

ALTERNATIVE COMMUNITIES



by Keith Wiebe Gordon
featuring Mr. Big



the **power of small**
A LOCAL ALTERNATIVE



Alternative Communities

Local Solutions for the Common Good

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Throughout the Earth's five-billion-year history, there have been cycles of ebb and flow. A greenhouse Earth led to a snowball Earth. The first birth of life eventually led to the first extinction of life. The rise of the first societies was followed by their eventual fall. These changes are all part of the natural order.

The Scientific Revolution in 17th-century Europe laid the groundwork for a peak in human thinking and unprecedented advancements in the modern era. Many social and economic improvements that are now valued globally, such as increased standards of living, national healthcare programs, universal education, and social housing plans,

can trace their beginnings to the models conceived by rational thinkers centuries ago.

The use of the scientific model led to advancements in fossil fuel extraction, which improved the food supply, resulting in increased global population and a growing global economy. This, in turn, led to an expanded tax base, providing resources to fund economic and social engineering.



Hi! My name is Mr. Big. I am here to tell you that all this small talk stuff is a pile of... well maybe there are children in the room, and I shouldn't use words like that. You can read more of this boring article if you are that desperate. Let's talk later.

However, there is a downside. There are limits to growth. Economic and social engineering is not carried out in isolation and depends on other related global systems that are currently struggling. Our global society is now at the end of a long run of technological, economic, and social achieve-

ments. We have reached a peak and are now descending, entering a phase akin to a cascade.

In our urban planet, family members and individuals in their local communities can no longer find simple pathways to creating their own housing, finding work, and the satisfaction of developing self-sufficiency where collective small actions impact the well-being of neighbors.

If the global status quo can no longer be maintained, it is time to explore alternative communities: local solutions for the common good. In the last two decades, alternative communities have emerged as responses to well-meaning but impersonal and increasingly ineffective social and economic systems. These communities empower citizens to address societal challenges and pursue the common good in a peaceful and productive manner.

This article explores the formation, structure, resourcefulness, challenges, and potential of alternative communities, highlighting the role of the Power of Small in achieving meaningful and sustainable solutions.

The Emergence of Alternative Communities

The concept of alternative communities gained prominence through the efforts of Václav Havel, a Czechoslovakian playwright who became the first post-communist president of his country. During the height of the social engineering era in Eastern Europe, Havel championed democratic alternatives and paid the price by enduring imprison-

ment.

After the fall of the dominant regime in the 1990s, Havel became a symbol of local empowerment and was recognized worldwide for his advocacy of alternative communities. Václav Havel was praised by 25 democratic governments and awarded the highest honors of achievement.

Havel is known as the leader of the Velvet Revolution, also called the Quiet Revolution. Under his leadership, this



Hi again. You should know that the Havel guy had a wife and a mistress. The night before he was being made president of Czechoslovakia, gossip says he told his wife, "Tomorrow you are going to be my first lady." His wife replied in sadness, "All I ever wanted was to be your only lady." If you ask me, Václav was just a velvet loser!

peaceful social movement brought about a profound transformation in Czechoslovakia, marking the end of top-down rule and the beginning of a new era of freedom and self-determination. The Velvet Revolution inspired a wave of

change across Eastern Europe, sparking a desire for alternative communities that would foster democratic ideals on a local level.

These communities sought to create spaces where individuals could live according to their own values, free from the constraints and pressures of the dominant culture. They were characterized by a spirit of cooperation, shared responsibility, and a commitment to social and environmental sustainability.

The first alternative communities took various forms, ranging from eco-villages to artistic collectives and grassroots movements. In these spaces, individuals came together to experiment with new ways of living, often rejecting consumerism and materialism in favor of simplicity, self-sufficiency, and a closer connection to nature. They prioritized community building, fostered strong interpersonal relationships, and promoted mutual support and collaboration.

The personal appeal of alternative communities lies in their ability to provide a sense of belonging and purpose in a world that can often feel alienating and disconnected. By creating their own microcosms of society, these communities offer an alternative vision of how human beings can live and interact.

Alternative communities serve as laboratories for innovation and experimentation, testing new models of governance, decision-making, and resource management. They

provide valuable insights into bottom-up community development initiatives such as holistic healthcare, community-based housing, sustainable villages, environmentally beneficial policy decisions, and the development of social enterprise. By demonstrating alternative ways of organizing, living, and working, they contribute to the ongoing discourse on social justice, environmental stewardship, and human well-being.

The impact of alternative communities reaches far beyond their immediate boundaries. They serve as a model of the power of collective action, the importance of questioning established norms, and the potential for individuals to create meaningful change. They inspire the reimagining of human relationships and our relationships with the natural world, urging collective efforts to strive for a more just, inclusive, and sustainable future.

