

A Day in the Life of an Ecovillager - a stream of consciousness.

"I wake up early (my body clock being my alarm) to the first light in the eastern sky. It's quiet, not a sound outside, it seems the world is yet to wake up. I can smell the clear musty smell of the forest wafting through my window, beckoning me to go for a walk to say hello. I get ready really quick, put on my sneakers and am off for my morning jaunt. As I run through the trees I can hear a bird here, an insect there waking the forest up. It's just them and me and it feels like a privilege to begin the day with such peace. Even though I take my usual route, there is always something new to discover every single time. I savour my solitary jog back to my room, looking forward to starting my morning rituals before I meet everyone.

Mornings in the community usually begin with cleaning. We assign areas to ourselves and sweep, dust, arrange and leave it fresh to be used for the day. Usually we do it together so that is when we first meet and greet, and start the day. It's 7:30 am and breakfast is about to be served. I quickly get ready and head down to the kitchen, meet my neighbours on the way, greeting each other with the familiarity of family.

Breakfast is an energetic activity. There is so much hustle in the dining room. Food being laid out, plates being stacked for us, children streaming in and chattering as loudly as cicadas. So much energy in the air that it's impossible to not be infected! There is poha and chai for breakfast today. We take our plates, stand in line to serve ourselves - banana, poha, chai or milk. There is a five year old in front of me. She comes to my knees. She has double my quantity on her plate. I've always marvelled at the appetite of these tiny tots! I see people I haven't met yet in the dining area and naturally gravitate towards them. We meet like long lost friends even though we were together till late last evening. Odd how we can't seem to have enough of each other.

After breakfast, it's time to get to work. Some of us have decided to go help out on the farm today. They need hands. Others rush to their respective jobs either managing the grounds, working in the school or in the startup studio. Everyone is off being productive in their own special ways for the next few hours until lunch. It's a warm day today, so we cover our heads and water the plants, spread mulch on the beds and help with odds and ends in the vegetable gardens and greenhouse. Most of us knew nada about farming when we first came but with the help of the local community we have learned so much. They help us run the farm and work with our permaculture expert. Seems they have applied some permaculture techniques in their village too to their benefit!

It's almost lunch time and I am starving. We wash up and in our work clothes rush to the kitchen to eat. We fill our plates to the brim and dig in. Food always feels good after some hard labour on the farm. The kitchen is abuzz again of course. How does everyone always have so much energy?! Afternoons are hot so we have declared siesta time across the community. Usually people go back to their rooms to catch a nap or hang out in the community living room to read, watch some tv or just relax in the hammocks.

Around 3 we start heading back to work to give a few more hours of love, labour, thought and intention to our chosen tasks. Then we head to the volleyball court or football field (our choice of activity) to get the blood flowing, after all exercise boosts brain power! An hour or two of play, and sweaty, happy, laughing individuals are heading back to bathe and freshen up. We are helping cook dinner today.

The volunteers from the forest immersion course want to treat us tonight. Help is the least we could offer for their kindness. We've all gathered and are following their instructions. It's a lark working in the kitchen. Some hilarious disaster will always take place and so will the wafting of delicious aromas. The

laughter and jokes that float in the air leave a good feeling in my heart and gut. Food is ready! I can't wait to eat! The children came streaming in 15 mins ago and dipped their fingers into as many unattended pots as they could. They eat like giants tonight!

After dinner it is chill time! We all head to the living room. People are drawn to their own personal siren calls, be it the foosball table, the book shelf, meditation, the tv or just sitting together. One group starts a game of antakshari and soon everyone has joined in. We have two teams now and the competition is getting wild! Loudly delivered lyrics and banging of tables is making the window panes vibrate! What a night it has become!

As we head to retire, good nights are whispered across the open air. Others might already be sleeping after all. It's time to turn down. My bed looks so inviting but I need to wash up and change. As I lie down my back sighs with relief and I am asleep even before I realise.

Tomorrow is another day of adventure, and I can't wait to wake up :).

Live naturally, build naturally.

One of the reasons we started this community was because we all wanted to lead a different life. We are mostly from urban spaces but we had become disillusioned with the life we had been living. It was convenient and had everything we needed, and more, full of art and culture, plays, music, sports facilities if we wanted it, but all these things that inherently soothe the soul started to feel like distractions instead. When that happens you know something is wrong. It wasn't the activities, it was the life we were leading we realised. We had to make changes to how we were choosing to live to be able to live in harmony with nature. It was quite a decision to take actually, leaving everything we had known behind and starting in a new environment, living a life we were gradually going to sense, discover and evolve into. In the last so many years it has been quite a journey: eventful and life changing.

