# Enacting intentional heterotopias

Discovering alternative spaces through a relational-scalar
approach in the spiritual intentional communities
of Damanhur (Italy) and Terra Mirim (Brazil)

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# Abstract

This thesis explores the social, material, spiritual and spatial enactment of alternative spaces by considering multiple related scales. Drawing on ethnographic research, this work investigates two spiritual intentional communities: the shamanic community of Terra Mirim in Bahia, Brazil and the federation of Damanhur, in Italy. The research offers a context-specific exploration of how "alternative orderings" (Hetherington, 1997) can be enacted in the global south and north. Theoretically, although recognising the limits of utopian studies in investigating intentional communities, this research combines utopian literature with the concept of heterotopia. Heterotopias are what Foucault calls "enacted utopias"; this understanding allows a more "systematic description" from which to read, analyse and situate these alternative spaces (Foucault, 1986:24). By interrogating these themes of utopianism and heterotopianism, this thesis argues that a relational-scalar approach provides a more integrated and nuanced account of enactment than is found in existing research, where the tendency is to view the individual, or the place, or the performance of community rituals, as separate entities. Significantly, this thesis weaves a transcendental scale and understanding into a relational-scalar analysis of the individual, the community, the local, and the global. Drawing upon empirical evidence this study argues that, firstly, intentional heterotopias create new conceptual spaces and shape alternative orderings that challenge the boundaries traditionally conceived to separate the social, spiritual and economic dimensions of daily life; secondly, that the enactment is initially triggered by individuals' life change experiences, followed by community practices but also by relational-spatial processes embedded in local areas and within the global network; thirdly, that within the transcendental scale alternative spiritual knowledge is produced, community enactments are disclosed and sacred spaces of juxtaposition created. Overall, the thesis contributes to a geographical understanding of alternative spaces, arguing that a holistic understanding of enactment must look beyond the physical place of community building; thus recognising, contrary to the traditional notion of utopian 'islands', multiple yet related scales.

*Many tribes of a modern kind, doing brand
new work, same spirit by side, joining hearts
and hand and ancestral twine, ancestral twine.
Slowly it fades. Slowly we fade.
Spirit bird she creaks and groans she knows
she has, seen this all before she has, seen this
all before.*

Xavier Rudd – Spirit Bird

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This PhD research has not only been a stimulating intellectual journey but, more than anything, a life journey. This experience has nurtured my mind, body and spirit and deeply enriched my understanding of social, material and spiritual alternative spaces. Within all the precious learning I received, I guess the main lesson I learnt is to *trust*. Trusting the path that we are walking because, eventually, it will lead somewhere. There will *always* be challenges on the way: they are there to teach us something, to strengthen our desire, or simply to test our determination. But the important point is to keep going and to keep moving. This PhD is the result of such movement, desires and determinations.

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One cycle closes, another one begins.

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# List of Acronyms

CASA: Council of Sustainable Settlements of America *(Consejo de Asentamientos Sustentables de las Américas* )

Dh: Damanhur

EDE: Ecovillage Design Education

GEN: Global Ecovillage Network

GEN-INT: Global Ecovillage Network International

PSR+20: Peoples' Summit at Rio +20 for Social and Environmental Justice" (*Cúpula dos Povos na Rio+20 por Justiça Social e Ambiental*)

RIVE: Italian Ecovillage Network (*Rete Italiana Eco-Villaggi)*

TM: Terra Mirim

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# Introduction

Tuchis: 'I have a friend who left the city to go to live in an ecovillage a few months ago!'

Francesca: 'Really? Why?'

Tuchis: 'He didn't like his life in Bogotá and decided to join a community in the South of Colombia.'

Francesca: 'Cool! But sorry Tuchis, what exactly is an ecovillage? Is it like a sustainable, rural community?'

Tuchis: 'I don't know exactly, but I think it is like a community in the countryside where people go to live closer to nature.'

Francesca: 'Interesting! Are they like hippy communities?'

Tuchis: 'Something like that, it's not like a typical traditional or indigenous community… and there are a lot of young people. I'm sure you would love it. We should go there one day to visit him.'

My interest in ecovillages emerged in 2010 during a conversation with my Colombian friend, Tuchis. After our chat, I started to do research to find out more about ecovillages; an initial investigation on the web revealed that ecovillages were located not only in Colombia, but were also evident through the growth of intentional communities in different parts of the world, both in the global north and south. During this first search, I realised that ecovillages were also part of a wider organisation called the Global Ecovillage Network (GEN). The GEN website made available a list of ecovillages for each country, typically providing a brief description of each initiative. However, from this information it was difficult to understand in more depth what an ecovillage was about. These intentional communities appeared to be very different from each other: some were urban, and others were rural; some had more than a hundred participants and others did not have even 10 residents; some were spiritually focused and others instead seemed concerned only with environmental issues.

Since GEN was established in 1995, more than 630 initiatives have decided to join the network. Furthermore, according to the Fellowship for Intentional Communities (FIC), around 25,000 community projects exist in the world (Olivares, 2010:77). The journalist Dan Hancox (2013:2), in his recent book about the intentional community *Marinaleda* located in the South of Spain, writes:

There was so little information about the village available beyond that short summary, either in the guidebook, on the internet, or on the lips of strangers I met in Seville. 'Ah yes, the strange little communist village, the utopia', a few of them said. But none of them had visited, or knew anyone who had – and no one could tell me whether it really was a utopia.

My conversation with Tuchis and this short piece by Hancox reflect the lack of knowledge about these alternative communities. Unless a lay person has visited one of them – which is rare – the large majority of people do not know what ecovillages and intentional communities are. The few who have heard something about these alternative communities had questions and comments such as 'Are they like hippy communities?' 'Ah, yes I have heard of that sect!' 'Are you crazy to go to live with them? They are really weird people!' 'Do you like to smoke marijuana? You will have fun!' I was determined to look beyond these stereotypes, motivated by more existential questions such as: why do people move there? How do people live there? What do they value? What do they do in their everyday lives? How are these communities connected with their local areas? And what do intentional communities located in the global south and north have in common?

This research is the result of this initial personal curiosity that eventually expanded towards a broader academic interest in alternative spaces. Using the concepts of utopia and heterotopia, this thesis considers intentional communities as alternative spaces and investigates how these spaces are enacted. The research takes into consideration different levels of enactment adopting a relational-scalar approach that explores the community enactment, but also goes beyond its physical boundaries.

This research focuses on two intentional communities: the federation of Damanhur (Dh) in Italy and the shamanic community of Terra Mirim (TM) in Brazil. Although the rationale that underpins the choice of these empirical sites will be discussed in *Chapter 3*, here it is important to note four key common characteristics: firstly, both are spiritual communities; secondly, they have been solidly established for more than 20 years; thirdly, they each have more than 20 residents; and finally, they are members of GEN.

Before explaining the significance of this research and how it contributes to the current academic debate, the next section will briefly contextualise and define the key terms of intentional communities and ecovillages.

## 1.1 Context and key terms

According to the report *Ecovillages and Sustainable Communities* (1991 in Dawson, 2006:13), the original definition states that an ecovillage is:

> A human scale full-featured settlement in which human activities are harmlessly integrated into the natural world in a way that is supportive of healthy human development and can be successfully continued into the indefinite future.

Ecovillages have been intentionally created by people who want to live in better and more sustainable conditions to those that current societies offer and they are a combination of four dimensions of sustainability: ecological, cultural/spiritual, social and economic (Global Ecovillage Network, n.d.-a). According to Dawson (2006), ecovillages have emerged in response to recent environmental, economic and social crises. More specifically, the 'failure' of the capitalist market economy, environmental problems, and technological development has led to diminishing community cohesion and a sense of isolation (Kasper, 2008). However, ecovillages are not a new phenomenon but rather the evolving legacy of a longer history of communalism and are different manifestations of what are described as intentional communities. Definitions of intentional communities vary, but it is widely accepted that they are:

> A group of five or more adults and their children, if any, who come from more than one nuclear family and who have chosen to live together to enhance their shared values or for some other mutually agreed upon purpose. (Sargent, 1994:14-15)

Analysing the history of communal experiences, Zablocki (1981:25) considers the creation of intentional communities to represent a strategy "to escape from alienation by achieving consensus within a circumscribed social microcosm. This strategy has continued to win adherents for over two thousand years". However, it was only in the late 1980s that the communal phenomenon began to take the shape of a global movement with the aim of connecting sustainable communities all over the world. GEN was set up in 1995 with the aim of creating a bridge around the world establishing partnerships between sustainable living projects in the global north and south. The new term, ecovillage, entered circulation to define the intentional communities of this global age. As with historical intentional communities, ecovillages are generally the result of collective feelings of dissatisfaction towards the contemporary society. Yet, ecovillages

differ from their predecessors in at least two ways. Firstly, they explicitly connect communal living with environmental concerns (Kirby, 2003) and, secondly, they assume a stronger relational spatial identity by abandoning traditional features of isolation and escape (Schehr, 1997).

In this research the terms 'ecovillage' and 'intentional community' are both used and considered relevant. The case studies of Dh and TM respect the criteria of both conceptualisations and consequently are defined in both ways. Nevertheless, the most recent ecovillage definition embraces a wider range of sustainable initiatives including not only intentional communities, but also transition towns, eco-caravans, permaculture centres, living and learning centres, urban neighbourhoods and traditional communities (Global Ecovillage Network, n.d.-b). This thesis does not engage with this wider interpretation but instead focuses specifically on the lived experience of intentional communities. Therefore, I will use mostly 'intentional communities' when referring to the common commitment of a group of people to live and work cooperatively in a specific area, and 'ecovillages' only when referring to the global network as a means to indicate the wider social movement.

## 1.2   Ecovillages and intentional communities: existing frames of analysis

Interest in intentional communities and ecovillages increased significantly over the last two decades, initially with contributions from activists, practitioners and civil society (Jackson, 2000; Jackson and Svensson, 2002; Christian, 2003; Bang, 2005; Christian, 2007; Joubert and Dregger, 2015) and later also from scholars across a wide range of disciplines. It is possible to identify four main trends to have emerged from this literature and interest within the social sciences.

Firstly, although scholars in the last decades have expressed growing interest in sustainable initiatives and practices, often their attention is limited to the ecological features of ecovillages. For instance, ecovillages have been studied by urban planners and landscape architects as patterns of sustainable development both for revitalising urban neighbourhoods (Sizemore, 2004; Swilling and Annecke, 2006; Kellogg and Keating, 2011) and rural areas (see Takeuchi *et al.*, 1998). This emphasis on looking at ecovillages and intentional communities as models of sustainable living has also been a feature of social science scholarship (such as Mulder *et al.*, 2006; Locyer, 2007; Ergas, 2010; Miller and Bentley, 2012; ). For instance, Avelino and Kunze (2009) analysed their 'transitional potential'; Kasper (2008) and Kirby (2003) investigated how these

spaces are attempting to be precursors of a paradigmatic shift in favour of a new model that recognises human-ecosystem interdependence; and Seyfang *et al.* have written several contributions looking at communities' energy consumption as forms of sustainable innovation (see Seyfang, 2010; Hargreaves *et al.*, 2013; Seyfang *et al.,* 2013; Seyfang *et al.*, 2014).

Secondly, intentional communities have typically been considered by social scientists as utopian practices and experimental laboratories. One of the seminal contributions that has analysed intentional communities as utopian spaces was *Commitment and Community* written by Kanter (1972). Since then, scholars such as Levitas (1990, 2013), Kumar (1991), Sargent (1994, 2006, 2010) and Sargisson (1996, 2000, 2012) have paved the way for a utopian theorisation of these alternative communities. While utopian thinking has at various times been accused of authoritarianism and totalitarianism by anti-utopianists like Karl Popper (1962 [1945]) and John Gray (1998, 2002, 2007); practical utopias exemplified by intentional communities have survived this critique. They have demonstrated instead that utopias are dynamic and continually evolving: they can be localised, contingent and diversified, as Kumar (1991) has suggested. Therefore, intentional communities contribute a lens through which to pragmatically observe the application of utopian values and how the desire for a better world can be experimented with, while at the same time, utopian studies provide a theoretical framework to inform an understanding of these spaces. Within social scientists, the most influential writer on Australian utopias and all manner of intentional communities is Bill Metcalf (1984, 1995, 1996, 2003, 2009, 2012), currently working on an encyclopaedia of the entire history of Australian communities.

Thirdly, the burgeoning literature on ecovillages and intentional communities covers a wide range of disciplines within social sciences, yet few geographers have contributed to these debates. Wagner (2012) is the only scholar, so far, who has attempted a comprehensive and integrated research review on ecovillages and intentional communities based on the analysis of 59 studies, in English and German, published from 2000 to 2012. He has identified three main frames of study within the social sciences, considering the perspectives of individuals, sociological researches and ethnographic/cultural investigations. Within these frames, it emerges that research has been conducted predominantly in the fields of sociology, anthropology and political science. As said, only a few geographers have engaged in the analyses of these alternative spaces. Among them, Jarvis (2013) is interested in how countercultural

intentional communities, such as the autonomous community of Christiania, in Denmark, challenge dominant norms of single-family housing and social organisation through experiments with collective housing alternatives. Jarvis has also comparatively studied how multiple temporalities are constructed within these alternative spaces such as with cohousing (2011) and more recently, using Australian case studies, she has discussed how these 'living laboratories' engage in outreach activities beyond their residential sites (forthcoming). Two other influential geographers are Pickerill and Chatterton who collaboratively developed the conceptual framework of 'autonomous geographies' to explore anarchic living spaces (2005, 2006). Moreover, Chatterton (2013; 2015) aims to provide an agenda for eco-houses, drawing upon his personal experiences with the LILAC project in Leeds; while Pickerill (2012, 2015, forthcoming) provides rich socio-geographical theorisations of ecological building exploring a wide range of issues from politics to gender. In addition Pickerill and Maxey (2009), focusing on the example of low impact development, enrich the understanding of geographies of sustainability. More recent contributions see Pickerill arguing how more gender-neutral approaches are enacted, embodied and experimented in eco-building (2015). Geographical contributions also come from scholars interested in urban intentional communities (i.e. Miles, 2007) and those interested in new ruralities such as Halfacree (2006) Meijering *et al.* (2007a, 2007b) and Fois and Forino (2014). For instance, Fois and Forino (2014) have analysed how after L'Aquila earthquake in Italy in 2009, processes of community resilience have resulted in the construction of a rural ecovillage.

Fourthly, research on intentional communities and ecovillages has also largely been undertaken in the global north or, what Meijering *et al.* (2007b) call the western world. The majority of studies on intentional communities focus on US case studies (i.e. Kirby, 2001; Kirby, 2003; Friesen and Friesen, 2004; Mulder *et al.*, 2006; Lockyer, 2007; Kasper, 2008; Ergas, 2010), mostly due to the fact that the US is the country with the highest number of communal initiatives; followed by Australia (Metcalf, 1984, 1995, 2003; Bohill, 2010; Miller and Bentley, 2012; Jarvis, forthcoming), Britain, New Zealand and other European countries such as Germany, Denmark and Italy. Several attempts have been made to categorise intentional communities (Sargisson and Sargent, 2004, Meijering *et al.*, 2007a, Kasper, 2008) and to present – sometimes compare – communal initiatives across different countries (Metcalf, 1996, Sargisson, 2007; Santos Jr., 2010; Jarvis, 2011; Pickerill, 2015).

## 1.3  Rationale

Taking into consideration these four main trends of analysis, this thesis identifies several gaps in the research that arguably require further investigation.

Firstly, social scientists have considered ecovillages and intentional communities as sustainable laboratories. Yet they have focused their investigation mostly on the ecological and social features of these sites to the neglect of other interdependent functions of sustainability, such as economic diversity and spiritual practice. It is interesting that contributions from practitioners and activists (for example Jackson and Svensson, 2002; Bang, 2005; Joubert and Dregger, 2015) regard spiritual/cultural values and economic/financial issues as equally relevant as the social and ecological features of ecovillages, yet this interdependence is not reflected in current academic scholarship. As Wagner (2012) says in his literature review on ecovillages and intentional communities "economic studies are almost non-existent, with Avelino and Kunze (2003:88), who at least considered the economic perspective, as an exception". The spiritual dimension receives even less attention than the economic. My argument is that economic/financial features and especially spirituality have been overlooked within the debates about intentional communities and therefore require further investigation. By filling this research gap and overcoming what Keating (2008:55) calls the "spirit-phobia" that exists among academia, this thesis investigates two spiritual communities and their material, transcendental, social and spatial enactment.

Secondly, scholars have generally applied a utopian framework to understand intentional communities. Within a critical appraisal, I argue that utopian studies provide only a limited lens for understanding the enactment of these alternative spaces. In the 1960s, Michel Foucault suggested that a theoretical framework for the study of heterotopias within social sciences was necessary for a more meaningful study of alternative spaces. Despite claiming that heterotopia means "enacted utopias" or "other spaces", Foucault (1986) did not provide a comprehensive definition of these spaces. Recently, "heterotopias are defined as sites which are embedded in aspects and stages of our lives and which somehow mirror and at the same time distort, unsettle and invert other spaces" (Johnson, 2013:790-791). Foucault's (1986:24) heterotopology sets out to provide a "systematic description" to read, analyse and understand these alternative spaces that exist in society. By combining utopian and heterotopia literatures, this research proposes a conceptual framework for analysing the enactment of alternative spaces and specifically intentional communities.

Thirdly, research on intentional communities and ecovillages has been conducted predominantly in the fields of sociology, anthropology and political science. A few geographers have engaged in the theorisation of intentional communities and ecovillages, yet I argue that a holistic geographical analysis of the enactment of these alternative spaces is missing. Indeed Pickerill and Maxey (2009:1515) encourage a "clearer consideration of scales" for a re-conceptualisation of the geographies of sustainability, drawing on the example of low impact development. Additionally, Jarvis (2011) encourages a multi-scalar analysis to examine space-time interactions within intentional communities. She specifically identifies "three temporal scales [in] the development of cohousing: everyday life in the present, group history from the past, and enduring ecological change over the life course" (Jarvis *et al.* 2011:520). This thesis claims for a relational-scalar approach that offers a more integrated and nuanced account of enactment than is found in existing research, where the tendency is to view the individual, or the place, or the performance of community rituals, or the networks among communities, as separate entities. This thesis argues that approaching enactment with a relational-scalar analysis allows light to be shed onto multiple, yet related scales such as the individual, the community, the transcendental, the local and the global. This relational-scalar approach reveals how multiple spatialities, temporalities and characteristics are involved in the enactment of these alternative spaces.

Fourthly, as already mentioned, the majority of academic research to date has been undertaken in the global north and mostly from an Anglo-American perspective. This research offers an exploration of two intentional communities, one located in the global north (Italy) and the other in the global south (Brazil). By drawing on similar inside observations from these different intentional communities, this research extends and deepens current geographical knowledge within non Anglo-American territories, offering a context-sensitive exploration of the process of enactment.

To summarise, the four gaps that this research addresses are: firstly, the almost absent focus on spiritual communities and generally, the transcendental and material dimensions of sustainability; secondly, it challenges conventional utopian analysis to take meaningful account of contemporary alternative spaces; thirdly, the necessity to explore multiple related scales for a more holistic understanding of everyday utopian enactment; and finally, a neglected context-specific comparison of global north and south communal experiences.

## 1.4 Aims of the project and research questions

This chapter has introduced the reader to the main limitations of previous research on intentional communities and ecovillages, emphasising how current knowledge fails to provide a holistic geographical understanding of the enactment of alternative spaces. By contrast, this thesis develops a conceptual framework that reveals the nature and the enactment of alternative spaces as an empirical journey that passes through five scales of analysis. The observations from this analysis show how multiple scales shape the process of enactment of spiritual intentional communities.

In so doing, the research has three specific aims:

*- To explore conceptually and empirically the nature of alternative spaces, defined intentional heterotopias.*

*- To investigate the enactment of spiritual intentional communities.*

*- To understand how multiple related scales shape the enactment of intentional heterotopias.*

In order to address these research aims, the empirical chapters will address five scale-specific sub-questions:

1. *The individual*: Why have people moved to the intentional communities of Dh and TM?

2. *The community*: Which performative community practices play a key role in the material and social enactment of intentional heterotopias?

3. *The transcendental*: How is the transcendental scale enacted and how does it shape intentional heterotopias?

4. *The local*: How are these communities spatially enacted and how do they engage with the wider world; what is their impact and how do they effect change in local cultures and economies?

5. *The global*: How is the communal movement globally enacted and how does it connect or bridge global north and south intentional heterotopias?

## 1.5 Methodology

Intentional communities have been analysed using different methods. For those scholars interested in categorisation, surveys can provide an overview of the main features of a

significant number of communities. For instance, in an attempt at categorizing western world communal practices, Meijering *et al*. (2007a) did a survey of 1023 intentional communities and received back 496 questionnaires (48.5%). Similarly, Sargisson and Sargent (2004), Mulder *et al*. (2006) and Sargisson (2007) were interested to trace the different types of intentional communities and for this purpose they organised them into categories.

Intentional communities are known to be very different from each other: while typologies based on extensive surveys and questionnaires are generally useful, especially for context, questions remain outstanding that call for deeper knowledge and understanding of the process of enactment. A strong case is made for in-depth ethnographic investigation. Ethnography is often used for studying intentional communities, especially for anthropological investigations (e.g. Lockyer, 2007; Ergas, 2010). It allows the observation of these communities from the inside as a way of uncovering the dynamics, that in general, are hidden from the outside. Yet, although ethnographic research can reveal a more in-depth understanding and a more context-sensitive investigation, it requires a significant time of engagement and it is generally limited to one or two case studies. One of the main limitations therefore is that, although an ethnographic research would investigate in depth two intentional communities, it does not provide an overview, categorization and generalisation of communal spaces worldwide.

In addition, intentional communities are extremely diversified and attempting a comparison could run the risk of making general assumptions. Taking into consideration these limits, this research explores the enactment of alternative spaces by drawing upon an ethnographic exploration of two case studies, one in the global north and one in the south. In so doing, it engages with an "experimental international comparativism" which aims "to proliferate conversations across scholarships embedded in different […] contexts at the same time as it directs us to new units of comparison" (Robinson, 2001:19). Dh and TM are not compared in a strict sense, but rather by being explored together when possible – but also independently when required – they allow the identification of those common trends that characterize the nature and enactment of spiritual alternative spaces.

The ethnographic investigation carried out in this research uses a range of methods to collect data such as in-depth interviews, participant observation, field diary, collection

of documentary and visual materials. They will be explored and justified in more detail in the methodological chapter.

## 1.6   Outline of chapters

*Chapter 2* sets out the conceptual framework adopted in this thesis. The first part critically discusses the evolution of the concept of utopia and how it has been used for theorising intentional communities. In overcoming its geographical limitations, the second part will explain how heterotopology has been understood and used in social science. The third part emphasises the scant attention dedicated to spiritual spaces from both conceptual frameworks.

*Chapter 3* discusses the methodological aspects. It explains why and how an 'international experimental comparativism' research design is adopted and how an ethnographic investigation is developed. The second part of the chapter sheds light on my journey, showing the different phases of the research process, such as the choice of the case studies and the challenges in getting access; the research methods used to collect data during the fieldwork and the analytical and reflexive phase after the fieldwork.

*Chapter 4* has two aims: explaining, positioning and analysing the scalar approach used in this thesis by taking into consideration the recent debate in human geography; and to set up the contexts in relation to the different scales of enactment and the case studies of Dh and TM.

*Chapter 5* offers an empirical investigation of the individual scale, by exploring individuals' life journeys before entering the communities of Dh and TM. By considering the role of life-changing experiences, I discuss how individuals have passed through processes of questioning and searching before joining the communities. This chapter sheds light on the role of intentions and desire in intentional communities.

*Chapter 6* engages with an analysis of the community enactments of Dh and TM heterotopias by investigating key performative practices. The first part uncovers the material enactment of Dh and TM by underlining the combination of diverse and spiritual economic practices, whilst the second part looks at the innovative, playful and artistic practices which reveal the social enactment of Dh.

*Chapter 7* explores the transcendental scale by using mainly 'spiritual embodied methods'. It reveals how transcendental practices such as rituals and community living

shape individual spiritual paths and especially the community enactment. Moreover, it investigates how these communities engage with heterochronic spiritualities.

*Chapter 8* studies the spatial enactment and the local scale by exploring, firstly, their system of opening and closing and secondly, how they are related to the local context in which they are embedded. Using empirical data, this chapter touches upon concepts such as boundaries, openness, estrangement and impact.

*Chapter 9* investigates the enactment of GEN in developing as a global social movement across north and south. The analysis draws upon five spatialities –scale, place, mobility, network and positionality – and adds proliferation as another lens of investigation.

*Chapter 10* summarises the key arguments of the thesis, outlines the key contributions and offers new possible research directions within human geography and beyond.

# Conceptual framework: from utopia to heterotopia

Social science scholars have often considered intentional communities as concrete and pragmatic examples of utopias or as the closest to an utopian experiment existing in the world. Identified as 'utopian practices', intentional communities together with 'utopian literature' and 'utopian thought' are the three expressions of utopianism (Sargent, 1994).

> Utopian practice includes what are now most often called intentional communities, or communes, but were once called by many other things, including utopian communities, utopian experiments, and practical utopias.
> (Sargent, 2010:6)

How have these practical utopias been analysed in the academic literature? During the last decades, both utopian studies and intentional communities have been involved in a transformation process due to historical, economic and political changes which have taken place since the Second World War. Rather than provide a comprehensive review of this literature, the following section draws attention to a critical analysis of the main contributions that help us to understand how a utopian theoretical framework has evolved in recent years, and to offer fresh insight on our understanding of intentional communities as alternative spaces. By overcoming some of the constraints of utopian studies, the second part of the chapter introduces a conceptual framework of heterotopia that enables a more integrated approach to understanding the enactment of alternative spaces. The last part, pointing out how spirituality is overlooked within utopian and heterotopian studies, stresses the importance of considering spirituality as a key element in the enactment of spiritual alternative spaces.

## 1.7 Utopia, utopianism and the evolutions of the concept

### 1.7.1 Utopia: a perfect place…

The word utopia was coined 500 years ago by the renowned social philosopher Thomas More, Lord High Chancellor of England, in the reign of Henry VIII. Since then, the concept has been widely used, but invariably, in contested ways. Contestations can be attributed to the original ambiguity of the concept itself: if the Greek word '*topós*' undoubtedly means 'place', the suffix *u* could be *ou* meaning 'not' or *eu* meaning 'good

or well'. Doubts arose regarding both the real nature and the good purposes of this utopian place, even though More deemed utopia to be both an imaginary *and a* good place. Yet after five centuries this debate persists: it has evolved, dividing utopian scholars among pro-utopianists, anti-utopianists and even anti-anti-utopianists (Sargisson, 2012). Nonetheless, most scholars agree about one of the main features (perhaps the most important) of utopia: its critical function. Tom Moylan (1986, 2000), who coined the term 'critical utopias', stresses this comparative function: utopias criticise contemporaneous systems and propose new alternatives.

From the origins of the term, Thomas More emphasised the critical function of utopia by structuring his book *Utopia* (2001 [1516]) in two parts: firstly, a critique of the contemporary English society of Henry VIII and secondly a description of the alternative political, economic and social system of Utopia. In the first part, it emerges how ineffectual was the English punishment law against theft at that time. Raphael (who assumes the role of a storyteller) explains that punishing the thief with death does not eliminate the cause of the problem because, he argues that "the land enclosures by the rich and powerful cause that poverty leads to crime" (Miles, 2007: 12). For Raphael the solution was to radically replace the economic and political order with a system based on communal property, which could ensure a political regime, based on justice and prosperity. To justify his point of view, in the second section, More explains how an alternative system works in the island of Utopia. At the end of the book, More (1516:69) says "I cannot perfectly agree to everything he [Raphael] has related; however, there are many things in the Commonwealth of Utopia that I rather wish, than hope, to see followed in our governments".

Another seminal utopian writer was the Dominican philosopher Tommaso Campanella. The alternative system proposed by Campanella in *City of the Sun* (2009 [1602]) was a propaganda manifesto for radical change in the austere Catholic environment of the Counter Reformation, when the south of Italy was dominated by Spain. Campanella's knowledge, ideas and vision expressed in the *City of the Sun* and elsewhere were deemed too radical and extreme for the Catholic inquisition and, after being accused of heresy, he spent 27 year in prison. Both *Utopia* and *City of the Sun* presented imaginary, perfect and harmonious places with the aim of criticising their contemporaneous societies. They were not just a dream, but rather presented by the authors as proposals that could be implemented in the real world.

Since More and Campanella's seminal contributions, a large body of literature has

engaged with utopian imaginaries. Among these scholars, for instance, are the well-known utopian socialists Saint Simon (1760-1825), Owen (1771-1858) and Fourier (1772-1837) who criticised the unjust and unequal effects of the early industrial society upon the working class. They envisioned alternative economic-social-political systems embedded in cooperation and association (Levitas, 1990). Indeed, the first link between utopian studies and intentional communities emerged with Fourier and Owen who not only imagined a utopian socialist society, but sought to concretely implement their projects. Fourier established Brook Farm in Massachusetts (US) in 1841 and Owen built New Lanark in Scotland and New Harmony in the US in the early 19th century (Friesen and Friesen, 2004). Unlike Fourier's orientation toward an agricultural society, Owen was interested in the development of a fairer industrial society based on economic communalism. Since then, utopian studies have been the most common framework used by academics to explain intentional communities and these in turn have largely been regarded as one of the main drivers towards the experimentation of utopian imaginaries in the real world.

One of the first scholars who explicitly studied intentional communities as utopian spaces was Kanter (1972). By investigating how and why groups are built and maintained, and to what extent they realise their ideal aims, her contribution is considered a landmark among intentional community scholars. Kanter identifies three main historical waves of utopian communities in the US, which emerged as alternative projects according to different critiques of contemporaneous societies. The first wave (from early days until 1845) had religious roots; these are those communities in search of a purified and spiritual life style (for example Anabaptist communities such as the Amish). The second wave (1820-1930) began as a political-economic critique of the burgeoning industrial society, for example the socialist communities inspired by Owen and Fourier. The third wave started as a psychosocial critique of contemporary society (from the 1960s) which was accused of not allowing people to express their full potential, but was instead forcing them into narrow roles where feelings of alienation and loneliness prevailed.

The deep-rooted sense of frustration and dissatisfaction with the established order is the main reason why intentional communities are considered utopian practices.  It is dissatisfaction that prompts the search for an alternative, ideal and perfect space where people can seek refuge from the problems and issues of present society (Kanter, 1972). However, concluding her book *Limits of Utopia* Kanter explains how the reality can

modify the dreams and consequently the "perfect" ideals cannot always be accomplished (1972: 211). Advancing this discussion, Zablocki (1980) provided a more detailed analysis of intentional communities as a social movement, viewed in four ways. It started from a global study over different centuries revealing how the movement can be seen to be "unevenly distributed across the continents and across the centuries" (Zablocki, 1980:18). Afterwards it focuses on 120 American experiments, moving to a few single cases, to finally exploring the bonds that link members of the same community.

Like Kanter, Zablocki's research focuses on utopian experiments that developed during the 1960s and 1970s in the US. Both works are relevant because they explain the development of intentional communities as part of a bigger social phenomenon. Zablocki linked the growth and distribution of communal experiences to cultural paradigm changes that occurred in specific places and over historical periods. Furthermore, both authors question why those communities failed during those years. Despite recognising the potential of intentional communities, they pointed out the difficulties faced by these communities to survive in the long term, and furthermore, to create a significant change in society. Nevertheless Kanter argues for the importance of utopian aims and practices for the "creation of a new social world" (1972: 236), whilst Zablocki "did not adequately recognise intentional communities as a form of popular resistance capable of producing broader social change" (Lockyer, 2007:70).

Their understanding of intentional communities is clearly influenced by earlier conceptualisations of utopias that looked at these places as spaces of perfection. However, I argue that comparing intentional communities to utopian spaces, or even considering them as utopian laboratories, will inevitably lead to pessimistic research results, simply because the perfect idealism proposed remains unachievable. While not denying the importance of such researches, – Kanter and Zablocki provided seminal contributions to the field –it can be argued that our understanding of intentional communities has suffered from over estimations and unrealistic expectations emerging from a 'too ambitious' theoretical framework. This does not mean that inhabitants' aims or visions are not utopian ideals, but rather that the utopian theoretical framework used in the academic debate in the 1970s provided insufficient means to understand intentional communities – and overall alternative spaces. Furthermore, understanding utopias as perfect projects can also lead to distorted consequences in the real world.

### 1.7.2   Anti-utopianisms

If, on the one hand, utopian imaginaries led to the experimentation of alternative spaces such as socialist communities, or Amish communities, or eco-communities, on the other hand, the 20th century demonstrated how utopian projects could also lead to far from harmonious experimentations. The main argument of anti-utopianists such as Karl Popper (1962 [1945]) and John Gray (1998, 2002, 2007) is that utopia can lead to totalitarianism and generate violence and fear, as in the case of Hitler's fascist and Stalin's communist utopian projects. More specifically '[u]topian social engineering', according to Popper (1962 [1945]), is based on an ideal of a perfect society that, if challenged, allows the use of violence; does not accept dissidents; and satisfies the dream of a few, yet often being the nightmare of others (Avery, 2000; Sargisson, 2012).

Like Popper, Gray argues that "[u]topias are dreams of collective deliverance that in waking life are found to be nightmares" (2007: 24). Gray's contribution adds interesting evidence by including among these dangerous utopias, a number of current political projects such as the War on Terror, 'legitimised' for the realisation of a universal democracy, and de-regulated processes of privatization to pursue the dream of a global free-market to ensure universal peace and prosperity. In this regard, Gray says "Utopian thinking is most dangerous when it is least recognized" (2007: 118). Gray not only warns of the danger of the universal neo-liberal democratic utopian project promoted by Western governments, but also underlines how this for instance clashes with the Islamic vision of how the world should be governed (see also Bonnett, 2004). Overall, Gray's main anti-utopian argument is that human beings have an inherently conflictual nature that will never result in a harmonious society.

> If human dreams were achieved, the result would be worse than any aborted
> Utopia. Luckily, visions of an ideal world are never realized. (Gray,
> 2007:23-24)

Although Lyman Sargent is not an anti-utopianist, he extends this debate by pointing out how the utopian projects of European colonisers were the nightmares of the indigenous local communities; "the dream of the settlers clashed with the expectations of the people already living there" (2010:51). Sargent is one of the few scholars who investigate utopian projects in non-western traditions (1994, 2006, 2010). He identifies the concept of postcolonial utopianism, highlighting how little is known of the utopian dreams of indigenous inhabitants compared to what is known about the dreams of the

settlers. In so doing, he explains that the myths and dreams of colonised people were 'hidden' and often 'destroyed' by the colonisation process, and the only utopian dream that 'remained' to the local inhabitants was to gain independence from their oppressors.

Despite the negative effects of *some* utopian projects that were visible since the 16th century with colonisation, it is only since the Second World War that the concept of utopia has been significantly attacked (as explained above) for dangerously leading to, what are commonly known as, dystopias. Over recent decades, several scholars (i.e. Marcuse, 1970; Žižek, 2005; Gray, 2007; Kumar, 2010; Žižek, 2011, 2012, 2013) announced 'the end of utopia' or 'death of utopia'.

### 1.7.3   Is this the end of utopia?

The idea of 'the end of utopia' found broad agreement across academic debates in the 20th century, yet anti-utopianists, anti-anti-utopianists and pro-utopianists have reacted in different ways (Sargisson, 2012).

Firstly, as discussed above, anti-utopianists such as Gray (1998, 2002, 2007) claim that a 'hidden' utopian thinking – such as democracy and free markets – is even more dangerous than explicit forms of utopia; so utopias are dead because they have evidently not achieved the promised harmony and perfection.

Secondly, anti-anti-utopianists such as Jameson (2005) and Žižek (2005, 2011, 2012, 2013) wish for a new kind of utopianism, a new reinvention of utopia. Their concern is that human beings do not believe anymore in alternatives accepting "silently that global capitalism is here to stay" (Žižek, 2011a cited in Sargisson, 2012: 32).

> The lesson of Wall Street for me is that the true utopia does not mean we can have a different society. The true utopia is the way things are, that they can go on indefinitely just like that. I claim that we are approaching some tough decisions. If we do nothing, then we are clearly approaching a new *authoritarian* [original emphasis] order. (Žižek, 2013: 30)

For Žižek, utopia is not a free imaginary world anymore, but rather a necessary survival strategy to find a way out of the capitalistic system (2011a in Sargisson 2012). Anti-anti-utopian approaches are essentially pessimistic yet still hopeful.

Thirdly, pro-utopianists such as Levitas (1990; 2013); Kumar (1991); Sargent (1994; 2006; 2010) and Sargisson (1996; 2000; 2007; 2012), despite having acknowledged the danger of utopias, defend utopianism with several arguments. For instance, Sargisson

argues that the danger of utopia depends on the authorship, in other words "whether utopia is the property of a political elite or political mass, a leader or the grass roots" (2012:13). Additionally, Sargent (2006:13) claims that utopia is not intrinsically unsafe, but becomes problematic when it is a universal plan and "the only correct way of living".

> [E]very ideology contains a utopia, and the problem with utopia arises when it becomes a system of beliefs rather than what it is in almost all cases, a critique of the actual through imagining a better alternative. (Sargent 2006:12)

Like Sargent, Levitas (2013:10) points out how anti-utopianists' understanding of utopias are still attached to the idea of "human perfectibility" encouraging us to go beyond the notion of "political blueprints". Whilst accepting the limits of utopias, pro-utopianists strongly advocate a new conceptualisation of the term with the aim of rescuing the positive inherent feature of utopias. Furthermore Sargisson (2000), Sargent (2006), Kumar (2010), and Levitas (2013) argue that utopias, as *eu*-topias, are still alive: this is demonstrated by the examples of existing intentional communities. In this vein, Kumar (2010) asserts the end of utopia as a 'literary genre' and as 'social theory', but he argues against the end of utopia as a practice using, the example of existing intentional communities, identified as "glocalized utopia" (2010: 561).

Surprisingly, even the anti-utopianist Gray acknowledges that utopianism does not necessarily lead to totalitarianism but can be harmlessly embodied in voluntary intentional communities (2007). Thus, it appears that practical utopias like intentional communities have survived this anti-utopian critique and claims of the 'end of utopia'. Instead they demonstrate that utopias are still alive and can be localised, contingent, diversified and, especially, that they do not necessarily lead to totalitarianism. The next sections explain how pro-utopianists have re-conceptualised utopia by discussing the two themes of function and processes.

### 1.7.4   Utopianism as a function

More recent conceptualisations of utopia move from the proposal of a perfect place to a desirable world. According to Levitas (1990:8) "the emphasis has changed from the presentation of finished perfection to a more open exploration in which the construction of the individual, and […] the question of another way of being, has become the central

issue". Levitas (1990) examines the different existing ways in which utopia has been defined: as a content – which indicates how the good society would be; as a form – which studies utopia as a fiction, a literary genre; and as a function – which, embedded in a more methodological approach rather than normative and descriptive, stresses the oppositional and transformative role of utopias. Taking into consideration these three main approaches yet drawing upon mostly utopias' functional characteristics, Levitas suggests a broader methodological concept that considers utopia as the desire for a better way of living and of being (1990, 2013). For Levitas, desires, functioning as catalysers, can contribute to seeing and believing that the world can be otherwise, and through which the scarcity gap, between needs and satisfaction, can be bridged. Levitas makes "an enormous contribution to the field by isolating the shared element – desire – as the key to the concept of utopia" (Garforth, 2009:8) and in particular pointing out that "the functions of utopia are the education to desire and the transformation of the world" (Levitas, 1990:8).

Sargent, strongly influenced by Levitas, distinguishes between utopia and utopian*ism*. Whilst utopia (in its positive version) means "a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as considerably better than the society in which the reader lived", utopianism is defined as "social dreaming" (Sargent 1994:9). For Sargent utopianism is a universal phenomenon inherent in the life of human beings, it is the human propensity to dream. He argues "the overwhelming majority of people – probably it is even possible to say all – are, at some time dissatisfied and consider how their lives might be improved" (1994:3). For Sargent, utopianism is essential for creating any social improvement, it is the trigger of any social change and it is the inherent capacity of dreaming for something better.

Besides being inspired by philosophers such as Bloch, Mannheim, Sorel, Davis, pro-utopian scholars share in common the claim that utopianism is a desire, a human propensity, and an impulse for creating a better world. Utopianism is the act of dreaming of a world that, despite not being perfect, could be better than the one existing in the present. These new conceptualisations of utopia open up a different understanding of intentional communities. In so doing, less attention is now given to how these intentional communities are organised and structured, they are not conceived anymore as perfect places, but instead as microcosms where it is possible to dream differently

and to experiment with alternative ways of living that could potentially bring change in the world (Sargent 2006).

In line with the recent conceptualisation that centralizes the function of utopias, Sargisson (1996, 2000, 2007, 2009) brings a new understanding of intentional communities by providing a utopian feminist approach. She defines transgressive utopianism "as the product of an approach to utopian thinking that does not insist upon utopia as a blueprint: utopia as the inscription of perfection" (2000:6).

> [Instead] it transgresses, negates and destroys things that confine it. And, in doing so, it generates a space in which something different can occur: an utopian space. […] It is, above all, resistant to closure and it celebrates processes over product (2000:3).

According to Sargisson (2000:4) "transgressive utopian thought works thus: it breaks rules and confronts boundaries; it challenges paradigms; it creates new conceptual and political space". Intentional communities are recognised as a body of people that experiments with these transgressive paradigmatic shifts. Although Sargisson offers an interesting way to look at intentional communities' functions, she does not go into much depth in the analysis of these alternative spaces. In which way do these communal experiments challenge paradigms and confront boundaries? What is the function of alternative spaces such as intentional communities? How do they impact, proliferate and outreach the outside world?

Like Sargisson, Schehr in *Dynamics Utopia* (1997), contributes to the debate by stressing the potential transformative function of intentional communities and how they seek to bring social change through outreach activities. While considering contemporary intentional communities as a new social movement, Schehr identifies eight significant characteristics which distinguish contemporary intentional communities from their predecessors of the 1960s and 1970s. One difference that emerged was that there was increased communication between these new communities and their surroundings. Intentional communities seem to lose the feature of being isolated and closed places for gaining a new relational identity. Through a few examples, Schehr indicates how the participation in local and regional activities has impressively increased. According to the author (Schehr, 1997:46), "there is a strong philosophical dedication to community outreach, often pursued through slide shows, books, publications, newsletters, and conferences". He indicates a cultural shift in the communal movements where instead of

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being exclusively focused on creating an alternative organisation, communities are concerned to testify and offer to the outsider world their experiences and results.

Moreover, according to Schehr what is noteworthy is the ability of utopianism to promote alternate modes of living *transcending* the status quo (citing Mannheim 1936 in Schehr, 1997: 145). He recognises utopianism in the power of juxtaposition. It is intended as the capacity of intentional communities (not all of them) to recover, from the memory of pre-modern cultures, the knowledge that allows them to produce their own organisation and consequently to resist the dominant cultural. In other words, through rituals, symbolisms, signs and traditions, these communities are able to offer alternative modes of living to resist dominant norms and, at the same time, to offer examples of counter-hegemonic practices. Intentional communities are consequently acknowledged as utopian spaces that are fundamentally able to juxtapose past, present and future by rescuing pre-modern cultures and merging them with new contemporaneous social forms for shaping a better future. Drawing upon this temporal function, also Sargent says:

> There is a sense in which many utopias, correctly thought of as radical and transgressive, are profoundly conservative in that they often hark back to the past for the ideals that they project onto the future (Sargent, 2007:311)

Afterwards, Sargent remarks that what is most important is "what is done with the past when it is projected onto the future" (*ibid*) and how this is transformed in new materialities and new moral lifestyles. He also wonders if this coming back to the past is a form of nostalgia.

Alistair Bonnett (2009, 2010) might describe these practical utopias as sites of radical nostalgia where the 'politics of loss' is provocatively used as a resource for counter-cultural interventions. Bonnett critically emphasises how radical nostalgia can be negotiated within present times through practices that refuse, yet evoke, modernity (2009). Within the different forms of radical nostalgia, Bonnett (2010:101) highlights the existence of postcolonial nostalgia, whose aim is "rediscovering tradition and asserting non-Western cultures as providing distinct cultural paradigms". Bonnett refers to the work of Walter Mignolo explaining how he calls for "a symbolic restitution of the past in view of a better future" (Mignolo, 2000:149 in Bonnett, 2010:101). Bonnett's work is noteworthy here, as it brings new elements to understand the temporal function of practical utopias and specifically to understand what Sargent has before called 'Postcolonial utopias'. Indeed, intentional communities could also be considered sites of

postcolonial nostalgia, where indigenous knowledges, traditions and practices are rescued from the past, reshaped in the present for the building of a better future. Expanding on Mignolo's (2000:13) work, it is relevant to introduce his concept of "border gnosis".

> 'Border gnosis' is the subaltern reason striving to bring to the foreground the force and creativity of knowledges subalternized during a long process of colonization of the planet, which was at the same time the process in which modernity and the modern Reason were constructed.

How are past knowledges, traditions and practices rescued in postcolonial practical utopias? How does 'border gnosis' shape alternative spaces such as intentional communities? What is the function of these subaltern knowledges outside intentional communities?

Recent utopian conceptualisations, although focused on the utopian function, do not seem to specifically address the function of the past and how it affects the enactment of alternative spaces. I argue that this needs to be considered, especially if referring to intentional communities located in former colonial territories. Yet, as the next part discusses new conceptualisations are instead more concerned with dismantling the future rather than thinking about the past.

### 1.7.5   Utopianism as a process

When utopia is conceived as a plan for the future, to overcome the limits of present society, it becomes processual, immanent and ubiquitous. Ernest Bloch played a key role in shaping this new utopian understanding with *The Principle of Hope* (1968) that, although firstly published in 1955, became influential only when recently translated into English.

