the mother earth and people should take care of it. For the Andean world, the universe and the earth are a living totality. The parts are not understood as separate from the whole. This totality includes the earth, the territory, the climate, the water, animals, plants, the human, natural and cosmic community. Everyone deserves deep respect. All these elements are related through a permanent dialogue of complementarity and mutual reciprocity. Everything is sacred, the earth or Pachamama [...] and all its creatures are related, including trees, rivers, animals, stones, mountains, and all of them interact as living beings"[26].

As the quote shows, the Andean Buen Vivir and the form of dwelling that it inspires, embodies the attention conferred by indigenous peoples to the maintenance of a balanced relationship with the living beings who populate the cosmos. This implies a way of life based on the capacity of adaptation to the environment that is made possible by maintaining a constant focus on the local community and its autonomy. Buen Vivir is a system of knowledge alternative to the epistemologies of "Euro-modernity" [24] as well as a social practice opposing the logic of unlimited development [27]. Thus, Buen Vivir is an instrument for the mobilization of social movements and the formation of new alliances [27]. On this basis, a broader vision of Buen Vivir takes shape, including the demands for territorial autonomy, for an economy not oriented towards human well-being, and incorporating the principle of reciprocity practiced by indigenous communities [28]. The Eco village movement worldwide seeks to generate radical changes in our way of living, producing and consuming, with the goal of preserving nature. If the contemporary ecological crisis is a crisis of models of knowledge, as well as a crisis that questions our patterns of creation of the world, [29] then Eco villages try to overcome the ontological divide between different perspectives of the world, to find more resilient ways to dwell on it. Does then continuity exist between the form of dwelling proposed by Eco villages and the principles of Andean Buen Vivir?

To answer this question I present some reflections from my ethnographic fieldwork in Eco villananda, a Mexican experiment of ecological living by a restricted group of people, mostly from United States, located at 2500 meters in altitude near to the municipality of San Sebastian Rio Hondo, in the Sierra Sur of Oaxaca. In this forested area dwell the indigenous population of Zapatero's, known for the use of mushrooms as a sacred, medicinal plant, whose consumption is at the basis of related shamanic healing practices. Starting from the 2010, Eco villananda develops as collective experiment of eco-sustainable life. The

community receives volunteers interested in experiencing holistic practices focused on the body as well as meditation techniques and ritual ceremonies with medicinal plants. The residents, mostly coming from the US, have settled gradually in order to integrate with the indigenous population. What struck me when I got to Eco villananda was the incredible beauty of the landscape. As you venture through the paths in the forest you observe the communal houses built in mud and straw using the traditional construction techniques and the permaculture gardens where children learn self-sufficiency and how to recognize native plant species. The members of Eco villananda are committed to involving the local indigenous population in community projects, such as the recovery of traditional handicrafts, and the production of clothes made with organic cotton.

Focusing on the experience of one of the residents of this eco-community I highlight how the encounter with the local population takes place, to understand how ideas of dwelling originate from this encounter and how it affects the personal biographies of those who participate in this community project. With this respect, I am introducing the story of Sasha who was living in the community while I was there doing fieldwork. Sasha was born and raised in England, where she studied veterinary and herbal medicine. Despite having successfully completed university, Sasha felt like something was missing in her life. She was living with a concern that ultimately prompted her to move away from her country in search of a more fulfilling life experience: "With all my academic credentials, my formal studies and my western ego", Sasha told me, "I went to work in several countries in Europe, India, Sri Lanka, Thailand until I finally arrived in Mexico, and I loved it because it was a serious blow for my ego. The locals told me: ah, your credentials. What do they mean at the end of the day? Since then, I started to "find"". What Sasha seems to find in her experience in Ecovillananda is a radically different way of managing social relationships, as well as a different way of interacting with nature and the living beings that inhabit it. Her permanence in the community seems to be an ongoing learning process in which the interaction with the local indigenous population, with their different habits and their customs plays a central role in the transformation of Sashes' biographical trajectory. This is how she describes this encounter:

By living in this place I learnt what community means. The most fascinating thing is that here locals grew up knowing they have to cultivate their own food, if they don't, then they do not eat. If they don't bring their firewood, they are cold. It sounds easy but it's not like that. We (Western people) are used to find other ways, like making money to buy the stuff we need, but they have another kind of adaptation. This type of adaptation requires community. For example, if the time of cleaning the fields comes, they

have to go and do it, the whole family! Their point of view is collective, not individualistic; you can't make it by yourself! We do not have this need, but all of us foreigners, we grew up accordingly to an individualistic pattern of life. For this reason I feel that creating divides, making conflicts, and not being able to tolerate each other is always easier for us. I noticed that I don't like this wave. It's like arriving and being a bubble of foreigners and trying to create our own community separating ourselves from the community that already exists! I do not like it! I feel very arrogant, very western and many times they know so many things that we do not even think to ask about. You already know it, I am talking about the typical attitude of the "gringos" who arrive [...]. But speaking with the local indigenous population and living with them I began to understand a different meaning of the word community. That the community can be very fluid. For example, I already feel by interacting with them, that they possess something that I have never had in my life. They have a family of blood, they grow together, they do everything together, and they made me understand that I will never have this, but it's fine, I don't have to keep looking for this. I'm sorry my friend, I am sorry for people who keep looking for this wave of remote, tiny ranch in the mountains. Then, they let me see that I don't have to keep looking for this, rather accept and love what I already have, and recognize that my community is everything: these foreigners and the locals as well. I should be happy with that, and not keep looking for something that maybe is impossible to reach; and maybe learning how to accept myself for being more individualistic than them, because I didn't grow up like them. Because I started to think: can I live like them? And the answer was: no, I have my individual desires, my individual things that I would like to do, which cannot be done in this environment.

(Sasha, 32 years old, Ecovillananda, Oaxaca, Mexico)

Sasha's' awareness of the substantial impossibility of adopting a communitarian way of life similar to that of local inhabitants comes with the daily interaction with the indigenous population, after living, working, eating and sleeping with them:

I spent almost two months with A. and C. (a couple of indigenous peasants) working exactly as they do. I was used to wake up with C. and going with him to the ranch. I sowed corn, I reaped, I learnt everything from him about the cornfield. I used the plow and oxen to plough the soil. I learnt construction techniques with clay; I tried all my best to learn how they live their lives; how they eat; I learnt how to make tortillas, everything that I could. Then, after two months, I was completely worn out. So, I realized that it was not the work that I really wanted to do in order to change my life and to be self-sufficient. And I still don't know if it's something I'd like to do; because they don't rest here, they barely have time for their own spiritual things.[...] At the end of the day I didn't

grow as a producer, I grew up in another state and in another environment, and I still have my attachments.

(Sasha, 32 years old, Ecovillananda, Oaxaca, Mexico)

The excerpt shows that the relationship with the land, or Pachamama, that according to the literature. [21,22,30] would represent the connection between Eco villages and indigenous cosmologies, assumes different forms and meanings. In the case of indigenous practices, the daily contact with the land is linked to a basic need of survival, since nature is the source of material and spiritual sustenance. This connection of the local population with the surrounding environment and its rhythms derives from a deep knowledge of the natural world tied to logic of subsistence. On this basis Buen Vivir is presented as a "symbiotic" approach that recognizes the co-dependence existing between all living beings, including the human community and extending native kinship terms to nature.

In the case of Sasha, and more generally in Eco villananda, this dimension is not related to the return to the land in terms of self-sufficiency, rather it entails the search for a more intimate and less mediated interaction with the natural world. This process is aimed at overcoming the primacy of consciousness and rationality that define human action and instead expand human capacity to be open to the others [31]. My informants frequently describe this specific experience in terms of a renewed sense of "spirituality" that enables them to reconnect with their sensorial and sensitive perception of the world. This process seems to increase the sense of fulfillment deriving from the possibility of better understanding the external environment as well as the inner landscapes that subjects co- create. In terms of dwelling this also influences the ways of thinking and making community, by not limiting its material and symbolic boundaries to human presence. As the narration of Sasha shows, this process had concrete consequences on the way in which she perceives herself and her role within the community:

Before coming here my medicine was working to some extent, but it was limited; I couldn't reach its deepest levels, and I wasn't able to understand why. Then, I started dreaming crazy things. I believe that through dreams I realized there was something that I needed to understand. So here, listening people's talks and through my dreams, I became aware that plants have something to tell me, but at that time I didn't know how to get it. So, I began to meditate but I could not reach the depth needed to understand. But then, I found a lot of local people here who became my masters. They don't have any credential, any study but undoubtedly, they know so many things, and they taught me, they showed me that the most important thing is experience, as well as your hands, your instinct, listening to plants and not just studying them in books. Since I have been living here

I tried to meditate with plants, to enter, as they call it, in “the medicine of the spirit of the plant”, which is like - this word is very overused – “shamanic”. I use it to say that in my opinion every plant possess an essence, a spirit, just like animals. They (the plants) can tell how they can help us and how we can collaborate with them, and they (the plants) will work with us just if we are useful for them as well. This is what I understand. Well, this and much more from the indigenous people here, they have a lot of knowledge, although they do not admit it, but yes they really do. By interacting with them I am always learning and now I provide medical consults also for local people here, but I have never felt that my learning process came to an end, I am still learning from local indigenous medicine.

(Sasha, 32 years old, Eco villananda, Oaxaca, Mexico)

The interesting thing about quote is that what is meant by Sasha as “spiritual” is radically immanent. The knowledge Sasha is learning and creating thanks to the interaction with indigenous people is a corporal knowledge rooted in practice. The centrality of this kind of a relational pragmatism that is also at the core of the aesthetic experience mentioned in the previous paragraphs is highlighted in the continuation of the extract:

When I talk about “spiritual practices” I do not mean that I learned how to meditate from them (the indigenous), or how to do any technical thing with them; but they are people who, when a mountain collapses, leave the place and continue with their life. For me the fact that they accept nature as it is, that they dwell down in its shades, that they live in the rains and bathe in cold water is a huge spiritual training ... they are not always looking for something, they are not chronically unsatisfied like me. So yes, they are teaching me a lot about my spiritual practice, not through techniques, but through their way of living, their way of speaking, their stories, through the things elders tell me. [...] And now that I know better my spiritual side, I realize that I attract people with whom I share a common vision. [...] For example, my dreams lead me to work with a curandera (shaman). So happened that I met one, and she told me: «Sasha, you’re not Mexican, I’m not going to train you, forget it!». Then, I went back to my house and I cried, I felt that maybe I was out of place and all this kind of thoughts. Then, I calmed down, and talked with many locals, not about her but about what she told me, and they said: «keep looking!, look for other ways! Work with plants, talk with people! you will see, she is not the only one, there are others». Then, they helped me and recommended this lady who knows some remedies, another one who knows something else, so I am learning in this way. And then, something interesting happened: the same curandera who rejected me, brought me her sick dog.

(Sasha, 32 years old, Ecovillananda, Oaxaca, Mexico).

The encounter with the local community and with native cosmologies helped Sasha in re-unifying her rational and spiritual side, finding a balance between the conscious and the unconscious that is fundamental for the existence of the individual as “a mind” [32]. This concept refers to the combination subject-environment that Ingold [6,7] addresses in his reflection on the dwelling perspective, presenting it as a complex and densely interconnected system that makes our being in the world possible. This is made possible for Sasha firstly through her daily physical and material work in her permaculture garden, an ongoing practice of learning how to interact with plants, local species and with the internal and external environment. A practice mainly based on long observational time and on a constant game and experimentation with the land, the natural environment and the creatures that live in it. The extract also shows that the form of dwelling that characterizes Sasha experience is animated by the curiosity towards what she considers “different”. The re-connection both with her own roots and the local environment took place through a slow and gradual interaction with the local indigenous population, describing what in anthropology would be defined as an ethnographic encounter. From this encounter arise a renewed sense of community - in the differences - and the feeling of empathy that links people and nature in a dynamic of mutual interdependence. The movement of opening that makes Sasha’s experience possible, is part of a continuous process of knowledge distinct from rational abstractions, rather rooted in rationality and in daily practices of communal living [33]. This also involves the enhancing of perceptual, sensorial and emotional abilities, that contribute to living and then to dwelling in a more fulfilling, resilient and sustainable way. On this basis, Eco villages can be defined as aesthetic communities generating an original form of Buen Vivir not meant as romantic return to a state of nature nor of a subsistence way of life, but as a way of acting and thinking alternatively to the logic of separation, unlimited growth and uncritical consumption in which nature and non-human beings are considered objects to be used. The way of dwelling proposed by Eco villages recognizes the fundamental value of changing rationalities and multiple ecologies [34]. Consequently, this form of dwelling cannot be separated from community: the practice of Buen Vivir belonging to Eco villages is always collective and it necessarily implies the community, opposing individualism and anthropocentrism in favor of an hybridized and creative approach to life based on an ethic of closeness and proximity [35-50].