When we moved out of the city, we realised we would need to learn many new skills to thrive in our chosen life. We knew we wanted to be responsible to the planet and thus build our settlements that way, so we decided to build with the natural materials found on our land. Since most of us had come together with the same intentions we resonated on the kinds of houses we wanted to live in. Our houses are mostly round and not larger than two rooms. Most of us opted to build with cob and have living roofs where we grow flowers and herbs. Some others have experimented with other techniques, which has been super helpful for us to see what works best in our environment. We mostly have a bedroom and a living room that also doubles up as a study, along with a bathroom ofcourse. That said there are a number of composting toilets around that many people have chosen to use rather than build their own toilets.

All the other structures around the community, we have also built with natural materials. The beauty of building with mud has been that you can design it and shape it however you want! They have been evolving works of art where each building represents its function and its intent. Take the creators village (or cohob) for instance. It is a beautiful open space surrounded by pottery and murals. You can see people painting natural scenes in the courtyard or comfortably painting indoors thanks to the thick earthen walls. These structures have inspired our artists to paint, weave, build, sculpt, cook, and create. They tell us that the earthiness of the place gives them grounding and thus clarity. It was always our dream to build a community for creators where they could create as they wanted and just watching them work and taking part in this learning would allow us to immerse in the beauty of creation.

Building with earth also helps you connect with it. Did you know that there is a bacterium in mud that is found to trigger the release of serotonin? It's no wonder I feel happy when I have worked in the soil. Other than living in and building natural homes, I have found happiness in growing food. I love to grow food! I love it when the first shoots pops out of the soil, so young and fragile but in a matter of weeks it grows into a sturdy plant taking the onslaught of the elements. The moment the first fruits come, make me feel like a mother, tender and ecstatic at the same time! This is why I work in the fields and the food forest. Everyday I devote a few hours to working with plants. We tend to them when necessary, covering their base with mulch to keep them warm in winter and cool in summer. Water them lovingly and watch their green grow more intense with their happiness.

We follow permaculture and natural farming practices to grow our food. We also grow a food forest where we imitate the forest floor design to grow our food. I love how nothing is wasted in this system. The waste of one becomes food for another and so the cycle of nourishment continues in this ecosystem. We grow food for our entire community and each year we strive to provide all year round. Our permaculture experts and the local farming expert from the nearby village, work hard to build our farms together. We are of course temporary help but they have a number of residents and local villagers who dedicate all their time to growing food for the community. It's always nice to walk by when they work and see the fruits of their labour growing happily with other fruits and vegetables rather than in neat, manicured and sanitised rows. I love walking past them at work as they always give us some fruit or vegetable to munch on! Have you ever had a carrot straight off the farm, or a plum right off the tree? It is the most gratifying feeling. That is when I know where my food is coming from and I feel gratitude for the plant or tree that gave it to me! It's simple and beautiful. Could I have asked for a better life!

To learn, and learn, and learn!

Today is a super interesting day! Our natural builders are arriving this afternoon. We have a few close natural builder friends called House Alive, who come every year to conduct their workshop on different kinds of natural building techniques, and leave behind a beautiful structure on our grounds as a gift. Last year it was a one bedroom tiny home with a fireplace! This year I hope they build the library! It's always a treat to have them because we learn new techniques or another philosophy that makes natural building seem even more worthwhile. Secondly, we get to meet such interesting people who are either embarking on their spiritual journey of self discovery or have been on it for sometime. Interacting with this group has always been a learning experience :). The children love these workshops the best for they get to be a part of it from start to finish. Some of them have taken part in three of these workshops and now are quite proficient in this skill.

Just like the natural building workshops we keep having some new training or workshops given by the resident experts and many times our children as well in their areas of proficiency. These learning opportunities are created not just for visitors but sometimes just for the residents. I love that because it reminds me that even though the community depends on these skills to earn money for the community, it is not its sole objective. So far we have had a number of different workshops on permaculture design, growing food forests, observing the rhythms of nature, weaving cloth out of hemp, impact entrepreneurship retreats for school children and new entrepreneurs, founders retreats etc.

Currently, there are at least three different workshops taking place in the community, and we can join any that we want. Time and understanding is always given to us to further our learning in the community. So much so that when we want to go out to learn, that too is supported by the community. We are encouraged to keep learning, a beautiful lesson for our children, who have a very different learning environment here in our community. They don't go to normal school. Until they are 8 years old they are

encouraged to learn from their environment, our society, the local community and also have some formal academic lessons where reading, writing and mathematics are taught. Other than this their learning is organic but monitored by their facilitators who take it upon themselves to guide their learning journey like sherpas. They participate in workshops and training that happen here depending on their interest and then the facilitators have regular reflection circles and processes where the children are taught to see the connections in their learning. They reflect often on the lessons learned from their experiences and are encouraged to apply them to face issues in their lives, rather than avoid them. They seem to enjoy this method more as they have more freedom to carve their own learning journey. They learn to learn and not for the sake of exams and it is the greatest gift to see them grow this way!