A Global Phenomenon

One of the most globally renowned alternative communities is the Findhorn Ecovillage, located in northeast Scotland. Founded in the early 1960s, it is considered one of the oldest intentional communities in the world. The Findhorn Ecovillage focuses on ecological design, sustainable living practices, and spiritual exploration. It has become a hub for ecological education, research, and environmental stewardship.

In North America, Earthaven Ecovillage in North Carolina was established in 1994 and is dedicated to regenerative living, permaculture principles, and community resilience. It aims to create a sustainable village that harmonizes with the natural environment while fostering social connections and shared resources.

The Auroville community in India represents a unique model of cross-cultural exchange and spiritual development. Established in 1968, Auroville aims to be a universal township where people from all backgrounds live in harmony. It focuses on sustainable practices, cultural diversity, and integral education.



Hmm, let me get this straight. These alternative communities are growing all over the world like a velvet revolution. It sounds more like a rough revolution to me. All work and no play. No thanks. Let's party!

In Latin America, the ecovillage of Los Horcones in Colombia has gained recognition for its commitment to sustaina-

ble development and community empowerment. Founded in 1972, Los Horcones promotes organic agriculture, renewable energy, and environmental conservation. It serves as an educational center for sustainable living practices.

The Nimbin Village in The Gambia is an intentional community that has developed sustainable living, alternative education, and community empowerment. The community emphasizes ecological practices and renewable energy.



Alternative communities are also prominent in the Power of Small global network. In Hope BC, Canada, the Anhart Community Housing Society is currently developing community-based housing using a combination of social impact investments and low-cost government financing. A coalition of community members from all walks of life have united to develop affordable apartments, housing for

adults with cognitive disabilities and a tiny home village.

In the Southern Highlands of Tanzania, villagers in the Umalila region began with one \$300 micro credit loan and created a successful pharmacy in 1988. The pharmacy began paying forward its profits to other village-based ventures. Now, there are 20 community-based organizations in the surrounding villages creating community agricultural businesses, schools, and medical services and then paying the loans forward to new organizations.

These examples highlight a fraction of the thousands of alternative communities around the world that have emerged to offer innovative solutions for sustainable living, social harmony, and environmental stewardship. Every alternative community can inspire us to reimagine our relationship with one another and with the natural world, fostering a more just, inclusive, and sustainable future.

Navigating Two Worlds

The reality for most fledgling alternative communities is that they often have a small membership and struggle to establish themselves within their neighborhoods. The Power of Small is dedicated to creating an online space for newly formed or developing alternative communities worldwide to find pathways to establish and sustain their alternative community health, education, environmental, and social enterprise services.

One of the key challenges for newly created alternative

communities is learning how to navigate the complexities **of two distinct worlds: the** established authoritative systems and the desire for local autonomy and self-governance.

These alternative communities rely on the support and cooperation of governmental bodies to ensure the protection of their rights and the provision of essential services. National policies and regulations can play a significant role in enabling the growth and sustainability of these communities. However, alternative communities also value the freedom to shape their own local destiny.

To navigate these two worlds, alternative communities employ strategies that involve collaboration, negotiation, and advocacy. They engage in dialogue with government officials and policymakers, aiming to foster mutual understanding and garner support for their initiatives.

Alternative communities invest in building networks and alliances with like-minded organizations and individuals. By forming partnerships with governmental bodies, impact investors, socially responsible businesses, and local community-based organizations, they create a supportive and interdependent system that models effective community development.

The journey of navigating these two worlds is not without its challenges. Alternative communities may encounter the need to explain their goals and methods to established power structures and investors. They may face legal or bu-

reaucratic tasks that seem overwhelming or experience a lack of resources to undertake community projects. However, with dedication and an understanding of the first principles that originally fueled their formation, alternative communities can overcome these obstacles and successfully become self-reliant at a local level.

A peaceful balance between local autonomy and global cooperation can help alternative communities harmonize with national structures that impact their growth and development.

By navigating these two worlds and finding ways to collaborate with external stakeholders while maintaining their unique values and visions, alternative communities can carve a path towards resilience, sustainability, and the pursuit of the common good.

Formation of Alternative Communities

At the Power of Small, alternative communities have formed in diverse countries through the collective efforts of local leaders who share a common vision for change.

These leaders come from various backgrounds and include everyday citizens driven by compassion and a desire to develop community-based organizations. Many alternative communities are also supported by college graduates who dedicate their lives to the common good, choosing triple bottom line organizations over corporate careers.

Experienced farmers and fishers, equipped with leadership skills, contribute to the success of alternative communities by managing collective farms and fisheries. Pay-forward microcredit programs further empower these communities and promote village sustainability.

Seasoned professionals and impact investors are attracted to alternative communities, offering resources and mentorship to younger members, fostering an intergenerational dynamic.

Alternative communities typically adopt incorporation strategies that balance local autonomy and recognition from higher levels of government, often as non-profit organizations, or community contribution companies.