For Bloch the future is immanent to the present, is latent in the present and is anticipated in the present. He develops the concept of Not yet (through the theorisation of Not-yet-Conscious and Not-yet-Become) explained by Levitas (1990:102) as follows

> The German phrase *noch nicht* can be translated both as 'not yet' and as 'still not'. It may thus carry the meaning of something that is not *yet*, but is expected, stressing a future presence or actuality; or something that is still *not*, stressing an absence or lack in the present.

In Bloch, the future is grounded in the present through the feeling of hope, becoming the desire and catalyst for social change and, thus, utopia looks into the future but only to "penetrate the darkness so near it of the just lived moment" (Bloch, 1968:12). This has at least two main intertwined implications in the utopian thoughts.

Firstly, this anticipated future expressed in the Not Yet emphasises the on-going nature of utopianism, as something that 'is becoming' but at the same time is 'not yet become', characterising utopianism as a dynamic process (Anderson, 2006). Secondly, Bloch challenges the idea of the future as pre-determined, defined and finished as envisioned in the traditional utopias, but it becomes fluid, open and a realm of possibilities (Levitas, 1990; Anderson, 2002, 2006; Garforth, 2009). Garforth (2009:12) calls it the "disappearance of the future", stressing how utopian studies are now more focused on the utopian process and how it affects the everyday, rather than achieving future goals and outcomes. The disappearance of the future and the emphasis on the process have two significant consequences for understanding intentional communities as alternative utopian spaces, firstly they problematise the role of intentionality, and secondly, they stress the temporal process rather than the spatial form.

*The problem of intentionality*

According to Garforth (2009), recent evolutions which have reconceptualised utopia as processual, critical, reflexive and open-ended, strongly problematise the role of intention.

> I will argue here that intention is about closure – around the object, an aim, an ultimate good or goal. Contemporary approaches to utopianism by contrast, wish to hold onto notions of the good, the better, the ideal, the hopeful, but simultaneously refuse closure – in relation to signification and desire, to the social and the subject. (*ibid*: 20)

By asserting that intentions are wedded to aims, goals, and defined plans, she detaches intentionality, claiming that utopia is rooted in desire and hope. As a conclusion, she calls for research to further investigate the relation between (un)intentionality and utopia; "Can utopia be to do with unintended or accidental events, effects, affects, and perceptions? That is, does utopia happen (to us) rather than being something we mean or intended? If so, what makes something utopian?" (*ibid*: 25)

In the special issues *Utopia and the 'Problem' of Intention*, launched by Garforth and Kraftl (2009), also Kraftl (2009), Miller (2009) and Miles (2009) problematise and critically interrogate the role of intention in utopian studies. Analysing the relation between utopia and childhood, Kraftl (2009) challenges the way that young people's intentions are invoked, assumed and represented in common utopian texts. Through disclosing young people's hope, Kraftl emphasises how their intentions are ambiguous, pragmatic, modest and linked to the everyday. He then argues how scrambled temporalities fragment utopia into multiple intentions and invites further critical interrogations.

In contrast, Sargisson (2009) argues that "[a] utopianism without intention lacks direction, authorship and desire. It is, quite simply, no longer utopianism." (*ibid*: 90) and "[t]o abandon the notion of intention would be to cast utopia adrift, leaving it aimless. To abandon the notion of intention would be to leave utopia without desire" (*ibid*: 94). In reply to Garforth and Kraftl (2009) who called for an unintentional utopia, Sargisson (2009:93) says "Yes, intent does matter, but we need to understand it more deeply" through investigating its limitations, implications and consequences.

Considering these recent evolutions of utopian studies and specifically this call for an unintentional utopianism, how does an unintentional utopianism explore, understand and regard intentional communities? Intentional communities, as discussed above, have been widely recognised within utopian studies as practical utopias, applied utopias, and utopian experiments. If intentionality is inherent, intrinsic and rooted in intentional communities, it should be also inherent, intrinsic and rooted in utopian practices (or at least part thereof). Therefore, Garforth and Kraftl (2009) question the existence of intentionality in utopias, and thereby indirectly question the existence of intentionality in intentional communities.

Taking this challenge, Miller (2009) investigates the notion of intent in practical utopias. Using the historical example of ex-slave frontier communities of the 19th century in the US, and the pirates' communities of the late 17th/early 18th, he casts away intention arguing for 'unintentional ideal communities'. In support of his argument, Miller (2009) says that unintentional ideal communities "lack […] utopian intent in the foundation and development of the community" (37) and they arise "due to a combination of influencing factors, and not through a positive desire to have them at the centre of the community, not as a reason for the community existing" (38). He makes a clear distinction between 'intentional communities' and 'unintentional ideal

communities', because the latter compared to the former lacks "deliberate, positive, utopian or ideal intentional or framework" (2009:38). Nevertheless, Miller does not address the tension between unintentionality in intentional communities, which instead I argue requires further investigation.

Studies in the past have looked at the main motivations and reasons that lead people to create or move to intentional communities (i.e. Lockyer, 2010); yet in doing so they assume already the existence of intentionality. However, following Garforth's (2009:25) challenge, the question has to be asked whether: utopian practices can be "to do with unintended or accidental events, effects, affects, and perceptions". It is in order to address this gap in current understanding that this research focuses on the relationship between intentionality and practical utopias and, following the recent evolution of utopian studies, the individual level of desires, feelings and experiences. Arguably, it is necessary to critically interrogate individuals' life experiences, desires and feelings before considering the function and process of the community, in order to better understand if and how intentionality matters in the creation of these alternative spaces.

*Utopian process: the loss of 'topos'*

(Un)intentionality is not the only feature that has arisen from the recent evolution of utopian studies. As previously mentioned, utopianism is nowadays increasingly recognised as a 'process' rather than as an end in itself (Bloch, Levitas, Sargent, Kumar, Sargisson, Anderson, Garforth). Despite conceptualising utopia as a process, how is this utopian process enacted? How are these individual/collective desires for a better way of living materialised and territorialised? What characterizes the process of enactment of practical utopias such as intentional communities?

Ben Anderson (2002) explores immanent utopianism through everyday practices. Specifically, he looks at common ways to use recorded music to feel better. He argues that utopianism is immanent, real and excessive (2002, 2006). Strongly inspired by Bloch, Anderson then defines utopia as "a distinctive *type of process* [original emphasis] in which something better is 'not-yet' and thus has disruptive, excessive qualities even as it is immanent to lived and material culture at multiple scales" (2006:698). Although Anderson looks at the individual dimension rather than any collective projects, he links the utopian process to 'everyday practices' and to 'material culture' whereby "materialities anticipate new possibilities and potentialities" (699-700).

Similarly, Davina Cooper, in her recent book *Everyday Utopias* (2014) centralises the importance of 'materiality' and 'practice' in order to understand the actualization of everyday utopias. Cooper, drawing upon six case studies, investigates how concepts are imagined and how they are actualized through everyday practices enacted in utopian spaces. Cooper is, to my knowledge, the only scholar to date who has explored the process of actualisation of utopian imagined concepts through material practices. Her contribution however is not focused on the enactment of alternative spaces and especially she makes clear how her case studies differ from intentional communities "where people live out (or plan to live out) significant chunks of their life" (*ibid*:8).

Although Anderson and Cooper have not analysed the enactment of alternative spaces, they have underlined how the utopian process is shaped by everyday practices and materiality. Thus taking into consideration their findings, a starting point to explore the utopian enactment of practical utopias is to consider how everyday community practices are materialised and territorialised in these alternative spaces. Yet beyond these contributions, the processual nature of utopianism has received very scant attention from empirically grounded conceptualisations. Specifically, scholars have overlooked how the utopian process is enacted in alternative spaces such as intentional communities.

The inherently problematic nature of materialisation and territorialised explains, in part, this lack of attention. Adopting a geographical perspective, Harvey identifies a spatio-temporal conflict in the materialisation of utopias.

> The upshot of this argument is that the purity of any utopianism of process inevitably gets upset by its manner of spatialization. In exactly the same way that materializations of spatial utopias run afoul of the particularities of the temporal process mobilized to produce them, so the utopianism of process runs afoul of the spatial framings and the particularities of place construction necessary to its materialization. (2000:179)

In other words, when utopianism becomes a spatial form in the sense that it "comes geographically to earth" (Harvey, 2000:177) it degenerates, it destroys itself, and it "produces results that are in many instances exactly the opposite of those intended" (180) getting re-embedded in the same historical social process, such as neo-liberal capitalism, that originally it wanted to resist. To overcome this spatio-temporal utopian trap, Harvey suggests a 'dialectical utopianism' that considers both time and space: this overcomes the problematic closure of utopian spatial forms by instead rooting it in

present possibilities. This in turn leads to a process of "endlessly open experimentation" (*ibid*: 182).

Although Harvey offers interesting insights about this process of experimentation, seeking to overcome the existing tensions between utopian processes and its materialisation, this tension arguably remains to be solved and his contribution strongly emphasises the ambiguities of utopia as a spatial form. I argue that these new utopian conceptualisations, although they have revitalized utopianism and opened up the research field in several exciting new directions, at the same time, they have resulted in a loss of geography from the concept. We have seen how utopia has become a desire, an impulse, a feeling, and an on-going process of 'becoming'. Utopia is in everyday practices, immanent and ubiquitous. It has become a transgressive conceptual space, that can exist everywhere and anytime but that does not take root anywhere. And, if it does, history shows that it might be dangerous, as anti-utopianists have strongly emphasised.

Geography has been eliminated from utopia and utopianism and the temporal process has taken its 'place'. Bauman (2003) similarly supports this argument from a different perspective, in his paper *Utopia With No Topos*. Analysing traditional understanding of utopias, he claims that "utopias were always territorially defined" (Bauman, 2003:12) and indeed "utopia was the *topos* that rewarded the hardship of the travellers" (15). However, in the era of globalization, privatization, and liquid modernity, "the globe is full" (*ibid*: 22), and "there are no more plots left to which one could escape and in which one could hide" (*ibid*: 21).

While intentional communities could be an example that 'other' places still exist, Bauman's argument is relevant here to explain once again how geography has been not only problematic but also even left out of contemporary understanding of utopias.

> 'Utopia' – in its original meaning of a *place* that does not exist – has become, within the logic of the globalized world, a contradiction in terms. The 'nowhere' (the 'forever nowhere', the 'thus-far nowhere', and 'the nowhere-as-yet alike') is no more a place. *The 'u' of utopia bereaved by the 'topos', is left homeless and floating, no more hoping to strike its roots, to 're-embed'* [original emphasis]. (Bauman, 2003:16)

Taking into consideration recent utopian evolutions and the disappearance not only of the 'future' but also of 'geography', the question emerges how and whether

contemporary utopian studies can offer a complete framework to understand the enactment of alternative spaces such as intentional communities. The next section summarises the main research gaps and the limitations of a utopian conceptual framework for analysing alternative spaces such as intentional communities.

### 1.7.6   *Limits of utopianism*

More recent conceptualisations of utopia have underlined three significant aspects that need to be put under empirical investigation; firstly, the importance of considering the utopian function and exploring intentional communities as trangressive spaces or as spaces of postcolonial nostalgia. Secondly, the necessity to investigate the individual level and how individuals' desires, experiences and feelings shape the enactment of these alternative spaces, and specifically, if these spaces are the product of established intentions or accidental life events and experiences. Thirdly, by seeing utopianism as a process arises the necessity to analyse intentional communities in terms of their enactment, here understood as that process where individual /collective desires, dreams and visions get materialised and territorialised in an alternative space. Building upon some recent contributions, yet considering their limits, it emerges how the utopian process – enactment – can be understood by investigating everyday community practices. Besides the individual level, another level of analysis is therefore identified to investigate alternative spaces: the community.

However, after exploring how utopian studies have evolved and how they help in building a conceptual framework to understand alternative spaces, the last section has identified a fundamental issue with utopianism and geography. Using the works of Harvey and Bauman, it has been argued that utopianism loses its utopian features when territorialised and materialised, and that utopias' new conceptualisations have lost their *topos* – place. Recent utopian evolutions have survived from anti-utopianists' attacks – which were strongly supported by the drastic failure of historical utopian projects  – by affirming that utopia is a desire, an impulse, yet is not material. Thus, how then does utopianism analyse material spaces? How can utopianism provide a conceptual framework that illustrates the process of enactment of alternative spaces, if inherently it assumes the illusion of these places and, if fundamentally, it clashes with the idea that utopias get territorialised and materialised?

My main argument is that utopianism is useful, yet incomplete. It is useful because it sheds light on the importance of the individual and how individual desires, feelings and

experiences matter. It is useful because it stresses the importance of the function and process and how these desires can be enacted through everyday practices, but also limited, since it does not compete with its spatial enactment. How can we understand the enactment of alternative spaces using a framework that insists that utopianism is only imaginary and desirable?

I am not denying that intentional communities are utopian practices or better utopian laboratories or experiments. However, I argue that their desires are utopian but not once they are enacted, because as demonstrated utopia dwells in the imaginary world. As long as we use the word utopian, the focus will be on their desires, but what the research seeks to investigate is also the social, material, spiritual and spatial enactment that makes these intentional communities as 'real' alternative spaces, as enacted utopias. In order to overcome this spatial limitation and, thus, to offer an integrated conceptual framework for the understanding of alternative spaces, that brings back the *topos* in utopia, the next part of the chapter analyses the heterotopia framework proposed by Foucault in the late 1960s.

## 1.8   Heterotopia as a conceptual framework

Heterotopia is a very controversial, elusive and open-ended concept that, while it is widely used by scholars across architecture, urban studies, history, literature, sociology, and especially by geographers, continues to arouse notable interest for different and contrasting interpretations (Johnson, 2012b, 2013). Johnson (2006:81) underlines this by observing "Foucault's account of heterotopia, however playfully presented remains briefly sketched, provisional and at times confusing". Likewise, Soja (1996:162) claims "Foucault's heterotopologies are frustratingly incomplete, inconsistent, incoherent". Yet, although elusive, sketchy and incomplete, heterotopia offers a theoretical framework that overcomes some of the limits of utopian studies and helps in developing the conceptual threads for an understanding of alternative spaces and of intentional communities. Heterotopia is not considered a central concept in the Foucauldian philosophy, he mentioned it only on a few different occasions[1]; yet it is noteworthy for its double meaning of 'other spaces' and 'enacted utopias'.

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[1] The first reference to heterotopia appeared in the preface of his book *Les Mots et les choses* published in 1966 - translated in English four years later as *The order of things: an archaeology of the human sciences* (1970). In the same year, Foucault presented his ideas on heterotopia during a radio broadcast on the theme utopia. Finally, another version of the conference *Les Heterotopies* has been presented to a group of architects on the *Centre d'études architecturales* on the 14th March 1967 with the title *Des espaces*

## 1.8.1 Intentional heterotopias

The word heterotopia has been coined in the medical field to indicate "a condition of growth of normal tissue in unexpected ways and places" (Cenzatti, 2008: 75). The word heterotopia is formed by the two Greek roots of *hetero* and *topos*. The word *hetero* can mean both 'different' and 'other'. While translating Foucault's lecture entitled *Des espaces autres* (1984) discussions emerged in regard to the meaning of *autre*. Some authors preferred to translate the title as 'different' spaces (Hurley, 1998 in Dehane and De Cautier, 2008:22), others instead preferred to use 'other' spaces (versions translated by Miskowiec, 1986; Dehane and De Cauter, 2008). According to De Cauter and Dehane (2008:23) "Foucault's discussion takes place at the intersection on alterity and difference. […] Difference suggests a relational definition, otherness privileges separation". In some ways heterotopia spaces are both different and also other spaces (in fact, Foucault uses both words indistinctly during his lecture). Can heterotopias be presented also as alternative spaces? According to the Oxford English Dictionary (OED, n.d.) "alterity' is defined as 'the state of being other or different; diversity, otherness". Yet, its adjective 'alternative' is linked with choice, decision;

> (Of one or more things) available as another possibility or choice or (second meaning) relating to activities that depart from or challenge traditional norms: *an alternative lifestyle* [emphasis added] (OED, n.d.)

By presenting heterotopias as alternative places, the assumption is that they are places where individuals can decide whether or not to dwell, to use, or to leave. But this is not always the case of all examples of heterotopia mentioned by Foucault. During his lecture, he drew parallels between heterotopias and prisons, cemeteries, brothels, ships, gardens, Muslim baths, asylums, Jesuit colonies, saunas, museums, holiday camps, libraries. Some of these are places that individuals have volunteered to enter, such as libraries, museums, holiday camps; while others are compulsory such as hospitals, prisons, cemeteries. Defining heterotopia as alternative places makes a functional selection inside heterotopic sites; it distinguishes 'intentional heterotopias' (those heterotopias in which people have chosen to go, use and dwell) from 'compulsory heterotopias' (those heterotopias in which people have been forced to go, use and

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*autres* and published shortly before his death in 1984. This lecture has been translated into English three times. The first version called *Of other spaces* has been translated by Miskowiec in Diacritics in 1986, the second one by Hurley with the title *Different spaces* (1998) and the last one by Dehane and De Cautier in 2008. Here used is made of the first and third translations.

dwell). Although heterotopias are widely analysed across social sciences, no attempt has been made to underline the intention underpinning these spaces. Yet, in this thesis I argue that it is crucial to make a distinction between intentional heterotopias and compulsory heterotopias before exploring the concept in more depth.

Intentional communities have not hitherto been conceptualised as heterotopias, probably because the concept, without making a clear distinction between compulsory and intentional heterotopias, remains ambiguous and open to misinterpretations. One exception is in the way that Levitas (2013: xiii) defines intentional communities as "alternative enclaves or heterotopias". Yet she does not elaborate on this connection. From this point of departure I argue that intentional communities are one type of heterotopia, specifically intentional heterotopias, which need to be understood theoretically and through in-depth empirical investigation. How then does heterotopology – as Foucault (1986:24) calls it the science or "systematic description" to analyse and read these other spaces – help lead to an understanding of alternative spaces? The next section will start exploring heterotopology by disclosing the link between utopia and heterotopia and how the latter are considered 'enacted utopias'.

### 1.8.2   Enacted utopias

In *Of Other Spaces*, Foucault (1986:24) underlines two key aspects that have been discussed in the first part of this chapter; firstly he underlines how utopias have the inherent capacity of being 'other', of contradicting, subverting and neutralizing "all other sites", in other words how they are different than the contemporary society; Secondly, he underlines that utopian spaces are unreal places and thus, do not exist in the real world. From here, Foucault overcomes utopian spatial limits by introducing another type of alternative spaces that, even if strictly linked to utopia, is embedded in the real world. In so doing, in contrast to utopias, Foucault (1986:24) calls them heterotopias.

> There are also, probably in every culture, in every civilization, real places – places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society – which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested and inverted. Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in the reality. Because

these spaces are absolutely different from all the sites that they reflect and speak about, I shall call them, by way of contrast to utopias heterotopias.

For Foucault, heterotopias are "*sortes d'utopies effectivement réalisées*", translated in English as "enacted utopia" (translated by Miskowiec 1986:24) or interpreted as "a sort of effectively realized utopias" (translated by De Cauter and Dehaene 2008:7). Heterotopias are real places, enacted utopian places, whereby utopia becomes real and therefore, becomes heterotopia. However, the relationship between utopia and heterotopia is not so straightforward in *Of Other Spaces* (Foucault, 1986).

For explanation, Foucault adopts the metaphor of the mirror. Through a mirror it is possible to see yourself in a place that you are not, in a virtual space, that – according to Foucault – is a *un lieu sans lieu* translated as a "placeless place" (translated by Miskowiec 1986:24) or a "place without place" (translated by De Cauter and Dehaene 2008:7). Thus the mirror functions as utopia but also a heterotopia because it reflects back the reality, where you are. It is a journey of sorts, taking you from where you are through the mirror to a virtual space that is on the other side of the glass, for after coming back to the real side of the mirror. Foucault (1986:24) adds:

> The mirror functions as an heterotopia in this respect: it makes this place
> that I occupy at the moment when I look at myself in the glass at once
> absolutely real, connected with all the spaces that surround it, and absolutely
> unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass through this virtual point
> which is over there.

The metaphor of the mirror, despite making clear that the utopias are virtual and heterotopias are real, does not elaborate further about this relationship. In other words, the mirror could be understood as that means that it allows one to see another reality, that it is only imaginary but that it reflects clearly all the features of reality. It also reflects the pros and cons of where you are now, of your reality, of your present society. The mirror reflecting the reality in a virtual place can help to shed light on what works and what does not and what to change when 'after the glance' you come back to your reality. Yet, according to De Cauter and Dehane (2008) Foucault leaves this relation with a sense of uncertainty about its function. The authors (2008:25) argue "[i]ts attachment to utopia charges heterotopia with the full ambiguity, even undecidability, of whether to attribute to it 'eutopic' or 'dystopic' qualities". What remains unclear is whether heterotopia is intended to represent a good place, or the opposite. When

Foucault refers to utopia and remarks on its unreal features, it is as if he regards it in its suffix *ou* form (meaning no place) instead of *eu* (good place).

Exploring in greater depth the relationship between utopia and heterotopia and taking into consideration that heterotopias are 'enacted utopias', I argue that all heterotopias ultimately spring from a utopian desire. Yet the owners of these desires are not necessarily those that dwell in or use these spaces. For instance, prisons are spaces enacted for the utopian desire of ensuring a safe society. Similarly, hospitals are spaces enacted with the utopian desire of establishing a healthy society. Jesuit colonies are built with the desire of enacting a utopian Christian community. Often the desires of those that inhabit and use these spaces do not correspond to the desires of those who own these spaces. Here therefore, it is again very useful to make the distinction made before between intentional and compulsory heterotopias. Thus, another main difference between them is that compulsory heterotopias are places created for the utopian desires of those who are not supposed to dwell, use and go there, these are spaces enacted for the utopian dream of allowing the rest of the society to lead ordered, healthy and disciplined lives by isolating those who do not 'fit'. However, intentional heterotopias are enacted with the utopian desire of finding an alternative, of leaving that ordered, healthy and disciplined society; these are spaces where people are seeking 'otherness'.

Arguably, the relationship between utopia and heterotopia becomes clearer if heterotopias are considered as the enactment of utopian desires. Heterotopias arise when utopian desires are materialised and territorialised, whether these are compulsory or intentional. It is in the process of enactment, when these spaces become places, that utopias become heterotopias, even if they remain the expression of the utopian desires of someone else. How does this process of enactment take place? How does it shape heterotopias?

### 1.8.3   Juxtaposition and multi-enactment

Drawing upon Foucault's work, Hetherington in his book *The Badlands of Modernity: Heterotopia and Social Ordering* (1997) has significantly opened up and deepened the understanding of heterotopic enactment. In his introduction he (Hetherington, 1997: xiii) writes:

> More precisely I defined heterotopia as spaces of alternate ordering.
> Heterotopias organize a bit of the social worlds in a way different to that

which surrounds them. That alternate ordering marks them out as Other and allows them to be seen as an example of an alternative way of doing things.

Hetherington challenges the literature on marginal spaces, arguing that it simplifies difference and otherness. He suggests that to overcome such dichotomies as centre and margin, or order and resistance, it is necessary to speak of ordering instead of order. He (1997:8) explains that "it has to do with different modes of ordering rather than simply with a contrast between order and resistance". According to Hetherington, Foucault identifies two modes of ordering; through resemblance or similitude. The former is a familiar order because it associates elements that 'usually' go together; instead the latter is an order in which juxtaposed elements that do not fit with each other are combined together constituting the alternate ordering of heterotopias.

> Similitude, however, is all about an ordering that takes place through a juxtaposition of signs that culturally are seen as not going together, either because their relationship is new or because it is unexpected. […] Similitude is constituted by an unexpected bricolage effect. This similitude can be used to challenge the conventions of representation. This representation may well be all about resisting or transgressing the cultural expectations that go into making up the idea of a social order. All the same, this similitude is still a mode of ordering. (Hetherington, 1997:9)

Hetherington stresses the importance of heterotopias as spaces where processes of alternate unconventional ordering are happening through juxtaposition. Juxtaposition appeared for the first time in *The Order of Things* (Foucault, 1970) first published in 1966, when Foucault presented for the first time the concept of heterotopia. Initially it referred to textual spaces and only subsequently to social and cultural spaces (Johnson, 2006). The first example of heterotopia that inspired Foucault (1970: xvi) was a "certain Chinese encyclopaedia" mentioned in Borges' text where:

> Animals are divided into: (a) belonging to the emperor, (b) embalmed, (c) tame, (d) sucking pigs, (e) sirens, (f) fabulous, (g) stray dogs, (h) included in the present classification, (i) frenzied, (j) innumerable, (k) drawn with a very fine camelhair brush, (l) *et cetera*, (m) having just broken the water pitcher, (n) that from a long way off look like flies.

Foucault read this text with some amusement – but even uneasiness – for the way in which the order is shattered and the taxonomy proposed does not respect the "usual way

in which words and things are drawn together" (Johnson, 2012a:1). Since then juxtaposition became the main feature of heterotopian process of enactment and also that characteristic that makes heterotopias so popular among social scientists and particularly geographers.

If intentional communities are enacted utopias and, therefore, heterotopias, how does juxtaposition help in understanding the enactment of these alternative spaces? Considering that intentional communities have been defined as intentional heterotopias, how do intentional communities enact a juxtaposing alternate ordering that transgresses the usual ways in which things are drawn together? These emerging questions are put to empirical investigation to deepen our understanding of enactment of alternative spaces.

However, looking at the enactment only by analysing the juxtaposing of alternate ordering would mean limiting the understanding of these alternative spaces. Indeed Foucault identifies six main principles of heterotopia with the aim to find a common way that could help the description of these counter-sites. He wonders "[a]s for heterotopias as such, how can they be described? What meaning do they have?" (1986:24). The six principles can be summarised as follows:

1. Heterotopias of crisis or deviation;

2. Heterotopias' function is related to the context in which it is embedded;

3. Heterotopias as spaces of juxtaposition;

4. Heterotopias as heterochronies and the break with traditional time;

5. Heterotopic system of opening/closing;

6. Heterotopias of illusion or compensation.

Juxtaposition is one of the six principles, yet it is not the only one. The six principles are very diversified and often vague or sketchy yet, I argue, they justify exploring the enactment from different perspectives beyond the site itself.

For instance, the first principle opens up to an investigation of the individual that is dwelling, going to, or using these alternative spaces. According to Foucault heterotopias can be distinguished into heterotopias of crisis or deviation depending on whether the subjects are living through a period of transition in their life or are excluded because they do not conform to the required norms (Foucault, 1986). Specifically in heterotopias of crisis are those persons that are living a period of transition, those who are in a state of 'crisis' because they are passing through different periods or stages of their life:

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adolescents, menstruating woman, pregnant women, the elderly and so on. These places can be huts used for example by traditional indigenous communities when women have got their menstrual period, military barracks for young men when they were initiated through the military service to adulthood or honeymoon hotels where women were supposed to lose their virginity. How can this first principle of heterotopia contribute to an understanding of the enactment of intentional communities? This first principle is relevant here to point out that an investigation of these alternative spaces starts from looking at the individuals who inhabit the heterotopia, and thus the inhabitants of the intentional communities.

As discussed previously, the third principle focuses on the importance of looking at the alternative juxtaposing ordering enacted inside these spaces and how heterotopias "have the capacity to distort, unsettle or invert other spaces" (Johnson 2013:791). Similarly, the fourth principle looks at how in these sites a juxtaposing chronic ordering is established and how breaking with the traditional time heterotopias become also heterochronies.

Moreover, the second, fifth and sixth principles suggest that heterotopic sites need to be understood in relation to other sites (Hetherington, 1997), and thus, they need to be contextualised. Indeed heterotopias are strongly different within each other, also depending on the context in which they are embedded. Understanding these spaces as relational sites leads to a new way of analysing intentional communities. Rather than investigating the specific heterotopic site as dis-embedded, it is necessary to contextualise and analyse the local context in which these spaces are rooted, and how the local context shapes the enactment of these spaces, and how instead these heterotopias shape their local contexts. It opens up to an investigation of the local scale and its relation with the intentional communities. Drawing upon these last principles, heterotopia concepts invite us to explore these spaces in relation, not only to the context in which they are embedded, but also in relation to other similar heterotopias. This opens up the need to investigate the relation among heterotopias on a global scale, and to see how intentional communities from different parts of the globe are connected to each other.

Drawing upon heterotopian framework, my argument is that the enactment of alternative spaces cannot be explored only by empirically investigating the site of the community. The enactment starts at an individual level and expands to the local context and then to the global scale. Thus, to explore the enactment of alternative spaces it is

necessary to investigate several scales: the individual, the community, the local and the global. This argument will be explored in more detail throughout the thesis, yet before concluding, the next section discusses the contemporary usages and debates on heterotopias and points out its limits in exploring spiritual spaces. Although Foucault's heterotopology is widely used in social sciences and is relevant here for understanding the enactment of alternative spaces, it has been strongly criticised and contested.

### 1.8.4    *Heterotopian interpretations: why so contested?*

Since 1990, heterotopia as a conceptual framework has been used uninterruptedly by scholars in social sciences. The concept has been employed in very different ways: from theoretical contributions interested in exploring the notion itself to more normative papers whose final aims were to explain how their case study was a heterotopic place.

Peter Johnson, an English sociologist, makes an interesting contribution to Foucault's ideas on heterotopia (Johnson, n.d.). On his website, he publishes several articles that look at heterotopia from different perspectives, he counts more than 200 texts that have analysed, employed and mentioned the concept of heterotopia across the humanities (literature, architecture, geography, sociology, science fiction, etc.). In his recent paper *The Geographies of Heterotopia* (2013), Johnson offers the most updated literature review on heterotopian texts, he underlines arguments for and against the concept and he  identifies 36 diverse case studies that have used the concept of heterotopia. Gardens in Vienna, Pornographic sites on the internet, Underground band rooms in Hong Kong, Lunar Cemetery and Cybercafé are some of the "dazzling variety of spaces [that] have been explored as illustrations of heterotopia" (Johonson, 2013:796). Yet, my research is the first contribution that looks at intentional communities through heterotopian framework and makes a distinction between intentional and compulsory heterotopias.

Another observation about the usage of heterotopias is that, whilst utopian theoretical framework receives very scant attention in human geography, most probably for the lack of spatiality of recent conceptualisations, heterotopia is very well appreciated by social and cultural geographers (see figure 2.1). Among geographers, Soja (1996) claims that Foucault's concept of heterotopias envisions an alternative approach to geography (Johnson, 2013); Harvey argues that the concept "has the virtue of insisting upon a better understanding of the heterogeneity of space but it gives no clue as to what a more spatiotemporal utopianism might look like." (2000:185). Two main books explore the concept of heterotopia within a geographical perspective: *Heterotopia:*

*Postmodern Utopia and the Body Politic* (Siebers, 1994) in which heterotopia is analysed within the postmodern context and *Heterotopia and the City: Public Space in a Postcivil Society* (Dehaene and De Cauter, 2008) that looks predominantly at the intersection between urban studies and heterotopia.

| Authors (Year) | Empirical subject | Journal |
|---|---|---|
| Wesselman (2013) | High Line of Manhattan, 'The Balloon' | Space and Culture |
| Street and Coleman (2012) | Hospital | Space and Culture |
| White, Hilman and Latimer (2012) | Hospital | Space and Culture |
| Otsuki (2012) | Frontier governance in Brazil | Environment and Planning D |
| Boedeltje (2012) | European Neighbourhood policy (ENP) | Geopolitics |
| Lee (2009) | First Aid nursing Yeomanry (FANY) in World War I | Gender, place and culture |
| Baer and Ravneberg (2008) | Norwegian and English prisons | Swedish Society for Anthropology and Geography |
| Lou (2007) | Chinatown Community in Washington DC | Space and culture |
| Neal & Walters (2007) | Rural communities in England | Geoforum |
| Barnes (2004) | Quantitative revolution in geography | Progress in Human Geography |
| Hook & Vrdoljak (2002) | Gated communities in South Africa | Geoforum |
| Bonazzi (2002) | Heterotopia and geography | Space and culture |
| Bridge (2001) | Primary commodity supply zones | Environment and Planning A |
| North (1999) | Local Exchange Trading System | Environment and Planning D |

**Table 2.1:** Schematic table of academic papers on heterotopia in human geography (elaborated by the author)

Although geographers have employed the concept, mostly due to its capacity to analyse spatial alterity and thus, for investigating the relation between the 'other' space and the society, heterotopia has also been strongly criticised. It is not the aim in this thesis to review these debates for and against heterotopias (see Johnson, 2013). Instead, discussion is focussed on the main limitations in the way that the heterotopian framework is used in this research.

Heterotopology has never been a central notion in the Foucauldian philosophy, having instead always a marginal importance compared with other topics. In fact, Foucault wrote and gave talks about heterotopology during the years 1966-67, but afterwards he rarely mentioned the concept. Only after almost 20 years, after being requested to do so, Foucault decided to publish the lecture presented to the architects with the title *Des Espaces Autres* (*Of Other Spaces*). The fact that heterotopia is a marginal notion in Foucault's philosophy, that the philosopher was reluctant to publish the lecture, and that *Of Other Spaces* has the form of a work-in-progress paper are all hooks used by scholars to critiques towards the notion of heterotopia (Johnson, 2006).

For instance, Genocchio (1995:36) argues that heterotopian framework has been generally applied without critical engagement, used as "some theoretical *deus ex machine*", briefly intended as a sudden solution to an unresolved problem, that does not take into consideration the history of it. Genocchio says that scholars have used heterotopia without really questioning the coherence of Foucault's argument. Indeed, Genocchio argues that so many possible places could be listed, that the list of heterotopias could be endless. Citing Noel Gray (1995:38), Genocchio points out that Foucault's heterotopias suffers from a problem of coherence, and also of completeness. Genocchio notices and criticises an inconsistency from the preface of *The Order of Things* to the following lectures (Johnson, 2012b:1). In fact, he seems to accept heterotopia as explained in *The Order of Things*, as the impossibility to find a coherent space where such taxonomy (refer to the Chinese dictionary cited by Borges) could take place. The only place that could be considered feasible to locate such as juxtaposed elements is a non-place: the language. Genocchio strongly criticises and points out the incongruity of the concept when Foucault uses heterotopias not only for texts but also for spaces.

By contrast, Hook and Vrdoljan (2002:207) overcome the debate about the incoherence between textual and spatial heterotopias, claiming that "[w]e should bear in mind the breadth with which Foucault uses the notion of discourse. […] The implication of this is

that we should apply the notion of the heterotopia *as an analytics rather than merely as place*; as a particular way *to look* at space, place*, or text* [original emphasis]".

Another scholar who has been very critical of considering heterotopia as a space is Saldanha (2008). He resumes Genocchio's (2008:2083) argument with the aim to deconstruct the "heterotopic site in the first place". Saldanha, in a well-argued paper, accuses Foucault of using a structuralist approach in describing heterotopic spaces. In fact, heterotopology seems to create a dichotomy between what is a heterotopic space and the rest of society, considering the rest of society as a totality, a whole without differentiation.

In contrast to Saldanha, I argue that according to the first principle of heterotopia "there is probably not a single culture in the world that fails to constitute heterotopias" (Foucault, 1986:24). Foucault is aware of the different existing cultures; he does not seem to find a unique society. He claims clearly, a few lines later, that varied forms of heterotopias exist, "and perhaps no one absolute form of heterotopia would be found" (*ibid*). According to Foucault, there does not exist any universal heterotopic form, and in attempting to describe these other spaces he identifies the six principles of heterotopias. The six principles indicated, rather than being regarded as prescriptive and normative, should be used in respect of their analytical function, as suggested by Hook and Vrdoljan (2002). In so doing, these six principles open up to a variety of lines of enquiry – that in this research are scales of enactment – rather than closing possibilities or suggesting how heterotopic spaces are or should be.

*Of Other Spaces* was a work-in-progress paper, a draft that can often seem incoherent, incongruous and provoke different interpretations. For this reason the concept has been highly contested. Yet, drawing upon these critiques, I argue that it is precisely for its incompleteness, ambiguity and elusiveness that the concept of heterotopia is open to different usages and understandings. Johnson concludes his recent paper saying:

> The concept of heterotopia introduces a starting point for imagining,
> inventing and diversifying spaces: nothing more, nothing less. Heterotopias
> have no axe to grind, just scissors to cut. (2013:800)

In this research heterotopias are used as a starting point, useful for overcoming the spatial limits of utopias and exploring more in depth the different levels of enactment. Specifically, the six heterotopian principles have paved the way for a relational-scalar approach of these alternative spaces. In this thesis, heterotopia and utopianism are

combined together and integrated with further literature for building a conceptual framework able to explore the enactment of alternative spaces. Yet in both utopian and heterotopian frameworks something is still missing; I argue, that they are incomplete and so are unable to fully understand the enactment of 'spiritual' alternative spaces. Spiritual and religious communities have sometimes been approached within utopian studies and sacred spaces within heterotopias, but neither conceptualisation addresses spiritual alternative space specifically. The next section aims to cover this gap and to specifically address the enactment of spiritual alternative spaces.

## 1.9   Spiritual alternative communities

In the last two decades geographers have been increasingly interested in analysing how religion and spirituality forge everyday-life, cultures and institutions shaping places, spaces, and landscapes (i.e. Kong, 1990, 2001; Holloway and Valins, 2002; Holloway 2003, 2006; Hopkins, 2006, 2007; Dewsbury, and Cloke, 2009; Kong, 2010; Sheringham, 2010; Woods, 2012; Dwyer *et al.*, 2013; Saunders, 2013; Hopkins, 2015). Nevertheless, the majority of these studies look at mainstream religions such as Christianity and Islam and often, spirituality and religion tend to be used indistinctly. I argue that religion and spirituality are two distinctive fields that might overlap, but not necessarily. In supporting this argument, below is Carrette's analysis of Foucault's understanding of these terms.

> There is also a certain amount of slippage between concepts of 'religion', 'theology', 'Christianity', and 'spirituality'. Sometimes these terms appear to be synonymous. However, Foucault generally uses the term 'religion' as a kind of overall phenomenological term to refer to any institutionalized faith tradition, though this predominantly means institutionalized Christianity. The term spirituality in a similar fashion appears to refer to any religious faith, but is used, as we shall see, to avoid the word 'religion'; and strategically disrupt traditional religious meaning. (Carrette, 2002:6)

This thesis seeks to avoid the word 'religion' considering shamanism and New Age and Paganism (if Dh can be put in one of these latter categories) as two different ancient spiritual beliefs that did not have the same process of institutionalisation as mainstream religions, and do not have a globally agreed religious text such as the Bible or Koran (although contingently differently interpreted). According to the *Encyclopaedia of New Religions*, shamanism is rooted in the indigenous traditions and the Federation of Dh is

considered a "spiritual community with connection to New Age and esoteric thought" (Partridge, 2004a:349).

This research takes the distance from religious approaches and instead adopts the term of 'alternative spiritualities' where "private, non-institutional forms of belief and practices" are enacted (Partridge 2004b:14). According to the Encyclopaedia, alternative spiritualities "move away from a 'religion' that focuses on things that are considered to be external to the self (God, the Bible, the Church) to 'spirituality' that focuses on the 'self' and is personal and interior" (Partridge, 2004b:14). Having clarified that this thesis is interested in alternative spiritualities and specifically in spiritual intentional communities, how is spirituality conceived in utopian and heterotopian studies?

The first historical examples of intentional communities were religious communities such as the Hindu villages ashram in India and Taoist community in China around the 500 B.C.E. (Zablocki, 1989); the Buddhist communities around 100 C.E. (Sargent, 2010); and from the 5th century also Christian convents and monasteries (Zablocki, 1989). Utopian scholars such as Sargent (2010), in his analysis of 'utopian practices', gives a notable weight to these initial communal monastic experiments and also to the relationship between utopianism and the Christian tradition. However, scant attention is given to alternative spiritual communities.

In attempting a classification of intentional communities within the utopian framework, Sargent and Sargisson (2004) identify three types of religious/spiritual communities: contemplative religious communities; religious communities of social change and spiritual communities of personal growth (see table 2.2). Of the 30 communities they have analysed in New Zealand, 19 are Christian, 6 are Buddhist and only 5 of them do not belong to an institutionalized religious tradition.

Despite Sargent and Sargisson's classification very little is known about spiritual intentional communities. Sargent (2010) mentions alternative spiritual communities such as Hare Krishna, yet does not engage in an in-depth theorisation between spirituality and utopianism despite mentioning that often utopian spaces are the product of spiritual beliefs. More generally, utopian studies seem to have removed the transcendental aspect of utopias in most recent conceptualisations. For instance, Anderson (2002, 2006) in his papers remarks how utopianism is immanent and how any form of transcendentalism will not be useful to understand its everydayness.

### Religious or spiritual communities

| | |
|---|---|
| **Contemplative religious communities** | -They aim to intercede, supplicate, and to devote their life to a higher cause<br>-immediate utopia: life of religious observance and/or spiritual practices<br>-ultimate utopia: attainment of perfection, enlightenment and/or salvation<br>-they are often enclosed communities in order to maximize the opportunity for prayer and meditation<br>-they belong to a wider tradition and network of religious faith and practice |
| **Religious communities of social change** | -They are active and interventionist;<br>-they seek to realise change in the world;<br>-they seek to realise spiritual or religious truth through actions;<br>- immediate utopia: life of service and good work<br>-generally they do not remain in one location, providing work 'out there' |
| **Spiritual communities of personal growth** | -They seek personal growth, spiritual development and self- improvement<br>-places in which people can focus on a life style that fully articulates their spiritual beliefs<br>-some are enclosed, some engaged in outreach<br>-disparate group of communities |

**Table 2.2:** Religious and spiritual communities categorisation (elaborated by the author with data collected from Sargent and Sargisson, 2004)

On the other hand, in heterotopian studies, Dehane and De Cauter (2008) are interested in sacred spaces as heterotopic forms, yet their conceptualisation, although pointing out the relevance of rituals, does not engage in further developments of spirituality. Returning to the seminal text *Of Other Spaces*, Foucault (1986) gives two examples of sacred spaces: the Jesuit colonies or Puritan societies founded in South America, that accordingly to the sixth principle of heterotopias had the function of compensating the limits of traditional local system; and the Persian garden analysed in the third principle as a juxtaposing sacred space. Heterotopian studies have engaged rarely in the analysis of spiritual sites (Tonna, 1990; Owens, 2002), yet I argue that spirituality is strictly connected to heterotopia.

> The spiritual was being used to demarcate a new politics of experience
> outside the traditional dualist and hierarchical categories of religion. It was a
> term which valorised the excluded. (Carrette 2002:54)

If 'spiritual' is the term that valorises the excluded and if heterotopias are 'other spaces', then alternative spiritual spaces can easily fall into the wide category of heterotopias. Foucault's heterotopology is influenced by the surrealists (as Hetherington also underlines) and, this connection I argue, opens up to a new understanding of spirituality, which considers the body central to its understanding, and gives political power to the other (Carrette, 2002). Thus, spirituality in Foucault's terms encompasses the other, the political and the corporal. But also speaking about spirituality, Foucault refers to 'spiritual practices' as those experiences at the boundary of rationality. According to Carrette (2002:46-47), for Foucault spiritual experience is "an immanent process of change on the edges of rationality, which perhaps involves an engagement with the excluded, the enigmatic, and much later the politics of the self".

Inspired by Foucault, I wonder if spiritual heterotopias can be understood as spaces where alternative spiritual beliefs, perhaps marginalised or obscured by western thought, can be expressed through the body for generating a new politics of experience. Although this thesis does not want to engage specifically in the Foucauldian analysis of spirituality, in investigating spiritual alternative spaces, this thesis must consider how spirituality matters in the enactment of intentional communities. Another scale of investigation should be added to the four scales previously mentioned (individual, community, local and global) and to overcome the incompleteness of utopian and heterotopian studies in looking at spiritual spaces: the transcendental scale.

In order to further investigate the role of spirituality it is useful to consider the work of Gloria Anzaldúa (2002) called 'The Path of *Conocimiento'.* Anzaldúa was a scholar of Chicana cultural theory with a radical feminist postcolonial approach. Her theoretical insights address the lack of spiritual understanding rooted in academic epistemologies, contributing to a more nuanced and holistic comprehension of spiritual alternative spaces. *Conocimiento* is the Spanish translation of knowledge and skills. Challenging the conventional understanding and production of knowledge, Anzaldúa (2002) speaks about the 'the feminization of knowledge' (541) where *conocimiento* "comes from opening all your senses, consciously inhabiting your body and decoding its symptoms" and "challenge[s] official ways of looking at the world, ways set up by those benefiting from such constructions" (542)

Anzaldúa identifies seven main stages in the 'Path of *Conocimiento'*, a path where the individual spiritual journey becomes manifest in spiritual activism (see table 2.3). According to Keating (2006:11), Anzaldúa's spiritual activism is "spirituality for social

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change" and "it starts with each individual but moves outward as we challenge and transform unjust social structures".

**Seven stages of *Conocimiento***

| | |
|---|---|
| 1. | "El arreabato… rupture, fragmentation… an ending, a beginning" |
| 2. | "Nepantla – torn between ways" |
| 3. | "The Coatlicue state… desconocimiento and the cost of knowing" |
| 4. | "The call… el compromiso… the crossing and conversion" |
| 5. | "Putting Coayolxauhqui together… new personal and collective 'stories'" |
| 6. | "The blow up… a clash of realities" |
| 7. | "Shifting realities… acting out the vision or spiritual activism" |

**Table 2.3:** The seven stages of the 'Path of *Conocimiento*' (source Anzaldúa, 2002:546-574)

Although it seems a linear structure in which stages appear sequentially, it must be seen as a "continuous and iterative process" (Bobel *et al.*, 2006:35). Anzaldúa's work provides a framework for exploring individual's spiritual journey to understand how personal experiences shape the enactment of alternative spaces.

