

CODE OF CONDUCT

Collaboration between Researchers and Ecovillagers

Background

This Code of Conduct (CoC) is designed to facilitate ethical, respectful, and mutually beneficial collaboration between researchers and ecovillagers/community members. Even though the term ecovillage is used, the CoC is equally suited for other living communities, like cohousing or other community led initiatives like urban gardening or transition (town) projects. The CoC outlines guidelines and expectations for both parties to ensure a harmonious working relationship. The goal is to bridge understanding and cooperation between the field of researchers and that of community members, recognising the value each brings and enhancing the usefulness of research conducted in and about communities.

The CoC aims to mitigate known challenges in these collaborations, including:

Access challenges: The need for clear guidelines, direct communication and informed consent to assist researchers reach the right target groups.

Practical agreements: Addressing compensation, recognition, and data use to clarify practical agreements.

Expectations: Clear expectations for both parties regarding the research process and its outcomes.

Dissemination: Define expectations for research dissemination, ensuring alignment with the needs and preferences of ecovillages/communities.

The CoC has evolved as a deliverable of the REGEN4ALL project through interviews and workshops held with both researchers and ecovillagers, to harvest practice and experience directly from the field. It is located here: <https://ecommunity.gen-europe.org/>

Reading instructions:

SECTION A - for researchers

SECTION B - for ecovillagers

Sample contract - for inspiration

Note, that it is recommended to study both sections when collaborating.

We sincerely hope the CoC will come to use.

For additions, comments etc., please contact anne.schwab@ecovillage.org

THE REGEN4ALL TEAM

Section A: For researchers (how to study the field)

1. Understand the existing field of research

Sustainable and innovative communities are increasingly being approached by researchers, policy-makers and media content producers. Thorough research has been conducted and an increasing number of publications are available to refer to. It is crucial to be aware of studies previously conducted in order to not repeat, but build on them and be able to produce additional, valuable and needed contributions to the field.

Proposed action before doing research at one specific place: Ask if the place has been involved before. Study and refer to the large variety of quality research and literature that has already been published. There is likely to be existing research that can improve and sharpen the intended research questions. A vast amount of literature is available in the [E-community library](#), which is openly accessible.

2. Access - respect unique community values

Before approaching a living community, researchers should do adequate background research about their values and goals, to approach them from a standpoint that respects their specific culture and way of life. Researchers also should be fully aware that each ecovillage/community is unique, and that attitudes to scientific research and researchers can vary greatly from place to place. As a visitor, be mindful that even within a place that welcomes engagement with scientific research, individual attitudes may vary, as well as attitudes regarding the presence of researchers in their premises.

Proposed action: Contact the [national network of ecovillages](#) (around 20 in Europe) and ask for advice about which ecovillages could be relevant for the exact focus of the study. Contact the ecovillage (ask for a specific contact person) and make sure to study their website before the first contact. Be curious and ask your contact person whether there have been previous studies done and how that experience has been.

2. Establish informed consent

Researchers must obtain informed consent from all participants in their studies, and in the best case from the entire community, clearly explaining the purpose, scope, and potential implications of the research. Communities and community members have the right to avoid participation without any consequence.

Proposed action: Send an introduction email that informs about the study. Make sure that the email is sent around internally and ensure there will be consent from the ecovillage, preferably in writing.

3. Share transparent research objectives

Researchers should provide explanations of their research objectives, methods, and expected outcomes. It is not useful nor necessary to introduce the exact research question, since the academic language tends to articulate quite complex, but to be able to explain the

focus with simple words. This includes disclosing any potential conflicts of interest.

Proposed action: Offer a public introductory briefing to community members before you begin the fieldwork, during a preparatory visit, a webinar or the like. Sometimes it can be useful to visit the plenary or a membership event to introduce the research ideas.

4. Ensure confidentiality and privacy

Respect the privacy and confidentiality of individuals within the ecovillage community.

Ensure that data collected is used only for the intended research purposes and anonymised when necessary. Researchers must use data collected ethically and responsibly, adhering to relevant laws and regulations.

Proposed action: From the offset, establish an agreement with ecovillage members about any pseudonymisation - or not - of the ecovillage's name and the names of its members. Also inform them of how collected data will be stored and handled.

5. Clarify issues of compensation

Researchers should consider fair compensation for the time, knowledge, and resources invested by the ecovillage. This can also be the case if staying in a guest house. Never take for granted that staying, eating and living there is free, just because research is conducted.