While alternative communities have unique local contexts, they share a universal response to social, economic, or en-



Haha! You are hilarious! Stop making me laugh. You're making my stomach hurt! The only power of small is the power to be a loser. Go ahead, be small. More room for me at the top!

vironmental challenges. Decentralized decision-making structures empower members to shape their shared destiny actively.

Inclusivity is essential in the formation of alternative communities, both in physical spaces and through online platforms like the Power of Small, which allows individuals from all regions to contribute to shaping their shared destiny.

Membership in alternative communities is often open, promoting the development of resources that benefit members and their communities.

Formation is an ongoing process that requires commitment, collaboration, and adaptability to changing circumstances. Challenges and conflicts are addressed collectively as the community evolves.

Alternative communities learn from successful models and experiences of others, locally and globally, to effectively address similar challenges, avoiding reinventing the wheel and benefiting from the collective wisdom of the broader alternative community movement.

Resourcefulness and Sustainability

Alternative communities rely on diverse resources, including donations, investments, sweat equity, loans, communal land, shared infrastructure, cooperative economies, renewable energy, and volunteers. Collaboration and re-

source sharing within and between communities promote self-sufficiency and effective solutions to community challenges.

Shared land use is a key resource for alternative communities, enabling community gardens, collective farms, co-living housing, and more. By pooling resources, community members create shared spaces for living, working, food production, and environmental preservation.

Infrastructure and business services can also be shared and provide critical mutual support within alternative communities, with pooled resources maintaining essential community projects and offering low-cost administrative, marketing, and operational assistance.

Cooperative economies based on natural energy sources play a vital role in resourcefulness and sustainability. These models span food production, manufacturing, crafts, services, and renewable energy, promoting local resilience and collective ownership.

Alternative communities harness natural resources like solar, wind, or hydro power, reducing reliance on fossil fuels and contributing to climate change mitigation.

Local expertise and knowledge within alternative communities are valuable resources, allowing them to address challenges and promote self-reliance.

Investment tools such as pay-forward microcredit programs, low-interest loans, community bonds, and partnerships with accredited investors help finance self-sufficient

social enterprises.

By increasing community-level resources and improving administrative and financial capacity, non-profits and community contribution companies can partner with larger financial aid programs to expand small-scale community services.

Sustainability is a core principle of alternative communities. This principle gives priority to resourcefulness, self-



Oooo. Small world is using fancy words like "resourcefulness" and "sustainability" to sound sophisticated. Let Mr. Big tell you the real story. An alternative community will always just be a free loader on society. Just throw a few bones at the little beggars and keep them happy!

sufficiency, minimizing ecological footprints, aiming for regenerative practices, and meaningful living experiences for future generations.

Real-Life Challenges

While alternative communities offer promising solutions to gaps in top-down social engineering systems, they face real-life challenges that hinder their growth and sustainability. These challenges stem from internal and external factors, requiring resilience and creative solutions.

Alternative communities often operate outside traditional economic systems, relying on cooperative economies, shared resources, and local expertise. Sustaining economic viability becomes a challenge due to limited access to financial resources, markets, and employment opportunities. Generating income through sustainable businesses, cooperative enterprises, or local trade networks becomes crucial for long-term sustainability.

Land acquisition and security pose significant challenges for alternative communities due to rising prices, legal barriers, and competition with mainstream development. Partnerships with impact investors, advocacy for supportive land-use policies, and alternative ownership models like community land trusts or cooperative ventures can help overcome these obstacles.

Scaling up and replicating successful models can be difficult. Resolving issues of growth, resource allocation, and times of contraction requires careful consideration.

Adapting to changing demographics and engaging younger generations with different values and preferences requires continuous innovation, mentorship opportunities, and

spaces for dialogue.

Economic viability, access to land and resources, social integration, governance, environmental sustainability, scaling, and generational shifts are key challenges for alternative communities. Addressing these challenges with creativity, collaboration, and adaptability allows alternative communities to provide sustainable solutions and inspire broader social change.

The Power of Small

The Power of Small embodies the transformative nature of alternative communities as dynamic and adaptive systems. By valuing local knowledge, grassroots initiatives, and bottom-up problem-solving, alternative communities can foster meaningful change.

Alternative communities embrace localized solutions and the ability to adapt and respond to complex challenges. This empowers community members to leverage their unique strengths and perspectives, amplifying their impact on the common good.

Grassroots initiatives serve as a vital force within the Power of Small. Driven by passionate individuals deeply connected to their communities, these initiatives address specific challenges and instill a sense of ownership and responsibility among community members in order to develop environmentally responsible community housing, sustainable villages, social enterprises, and holistic health programs.

The Power of Small promotes bottom-up problem-solving, acknowledging that those closest to the challenges often hold the most valua-