## 1.10  Conclusions

The concept of utopia has evolved during the last decades: it has passed from blueprint utopias through its own end/death, and eventually it has been re-launched in the name of utopianism with new conceptual features; functional, processual, immanent and ubiquitous. Utopianism has also used intentional communities as an example of practical utopias for proclaiming that utopia (at least in one of its three expressions) is still alive. An enduring feature, from the beginning of utopian studies to the present day, is the utopian critical function: the underlying power of criticising the existing society by proposing an alternative that juxtaposes and challenges the dominant culture.

Essentially, the 'alternative' has been the key aspect in the evolution of the utopian thought. It is this critical function and the desire of creating an alternative space that makes the utopian framework suitable for understanding alternative spaces and consequently, intentional communities. Indeed, the utopian conceptual framework is the only one, so far, that has offered a systemic and continuous frame for analysing intentional communities.

At the beginning of the 1970s, intentional communities were looked at in terms of their results instead of their processes, evaluating their success or failure according to their longevity. In more recent conceptualisation, intentional communities have been identified as a new social movement, as dynamic utopias where pre-modern practices are recovered for creating alternative organisation. They have also been conceived as spaces where possible paradigms are challenged and boundaries confronted. At the same time that these developments open up new threads of investigation, they also eliminate the spatial expression of utopianism. Utopianism becomes a desire rather than an enacted utopian experiment. Indeed, according to Foucault (1986) when utopias are enacted they become heterotopias.

The second part of the chapter, drawing upon heterotopian conceptualisation, argued for distinguishing between intentional and compulsory heterotopias, depending on whether these spaces are enacted to satisfy the utopian desires of those who create, dwell, go and use them, or not. In making clear that this research investigates intentional heterotopias such as intentional communities, it has been discussed that Foucault's heterotopology contributes to a greater understanding of these spaces for the following reasons: firstly, it overcomes the spatial limits of utopias making a distinction between utopias and heterotopias; secondly, it highlights how, in heterotopias, alternative orderings are enacted through juxtaposition. Thirdly, drawing upon the six principles it emphasises how heterotopias are the result of the different processes of enactment and therefore these spaces cannot be analysed only considering the site itself.

Through a critical review of heterotopia, I argue that because this concept remains incomplete, elusive and vague. It is open to new developments and can be used as an analytical starting point for exploring alternative enactment. This chapter has also identified a gap in the understanding of spiritual alternative spaces in both utopian and heterotopian conceptualisations, and underlined how the thesis must consider the transcendental scale in order to understand how spirituality shapes the enactment of these spaces. The next chapter will establish the methodological framework adopted to

understand spiritual intentional heterotopias and will shed light on the research journey undertaken.

# My research journey

This chapter discusses the methodological framework adopted in this research. The aim of the first section is to explain and justify how the enactment of alternative spaces has been studied by using a qualitative research strategy, specifically ethnography, as a methodology. The following section sets up the research design by expanding on why and how a framework of 'experimental international comparativism' has been chosen and employed. The second part of the chapter explores my research journey discussing the selection process, how access into the communities was gained and the research methods adopted. This part describes how the researcher's journey can be emotional, eventful and challenging and how the fieldwork shapes the research direction, approach, and output. The last section discusses the analytical phase, the writing up process and concludes with ethical and final reflections.

## 1.11  Research strategy

### *1.11.1  Qualitative research*

As discussed in the introduction, intentional community scholarship includes both quantitative (i.e. Mulder *et al.*, 2006; Meijering *et al.*, 2007a) and qualitative approaches (i.e., Bohill, 2010; Jarvis, 2013; Pickerill, 2015). In this thesis, a qualitative research strategy has been adopted to enable the researcher "to engage *in-depth* with the lives and experiences of others" (Limb and Dwyer, 2001:1) and to understand how alternative social worlds are "constructed through the intersection of cultural, economic, social and political processes" (*ibid:*6). According to Bryman (2012) qualitative research can be distinguished from quantitative approaches in three distinct ways: first, it adopts an inductive, rather than deductive, approach; second, epistemologically it rejects positivism in favour of interpretivism; and third, ontologically, it believes in constructionism rather than objectivism.

A qualitative approach is adopted, firstly, because the research seeks to discover the enactment of intentional communities rather than to deductively test an existing theory. Thus, inductively, the theory and approach of this study have been strongly shaped by the findings of the research. Secondly, the enactment of alternative spaces would have not been disclosed by using natural scientific methods, as suggested by positivism. Conversely, the aims of this research can be addressed by uncovering and interpreting

respondents' meanings and community practices through a hermeneutic approach (Hoggart *et al*., 2002; Bryman, 2012). The understanding is that epistemology is generated through interpretation rather than validation. Finally, influenced by a postmodern orientation, this thesis adopts a constructionist ontological position that believes that reality is dynamic, subjective and socially constructed rather than fixed, objective, and pre-given, as Crang (2003: 494) argues:

> [M]uch current work follows through a constructionist agenda – in terms of seeing people discursively creating their worlds, seeing the field as discursively constructed and indeed both the fieldwork and field worker as socially constructed.

Reflecting the influence of the "cultural turn" in human geography since the 1990s (see Cloke *et al.*, 2004:180), qualitative methods have been used increasingly, widely and in novel ways (Crang, 2002, 2003, 2005; Davies and Dywer, 2007, 2008; Dywer and Davies, 2010). Critiques on their plausibility, rigour and reliability raised at the end of the last century have been addressed and, as Crang suggests, "there is now a maturity about qualitative methods in geography" (2005:225). Within this qualitative turn, ethnography has been increasingly used within human geography for its ability to explore how everyday practices shape the processes and meanings of socio-spatial life (Herbert, 2000).

### 1.11.2 Ethnography

Drawing upon anthropology and sociology, geographers in the last decades have integrated ethnography into their qualitative research strategies. This development was first launched by urban geographers such as Ley (1974), Rowles (1978) and Western (1981) whose ethnographies are considered "milestones of geographical enquiry" (Cloke *et al.,* 2004: 173) and later supported by feminist geographers such as McDowell (1992) and Rose (1993).

Ethnography was originally employed by anthropologists for discovering 'other cultures' and for exploring the everyday life, beliefs and practices of remote indigenous communities (see Malinowski, 1922). The historical evolution and the importance of the Chicago School's legacies for ethnographic research are reported, in detail, elsewhere (see Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995; Hoggart *et al.,* 2002; Gobo, 2008). However,

here it is important to specify that though it is difficult to define, ethnography is widely recognised as:

> [A] particular method or set of methods which in the most characteristic form involves the ethnographer participating, overtly or covertly, in people's daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions – in fact, collecting whatever data are available to throw light on the issues that are the focus of the research. (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995:1)

Ethnography is often confusedly considered a method (Herbert, 2000), design of enquiry (Creswell, 2014), methodology (Gobo, 2008) and participant observation (see Bryman, 2012). Although participant observation is the primary method or technique used in ethnography, it is not the only one. As suggested by several scholars (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007; Watson and Till, 2010; Atkinson, 2015), ethnographic research is based on the combination of different methods such as participant observation, in-depth interviews, field notes, visual and documentary materials and more. Thus, I argue that identifying ethnography as a method, or as being synonymous with participant observation does not fully address its methodological multitude and, specifically, within the current application.

Agreeing with Gobo (2008:30), ethnography is understood here, as a methodology, "a global style of thinking, a general approach to studying research topics or an overall research strategy". It is the 'global style of thinking' and the combination of methods proposed in the ethnographic approach that make this methodology suitable for addressing the identified aims of this research and for understanding the holistic and scalar nature of these alternative spaces. Additionally, as Herbert claims "[e]thnography uniquely explores lived experience in all its richness and complexity" (2000: 551). The enactment of alternative spaces can be captured only by observing the daily community life, listening to members' narratives and worldviews, reading the community's documents and participating in the community's everyday practices. Due to its unique ability to understand the entanglements between sociality and spatiality by exploring "the processes and meanings through which everyday life is maintained" (Herbert, 2000:564), ethnography is thus the most appropriate methodology to reveal how processes, practices and meanings have shaped the alternative spaces here explored.

Thus, as suggested by the anthropological tradition, an *in situ* prolonged exploration is fundamental for an understanding of the holistic cultures of these spaces. This is

reinforced by the fact that these communities are localised in a specific territory, confined by material borders and intentionally – yet relatively – isolated from the rest of society. Although nowadays the idea of "pure culture" has been challenged for giving legitimacy to more ubiquitous and societally embedded ethnographic accounts (Crang and Cook, 2007:11-13), this research aims to use ethnography in its *traditional* form to study, perhaps not 'pure cultures', but *contemporary* intentional heterotopias.

Nevertheless, ethnography has been strongly criticised for three main reasons. Herbert (2000) explains that firstly, critiques point to the lack of objectivity due to its subjective interpretative approach. Conversely Crang and Cook addressed this critique claiming that "as ethnographers, we don't have to try to be 'objective' or 'unbiased' in our work", but rather they suggest "to turn worries about the 'mere subjectivity' of ethnographic research into a sense of rigorous subjectivity" (2007:15). Secondly, there are concerns about its inability to make generalisation because ethnography tends to focus on a limited sample of one or two case studies (Herbert, 2000). These critiques will be addressed in the *Research Design* section by interrogating how a 'rigorous subjectivity' is attempted, and how generalist limitations are tackled.

Thirdly, ethnographers have been criticised for their lack of interrogation of "the conditions under which they produce ethnographic knowledge" (Herbert, 2000:562) such as their power relations. In order to address this last issue Herbert (2000) proposes a self-critical approach based on forthrightness, modesty and reflexivity. Forthrightness will be approached in this thesis providing clarification into my personal research journey by explaining how access into the communities was gained, the relations with the communities' members and my 'personal politics' (Cloke *et al.*, 2004). Modesty is gained by recognising (in this chapter and in the conclusions) the limits of this research, how some of these constraints have been overcome and yet how others still exist. Finally, it is essential for the ethnographer to be reflexive (Herbert, 2000; Cloke *et al.*, 2004; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007; Cloke, 2014). Reflexivity is explained by Gobo (2008:43) as:

> The self-aware analysis of the dynamics between researcher and participants, the critical capacity to make explicit the position assumed by the observer in the field, and the way in which the researcher's positioning impacts on the research process.

In order to engage in a rigorous ethnographic approach, the next section will introduce my reflexive journey by positioning myself.

### 1.11.3  Positioning myself

An investigation of the enactment of alternative spaces cannot be undertaken without a clarification of the 'self'. As Cloke has suggested "[d]ealing with the 'other' is of course linked to dealing with the 'self' (2014:72). Thinking about my socio-spatially constructed identities, acknowledging my cultural background, conceptualising my subjectivity and reflecting on my own positionality are fundamental steps for undertaking an ethnographic project (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995; Cloke *et al.*, 2004; Crang and Cook, 2007; Cloke, 2014). The box 3.1 aims to clarify 'where I am coming from' and how my 'position' in society situates me within this research context, and overall as a human geographer.

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**Box 3.1 My positionality**

I come from a town of 10,000 people called Tortolì, in the island of Sardinia in Italy. Due to the Sardinian language, the geographical isolation and the different historical background, Sardinians have developed a strong sense of regional identity that tends to be popularly used to differentiate us from the rest of Italians. Despite these regional characteristics, we share a common Catholic mainstream background which has strongly influenced the culture, the educational background and overall lifestyle. My interest in the 'alternative' became evident in 2004 when I decided to practise 'another' religion by joining a Buddhist organisation. The reason behind this decision was that I felt Buddhism could offer me a philosophical framework with which to understand my life that I could not find in Catholicism. Perhaps influenced by my new Buddhist philosophy and the endless search for happiness, on finishing my first MA in economics and management at the age of 25, I realised that I did not want to spend my life thinking about how to make a profit. I felt there was something inherently wrong with what I perceived as the societal obsession with money. During this transitional time, I undertook a research project for 6 months in South America to investigate the Argentinian economic crisis of 2001 and the impact of a development programme proposed by the Government. This experience impacted my academic path in three interrelated ways: firstly, it generated a feeling of disappointment and anger whilst studying the inequalities and power relations in the Latin American context; secondly, it triggered off the desire to focus on how grassroots groups challenge dominant mainstream ontologies, values and practices, thus shaping and enacting alternative spaces: and thirdly, it opened the way toward my PhD research. This brought me to various universities (*La Sapienza* University of Rome) and eventually to the UK, initially to Durham University and later to Newcastle University to undertake the current project.

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To summarise my 'position', I could be identified as a middle-class white woman in her early 30s, who grew up in a marginal geographical Italian context with a rich Western educational background and who has adopted a postcolonial religion (Fois and Sesto, 2012). Thus, my perspective and understanding of the alternative spaces here investigated will be clearly shaped by a dominant western background yet strongly hybridized by the eastern philosophy of Buddhism. What emerges from my 'story' is also how feelings of disappointment and dissatisfaction with the neoliberal capitalist ontologies – taught in business schools and unsuccessfully applied in Argentina – have led to an exploration of alternative geographies. Perhaps this search for the alternative has been also influenced by my desire to leave Sardinia, to go beyond the geographical boundaries of the island, to cross and explore beyond the sea.

Cloke (2004:1) observes that our research choices are influenced not only by the "persuasiveness of the study" but also by our "subjectivities, identities, positionalities and situated knowledges". These "personal politics" are considered "the prompts for our individual practice of human geography" (Cloke *et al.*, 2004: 365). Thus, within Creswell's (2014) categorization of philosophical worldviews, my 'personal politics' would be closest to the 'transformative worldview'. This approach includes critical scholars interested for instance in postcolonialism, feminism, Marxism, and indigeneity, whose research is driven by the desire for social justice in advocating "an action agenda to help marginalized people" (Creswell, 2014:9). Although adopting a similar vision to the transformative worldview, this research investigates another type of marginality, one that has been intentionally created. In this specific research, my 'politics' therefore, aim to give voice to those self-excluded groups who have chosen an alternative lifestyle to show how 'other' worlds are enacted.

After this reflection, I can conclude that my positionality and my 'personal politics' have shaped my academic research towards a social geographical orientation that seeks "to break with complacency and to use both practice and critique to create a better world" (Smith *et al.,* 2010:8-9). The next section will move on to discuss the research design adopted.

## 1.12 Research design: Experimental international comparativism

The research design aims to provide "a framework for the collection and analysis of data" (Bryman, 2012:46). This research undertakes a cross-cultural comparative design in which two different cases are studied through ethnographic methodologies. Within

human geography, urban studies have strongly contributed to the understanding of issues involved around comparative research. Although this research does not engage in the comparison of cities, it draws upon some recent key contributions in order to understand the methodological, analytical and theoretical implications of comparing two intentional communities. Relevant is the work of urban geographers such as Robinson (2002, 2003, 2011, 2013) and McFarlane (2010, 2011) who, criticising the hegemonic western academic production of urban theory, have proposed "a dialogue between different urban sites, processes, and debates" (McFarlane and Robinson, 2012:769). Answering the call for a more critical and postcolonial engagement in human geography (Robinson, 2003), this research does not engage with a *traditional* form of comparison between the two intentional communities but rather it attempts an "experimental international comparativism" (Robinson, 2011:19). To clarify this, four key questions are raised (Gough, 2012): *Why* am I comparing? *What* am I comparing? *Which* [intentional communities] am I comparing? And, *how* am I comparing? *Why*, *what*, and *which* are analysed in the three following sections, while *how* is addressed in section 3.4.2 of this chapter.

### 1.12.1 Why?

Intentional communities are, interestingly, simultaneously strongly localised yet global phenomenon. As demonstrated in the contextual chapter, despite being locally embedded, intentional communities have been historically spread throughout different parts of the world and have recently become globally connected. Robinson calls for a cosmopolitan postcolonial approach in comparative urbanism that "learn[s] attentively from the diversity of urban experiences around the world" (2002:283) in order to "enable urban studies to stretch its resources for theory building across the world of cities (2011:19). This is what she calls "experimental international comparativism" (2011:19). If this approach is expanded beyond urban studies, it can be helpful to understand alternative spaces from a cross-cultural perspective that goes beyond the local communal experience. Thus in order to engage with an 'experimental international comparison', this research must engage with more than one case study to build a conceptualisation of alternative spaces that is informed by different international experiences. In order to avoid the Anglo-American centrism of human geography (Robinson, 2003), this study offers a postcolonial approach that brings experiences from

the global north and south "into a more horizontal comparative field" (McFarlane, 2010:726).

Drawing upon utopian and heterotopian studies, the ultimate aim is to build a conceptual framework for spiritual alternative spaces that is strongly shaped by a cosmopolitan empirical basis. However, it should be clarified that the two selected case studies are not used as representative of the global south and global north overall. As discussed in the context chapter, intentional communities are variegated, locally embedded and 'exceptional'. No intentional community could be representative of another one, even if they have been created by the same founder(s). However, inspired by Peck (2015), I argue that this particularism and exceptionalism should not stop researchers from searching for a conceptualisation of these spaces. Although sympathising with Robinson in recognising the rich diversity of urban experiences, I do not totally support her invitation to reject a comprehensive theoretical approach "for a more radically decentred and reflexive subject of theorising" (2015:274). Here my approach tends to rather agree with Ward (2008) and Peck (2015) who conversely problematize urban studies for not moving beyond their particularity and exceptionality of each single case study. Ward (2008:407) explains that

> 'Theorizing back' is an intellectual necessity in light of the wider insights generated by postcolonial critiques of the geographically uneven foundations of contemporary urban scholarship.

Similarly, Peck calls for a new comparative methodology that does not fall into the theoretical impasse and scepticism of recent post-structural approaches, but recognising the limits of previous Western studies, proposes new postcolonial "forms of theory building" (2015:175).

Taking this challenge beyond urban studies, this research engages in an 'experimental international comparison' because it aims to build a grounded, postcolonial conceptual framework, supported by ethnographic methodology. Although there are no doubts that generalisations and universalisation can be risky and problematic, and that each case study has its own uniqueness and exceptionality, especially in the case of intentional communities, "the ultimate goal of ethnography should be the improvement of theory" by creating a dialogue between theoretical concepts and empirical data (Herbert, 2000:560). This work does not claim to have a universal framework, but in recognising the differences and exceptionalities, it aims to 'theorise back' to offer a conceptual understanding of these spiritual intentional communities.

### 1.12.2  What?

As already clarified in the conceptual chapter, this research aims to study the enactment of two intentional communities, one in the global south and one in the global north, at different related scales. Adopting a scalar approach helps to overcome some of the limits of traditional comparativism. For instance, one geographer pointed out the limits of comparative urbanism for studying cities as "discrete, self-enclosed, and analytically separate objects" (Ward, 2008:407). Similarly, Robinson (2011) suggests developing a research agenda that investigates different units of comparison and spatialities. She claims the necessity to go beyond the urban scale itself, the city, inviting "new, creative ways for thinking across different cities and across a different range of cities" (Robinson, 2011:16). Equally, this research argues that, to understand the enactment of alternative spaces, it is necessary to go beyond the community scale itself, investigating how different spatialities shape relationally this heterotopic process. Thus, it undertakes an 'experimental international comparativism' where different contexts are analysed together through a multi, relational and scalar units of comparison. The next part, by clarifying the *which* of the comparison – in other words why Dh and TM were the two selected communities – takes a more personal register in which the choices, emotions, encounters and challenges of my ethnographic research journey are discussed.

## 1.13  The journey

### 1.13.1  Which communities?

According to Crang and Cook "the theoretical sampling […] refers to the means by which a researcher decides who should be approached to take part in his/her approach" (2007:14). The theoretical sample plays a key role in establishing a rigorous ethnography and overcoming some of its limits. Initially three international experiences were considered, one from Europe, one from Latin America and one from Africa; however the difficult practicalities of engaging with three ethnographic studies, within the time and funding constraints of PhD research, restricted the choice to two. As suggested by Hammersley and Atkinson (2007:31) "the more settings studied the less time can be spent in each. The research must make a trade-off here between breadth and depth of investigation". The selection of the intentional communities to investigate and compare was not straightforward. Taking into account the comparison, one of the main

difficulties was to identify appropriate criteria for the selection of the two communities. The selection criteria initially identified were:

| | Selection Criteria | Rationale |
|---|---|---|
| 1. | Be an established intentional community with at least 20 years of shared community living | To better understand the enactment, I believed it was required that the community was not in an embryonic phase. |
| 2. | 20 or more residents | Necessary in order to have a satisfactory social basis to investigate. |
| 3. | Be open to receive and collaborate with researchers | Required considering that this is an overt research where my status of researcher was known from the initial phase by the community members (Gobo, 2007, Bryman, 2014). |
| 4. | For it to be possible to live and conduct research in the community for at least 4 weeks | Two weeks is considered the necessary time for a micro-ethnography (Wolcott, 1990 in Bryman, 2014). Considering that the research was undertaken in a non-familiar context, I believed that a period of 4 weeks was the minimum time required to collect substantive data. |
| 5. | Be a member of GEN | One of the aims was to study the communities' involvement in the GEN. Additionally, GEN provided an online database in which it was possible to find information about the communities' vision and programmes. This was also essential to assess their reliability. |
| 6. | One community from global north and one from global south. Preferably Europe and Latin America | Within the global north, Europe counts a good number of established intentional communities. However compared to USA, Australia and New Zealand the phenomenon is more overlooked. The choice of a Latin American case study is due to language reasons and to my background knowledge and research in this area. |
| 7. | Speaking Italian, Spanish, French, Portuguese, or English | I believed that to be an effective international comparative ethnography it was better to avoid the language barrier (McFarlane, 2010). Thus, it was essential to choose a community where members speak one of the languages I am fluent in. |
| 8. | Similar focus; spiritually, economically or ecologically orientated | Despite exceptionality and uniqueness, I believed that the two communities should have a relatively similar focus. |

**Table 3.1:** Case studies selection criteria (elaborated by the author)

Initially the selection phase required the creation of a shortlist of the possible intentional communities. The pilot research started on the web, predominantly through the GEN website, considering the practical difficulties in conducting an *in situ* selection. The language, the location and the necessity to be an established community with at least 20 residents were the initial key criteria which automatically generated a first cut-down. Compared to other European countries, Italy had a long tradition of communal initiatives, as demonstrated also by the established Italian ecovillage network (RIVE – *Rete Italiana Eco-Villaggi*). Yet few academic studies have been undertaken in the Italian context. Additionally, considering my nationality, I believed that getting involved in an ethnographic research within my own cultural context (or relatively similar) could have its own advantages, such as easier accessibility, common language and overall fewer cultural barriers. This could be a beneficial ice-breaker to establish a first contact with intentional communities before moving to Latin America. GEN website offered a list of ecovillages divided by country (See figure 3.1).

search again    17 ecovillages were found (sorted by Name). Click on any of the names for more details.

| Name | City | State/Province | Country |
|---|---|---|---|
| Anarres - Ca\' Favale | Ne | Italy | Italy |
| Associazione del popolo elfico | san buca pistoiese | bologna | Italy |
| Casa cares | Regello (FI) | .. | Italy |
| casa maya | Piazza armerina (En) | Italia, Sicilia | Italy |
| CastelMerlino | Monzuno | Bo | Italy |
| ComunitÃ¡ di Etica Vivente Valle del Sole | CittÃ¡ della Pieve | Perugia | Italy |
| Damanhur Federation | Baldissero C.se (TO) | Piemonte | Italy |
| Ecovillaggio Habitat | Gambassi Terme | Firenze | Italy |
| Gaia Villages | Pinerolo | Torino | Italy |
| La Comune di Bagnaia | Sovicille | SI | Italy |
| Libera UniversitÃ¡ di Alcatraz | Gubbio | PG | Italy |
| Progetto Pecora Nera | Raveo | Udine | Italy |
| rainbow eco peace village | viganella | vb | Italy |
| RIVE | Firenze | FI | Italy |
| Torri Superiore | Ventimiglia | IM | Italy |
| Villaggio Ecologico Solidale | Fossombrone PU | I - Pesaro Urbino | Italy |
| Villaggio Verde | Cavallirio | Novara | Italy |

**Figure 3.1:** List of GEN ecovillages members located in Italy - data collected in 2012 (Global Ecovillage Network, n.d.-b).

Meanwhile, another shortlist was made within Latin American communal experiences. The idea was to select them simultaneously in order to choose two communities that had a similar focus. However, on the GEN website, the number of ecovillages in Latin

America was quite limited. Nevertheless, Argentina was my first choice because I was familiar with the economic and political context. However the two selected established communities replied only after a few months when I was already in the fieldwork.

After considering the initial lack of response from Argentina, the next countries with a high number of established intentional communities were Colombia and Brazil. I then opted to search first within the Colombian communities because I had already had contact with a Colombian family (the family of my friend Tuchis – see introduction) who could host me in Colombia before and after the fieldwork.  Knowing that I had some contacts with locals made me feel safer. The selection process was rational – considering that I was searching for the appropriate case studies for addressing my research aims – but also very emotional. The fear of choosing communities in which my safety could be at risk was something that affected my decision and part of the research journey. According to Longhurst *et al.* (2008:210), "[i]t is important to consider the emotional processes of doing research and of being researchers".

Although the aim of the section is not to expand on recent geographical research on emotional geography (for which I refer to Davidson and Bondi, 2004; Davidson and Milligan, 2004; Bondi, 2005; and Davidson and Smith, 2009), I argue that in order to understand the selection process and the researcher's journey, it is necessary to take into consideration also the role of emotions and not only the 'rational rationale'. Drawing upon feminist geographers such as Bondi (2005), this research challenges the binary opposition between the emotional and rational, arguing that "emotions *matter* [original emphasis]" in the research process (Davidson and Bondi, 2004:373). Bennet (2004:414), specifically, underlines how geographers are reluctant "to reveal and analyse emotion in fieldwork". Inspired by Laurier and Parr (2000), Bennett (2004), Bondi (2005), this research calls for a more sensitive exploration of emotions in the ethnographic research process at every level; before, during and after data collection. Therefore, taking this into account, the selection was clearly shaped by the eight criteria identified above, and by other emotions such as fear, and anxiety, in order to choose safe and relevant intentional communities. Once a first selection was made within Italian and Colombian intentional communities, the second phase of gaining access started.

### 1.13.2 Gaining access

Access and field relations are the milestones of ethnography and therefore widely discussed in the literature (see Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995; Crang and Cook, 2007; Gobo, 2008). Once the selection has been made, "[g]aining access to the field is the most difficult phase in the entire process of ethnographic research (Gobo 2008:118).

An email was prepared in Italian and Spanish to send to the selected intentional communities. In these emails I presented myself and my project and asked "if you might be interested in having me as a volunteer for about a month in April 2012. I would be willing to work as a volunteer, to share with you the goals of my research and my knowledge and, in short, to make myself as available as possible for the community" (email 13/01/2012) and "I like to cook, clean and I have no problems in adapting to whatever is necessary" (email 02/02/2012). Offering my time for volunteering activities within the community was the negotiation enacted in order to gain access (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). The role I was seeking to assume was both as a researcher and volunteer. The idea was that an exchange, in which I was not only taking up their time for research purposes but also giving my time for community activities, was a fairer and more ethical way to conduct fieldwork. Additionally, I believed that this would have allowed a better integration within the community and so enable me to conduct simultaneously the participant observation as informal conversation with the members, while volunteering. As suggested by Crang and Cook (2007:22) "a good deal of thought [should] be given to how the research is likely to occupy time in the field in order to most productively use it".

After two months attempting to 'gain access', Dh in Italy and Atlantida in Colombia were the two intentional communities who were willing to welcome me as a researcher. However, two issues remained: spiritual intentional communities and limited time. Of the 7 contacted intentional communities, the only two that agreed to host me had a strong spiritual focus. Although my initial interest was predominantly on the economic and social dimension, the process of 'gaining access' completely shaped the direction of this research. The possibility of investigating spiritual communities destabilised me, because I initially preferred to avoid the spiritual focus. There was not an obvious reason why I wanted to avoid communities with a strong spiritual focus, but a general feeling of scepticism, suspicion and mistrust prevailed. Although my research aimed to challenge common stereotypes around the idea of intentional communities, I realised I had my own preconceptions before entering the field. I guess this was affected by a

general cultural prejudice towards those alternative spiritualities that do not follow a specific institutional organisation. I felt that I could relate more to a socialist community rather than a New Age group who for instance worship a tree. Reflections like "are you crazy to go there? They will brainwash you!" were popping into my mind. This suspicion was sharpened by the media's representations of Dh, which were not the best advertisement. Furthermore, considering the experience of my Buddhist everyday practices, I was aware that when entering in a strongly embedded 'spiritual world' the inner self can be easily turned upside-down. Although fearing the unknown, from an academic perspective, there was an evident gap in the literature and very little engagement with alternative spiritual intentional communities, as discussed in the introduction. After prolonged reflection, I decided that spiritual intentional communities were to be the focus of my research. If I wanted to dispel stereotypes I must overcome mine first by challenging the fear of the spiritual 'other'.

Moreover, both Atlantida and Dh accepted my double role of volunteer and researcher. They requested that I pay extra to cover my expenses, which I considered a fair arrangement. However, the gatekeepers (the person who supervises the community territory) – worried "that the research may damage the organisation's image, and that the researcher's presence may alter its internal relationship" (Gobo, 2008:122) – proposed a non-negotiable two-week period. Although I could entirely understand their reason, the time limitation could have been a significant issue for the whole research process considering the practical difficulties in gathering ethnographic data in such a short time.

Investigating alternative ways to extend my visit in these communities, I found out that in May 2012, Dh in collaboration with Gaia education and GEN were holding a course called 'Ecovillage Design Education' (EDE). The aim of the 4-week course was to provide a specific training on the enactment of an ecovillage exploring the four dimensions of sustainability: social, economic, spiritual/worldview and ecological (see figure 3.2). Since 2006, it has been carried out more than 180 times in more than 39 different countries (Gaia Education, n.d.).

**Course Outline**

**Worldview**

- Module 1 - Holistic Worldview: What makes us similar to everything around us?
- Module 2 - Reconnecting with Nature: How well do we work with the rhythms of nature?
- Module 3 - Transformation of Consciousness: What are we fully aware of?
- Module 4 - Personal and Planetary Health: Can we heal the planet, and ourselves?
- Module 5 - Socially Engaged Spirituality: What guides our actions?

**Social Design**

- Module 1: Building Community and Embracing Diversity: Group development
- Module 2: Communication Skills and Decision Making: NVC, and participatory leadership
- Module 3: Leadership and Empowerment: Coaching, and emotional intelligence
- Module 4: Art, Ritual, and Social Transformation: Personal and group creative process
- Module 5: Education, Personal Networks and Activism: Connecting with others

**Economic Design**

- Module 1: Shifting the Global Economy to Sustainability: How does it work?
- Module 2: Right Livelihood: Can we do well by doing good?
- Module 3: Local Economies: What can we find within a low carbon reach
- Module 4: Community Banks and Currencies: What are our means of exchange?
- Module 5: Legal and Financial Issues: What are the ethical issues, tools and instruments?

**Ecologic Design**

- Module 1: Green Building and Retrofitting: Building with the Earth in mind
- Module 2: Local Food and Nutrient Cycles: Creating security for all
- Module 3: Water, Energy and Infrastructure: Regenerative thinking and design
- Module 4: Nature and Urban Regeneration, and Disaster Recovery: Making it better
- Module 5: Whole Systems Approach to Design: Everything is connected to everything else

**Figure 3.2:** EDE generic course outline (Gaia Education, n.d.)

Participating in the course would provide advantages of, first, extending my stay in Dh from 2 weeks to 6 weeks; second, interacting with GEN organisation; and third, exploring in detail the four dimensions of an ecovillage and its 'recommended' enactment. This combination of 2+4 weeks enabled me to overcome the time limitation and to gather further valuable data for my research about Dh and GEN.

While the combination of Dh plus EDE appeared as a good compromise, I was not so successful in negotiating my time extension in the community, Atlantida, in Colombia. I was not fully convinced that I could both adjust to the Colombian context and collect enough data in only 2 weeks. I initially accepted the offer but explained that the time limit was an issue. Although I was not entirely satisfied with the outcome, it was time to approach the field and to set up the research methods more precisely.

### 1.13.3  Approaching the field: the research methods

As previously discussed, within ethnography there are a range of different research methods that can be applied. In this research, data were collected by participant observation, field notes, semi-structured interview, photography and the acquisition of internal documentary material.

*Participant observation* is the heart of ethnography research (Herbert, 2000; Crang and Cook, 2007; Atkinson, 2015). Participant observation is "an approach to learning about the social and cultural life of communities, institutions and other social settings" (Hoggart *et al.*, 2002: 275). It involves both participation and observation. Atkinson (2015) though stresses that ethnography is achievable only with some degree of participation. Within my research the participation in the communities was assured by the volunteering activities. However, it was difficult to know in advance in which activities I would be involved. Nevertheless, the main aim was to become familiar with the social space and to help as much as I could in the community activities. Besides academic goals, I thought volunteering was an opportunity to learn something different and to be involved in another range of activities compared to my everyday life. Observation is equally important as participation, however it requires going beyond the observable phenomenon, the act of just seeing.

> It means being attentive to the multiplicity of actions – spoken and unspoken – and of social actors, material culture, spatial and temporal arrangements that together constitute the field. (Atkinson, 2015:40)

Although participant observation is considered the "easiest method in the world since it is ubiquitous and we can all already do it" (Laurier, 2010:116), it requires an "analytical attention" to make a systemic sense of the social world explored (Atkinson, 2015:41). Participant observation in this research has been adopted to better understand the social, material and spatial enactment by 'analytically looking' at community dynamics, practices and social interactions.

In order to make more effective use of the time available for participant observation another method used in ethnography is the use of a *field diary*. Taking notes during the ethnography period is essential for overcoming the fragilities of the human memory (Bryman, 2012). According to Hoggart *et al.* (2002) the detail and accuracy of the field notes can significantly shape the outcomes of the research. During my research, a field diary was kept and used daily. It was an essential tool for recording formal meetings and informal conversations that I participated in, facts and events that I observed, and emotions and feelings that I felt.

However, one of the main drawbacks is that participant observation can be misleading, for instance without knowing the cultural context, the phenomena observed can be misinterpreted. In order to assess conceptual validity it is often suggested to triangulate

sourced data (Hoggaert *et al.*, 2002). Triangulation means the use of multiple research methods and/or multiple sources for exploring the same phenomena (Valentine, 2005).

> Triangulation can also take place within a qualitative research strategy. In fact, ethnographers often check out their observations with interview questions to determine whether they might have misunderstood what they had seen. (Bryman, 2012: 392)

*Interviewing,* another key ethnographic method, was adopted for overcoming some of the limitations when completing the participant observation, and therefore to have a more comprehensive picture of the socio, cultural and economic context of the communities (see Valentine, 1997; Longhurst, 2003; Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). Additionally, it was the most appropriate method for exploring the individual scale and the residents' life stories. I used a combination of semi-structured and unstructured interviews, that I will generally identify here as *in-depth interviews.* Predominantly, semi-structured interviews were used, namely when there is a specific set of themes that needs to be covered (Bryman, 2012). For instance, they were very useful for understanding some specific social and economic aspects of the communities. However, unstructured interviews were more appropriate when investigating residents' life histories (Dunn, 2000). The aim was to let the interview flow as a conversation in a way that the respondents could share his/her personal story freely (Dunn, 2000; Valentine, 2005; Bryman, 2012). One of the limitations of this method is that the interview can take a very long time.

Furthermore, *photographs* were used to provide a visual support to the previous methods. As Hoggart *et al*. (2002) suggest photographs are indicated in ethnography for providing visual insights of the locality researched, and to enrich the field notes. Finally, relevant *documentary material* was collected to "give insights on previous practices, issues or events in an organisation, group or community, as well as highlighting sensitive topics, potential research problems or 'local' peculiarities" (Hoggart *et al*. 2002:279). These were the ethnographic research tools chosen before entering the field.

## 1.13.4 In the field

*Damanhur (Italy)*

The field work in Dh started on 9th April 2012 and finished on 3rd June 2012, including the EDE course. In the two first weeks I was based in Dishna[2], one of the 26 social units of Dh called *nuclei* (nucleus- community)[3]. At the time of the fieldwork[4] Dishna was home to 21 Damanhurians, four of whom were children. During this period, I was involved in Dishna community activities such as helping in the construction of an earth-bag house, cleaning, planting tomatoes, vegetables and any other activities required. Meanwhile, I was participating in the weekly Damanhurian meetings. These experiences were recorded in my field diary. I used a notebook daily, to record brief notes to help to remember key facts acquired during the participant information and informal chats. These are called "jotted notes" (Lofland and Lofland, 1995 cited in Bryman, 2012:420). These brief notes generally were conveyed in a more complete field diary that I used to write at the end of the day. In these "full field notes" (Bryman, 2012:420) I wrote down information about events, experiences, people, impressions, feelings and anything that I noticed and thought could be relevant, yet also simply daily routine. Additionally, in-depth interviews were conducted with Damanhurian residents. However, because the community counted more than 600 members, it was necessary to select the respondents in a reasonable manner. I identified three main groups: residents, economic actors and political actors.

The first group included a selection of residents with the aim to investigate their life stories and to find out why they decided to live in Dh, their working experiences, their engagement within the community and finally their understanding of spirituality. In the *Appendix B* it is possible to find the basic questions asked of the residents. However, considering the conversational nature of the interviews, more questions emerged that were shaped by the natural flow of the conversation and clearly not previously planned. The interviewees selected were the residents of Dishna social units. Living in their shared house and collaborating in their activities allowed me to build a mutual trust and gain easier access. Also each social unit tended to be representative of Dh population; shaped by both old and new members, from different nationalities and of mixed gender

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[2] In order to maintain anonymity I have changed the name of the Damanhurian social unity where I was based; thus Dishna is not the real name.

[3] This will be further explained in the *Chapter 4*.

[4] All the information reported in this project is relative to when the fieldwork took place.

and ages. I interviewed all the 17 adult residents (*Appendix A*). I did not interview the children but I interacted with them daily.

The second group included political actors. The aim was to interview a selection of those Damanhurians who played key organisational and political roles within the community. The interview questions thus were not oriented toward their life choices but to the Dh social structure and their roles within it (*Appendix C*). A total of 15 political actors have been interviewed.

The third group was a selection of economic actors, by which I specifically mean those individuals who own or are responsible for a business in the Dh commercial centre (*Dh Crea*). Here the questions were directly related to their businesses such as main activities, n. employees, customers; currency, ethics, etc (*Appendix D*). I interviewed 11 economic actors. However some of the political and economic actors interviewed were also Dishna residents and in this case I combined the questions as necessary. In total I have interviewed 30 Damanhurians (for details see *Appendix A*). Moreover, in Dh I have also collected different types of internal documents (see *Appendix H*).

By 24th of April I had collected 80% of my overall data on Dh. I felt that I was close to what Crang and Cook call ethnographic "theoretical saturation" (2007:14). However, after a one-week break I was supposed to come back to Dh for the second part of the Dh fieldwork, the EDE. I felt that this would have been a great opportunity to investigate further the community and to clarify some remaining doubts. I was very satisfied with the amount of data collected and the experience I had had until that moment. The field relations with members of the community, especially Dishna residents, were based on mutual respect, appreciation and empathy. Their willingness to collaborate with my research project was very valuable and strongly appreciated considering their busy life style. Generally they were interested in my life and I often shared my life experiences, thoughts and beliefs. The majority of them were very familiar with my Buddhist organisation and often I heard comments such as "If I was not living in Dh and believing in Dh philosophy I would certainly follow a Buddhist philosophy". I believe that sharing information about myself helped in the building of field relations. However, I never felt like a complete participant (Bryman, 2012), my identity as a volunteer and researcher was always mutually recognised. However, in these first two weeks I felt very introspective on several occasions; I had very weird dreams, old memories were coming back, but I did not want to be introspective. I believed it was not the right place

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to think about my past or to explore these emerging feelings. I wanted to be focused on my research and I felt time was limited.

*Ecovillage Design Education*

After a week's break I came back to Dh for the EDE course. As discussed, the course aim was to teach the four dimensions of sustainability supported by lectures and local fieldwork. Being located in an ecovillage like Dh was fundamental because the community experiences and practices constitute the empirical material used to understand the theoretical concepts of sustainability (see *Appendix E* for the specific course schedule).

We were in total 13 participants from Italy, Brazil, Romania, Turkey, Germany, Latvia, France, Peru, Spain and USA. Generally the other participants were practitioners who were planning to build or were already involved in other sustainable communities or organisations. I was the only academic researcher in the group. This experience has been fundamental for gathering the remaining data on Dh (see *Appendix A*), relevant material on the ecovillage network and culture (see *Appendix H*) and for supporting my learning about ecovillage sustainability across the four dimensions – a complete notebook has been written with details on the lectures, activities and experiences. Moreover, another aspect has crucially shaped my fieldwork: encounters.

The EDE offered the opportunity to meet and have several conversations with GEN leaders and to meet people who were experimenting with other communities worldwide. These went far beyond occasional meetings considering that we were 13 participants in close contact with each other 24/7 for the whole 4 weeks. Amongst these participants, I 'encountered' Jussara from TM in Brazil. Laurier and Philo (2006) observe that with respect to café encounters it is common for the direction of the research to be shaped by routine encounters in the fieldwork process. In my case, meeting Jussara was an unexpected encounter in a sense that I was not expecting to find in Dh the "guarantor" (Gobo, 2008:132) of my second case study. Our encounter shaped my whole research process, and instead of going to an intentional community in Colombia (the negotiation for which was never finalised) I went to TM.

Vannini explains in relation to non-representational ethnographies that fieldwork encounters are "events through which they [ethnographers] and their informants make and remake their lifeworlds through their changing positions and relations" (2014: 4). Jussara and I became good friends from the beginning of the course: I was fascinated by

her stories about the shamanic community of TM and she was really interested in my research project. Trust was established in these weeks and at some point Jussara, in an informal conversation, suggested TM as a possible second case study for my research. By reflecting on this possibility, surprisingly TM met all 8 of the selective criteria that I had previously identified such as: sharing an equal strong spiritual focus as my first case study, more than 20 residents and 20 years of experience. After having checked with the other members, Jussara assured an overall willingness from the other members to collaborate with the research. Jussara acted as a guarantor: "a person who reassures the group or organisation about the ethnographer's good reputation and his or her trustworthiness" (Gobo, 2008:132). Supported by a guarantor, rather than a gatekeeper that does not have information on the researcher, accessibility was easily gained and the negotiation successfully ended with the volunteer/research option and with no time restrictions. Although I am not expressly adopting a non-representational ethnography, this approach helps to shed light on some dynamics of my fieldwork.

> Non-representational ethnographies are restless, rich with verve and brio, constantly on the move, forever becoming something else, something originally unplanned (Vannini, 2014:4)

Indeed, with each new encounter, and as plans changed, other opportunities for gathering further data appeared: the possibility to participate in the People's Summit at Rio+20. In Rio de Janeiro, the leaders of GEN (which I met during the EDE) were going to meet the members of the recently established, ecovillage Latin American network (CASA – *Consejo de Asentamientos Sustentables de las Américas* – Council of Sustainable Settlements of America). This would have helped to gather relevant data for exploring how the communal movement is globally enacted, and the interactions between the ecovillages in the global north and south.

*People's Summit at Rio+20 for Social and Environmental Justice*
I stayed in Rio de Janeiro from 17th to 24th June 2012. During that week Rio de Janeiro hosted the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD, 2012), called "Rio+20"[5]. Meanwhile, parallel to the United Nations Conference, the global

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[5] This event, held from 20th to 22nd of June 2012, marked the 20th anniversary of the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) held in Rio de Janeiro, and the 10th anniversary of the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg. The Conference focused on two main themes: firstly, a green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication and secondly, the institutional framework for sustainable development (UNCSD, 2012).

civil society organised a number of events under the name of 'People's Summit at Rio+20 for Social and Environmental Justice' (PSR+20 – *Cúpula dos Povos na Rio+20 por Justiça Social e Ambiental*). The Committee of the Brazilian Civil Society invited organisations and popular social movements from around the world to protest against the lack of concrete actions by the United Nations to tackle environmental and social injustices, and with the aim to explore alternative ways and new paradigms for a civil society political agenda post Rio+20 (Instituto Humanitas Unisinos, 2012). In total, more than 800 self-managed activities were organised and it has been estimated that around 350 thousand people participated during those days (Instituto Humanitas Unisinos, 2012; Brazilian Government, 2012). One of the tents was named "Ecovillages and Transition Towns: laboratories for sustainable living" organized by Gaia Education and GEN. This tent was a meeting point for ecovillagers from all over the world (see figures 3.3 and 3.4).



**Figure 3.3a, 3.3b and 3.3c:** People's Summit at Rio+20 (Author, 2012)

**Figure 3.4a and 3.4b:** GEN tent at Rio+20 (Author, 2012)

During this week I participated in numerous events, but four main meetings are relevant to this research:

- 17<sup>th</sup> June 2012 – the second official meeting of the Latin American Ecovillage Network (CASA) that was recently set up
- 18<sup>th</sup> June 2012 – the first informal meeting between CASA and GEN
- 20<sup>th</sup> June 2012 – the second informal meeting between CASA and GEN
- 21<sup>st</sup> June 2012 – the first official public meeting between CASA and GEN

During these meetings I used participant observation and a field diary as my main research methods. The data collected have shaped *Chapter 9* on the global scale. The EDE course and the PSR+20 have strongly brought a new awareness on environmental issues and on the necessity to build a more sustainable world. I was glad to have had the opportunity to participate in the EDE course and the PSR+20 and especially to notice that a considerable number of people, communities, and groups from the civil society are trying to create sustainable spaces around the world. These experiences raised several personal questions, they were unsettling and challenging to the 'way' I conduct my everyday life, yet I could not find any concrete response by the end of these events. Then, I flew to TM on the 24<sup>th</sup> June 2014.