Proposed action: Ask about any fees to be paid and be ready to offer payment for services offered. During a stay it can be good to offer to volunteer for the community, like taking part in cooking shifts, giving a hand in the garden or the like. Also the data and material conducted and the research itself can contribute to public relations and marketing issues for the community. Offer support wherever possible.

6. Recognise contributions

Remember that knowledge created through research in ecovillages is only possible with the goodwill and active engagement of their members.

Proposed action: Acknowledge and credit the ecovillage and even its specific ecovillagers in the foreword or afterword of research publications or presentations.

7. Analyse the data and check in for its correctness

When analysing data from the field, be aware to crosscheck with the community, in case of doubts and unclarities, to secure correct representation.

Proposed action: Maintain constructive contact with the community throughout (and maybe also after) the research process, giving and receiving feedback. Do not hesitate to check unclear information.

8. Keep up timely communication

Maintain open and timely communication with the ecovillage communities throughout the research process. Address any concerns or questions raised promptly. Be available.

Proposed action: When having conducted fieldwork, remember to write back to the

community from time to time to inform how the research project is doing, also if delays should occur in the agreed publications or seminars.

9. Disseminate results in a preferred way

Share research findings with the ecovillage communities involved and with the broader ecovillage movement. Focus on why, how, when and what to disseminate, to whom.

Proposed action: Ask about which format the ecovillage would like to receive the research outputs. It could be in the form of a presentation, a 'popular' article, a webinar etc. Inform where academic articles can be found, but make sure to align specific dissemination towards an ecovillage target group. Upload publications into the [E-community Library](#) for it to be available to broader society. Please contact [GEN](#) and [GEN Europe](#) if you want dissemination from their channels (it will be appreciated).

10. Keep agreements in a written form

To avoid the risk of misunderstandings, it can be helpful to have agreements settled and written down beforehand, for both parties.

Proposed action: Use the sample contract format and contextualise to the specific situation.

NETWORKING WITH OTHERS?

If you want to connect to other ecovillage researchers for networking, presenting your research project or to receive feedback, you are welcome to explore the growing '[Community of Practise](#)' development. The Global Ecovillage Network runs a research group. Subscribe to the group: genresearchcircle@googlegroups.com

Section B: For ecovillagers and community members (how to be studied)

1. Be open to research and contribute with input on desired research topics

Actively engaging with scientific research and researchers brings potential benefits to ecovillages and their members, the ecovillages movement, and the wider society. Such engagement may provide support, or even solutions, to the challenges that ecovillages face in their functioning, as well as in their relationship with the wider ecosystem of public institutions, social movements, NGOs, the market and nature herself. Research can bring valuable answers and shed light on dilemmas and complexities. These benefits are in themselves incentives to engage in research collaboration - but ecovillagers sometimes have to be reminded why this is important.

Proposed action: Give attention to research conducted in other ecovillages and share through mailing lists, social media etc., making ecovillage research an integrated part of ecovillage life, adding value and new perspectives. Discuss at community meetings what areas could be useful to link to research. Set up a group responsible for answering requests and participate actively in the match-making platform.

The [matchmaking platform](#) offers ecovillages the opportunity to indicate topics or areas for which they would like to count on the support of scientific researchers and institutions, making research more needs based.

2. Give informed consent

Ecovillagers have the right to ask questions and seek clarification about research projects. Choose a contact person who can provide the framework and needed level of informed consent before participating in a research project. Make sure to express concerns or boundaries, as well as to ask researchers and their institutions to provide information about the code of ethics and institutional review boards that they rely upon to guarantee ethical behaviour from the part of researchers and mutual benefit between researchers and what/who they research. Send them this CoC if they do not know it already.

Proposed action: Be clear about the research collaboration to the whole community and include questions and objections. Make sure everyone has consented. Use the CoC actively.

3. Collaboration and communication are key factors

Collaborate with researchers by openly and willingly sharing knowledge and experiences to contribute to the research process. Offer the needed time after having agreed to be studied. Recognise that the insights from ecovillagers are valuable and that diverse views are needed.

Avoid handpicking the same people for interviews and respect that every voice is unique. Maintain open and respectful communication with the researchers. Express expectations and concerns, always seek clarification when needed.

4. Clarify compensation schemes

Agree from the offset on compensation and recognition with researchers when appropriate. Be clear of costs for staying in a guest room, eating at common dinners etc. Many research projects have a field cost budget to spend from. Ensure that agreements are clear and fair, considering the time and resources contributed. Some communities have it as a condition that a person from the community is paid to organise logistics for the research team. Clarify these aspects on time and follow up if changing needs occur.