I rule, you rule, we ALL rule!

Governance is a concept I remember always associating with corruption, bad decision making, unruly law keeping, maniacal organisational systems and irrationality. That is what made me mistrust our mainstream governance systems. Governance was supposed to build societies, not break them down and yet it has. Was this the true reality of governing systems or could it be built for the people, by the people. This was the experiment we decided to embark upon when we began living together. Our systems of course evolved over time and not yet perfect but it is work in progress.

We created a combination for our system with an organisational system called teal and direct democracy. To explain this I will give you a glimpse of one of our sessions.

We had our last community open hall on monday. It was called by one of our members through our governing app called Aragon. Anyone in the community can put up an issue on the open hall portal and call for a session if they strongly feel the whole community is needed for it. There is no central governing body that directs this.

Lamat called for a session to talk about our cohub guests misusing some of the common spaces in the community. This same thing had happened twice before and he had brought it up on the portal, many solutions were offered but no solid resolution came of it. Finally he felt a conversation was needed. We discussed the issue, many others also had seen examples of it and had told the guests but something in our implementation was missing, else the problem would have been resolved. A group of the most experienced community managers decided they would tackle it. They took a week's time to observe and suggest a workable solution.

A week later we met again. They presented their findings to the group. It was found that even though we had set down rules for our visitors, we would become lax when we became friendly with them and allow them leniencies which confused their boundaries. We had to check ourselves. Based on their experience of human nature they put down measures for us to practise mindfulness in maintaining boundaries and holding each other accountable. Now the real decision making part emerged. We can suggest changes but it is not necessary for a group to follow it. We had to get everyone's buy in on this. The idea being presented, community members were given time to talk about it and recognize their commitment to the solution. Questions were asked, changes suggested and finally it was time to decide.

Each of us used aragon to state their consensus. This time around we had an almost unanimous decision. Those who were on the fence were worried whether they could be assertive and wanted us to support them. I'd say this was a really good session for it is hard when a solution requires us to work on ourselves.

This kind of a decision making session came from Teal's advisory model where it believes that the person/s with the most expertise in a particular area helps resolve issues related to it. There is no hierarchy or a central governing body. There are natural and dynamic hierarchies that get created based on what we bring to the table. We also don't have too many processes to arrive at solutions. As the famous saying goes, "less is more" we too believe that fewer steps in the system for a community as small as ours will be more efficient. The only process we have is first bringing up an issue on the portal and then in person if needed. Anyone can bring it up and then the whole community decides together using technology for efficiency. People are encouraged and supported when issues are raised and this is what sets our system apart. We inculcate trust by accepting our members for who they are and thus creating a safe space for them to share.

There are good days and bad days and many lessons learned in between, but we are glad we try rather than become bitter and give up on our progress.

Money, Money, Money, must be funny, in the rich man's world

Money - we don't use any! Our community does not follow the system of monetary transactions within the community! I know that is an odd idea, especially in the world we live in today, but it works, and the only way to make you believe is to show you!

Yesterday I ran out of basic essentials like washing soap, cleaners, my toiletries and my favourite camomile tea that I drink every morning and evening. When I lived outside I'd go for a grocery run once a week to buy my things. I would be watchful of my budget and check if I could purchase other than the necessities. That worked fine too but yes money and sometimes the lack of it was often on my mind. Now, when I run out I go to the place we lovingly call 'The Stuff Barn' (a large barn-like area where products we need are kept on different shelves, where we go around like in a supermarket, collect the things we need and then take them home to use.

The beauty of this system is that it is based on the idea of abundance. We shall all have enough if we take just what we need and don't try to hoard. We won't hoard if we know that what we need is available for us at any time. This idea seems idealistic but actually it is so simple and doable that we don't believe it is possible. Odd isn't it?!

Food is mostly taken care of by the kitchen so we don't have to worry about that. If we feel like making something we can either use the community kitchens or use the kitchen in the community house, so as not to disturb the kitchen crew. There are other needs too such as clothes, shoes, some pieces of technology, further education etc. Many wonder how we manage to take care of these? We don't have to for the community takes care of it. It provides for most of these items including courses we might want to take outside the community, or if we want to travel. If it costs a lot then we apply and the team taking care of this considers our request and if it is possible pays for that too.

We also get a monthly stipend which is perfect for any other needs we might have or family outside the community we want to look after.