*Terra Mirim (Brazil)*

I stayed in TM from 24th June to 24th August 2014. As in Dh, I was volunteering in the community activities. However in TM they asked me to predominantly support the Administration and Finance department considering my background in business management. As I will discuss in the context chapter, TM is a smaller community than Dh. It counts approximately 25 permanent residents, plus other residents who live temporarily for a few months during the year, plus other people from the local area who work in TM foundation but do not live in the community, and other guests. Therefore, I did not select a sample of people to interview, as in Dh, but rather I tried to arrange an interview with anyone who was available (see *Appendix F* for the list of interviewees and *Appendix G* for the interview questions). I interviewed in total 25 people.

Additionally, during these months I collected a significant number of internal documents (*Appendix H*), I conducted participant observation and kept a field diary as in Dh. Considering the small scale of TM, the activities open to the residents were generally open to me as well, thus I could participate in several organisational meetings, weekly meditational groups, and a different range of events. This accessibility strongly contributed to my understanding of the community and facilitated the collection of data. However, during my time in TM I felt that the research methods selected – in-depth interviews, participant observation, internal documents collection – were limited in understanding the enactment of this alternative space. This became clear during my interviews. Respondents often pointed out that it was difficult to explain shamanism and to understand TM without participating in the rituals.

> *For me shamanism is not a theory, it is not something that you can learn in the books. I cannot learn in the books. I can learn the shamanic philosophy in the books but shamanism for me is living it, I have to experience it… You can explain to me what is the ritual of the 'Purification Lodge', also Internet can explain what it is, but I cannot feel it 'Search of the vision''' [another type of ritual], you need to do it, you need to feel it. Shamanism is about feeling. I need to feel, I need to feel the nature, I need to feel the parallel realities. For me this is shamanism.* (Mikania, woman, TM)
>
> *Rituals... Rituals made me understand what TM is. You cannot understand TM if you don't do the rituals, you will understand very superficially.* (Ixora, woman, TM)

Through Mikania and Ixora's words, I acknowledged the limits of the research methods selected. I felt to be in a sort or 'research impasse', in which if I wanted to go further in gathering data I had to explore other possible research methods. In other words, I had to

decide if I wanted to participate in the shamanic rituals. Among the different rituals taking place in TM there was the Ayahuasca ceremony. This ritual consisted in drinking a hallucinogenic brew from Amazonia which alters the state of consciousness (Callaway *et al.*, 1999; Beyer, 2012; Foutiou, 2012). The journey affects different dimensions – physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual – of the human being. Several questions occupied my mind such as: do you have enough data? Do you want to participate in the rituals? Are you ready to undertake a spiritual journey inside yourself? Is it really necessary? What about if your body cannot hold it? You know you don't have to… but why not?

Back in the 1960s the well-known anthropologist Carlos Castaneda wrote several books (1968, 1991a, 1991b) about his research into the shamanic Yaqui Indian community in northern Mexico. Castaneda was conducting his PhD research in UCLA and from his first book, *The Teachings of Don Juan* (1968), emerged his doubts about whether or not to participate in the shamanic rituals. Castaneda not only participated in the rituals but also engaged in a shamanic training himself. However, my research aim was not to explore shamanism itself, and initially it was not even to investigate spiritual communities, but rather the enactment of intentional communities as heterotopic spaces. However, if in Dh I felt I had collected a sufficient amount of data, even with only a partial understanding of their spirituality, I did not have the same feelings about TM. Respondents were not insisting on my participation in the rituals, I did not feel any pressure, but rather it was clear that with my main research methods I could not fully understand TM enactment. The 'research impasse' was solved when, despite my cultural scepticism, and my fears in engaging in such spiritual experiences, I took this step in the ethnography to pursue "theoretical saturation" (Crang and Cook, 2007:14).

This decision had a bearing on the methodology in two respects. Firstly, it highlights the importance of engaging in 'spiritual embodied methods' to better understand spiritual spaces. Recent feminist scholarship has explored the body as an instrument of research (i.e. Longhurst 1997, Longhurst *et al.,* 2008; Longhurst 2009). Yet, little is known about using embodied methodology as a research method for understanding spiritual spaces. As previously discussed, Foucault recognised the body as playing a key role in understanding the spiritual (Carrette, 2002). Holloway (2003:1963) also claims "to take the body and bodily practices as central to the enactment of sacred spaces" (see also MacKian, 2012). Nevertheless, generally speaking "[t]o date then, it seems there has been a sustained engagement with the bodies of research subjects but less engagement

with the bodies of researchers" (Longhurst, 2009:432). I argue that this assertion becomes extremely relevant when looking at the enactment of spiritual spaces. The first argument here is that in order to understand the enactment of spiritual spaces it is necessary to undertake 'spiritual embodied methods' in which the researcher engages with his/her body in the production of knowledge. The researcher's body thus becomes a research tool to collect data, as has happened in this research.

Secondly and consequently, ethnographic research becomes also autoethnography (Butz and Besio, 2009; Moss, 2001). According to Gobo (2008:62), "many postmodern ethnographers believe that instead of understanding the *other* [original emphasis] more fully, what field workers should do is gain a fuller understanding of themselves. […] More recently this style has taken the name of autoethnography". Butz and Besio (2009) identify five categories of autoethnography research. The one that fits most in this research is the "personal experience narrative" in which the researcher's experience is used to understand a cultural phenomenon. To reply to the critiques raised by Butz and Besio (2009), I do not wish to suggest that my personal experience in the shamanic ritual is representative of others' experiences. Instead, through direct experience I could understand how these spiritual practices shape the heterotopic space. An autoethnographic tends to escape postcolonial critiques by "avoid[ing] some of the pitfalls of speaking of, with and through the voices of others, but it raises as many methodological difficulties as it resolves" (Bondi 2014:335). One way to face these possible methodological issues is to be transparent, and predominantly to adopt a self-reflexive approach. However, as Bondi (2014:335) suggests "[c]laims to knowledge based on introspection and first-person testimony are no different from those grounded more externally".

Finally, adopting an autoethnographic approach combined with spiritual embodied methodologies as additional research tools can have several implications such as challenging and unsettling the life of the researcher. Furthermore, it had implications on the research time. Making sense of spiritual knowledge is not necessarily a straightforward process.

I returned to TM a second time from 25th December 2012 to 17th January 2013 to collect further data. The celebrations for the end of the year offered a wider range of rituals and more people to interview (see *Appendix F*). In total I participated in 4 Ayahuasca rituals, two Purification lodges, and other shamanic events. Before discussing the final stage of

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the research, I conclude with Malinowski's quote that appropriately summarises the end of my fieldwork (1922:56-57).

> There is all the difference between a sporadic plunging into the company of natives, and being really in contact with them. What does this latter mean? On the Ethnographer's side, it means that his life in the village, which at first is a strange, sometimes unpleasant, sometimes intensely interesting adventure, soon adopts quite a natural course very much in harmony with his surroundings.

## 1.14 After the fieldwork

### 1.14.1 Data analysis and writing up

The analytical phases after the fieldwork, what Crang and Cook (2007) call the "pulling it together", required a remarkable amount of time. This was anticipated by the pre-analysis phase which involved the transcribing of the interviews, the organisation of the field diaries and of the documentary and visual materials collected. For facilitating the transcribing of the interviews – recorded with a dictaphone – I used 'Dragon Naturally Speaking', speech recognition software that recognises the voice and types while you are listening and iterating the interviews. All the interviews have been fully transcribed. Afterwards, the interview scripts were uploaded in NVivo, a qualitative research data analysis software. Once I had set up NVivo, I started the coding process by which I generated one list of codes for each community.

Regarding the writing up process, extended quotes have often been used to provide a detailed insight into people's stories. Italian, Portuguese, and occasionally English and Spanish, were the four languages used during the fieldwork. The process of translation has been approached as a negotiation between leaving the text as close as possible to the interviewees' words, and to making it understandable when reading in English. The reader should bear this in mind when reading the respondents' quotes. Moreover, I often use vignettes to generally report data from my field diaries or to summarise contextual sections. However, to better understand the rationale behind the data analysis and writing up process it is necessary to further reflect on how an 'experimental international comparativism' has been undertaken.

### 1.14.2 *How to compare?*

Comparison, generally, aims "to seek explanations for similarities and differences or to gain a greater awareness and a deeper understanding of social reality in different national contexts" (Bryman, 2012:72). This quote might be relevant within this research but only to some extent. Specifically, this research aims to find similarities within the 'process of enactment' of the two intentional communities, but not similarities between the two communities. The aim is not to compare in order to identify a best practice or a successful model of intentional community. To further clarify, the comparison seeks to identify common emerging themes of the process of enactment but it does not want to compare 'the results' of the enactment.

So, for instance, when analysing the material enactment, two common practices have been identified in both communities: donations and voluntary work. Once these two common practices have emerged from the comparative analytical phase, the findings are discussed not with the aim of evaluating, but rather to understand how these common practices have contingently influenced the enactment. However, this analytical comparison has not always led to common emerging themes between the communities or even if common themes have emerged between them, sometimes only one of them has been analysed in greater detail. To clarify, this research significantly differs from traditional forms of comparisons by engaging in an 'experimental international comparison'. In this study, this has led to a diversified presentation of the two communities, justified by the richness yet variety of the ethnographic experiences and thus, of the findings that have emerged. In this search for similarities and differences, strong emphasis has been given to the geographical context. A contextual sensitivity is essential not only for undertaking a postcolonial comparative research, but also for conducting a rigorous ethnography. Crang and Cook call it a "theoretical adequacy" which means "that ethnographers have been encouraged to understand the various context of their studies, and their similarities and differences with others" (2007:15).

Indeed, in this study, flexibility, openness and 'groundedness' were adopted in the analytical phase with the aim to "find in the empirical, comparative interrogation of its most abstract concepts a rich field for creative reconceptualization." (Robinson 2011: 17). Thus, the analytical categories were not isolated and defined *a priori*, but rather they were identified during and after the data collection (Hoggart *et al.*, 2002). For instance, the conceptual framework was strongly re-shaped by the outcomes of the research. Additionally, the relational-scalar approach was entirely the result of an

analytical process that aimed to understand through geographical lenses the communities studied. By reflecting on the data, it became clear that these communities were not the result of only one or two scales of enactment but rather they were the product (and the producers) of, different, yet interrelated scales. In this analytical process, five relevant scales of investigations have emerged: individual, community, transcendental, local and global.

> With respect to *how to conduct comparative* [original emphasis] urbanism, it was shown here that one valid way is to adopt an inductive approach. In the words of McFarlane (2008, p. 355), "not knowing where a comparison might lead is a legitimate task". (Cough, 2012:875)

It is a legitimate task not only "not knowing" where the comparison leads, but also where the ethnographic journey might lead. As it has been shown in this chapter, the outcomes of the ethnographic process can be absolutely unpredictable, from the selection process to the writing up stage. This opens up to the concluding section where the final reflections are exposed.

### 1.14.3   *Ethical considerations*

Ethical issues were considered throughout the whole research process. Ethics is understood here as "a set of norms that regulate behaviour in the professional sphere" (Gobo, 2008:146).  Participation was agreed on the basis of informed consent and with the assurance of anonymity. All interviewee names have been changed to preserve confidentiality. Dh interviewees' names have been substituted with the names of stars (to acknowledge the spaceship metaphor used in Dh). The names of TM members have been changed to the names of plants.

Ethics, however, does not only mean to maintain privacy and, overall, to respect the professional codes, but also to reflect on the process of knowledge production (Thrift, 2003). Notwithstanding the practice of reflexive writing (Bingham, 2003), this thesis is clearly shaped by my positionality, subjectivity and understanding. Furthermore, the analysis presented is limited to data collected during a limited time and in specific contextual scenarios.

Moreover, reflecting on the co-production of knowledge it is essential to underline that while I have taken my respondents' ideas into consideration when conducting this research, I am solely responsible for the material produced here. However, a

participatory research approach (Pain, 2004) has been considered in the output of this research. The shamans Alba Maria and Dhan Ribeiro from TM were in UK in June 2014. For the occasion, I organised an event as part of the research cluster Geographies of Social Change in which I invited the spiritual leaders to give a talk about their community. The event, entitled "'The Shamanism of the Mother Goddess is alive in Brazil!' Terra Mirim: shamanic community and sustainable alternative way of living" was held on Wednesday 25th June 2014 at Newcastle University and received 60 guests from within and outside academia. On that occasion a small donation was collected for the community. While this is not a typical example of co-production of knowledge, it created a space where the Brazilian members could raise awareness and directly present their community. Moreover, this manuscript will be sent to the communities of Dh and TM once it is finished.

## 1.15  Concluding reflections

This chapter has clarified the rationale behind the research strategies and research design (see table 3.2), and also their strengths, limitations and weaknesses.

### Methodological research choices

| Research Strategy | Qualitative |
|---|---|
| Research Design | International experimental comparativism |
| Case studies | Dh (Italy) and TM (Brazil) |
| Methodology | Ethnography |
| Research methods | Participant observation<br>Field diary<br>In-depth interviews<br>Documentary and visual materials<br>Spiritual embodied method (only in TM) |

**Table 3.2:** Methodological research choices (elaborated by the author)

Besides explaining the research journey this chapter has argued how unplanned events, field encounters, and emotions can shape the whole research journey and impact on the research output. Thus, they should be taken into consideration. Moreover, in the analytical phase it emerged how engaging in an 'experimental international comparison' has led to the development of a scalar approach. Also taking in account the themes of

utopianism and heterotopia, this thesis has previously argued that a relational-scalar approach provides a more integrated and nuanced account of enactment than is found in existing research, where the tendency is to view the individual, the community, or the local context, as separate entities. Thus, in the next chapter, firstly, the ontological and epistemological implications of engaging in a scalar approach are discussed, and secondly, the contexts of Dh and TM are presented.

# Scales & contexts

In order to understand the enactment of intentional heterotopias, notably spiritual intentional communities, I have argued that it is critical to consider how this functions across multiple scales. This is because the process of enactment is not limited to the individual, or community or a particular place but rather co-constituted, interacted and entangled. Operationalising a relational-scalar approach poses a number of challenges.

In recent decades, scale has been debated in human geography as a concept that can be understood beyond its geographical dimension. Opinion has tended to be polarised between those who continue to assert the importance of scale as a geographical spatiality, and those who have moved beyond this 'vertical approach' to claim that the world comprises networks, assemblages and flows. While there are studies that strike a balance between these two polar perspectives, these differences of opinion emphasise how the concept of scale is highly contested in the discipline. The next section will explore recent debates on scale with the aim to underline how this research understands, considers and uses scales for investigating the enactment of intentional heterotopias.

The second part of the chapter provides a context for the global scale by exploring the communal movement of GEN. Following this, the next two sections will provide contextual information for the communities of Dh and TM. In line with the relational-scalar approach adopted throughout this thesis, contextualisation will consider the transcendental, the local, the community and the individual scales for each of the two communities. The contextual exercise will be followed by a brief literature review of studies specifically investigating Dh and TM.

## 1.16  A relational-scalar approach

### 1.16.1  Ontological or epistemological status?

One of the main issues concerning spatial scales debate is its ontological status. Herod (2011) identifies two main approaches: the materialist one inspired by Marx, which arose in the 1980s through political economic scholarship, and the Kant inspired idealist position, which emerged in the 1990s, mainly among political geographers. He explains that the main difference between the two approaches regards the ontological nature of scales, and therefore whether scales are considered real entities or not.

The materialist, also known as the political economic approach, does not question the existence of scales but rather conceives them as 'material socio spatial entities' (Moore, 2008:204). In the early 1980s Taylor (1982), in his attempt to develop a materialistic framework to understand the political within the capitalist economic context, asserts that "geographical scale as a way of organising the subject-matter of political geography" is common among geographers, and that "the three scales – global, national, urban – are as 'natural' as social science's division of activities economic, social and political" (Taylor, 1982: 21). He also emphasises that "this spatial organization is simply given" (*ibid*). In the 1990s the materialist approach slightly evolved with economic geographers such as Smith (1993) and Brenner (1998), proposed the understanding "scales as products of social, political, cultural and economic processes rather than pre-defined arenas within which such processes unfold" (MacKinnon, 2011: 23). Even if political economists have moved forward from Taylor's seminal rigid theorisation by focusing on the production of scales; claiming the existence of more than three scales; and recognising their flexibility; critics still accuse them of deeming scales as ontological givens and as real and material dimensions.

The majority of these critiques come from idealists and poststructuralists (defined by Castree *et al.* (2013) as latter day idealists) who instead proclaim scales as "socially constructed rather than ontologically pre-given" and "not simply [as] an external fact awaiting discovery but a way of framing conceptions of reality" (Delaney and Leitner, 1997:94-95). Jones (1998) in her paper, *Scale as Epistemology*, points out how using scales as ontological categories reduces and limits the understanding to that of homogenous scalar categorizations and representations. She defines scales as a "representational trope, a way of framing political-spatiality that in turn has material effects" (1998:27). Jones suggests that "we may be best served by approaching scale not as an ontological structure which 'exists', but as an epistemological one – a way of knowing or apprehending" (1998:28). In the same direction, a few years later Marston (2000) expanding on the social construction of scale, wrote the most influential paper within scalar theorisation. She underlines that the role of geographers should be to investigate how scales are constituted within socio-spatial dynamics.

However, claiming that scales are epistemologically constructed was not sufficiently advanced for some poststructuralist geographers such as Marston, Jones III and Woodward who in 2005 provocatively proposed to eliminate scale from human geography vocabulary launching instead an alternative 'flat ontology'.

That is, in contrast to transcendent ontologies and their vertical semiotics of scale, flat ontologies consist of self-organizing systems, or 'onto-genesis (Simondon 1964 1989), where the dynamic properties of matter produce a multiplicity of complex relations and singularities that sometimes lead to the creation of new, unique events and entities, but more often to relatively redundant orders and practices. (Marston *et al.,* 2005:422)

Strongly affected by the non-representational turn in human geography, Marston *et al.* are not interested in taking a position between the ontological (scale as spatial material object) and epistemological (scale as narrative and conceptual device) dispute, but rather their concern is in the material effects that scalar abstractions and representations can have through reification (Jones III *et al.,* 2007). Flat ontology is therefore an approach that considers sites, instead of scales, central to geographical analysis.

The proposal of an alternative flat ontology, and especially the rejection of a scalar approach launched by Marston *et al.* (2005), has aroused strong responses in human geography. Scholars such as Hoefle (2006) and Jonas (2006) have positioned themselves in defence of scales, strongly refusing its elimination; others such as Escobar (2006) and Collinge (2006) have instead accepted the provocation and encouraged a more relational geographical analysis. Other scholars (Leitner and Miller, 2006; Leitner *et al.,* 2008; Jessop *et al.,* 2008) claim the necessity to adopt an approach that still recognises the importance of scales, but that reappraises scale as only one, and not the most important, spatial dimension. Within these debates, how then can we use a scalar approach for understanding the enactment of intentional communities?

Adopting a flat ontology approach for analysing the enactment of alternative spaces, would lead to focusing on the 'site' and how it emerges and is transformed by event-relations and by human and non-human practices and orders (Escobar, 2006; Leitner and Miller, 2006). The site approach might be useful to understand the nature of alternative spaces, how intentional communities have emerged through human and non-human interactions, and specifically, which practices and orders are enacted to shape socially and economically these spaces. Yet, I argue that limiting the analysis to the site and its material event-relations, although essential, would not uncover the holistic and multi-level nature of heterotopic enactment, while a scalar approach will help by going beyond the site itself, and illustrate the different coexisting and overlapping scales. Thus, in order to study and understand the enactment of alternative spaces, such as intentional communities, it is necessary to consider scales; firstly, through an

epistemological approach rather than ontological; secondly, through a relational perspective rejecting any sort of hierarchy and vertical theorisation; thirdly, not necessarily as geographical dimensions thereby challenging the materialist approach.

### 1.16.2 Scales as epistemological, relational and even transcendental

*Epistemological scales*

Firstly, in this project scales are not considered as real, material and ontological entities. This is a response to the social constructive approach adopted in human geography (that have now influenced also mostly political-economic geographers), in which scales are "not given, but contingent, contested social constructs that are continually being made and remade" (Moore, 2008: 208). Additionally, Moore (2008) distinguishes between scales as 'categories of analysis' and 'categories of practice'; the former refers to scales as analytical device used by social scientists, the latter instead, as "categories of everyday experience, developed and deployed by social actors" (Bourdieu *et al.,* 2000:4 cited in Moore, 2008:207). Although Moore uses the two categories as separate ways of considering scales, the scalar framework used here is positioned between these two ways; as an analytical device that has been mostly shaped by empirical ethnographic evidences. Indeed, by looking at how actors, practices and processes shape the enactment in the intentional communities of Dh and TM arose the requirement to consider their scalar dimension. So, although scales are used here as a category of analysis, this research claims that practices, processes and social actors have shaped the scales of enactment and thus, they are epistemologically significant. Scale will be used here, as Jones (1998:28) suggests, as "a way of knowing or apprehending" the enactment of alternative spaces.

*Relational scales*

One of the main critiques made by Marston *et al.* (2005) is that scales are fundamentally hierarchical, vertical and rigid and that no deconstruction can challenge this discursive power. Leitner and Miller (2007:117) criticise Marston *et al.*, for conflating verticality and hierarchy whilst "hierarchy is a particular form of verticality, suggestive of top-down power relations". Furthermore, Springer (2014) suggests new political possibilities in which decentralized, autonomous, and anarchical organisations challenge established hierarchical power dynamics. In so doing, in reply to Marston *et al.*, he suggests:

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> So, while I would hesitate to discard scale altogether because of the alternative possibilities that may yet remain hidden within its theorizations, ultimately Marston *et al*. (2005) are correct; there is a need for a flattening of the spatial register, a deconstruction of the assumed hierarchies, and a tearing down of the scaffold imaginary, so that another, more autonomous politics become possible". (Springer, 2014: 410)

Indeed, by arguing against a hierarchical geography it is not necessary to eliminate scales from the discipline, but instead to reframe, reconceptualise and rethink scales as for instance relational. In 1998, Howitt considered scale as a level, as a size and as a relation. Particularly, using a musical metaphor he sought to "facilitate a shift in understanding of scale from an (over)emphasis on scale as a size, and/or scale as level, to include aspects of scale as relation" (1998:56). Yet, according to Leitner and Miller (2007), Howitt does not provide a clear conceptualisation of the meaning of relation. After more than 15 years, this research retakes this challenge and proposes a framework that conceives scales as epistemological, relational, practical yet analytical categories. Multi scalar approaches have been used in social sciences, however I argue that scales are not only multiple co-existing (i.e. Howitt, 1998; Leitner and Miller, 2007), but also they interact, entangle and co-constitute each other (i.e. Swyngedouw, 1997). Scales are in this sense relational. However, it is necessary to deconstruct these into what can initially appear to be a vertical approach, in order to extrapolate a relational-scalar enactment, and to subsequently explore their entanglements. Thus, this research is interested in observing how by interacting, entangling and co-constituting each other, multiple scales shape the enactment of alternative spaces such as intentional communities and how alternative knowledges are produced in this process.

*Spatial, temporal and transcendental scales*

According to Herod (2011:14) "both idealists and materialists generally saw scales as areal in nature, with the scalar boundaries delimiting various spaces, serving as containers of particular parts of the landscape – regions, nation-states, etc". Scales are generally defined as geographical, yet often their boundaries are neither clear nor rigid. The most common scales are the national, the regional and the urban, but with the globalization phenomenon the local and the global have become popular ones. Smith (1992) expanded this to include the body, the home and the community. A few years later, Marston (2000) added the scale of household. The main argument underpinning

this wider understanding of scale was that scales are socially constructed, and specifically that "scale is constituted and reconstituted around relations of capitalist production, social reproduction and consumption" (Marston, 2000: 221). As discussed, this thesis analyses five scales for exploring the process of enactment: the individual, the community, the transcendental, the local and the global. The community, the local and the global are geographical scales and areal in nature, the individual is a temporal scale and the transcendental is a spiritual scale. Each is described briefly here.

Starting from geographical scales, the community "is conceived as the site of social reproduction" (Smith, 1992:70). Yet, the way the community scale is understood in this research is as sort of in-between Smith's categorizations of home and community scales. The community scale is conceived here as that site where the social activities, everyday practices, working activities but also "routine acts – eating, sleeping, sex, cleaning, childrearing" (Smith, 1992:68) are enacted. The community scale is used, in this research, to indicate the site of the intentional community, in which the borders are clearly recognisable and the territory is sharply defined.

The second geographical scale is the local one. It is used here to refer to the surrounding area where the community is located. It does not have sharply defined borders but what characterizes the area of the local scale is the shared cultural and historical context.

The last geographical scale is the global scale. According to Smith, "with the capitalist mode of production, the global scale is primarily a construct of the circulation of capital" (1992:76). Yet, here the global scale is understood as the scale of the transnational networks, where sites, specifically intentional communities are connected without necessarily sharing any historical, cultural and social affinity.

The individual scale is here used as a temporal scale. Drawing inspiration from Jarvis who has identified three main temporal scales in the development of cohousing (2011), in this research the individual scale is deemed as a temporal scale of individuals' life experiences. The boundaries of this scale are temporal rather than spatial, mostly focused on individual narratives before moving to the communities of Dh and TM.

The transcendental scale is neither temporal nor geographical, but rather spiritual. Howitt (2002) uses Levinas's philosophy and indigenous Australian work to propose a different conceptualisation of scales by combining time, space, place and scale. According to Howitt "[a] more relational concept of scale might allow a better understanding of the 'unthought, the unheard, the unseen' in socio-spatial experience

(2002:303). Howitt's paper is noteworthy because, drawing inspiration from the metaphor of the dreaming, he originally suggests an alternative view of scale that captures a more transcendental approach.

> The dreaming, as a scale metaphor, therefore, opens a window on the plurality that Levinas alludes to – the infinite within the immediate. It mediates relationship across space and time at vast scales, while retaining an embodiment and emplacement that is concrete, local and specific. (Howitt 2002: 302)

Howitt is the only scholar, to my knowledge, who seeks to engage with another 'kind' of scale: a scale that transcends spatiality and temporality. Yet although he originally contributes to the debate, his ideas lack empirical analysis. Howitt also identifies a gap within the geography discipline of considering this type of scales.

> Geographers have engaged enthusiastically with the challenges that arise from serious consideration of this spatial scale [the body], but have generally avoided shift to the metaphysical scale (the infinite), generally limiting their scope to global (cultural, economic) and planetary (physical, environmental) scale. (Howitt, 2002: 306)

Taking up this challenge, this research explores empirically the transcendental scale, arguing that it plays a key role in the enactment of spiritual heterotopias. Given that the transcendental scale has neither spatial nor temporal boundaries, following Howitt, it is necessary to start from the scale of the body.

This first part of the chapter has briefly discussed the existing debates on scales and claimed that this research deems scales as epistemological and relational, as analytical but also as practical categories. Furthermore, considering scales as social constructs, it has identified the necessity to investigate geographical scales (the community, the local and the global) but also the temporal scale (the individual) and the spiritual scale (the transcendental). Before starting the empirical investigation of each of these five scales, next section will set up the contexts for later facilitate the understanding of the enactment at multiple, related scales.

## 1.17  Contextualising

### 1.17.1  The Global Ecovillage Network

This thesis focuses on late 20th century developments and the present day communal movement, most notably the intentional communities that have emerged since the 1980s, that are typically identified as ecovillages. In the 1980s, Hildur Jackson (Denmark) and Ross Jackson (Canada) played an initial and key role in the creating of a network of communal sustainable practices. According to the Jacksons, it was a necessary cultural change, based on sustainable human settlements, one that was needed to tackle current environmental, economic and social challenges. The Jacksons set up the Gaia Trust in 1987. Since then, communities around the globe have connected and interacted with this shared vision in a number of ways. The timeline below summarises the first four meetings organised by the Gaia Trust.
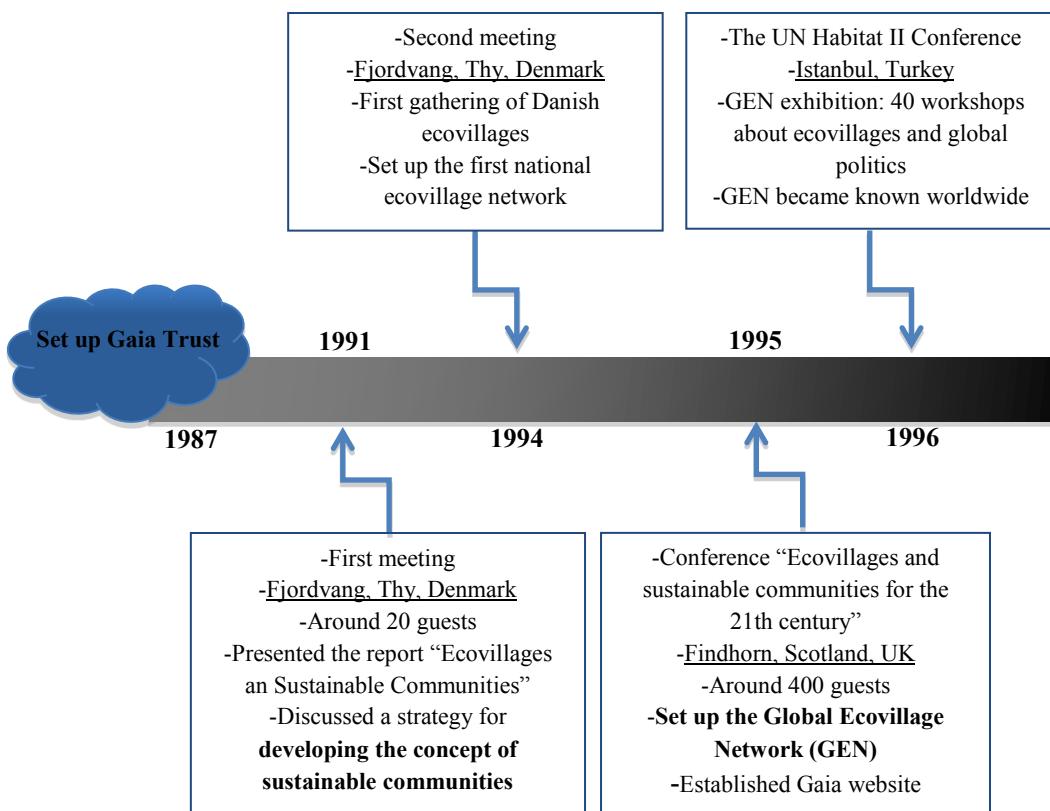


**Figure 4.1:** GEN first meetings timeline. Data collected from Gaia trust (Jackson, 1998; Jackson, 2004; Jackson and Jackson, 2004)

As illustrated above, the first meeting in Denmark coined the first definition of ecovillages. Afterwards, at the meeting in Findhorn (1995), GEN was set up with the aim, "to encourage the creation and preservation of sustainable settlements across the globe" (EDE document 1)[6].

Since its foundation in 1995, GEN has played a key role in considering and presenting ecovillages as part of a wider movement. For GEN, an "ecovillage is a human-scale settlement, consciously designed through participatory processes to secure long-term sustainability (EDE document 2). The main key points behind the GEN philosophy emerge from the GEN Words Cloud showed below (see figure 4.2).
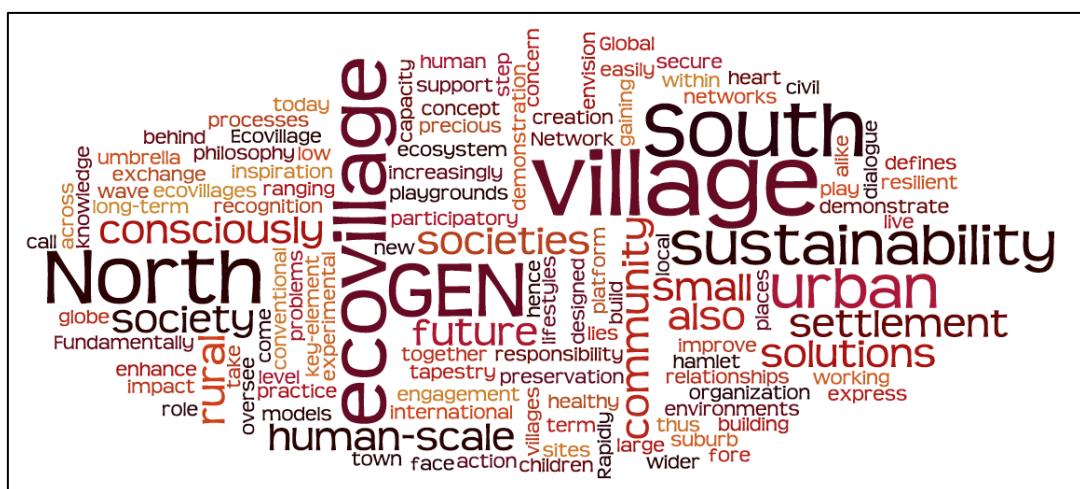


**Figure 4.2:** GEN words cloud (elaborated by the author with data collected during the EDE course 2012)

In addition to the key concepts shown above, such as ecovillage, sustainability and village, the words south and north also have a fundamental importance in GEN. Indeed, as an umbrella organisation, the main goal of GEN is to establish global partnerships between sustainable living projects by creating "a platform for North–North, South–North and South–South exchange" (EDE document 2). In so doing, during the three years following its foundation (1996–1999), GEN became GEN International (GEN-Int) and established three autonomous ecovillage networks:

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[6] See *Appendix H*

- ➢ Ecovillage Network of the Americas (ENA)
- ➢ Global Ecovillage Network Europe (GEN Europe): which initially incorporated also Africa Ecovillage Networks
- ➢ Global Ecovillage Network Asia and Oceania (GENOA)

GEN regions operate independently from GEN-Int, although they are strictly connected in terms of a common mission. They each have their own Council, Board and staff and two representatives from each GEN region belong to the GEN-Int board.

It is very difficult, if not impossible, to estimate how many communal projects are present in the world today. In 2002, Jackson and Svensson state that around 4,000–5,000 ecovillages exist, but he adds that this number varies according to the definition applied, and there could be as many as 15,000. The Fellowship for Intentional Communities (FIC), an organisation based in the US, reports around 25,000 communal projects in the world (Olivares, 2010). The numbers differ significantly according to the sources used and the parameters used to define them. The pie graph and the table presented below show ecovillages that were members of GEN in 2013.
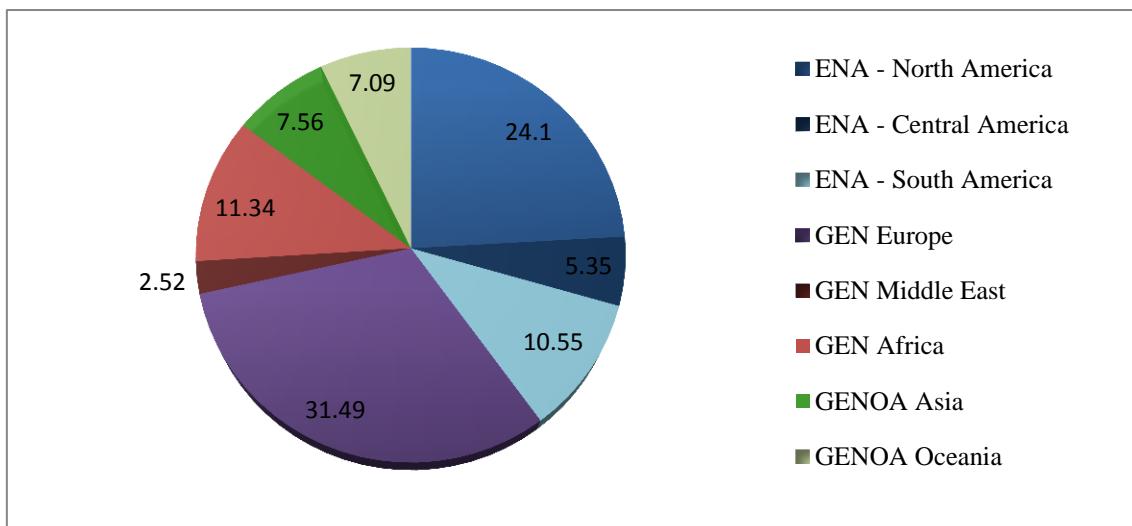


**Figure 4.3:** Percentages of GEN members divided by GEN sub-regions (elaborated by the author with data collected from Global Ecovillage Network, n.d.-c)

| GEN Regions | Total n. Ecovillages | Sub-regions | Total n. Ecovillages |
|---|---|---|---|
| ENA | 254 | North America | 153 |
| | | Central America | 67 |
| | | South America | 34 |
| GEN Europe/ Africa/Middle East | 288 | Europe | 200 |
| | | Africa | 72 |
| | | Middle East | 16 |
| GENOA | 93 | Asia | 48 |
| | | Oceania | 45 |

**Table 4.4:** Total number of GEN members (elaborated by the author with data collected from Global Ecovillage Network, n.d.-c)

GEN website counts in total 635 ecovillages in 2013. The pie chart shows the percentages of GEN members in each region and sub-region. ENA sub-regions are coloured in the tones of blue, GEN Europe/Middle East/Africa sub-regions in purple/red tones and GENOA for Asia and Oceania in green. The table reports the same values but the percentages are disclosed. It is necessary to point out that these are indicative numbers and that the numbers of GEN members are growing rapidly. With this in mind, the usefulness here is to help to understand the geographical trend which indicates that more than 50% of GEN ecovillages are located in the north, precisely 32% in Europe (32%) and 24% in North America.

The fact that 353 (comprising 153 in North America and 200 in Europe) out of 635 GEN ecovillages globally are located in northern countries opens up a new discussion about the ecovillage movement. Gaia Trust and, subsequently, GEN were set up in Europe. These numbers do not necessarily imply that there is more sustainable practice in the northern part of the globe, but rather that there are more northern projects that consciously engage with a global network. It might be because numerous communities in the global south are not aware of this 'network' enacted to create bridges between sustainable experiments at a global level or, even, because they are not interested in being part of one.

Nonetheless two new southern networks have emerged in the last two years. One is GEN-Africa, and the other is the Latin American CASA (*Consejo de Asentamientos Sustentables de las Américas* – Council of Sustainable Settlements of America). CASA, however, is atypical compared to the other ecovillage regional networks because it was established autonomously and independently from GEN-Int by representatives of

Central and South American communal experiences. CASA was created in January 2012 in an international communal gathering held in an ecovillage called Ecoaldea Atlantida, in Colombia. Its aim is to coordinate, support, represent and give visibility to sustainable settlements in Latin America (see Renace, n.d. and Christian, 2012). After this first meeting the communication among CASA members started through emails and Skype conversations and CASA planned a second official meeting in June 2012 in Rio de Janeiro to coincide with the "People's Summit at Rio+20 for Social and Environmental Justice". The outcome of the meeting held in Rio will be discussed in *Chapter 9* as part of the analysis of the global scale. The next section provides a review of the literature on GEN.

### 1.17.2  Studies on the Global Ecovillage Network

Ecovillages have been the subject of growing academic interest. Yet the expansion of GEN has largely been overlooked by social scientists. Most of the literature stems from GEN activists and ecovillagers such as Jackson and Svensson (2002), Christian (2003), Jackson and Jackson (2004), Bang (2005), Dawson (2006) and Joubert and Dregger (2015). There are also a number of MA and PhD theses that, albeit unpublished, provide interesting insights about GEN. For example, the geographer Santos Jr (2010) provides an updated contextualisation of the Brazilian Ecovillage Movement. It is useful in highlighting the main features of the ecovillage socio-territorial phenomena, however it risks being too ambitious in attempting a very wide detailed presentation. By investigating the concept of the "genuine ecovillage", he surveys 81 ecovillages and visited 20 between 2005 and 2008. He concludes his research focusing on TM community – the same case study presented here – where he had been living since the 1990s.

Another relevant unpublished work is provided by Avelino and Kunze (2009). Their paper, using transition management literature, investigates the transitional potential of GEN, particularly focusing on the relationship between 'niches' (ecovillages) and 'regimes' – defined as the most 'dominant' configuration that controls "the function of the social system and defends the status quo" (2009:3). Avelino and Kunze recognise that contemporary intentional communities differ from previous communes, arguing that the contemporary ecovillage movement is a "trans-national network of transition experiments" (2009:11) where ecovillages are not isolated identities but rather local niches connected through different scales (regional and global).

Among the few published works, Ergas (2010) considers ecovillages as part of a bigger social movement toward sustainable goals. Ergas's (2010) research is very similar to my project in terms of ethnographic approach, though she does not specifically refer to GEN. Liftin's study (2009) is perhaps the only one which focuses entirely on GEN and its holistic approach. Her more recent contribution (Liftin, 2014) instead provides an updated analysis of the ecovillage movement but does not focus on its enactment.

The Federation of Dh and TM Communitarian Foundation are two ecovillages that belong to GEN and, as explained in the methodology, are the two case studies of this thesis. The next section aims to set up their contexts.

### *1.17.3 The Federation of Damanhur*

*The local*

The Federation of Dh is situated in the region of Piedmont, north-west Italy, approximately 40 kilometres north of Turin and 14 kilometres from Ivrea. It is located in the subalpine geographical and historical area of Canavese and is predominantly located in the Valchiusella valley which is crossed by the river Chiusella. Dh does not occupy a homogenous and unified area: it is spread across several municipalities including Baldissero Canavese, Vidracco, Vistrorio, Issiglio, Cuceglio, Castellamonte and Foglizzo (see figure 4.4).
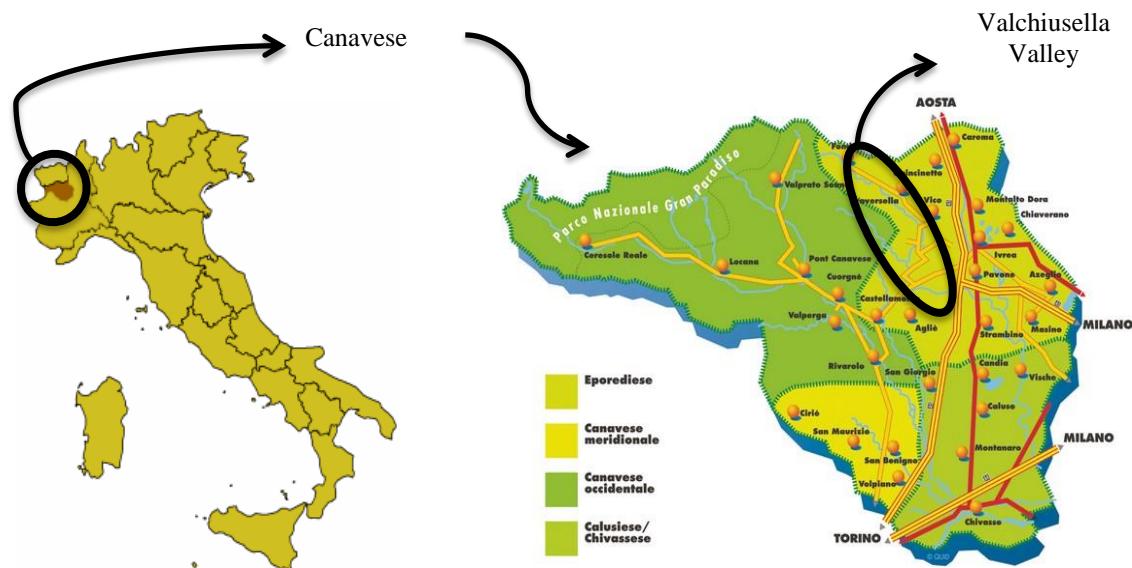


**Figure 4.4:** Italy**,** Canavese and Valchiusella Valley (elaborated by the author, 2014)

The main municipalities hosting Dh properties are Baldissero Canavese with 534 inhabitants (ISTAT, 2011) and Vidracco with 500 inhabitants (ISTAT, 2011). They are villages of the subalpine valley that, as with other Italian villages, have been affected by rural exodus and have suffered depopulation. From the 1920s inhabitants have migrated to the industrial cities, notably Turin, attracted by the employment offered by the Lignotto FIAT factory (*Fabbrica Italiana di Automobili Torino*) which started car production there in the early 1920s. Whilst Turin's population increased, the number of inhabitants in Vidracco decreased drastically, falling from approximately 500 inhabitants in 1921 to around 300 in 1951. Likewise the population of Baldissero Canavese fell by almost half (from approx. 800 in 1921 to 400 in 1960) (ISTAT, 2011).

Until the Second World War the main economic activities of the Valchiusella valley were agriculture and farming, with the mining industry also playing an important role in the area. During the 1950s the Canavese area was affected by further industrial development of Ivrea and surrounding areas. Specifically, the entrepreneurial phenomenon, led by Adriano Olivetti, played a fundamental economic and social role in Vidracco village and in the Valchiusella area (see Box 4.1).

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**Box 4.1. Adriano Olivetti's utopian project in the Canavese**

Adriano Olivetti was born 1901 in Ivrea, Piedmont. Thanks to Adriano, around 1925, his family business shifts from a handcraft enterprise to a mass production industry that became famous for producing the first Italian examples of typewriter (Cigliano, 2010). However, the Olivetti enterprise did not just become famous for its innovative technological products and systems, but also for the alternative and "new cultural paradigm" promoted (Berta, 1980: 8). Criticising the effects of industrialisation processes, Adriano Olivetti envisaged a modern democratic society where industries, rather than profit driven, served the communities and functioned as catalysts for the economic, social, cultural and urban development of the surrounding area (Astarita, 2008; Cigliano, 2010). Between 1942 and 1945 he wrote "*L'ordine politico delle comunità*" (The political order of the community) and developed the idea of the '*Comunità Concrete*' (Concrete communities). These were territorial units that combined administrative, political and economic levels and which could gradually become a means of moral and spiritual affirmation (Ossola, 2014: 17). Despite his political projects being unsuccessful at a national level − his party '*Movimento Comunità*' (community movement) won only one seat at the election in 1958 − his ideas of 'Concrete Communities' were further developed in Canavese (Melone, 2008). He is widely remembered as an example of a social entrepreneur and a utopian thinker.