5. Ensure privacy and confidentiality

Respect the privacy and confidentiality of your fellow community members. Inform the researcher of any specific privacy concerns or boundaries within the community. It could be certain places where photography is prohibited.

6. Give feedback and underline accountability

Provide constructive feedback to researchers to improve the research process. Hold researchers accountable for their ethical conduct and adherence to this Code of Conduct. Ecovillagers must be ready to receive critical feedback without feeling threatened. They must also be aware that the timeline of research projects can be several years, so it may take a long time until the results and outcomes are ready to be shared.

7. Arrange for a proper level of recognition

Provide information on how you want to be mentioned, recognized and quoted. Whether mentioned anonymously or by name (for both the place and its people).

8. Agree on mode of presentation/delivery of results

Be clear in voicing expectations on how and when the results of the research will be presented by the researcher. Find appropriate means of dissemination, like a live presentation, a webinar or the like. Do not settle for a link to a ph.d dissertation (this happens), but ask for an article or something that can be shared internally and externally. *Proposed action: As an ecovillage it can be interesting to be studied, but the results can be valuable for a wider network. Do not hesitate to contact your national network and have them assist in disseminating the research results.*

9. Keep agreements in a written form

To avoid the risk of misunderstandings, it can be helpful to have agreements settled and written down beforehand, for both parties. Use the sample contract format provided and contextualize to the specific situation.

This Code of Conduct and the accompanying collaboration contract serves as a foundation for ethical and productive collaborations between researchers and ecovillagers. By adhering to these guidelines, both parties can engage in research projects that benefit all involved while respecting the principles and values of ecovillage communities.

Feel free to use and adapt this CoC to your needs.

Sample research collaboration contract

Attached is a sample collaboration contract that researchers and ecovillagers can use to formalise their agreements. This contract should be customised to suit the specific needs of each collaboration.

Research Collaboration Contract (SAMPLE)

Name of ecovillage: _____

Name of contact person: _____

Contact information: _____

Name of researcher: _____

Institution, department and research project: _____

Contact information: _____

Period of field work: *

From .. /.. / 20.. ..

To: .. /.. / 20.. ..

Methodology of the field work (interviews, observations, data collection etc.):

Profile and number of people to be interviewed:

PRACTICALITIES:

A) Accommodation and other practical needs:

B) Financial agreements/fees to be paid:

C) Mode of presentation/dissemination of results:

1. Purpose of collaboration

This contract aims to formalise and govern the collaboration between the ecovillage/community, represented by the contact person, and the researcher or the research team in conducting research for the specified research project during the defined period of field work.

2. Responsibilities of the parties**2.1. Responsibilities of the researcher.**

The researcher agrees to:

- a. Conduct research in accordance with the approved research project and ethical guidelines, including adhering to the Code of Conduct as shared between the parties.
- b. Respect the rules, values, and privacy of the ecovillage/community during the fieldwork period.
- c. Ensure any preferred anonymity of the ecovillage, its residents, and any individuals interviewed, as specified and agreed in this contract.
- d. Abide by the financial agreements and provide any agreed-upon compensation for accommodation or other expenses.
- e. Present and disseminate the research results in the mode agreed upon, ensuring transparency and acknowledging the ecovillage/community's contribution.

2.2. Responsibilities of the ecovillage/community

The ecovillage/community, represented by the contact person, agrees to:

- a. Provide necessary assistance and access to the community during the researcher's agreed fieldwork period.
- b. Ensure the safety, well-being, and privacy of its residents during interviews and data collection and alert the researcher as soon as any challenges are observed.
- c. Collaborate with the researcher to determine suitable accommodation and other related expenses, as specified in this contract.
- d. Support the researcher in the mode of presentation/dissemination of research results, as agreed upon.

3. Anonymisation of place and people

[select either "Yes" or "No" in accordance with the agreement]

YES: ☐

NO: ☐

IN SPECIFIC CIRCUMSTANCES: ☐

Please elaborate _____

4. Financial agreements

The financial terms of this contract are as follows:

- A) Accommodation: The researcher agrees to provide the designated compensation, as mutually agreed upon, for accommodation and any related expenses during the fieldwork.
- B) Other expenses: Any additional financial arrangements, if applicable, agreed upon.
(details are spelled out in the PRACTICALITIES section)

5. Mode of presentation/dissemination of results

The mode of presenting and disseminating the research results will be as follows:

An article: ☐

A seminar: ☐

A live presentation: ☐

An online presentation: ☐

Other mode: ☐ _____

6. Duration of the contract

This contract shall commence on the effective date and continue until the specified fieldwork period has been concluded and dissemination of the results of the research has been taking place.