I am sure you are wondering how the community is being able to do this? How is it supporting 300 people financially? Well we have a solid economic engine. The startup studio that nurtures impact based startups works hard to build the startups they foster which as they become successful start to payback returns. In this manner there is a steady stream of income for our community! There are of course other inhouse economic ventures that also add to our kitty, and donations and grants that further provide for our needs.

This system is similar to our joint families where there is one monetary kitty and we all contribute to it and then take what we need from it. Our needs are simple ofcourse, but we chose this lifestyle so we don't pine for things our incomes cant afford. This system works for us and I think that is what every community needs to figure out for themselves :).

And then there were two.

Days in our community are mostly similar - you wake up, clean, have all our meals together, work, play together, hangout and go to sleep and then repeat! That is our daily routine but our life in the community is full of so many different activities everyday. For instance, yesterday there was a major need in the farm and the food forest. The vegetables were ready to be harvested. So we spent the day following Olvin (our most experienced farmer) who was showing us where and what to harvest. Following his instructions I think we did a half decent job! But this is not new. Members of our community are constantly helping in the farms and the food forest, or with the animals. We learn farming the permaculture way and have come to appreciate nature even more. I have come to appreciate how much care and intention goes into living this life we have chosen. I am grateful for being a part of it :).

Today is going to be an important day. The community is going to decide if Lizzy and Panta are going to become permanent residents. They have been living and working with us for a year now. They came as digital nomads - they'd work online and keep moving about, travelling all over the world. Usually they stay in a place for a few weeks for a few months at the most, but it seems they couldn't leave. About a year ago they told us that they wanted to become members of our community. It seems they liked the life they were living here and the people they were living it with. Lizzy is a software engineer and Panta is a carpenter, and they made a compelling case for why they should be a part of the community.

As is our rule, a potential resident has to live here for a year at least, living and working as permanent residents do. They have to determine by experience whether they too believe in our values and principles. It's important to find alignment in our beliefs else that leads to unnecessary conflict in the community, as we have experienced before. Anyhow, today is the day. The whole community will get together. We are going to share our experiences of living and working with lizzy and panta, and they are going to do the same, and then they get to choose if they still want to stay. If yes, then it's now the turn of the community, children and adults, to say whether they think Lizzy and Panta align with our way of life and would flourish here!

The air is abuzz with excitement. I can see that Lizzy and Panta are both excited and nervous. They know we love them and want them to stay but it's still hard to not feel nervous. Some of the little ones seem to have picked up on their nervousness. They're sitting with them, their tiny hands in lizzy and Pantas. I marvel always at the compassion children bring to the world. It's a beautiful way to be reminded of our own capacities for compassion. It's time to start. The community is being called to gather by the current facilitator. Panta and Lizzy seem calm and happy. The children did a good job of taking their mind off their anxiety.

The gathering went as I had expected. Everyone had so many good things to say about both of them. It was obvious we saw professional value in their being a part of the community, but more importantly personal value. They are kind and compassionate people who constantly look out for others. They have been open to learning, to feedback and to giving sincerely and wholeheartedly to the community. They said it was because of us, but I think that's just who they are. We had a great round of sharing and offering some constructive feedback as well for there is always room for improvement. It was such a great discussion that when it came to giving our approval, the result was obvious. Along with a

unanimous 'yes', the whole amphitheatre erupted with loud cheers, jumping, laughing and rejoicing! :D
Now it was time to par-tay!

Our parties are legendary! Today the party is going to be moving through the community. It will begin at the community centre with food and nimbu pani and a cake we made to welcome both of them to the family. Then it is going to move to their new house, which they helped build by the way, where we will help them settle in, bring their things from their room to the house, and basically invade their space. They can't kick us out today, unfortunately for them! Hehe! Once we've set up the basics with them we're going to take them around to all the houses where they will get a present of some kind and food and congratulations! Once we've gone a quick round we come back to the community house where a bonfire awaits everyone. Now the party is allowed to take a life of its own. It can be a chill scene with someone playing an instrument and others singing along, or it can become a raging party in the community living room with some wild dancing! We don't try to control the flow too much.

Both these poor souls were oscillating between happiness and overwhelm the whole day today. They couldn't figure out whether to run or stay. By the end though they seemed to be grateful we did this to them (They were crying. With happiness I hope!). We had a rager this time and everyone went home full of food, warm fuzziness and tons of laughter. I know it seems much to an onlooker but sometimes we purposely break through each other's walls. By forcing ourselves on the other, we've come to realise, we are able to get behind the walls created to protect ourselves, and that is when we really begin to trust and bond with each other.

I know this will be a day the both of them will never forget. Everytime they face challenges here, I know they will look back to this day and be reminded that everything is going to be ok, for we are there for each other. We have their back, as we know they have ours :).

I am grateful for the end of another good day, two more members in my family and the blessed opportunity to live this life :). Good night.