In 1954 the I-RUR (*Istituto per il Rinnovamento Urbano e Rurale* – Institute for urban and rural regeneration) was set up with Adriano as the president. The institute aimed to improve the social and economic conditions of the Canavese, by promoting and supporting an integrative form of development, encouraging the enactment of social enterprises and cooperatives, and fighting unemployment and the rural exodus (Marotta, 2001; Melone and Rizzato, 2008; Cigliano 2010). One of the plants established by the I-RUR in 1955 was the Vidracco laboratory for the production of portable typewriters, which grew from an initial 31 employees to 150 in 1964 (Istituto Cena, n.d). During that decade, the majority of the population (both men and women) of the Valchiusella worked in the Olivetti factories and experienced the utopian phenomenon and the social care reserved for Olivetti employees. Olivetti's social experiments did not persist for long after his death in 1960, and although the Vidracco factory functioned until the early 1980s, it has now been closed for over 25 years (Merrifield, 1998).

Following de-industrialisation, the majority of people in the Valchiusella valley, and more generally in the Canavese, returned to agro-pastoral activities. The population of Vidracco and Baldissero Canavese remained stable in the 1960s and 1970s during the Olivetti phenomena and, interestingly, the population increased from 1981 directly as a consequence of Dh Federation.

*The transcendental*

The Federation of Dh is located in the Canavese and, more precisely, in the Valchiusella valley, in the same area where two decades ago the famous utopian Olivetti experiment took place. At the end of the 1970s the spiritual leader Oberto Airaudi, called Falco, chose the Canavese to establish an alternative spiritual community.

Falco was born in Balangero, in the North of Turin, in 1950 (he died in 2013). He was the dreamer, founder and spiritual leader of Dh. According to Damanhurians, when he was young he had a vision of a spectacular underground temple, and of a new civilization where inhabitants "enjoyed a meaningful existence in which all people worked for the common good" (Ananas and Pesco, 2009:5). In 1975 Falco, with others, set up the "Orus Centre" in Turin to do research in the field of parapsychology, esoterics, and pranotherapy (Berzano, 1998; Introvigne, 1999b).

Despite the Catholic religious background that characterizes Italian culture, since the l850s Turin had become known as "the home of many occult and spiritualist groups" and often called the "City of the Devil" due to its hostility towards the Catholic Church

(Introvigne, 1999b:185). In this alternative context, while carrying out different spiritual and esoteric experimentation, Falco also aimed to find a suitable location to build this new community and its temple. For him, that right place had to be in correlation with the "Synchronic lines", or energetic lines of communications which for Damanhurians are explained thus:

> Energy rivers that surround the earth and link it to the universe where the great forces present in the cosmos are able to catalyse. These lines can modify events and carry ideas, thoughts and moods in their flow, thereby influencing all living creatures. They are the communication pathways of the universe. (Ananas *et al.*, 2006:7)

According to Damanhur Guide (Ananas *et al.*, 2006:7), Falco and his fellow researchers completed a map of these Lines of Energy, discovering that in the Valchiusella valley, near Turin, there was an energetic active point where four Synchronic lines met (see figure 4.5). There they decided to locate Dh community and to build their temple (Ananas and Pesco, 2009:12).
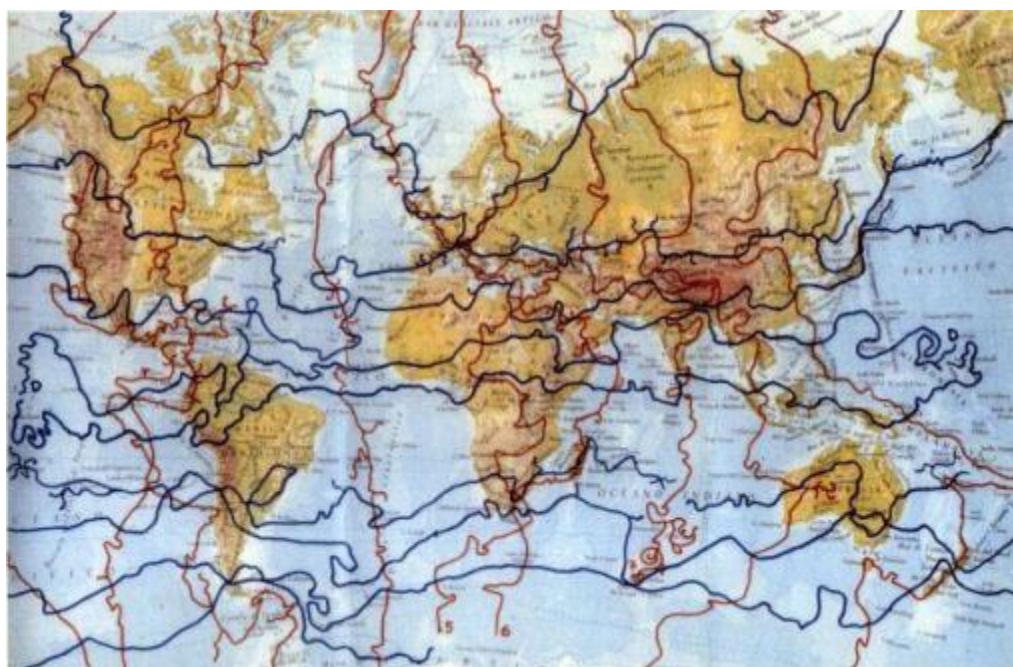


**Figure 4.5:** Map of Synchronic lines (Damanhur, n.d.)

In 1977 the group purchased land in Baldissero Canavese and a farmhouse in Vidracco. A settlement was established and named after the Egyptian city Damanhur which means City of the Sun (Berzano, 1998). On 26th December 1979, the Dh community was

inaugurated (Introvigne, 1999b). In the same period the project of the underground Temple began a few kilometres away from Vidracco village. The Damanhurians built in secret for more than 10 years, until 1992, when an ex-Damanhurian citizen informed the local authorities (Del Re and Macioti, 2013). Having built without the permissions required by the Italian regulations, Damanhurians went through legal procedures until 1996 when a court case eventually found in favour of Dh. With authorisation for the Temple of Humankind, Damanhurians also got permission to expand it (Introvigne, 1999b). In 2006, the Temple occupied 6,000 cubic meters on five underground levels, it counted around "150 meters of corridors, 400 square meters of paintings, 350 square meters of wall and the floor mosaics" (Ananas *et al.*, 2006: 9). The Temple is now open to the public and has become a tourist destination attracting visitors from all over the world (see figure 4.6).



**Figure 4.6:** Structure of the Temple of the Humankind in Dh (Damanhur, n.d.)

The temple is both the heart and the symbolic representation of Dh spiritual philosophy. This does not correspond with any established religion. Scholars tend to consider it as a new religious and/or spiritual movement (Berzano, 1998; Introvigne, 1999b; Meijerink, 2003; Del Re and Macioti, 2013) and Dh does have innovative and alternative features that are combined with Egyptian and the Celtic traditions (Berzano, 1998; Introvigne, 1999b). Besides building the Temple of Humankind which took around three decades,

in their 40 years of existence Damanhurians have been engaged in the construction of an alternative community in the Valchiusella valley.

*The community*

The first area purchased in Baldissero Canavese, renamed *Damjl*, is now a multi-functional Dh territory. It is comprised of a reception, welcome centre, guest house, Open Temple, school, some of the Dh residents' houses, gardens, spirals, menhirs, and Dh sculptures (see figure 4.7). Over the years, as the number of residents has increased, Dh started to acquire extra properties, purchasing lands and buildings in new areas. Some of these areas are used to house the increasing population while others are used for agricultural and pastoral purposes and for economic activities. One of the most significant acquisitions was of the old Olivetti factory of Vidracco in 2004. The building, after having been carefully renovated, has become the Damanhurian commercial centre, called *Dh Crea* (see figure 4.8 and 4. 9). This building houses a restaurant, bar, grocery store, health centre, art gallery and insurance office among other things.
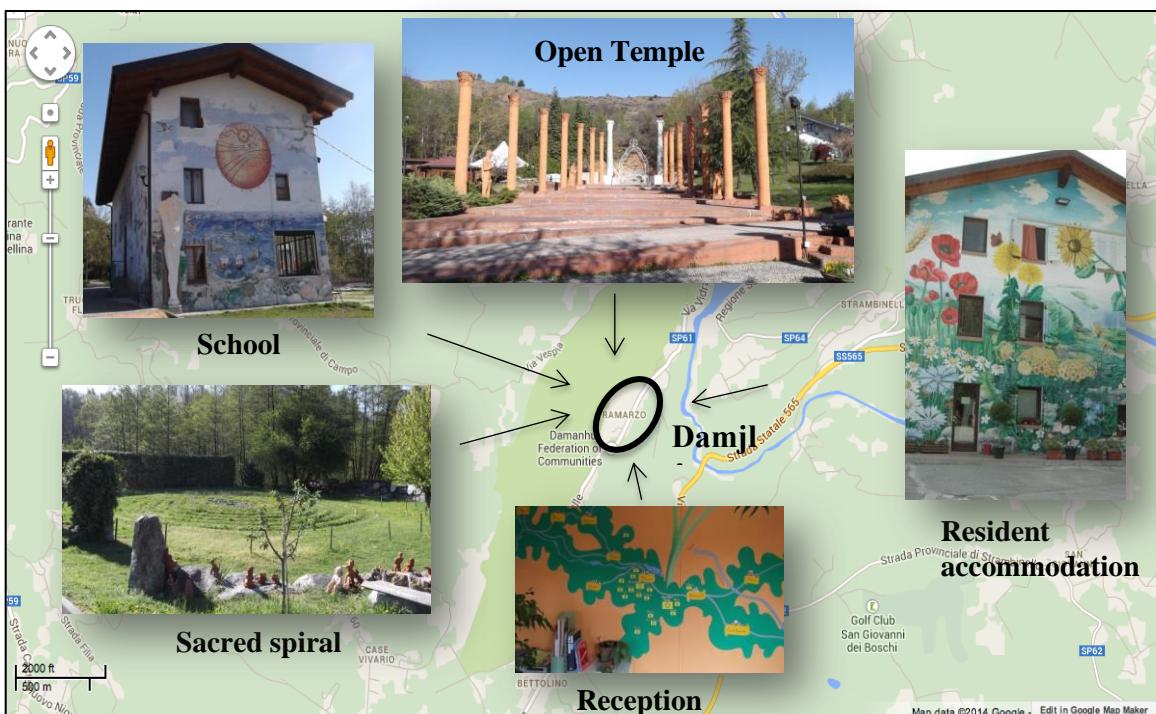


**Figure 4.7:** *Damjl* area in Dh (Google Map; elaborated by the author with pictures collected in 2012)

**Figure 4.8:** Vidracco town and *Dh Crea* commercial Centre bottom left (author, 2012)



**Figure 4.9:** Previous Olivetti factory and now *Dh Crea* commercial Centre (author, 2012)

Figure 4.10 shows the Dh map. It indicates *Damjl* area with the Damanhurian welcome centre (Dh symbol), the commercial centre *Dh Crea* (yellow bag symbol) and the Temple of Humankind (green temple symbol). The blue indicator symbol represents the

residential blocks. The map reveals how Dh is spread across 400 hectares of the valley (Del Re and Macioti, 2013) over several municipalities of the Canavese area rather than occupying a clear discrete plot of land.
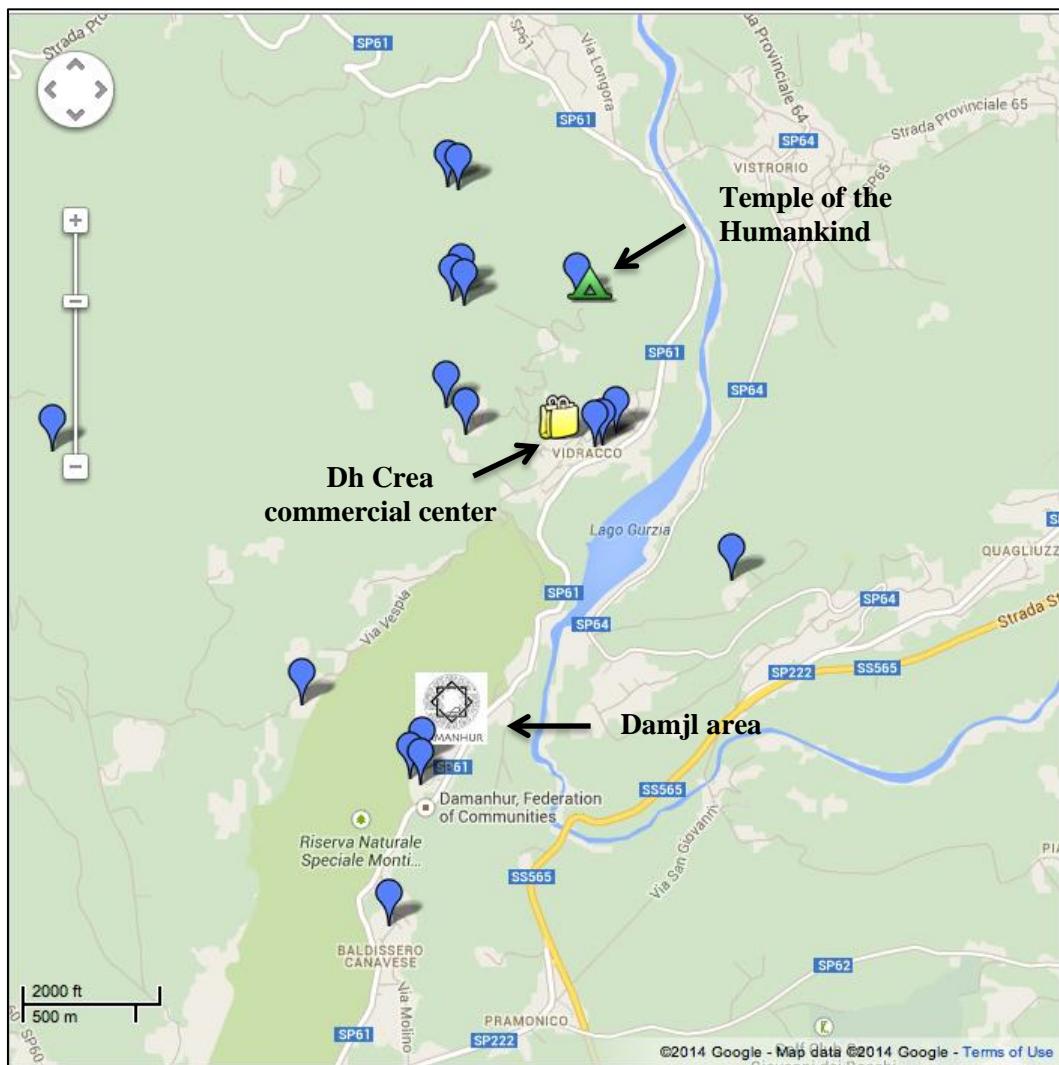


**Figure 4.10:** Dh map (Google map and elaborated by the author, 2014)

It is difficult to contextualise and present the Dh community in a short section and it is not my intention to present a full description or overview (see Merrefield 1998; Berzani 1998 and Del Re and Macioti, 2013). My aim is to provide a brief context, which I consider essential to understanding Dh and relevant to the analysis presented in the following chapters.

Dh is established on four main pillars called bodies: 1.the school of meditation; 2.the social body; 3.the game of life and 4. Tecnarcato (see table 4.2).

111

| Dh bodies | Description |
|---|---|
| The School of Meditation | "All full citizens are initiates of the School of Meditation, which is an individual and collective path aimed at connecting every human being with the divine, uniting the common sense of all traditions. It is an inner discipline towards knowledge and self-empowerment through a ritual connection with the sacred." |
| The social body | "Some thirty years of community living and experimentation have resulted in a social system that has proved highly successful in preserving the Damanhurian dream." |
| The game of life | "An elected group of citizens have the responsibility to organise often large scale games that will sometimes upset the equilibrium of social situations, but which break through habitual barriers of rigidity and conformity that hold back most personal and community development." |
| Tecnarcato | "It is the individual path of refinement. It provides each person with tools and practices that help in this process towards the awakening of their inner divinity." |

**Table 4.2:** The four Bodies of Dh (Ananas *et al.,* 2006)

The social body is the one that has evolved and transformed the most in Dh. Nowadays there is a decentralized structure where the social body is divided into smaller social units called *nuclei* (nucleus-community) which collectively combine to create the Regions. Consequently the intentional community of Dh prefers to be identified as a Federation of Communities. Dh Federation has it is own Constitution (Dh website, n.d) first produced in 1981 and revised several times since (Introvigne, 1999b). The latest version was produced in 2007 and is accessible on the Dh website in Italian and English (Dh website). The box 4.2 summarises part of Dh government using data collected from April to June 2012 and elaborated by myself.

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**Box 4.2: Damanhurian Government**

The Federation is governed by three Kings/Queens Guide, elected each 6 months by Dh citizens through the School of Meditation. They represent the executive power of Dh and take strategic economic, political and social decisions on behalf of the whole federation. These decisions involve the acquisition of territory, partnerships with communal networks, and decisions related to their political party '*Con te per il Paese*' (With you, for the Country). In addition, they have legislative power and can change the rules inside the federation. However, if Kings/Queens Guide changes a rule that is against the Dh Constitution, the College of Justice stops the Kings/Queens Guide and prevents such laws becoming enacted. Therefore, the college of Justice acts as judiciary, protecting Dh Constitution. It also operates to resolve conflict between citizens.

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Dh has a complementary currency called *Credito* and its own newspaper, QDQ. Dh has established a nursery and kindergarten for children aged 0 to 6 years, a primary school (*scuole elementari*) for 6 to 11 year olds and a middle school (*scuole medie inferiori*) for 11 to 14 year olds. In 2012, according to the school director, there were 10 children in the nursery and kindergarten, 16 in the primary school and 18 in the middle school, a total of 44. The Dh school teaches the main modules of the Italian Curriculum but it also includes some additional courses such as building ecological houses, the science of the self, techniques of personal growth, and Vedic mathematic. As well as an alternative school, Dh has established an alternative medical system, called *Crea Salute* (Crea Health) locate in *Dh Crea*, where it is possible to be treated with either alternative therapies or conventional medicine.

*The individual*

Dh has four types of citizenship: residents (A and B) and non-residents (C and D). The difference between an A and B citizen is based on an individual's financial status, essentially on whether they contribute all, or part, of their personal assets when becoming a citizen. This in turn influences the voting weight during internal elections. Citizens types C and D do not live in Dh. The former belong to the school of meditation and while the latter do not, they have an allegiance to Dh and a connection with the principles and ideals (Merrifield, 2006). All four categories are referred to as *Popolo di Damanhur* (people of Dh).

Over the decades, the number of Dh citizens or *Popolo di Damanhur* has increased steadily from 15 people in 1976, 190 in 1987, 450 in 1995 (Barzano, 1998), 600 at the beginning of 2000s (Peters and Stengel, 2005) to approximately 1000 later 2000s (Olivares, 2010). The majority of Dh citizens are drawn from European heritage middle classes and they are predominantly Italians. However during the past decade Dh has counted an increasing numbers of new international citizens, predominantly Germans.

### 1.17.4  Studies on Damanhur

Dh has acquired an increasing international profile and over 37 years has been studied by several scholars and students (see Metcalf, 1999; Meijerink, 2003). Within the Italian context, Cardano (1997), Berzano (1998), Introvigne  (1999a, 1999b) and Macioti (2009) and Del Re and Macioti (2013) have made seminal contributions to our knowledge of the community, describing and analysing the Dh history, organisation,

and philosophy, and generally following Dh through its development. Furthermore, Merrified wrote a book in 1998 which became very popular because it provides, in English, a complete overview of the community. Dh has also been strongly criticised by Del Vecchio and Pitrelli (2011) for being a cult. Popular media has also reported very negative views on Dh, as depicted in the documentary by Bellano (2012) which highlights illegal activities carried out by the community. A number of web sites and blogs serve explicitly to denigrate the Dh federation, some of them written by former citizens (i.e. Damanhur alla rovescia, n.d.). Del Re and Macioti's contribution (2013) offers an interesting, up to date analysis of the different views that affect the Dh federation and the judicial cases that the community went through.

### 1.17.5  The Communitarian Foundation of Terra Mirim

*The local*

TM Communitarian Foundation is located in the Federal State of Bahia, Brazil. It occupies a site in the Simões Filho Municipality, in the Metropolitan Region of Salvador. It is less than 10 km from Simões Filho and approximately 30 km from the centre of Salvador (figures 4.11). TM land is crossed by the Itamboatá River which gives its name to the surrounding valley. The Itamboatá valley has recently been affected by an intense process of industrialisation, which almost destroyed the original Atlantic rainforest (*Mata Atlantica*) that covered this area; only 164 species of Atlantic forest flora remain, and several animal species are endangered (Santos Jr, 2010: 337).
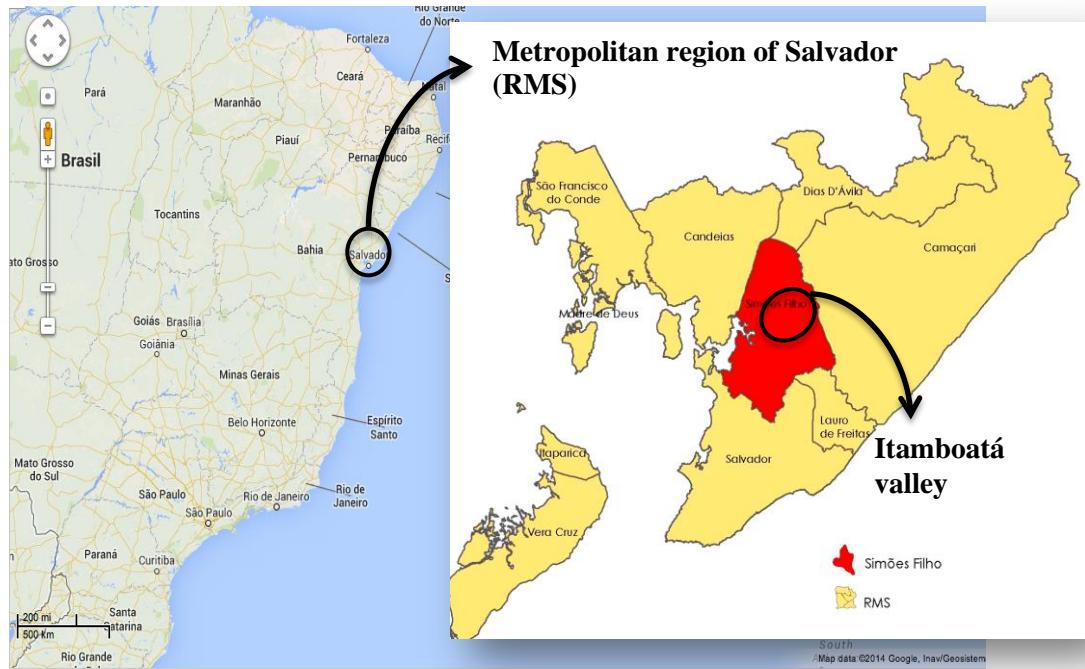
**Figure 4.11:** Brazil, Metropolitan region of Salvador and Itamboatá Valley (elaborated by the author, 2014)

Before the arrival of the Portuguese colonizers in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, historically these lands were occupied by the indigenous population Tapuia (Riberiro, 2005; Santos Jr, 2010). However, the colonization process has strongly marked, impacted and transformed the history of this area. For instance, in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries the lands of Simões Filho, originally called Água Comprida district, were predominantly used for the cultivation of sugar cane to satisfy the requirement of the Portuguese Empire's economic demand (Santos Jr, 2010).

> The demands of a sugar plantation economy made Bahia one of the major importers of African slaves during the colonial period. By 1724 it was not uncommon to find that in the parishes in the sugar zone, 60 to 70 percent of the population was slave. (Schwartz, 1974: 607)

In 1808, the district of Bahia counted 50,451 whites; 1,463 Indians; 104,285 free or manumitted blacks and mulattos and 93,115 slaves, both Black and Mulattos (Reis, 1993: 4-5). In 1888 the Golden Law which abolished slavery in Brazil was passed. Subsequently several Quilombos communities were created by groups of ex-slaves in the Itamboatá valley that still exist today (see box 4.3).

> **Box 4.3: *Quilombos* communities**
>
> The word *Quilombos* (or *Quilombolas*) is used in Brazil to identify rural black settlements of escaped slaves (Reis and Gomes, 1996; Amorim and Germani 2005). According to Almeida (2002 in Souza, 2008: 3), Brazilian legal documents dating from 1740 identified as defining features of the Quilombos community: a minimum quantity of fugitives (generally 5); geographical isolation; habitual dwelling or ranch/farm; and, self-sufficiency. The abolition of slavery in 1888 with the Golden Law saw the disappearance of the term 'Quilombos' from formal documents, although it was still used in informal context. Since then, former Quilombos communities were not legally recognised, nor were they entitled to their own land, which was often 'legitimately' occupied by other groups (Leite, 2000). Therefore, the afro descendants, called libertos, were continually removed from their settlements, and affected by various forms of racism, violence and segregation. Quilombos communities were, even after the abolition of slavery, spaces of conflict and rebellion where generations of afro descendants fought to maintain their illegitimate lands spaces (Reis, 1996; Leite, 2000; Amorin and Germani, 2005). A century later, the word Quilombos reappeared in 1988 in the Brazilian Federal Constitution with the aim to recognise the rights for the "remaining communities of Quilombos" to own their land (Souza 2008). Despite 387 Quilombos communities existing in Bahia, only 24 have sought to reclaim their land (Amorin and Germani, 2005: 803).

There are approximately 8 "remaining" Quilombos communities in the Itamboatá Valley, yet only two of them have been officially recognised (Pitanga de Palmares and Dandá). Moreover, at the beginning of the 20th century the valley belonged to a single owner, known as Coronel Teixeira, and the majority of people that lived in the area, including ex-slaves, were working for him in the plantations (Silveira, 2009 in Santos Jr, 2010). It was a hybrid and mixed rural population involved predominantly in subsistence economies (Silveira, 2009 in Santos Jr, 2010). However, in the 1960s the Teixeira's farm passed to his heirs and the land of Itamboatá started to be fragmented and sold. With the commodification of the valley, regional economic development strategies saw intensive industrialisation take place, which resulted in the installation of the Industrial Centre of Aratu and the Petrochemical Complex of Camaçari. Working in the industries became a major attraction for the rural workers of the poor area of Bahia, leading to an intense and disordered growth of the urban area (Silveira 2009, in Santos Jr, 2010). Simões Filho became a dormitory town registering a rapid increase in population which nowadays numbers 129,964 (IBGE: n.d.). By 2000, only the 10% of Simões Filho population were living in the rural area spread over the nine rural

communities of the Itamboatá valley[7] (Sampaio, 2011). One of these is TM, the only intentional community, and the other 8 are 'remaining' Quilombos communities.

The industrialisation and the regional economic strategies of the metropolitan region of Salvador, although generating an increase of the PIL, have not generated positive ecological, economic and social impacts for these areas (Porto and Carvalho, 2001; Reis, 2007 in Santos Jr, 2010). These intense processes of anthropization adversely affected the environment, contributing to the devastation of the Atlantic rainforest in the Itamboatá valley. Furthermore, pre-existing problems of segregation and exclusion have been reinforced (Porto and Carvalho, 2001). In Simões Filho the 43, 06% of the per capita household monthly income is at less than half of the minimum national wage, compared to 28.7% in Salvador according to the Census 2000 (IBGE, n.d.). Even though the latter percentage is still high, the city of Salvador does not reach the same levels of poverty as the metropolitan areas.

Moreover, according to the Map of Violence, based on data provided by the Ministries of Justice and Health (Waiselfisz, 2012), Simões Filho city has registered the highest murder rate in Brazil for three consecutive years. The city, called the Capital of Death, had an average of 146 murders per 100,000 inhabitants between 2008 and 2010, almost six times greater than the Brazilian national average (26.2 per 100,000) and more than twice that of the most violent country in the world (El Salvador, 71 murders per 100 000 inhabitants) (*ibid*). It is in this troubled context that the Communitarian Foundation of TM was born.


*The transcendental*

In the 1980s, the psychologist and natural therapist Alba Maria was living with her family in the *Fazenda Mirim*, a farm that occupied approximately 8,5 hectares of land in the Itamboatá valley. Mirim farm was located in the rural area, a few kilometres from the urban centre of Simões Filho. One day, during one of her meditations, Alba Maria had a vision of many people from around the world living in Mirim land. Santos Jr, charting the origins of the community, specifies the importance of the 'vision' in shamanism. He explains how the vision is a way for the Shaman to channel a transcendental spiritual dimension obtained through an alterate state of consciousness

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[7] Starting from km 01 of the highway BA 093, these nine rural communities are Santa Rosa, Oiteiro, Jardim Renatao, Convel, Terra Mirim, Guaíba, Dandá, Palmares and Pitanga de Palmares (Sampaio, 2011)

(Santos Jr 2000). The Shaman is considered the "Mentor", the "Wiseman", the "person that knows" (Sampaio, 2011).

In 1990 Alba María started to organise shamanic and healing workshops, both in Salvador and at the Mirim farm, attracting the interest of a lot of people in the area. Santos Jr explains that during these workshops Alba María was sharing her vision and presenting her dream to create a space in which to develop an integrative ecology, awaken the consciousness of the human being, promote self-knowledge and to support a sustainable communal development whilst taking care of the wellbeing of the natural environment (2010: 343–344).

During the 1990s, TM was transformed from a farm into a shamanic community. Although it was guided by the shaman Alba María's intuitions, decisions were taken collaboratively (Santos Jr, 2010).

> There was not an established plan of what shape the ecovillage would have taken. But we try to follow, through meditations and rituals, a 'Greater Plan', an order, that for its members was beyond a rational and objective understanding of reality. (Santos Jr, 2010:344)

Despite TM accepting people from different religions and/or with different beliefs, the spiritual foundation of the community is shamanism. Shamanic tradition can be dated back to the early prehistoric ages (Eliade, 1964). Winkelman (2010:2) says

> Shamanism, humanity's most ancient spiritual and healing tradition, has re-emerged in contemporary societies' religious, spiritual, and healing practices and consciousness traditions. Although the precise basis and the nature of shamanism have often been ambiguous, it has broadly recognized as a primordial, natural form of healing and modification of consciousness, a human heritage with continued relevance for today's world.

The shamanism adopted by Alba María and TM regards Nature as the mentor and is expressed as a form of devotion to the Mother Goddess (*Deusa Mãe*) and the four elements of Water, Fire, Air and Earth. TM residents have built four temples, each one devoted to one of the four elements (see figure 4.12).

**Figure 4.12:** The Temples of the four elements in Terra Mirim (author, 2012)

According to Santos Jr (2010), in TM the earth is considered as the sacred matrix that supports physical and spiritual life. Whilst the centrality of the Mother Goddess gives a specific female dimension to the shamanism of TM, Alba describes it not as a gender-oriented shamanism but rather one that stimulates and works with those nominally female qualities, such as intuition, that exist in both genders. Based on this spiritual shamanic foundation, TM has evolved into an intentional shamanic community called by residents a *Centro de Luz* (Centre of Light) in the Itamboatá valley.

*The community*

In 1992 Terra Mirim Foundation, a non-profit institution, was formally established as part of Mirim farm, a land of 2.5 hectares donated by Alba María and her partner (Bissolotti and Santiago, 2004; Santos Jr 2010). In these first years, TM was a space dedicated to the development of shamanic workshops, generally held over the

weekends. At the same time, the area was reforested and the space adapted for the new communal purposes (Bissolotti and Santiago, 2004).

The original family house was converted into an administration office, reception, library, community dining hall and kitchen (Bissolotti and Santiago, 2004). According to Santos Jr (2010), the chicken coop was converted into an office specifically to work on studies and projects for the environment, called 'Environmental space' (*Ambiental*). The stockyard was turned into the Art House (*Casa das Artes*) where some of the community activities are held (figure 4.13).



**Figure 4.13:** Terra Mirim Art House (source: author 2012)

The early years also saw construction of the temples (Meditation temple, Temple of Masters, and the temples of Water, Air, Fire and Earth) and the *Casa do Acolhimento* (welcome house), where members' accommodation was initially located. In 1996, a group of people moved to live at TM and a residential community started to take place (Santos Jr 2010) with new accommodation being built, such as the *Chalets* in front of the lake. After a few years some residents started to build their individual houses in the adjacent lands and three residential areas (block houses) have arisen (figures 4.14 and 4.15). Nowadays *Casa do Acolhimento* and *Chalets* are reserved for visitors and volunteers.

Colmeia
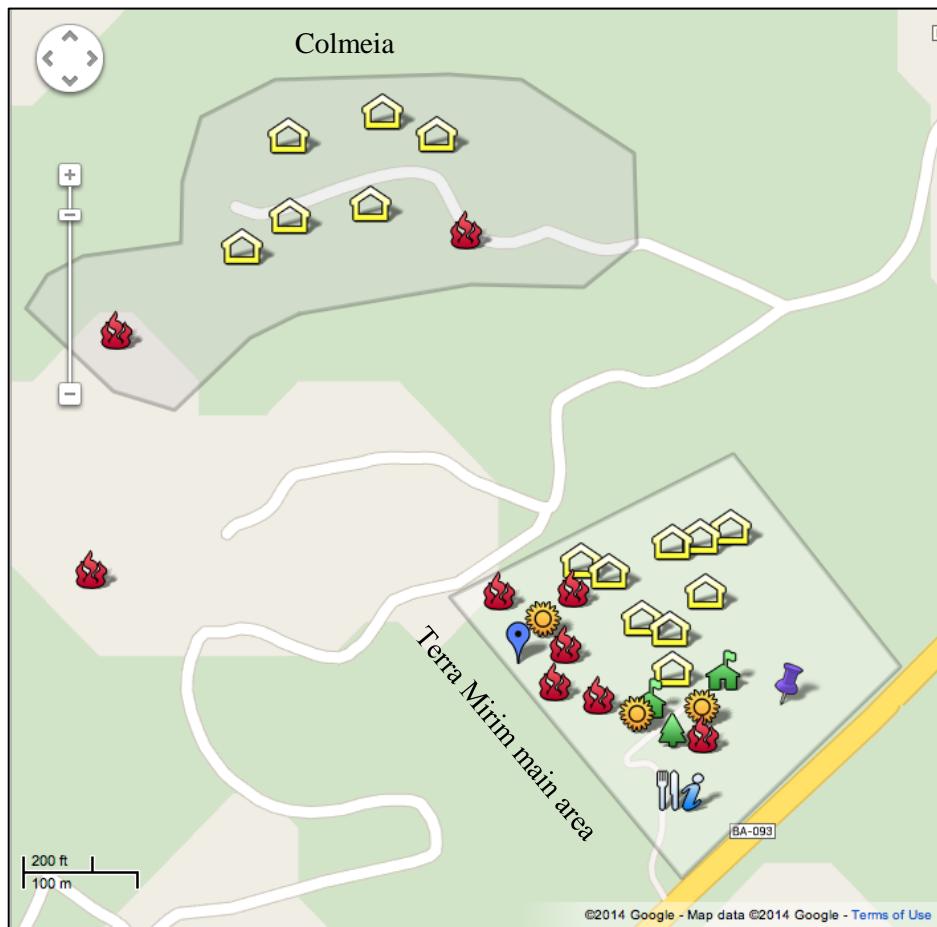
| | |
|---|---|
| *i* | Terra Mirim Foundation (administration office, reception, library) |
| 🍴 | Community dining hall |
| ⌂ | Resident accommodation |
| ☀ | Community places |
| 🔥 | Temples and Sacred Spaces |
| 📌 | School |
| 🌲 | Environmental Space |
| 🏠 | Visitor accommodation |
| 📍 | Massage centre |

**Figure 4.14:** Terra Mirim lands (Google Map; elaborated by the author with pictures collected in 2012)

**House of the Sun**

*Casa do Acolhimento* **(Visitor accommodation)**

**Temple of Masters**

**Environmental Space**

**Community dining hall**

**Terra Mirim Foundation (administration office, reception, library)**
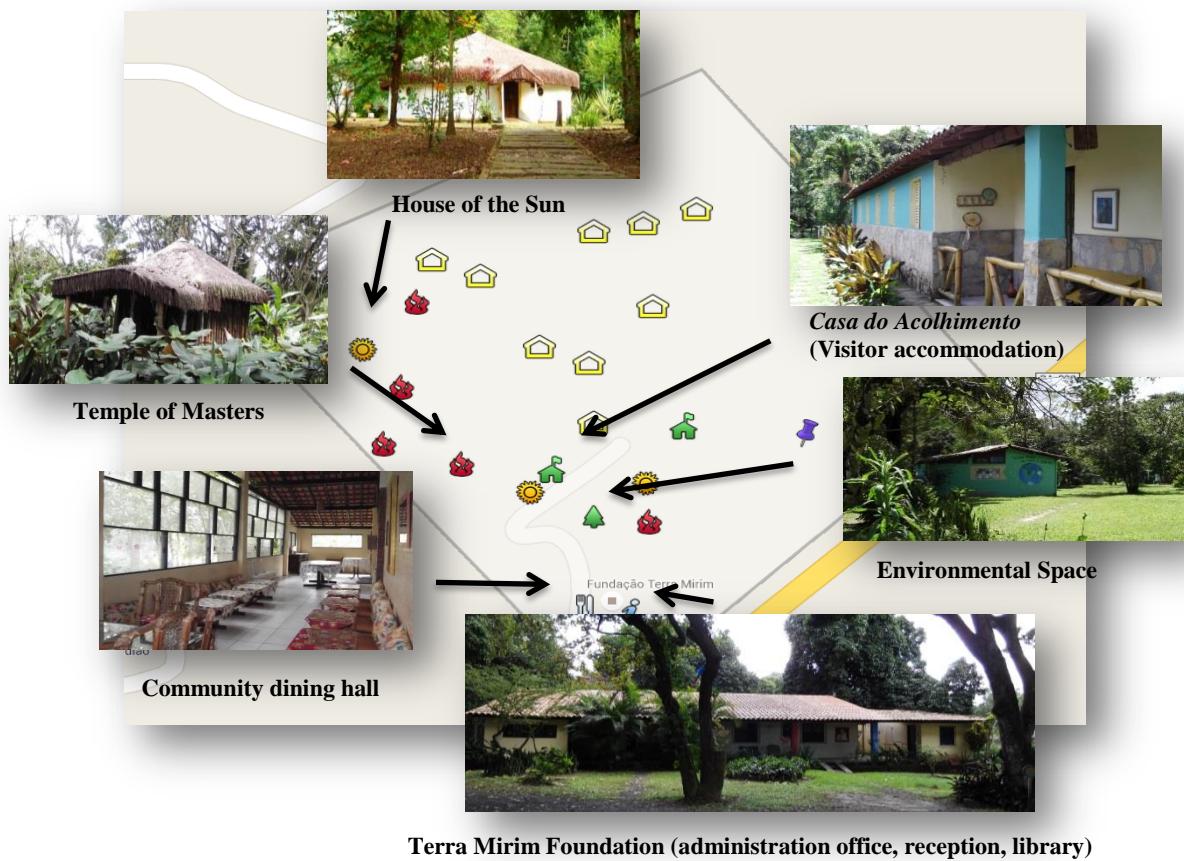
**Figure 4.15:** Terra Mirim main area (Google Map; elaborated by the author with pictures collected in 2012)

In 2003, another piece of land, called Colmeia, was purchased by some of the members and friends of TM, at walking distance from the community area. This area was bought for agricultural purposes and environmental conservation, and it has also become another residential area after a few members decided to build their houses there. In 1999, the Ecologic school was created to educate children of TM residents and during the following years the school evolved into an educational centre for the valley reaching 110 children and teenagers in 2007 (Santos Jr, 2010).

TM is a Communitarian Foundation and the foundation is the legal body that represents the community. The Foundation has its own statute that is updated according to the evolution of the community. It was last updated in 2008 and it is structured as follows (Santos Jr, 2010)

1. Immaterial bodies: Master Shaman and Circle of the Ancients
2. Strategic bodies: Trustee board and Supervisory board
3. Executive bodies: Superintendence; Executive board and Management areas (Administration and Finance; Environment; Participatory Host; Art and Culture; Communication; Nutrition; Education).

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At the same time the foundation also has its own projects and activities that partially involve the residents of the community. For Sampaio (2011), community and foundation are the two faces of the same movement. The former represents the shamanic community while the latter is its institutional embodiment.

*The individual*

During its two decades of existence TM has passed through different stages. Some of the founders have left and new people have arrived. Initially all the residents were Brazilian and predominantly from Bahia. Nowadays permanent residents come from other parts of Brazil and also other countries such as Germany, Portugal, Estonia and Lebanon. TM is attracting more interest worldwide and each year more foreigners come to TM and experience the communal shamanic lifestyle. There are approximately 25 permanent residents with a significant and relevant number of others who live in the community for a few months during the year. It is significant that 80% of TM residents are women. The feminine shamanic approach developed by Alba María has been particularly attractive for women and they are, therefore, the ones that lead the community. TM residents came from very different cultural backgrounds, yet are generally from the white middle class. The majority of the residents have got a university degree and some of them also have postgraduate qualifications (Santos Jr, 2010).

### 1.17.6  Studies on Terra Mirim

TM has been studied by its own residents engaged in postgraduate courses such as Santos Jr, who used TM as a case study in both his Masters dissertation and PhD thesis in Human Geography (2010) He presents a clear and detailed synthesis of TM history and organisation, touching upon the social, economic, spiritual and environmental dimensions of the ecovillage. Furthermore, TM has been studied by Sampaio, a lawyer expert in sustainability who did a MA thesis about ecological sustainability (2011) and Bissolotti (2004) for her MA postgraduate dissertation in Sustainable Architecture.

The second half of this chapter has provided a context for the communal movement focusing on the recent evolution of GEN. Afterwards, Dh and TM have been contextualised in the sub-sections: local, transcendental, community and individual. However, for logical reasons the exposition of the findings follows a reverse order: it

starts with the individual and ends with the global scale. From now on, it remains to engage in the empirical investigations of these intentional heterotopias.

# The individual: Discovering personal journeys

As mentioned in the literature review, prior studies have noted the importance of researching motives and rationales behind people's decisions to create, or to join, intentional communities. Results have shown that these decisions are often due to the desire to create a better world (Metcalf, 1996). In particular, these communities offer spaces of protest against contemporary society (Kanter, 1972; Lockyer, 1998; Zablocki, 1980); sites where alternative lifestyles are experimented with (Dawson, 2006) and sites where forms of ethics are performed (Bohill, 2010). However, far too little attention has been paid to what happens to people before they move to the intentional communities. In this chapter, I argue that more attention should be paid to the biographical triggers for such life-changing decisions. Drawing inspiration from Foucault's analysis of heterotopic spaces, this chapter investigates whether interviewees have experienced any sort of crisis – using the Foucauldian terms – and whether this is related to their decision to move to the community. Thus, the first part of the chapter will explore personal journeys; in particular life-changing experiences lived by the respondents before moving to Dh and TM. The second part of the chapter investigates how and when residents have encountered the communities of Dh and TM, and it uncovers the role of intentions and desires to join such places. By answering the call of an unintentional utopianism (Garforth, 2009), this chapter aims to understand if utopian practices and, more generally, the enactment of alternative spaces, are linked to unintended or accidental events. Thus, this chapter investigates the individual scale, understood here as a temporal scale, to explore how such individuals' stories affect, shape and enact the community. The work of Gloria Anzaldúa will guide the analysis by unpacking the different stages of the respondents' journeys. It also allows for further exploration into how the spiritual dimension, generally excluded by academia, affects people's journeys.

## 1.18 Heterotopias of crisis or deviation?

### 1.18.1 *"Arrebatos" & crisis*

According to Foucault, heterotopias can be divided into heterotopias of crisis or deviation depending on whether the subjects are living through a period of transition, or of not fitting in- feeling outcast (Foucault, 1986). A relevant case of heterotopia of crisis

could be found in the story of Clusia. Clusia is a 25-year-old Brazilian woman. She visited TM 6 years ago while on a professional internship with the TM Foundation (FTM). For various reasons she lost contact with the community after the internship finished. While recounting her story, Clusia explained how the death of her father evoked a powerful shift inside herself. As well as feeling grief, she felt responsible for what happened to her father. This brought her to a period of extreme suffering and depression where she felt that she could not '*hear*' herself any more (Clusia, woman, 25, TM). During the following months, Clusia could not find any sort of exit from feelings of guilt and depression. She worked for a while, she started language courses but this did not alleviate her condition.

> *After 3 months I finished the university, my father passed away. Since then I started to feel very guilty and still I feel guilty in part. This is because I focused so much on my studies for the university and I spent so much time outside the house that I couldn't pay attention to the health of my father. My father was having a complicated situation at work. I had the feeling that he was depressed, but I didn't have the certainty. He was not feeding himself properly and I didn't manage to pay attention to that… I felt very bad, very bad. After 6 months of the death of my father I had an expansion of consciousness. … Everything that Alba María taught me in that period, I managed to understand and comprehend. (Clusia, woman, 25, TM)*

The work of the chicana scholar, Anzaldúa, is relevant to understand Clusia's story. Anzaldúa introduces the concept of *arrebato* as the first step of the 'Path of *Conocimiento*'.