7. Termination

This contract may be terminated by either party with written notice to the other party if any party fails to fulfil its responsibilities, breaches ethical guidelines, or violates the terms of this contract.

In witness of their agreement to the terms and conditions herein, the parties have executed this collaboration contract as of the effective date.

Name and signature of researchers

Date signed: .. /.. / 20.. ..	Signature: _____
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Name and signature of contact person in the ecovillage/community

Date signed: .. /.. / 20.. ..	Signature: _____
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Attach any additional documents or agreements related to this contract, if necessary.

QUOTES FROM RESEARCHERS AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS:

"As a resident and board member in a large co-housing community in Denmark, I have, for almost 10 years, experienced that collaboration between researchers, research projects, and communities working on sustainability at all levels has great value for all involved parties. Many sustainability-focused co-housing communities include dissemination, knowledge collection on effects, and the spread of results as part of their profile/mission with a desire to inspire others and demonstrate on a data-driven basis what eco-communities or sustainable behaviour can achieve. The collaboration benefits the documentation that community projects make a difference, and thus the significance sustainability can have for societal development, the economy, or the social context that the community supports. Residents benefit from engaging in contexts where they need to reflect on their processes and a larger context than what they are currently involved in. It strengthens motivation and the experience that experimental behaviour matters.

In my community, we have participated in various research projects, such as the analysis of sustainable materials, reduction of food waste and CO2 footprint, or collective reflection on ageing in a mixed-age co-housing community. We have many Ph.D. and master's students investigating the community and the anthropological meanings—for example, loneliness, identity-building, collaboration between generations, conflict prevention and management, children's lives, etc. This ranges from collaboration with longer-term research projects, for example with DTU, RUC, AUC and BUILD, and other Danish and European research projects. Research contributes to convincing, among other things, sceptical politicians about trends in societal development and of doing things differently than society normally supports. It is demanding for a co-housing community to be available for interviews, information, collection of statistical material, perhaps group discussions, but it returns manifold in terms of attention to the significance and mission of co-housing communities as catalysts for change in society."

Inger Maaløe, Permatopia, Denmark www.permatopia.dk

"Collaborating as a researcher with "real life" practitioners or organisations provides large benefits in terms of not only using their insight and background knowledge more directly than "just" as informants but also developing ideas and understandings in dialogue. Moreover, it's a really good way of generating ideas for new research. There can also be challenges, for instance, practitioners might have a more normative approach to research objects such as ecovillages, but as a researcher, it's important to maintain your integrity and stick to evidence, so the collaboration needs to respect each other's positions. This has luckily not been a problem in my projects".

[Jesper Ole Jensen](http://www.aau.dk), Aalborg University, Denmark
<https://www.build.aau.dk/>

“In our ecovillage (Hallingelille) we have had researchers and students around several times, conducting field work for their projects and thesis/phd work. To be interviewed about what this community is and what it wants brings another level of reflection, which is different from our internal processes. It happens that we do not receive feedback from the researcher about the completion of their work and our role in it. Then we ask. Sometimes we get a full report sent back to us, but not many people in my community will go through a whole report to trace the parts we are in”. Camilla Nielsen-Englyst, www.hallingelille.dk, Denmark

“During thesis work we visited several Danish ecovillages. After our field study at the Munksøgård, we orchestrated an article targeted habitants of the ecovillage, in order to convey our results. This was done in order to show gratitude to the multitude of involved participants, and to be able to boast a bit about our great feedback from the examination. Our results showed that habitants of Munksøgård did in fact live a happier life in comparison to the Danish statistical norm. Something we would never have guessed”.

Ditlev Hjort, Roskilde University, Denmark

“As a researcher I have studied many cohousing and eco-communities, including some groups in the process of developing their communities. In the communities there was in general openness to engage in research. Only two communities were not open for an interview. In the one community it was a decision made on a common meeting for a period of time not to have visitors. The other community was new-built and here it was the developer who was afraid of unfavourable comments, but the inhabitants were open for a short interview and a visit. In my PhD I followed the process and motivations of creating and moving to a countryside cohousing, and I met so many interesting and lovely people who wanted to share their viewpoints with me, including letting me be part of different social events of their communities. In this process, I interviewed future inhabitants, often several times and this resulted in a deep acknowledgement and dialogue about creating community, on a social, organisational, and physical level. Through this dialogue, the research participants came through with new nuances and perspectives on the subject. Sometimes these were reflections they had not had before.”

Anna Falkenstjerne Beck, Industrial PhD, Build/AAU, Denmark & Kuben Management
CEO at Falkenstjerne Fælles.