Conclusion

The experience of Eco village living described in these pages is similar to that of many who radically changed their existence to undertake paths of community life. The internal drive is the desire to break the chains that bind us to the

mainstream economic system, that keep us slaves to the salary at the end of the month and that prevent managing independently our own time, our personal ambitions and the rhythms of our lives as well. Getting rid of this implies the utilitarian choice for a community life since it provides the resources that enable the individual to survive outside the mainstream. However, it is not surprising that in many cases the core of community life is not self-sufficiency. Within Eco villages agricultural work frequently entails the re-appearance of schemes and paradigms similar to those of the mainstream society which are re-created in agricultural settings rather than in urban contexts. Even in the communities I visited where food self-sufficiency was the main community goal, the inhabitants frequently stressed that they live in the ecovillage not to be farmers. It is precisely the concept of work meant as the main pillar of the Western world that people want to avoid embracing a communitarian way of living. However, moving away from technological and globalized societies to the Mexican jungle is not easy, past the romantic disguise; the main issue is shifting from a logic of extreme individualism to a different mindset in which “the other” is essential for your own survival both in symbolic and material terms. Indigenous lifestyle teaches precisely this: re-learning how to be a community, how to co-exist and stay together. The frustration Sasha experienced during her first interaction with the indigenous community is not due to her incapability to learn their habits and traditions, rather from the feeling of being out of place despite her effort in understanding and being closer to locals. Sasha found herself incapable of sharing with them the same place and to feel at home in it. By the contact with indigenous, Sasha got involved in a process in which learning how to dwell implied to re-establish a connection with the surrounding environment before than the increase of her knowledge of indigenous practices and specific local codes. In the Western world we are crushed by the culture of “doing”. The belief that getting closer to indigenous traditions means first of all returning to the idea of “do it yourself” is a misunderstanding, it is not about to make a living out of the mainstream, rather it implies the idea of “do it together”. The search for empathy is by definition the ability to feel with the other, this makes ecovillages experiments of sustainable living. In these communities people try to relearn how to feel and perceive, how to contact their own emotions, how to awaken their own senses and consequently regain possession of their own bodies. In these terms, the existential path undertaken by Eco villages can be interpreted as an aesthetic research, and this is the element of connection between the indigenous Cosmo visions and Eco villages’ approach to reality. The influence of the indigenous communities on Eco villages is not in terms of subsistence, nor is about to learning local practices to re-connect to the natural world, what we miss is not what the indigenous do, but how they do things, their way to approach the world. What foreign incomers

building an eco-community on Indigenous land can learn is how to situate themselves in a different world and how to see things from another point of view, since coming from a Western society frequently implicates not just a monoculture but also a mono-vision. This is one of the main goal of Eco village living: deconstructing the tradition of Western humanism that places man, the individual, as an original and unique individuality, at the center of everything. This cultural attitude of positioning man and “human nature” at the center has been leading us to isolation and stillness. The Indigenous way of living helps in realizing that we are stuck on the stage, it contributes to free ourselves from our immobility, to dynamite our lives, and to finally recognize the interconnections that make our being in the world possible.

The Eco village living and its relations with indigenous cosmopolites and Cosmo visions still remains a complex phenomenon that deserves to be observed and studied in its evolution. Further research is needed to understand the indigenous’ experience of these sort of Eco villages and eco-communities. A particular effort should be done listening to the voices of the indigenous, putting them in dialog with Eco villages all over the world.

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