> Every *arrebato* – a violent attack, rift with a loved one, illness, death in the family, betrayal, systematic racism and marginalization – rips you from your familiar home, casting you out of your personal Eden, showing that something is lacking in your queendom. *Cada arrebadata* (snatching) turns your world upside down and cracks the walls of your reality, resulting in a great sense of loss, grief, and emptiness, leaving behind dreams, hopes, and goals. You are no longer who you used to be. As you move from past pre-suppositions and frames of reference, letting go of former positions, you feel like an orphan, abandoned by all that's familiar. Exposed, naked, disoriented, wounded, uncertain, confused, and conflicted, you're forced to live *en la orilla* – a razor-sharp edge that fragments you. (Anzaldúa, 2002: 546-47)

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According to the Free Dictionary, the Spanish word *arrebato* means "a sudden and violent manifestation of a feeling or a state of mind" (n.d.). Anzaldúa understands it as an event, generally unexpected, which provokes a sudden disruption of the previous state of mind and emotions. *Arrebatos* are considered turning points which, provoking "disconnection from one's established worldview and one's established self-view" (Bobel *et al.*, 2006: 335), initiate the individual toward a process of self-reflection. Reflecting on Clusia's story, it emerges how the death of her father turns her 'world upside down' leading to despair. For Anzaldúa (2002), *arrebatos* correspond to the starting of seven phases of the 'Path of *Conocimiento'*: it's both an ending and a beginning.

*Arrebato* is followed by the second stage of this spiritual path, called *Nepantla*, in which the individual seeks to take awareness of what happened in his/her life, trying to find a new balance (Anzaldúa, 2002). However, for Anzaldúa this can lead to the third stage *Coatlicue,* in which "[m]ourning the loss, you sink like a stone into a deep depression, brooding darkly in the lunar landscape of your inner world" (2002:551). Similarly, after the death of her father Clusia felt lost and depressed. Beyond grieving she started to question her past actions, reflecting on her lack of attention to the father's health and considering herself responsible for his death.

After a few months in the third *Coatlicue* stage, Clusia felt that something changed, she called it an '*expansion of consciousness'*, where she felt that the teachings of TM's spiritual leader, Alba María, could have helped to overcome her suffering. This shift is identified by Anzaldúa as "The Call" in which "in the fourth space a call to action pulls you out of depression" (2002:545). This is the phase where the individual faces 'reality' and starts to take responsibility for his/her life. Anzaldúa explains this fourth phase using the metaphor of a bridge, understood as a "boundary between the world you've just left and the one ahead"; the bridge is "both a barrier and point of transformation. By crossing, you invite a turning point, initiate a change" (2002:557). Anzaldúa (2002) highlights two key elements of the recovery process experienced after the *arrebatos*; first, the importance of other people, and especially of a mentor and, second, the transformative nature of this recovery path. Analysing Clusia's journey, she indeed felt the necessity to come back to TM; to be healed; to find herself. Clusia added; '*I am very grateful to the universe, to the Great Mother[8] that I had the possibility to find these*

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[8] The Great Mother is used to refer to the planet Earth, which is understood in Shamanism as the 'mother' of each being (human and non-human) that exists on this planet.

*people in my life. They helped me a lot to come back to what I am*' (Clusia, woman, 25, TM). This emphasises the transformative process that Clusia experienced in the period spent in TM. The transformative feature of the 'Path of *Conocimiento*' is the connection point with heterotopias of crisis.

Heterotopias of crisis can be understood as spaces enacted for people in transitional phases. They are generally related to biological evolutions such as growing up, getting older, which are also often followed by changes in social status. These, according to Foucault, can lead the individual to a "state of crisis" in relation to the society in which the person lives (1986:24). Heterotopias of crisis are indeed considered transitional spaces, places "where individuals in between recognised roles retire from society, and from which they emerge to re-enter society when they are ready for a new stable social position" (Cenzatti, 2008:76). This understanding is often correlated to van Gennep's (1960) concept of 'rites of passages' and Turner's (1969) ideas of liminality (see Hetherington, 1997; Cenzatti, 2008). Clusia's story is the most appropriate example of heterotopia of crisis considering that Clusia went to TM to 'heal' herself and, once better, she left the community to come 'back to society'. Though still very close to the community, TM was, for Clusia, a temporary phase, a transitional space. Clusia's story is, however, a sort of hybrid heterotopia as the biological change affected her father's life, not her directly. Nevertheless, her *arrebato* (father's death) pushed Clusia toward a state of crisis and a process of inner transformation for which she felt the necessity to join TM.

A further investigation of the word 'crisis' can enrich this analysis. Etymologically, the word 'crisis' comes from the "Greek *krisis* 'decision', from *krinein* 'decide'", then in late Middle English it was used to denote a "turning point of a disease" indicating either recovery or death (OED, n.d). Josephine Butler's understanding of mourning is also useful here, when saying "[p]erhaps mourning has to do with agreeing to undergo a transformation (perhaps one should say submitting to a transformation)" (Butler, 2004:21). The key point here is that, in order to cross the 'bridge', a decision is necessary, a willingness to get out of the previous state of despair. It is necessary to agree to undergo a transformation, in Butler's words.

Here, then, it can be helpful to refer to the classification made in the conceptual chapter where 'intentional heterotopias' differ from 'compulsory heterotopias' because the individuals have volunteered to enter and/or dwell in these alternative spaces. By drawing upon such analytical categorisation, the concept of 'intentional heterotopias of

crisis' can be introduced, where the individual after experiencing an unexpected event – *arrebato* – which unsettles his/her life, *decides* to undergo a process of transformation. Thus, spiritual heterotopias such as TM are enacted to function as places where the individual moves to feel supported in his/her process of transformation, as shown in Clusia's story. Indeed, in the TM community she found a place where this recovery could take place; it functioned as her heterotopia of crisis.

### 1.18.2 Questioning and searching

Clusia's experience is significant because it sets up the analysis of heterotopias of crisis and the role of *arrabatos*. However, it is unconventional because Clusia knew TM prior to experiencing her *arrebato* – her father's death – and because she is not a permanent resident. By further exploring residents' journeys, two other key analytical aspects will be discussed in this section: questioning and searching.

Similarly to Clusia from TM, Nunki (man, 35) and Tureis (man, 55) from Dh both began their stories speaking about their parents, as it was the starting point of their journeys. '*Everything started when my mother got a cancer*' Nunki says at the beginning of his story. He added:

> *It was an intense period because I was at home studying and my mother was ill and I couldn't find interesting answers in my world of reference about what was happening to me. I come from a very Catholic education and, we can say, this was what I believed, this was my culture. I have suddenly started to feel that there were parts of me that did not find any longer correspondence with what my world of reference was. So I started investigating, searching for new truths and hoping to find something that could give back a track in my life.* (Nunki, man, 35, Dh)

The illness of his mother was for Nunki the starting point, the breakthrough toward a new frame of reference. Likewise, Tureis (man, 55, Dh) commences his experience saying '*the time before was hard, my mother died young, and in a special way, this was helpful to find my way*'. He went on to study physics because he was really interested in understanding the material world.

> *There is this strange theory called quantum theory that for me it was a breaking point when I tried to understand it. In fact, studying it, you lose your base in the material world. We could speak a lot about quantum theory but, the main thing is that if you really go into it and try to understand what is beyond it, then you lose your base and you see that matter is not matter as you mean it, it's not something substantially out of you. It's… I don't know,*

*nobody knows what matter is, I think. This was a breaking point because I lost my bases and I went into depression. [...] Then, I met this guy that told me about meditation. I started a new period of my life doing Zen meditation, it's about only sitting there and meditate – very different from what we have here in Dh! This was my start to a spiritual way and I wanted to find my bases, but not based in the material world but in the spiritual one.* (Tureis, man, 55, Dh)

Clusia's, Nunki's and Tureis' experiences have something in common. They started their journeys due to an *arrebato*. For Nunki, the illness of his mother was clearly the reason why he started to question his frames of reference; similarly, for Tureis, the death of his mother '*was helpful in finding his way'*. When Nunki felt that his Catholic background could not help him in making sense of his 'new' phase, he started to read books about philosophy, alchemy and different types of spiritualities. He found himself very interested in Rudolf Steiner's theories and Osho's spiritual path. In this reading phase, Nunki realised that other people were having similar journeys, questioning mainstream understanding and searching new philosophies. Unlike Nunki, who found some answers through reading, Tureis instead studied physics and got more confused and lost. Quantum theory generated another *arrebato* in his life, rather than providing the answers he was looking for. This last *arrebato* corresponds to the shock of discovering that 'matter' is not 'matter' as he conceived it. Anzaldúa (2002:547) adds "*Cada arrebatamiento* is an awakening that causes you to question who you are, what the world is about". In some ways, Nunki and Tureis' *arrebatos* challenged their understandings of life generating a search toward new frames of references. In this search, identified by Anzaldúa (2002:548) with the second stage, *Neplanta*,

> [Y]ou reflect critically, and as you move from one symbol system to another, self-identity becomes your central concern. […] Nepantla is the site of transformation, the place where different perspectives come into conflict and where you question the basic ideas, tenets, and identities inherited from your family, your education, and your different cultures.

Both Nunki and Tureis have passed through this stage, in which, while questioning the '*old* world of reference', they searched for '*new* truths'. Unlike Nunki and Tureis, Clusia did not spend time in searching for something that could help her to understand what was happening. Shamanic teachings experienced during her initial stay at TM started to make sense and were sufficient for enabling her recovery process. Differently, Nunki and Tureis started searching for answers through reading. After this first 'reading

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phase', they moved to a second phase, where they started to experiment by actively participating in workshops, courses, meditations, rituals etc. This *experimenting phase* of the searching process can be understood as a process of *embodiment*, where through their body they wanted to feel, and not to only rationally understand the teachings received. By moving to this embodied phase, besides the mental and emotional levels, the physical level was involved too.

Although Nunki's and Tureis' experiences are clearly not representative of each resident, the majority of Damanhurians interviewed have been involved in a searching process. This was shown by the recurring use of the following Italian words while counting their life stories: *cercare*, *trovare, ricerca. Cercare* means to search, to look for; *trovare* means to find; *ricerca* means search and research. Likewise, TM residents have often used the words *buscar* and *pesquisar,* that again mean to search. This first part of the analysis shows how the *arrebato* has worked as a 'turning point' in the lives of Clusia (TM), Nunki (Dh) and Tureis (Dh). After witnessing a parent's illness and death, the three interviewees suggest that this has initiated a spiritual journey. These dramatic events, or difficult periods of their lives, have generally challenged their previous 'frame of reference' based on their cultural backgrounds. These events have encouraged them to search for 'new truths' and eventually to join those communities where they could find correspondence with their understanding of life and knowledge. I argue that the enactment of an alternative places, such as Dh or TM, is often due to a number of *arrebatos*,  turning points that challenging the previous cultural understandings of the world instigate processes of searching.

### 1.18.3  Becoming a mother

Not everyone who moved to Dh or TM has experienced a negative experience. Merope from Dh has a different story. Merope is a 33-year-old German woman who moved to Dh in 2001. For Merope, becoming a mother was a turning point in her life. Merope says '*at some point I realised, when Han was born, that I had to live with other people, it became very clear!*' (Merope, woman, 33, Dh). Before becoming a mother, Merope defined herself as a '*vagabond*', travelling wherever and doing everything that she wanted. But, when Han was born, she remarked '*I started to think what to do with my life. It was more for him than for me. I had to find a strategy.*' She added later '*He (Han) was very important for me, as a catalyst in my experience, as an engine to make me move.*'

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*From his birth I realised that my dream was to live with other people, a wish that I had never had before. Since that moment, there was his life that depended on me and I did not want him to live in the world that I have known, in the society where I grew up and where I did not see this magic that I was feeling instead. [...] I felt that it was important for him to have more people from which to learn and to not have only my vision and version of life.* (Merope, woman, 33, Dh)

Firstly, I argue that becoming a mother, as in the example of Merope, is another type of *arrebato* compared to those identified by Anzaldúa. However, this *arrebato* was not generated by a loss, or a suffering situation. According to Foucault becoming pregnant is indeed another life-phase, which can lead the individual to heterotopias of crisis. Motherhood was for Merope the 'catalyst of her experience'; it functioned as a turning point and, specifically, the trigger to take responsibility for her life and the life of her son. It was a passage between different periods of life – from being a young girl to becoming a mother. This turning point helped her to understand how she wanted to live this new life-phase and how she wanted to bring up her son. Noteworthy, behind her 'crisis' there was a deeper feeling of frustration.

*The human being is a social being in reality, considering that we are social animals, we need others for protection, but also for growth. The child cannot grow by him/herself, at the beginning of life they need the protection of the adults around him/her. We are not as snakes who live alone, we are social animals. But the Western society is forgetting that, it has made people forget that.* (Merope, woman, 33, Dh)

A similar perspective is raised by Jarvis (2013) in her study of alternative homes and family life in the community of Christiania (Denmark). She pointed out how residents believed that "living in Christiania enabled them to negotiate the consequences of separation, divorce, single motherhood and transition to a blended family arrangement in a more flexible, humanistic way than they believe would have been possible 'outside' in mainstream urban social structures" (Jarvis, 2013: 951). Although Jarvis's analysis did not specifically focus on the educational advantages, she argues that the social infrastructure of community living tends to create spaces of care and openness that although having limits, enable non-traditional practices regarding income and consumption. Similarly to Jarvis' findings, Merope questions the socially constructed and normalised version of the western family, advocating community living as a better alternative for her as a single mother. For her, children need to grow up in an environment where they can see and know different approaches to life through living with other people.

By deconstructing and reflecting on the constructed western social system (Anzaldúa, 2002), for Merope 'her problem' reflects a wider, modern, social uneasiness: forgetting that living in a community is the '*natural*' dwelling for human beings. Moreover, community living is not only a temporary life-phase for bringing up her child, but a 'natural' social setting in which to spend her life. Understanding heterotopias of crisis as spaces for transitional and temporal life-phases can be limited when the individual advocates a more permanent heterotopic space. While it was helpful when considering Clusia's experience because she stayed in TM a limited period of time with the aim of going back to 'society'; heterotopias of crisis become problematic when encountering places for less transitional life-phases. Indeed, living in a heterotopic place such as Dh was for Merope a long term, or even permanent, decision. This point is made by Foucault (1986) who suggests that while heterotopias of crisis were typical in primitive societies, they are disappearing in the contemporary world, leaving space for the more permanent heterotopias of deviation. This is to where I turn now.

### 1.18.4 'I cannot do what they want me to do.' Got it?'

Merope is not the only interviewee who criticises the way mainstream society runs. Merope's experience leads us to a question: how are personal *arrebatos* caused by, or linked to, external circumstances? In other words, how are personal turning points interconnected to a wider societal crisis? Now we will move on to explore the story of Jussara.

Jussara, 30 years old, is a Brazilian from Salvador who moved to TM in 2009. Jussara wanted something different than the lifestyle that lay ahead. She comes from an upper middle class family and was living in one of the wealthier areas of Salvador. Her neighbourhood expanded in the 1980s to accommodate the new middle class of the city. Since she was a child, Jussara noticed the polarised social and economic conditions existing in her city and especially in Bahia. As she recalls:

> *The poor guys, that pretty life, strong community, you know? And then you get here in town, in Salvador. What I see is madness. So for me it was always clear these two different worlds. The world of the city is not the real world.* (Jussara, woman, 30, TM)

The class division existing in Brazil since her childhood was a source of frustration for Jussara. This triggered her decision to study law. Before joining TM she was constantly questioning her lifestyle and wondering what she wanted to do. For a short while, she

enjoyed everyday things, for example going out with friends, until she realised these things did not make sense any more. Jussara could not accept also the idea of working for someone, working for a '*system that is corrupted*'.

> *Then, it comes a time that you will work, 'I will not work in an office. It is impossible, impossible. I cannot do what they want me to do.' Got it? I cannot. I could never do what they want me to do, got it? I cannot. (…) Staying all afternoon in front of a fucking computer to do the most basic thing, I do not know why, but I cannot. Knowing that to make things work, you have to pay everyone out. How are you going to join this system? Why? For Justice? Considering that the own mechanism of her [justice] is corrupt. The system is corrupt. How can you do this? I could not!* (Jussara, woman, 30, TM)

Jussara's feelings of frustration are strictly linked to the ways in which she sees society is working. Her '*existential crisis*'– as she called it – is linked to the lack of hope in the society where she belongs. I argue that her personal *arrebato* is linked to a wider systemic societal and political problem. Unlike the respondents mentioned above, Jussara's *arrebato* was not a defined event, such as death or illness, or a period of passage between different life phases. Her *arrebato* is strictly linked to her perception of injustice linked to the external society. Anzaldúa (2002: 553) explains "that grief and depression may originate in the outside world".

Further investigating the link between external and internal *arrebatos*, between societal, economic, environmental issues and individuals' feelings of frustration, it can be useful to bring back the concept of heterotopia of deviation. Foucault says that these are spaces "in which individuals whose behaviour is deviant in relation to the required mean or norm are placed" (1986:25). Deviants are considered those people who do not fit to the norms, habits and customs of society (Cenzatti, 2008). Therefore, heterotopias of deviation gather those people who have been excluded for not conforming to the social processes of normalisation. This is not exactly the case with Jussara, as she has not been excluded from society. She comes from an upper middle-class family, she is in good mental and physical health, young, and she has not transgressed the law; Jussara would be expected to fit within society's rules. However Jussara does not wish to conform. She cannot accept the processes of normalisation that she sees in mainstream society. Jussara feels she does not belong, claiming *'this is the world; I don't have anything I can do'*. Though this is not the usual example of heterotopias of deviation, it reinforces the distinction to be made between compulsory and intentional heterotopias. Jussara intentionally rejects the cultural and social environment which she comes from. This

could be rather understood as a process of self-exclusion where the individual intentionally decides to move to, and enact an alternative space, rather than feel excluded on account of being considered deviant. However, to some extent, a form of deviance is present; it takes the shape of the desire "to diverge from usual or accepted standards, especially in social [...] behaviour" (OED, n.d.). Here, I argue, we are in the presence of 'intentional heterotopias of deviation', spaces enacted by those subjects who intentionally decided to diverge from social norms, habits and customs. Moreover, the deviance is not considered as a temporal life-phase –though it might be – but rather as a more permanent condition. This facilitates in dismantling the idea that heterotopias are spaces for transitional and liminal phases.

To summarise this first section of the chapter, we have seen how, in the experiences documented, a turning point, an *arrebato* has pushed people to make changes in their lives. We have seen how these moments are followed by questioning and doubting the personal original frameworks of reference. I have also argued that an *arrabato* is not necessarily linked to dramatic experiences such as illness or death, but it can also be generated from positive experiences such as the birth of a child. I have argued that *arrebatos* can be linked to individuals' dissatisfaction with the social, political and economic and environmental contexts. *Arrebatos* can be provoked by a personal experience, but can also be linked to external circumstances. This can result in the desire of diverging from conventional social norms, habits and customs. While deconstructing, by questioning, their cultural and social background, individuals often engage in processes of reconstruction, by searching for new frames of reference. This searching process often starts with a 'reading phase' and is generally followed by a more 'experimental phase'. This more active phase tends to generate a movement, a search where 'you get out of bed' (Anzaldúa, 2002:555) to experience something different. How, then, have Nunki, Tureis or Jussara, or anyone else found Dh or TM? What is the connection between the individuals' questioning and searching and the decision to move and to be actively involved in the enactment of these communities? This is what will be explored in the second part of the chapter.


1.19  **Seek and ye shall find**

As discussed in the context, Dh is a community that has existed for about 40 years. People have arrived at Dh at different times and in different ways. This is reflected in the sample of 16 interviewee-residents of Dishna nucleus-community who can be

identified according to three cohorts; those arriving in the 1970s and 1980s (n=4); those who arrived in the 1990s-2000s (n=9); and those who arrived after 2010 (n=3). Despite TM being located in another country and another continent, the collected data shows a similar pattern of different cohorts. There is the first cohort of TM residents who met Alba María at the beginning of 1990s (n=8). Later there is another group of people who joined in the early 2000s (n=4), predominantly as a consequence of TM's process of expansion and finally, a more recent cohort that has joined the community in the 10 last years (n=5). Now I turn to explore common trends that characterized these cohorts to further investigate the role of *arrebatos*, desires and intentions.

### 1.19.1  Encountering the spiritual leaders

The first cohort approached Dh because they felt inspired by Falco, the spiritual leader and founder of the community.

> *When I was studying in Rome I met Falco in 1981. Afterwards, we stayed in contact and he always invited me to come to here, Dh. I do not consider myself a spiritual person, or at least I had not thought of myself in this way [before]. It was predominantly my relationship with him [Falco] that led me here. The first time I met him he said: 'There, we will do that!' when in fact 'there', there was nothing. His desire to do something was really very strong, like madness. I think my generation got closer for his idealism, his dream, his idea, and embarked on this adventure without knowing where we will end up.* (Kurah, man, 59, Dh)

The relationship with Falco is the key to understanding Kurah's journey, but also the journeys of the first cohort of Dh residents. It was not the community itself that triggered people to the move to Dh – which was still in its embryonic stage – but the idealism and passion of the spiritual leader. As Kurah says '*there was nothing*', it was only about ideas, dreams and the willingness to realise them.

Despite the different personal stories, the first cohort of TM residents show similar patterns to Dh. In those early years, TM did not exist yet. This first cohort met Alba María while she was working as a psychologist in Salvador.  Below a quote from Philodendron that shed light on how Alba María's workshops affected him:

> *I was 26 years old. I was an intense young man who was searching – but I did not know what I was searching for – who lived things in a very intense way. Alba moved me a lot: her workshops, working with her. Her sincerity, the strength of these works, the radicalism with which these works were*

*made ... where we would go inside us, into the universe, into the cosmos. There was a very deep line.* (Philodendron, man, 48, TM)

Philodendron explains how he was touched by Alba's workshops. Alba's works of self-knowledge became very popular in Salvador during the early 90s. According to Philodendron, through Alba's workshops people started a process of personal discovery by '*awakening*' to their gifts and talents. As result of these workshops, a core group that supported the dream of TM was taking shape. Encountering the spiritual leaders, Falco or Alba María, was a strong experience for the respondents of the first cohorts of, Dh and TM. It was a turning point because since those encounters respondents' lives have changed direction. Laurier and Philo (2006) discuss the diversity of encounters and how encounters can change the orientation of the life course.

> [B]ut remember that all of our closest friendships and working relationships began with a first encounter wherein, at the time, there was no way of knowing the future that would follow. (Laurier and Philo, 2006:356)

Although encounters do not necessarily have an impact on the life course of the subjects involved, in the specific cases analysed here, they had an impact, an effect. Encountering Alba María or Falco could be considered as another type of *arrebato*, as an unexpected event, which strongly shaped the lives of the respondents, but also of the spiritual leaders. Often respondents, by encountering Alba María or Falco, found someone whose vision inspired them to the extent of breaking with their previous lifestyle and patterns and to join the spiritual leader in enacting that initial dream. Equally, encountering people who believed in their visions was essential for Alba María and Falco for materialising their dream and enacting TM and Dh. Alba María (woman, 60, TM) explained that '*the vision passed through her, but touched the lives of many others who did not see it yet*'. She identified herself as '*the first dreamer*' of TM, however strongly pointing out how that initial vision needed a group of dreamers '*to leave the potential state and to manifest itself materially*'. This leads to another key point: how the encountering of these individual stories shaped a new collective dimension.

Indeed, these encounters are not only significant because they generated another *arrebato* that eventually affected the life course of the people involved, but also because it was a turning point where the individual stories marry to form a collective story and to enact a communal alternative space. This is the second relevant result that emerged in analysing the responses of the first cohort. For instance, this becomes evident with

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Begonia's story. Living in TM for 20 years, she is one of the first cohort and one of the founding members of TM.

> *I had cancer twice, you know. So it was something I said 'hey, what am I doing with my life?', and 'I have to review everything in my life' so it was a very inner demand that drew me here; it was not a simple or abstract thing, it was my life [...] Then, I found here a group of dreamers; the high search of our dream was to reconnect with that energy starting from a process of self-knowledge, and to build TM as a place of healing, a place of reception, and community life. That was the dream, to live communally and creating and returning to old and ancestral values* (Begonia, woman, 65, TM).

Through these encounters, the individual stories join a collective dimension where the individual is not alone in her/his search any more. Anzaldúa explains how in the sixth phase, 'connectedness' becomes central in the last part of individuals' journeys.

> Where before we saw only separateness, differences and polarities, our connectionist sense of spirit recognizes nurturance and reciprocity and encourages alliance among groups working to transform communities. (Anzaldúa, 2002: 568)

Coming together to enact the same dream created a feeling of empowerment, where the individuals felt actively involved in shaping their personal stories and the story of the (potential) community they were aiming to enact. By joining the group, respondents felt as though they had found a space in which they could contribute to the collective dream of enacting spiritual spaces, where individuals could reveal their inner potential and heal themselves. The entangling of the individual and collective scales is crucial in understanding the enactment of these heterotopic spaces. Anzaldúa calls this entanglement 'spiritual activism', which is the seventh and final stage of the 'Path of *Conocimiento*'.

> Interconnectedness is a crucial component in all forms of spiritual activism, and facilitates the development of new tactics for survival, resistance, and transformation at individual and collective levels. (Keating, 2005:245)

The concept of spiritual activism here helps in understanding how an individual spiritual journey – characterised by *arrebatos*, questioning, searching – by merging with other individuals' spiritual journeys can culminate in a wider movement and, in these specific cases, in the enactment of spiritual intentional communities. Moreover, further analysing the findings related to the first cohort of Dh and TM residents, it is possible to

reflect on the role of desires and intentions and so to contribute to the open debate on intentionality and unintentionality of utopian studies.

### 1.19.2 Desires, intentions and means

As discussed in the contextual chapter, both Falco and Alba María explained that, initially, they had a vision of, respectively, Dh and TM communities and only subsequently, they started to share these visions with other people they knew and encountered. In these ways, they were often provoking *arrebatos* in the lives of those people who, even without experiencing that initial vision, began to share the same dream of creating a spiritual community.

> *Dh was born thanks to his [Falco] dream, however, it is not only Falco's dream, Dh is the dream of everyone. To his dream were added the dreams of others, thus it became the Dh of all. When a dream is dreamed by more people, it becomes a bigger dream.* (Chara, woman, 49, Dh)

As illustrated by Chara, if initially TM and Dh took the shape of a personal vision, subsequently they became a shared collective dream.

While understanding utopias as processual, the role of intention has been interrogated and challenged (Garforth and Kraftl, 2009; Kraftl, 2009; Miles 2009; Miller, 2009). The main critique moved is that intentionality has to do with closure, fixity and end (Garforth, 2009), thus not reflecting the fluid, mobile and processual features of recent conceptualisation on utopianism. As underlined by Garforth (2009), intentionality is linked to purpose, goal and aim. In defence of intentionality, Sargisson (2009:91) studying the etymology of the term emphasises how intention is a combination of "straining or stretching towards desire and purpose". She also adds that "intent signifies something tense, effortsome and earnest" and that "it stems from feeling and desire and gives purpose and direction" (*ibid*).

Reflecting on my findings, respondents often pointed out how, behind the enactment of TM and Dh, there was a 'bigger purpose'. Alba María explains how the dream of TM was not simply a desire,

> *Desires change, desires are consumed, desires cannot sustain themselves, it was something much deeper, it was a bigger purpose, but we did not know how to realise it! It required an incredible effort.* (Alba María, woman, 60, TM)

From the findings shown above, desire is understood as something that is superficial, transitional and consumable, differing from a deeper, enduring, and bigger purpose. However, desires are considered crucial for understanding utopianism. Indeed, according to Levitas, "[t]he core of utopia is the desire for being otherwise, individually and collectively, subjectively and objectively" (2013: xi). According to the Oxford English Dictionary (OED, n.d.), desires are related to individuals' feelings and wishes. Feelings of frustration with mainstream society, wishes for finding a frame of reference that could make sense, the desire for a better world, were evident throughout the findings presented across a range of respondents. The utopian desire of creating a better way of living is one of the main catalysts for enacting such alternative spaces, as shown by these findings. However, do desires automatically lead to their materialisation, realisation and enactment? Critically reflecting on Levitas' work, Balasopoulos (2010:230-231) says

> Levitas sees desire as a far more inclusive dimension than what it is frequently associated with—hope—since the former does by no means necessarily entail hope in realisability and thus includes visions that are not meant to be taken as capable of materialization. […] For Levitas, there is no deterministic link between utopian desire and social change, since "the transformation of reality and the realization of utopia depend […] upon not only wishful thinking but will-full action".

For Levitas utopia is understood as a method which does not necessarily lead to its enactment. However, intentional communities are enacted spaces. I argue that desires are crucial in enacting such spaces but they are not sufficient – as Alba María has pointed out '*desires cannot sustain themselves*'. In order to be enacted the desire needs to become a 'bigger purpose' which transcending the individual dimension requires a collective effort. For instance, in Dh the bigger shared purposes are: "the freedom and reawakening of the human being as a divine, spiritual, and material principle; the creation of a model of life based on the principle of the communal living and love; and harmonious integration and cooperation with the forces linked to the evolution of the humankind." (Ananas and Pesco 2009:3). While for TM, the bigger purpose is to be a light centre based on the Shamanic teachings of the 'Mother Goddess' and on the understanding that the 'healing' of the planet (environment) is strictly connected with the 'healing' of the human being (Alba María, woman, 60, TM).

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Thus, the utopian collective dreams of Dh and TM were not simply desires, but embedded in intentionality, if considering that these 'bigger purposes' have been the key to their enactments. Casting away intentionality from utopianism or, equally, reducing utopianism to a desire, limits the understanding of intentional communities because it does not necessarily lead to its enactment. In not denying the importance of individuals' desires in enacting these alternative spaces, intentional communities are, however, the result of a collective dream, a bigger shared purpose which goes beyond the satisfaction of personal interest. This becomes evident also when considering communities' conflict resolution; it emerged how individuals often have different and contrasting desires. However if the intention behind the enactment of the alternative spaces is established, shared and collectively recognised, it becomes 'bigger' than individuals' transitional feelings and desires. Intentions are therefore crucial to understand intentional communities, and as demonstrated, I argue that an unintentional utopianism would not sufficiently explain the enactment of these alternative spaces.

Nevertheless, though defending intentionality, another critical reflection should be made. Garforth (2009) underlines how intentionality is linked to closure, fixity and end. This can be explored further in evidence from Dh and TM residents.

> *I feel like someone who won the lottery. If 30 years ago someone would have asked me 'why the hell did you do that [move to Dh]?' I certainly would not have been able to give any reason. But now, after 30 years seeing everything we have done, I'm really lucky to have created, or contributed to the realisation of this society that now you can see. Thirty years ago it was madness. This is the most unforgettable experience for me.* (Kurah, man, 59, Dh)

> *When we started to create this movement [TM] we did not know…, we just knew we wanted a way to live differently, each one of us for searching something. We did not know which shape it would have taken, but we knew it was not what we have already lived: in an imprisoning system, [with] a meaningless job... and everyone who came, came with many questionings, searching a different way of living from the everyday life that we were used to live.* (Eugenia, woman, 56, TM)

Here it emerges how respondents themselves did not know what they were creating, what kind of space they were enacting. Surely, they felt they were doing 'something different'. Eugenia uses the word *different*, remarking that the intention behind the TM project was also to not reproduce the outside world. Alba María and Falco had a vision, that became a collective dream of the spiritual communities they wanted to enact, but overall nobody could know which shape this vision would have taken and how they

could realise it. Indeed, Kurah's quote shows that, considering the means they had at that time, the dream of Dh appeared surrealistic, mad, unachievable and unlikely to be realised, rather like winning the lottery.

According to Garforth (2009:10), intentions are not only linked to purposes and goals, but also to means, "it is the relationship between ends and means, and the purposive action that seeks to bring them together". However, when considering the means used for enacting the 'bigger purposes' of Dh and TM, respondents often emphasise how they were unaware of how to realise this shared dream. Alba María explained *'we didn't have a program, a plan'*. Moreover another resident says

> *The community [TM] has undergone through many changes, it needs to go through many changes to survive, we see at each moment how to continue: How is it now? [At each moment] we're feeling, building for the purpose to remain. Right now, I was working on the land and reflecting about [the meaning of] the path, the way, about the competences that we have acquired by 'walking' the path that we have chosen. Difficulties and obstacles that arise on the way, they arise to be able to confirm your choice. […] The path reveals itself when one walks it; and as you walk, it will reveal more and more and more and more.* (Sapium, man, 51, TM)

Sapium, by reflecting on TM evolution, uses the metaphor of the path to understand the community enactment. By saying that the path reveals itself by walking he means that each decision to be made, each action to be taken, cannot be established in advance, but decisions, actions and means became clear in the everyday, 'step by step'. Thus, though the *future* orientation and purpose are clear, the *present* enactment is unknown; the enactment is revealed in the everyday. Indeed Sapium uses the word of '*building*' to explain how the enactment is a building process for the '*purpose*' to persist. Reflecting on utopian temporalities, it emerges that while the future purpose is well defined, the means are unclear, lacking a structured and established programme. I argue that these results show that if the purpose is defined, established and collective, the means are rather processual, open and unknown. Intentionality is not separate from the everyday but rather it is through the everyday that it is built.

### 1.19.3 *Finding alternative knowledges*

If initially there was a core group linked to Falco and to his original dream, the subsequent cohorts tended to approach Dh more remotely through workshops and courses. A school of meditation in Dh was developed, and also courses and workshops were available to everyone who was interested in Damanhurian philosophy and spiritual

research. Dh offered radical and innovative spiritual courses, for example; courses for becoming healers; courses of personalities; courses about previous lives; workshops on pranotherapy. Furthermore, a process of decentralization took place in other European cities, and small Damanhurian centres were created in Berlin and Palermo to reproduce on a smaller scale the Damanhurian spirit and lifestyle. The aim was to offer a program similar to that offered by the School of Meditation in Dh. All the interviewees that approached Dh in the 1990s and 2000s were interested in Dh workshops and the philosophy that they had encountered in Dh, or in the outside Dh centres. Experiencing Damanhurian philosophy over the weekends gave participants the possibility of becoming familiar with the alternative culture, before taking a 'life changing' decision. The greater majority of them decided to move to Dh after several years of participating in Dh courses and workshops.

> *Over the weekend I could do interesting courses, but then I returned to my normal context and I stopped. For me it was the lack of continuity and having those passionate people around. It did not make sense any more to do these things only at the weekend, but I was looking for a stable condition, where my life, my day was embedded in this different condition of fullness. In Dh I saw this condition, namely the fact of being able to apply twenty-four hours per day the possibility of a path launched towards awareness, towards growth, towards transformation.* (Nunki, man, 35, Dh)

Weekend workshops and courses offered the possibility to become familiar with Dh philosophies. Participating in the workshops and courses was part of the searching phase discussed above, however once the respondents found a frame of reference they could make sense of, they felt the need to live that reality 24/7. Some of them decided to move to Dh and thus, the searching phase manifested as the settlement in the heterotopic space. Coming back to Nunki's story, after the *arrebato* due to the illness of his mother, he claims to have found in Dh the desired condition and the "new truth" he was searching for, and thus wanted to live it every day.

Similarly, people approached TM inspired by Alba's workshops that were held in the community or abroad. Indeed since the beginning of her shamanic activities Alba María has travelled abroad organising shamanic journeys. They were journeys of a few weeks and weekend workshops on shamanism were held to invite local people. Alba María created a very strong connection with people in Germany and in 2006 TM Deutschland was founded. A few of the residents of TM that I have interviewed are Europeans who, after participating in a shamanic workshop in Germany with Alba María, moved to the community and changed their lifestyle. Like Dh, TM had an expansion abroad, but

unlike Dh where different residents also held courses, in TM Alba María was the main moderator of shamanic workshops in those initial decades. If the first two cohorts of TM residents were shaken by Alba María's shamanic workshops, the last cohort has been touched by also experiencing the community lifestyle.

### 1.19.4 Experimenting the community lifestyle

By 2010, Dh and TM were at a mature stage compared to the previous decades. People that had more recently joined the communities were not attracted by the idealistic visions proposed by Alba María and Falco but by the enacted community itself, which was the materialisation of that initial vision. Aware of the attractiveness their alternative spaces enacted, both Dh and TM have started to propose longer residential visits to offer a more realistic and full-immersion experience of their community life-style.

In 2010s, a new program called *New Life* – where people can experience Damanhurian everyday life for a 3-month period – was launched in Dh. Over the first 2 years around 200 guests participated (Syrma, 45, woman, Dh). Three of the interviewees – from what I call the third cohort – have undertaken the New Life program. Before the *New Life* program, those interested in Dh started approaching the community through the School of Meditation, or through courses over the weekend. The School of Meditation was a relatively long commitment and required a strong and intent engagement from the participants. *New Life* instead works under other dynamics, through offering an intimate experience of community life, and a fully embodied and immersed experience with no breaks in between. Indeed, the program runs seven days a week for twelve weeks to reproduce the closest experience to Damanhurian lifestyle.

Like myself, Gienah was doing her research in Dh but she has participated in the *New Life* experience.

> *I have 2 weeks left. It was intense. I learnt a lot. It opened my mind in a lot of ways, and not only opened my mind but also opened my heart. I learnt in a different way, not only rationally, but also intuitively and spiritually – that also was quite new for me. I really embraced that. It was quite intense in the beginning and it really became a part of me. Also I feel that Dh became a part of me now; so that's an amazing change also for me.* (Gienah, woman, 25, Dh)

Gienah offers insight from her experience in Dh. The full immersive *New Life* program has affected her at a very personal level. Producing knowledge through spiritual and intuitive experiences challenges the western epistemological framework and, as Gienah

suggested, creates an inner change, which was shaping her whole research process. In order for this to occur, it was necessary to experience and to embody the searching process.

By analysing my TM findings, consistent results have been found. The last cohort of residents such as Jussara (30, woman, TM), Nidularium (30, man, TM), and Piper (28, man, TM) who arrived during the last 5 years typically moved initially because of their interest in the community. TM was not any more a potential dream, but rather an enacted place where residents lived close to nature as part of their healing process.

> *I have been looking for these people! I had. I have reached them now. Where are this people? Where are they? I could not find them!! When I saw what they were doing here, I thought this is the people. What I feel is that here, even if there is nothing you can see, ... we are fully realised in the sense that the people here are giving their life to do what is necessary to be done, to face reality, to ground and to face reality. Nobody else is doing it outside, not least where I live.* (Jussara, woman, 30, TM)

The results of this study show that there is a trend in both Dh and TM cohorts. The first cohorts, attracted predominantly by Falco and Alba María's idealism, joined the dream of the spiritual leaders of together building a spiritual community. The second cohorts felt a strong connection with the mentor, but also they were enthusiastic about learning these heterotopic philosophies by participating in weekend courses. Often residents who arrived in the 1990s and 2000s were so enthusiastic about the workshops and courses proposed in Dh or TM and/or in the outside centres to the extent that they wanted to be part of that reality 24/7 rather than periodically. The heterotopic knowledge learnt and experienced during these temporary workshops functioned as a catalyst to help them to decide to move to the communities and so participating to their enactments. If learning Dh and TM philosophies over weekends created an impact in people's lives, experiencing Dh and TM for three months has created an even more intense change. I argue here that *experiencing* Dh and TM for longer periods has been a life changing experience, another *arrebato* in people's lives, which often turned into a longer-term life-decision.

## 1.20 Conclusions

This chapter aimed to discover motives and reasons that have led people to move to Dh and TM. The evidence from this study suggests that life-changing experiences affected the life of respondents before moving to the communities and thus, the decision to join

and contribute to the enactment of such communities. Looking at the findings, though people had very different experiences before moving to the community, somehow they all experienced a sort of *arrebato*. The turning point leading to a crisis could have been considered negatively, positively and/or linked to external circumstances. Indeed encountering the spiritual leaders, discovering alternative knowledges produced and experiencing the communities' lifestyles have worked as turning points in people's lives, functioning as *arrabatos*. However, *arrebatos* were never planned or programmed, they were rather unexpected events. The decision to move to such heterotopic spaces was, rather, a consequence of such *arrebatos*, from which emerged the intention to collaborate in order to enact the bigger shared purposes. Thus, one of the critical reflections to be underlined that has emerged throughout this chapter concerns the role of *arrebatos* when understanding intentions. The intention to join TM and Dh was not a predefined plan but rather it emerged through unexpected events, turning points that have led individuals to question their understanding of life and to search for something different. Intentionality, thus, emerges unexpectedly during individuals' journeys. In answering the call launched by Garforth (2008), I argue for an 'unintended intentionality' rather than an 'unintentional utopianism'.

Furthermore, in the conceptual chapter, Bauman (2003) and Harvey (2000) claim that utopias are problematic because of this limited spatial form. By defining utopianism as a methodology, Levitas (2013) introduces the idea that utopian desires do not necessarily get materialised. These results have demonstrated that though desires are crucial for understanding utopianism, they are not sufficient for enacting such alternative spaces. A collective shared purpose is instead essential to facilitate the shift from an initial, potential and individual vision to a collective, manifested and material condition. Specifically in the case of intentional communities, while desires can be transitional, contrasting and individual, purposes tend to be enduring, shared and collective and thus, fundamental for supporting the spatial enactment of such communities.

In not denying the importance of utopian desires, a utopianism without intentions is limited for studying the enactment of alternative communities. In defence of intentionality, I argue that it needs to be reconceptualised as unexpected and unintended while fixed in the future purpose, processual in the everyday. By exploring the individual scale, and specifically people's journeys, it can be revealed how intentionality originates, manifests and evolves across temporalities. Indeed, by

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unpacking intentionality, this study has shown that purposes are defined, established, collective and oriented in the future but means are processual, open, unknown and rooted in the present.

By supporting the role of intention, I argue that this can be applied in the understanding of heterotopias. Indeed the heterotopia concept, although used in variegated and controversial ways, has helped to connect the individual life-changing experiences to the enactment of collective heterotopic spaces. Indeed 'intentional heterotopias of crisis' have been defined as spaces where the individual, after experiencing an unexpected event – *arrebato* – which unsettles his/her life, *decides* to undergo a process of transformation; while 'intentional heterotopias of deviation' are spaces enacted by those subjects who intentionally decide to diverge from social norms, habits and customs. Though not asserting that TM and Dh are exclusively heteorotopias of deviation or crisis, these findings have helped to clarify how such spaces are enacted by variegated individuals' experience. In any case, Dh and TM are the results of different *arrebatos*, unexpected events that have led the person to enact the intentional communities. To conclude, to understand the enactment of heterotopic spaces it is necessary to explore the individual scale in order to produce a holistic analysis and overview of these spaces. In doing this, Anzaldúa's (2002) work has helped to uncover and disassemble this inner process of transformation that has led the individual to approach, join and enact such heterotopic space by including, rather than excluding, the spiritual dimension.

# The community: enacting alternative ordering

This chapter explores the community scale by investigating how alternative spaces such as intentional communities are enacted. Specifically, it analyses the material and social enactment of intentional communities and thus, how these alternative spaces have been materialised and territorialised. It aims to investigate how these spaces, from being utopian desires, have become real places, enacted utopias and thus, heterotopias. Drawing upon utopian studies and particularly the work of Anderson (2002) and Cooper (2014), it is constructive to explore the utopian process by investigating community everyday practices and how they shape alternate orderings. Which performative practices play a key role in the community material and social enactment of intentional heterotopias? How are transgressive and alternative orderings established in material and social enactment of these spaces?

Being aware of the complexity of community enactment, I have structured the chapter into two main sections. The first part investigates the material enactment of Dh and TM by looking at two performative practices: financial contributions and collective voluntary work. The second part, focusing solely on Dh, analyses the social processes enacted by Damanhurians that highlight firstly innovative and experimental social practices, and secondly, the role that games and arts play in creating an alternative social order.

## 1.21  The material enactment

In exploring the material enactment of heterotopias, a few conceptual premises should be made to further engage in its analysis. While reflecting on materiality, another related term needs to be considered: economy. According to the OED (n.d.), one of the basic definitions of economy is "the management or administration of the material resources of a community". In both the communities of Dh and TM, resources were collected and managed. Therefore, economic processes were taking place, and thereafter, economic practices enacted in the materialisation of the communities. In this respect, recent understandings of economic spaces have further underlined the importance of "socioeconomic practice" (see Jones and Murphy, 2010, 2011) defined as:

> The stabilized, routinized, or improvised social actions that constitute and reproduce economic space, and through and within which diverse actors (e.g. entrepreneurs, workers, caregivers, consumers, firms) and communities (e.g. industries, places, markets, cultural groups) organize materials, produce, consume, and/or derive meaning from the economic world. (Jones and Murphy, 2011:2)

If the role of practices is routinely examined in social and economic geographies, what kind of economic practices are used in the material enactment of spiritual intentional communities? Considering that the spaces studied here are heterotopias, namely, 'other spaces', it would be logical to consider that these practices are alternative to capitalist economic forms (see Gibson-Graham 1996; 2003; 2006; 2008). To reinforce this point, in an informal email conversation with the scholar Dehaene, he says "I believe heterotopia plays a role in hosting economies other than that of the market, it plays a role in reconstructing dimensions of the economy that tend to be pushed aside/repressed when the market becomes dominant" (private email 2014). However, in exploring the material enactment of heterotopias De Cauter and Dehaene (2006, 2008) also highlight how processes of "economization of heterotopias" and "heterotopianization of economy" are enacted in these alternative spaces. Thus, how are conventional forms of economic practices combined together with diverse economic practices in the materialisation of heterotopias? Especially considering that Dh and TM are spiritual spaces, how are these socioeconomic practices conceived, applied and managed in order to materialise these spaces? Moreover, drawing upon Gibson-Graham (2008) when discussing the performative effects of diverse economies, the socioeconomic practices taken into consideration here are defined as 'performative' for their ability to shape, materialise and enact heterotopic spaces.

### 1.21.1 *Financial contributions*

De Cauter and Dehaene (2008) explain how ancient Greek heterotopias, such as festivals, were financed with private donations by prominent rich citizens. More generally, they add that "many heterotopias and most cultural institutions, precisely because they are not there for profit but for the public good, receive public subsidies, private donations or corporate sponsoring" (*ibid*: 98). Intentional heterotopias are also, predominantly in the initial phase of enactment, funded by donations. However, due to

their intentional nature, material and financial contributions come from their citizens rather than from external institutions as in conventional heterotopias.

