



Sustainable societies



By Guest Blogger **Paul Martin** | FRI 09 MAR 2012 | 6



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Functioning living arrangements where you share land, can solve many of the ecological and social problems we have in western countries.

I recently went to the Global Ecovillage Network (GEN) Europe conference and came away very inspired and impressed with how advanced co-operative infrastructure and living arrangements have become in western countries.

In 1998, ecovillages were first officially named among the United Nations' top 100 Best Practices, as excellent models of sustainable living in its Global Environmental Outlook 2000. Since then the GEN has received EU funding every other year to promote ecovillages.

The idea of living in a village or a sharing land has become quite foreign in real estate pages, as we can all afford our own home / car / family / services...or can we?

The housing market seems to be unaffordable to younger generations,

so we rent instead. For the majority of my generation the great Aussie dream is a thing of the past.

Making the move

As a green-minded couple living in and renting in Melbourne, tired of having to move every 2 years, never able to fully practice what we preach, we saved up our money and instead of using it as a deposit on a half-million renovation nightmare or small concrete box, my partner and I got out and started living the way I could only talk about in a city.

We joined the [Goolawah rural land sharing co-op](#) and have just finished building a solar passive house. We do not have a mortgage, yet we have 1.2 acres to use as we please, 100 square metres of raised garden beds with automated watering and everything-proof fencing. We also built our own off-grid solar power system, water catchment, composting toilet and orchard and love living in an environment where [we know our neighbours](#), have no fences, and kids can roam without fear.

The only ways I saw, of achieving this without a lifetime of debt, was to either have a lot of money already, move to a poor country to buy a cheaper property, or by sharing land with other people.

Smart alternative

Goolawah co-op is like an owner-builder sub-development. We bought [1600 acres between 78 people](#) and divided about 200 acres of it into 1.2 acre housing sites, [community areas](#), dams, sports grounds, playgrounds, access roads etc.

The financial result is that it has cost each of us \$13,500 to date to have access to land to build a home. And the location is bordered by enormous bush reserves - Limeburners wilderness area on the coast of Crescent Head.

If I were to buy a small block of land locally from a developer it would be \$120,000+ with suburb standard fences, busy roads and stranger danger.

Horizontal Strata title is my favourite way to describe the legal structure of a land sharing co-op. Just like a flat you have your own space and a share of a much bigger property; you own all of the land not a 1.2 acre block. Do as you like at home, but ask the rest of the members if you want to build or plant on the rest of the property.

Walk the talk

I love the home and community we are building and can see why the UN is acknowledging this type of living arrangement as an important way forward.

Here in Australia I tend to think it is time for some acknowledgement and focus on ways of living sustainable.

Just switching to buying green washing powder isn't going to change much in the bigger picture.

Let's face it, if we are going to live in a more sustainable manner, our living environment needs to be different than what we are doing now.

Paul is organising a [tour](#) of 4 - 5 different land sharing co-ops, with a maximum group of 30 starting with Goolawah, and north to other communities to meet some of their members and help them out with some work in exchange. There are still some places left.