A few years prior to the physical materialisation of the Dh and TM communities, founder groups were organising meetings and workshops in Turin (Dh) and in Salvador (TM). In those initial meetings the vision of creating Dh and TM was taking shape. Yet, the actual materialisation of these visions did not start until Falco and the initial group of founders bought the land in Baldissero Canavese and donated it for the creation of Dh, and when Alba María donated her family property, *a Fazenda Mirim*, to the founder TM group. The initial donation of the lands made by the founders was a key moment to the territorialisation of Dh and TM. Providing a place where the groups are free to experiment with their own alternative orderings is a prerequisite for heterotopic spaces. Considering that, at the initial stage, the communities are not generally able to produce their own incomes, individual contributions are the first performative practice.

Accepting financial contributions from their citizens is not only the first step of material enactment, but empirical data also shows how residents have been constantly contributing their own capital to the development of Dh and TM. For example Dh residents pay a monthly 'nucleus-fee' to the community where they live. According to Enif (man, Dh), the bursar of one nucleus-community, the fees vary between nucleus-community (from approximately 700 to 1,000 euro) and cover costs such as rent, food, utilities, and of routine and emergency maintenance. Besides everyday general expenses, the nucleus-fee covers the maintenance of the Dh School, the Temple of the Humankind, and any other project that the nucleus-community wishes to support, for example the construction of the earth house for Dishna nucleus. The cost of the Olivetti factory building in Vidracco (that Dh purchased for creating the commercial centre *Dh Crea*) was 1,200,000 euros. According to Izar (man, Dh), 400,000 euros were covered by the Dh federation and the remaining 800,000 euros by donations, through crowd fundraising over the internet, from Dh residents, friends and sympathisers. The first point here is that financial contributions were and are a substantive form of income for Dh. This could be seen as paradoxical considering that the one of the aim of these communities is indeed to create alternative spaces not dependent on capitalist forms. However, interestingly Harvey points out (1989:185):

> It takes money […] to construct any alternative to the society predicated on
> the community of money. This is the essential truth that all social
> movements have to confront; otherwise, it confronts and destroys them.

Money may be, as the moralists have it, the root of all evil, yet it appears also as the unique means of doing good.

Paradoxically, in attempting to be spiritually alternative it is necessary to resort to financial means. Drawing upon Harvey (1989) and the emerging findings, money thus becomes essential for any alternative space such as intentional communities to launch, materialise and maintain their own vision. At the same time, Dh does not rely exclusively on citizens' contributions. Over more than 40 years Dh has cultivated many business enterprises. However, the extra profits produced (after covering salary costs) by the 30 Dh businesses enacted are not individually shared but reinvested in each businesses or used to finance community growth. This underlines how, capitalist and diverse forms of economy are indeed overlapping and interweaving in order to cover the community financial needs. As observed by Gibson-Graham (2006: 95), "in a diverse community economy, it is the capacity to produce social surplus in a variety of forms, and not just surplus value, that is of interests, as it is this surplus that can be used to replenish and expand the commons and the productive base".

Similarly, TM material enactment has to deal with mainstream economic and financial issues. Analysing TM's accounts for the year 2012 (TM document 1), it emerges how contributions from residents are a significant source of income for TM. However, there is not a fixed established community-fee, as for example in Dh, that covers community projects, leaving it up to the individual resident to decide on their contribution. If, on one hand, it leaves more financial independence to the residents, on the other hand it does not assure a constant flow of internal income for the community, often limiting its possibilities. From the interviews with the TM financial and economic coordinators (Dioclea and Eugenia) it emerged how the financial aspect is problematic in TM and that a more regulated structure is perhaps needed. Although in the recent years new economic initiatives have been launched and implemented, during meetings and community forums, the financial problem was often mentioned as something that should be addressed more directly. Alternative and innovative ways of generating internal income were constantly proposed and discussed in order to fulfil their dream to become more self-sufficient. Residents also pointed out how, even though often troubled, they have somehow always managed to tackle any situation.

Residents' contributions are a fundamental source of income in the first phase when the community has not yet developed the capacity to generate its own income, and, thereafter, a constant flow of income is functional to ensure financial stability, the

subsistence of the community and to promote and materialize new projects. This calls to mind what De Cauter and Dehaene call 'economization of heterotopias'; processes where heterotopia, identified as 'space that consumes, squanders or even destroys the economic logic', is eventually affected by 'the all-encompassing economization of everything'(2008:98).

From this is argued that financial resources are a fundamental precondition for the materialisation of alternative spaces and that processes of economization and, financialization are, as a consequence, enacted in heterotopic spaces. Nevertheless, the language of diverse economies provided by Gibson-Graham is useful "to explore the multidimensional nature of economic existence" (2006:77), in order to understand the economization and financialization of heterotopias and how these processes are significant in the community enactment. Indeed, in the case of these intentional heterotopias – where intentional communities are created by grassroots groups without the ultimate aim of generating individual profit – they have the challenge of finding for themselves 'material' ways to enact their 'spiritual' spaces. The next section investigates the role that collective voluntary work plays in the community enactment and provides more insights about the importance of diverse economies such as gift economies in the enactment process.

### 1.21.2 Co-constituting scales through collective voluntary work

The previous section noted the importance of financial resources in the materialisation of the Dh and TM vision, highlighting how processes of 'economization of heterotopia' can be observed in both communities. Notwithstanding the importance of financial contributions, the evidence shows that diverse and capitalist forms of economy are overlapping; capitalist in the means, social and spiritual in purpose. Although financial resources are an essential component of enactment, this section challenges the claim that money is 'the *unique* means of doing good' (Harvey, 1989), arguing that collective voluntary work has, at least, an equivalent weight towards the materialisation and territorialisation of intentional heterotopias.

A common narrative emerged through personal stories of Dh and TM residents: once people have decided to move to these communities, they have offered their labour to the community to help build these alternative spaces. Chara (woman, Dh) has remarked how '*believing the dream*' means investing in it and building it. Similarly from TM:

*We are the 'working capital' of TM. If we want to put this [our work] in terms of values, if we were going to pay someone to do it [the work that we have done here], it would be too much [to pay]. So we offer our labour force to keep the dream fruitful and so that this movement will continue thriving, even with all the difficulties that it has. If we believe in the dream, we have to invest in it. There is no choice, no other way.* (Dioclea, woman, TM)

Residents have designed, built and decorated their temples, their houses, their common areas – shaping their landscape and creating spaces in which to live, meditate, work, and generally enact their alternative ordering. Sometimes they have renovated existing old buildings; at other times they have built *ex novo* as, for example, the temples. In addition, the residents' labour has been used for other sorts of activities such as organising, teaching, cooking, cleaning, translating, communicating, welcoming, writing and so on. This work has taken very different shapes according to, firstly, 'what was needed' in the community – as interviewees have generally pointed out – and, secondly, to the different skills, knowledge, competencies of each single individual.

*When you arrive in Dh, there is discussion about what maybe your characteristics, capabilities and in what ways you can contribute. We see also how each citizen can contribute beyond their own professional working experiences.* (Sabik, man, Dh)

The first point to be discussed is how residents' work has been shaped by the necessity of the community. Sometimes residents were expert in particular skills and felt competent to cover those jobs needed in the community; but at other times residents were not professional in the fields required, leading them to do something that they had not done before. Although they remarked how, at the beginning, it was challenging to be engaged in something that they were not specialised in, afterwards a lot of them discovered new skills and abilities. Peperomia (woman, TM) discovered that she could be a successful seller and possesses good communication skills; Dioclea (woman, TM) realised she has very good coordination and organisation skills and a hidden talent for working as an auditor. Zibal (man, Dh), whilst working as a farmer, discovered how much he loves this close contact with nature and has a talent for agricultural matters. These are only a few examples to show how working for something that was unfamiliar has often led to a process of recognition of hidden talents and skills. Peperomia, Dioclea, Zibal explained that they did not know anything about the specific roles they had the opportunity to undertake, but in spite of this, because the communities needed a 'seller', an 'auditor', a 'farmer', they 'took the challenge' to do it anyway. Community

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needs have shaped the individual scale, pushing residents out of their comfort-zone and challenging them to venture into unfamiliar fields. In this way residents have discovered new skills and abilities, developed their latent potential and often they discovered which skills they could improve, and which activities they had no talent for. From the community perspective, it was essential that someone could cover those activities that 'needed to be done' for its own enactment.

Secondly, it was not always the case that individuals started to work on 'something that was needed' but often the community asks the newcomers what they were able to do and talented in. For example, Kurah (man, Dh) is an architect and has a passion for eco-building –what is known in the literature as Low Impact Developments (see Pickerill and Maxey, 2009). A few years ago he asked the nucleus-community to fund the experimental project of a straw-bale house. Once his proposal was approved, he worked on a voluntary basis to build the straw-bale house where he is now living (see figure 6.1). Mira (woman, Dh) has a degree in civil engineering and, although she has never been involved in alternative eco-construction, inspired and followed by Kurah, she proposed the project of an earth-bag house. This is the second eco-construction experiment happening in Dishna (see figure 6.2). Kurah's knowledge, skills and passion for eco-building has physically shaped the community landscape and influenced others in similar projects, thus promoting the Dh community as a laboratory and school where experiments into constructing alternative eco-buildings are carried out. Supporting their proposals, Dh has given an opportunity to Kurah and Mira to realise their 'dream projects' and to fully use their potential as eco-builders.

By building these two eco-houses, Kurah and Mira have shaped the Dh landscape, and in the process, offered more housing solutions, whilst using alternative techniques. Similarly, TM is an experimental laboratory of alternative eco-buildings. Some of the buildings such as the temples are made with local eco-materials such as bamboo, and some of the residents (Philodendron and Jussara) have recently started to build their eco-houses using experimental techniques. Eco-buildings are just one example of how Dh and TM use their residents' knowledge, skills, and capabilities.

**Figure 6.1:** Straw-bale house in Dh (author, 2012)



**Figure 6.2:** Earth-bag house in Dh (author, 2012)

Generally, those communities tend to encourage and support residents to express their talents. For example, Ixora (woman, TM) is a singer and drummer and Piper (man, TM) is a professional songwriter and guitarist known in the Salvador area. Since they moved to TM, they have developed this common dream of recording a CD with Shamanic music and mantras of TM. In the last year, TM CD has been recorded and Ixora and

Piper are organising a tour to launch it (see figure 6.3). Furthermore, TM offers Yoga classes to the public because Inga (woman, TM) is a Yoga teacher; it offers Shamanic massages because Passiflora (woman, TM) is a professional masseuse. The main point here is that the community enactment process is strictly related to individuals' competencies leading often to unexpected results.



**Figure 6.3:** Terra Mirim shamanic CD (author, 2014)

If, on the one hand, the community in order to maintain its ordinary activities needs people to cover essential roles such as farming, auditing and selling (as seen above), on the other hand, it is very reliant on the individuals' knowledge and competencies to develop new projects and shape the community space. In summary, empirical evidence shows how individual and community scales have overlapped, shaped and co-constituted each other. The table below summarises the result of this process of co-enactment.

| Work | The Individual | The Community |
|------|----------------|---------------|
| Work based on communities' needs | Although individuals have often felt pushed out of their comfort zone, they have discovered hidden talents and skills | Communities have used the labour provided by residents to meet community necessities |
| Work based on individuals' capabilities | Individuals have often found a space where it is possible to use, develop and refine their knowledge, skills and competencies | The communities have developed beyond their own ideas and necessities according to each individual's talents |

**Table 6.1:** Working dynamics (elaborated by the author)

After showing how this community scale becomes entangled with the individual one in the enactment process, the next section explores how the 'voluntary' and 'collective' nature of the work offered by residents, shapes and enacts an alternate ordering.

### 1.21.3 Performing gift economies

De Cauter and Dehaene (2008) claim that heterotopias can disrupt and suspend the economic logic shaping heterotopic economic spaces. This is evident in the way residents explain how the gift economy works:

> *The base that supported this whole movement [the creation of the community], was the volunteer service, the collective effort, the donation of these people who worked, worked and also shared what they received.* (Eugenia, woman, TM)

> *Dh is based on voluntary work and I believe that lots of communities work in the same way. It is based on the fact that it is a pleasure to contribute and pursue a passion, a dream.* (Chara, woman, Dh)

> *We use various forms of exchange; the exchange is part of this communitarian reality… because the community is based on the exchange. We do a lot of voluntary work, volunteering [for us] is when we exchange our activities and ability to grow the community. It is in this way that Dh has developed. If we had had to pay someone to do all that was built, we would not exist. So we devote time to the volunteer work monthly, because we believe in this principle.* (Syrma, Woman, Dh)

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Findings show how the work offered by the residents has a specific double nature: voluntary and collective. Without having used unpaid labour force, Dh and TM would most probably not exist. As also suggested by the interviewees, the value of all their collective work would have been not only unaffordable for such communities, but even difficult to evaluate. Thus through voluntary and collective work, Dh and TM have created heterotopias that seek to 'break and suspend' capitalist economic logics. Specifically by challenging labour-market dynamics, heterotopias have the ability to enact alternative economic spaces and the processes of alternative orderings.

Moreover, according to De Cauter and Dehaene "Heterotopia caters to an-anti economical time: the time of sacrifice, gift, play and squandering" (2008:98). With the exception of squandering, notions of sacrifice, gift and play have unquestionably contributed to the enactment of Dh and TM. Making sense of this enactment process calls for a wider ontological approach (Gibson-Graham 1996, 2006, 2008). It is necessary, for example, to take account of the role of gift economies in a performative ontology on heterotopic economy.

The Italian cultural anthropologist Aime (2002), in his introduction to Mauss (2002 [1923]) *Essay on the Gift*, considers volunteer work as a gift offered in the form of service. Anthropological studies on the importance of the gift in traditional societies have pointed out how a gift is reciprocal: it is about giving and receiving. Syrma (woman, Dh) – in her quote above – speaks of the existence of an exchange between residents and the community. If the voluntary work is essential for the enactment of these communities, residents in return received the materialisation of Dh and TM, and consequently a space where they can experiment with living an alternative lifestyle.

Moreover, Dh and TM are not simply spaces where they can live alternatively but they are spaces produced collectively through their time, efforts and general sacrifices. Aime explains how, according to the philosopher and anthropologist Alain Caillé, in a society based on the 'Third Paradigm', goods and services if donated have the capacity of generating social bonds (2002:XIII). If according to Caillé (1998) the gift is the main operator in the creation of social ties, I argue that in Dh and TM, the collective voluntary work is the performative element that has not only led to the materialisation of the community visions, but has also created social and spatial ties among workers, and between them and the place. The main difference between compulsory heterotopias and intentional heterotopias lies in the fact that the 'gift' does not come only from an external source such as "public subsides, private donations or corporate sponsoring"

(De Cauter and Dehaene, 2008:98). In intentional heterotopias the 'gift' is produced internally through voluntary work, and in addition is produced collectively. Therefore, being the element that produces materially, socially and spatially the community, the gift in these heterotopias assumes a performative value that was not considered in De Cauter and Dehaene's interpretation.

Summarising this first point, I argue that the gift of collective voluntary work in intentional heterotopias is the performative element that enacts materially, socially and spatially the communities, generating alternative orderings where diverse economies are enacted. This is what residents gain back from their effort: their alternative spaces. To what extent is it possible to maintain the community's enactment through forms of gift economy such as collective voluntary work? The next two sections investigate what implications such diverse economies can produce for the residents and the communities of Dh, firstly, and TM, secondly.

### 1.21.4  Shaping new ontologies in Damanhur

In Dh voluntary collective work plays a fundamental role, although the community does require that each person is able to generate his/her income, and therefore does not rely exclusively on gift economy practices. Therefore, Dh has implemented a system where both paid and unpaid work are essential components of the community enactment.

To become citizens, residents must be able to cover all their expenses and pay their nucleus-fees. It means that having a paid job is one of the criteria for Dh citizenship. During these past 35 years Dh has created an economic space and capital circulation so that 70% of the residents have paid jobs inside Dh. Some receive a salary from the different Dh associations while providing services such as translating, teaching, guiding, others have their cooperative and own business inside *Dh Crea*. Nevertheless, a gift economy continues to play an essential role in Dh enactment. Each citizen must undertake two different types of voluntary work: "communities hours" for the nucleus-communities where residents live, and "*terrazzatura*" for the Dh federation. The former includes those hours dedicated to the nucleus-communities such as cooking, cleaning the house, children rota, and taking care of the external areas surrounding the house. It involves approximately one and a half days per week. The latter, "*terrazzatura*" (an untranslatable Dh neologism), instead is voluntary work for the Dh federation such as cleaning the temple, renewing the temple, teaching, agriculture, public relations with GEN.

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In Dh alternative and mainstream economies – voluntary and paid work – combine together in the enactment process. Processes of economization of heterotopias have taken place, as for example the essential criteria of having a paid job in order to become a Dh citizen. Nevertheless Dh still relies on voluntary work – scheduled into the resident's everyday life – as one of the performed practices to maintain and take care of common spaces and activities. Interestingly, it has been found out in the participatory observation that in order to combine the scheduled paid and voluntary work, residents' everyday life is extremely busy. Damanhurians start their activities in the early morning and end late in the evening. Also during weekends, people are constantly working. Another result is that they have very diversified activities, so in one week a person could probably have been involved in more than 5 different 'jobs'; such as farming, teaching, working in the bar, involved in a political role in the community, babysitting, painting and so on.

Even more interestingly is that Dh has created a different ontology regarding work that challenges the dichotomy between work time and free time. Chara (woman, Dh), Maia (woman, Dh) and Hao (man, Dh) explain that if there is a '*free time*', there is then a '*prisoning time*'. For them, this dichotomy has led human beings to associate the time that they are working as time that they are 'in prison', and it is then possible to get free only when work finishes. Hao (man, Dh) believes that this dichotomy leads human beings to suffer and creates a break in their everyday life. He adds "*the first thing that the world economy has to do is to 'heal' this gap*". This new ontology of work could be interpreted as a justification to allow and maintain very high standards of work and long hours, however, residents have highlighted how they like their dynamic and diversified activities, considering themselves fortunate to not have 'fallen into the trap' created by the dichotomy of free time and prisoning time.

To summarise, this section has shown how Dh's community enactment does not rely only on gift economy practices but has generated alternative spaces where conventional and diverse economies both have a performative function. Also, it has shown how such commitment to both paid and unpaid activities has led residents to have very intense busy days with considerable high rhythms of work. Nevertheless, because Dh has generated a new ontology of work, residents do not believe that their everyday life should be structured according to free time and working time. Instead, independent of the nature of the activity they are involved in, they seek to make the most of what is considered to be a valuable and enjoyable time regardless.

The main argument here is that in the community enactment process, Dh has combined conventional and alternative practices and furthermore has created new conceptual spaces where conventional understanding of work are transgressed and challenged. Not only are processes of economization of heterotopia happening, but also processes of heterotopianization of the economy, where conventional economic understandings are challenged and transgressed by alternative ontologies launched by this community. In the community enactment, Dh has generated heterotopic spaces of new performative ontologies (Gibson-Graham, 1996, 2006, 2008), new conceptualisations (Sargisson, 1994, 2004) and alternative orderings (Hetherington, 1997).

### 1.21.5 *From alternative to spiritual economies in Terra Mirim*

In considering TM, I divided the community into two main groups: a group that works exclusively in TM (giving all their time to develop the foundation activities and projects) and those residents that instead work outside contributing less with voluntary work. Of the first group, sometimes these people get paid if they are specifically contributing to the development of local projects for which external subsidies have been received, but generally they work on a voluntary basis. Of this first group of people who work predominantly on a voluntary basis, I have identified another sub-categorisation: the generation of the founders and the younger generation. For the first generation working on a voluntary basis is not an issue because the majority of them are retired and get a state pension or have an external income, as for example, the rent of their urban house. For the younger generation, working on a voluntary basis is much more problematic because although they manage to live in the community with its low costs, it makes it much more challenging to afford external market costs, for example travelling. This group of young TM people all have degrees, specific competencies and they speak at least two languages, if not three or four. Although probably, they would not encounter many difficulties in finding work outside the community, this second group of talented young people carry on working fully committed to the community's activities, because they believe that this work has a a intangible value, a sacred value. Service and devotional work are in fact the words often used to describe their activities. Their material contribution assumes a spiritual value for them. Inga (woman, Dh), referring to her voluntary work in the food-sector in TM, says '*I think that I see it not as a profession, but as a service, a contribution. But at the end of the day it is work! It's voluntary work!*' One of the points here is that because Dh and TM are spiritual

intentional communities, residents are creating sacred spaces. Their work is perceived as having a spiritual value. The fact that their work is devotional and '*serves the Goddess Mother*' (Mikania, woman, Dh) adds a spiritual component to it and to the enactment process. According to Eisenstein:

> A sacred economy recognizes that human beings desire to work: they desire to apply their life energy toward the expression of their gifts. There is no room in this conception for 'compensation'. Work is a joy, a cause for gratitude. (2011:402)

Eisenstein captures the understanding of voluntary work in these sacred spaces. Even if unquantifiable, the absence of monetary compensation is however a concrete issue in particular for this younger generation. Although respondents recognise their work as devotional and embedded with sacred values, it does not mean that they would not like to receive a monetary contribution for the activities. This issue was a constant topic of informal discussion and of continual proposals of how to generate income, while still supporting TM, were discussed every day. If on one hand the residents are fully committed and happy to dedicate their lives to support TM activities and vision because they perceive the sacred and devotional value of their work, they also often suffer financial problems and struggle to afford external expenses. Thus, in order to address the financial issues, residents are constantly searching and applying for external funds to support TM project and their work.

As discussed in the theoretical chapter, scholars (such as Anderson, 2006; Kraftl, 2007; Garforth, 2009) have pointed out how the utopian process is on-going, dynamic, open-ended, unsettling and immanent. In particular Anderson (2006:697) citing Bloch identifies the utopian process as excessive because "in the realizing element itself there is something that has not yet realized itself (Bloch, 1968 [1955]:193)". TM's search for ways to support the community and the residents' work financially could be understood as on-going and a 'not-yet' achieved satisfactory level of realisation. The "not-yet"-used by Bloch (1968 [1955]) - emphasises the on-going nature of utopianism, as something that 'is becoming' but at the same time is 'not yet become'. The enactment of intentional communities is clearly an on-going process, not-yet fully realised and open-ended.  Drawing upon Kraftl's work (2007), the unforeseen, unknown and unsettling nature of utopian processes can lead to feelings of worry, anxiety and despair. Yet, interestingly in the enactment process, such feelings do not seem to prevail in TM's residents. Instead, I argue that there is much more emphasis on present actions

and 'what can be done now', rather than future outcomes and 'what will happen'. Alba María in the public talk held in Newcastle in June 2014 explained what is one of the principles supporting this spiritual economy enacted in TM:

> *You receive what you need, not more. If you need 5 pieces of clothing you will receive 5 pieces of clothing, you will not receive 8 or 10, but if you need 8 or 10 you will receive 8 or 10. It's like this. ... This is spiritual revolution.* (Alba María, woman, TM)

Here, I am not arguing that Alba Maria's understanding is the same for each resident, yet it is representative of the spiritual approach that leads and supports TM material enactment. In fact, in intentional spiritual communities the material and the spiritual fields are often not separated. In spiritual heterotopias, performative practices do not include only forms of diverse economies such as gift economy but also forms of spiritual economy. Therefore, a broader ontology of economic practices that joins and breaks the boundaries between the material and spiritual fields has to be considered in order to understand community performative practices in spiritual intentional heterotopias.

Summarising this last part, I argue that enacting the community through alternative economies can have implications in the everyday life of the residents and can put at risk the community survival. I also argue, that because the material enactment is not-yet realised as wished for, constant attempts to overcome these limits are sought and performed by its residents. Nevertheless, conventional feelings such anxiety and worry that characterise the utopian process tend to disappear when performative practices are embedded in spiritual contexts.

In conclusion, as discussed and proposed by De Cauter and Dehaene (2008), processes of economizations of heterotopia have taken place. Residents, and in general the communities, face in their everyday life what the authors define as the all-encompassing forces of economy, leading residents to constantly seek ways to financially support the community and their activities. However, processes of economization cannot be understood only as capitalist driven. Accordingly, a wider ontology has been adopted. If some of the characteristics associated with mainstream economy are asocial, specialised, calculable, rational, competitive, amoral, large scale and a-spatial (Gibson and Graham, 2006), this first part of the chapter has shown how the community practices enacted are the exact opposite. Intentional heterotopias are then spaces where in the material enactment process, economy acquires a wider ontology becoming social,

cooperative, unquantifiable, ethical, diversified and locally embedded. In addition, considering that these communities are spiritual intentional heterotopias economy becomes sacred and the material enactment is enrooted in spiritual values.

## 1.22  The social enactment

Alongside the material enactment, the social enactment is under empirical investigations. According to Street and Coleman (2012: 4), "Foucault's concept of heterotopia usefully captures the complex relationships between order and disorder, stability and instability". In the context of rural English communities, Neal and Walters (2007: 261) employ the concept of heterotopia alongside panopticism, to explore how, in the same spaces, different rural narratives cohabit and, specifically "how regulated and unregulated ruralities are able to coexist". Again Lou (2007) emphasises that with heterotopia it is possible to explore the juxtaposition of heterogeneous spaces in a place. In heterotopic spaces contradictions are allowed to exist; they are spaces of order and disorder where different elements can stay together and where alternative orderings are enacted; however scant focus has been given on the actual process of ordering/disordering. Drawing upon these contributions and Hetherington's (1997: 63) understanding that "order is never achieved but deferred into new modes of ordering", the second part explores how social orderings are enacted, experimented and innovated through key performative social practices.

### 1.22.1  Experimenting and ordering Damanhurian social body

Dh has an established, regulated and agreed social structure that, controversially, is provisional, experimental and dynamic. This section aims to explain this controversial nature of Dh looking at, firstly, its current social structure, and secondly, at how this is the result of the processes of experimentation, innovation and dismantling. The Dh social unit, called nucleus-community, is the object of this analysis.

> **Box 6.1: The social body of Dh (elaborated by the author from data collected in Dh)**
>
> Dh has approximately 600 residents and has 400 more people affiliated off-site. Dh is divided into *nuclei* (nucleus-community) which are the smallest social units of Dh. Each nucleus counts between10 to 25 people. It is organized as a family and generally the group shares the same house or cluster of houses and uses common facilities and areas (such as kitchen, bathrooms, living room). At this moment 27 nucleus-communities exist. Each one focuses on a specific project such as to create networks with other intentional communities, specializing in renewable energies production, establishing contacts with the local municipality. There is a head for each nucleus, called Regent, elected annually, by the inhabitants of the nucleus-community. The regent is responsible for coordinating the activities in the nucleus, developing the programme presented during the elections and also is considered the coordinator of the energies of all members of the nucleus. Two or more nucleus-communities create a region, which is headed by a Capitan elected annually. The region can be geographical, established according to the proximity of two or more neighbouring nucleus-communities, or functional, designated according to common projects. There are 10 regions and another one called transversal region -*Dh Crea*- that is the Dh commercial centre.

Although the social body as described appears to be established and defined in structure, it is the result of both a current experiment and previous experiments. The creation of nucleus-communities is in fact given by the combination of different aspects, such us the non-homogenous localisation of the community and the 'Theory of the Critical Numbers'.

Firstly, Dh passed through a process of re-localising which influenced the enactment of the social body. While the number of residents grew, and it was not possible to acquire adjacent territories, Dh started to spread across the Canavese rather than occupying a discrete piece of land (see section 4.2.3 for context). These geographical arrangements supported the idea of increasing the number of smaller communities while also reducing the number of people in each of them. Besides the re-localisation process, Dh was experimenting and searching for the ideal number for community living, which eventually resulted in the 'Theory of the Critical Numbers'.

While Dh was growing, living all together was becoming very challenging, not only for spatial reasons as discussed previously, but also for social reasons. Testing and documenting the results of social experiments over more than 30 years, Damanhurians have noticed that the critical number for each nucleus-community is from 10 people

(min critical number) to 25 (max critical number – including kids). According to this theory, if in a nucleus-community there are more than 25 people the human group tends to generate division within the community, creating "small parties" which become "a community in the community" (Dh internal document 1) and "preventing the fluidity of human relationships" (Naos, man, Dh). On the other hand, if the minimum number of 10 is not reached, a sense of community is absent, making it difficult to generate community initiatives.

The enactment of social units as nucleus-communities is then the result of years of adaptation and experimentation. Firstly, Dh was forced to adapt to the land available because it could not spread in a homogenous way through the Valchiusella valley. Secondly, they discovered that by respecting their 'Theory of the Critical Numbers', the group stays unified, but at the same time, is sufficiently varied to stimulate initiatives and carry out communal projects. Thirdly, after several decades of practice, groups of 20 people could carry out projects that previously required 80 people due to the increase in their sense of responsibility, alongside the improvement of organizational skills. The experimental nature that characterizes intentional communities has been pointed out predominantly by utopianists rather than heterotopian scholars. Scholars such as Schehr (1997), Sargent (2006) and Sargisson (1996, 2000, 2004, 2007) have considered intentional communities as dynamic spaces where new paradigms are experimented with, often challenging and transgressing conventional ways of living. As Chara (woman, Dh) echoes "*we are basically a living laboratory, we are dreamers and experimenters that on our skin and at our expense, we experience everything, social, economic, education*".

### 1.22.2 Innovating and disordering

Nucleus-communities have been adopted as an ideal social unit where Damanhurians can live together and carry out common but independent projects. In order to overcome the limits of the nucleus-communities, Damanhurians launched two further social experiments; the creation of new regions and the New Life program.

> *Returning to the social today we have got a group of 20 people (including also the kids). We are at a new turn of the spiral where this group [nucleus-community] has grown so much in organization and specialisation that there was a risk of closing down, a risking that you within your group think only of your small territory and could not see [the rest] - although of course we are all aware of being part of a larger group. So then, we had to widen*

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*and we returned to the idea of the regions, where we join territorially when possible [if nucleus-communities are near], otherwise based on similar interest and affinity.* (Chara, woman, Dh)

Chara explains how Damanhurians have acted and re-acted in order to face the new limits discovered while implementing the nucleus-communities. This suggests both a process of self-reflection and awareness of the limits of this social order. The dynamic nature of the social ordering performed in intentional heterotopias means that innovative practices are constantly launched to disorder the order. According to Hetherington (1997: 35):

> Ordering is not simply something we do, as when we make lists; more significantly, it is something we are in (see Strathern 1991). Ordering is a performance context: social, technical, material, temporal and spatial, and this context is not fixed but open to infinite change and uncertain consequences.

Also, the New Life program has been launched for similar dis-ordering reasons. Chara explains how it was intentionally created to break up the '*well*', '*perfect*' and consequently '*rigid*' structure of the nucleus-communities. The idea was to provoke a '*flood*' inside the nucleus '*that split open the banks of the dam and naturally would have created new streams that in a spontaneous way would have formed a new order*' (Chara, woman, 49, Dh). This 'flood' in the nucleus was initiated by inviting people from all over the world (who were not Dh citizens) to live and participate with them for a few months, without being Damanhurians. She identifies the New life program as an '*invasion*' from the world into the nucleus-communities, but also as a successful opening attempt. The following resident quote reflects the main argument of Dh approach to social ordering and disordering:

> *We got to the point where things worked very well but they were going on for too many years and then eventually became a habit. The moment things become a habit they cannot be auto-renewable. The renewal and habit are two things that do not marry each other. Also one of the four bodies of Dh which is called the Game of Life, is created exactly with the aim to fight habits. Then when things work well but maybe are working for years, years, years at some point they must be dismantled.* (Kaus, man, Dh)

Experimentation and innovation are two key practices to understand Dh social enactment. Dynamic processes of launching new experimental forms, such as the creation of the region and the New Life program, are a constant aspect of the social Dh body. New social orders are performed in order to be destroyed, ameliorated and

renewed. Processes of creative-destruction are consequently enacted through dismantling and/or innovating practices to avoid the danger that established structures become habits. I argue that this dynamic and experimental social order has an unsettling nature: when a new order is deployed for the community enactment it becomes the limit to the enactment itself. In these spaces new social ordering such as nucleus-communities are enacted in order to be dismantled, ameliorated and renewed.

Heterotopia clearly captures the paradoxical nature of ordering and disordering, stable and unstable, regulated and unregulated; however, experimental intentional communities clearly take a distance from anti-utopian discourses (Grey, 1998, 2002, 2007) that consider utopian spaces to be aiming to reproduce defined, perfect and fixed societies. In Dh the utopian models enacted are constantly destroyed from within, unsettling its own order. Thus, alterity in these spaces does not lie on a specific established order but rather in its ability of ordering, disordering and re-ordering. In further investigating how Dh has built processes of alternative social ordering, the next section uncovers how games and arts have played a performative role in the social enactment.

### 1.22.3 Spaces of play

Heterotopias are *per excellence* unsettling spaces where "a new way of ordering emerges" (Hetherington, 1997: 40). This alternative social ordering is enacted through experimental, innovative, and creative practices. In the case of Dh this can also generate spaces of play and arts. Both utopian and heterotopian scholars have pointed out the importance of play and arts in such alternative spaces, but none of them has significantly investigated the role of these practices in the enactment process.

Accordingly, the third body of Dh is the 'Game of Life' (the third body of Dh[9]). Several people are elected annually as representatives of this body to organize projects and games that aim to bring change to the society, fighting against habits and rigid social structures (Dh internal document 1). Nashira (woman, Dh) explains: '*the Game of Life was born because things were going too well, and the social structure was becoming sclerotic [inflexible]*'. In particular, she explained that at that time, the beginning of 1980s, Damanhurian structure started to work properly, finding initial stability and

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[9] As discussed in *Chapter 4*, Dh is established on four main pillars called bodies: 1.The school of Meditation; 2.The social body; 3. The game of life; and, 4.Tecnarcato.

balance. But she echoed that when things work well people tend to '*stiffen in that model*' and it became a problem when new people arrived in Dh.

> *There was not the ability to change the mechanisms by those who had*
> *created their own community, the founders were not able to be open enough*
> *to allow the new generation to enter. [Having] the new generation also*
> *means having to change the model, because it's not that it's perfect!*
> (Nashira, woman, Dh)

Addressing this impasse, the spiritual leader Falco played a key role. He launched a battle-game between the new generation and the old founders. Falco gave a new territory and the Damanhurian flag to the new generation saying to them '*If you are convinced that you are the ones able to make Dh, defend the Dh flag!*', then he went to the older generation, saying again '*If you are convinced that you can represent Dh, go and take the Dh flag from them!*'. During her interview Chara commented on this event:

> *When there are new generations of citizens entering [in Dh] it is always*
> *difficult for the new people to bring new things and for the elders it is*
> *difficult to accept the newcomers and to pass [share] their experience.*
> *There is this block. Then you do a battle in the woods, with water guns for*
> *example, two days of battle and at the end ... The game is the element that in*
> *10 minutes makes you know the other. When you play with someone you*
> *know at once what that person is like. You can talk with someone but that*
> *person really knows you when you play together. Considering that it doesn't*
> *exist a table game for 300 people while instead the forest is big, the forest is*
> *the field of play, the space where you play and you know each other.* (Chara,
> woman, Dh)

The novelty is introduced in Dh while playing. The game was not the result of a spontaneous process but it was instead introduced provocatively with the main function of connecting and breaking through generational blocks and social resistances, and so having a performative function in the social enactment of Dh. Through playing, innovative and creative practices are implemented but also social bonds are created and reinforced. According to De Cauter and Dehaene (2008), while analysing heterotopias as spaces of play "Entering the game, entering the circle, requires some sort of initiation into the rules of the game. Play, therefore, has the capacity to establish a sense of community" (*ibid*: 96). I argue that playing contributes to establishing social bonds and to reinforcing the community cohesion, firstly, when the group of people decide to take part in it and enter in the game and, secondly, through the act of playing itself.

In *Making is Connecting*, Gauntlett (2011), explores how the creativity process can strengthen social bonds. For Gauntlett, in order to make something it is necessary to

connect together materials and ideas, and usually to connect with other people and with the physical environment. Damanhurians while playing have to share and connect ideas, to get involved with the physical environment – for example the woods that are often the playing-field- while also producing forms of social creativity. In order to do that, Dh provides a playing field, a place where the game can take place. The gaming aspect provides a childish dimension, and considering a group of 300 adults are playing 'for serious matters,' it is not conventional. Inspired by Foucault (1986), the playing field could be understood both as a 'chronic' and 'permanent' heterotopia. Chronic because time is limited, the game starts and ends, but also permanent because Dh always reserves spaces for a playing field (the woods for example). Furthermore, I argue that if permanent heterotopias are spaces where time accumulates, they are also spaces where time diminishes, where age decreases or simply where age does not matter. In this sort of heterochronia, Dh innovation takes place, breaking up rigid structures and in these heterocronic spaces social enactment is performed.

The generational battle is one of the numerous games enacted in Dh. Another game organised by the Game of Life had the object of stimulating 'kindness' among residents, where each person had 'to be kind' with someone else anonymously. The people giving the kindness were assigned in advance, but those receiving did not know. Chara says how people started to receive free coffees at the bar, free massages in the clinic and so on. But this process started to question the idea of kindness: '*Is this kindness?*' and, '*What is it kindness?*' (Chara, woman, Dh). Through this game, discussions about kindness appeared in the Damanhurian newspaper called QDQ and became central during general weekly meetings. Chara concludes "*eventually we've got to understand what kindness is about only because we have lived it, experienced it and put into practice. It was a game.*" In this case, according to Chara the experiment revealed that the '*real kindness*' was not connected to material gifts, but instead it was an attitude.

Thus, Dh games are also a way to understand key concepts and values through experimental collective practices. According to Cooper (2014:214), "[play] provides a way of enacting concepts, such as the market, that switches and reshapes what such concepts can become; and it provides a mode of critique that draws people in". Although Cooper was referring to market play, her explanation concisely identifies how play, more precisely games, has the capacity to enact and re-shape concepts such as kindness. Being actively involved, I argue, creates a collective identity and thus, reinforces social bonds. In fact, the inherent collective nature of the games – the

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necessity that a group of people has to be involved – has a direct impact on the social enactment but also on conceptual enactment. The practice of playing in order to stimulate creativity, break rigid structures and reinforce social bonds generates processes of alternative ordering differing from the conventional social practices.

> That space [of play] which is the seedbed of culture, its condition and possibility – from ritual to theatre – provides a clearing within the conventional order of society, sheltered from the normalizing forces of the everyday (Turner, 1982:20 in De Cauter and Dehaene, 2008:96).

Inspired by Turner, I argue that playing contributes to the social but also conceptual and cultural enactments of the community, shaping and performing an alternative ordering and disordering. The next section analyses the last performative practices identified in the enactment of Dh community: arts.

### 1.22.4  Performing arts

> Art, according to theorists of affect, offers intensity, the thrill of experience that crosses thresholds, transgresses limits and shatters and (re)produces subject and object, self and other, in unanticipated ways in a specific moment of becoming (Garforth, 2009:19)

As discussed in the theoretical chapter, heterotopian and utopian scholars have both often mentioned the importance of arts, although often supported by limited empirical evidence and concise theorisations (i.e. Kraft, 2007; Garforth, 2009; Cooper, 2014). Exploring Dh, this section shifts from generational battles to artistic battles. Artistic battles are something very common in Dh. They are a combination of playing and arts, where the groups involved challenge themselves to produce artistic artefacts. In one of them, six teams competed to build the 'Altar of the Earth.' Each team had a given territory where they had to build their altar. Judges had to decide which construction would become the official 'Altar of the Earth' of Dh (see figures 6.4 of the winner Altar).

**Figures 6.4a and 6.4b:** The Altar of the Earth (author, 2012)

Artistic battles have transformed the Dh landscape contributing both to the material and social enactment of Dh. Figures 6.4, 6.5 and 6.6 show how the territory of *Damjl* is shaped by sculptures, paintings made by Damanhurians.

**Figures 6.5a and 6.5b:** Damanhurian paintings in *Damjl* (author, 2012)



**Figure 6.6:** Damanhurian sculptures in *Damjl* (author, 2012)

This most relevant artistic work of Dh is the Temple of Humankind. For more than 20 years, Damanhurians have been involved in the construction of their spiritual centre. Built underground, for years the temple was hidden from the external public until authorities discovered it in 1992. The temple is now open to the public and visitors from all over the world come to see it. The artistic work done inside by Damanhurians is impressive (see figures 6.7). Building the temple was an opportunity for people to discover their latent artistic potential.
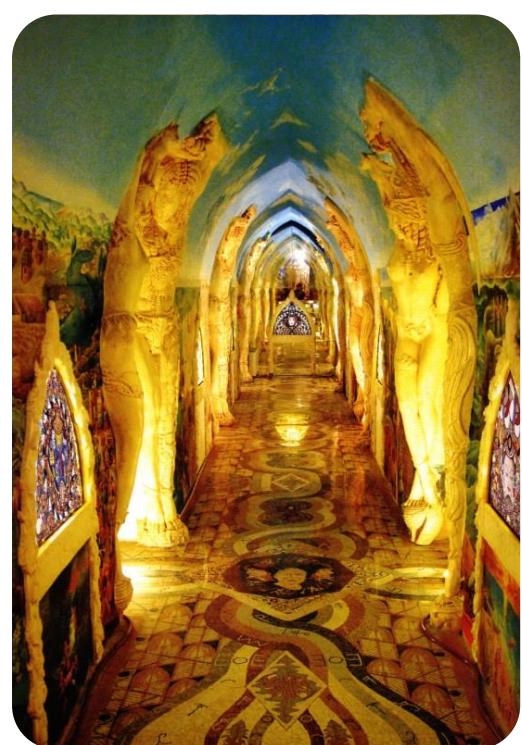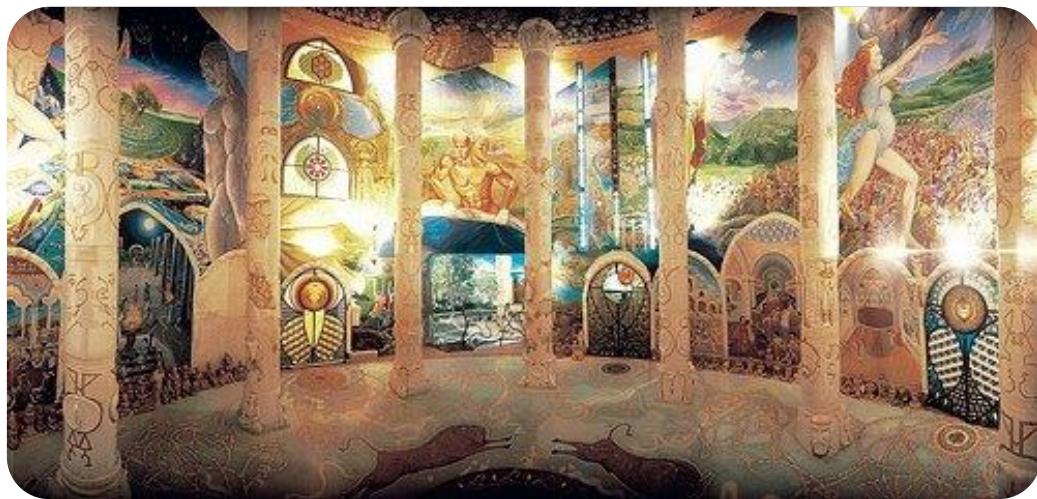


**Figures 6.7a, 6.7b, 6.7c and 6.7d:** Temple of Humankind in Dh (Damanhur, n.d.)

*The temple is born, let's go here, let's go there, without imagining what we could be able to build.* (Kurah, man, Dh)

*The temple is our baby, our life, our finest work, it is a source of pride because it is part of our growth; through the temple we have uncovered talents, transformed people.* (Porrima, woman, Dh)

When Damanhurians started the Temple, they could not imagine what they could have achieved. According to Crouch (2009:132), "[c]reativity emerges through the experience of practice and doing". While practising and doing, Dh people surprised themselves and discovered their artistic talents. The Temple reveals something else: the temple is a collective masterpiece. It is not the result of a few main Dh artists and furthermore, paintings, sections of the temple do not specify who designed what. Each citizen has been involved in its construction and the Temple is a collective piece of art.

The Altar of the Earth and in particular the Temple of the Humankind are some of the example of how arts play a key performative role in Dh. Firstly, the collective aspect of these performances enacts the community socially; secondly, shaping the Dh landscape, arts contribute to Dh materialisation; and thirdly, in these performative processes individuals discover and manifest hidden artistic talents. Expanding on the latter point, I argue that in Dh community enactment, arts generate heterotopic spaces of vernacular creativity where everyone can perform everyday creative practices (Hallam and Ingold, 2007; Edensor *et al*., 2009; Gauntlett, 2011). According to Edensor *et al*. (2009), vernacular creativity seeks to re-conceptualise creativity and to disconnect it from its bond with conventional forms of innovation and competition. In these spaces creativity does not belong to a privileged class, nor is enacted predominantly for generating economic values. Economic values can be a result of the creative process (i.e. visitors pay a ticket to enter in the temple) but they are not the reason why the creative process itself is generated.

In order to stimulate innovation, to break up structures and to avoid habitual practice, Dh launches creative experiments such as game activities and artistic battles. These performative practices play a key role in shaping heterotopic spaces of alternative ordering. In conclusion, drawing on my findings, I have argued that experimental game activities and artistic battles organized between the residents have stimulated the creative potential of each individual inside the community, strengthened social bonds, and generated social alternative spaces, performing the community enactments socially, materially, culturally and conceptually.

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## 1.23 Conclusions

To summarise, this chapter has analysed the material enactment of Dh and TM. Initially, I explained that, paradoxically, financial contributions are necessary in order to activate the materialisation of alternative spiritual spaces. This suggests that these intentional communities seek to become economic actors to sustain themselves. In the material enactment, also practices of gift economies such as voluntary collective work play a key role in co-constituting both the individual and community scales. Collective voluntary work, I argue, is the essential means towards the materialisation and territorialisation for both Dh and TM, and generally for intentional heterotopias. Nevertheless, performing diverse economies, such as gift economies, in a society driven by capitalist conventional economic form can generate several implications. In Dh, we have seen how the alternative ordering implemented combines both conventional and diverse economies to be able to cope in a capitalist society. Furthermore, though very intense rhythms of work are performed in the enactment process, conventional ontologies of 'working time' have been challenged and re-conceptualised. Processes of economization of heterotopias have been underlined, but in order to understand the material enactment of heterotopias I have argued that a broader understanding of economy should be used: an ontology that is open to practices of diverse economies but also that conceives economy as spiritually embedded. Therefore, intentional spiritual heterotopias are those spaces where the material enactment is performed though practices that transgress the boundaries between economic, social and spiritual dimensions, generating alternative orderings that are supported by new radical ontologies that challenge conventional understandings.

In the second part of the chapter, I have focused on the Damanhurian case study to investigate how the alternative social order is performed. Over a few decades, I argue that Dh has developed an established and regulated social body, which is shared and agreed among the residents. Although it seems fixed and established, I argue that is provisional, experimental and dynamic. Drawing upon the example of the nucleus-communities, I have explored the unsettling nature of Dh showing how processes of ordering and disordering are enacted in these intentional heterotopias and highlighting how on-going experiments and innovations are the performative elements of the social Dh enactment. In the last section, I argued that also games and arts play a relevant performative role creating 'spaces of play' (Marin, 1984 cited in Harvey, 2000, in Hetherington, 1997; Dehane and De Coutier, 2008) where heterotopias take shape and

place. In addition, this section has emphasised how these performing processes are unsettling, pushing residents out of their comfort-zone to discover their full potential on one hand, and to disrupt the stability and habitus of everyday life on the other. I have finally argued that they contribute to materialise and revitalise the alternative ordering and strengthen the social bonds among residents enacting the community socially, materially, culturally and conceptually.

# The transcendental: juxtaposing and embodying

The previous chapter indicates that spirituality is significant, both to individual and community scales of enactment. This highlights the need to develop a more nuanced analysis of what I call the transcendental scale. As discussed in *Chapter 4*, the transcendental scale is not a typical scale of spatial analysis as it has no conventional geographical reference. It does not even have temporal references. However, as suggested by Howitt (2002), it is possible to begin exploring this scale of enactment from the body. Rather than to pass through the body of the respondents, the analysis follows a personal process of embodiment with the active involvement of the researcher. By participating in the community rituals, this study employs what I term 'spiritual embodied methods', in which the researcher undertakes a spiritual journey, as part of the research process, in order to understand the dynamics of the community. The aim of this chapter, then, is to explore how the transcendental scale is enacted and how it shapes intentional heterotopias.

In terms of structure, two categories of transcendental practices will be analysed: rituals and everyday community life. After explaining the importance that rituals play in both communities of Dh and TM, the first half of the chapter will focus on TM, to explore how the transcendental scale is enacted in shamanic rituals. Using my auto-ethnographic experience of participating in shamanic Ayahuasca ceremonies, I examine four key themes: spaces of juxtaposition, gnosis, embodiment and disembodiment. The first part of the chapter makes reference to four summary boxes which draw on my fieldwork diary. Each box draws upon my personal experiences and observations, and serves to illustrate the processes of enactment of the transcendental scale. I then explore everyday community life in both TM and Dh as another type of transcendental practice. The last part of the chapter considers more broadly the spiritualities adopted in TM and Dh, exploring how they shape spiritual heterochronies.

## 1.24  Transcending through embodiment

### *1.24.1  Rituals*

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**Box 7.1: Auto-ethnographic diary − It's the day!**

It's finally arrived the day! 28th June 2012… the day that I am going to do the ritual of Ayahuasca, here in TM. I feel a bit nervous. I know that I cannot eat a lot before the ritual, that I need to stay light, but can I have my morning coffee? Can I smoke my cigarettes? Jussara seems much more relaxed than me… well, I guess she's got more experience and knows what to expect… I asked around how the rituals would be… but when I ask, people just tell me that it is difficult to describe, that it is very personal, that I should do it…and they also say "*lindo, lindo, lindo demais*" [beautiful, beautiful, too beautiful]. A few days ago I explained my research project to Alba María and I told her that I was going to interview the residents of TM. She said that I will understand better TM by doing the rituals… Well, not sure about that… but here I am, ready (I think…) for this adventure.

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Rituals play an important role in spiritual heterotopias and therefore in the communities of Dh and TM. Rituals are able to reveal how the transcendental scale is enacted and how they shape alternative sacred spaces. Rituals are not the only transcendental practice of the communities of Dh and TM. Indeed in section 7.2 I will explore how living in the community can be considered another form of transcendental practice. Yet, rituals have undoubtedly a fundamental role in spiritual heterotopias.

> The identities that are produced in these spaces, while they may be different and somewhat unsettling and challenging to the many who are happy not to challenge cultural norms, have their own logic, their own symbols, their own rituals and their own ordering. (Hetherington, 1997: 31)

TM and Dh have their own community rituals. They celebrate solstices and equinoxes and specific anniversaries or community festivities. They also both celebrate particular events such as the full moon, yet do so in different ways. For Dh, during the nights of the full moon the 'Ritual of the Oracle' takes place in the Open Temple. This is considered to be a "sacred ritual of contact and offering to the Divine Forces who allow and encourage the spiritual evolution of human beings" (Ananas *et al.*, 2006: 95). This event is also open to the public, after previous registration, and is accompanied by drumming and dances. In TM the Full Moon Ritual is called the *Ritual da Lua Cheia* and is often greeted by the ritual of the sweat lodge, or purification ceremony.

Participants enter into a sweat lodge with the intention of purifying themselves while singing and drumming. The sweat lodge itself is a hut built from wood and natural materials which, for the ritual, is covered with wool blankets to create a sauna effect. During the ritual, each participant upon entering the sweat lodge brings a hot stone from the fire, set up in advance, to put in the middle of the hut. Once everyone is inside the lodge the purification ceremony starts. This is considered an ancient shamanic ritual that has been used to purify and heal the body, the mind and the spirit since the Bronze Age (Gahlin and Spencer, 1999).

According to Hetherington (1997) rituals shape the identity of these alternative spaces. Researching into these communities, the importance of rituals for understanding their enactment of the community became more and more evident. As such, and as remarked by members of the community, a profound and integral aspect of understanding these communities would be lost if their rituals were not taken into consideration. Mikania (woman, TM) suggested that although it is possible to learn shamanic philosophy from academic sources, shamanism is a traditional indigenous philosophy that has been handed down, from generation to generation, through oral transmission.

Moreover, from this study it emerged how rituals contribute significantly to different levels of enactment. Firstly, they have a strong individualistic component, because each person participating in the ritual has a personal and unique experience that contributes to his/her own spiritual path. Secondly, rituals shape the community life and cycles, generating common sacred spaces shared by community members. Thirdly, rituals are one of the transcendental practices through which alternative sacred spaces are enacted. Therefore, different scales of analysis overlap and co-constitute each other when studying the transcendental scale in the enactment process of these alternative spaces.

Among the several shamanic rituals that happen in TM, the next section will focus on one of them: the Ayahuasca ritual. Firstly, the next part sets up the scene of the Ayahuasca ritual (see box 7.2) followed by an explanation of it from different resources. Following the experiences recounted in boxes 7.3 and 7.4, the analysis has to consider three main analytical themes: juxtaposing, gnosis, and embodying. Together these elements highlight the multiple spatialities and temporalities enacted in the transcendental scale through processes of embodiment and disembodiment.

### 1.24.2 Ayahuasca ceremony

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**Box 7.2: Auto-ethnographic diary – The preparation**

We met in the Casa do Sol at sunset. The Shamans were already there and welcomed me when I arrived. I placed my sleeping bag on the floor, respecting the circle and waited. People were arriving, some of them were TM residents, others were from Salvador or the surrounding area. I was very nervous… People seemed to be much more relaxed than me! The *Ayahuasquero* [the Shaman that leads the Ayahuasca ceremony] started to prepare a sort of small altar. He laid a small towel on the floor in front of him, invited people to put their power objects on it and took out *a medicina [Ayahuasca]* from his bag. He then started to explain what Ayahuasca was and how it was produced. Afterwards, he asked us, one by one, our intentions for the journey… Everyone shared their intentions… The *Ayahuasquero* poured a bit of *a medicina* into his glass, he drank it and went outside for a few minutes. Everyone was silent and waiting. The *Ayahuasquero* came back and invited the first person on his left to drink it. It was me! I went there, my heart was exploding and I was not sure what to do… I knelt in front of him. He first put *Aqua de Florida* [flowered water cologne] in my hands, and he told me that I should clap my hands and wave them over my face and body. I did it. After he filled a small glass of the purple medicine [Ayahuasca], he gently offered to me. I bowed to him and to the medicine and I drank it. I moved back to my sleeping bag, awaiting the mysterious effect.

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Defining Ayahuasca is difficult and problematic, because on the one hand you have the definition given by the Shamans and, on the other, the definitions given by scientists that can neither prove nor deny the validity of the Shamans' understanding. In highlighting the two perspectives it is necessary to recognise that limited research exists outside the fields of anthropology and psychology. In fact, "there was no such thing as Ayahuasca studies" (Beyer, 2012:1) and to my knowledge no research has been conducted by geographers.

From a scientific perspective, Ayahuasca is a brew composed of two plants: banisteriopsis caapi and psychotria viris[10] (Lewis, 2008), and it is considered a powerful hallucinogen (Callaway *et al.*, 1999).

> Ayahuasca is an Amazonian psychoactive shamanic brew that often elicits
> spontaneous, intense, and meaningful imagery narratives related to

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[10] It combines monoamine oxidase-inhibiting beta-carboline alkaloids with N,N-dimethyltryptamine (DMT), a psychedelic agent showing 5-HT2A agonist activity (Riba *et al*.2004 in Lewis 2012)

psychological healing, problem solving, knowledge acquisition, community cohesion, creativity, and spiritual development. (Echenhofer, 2012)

According to Beyer (2012:3), Ayahuasca has been used for millennia in the indigenous communities as "diagnostic tools", used to get information about personal life such as "identity of the seducer of an unfaithful spouse, the secret dealings of a business rival, the location and nature of the malignant darts within the patient's body". Ayahuasca is also known for its healing purposes, but despite some research that has demonstrated that alkaloids contained in the brew can help with anxiety and depression (Santos *et al.*, 2007 in Fotiou, 2012), it still remains an unexplored field[11].

On the other side, according to the anthropologist Foutiou (2012:9), Ayahuasca is considered by shamans to be a sacred healing plant, referred to as "the mother of all plants", and often also called as "the Medicine". The *Ayahuasquero* of TM states that:

> *her [Ayahuasca] focus is on the consciousness of the individual – on the individual growth as a human being, on touching the diamond that each one of us has inside, on making this diamond shine, even if at certain times it obscures. Certain times we get confused by our personal emotions, our personal ambitions, but the diamond is inside, wanting to shine.* (Sapium, man, TM)

In the community of TM, the Ayahuasca ceremony is generally a monthly ritual. Over the course of my fieldwork I participated in a total of four Ayahuasca ceremonies. Generally approximately 20 people attend them, they can be TM residents and visitors. In TM it is a personal decision to undertake the rituals and residents have no obligation to participate in them. Temporary visitors can attend these ceremonies as well as people from the surrounding area that are connected to TM, but who do not reside there.

The rituals take place inside the community, in the 'Northern Star Temple' that is a specific sacred place, dedicated exclusively to Ayahuasca rituals. Yet I argue that the space of the ritual is an alternative space in the community itself. The ritualistic practices of coming to the venue, laying the sleeping bag, sharing the personal intentions, receiving the *Agua de Florida* and later drinking the Ayahuasca is the ritualistic preparation required to enter into this other space. The preparation itself is part of the ritual. It is about setting the scene for entering into another reality. This ritualistic preparation is undertaken by all the participants at a community-group level

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[11] Also some research has demonstrated that it is not a toxic substance (Luna and White 2000; Fotiou 2012), that it does not produce physical danger (Lewis 2008).

before developing into a more individual experience. During the ceremony another space is enacted, it is a heterotopic sacred place. Considering the subjectivity of this ritual, the accounts presented in boxes 7.3 and 7.4 reflect exclusively on my personal experiences to reflect how the transcendental scale is enacted and how it shapes alternative spaces.

### 1.24.3 *Juxtaposing, gnosis and embodying*

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**Box 7.3 Auto-ethnographic diary – The meeting**

What an experience! For the first 10 minutes, one hour, two hours… I don't know.. It was like nothing… Just a lot of thoughts… I started to think that Ayahuasca didn't work with me, but at some point, something changed! She arrived. It's so difficult to explain. But there are few things that I remember very clear. The vision started with a sword passing through my throat. No pain! I could only see a very strong light coming from the sword. It was like a movie that has a spectacular beginning! Suddenly, I saw myself in the middle of the forest, animals, plants, shapes, colours, it was amazing.. but after.. I felt like a big plate of concrete was covering my body. I could not move, I could not breathe, and at some point a voice (I guess was her)... asked me "How does it feel?" "Do you like that?" Only then I realised that she was showing me what the human beings do to the nature… so powerful... so heavy… but something changed … and suddenly I felt so much love, I felt that the nature is generous, abundant and has got infinite love for the human beings despite what we do… The nature is the Queen of this planet…  such a strong realisation! After (I don't know how long after), I had the impression of smoking a cigarette and when I approached my imaginary cigarette to the mouth, it became a parrot which I had eaten. This very colourful parrot arrived to my stomach… and started to peck to my stomach… Such a weird feeling… I was aware of every single part of my body... This parrot never left… I guess it is still there… a lot of other things happened… so beautiful… But in the morning when I woke up and had to share this experience with the others to receive the guidance from the shamans, I could not speak. The only thing that I said was "so much love, love… The Nature is the Queen! I think words cannot express what I felt…"

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The box 7.3 is a short summary of my first Ayahuasca ritual in TM. How does it shed light on the enactment of the transcendental scale and how does it shape alternative spaces? Three main themes will be discussed: juxtaposing, gnosis, and embodying.

*Sacred spaces of juxtaposition*

> This is the main principle of heterotopia for Foucault: as sites – and these
> can be textual sites just as much as geographical ones – they bring together

heterogeneous collections of unusual things without allowing them a unity
or order established through resemblance. Instead, their ordering is derived
from a process of similitude which produces, in an almost magical,
uncertain space, monstrous combinations that unsettle the flow of discourse.
(Hetherington, 1997:43)

In *The Order of Things*, as discussed above by Hetherington, Foucault presents a heterotopic taxonomy in which order does not respect the usual way in which things are organized (Johnson, 2012a). I argue that the Ayahuasca ritual is the heterotopia *par excellence.* This is what happens in the Ayahuasca rituals: images, voices, feelings and bodily sensations are combined together in an order which does not make sense. Initially I felt the aggressiveness of human beings towards nature when my body was 'covered' by a plate of cement, but suddenly I felt the unconditional love of nature. During the ritual, I was aware of what was happening, although it was an altered state of consciousness, my mind was clear, I was thinking and commenting to myself about what was happening. The parrot in the stomach did not make sense during the ritual. Sometimes the visions were so bizarre that it made me laugh. Why am I eating a parrot? Why does it peck my stomach and why it does not leave my body? Nor did the sword going through my throat make sense.

The ritual was an unsettling process: breaking the ordinary logic of things, and combining heterogeneous elements together. Certainly, Ayahuasca ritual encompasses one of the main features of heterotopias: juxtaposition. As Foucualt (1986:25) suggests, heterotopias are "capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible". This juxtaposition has the ability of breaking the boundaries of logic and rationality, the conventional Western ways of looking at the world, and of enacting an alternative sacred space where a new (dis)order is shaped. I argue, then, that Ayahuasca rituals have the capacity to juxtapose in a single real place many different places, of destroying the logical order of things, and of making associations that logically would not make sense.

Interestingly, according to the anthropologist Michael Taussig, sacred spaces tend instead to be perceived as ordered and organized and ritualistic practices contribute to this sense of formality. Yet, shamanic Ayahuasca rituals shape a juxtaposing, disordered and unsettling sacred space, what I will term a heterotopic sacred space.

By and large anthropology has bound the concept of ritual hand and foot to
the imagery of order, to such an extent that order is identified with the

sacred itself, thereby casting disorder into the pit of evil. […] *Yagé* nights [Ayahuasca ceremonies] challenge this ritual of explanation of ritual. (Taussig, 2000:124)

Not only are heterotopic sacred spaces enacted through the transcendental practice of Ayahuasca, but also this shamanic ritual challenges conventional ways of understanding rituals. Indeed, rituals in heterotopias have the function of disordering, juxtaposing and unsettling. Thus, shamanic rituals, despite producing a heterotopic sacred space, are themselves alternative transcendental practices.

*Spiritual 'border gnosis'*

Foucault does not explicitly consider heterotopias as sacred spaces or sacred spaces as heterotopias, but his understanding of the spiritual corresponds with the concept of heterotopia. For Foucault the spiritual valorises the 'other', the excluded; he recognises spiritual practices whose experiences cross the boundary of rationality, that break with the dominant logic. In addition, for Foucault, spirituality is:

> The search, practice and experience through which the subject carries out
> the necessary transformation on himself in order to have access to the truth.
> We will call "spirituality" then the set of these researches, practices, and
> experiences… [which are for the subject…] the price to be paid for access to
> the truth. (Foucault, 2005a:15 cited in Vintges, 2011)

The Ayahuasca ritual for shamans is a ceremony where Nature, also known as the Great Mother, or the Goddess Mother, is passing her teachings on to human beings. The shamans are the mediators that facilitate this connection.

> *Shamanism for us is this: it is the Nature that is the Great Mother. This is
> the Great Master, this is the big book where everything comes from, all
> human knowledge; the book is here. […] Everything has been brought to me
> by the Medicine, all the learnings come to me through the Medicine of
> Ayahuasca. Ayahuasca showed me her potential, her beautiful mystery. She
> opens her book, the book of the nature for those who want to see, for those
> who have the courage to see, for those who want to dive into themselves....
> the path is my path of personal growth, as a human being.* (Ayahuasquero,
> Sapium, man, TM)

These spiritual heterotopias, enacted through transcendental practices such as the shamanic rituals, generate alternative processes of learning that, in shaping personal spiritual paths, challenge conventional knowledges. These spiritual heterotopias could

be an attempt to rescue traditional knowledges that have been subalternized during the process of colonization. Rescued subalternized knowledges are generally identified by Mignolo as "Border Gnosis" (2000). Mignolo makes a distinction between gnosis and epistemology. The former, used predominantly in the early modern world, refers to knowledge in general – "knowledge either attained by mystic contemplation or by pure logical mathematical reasoning" (*ibid:*10) – while the latter, epistemology, refers only to scientific knowledge. He explains that through the colonial/modern project, gnosis and gnoseology has been cast away by epistemology and the subalternizing of other kinds of knowledge. Foucault calls this "subjugated knowledges", identified as "something which in a sense is altogether different, namely, a whole set of knowledges that have been disqualified as inadequate to their task or insufficiently elaborated: naïve knowledges, located low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition of scientificity" (Foucault, 1994 [1976]:203).

The gnosis that is given during the rituals does not aim to have a scientific recognition; this is not the aim of shamans. It cannot be universalized, considering that each human being receives different teachings and has a different spiritual journey. Instead the teachings are personal, disordered and perhaps unclear. Thus this gnosis, that comes through irrational, illogical and (dis)ordered forms, aims to reveal the personal spiritual path and '*to touch the awareness of the individual*' (Sapium, man, TM). This justifies the emphasis on participating in person in the rituals rather than referring to the experiences of others. People could have explained to me what the rituals were about, but I could never have "learnt" without experiencing them.

Yet, for the reader, it might not be clear how the visions reported above in box 7.3 and my experience with Ayahuasca served to shape my spiritual path, touch my consciousness or reveal spiritual gnosis. Although my first experience was initially very confusing, perhaps 'bizarre' and inexplicable, it started to make sense, even on a rational level, in the following weeks and months. This was the beginning of a shamanic path that follows me to the present day. That experience changed my perception with nature. Though I was interested in studying eco-villages, and I was aware of the importance of respecting the natural world, I was actually separated from it. I was not connected to nature in a more profound level and I always felt it to be something external to me. In the Ayahuasca experience I felt my nature, I saw myself as nature, my organic body as part of nature. This deep realisation has changed my way of living, my way of nurturing myself, my way of looking at social phenomena. I experienced what

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some shamans call the "murdering of the ego" (Beyer, 2012:2), this was represented symbolically through the vision of the sword, whereby I was moving from an ethnocentric perspective toward an eco-centric perspective.

This spiritual border gnosis has a fundamental function in the process of enactment of the TM community because it constitutes the spiritual base of the community itself. Establishing the community through this spiritual gnosis, gained through transcendental practices as rituals, enact an alternative ordering. The result is not the abandonment of orthodox epistemologies, but rather the adoption and integration of a wide set of knowledges. The next section will discuss how in these heterotopic spaces, spiritual border gnosis is passed to individuals through processes of embodiment. Therefore, another relevant point that should be taken into consideration is the function of the body.

*Embodiment and tattoos*

The body acquires a key role in the enactment of the transcendental scale and the production of sacred spaces in spiritual heterotopias. For Foucault, there is a strong connection between the body and spirituality. He is interested in "the modes of experience that are rooted in the body that transgress rational or conscious thought" (Vintges, 2011:100). He introduces the notion of 'spiritual corporality' to move beyond the Western dualism of soul and body to reaffirm the neglected importance of the latter in the spiritual. Spiritual corporality "opens up the space of the Other in religion, the neglected and silenced aspects of the religious institutions; in this case, the body" (Carrette, 2002: 55). In the field of geography of spirituality Holloway considers "the body and body practices as central to the enactment of sacred spaces" (2003:1963). Highlighting the neglected role of the body, Holloway's contribution challenges previous studies of the production of sacred places.

For instance, the body plays a key function in shamanic rituals, such as the Ayahuasca ceremony. The Ayahuasca ritual effectively starts when the person begins drinking. The liquid moves through and interacts with the body revealing images, visions and experiences. The parrot that '*I ate and that stayed in my stomach*' during the ritual was felt as a strong bodily experience. Moreover, a few weeks after the rituals, when speaking with one of the shamans of TM, and coinciding also with a series of events that happened afterwards, I discovered that the parrot was my *Animal Mestre* (Master Animal). The Master Animal in the shamanic tradition is the animal that reveals the

paths in front of you; it is a sort of spiritual guide (Alba María, 2008). When we (the group) shared our intentions at the beginning of the Ayahuasca ceremony, I asked to see my life path more clearly. Not my future, but to have a sense of my life mission, if there was one. The long ethnographic fieldwork had destabilised some of my main reference points and I was feeling that I needed to 'anchor' again within myself. I began researching the role of the parrot and its spiritual significance. I felt a very strong connection with this bird. In fact, in the ritual afterwards, I saw myself as a parrot, experiencing the total embodiment of the parrot. The parrot has the ability to replicate (mimic) noises. Through the parrot I identified myself as a spokesperson, as someone that uses her voice to communicate to the others, as a teacher that is spreading messages, concepts to the students.

Another key point that emerges from these findings is that the body is the means through which spiritual gnosis is passed. According to the ethnographer Turner, who carried out research with indigenous Ndembu groups in Zambia:

> Whatever the mode of representation, the body is regarded as a sort of symbolic template for the communication of *gnosis*, mystical knowledge about the nature of things and how they come to be what they are (Turner 1967:107).

The body is the means through which the transcendental scale is enacted and through which the gnosis is revealed. In these spiritual heterotopias 'border gnosis' and traditional beliefs are rescued. In these spaces, the body, the soul, the mind, and nature, (categories that have tended to be considered separate from each other), combine together in the production of transcendental gnosis. Social geographers in the last decade have considered the importance of the body and of embodiment in particular, looking at how knowledge arises from body experiences and activities (see Longhurst 1997, 2009). However, it has never been explored as a method to gather spiritual knowledge. Through analysing Ayahuasca rituals, it becomes evident how through embodiment another form of knowledge is produced. In these spiritual heterotopias social and spiritual geographies combine together where the body becomes an analytical scale of investigation for transcendental practices.

Moreover, it has been such a strong encounter and embodiment that during the fieldwork I had a tattoo of a parrot made on my back (see figures 7.1)
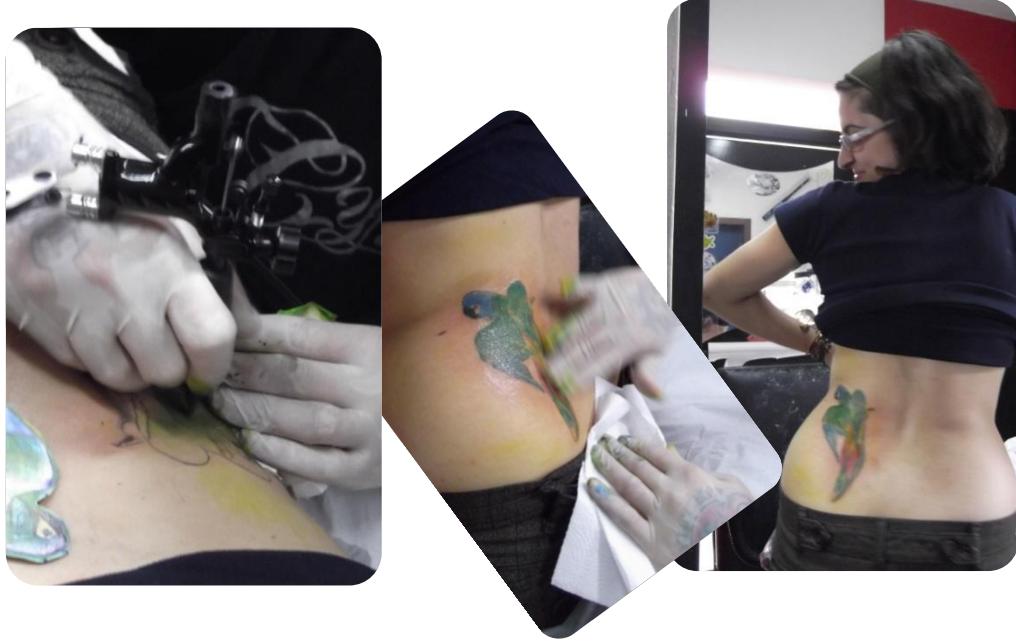
**Figure 7.1:** Tattoo (Jussara, 2012)

While explaining the utopian body, Foucault discusses the motives of tattooing oneself going behind aesthetic discourses:

> To tattoo oneself, to put on makeup or a mask, is probably something else: *it is to place the body in communication with secret powers and invisible forces* [emphasis added]. [...] The mask, the tattoo, the make-up: They place the body into an other space. They usher it into a place that does not take place in the world directly. They make of this body a fragment of imaginary space, which will communicate with the universe of divinity, or with the universe of the other. (Foucault, 2006 [1966])

The tattoo can be considered as a symbolic representation or manifestation of a spiritual path. That designed part of the body can assume a sacred value where the spiritual gnosis received through the embodiment is represented. It could be a spiritual reminder; it could be the metaphorical access toward the transcendental scale. The body then becomes a means through which the transcendental scale is enacted and spiritual gnosis is produced, but it can also become the representation of a sacred space itself. In these heterotopic spaces, transcending passes through embodiment.

### 1.24.4 Disembodying through embodiment: multiple spatialities and temporalities

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**Box 7.4 Auto-ethnographic diary – Travelling**

During another one of my Ayahuasca ceremonies in TM, I saw my life journey. Such a weird feeling! I saw myself when I was conceived, when I was in my mother's womb, I saw myself growing year after year. I re-lived the emotions of those ages, the joys and sufferings of the different phases of life. I saw myself up to the present days and at some point even the future. The future was so unexpected that I laughed; I laughed a lot during the ritual… I started a process of questioning and dialogue with that 'voice'. More I was questioning and laughing at what I was seeing more the visions became clearer, and clearer. I spent long time with the vision of the life journey…well I think so...difficult to say… And, after when the shaman sang some songs the vision changed. If before I had the feeling of going out of my body and travelling in time, now was in space. I arrived in Asia… I had to meet someone out there. I could see everything, but this person could not see me. I came back, I took back my body and went walk to the bananas trees there in TM (they really existed).

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The notion of the 'utopian body' explored by Foucault can help inform this analysis. Initially, for Foucault (2006 [1966]: 229), the body is the place where the human being is "condemned" and therefore, "[u]topia is a place outside all places, but is a place where I will have a body without a body". In a sense in the transcendental scale experienced through the Ayahuasca ceremony, I felt to 'have a body without a body'. This enacted a transcendental experience whereby the body is not constrained in the corporal dimension but can lead to processes of disembodiment. In these processes of disembodiment multiple spatialities and temporalities are perceived and the body does not feel 'condemned' to the corporal dimension.

In short, the body is the means for the enactment of the transcendental scale. The body becomes the device where the scales of the individual, the community, the local and the global come together to reveal multiple perspectives of life and existence. It becomes the device where the processes of disembodiment allow for travel through different scales and temporalities. In the same way that multiple spatialities are overlapping, multiple temporalities are in fact perceived. During the ritual, it is very difficult to perceive a 'real' time. Past, present and future come together in the same temporal dimension, a dimension where it is possible to move without temporal constraints. Therefore, my argument here is that the disembodiment process passes through

embodiment. Through this (dis)embodiment, conventional perceptions of space and time are challenged by an intertwinement of multiple spatialities and temporalities.

To summarise, the first part of the chapter has emphasised how the transcendental scale is enacted through transcendental practices such as rituals. Although I have mentioned the importance of rituals in both communities, I have focused my analysis on the TM shamanic ritual of Ayahuasca. I have argued that the Ayahuasca ritual is the heterotopia *par excellence* and that this ritual challenges conventional ritualistic practices producing sacred spaces of juxtaposition. Through the disordered perceived in the transcendental scale, spiritual border gnosis is rescued with the aim of revealing the personal spiritual path. I have also argued how the body is the main device through which the transcendental scale is enacted and it is the device through which spiritual border gnosis is passed to the individual. It is also the means by which processes of disembodiment are activated. In these processes of (dis)embodiment multiple spatialities and temporalities are challenged and shaped.

In these spiritual heterotopias the enactment of the transcendental scale through rituals produces heterotopic sacred spaces where the body is the means toward the transcendental; gnosis is not rational but spiritual and multi partialities and temporalities are overlapping. Alternative orderings that shape the community space are therefore created through the transcendental scale. However, the transcendental scale is not enacted only through rituals, but also through everyday community life. Considering both communities of Dh and TM, the next section will explore how community life can function as a repertoire of transcendental practices.

## 1.25  Transcending through the 'other'

Living in intentional communities is often perceived as an example of "escape attempts", namely, "the search for some site outside everyday life which we might regard as an 'alternative reality' or as 'Other'" (Cohen and Taylor, 1992 [1976]:6). In a critical analysis Cohen and Taylor suggest that communities develop "*against paramount reality*" often failing to produce the desired paradise (1992 [1976]:168-9). By contrast, the evidence from Dh and TM show that community living is not perceived either as an escape or as a failed paradise.  Residents from both communities underline how living in the community is not easy and how they had to adapt themselves to community life.

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*Believe me, living in a community is not easy, it is not absolutely escaping from the outside world, shut yourself up, and pretend nothing happened. Living with 20 people who come from different backgrounds, different countries, different logics to create a community together, I assure you that is not a walkover.* (Shaula, woman, Dh)

*Sometimes it can be difficult to live in a community, because of the cohabitation. Ideas are different, people are different. I also have a culture of another place. So sometimes we have to stop, to think, and to reflect. But it brings growth! I have realised that, while living together, people are like mirrors that we have within the community; people help us a lot to see, to see yourself as an individual.* (Nidularium, man, TM)

Reflecting on community life, Nidularium from TM suggests the metaphor of the mirror to explain how the other people can function as a reflection of your personality. Interestingly the metaphor of the mirror is often used by residents of the two communities to explain how processes of self-knowledge are manifested while interacting with the others.

*I think that living in this way [in community] is a privilege, but it's not easy because every day you have mirrors in front of you. You cannot hide yourself. It's impossible to hide here. Because human beings are playing a lot, do a lot of games, with ourselves and with the others. … But here is not possible. It requires a great availability towards a personal growth and the community. I feel like that.* (Mikania, woman, Dh)

*Spirituality is about entering in relation to the others where the others can become my teammates to achieve my transformation; because we only see [ourselves] from the inside, we do not see [ourselves] from the outside, to see us from the outside we need mirrors. So, the other is a means that can allow us to turn things [transform ourselves] faster.* (Nunki, man, Dh)

While living closely with other people is not easy, residents consider community life as a spiritual path of self-knowledge, as the first step towards a process of self-transformation. Drawing upon Foucault's ideas on spirituality (Carrette, 2002), community living could be interpreted as a resourceful way to revalorise the other, where the other is considered an essential means towards a personal spiritual journey. This conception breaks with the conventional separation between the 'self' and the 'other', where the 'other' is something that is functional to personal spiritual growth. Yet, it also appears a difficult process, because it 'forces' human beings to comprehend the 'other', rather than to hide from him/her. The metaphor of the mirror used by the residents shares similarities to the metaphor of the mirror used by Foucault to describe the relationship between utopia and heterotopia. As discussed in the theoretical chapter,

the metaphor of the mirror is interpreted in controversial ways by Foucault (1986). Looking at the mirror as utopia and as heterotopia helps the analysis in two ways. Firstly, in the 'utopia of the mirror', through the mirror you see yourself where you are not, you see yourself where you are absent, you see the utopian features that are missing. The 'others', through the community life, show to the individual his/her qualities, but also his/her limits. They reflect what is 'missing' in the personal spiritual journey or what should be strengthened. The others '*can allow us to turn things [transform ourselves] faster*' (Nunki, man, Dh). Secondly, the mirror for Foucault functions also as heterotopia, it brings you back to the real, "I begin to direct my eyes toward myself and to reconstitute myself there where I am" (1986:24). In this sense, after discovering more about themselves through the 'others', people come back to their personal reality, yet with a new awareness, new knowledge of themselves. This, I argue, is a heterotopic transcendental practice, where through the 'others' it is possible to enact the personal spiritual journey.

However, if the 'other' can function as a catalyst towards a path of self-knowledge, it has to be asked why this process does not function in the same way when living elsewhere. These processes of self-knowledge can happen every day and everywhere, the 'others' can work as mirrors, yet in the community life it differs for two reasons. Living in a community, in direct contact with other people, where close human relations occur on a daily basis, intensifies the process and people are forced to look inside themselves, '*You cannot hide yourself*' as Mikania (woman) from TM says. Secondly, residents of these communities have intentionally decided to live in Dh and TM. They do not avoid 'others' or see them as a threat. Rather, they are willing to undertake this challenge because it is part of their spiritual path. To reinforce this point Electra (woman, Dh) says that the success of the community depends on the will of the individuals to transform '*what you have to transform about yourself*'.

For instance, the last Dh body, the *Tecnarcato,* has been established with the intention of supporting individuals in their personal spiritual transformation. Defined in the Dh Guide as an "individual path of refinement" (Ananas *et al.*, 2006:88), Shaula (woman, Dh) who is one of the coordinators of this body, explains:

> *Being part of the Tecnarcato means undertaking an individual path that goes to modify the parts of ourselves that represent the 'rough spots' in the relationship with others, the 'rough edges' of unions. On the other hand, the Tecnarcato helps in identifying and highlighting personal talents in order to better live with oneself and with others.*

Shaula refers to the 'rough spots' or 'rough edges' to suggest those difficult or prickly aspects of individuals' character that can create obstacles in relationships with others. Therefore, aware of the transcendental function of community life, Dh has institutionalized a body to support people in their personal transformation while living in the community. This also happens in TM but generally, taking into account the different numbers, people directly refer to the spiritual leader Alba María. The key argument of this section can be underlined through Chara's explanation:

> *The social is not the goal, it is a means. Our life together is not the purpose for which we are here, the purpose of our being here is to achieve spiritual goals and they are accomplished through social life.* (Chara, woman, Dh)

My argument is that through a community life people become involved in a process of self-knowledge. Living together becomes a possible transcendental practice, whether or not people have the will to transform themselves and to improve those 'rough spots' of their own personality. The 'other' through community living becomes the mirror that functions as utopia and as heterotopia. It functions as utopia because it is showing to the person 'what is absent', the personal strengths and weaknesses it offers the opportunity to individuals to improve their personal development towards a spiritual growth/path. It works also as heterotopias, because coming back to the real, it makes it possible to improve those 'rough spots', shaping an alternative space in the inner self that breaks with the personal habits that can create difficulties in the relationships with the 'others'.


## 1.26  Spiritual heterochronies

The previous sections have investigated how the transcendental scale is enacted in the communities of TM and Dh emphasising the importance of rituals and everyday community life. Before concluding the chapter, this last section aims to briefly explore the broad spiritualities that underpin the enactment of Dh and TM. In so doing, it will be useful to further explore the concept of heterochronies:

> Heterotopias are most often linked to slices in time – which is to say that
> they open onto what might be termed, for the sake of symmetry,
> heterochronies. The heterotopia begins to function to full capacity when
> men arrive at a sort of absolute break with their traditional time (Foucault,
> 1986:26)

Foucault does not specify what traditional time is, yet Johnson (2013:799), citing De Cater and Dehaene (2008), claims that "heterotopias interrupt the continuity of time".

The example *par excellence* is the cemetery, which represent the end of the life and perhaps the beginning of a "quasi-eternity". Additionally, Foucault gives examples such as holiday-camps, saunas, carnivals, hammams, spaces which break with traditional time and also with conventional everyday life. In these heterochronies, individuals suspend the everyday routine while immersing in another sort of activity.

In Dh and TM it is possible to identify individual heterochronies and community heterochronies. The former happens when individuals moving to their communities break with their conventional everyday life or past life to start a new life stage. The latter at a community level happens because TM and Dh adopt, or are inspired by, ancient traditions such as shamanism or paganism, which are ways of interpreting life that have been abandoned through the modernization of the world.

Besides the break with the previous life style that happens at an individual scale when people have decided to move to Dh and TM (as discussed in *Chapter 5*), the real break with present time and mainstream society happens at a community level because the communities are rescuing and re-shaping ancient traditions. Indeed, it is not only the case of heterochronies which interrupt the continuity of the present time, but in addition they rescue old traditions for shaping the present. I argue that TM and Dh could both be considered as spiritual heterochronies, however they each have a different approach. TM explicitly follows the shamanic tradition of the Mother Goddess while Dh, even if it evidently presents elements of ancient traditions, does not explicitly recognise any affiliation. The next section will first explore TM and then Dh spiritual heterochronies.

### 1.26.1  Post-colonial spiritual heterotopia in Terra Mirim

> *My tradition follows the lineage of the Mother Goddess, a rescue of an ancient lineage which has been lost in time and through the memories that come to me through my ancestors, I go drawing or redesigning what is to be done now.* (Alba María, woman, TM)

TM endeavours to rescue an ancient shamanic tradition through the creation of a community. The 'old' and 'new' are combining together to shape the community space. This is one of the main differences of TM when compared to other shamanic communities. They have been intentionally created to rescue old values without being a traditionally indigenous shamanic community. Jussara, who belongs to the new generation of TM, says:

> *TM is different also because we are a new traditional community, because we don't have the generation before us. I have one generation, but they don't.* (Jussara, woman, TM)

TM could be considered an example of Neo-shamanism. Favilla (2007) interprets the reason for coming back to shamanic cultures, as a call toward ancestral origins to fulfil the necessity of reviewing the values of the existing society. In addition, this heterochronia could be defined as a post-colonial project "of rediscovering tradition and asserting non-Western cultures as providing distinct cultural paradigms" (Bonnett, 2010:101). Bonnett identifies the return to indigenism as a form of "[p]ost-colonial nostalgia" critically emphasising how authenticity for post-colonialists is "represented as a 'cult' or 'myth'" (2010: 102). Analysing Alba María's words, on the one hand, it can be seen as an attempt to bring back, to give life to, the almost disappeared 'authentic' tradition of the Mother Goddess. On the other hand, there is the feeling of reshaping it – *'drawing and re-designing'* – for the present day. Rather than pursuing a myth, it appears to be a process of embodiment and enactment of the ancient teachings through a process of re-adaptation for the present need to shape a new space. Besides postcolonial nostalgia, this juxtaposition of tradition and present/future could be interpreted as an example of "productive nostalgia" where nostalgia is embodied and enacted in practice and oriented towards the past but also towards the present and future (Blunt, 2003: 722). Jussara adds:

> *Living the tradition, the truth … in nature … facing the reality of all. We are not far away, we are not getting ourselves a part. This feeling is so South America, Francesca, that I don't know if you can touch it. Very South America. It's the fight for freedom, really! We are oppressed. Brazil has not born yet, people have not born yet. 500 years of manipulation! TM was born in a moment, right after the dictatorship finished. It finished in 1988. This is the beginning of TM movement. Let's create our utopia, let's realise it, let's be free. This is the moment, not only for TM but for many places in Brazil.* (Jussara, woman, Dh)

Jussara's quote suggests connections between past, present and future. Furthermore, it suggests links between (post)colonialism, shamanism and utopianism. Scholars seeking to make the connection between utopianism and postcolonialism typically emphasise a sense of hope in the "reality of liberation, in the possibility of justice and equality" (Ashcroft, 2012:2; see also Sargent 2010; Schehr 1997). TM residents do not 'hope' in an abstract way but rather through shamanism they produce a postcolonial utopian space. Therefore, spiritual heterochronies break with the conventional time and specifically with the colonial past, rescuing and re-vitalizing ancient spiritual traditions

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and shaping an alternative present and future. This is what I mean by spiritual heterochronia and in the specific case of TM, a postcolonial spiritual heterotopia.

### 1.26.2  Experimental spiritual heterotopias in Damanhur

Adopting ancient tradition is approached differently in TM and Dh. It has been discussed how TM explicitly follows the lineage of the shamanism of the Mother Goddess. On the other hand, Dh is inspired by ancient traditions but it does not follow one specific lineage.

Investigating what spirituality means for Damanhurians, residents do not include or classify their spiritual beliefs in any particular spiritual or religious institution. Electra (woman, Dh) explains that Dh is ideally suited to researching the true essence of religions and spiritual beliefs around the world. Damanhurians believe that this true essence could not be limited to a specific cultural context. She explains how in this search they have developed *'their own spirituality'* where before adopting any specific philosophical ideas, these are tested and experimented with in everyday life. Although residents claim their *'exceptionality'* and do not consider themselves as a New Age community or neopagan group, elements of both are evident.

According to the Italian sociologist Luigi Berzano, the Dh world view shows aspects of different religious traditions such as: Egyptian, Celtic, Occult-theosophical and New Age (Berzano, 1998; Introvigne, 1999b). For instance, Dh borrows the name of an ancient Egyptian city. References to ancient myths and traditions can be found in the Dh symbolism, arts and spiritual practices. For instance, Damanhurians, fascinated by the Egyptian tradition, have built statues to their divinities and, inspired by the Celtic tradition, they have positioned Menhirs in the *Damjl* area (see figure 7.2).

**Figure 7.2:** Menhirs in Dh (author, 2012)

There are no explicit references to paganism or the New Age movement but there are several examples that mirror a Neo-Paganic tradition of the centrality of the relationship between humans and nature (Pike 2004). One of them is the change of the family name to animal and plant names. Box 7.5 is an extract from "Dh Guide" (Ananas *et al.*, 2006:87) which explains this rituality.

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**Box 7.5 Animal & Plant names**

An important collective Damanhurian game for those citizens who so wish, is the acquisition of a new name. At a certain stage on their path of inner growth, Damanhurians acquire the name of an animal and later, they also often add the name of a plant. The name of a person is his/her frequency, choosing to modify it means to intervene at a personal level in a very practical way. The change of name testifies to the desire for renewal that each individual has in him/herself: the name that others gave us at birth is our first form of habit. Asking to change your name and replace it with an animal name means to connect with an animal race, learn to recognize its characteristics and to become symbolically its representative. This implies the search for contact, for a deeper identification with the other inhabitants of the planet, to breathe in sympathy with Nature to which we essentially owe our lives.

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In Dh, the practice of changing name is a personal choice, yet almost each citizen has changed his/her name. The ones who have not done so are still 'Citizen in Proof' and not yet full citizens. Macaque Tamarisk (*Macaco Tamerice*), Ibex Peach (*Stambecco Pesco*), Quail Coconut (*Quaglia Cocco*) are some of the examples. The decision of which names to adopt is personal, although once the person has decided he/she must present and defend his/her choices in front of fellow Damanhurians. The decision to

nominate oneself can be interpreted as the intention to detach from the traditional given family name. Changing name is a renewal, a new beginning and essentially a break point with the past. It could be interpreted as a rite of passage, that Hetherington (1997:32 citing Turner, 1967), defines "[r]ites of passage are rituals associated with life changes that require the move between different statuses, stages, ages or places". Closing with the past life does not necessarily mean to lose contact with family and friends – although it happened for some of them – but rather it officialised the conclusion of one life-stage and the beginning of a new one.

Moreover, this heterochronic practice is an explicit attempt to reconnect the human being to nature. Asking to identify with an animal species and a particular plant, it leads Dh citizens to investigate, choose and defend the connection between their personality and that of a specific animal and plant. Considering that for Dh this is part of an inner path of self-knowledge and perhaps transformation, I argue that this is a heterochronic spiritual practice. Yet, although elements of paganism are evident in Dh spirituality, it is difficult to attribute to Dh a specific spiritual tradition.

> Perhaps the most important distinction between New Agers and Neopagans
> is that New Agers tend to look toward the future, when a new age of
> expanded consciousness will dawn, while Neopagans look to the past for
> inspiration in order to revive old religions and improve life in the present.
> (Pike, 2004:34)

To some extent Dh could be considered both neopaganic and New Age because rescuing traditional values seeks to create a new experimental spirituality. The experimental nature is not only a feature of the social body, as has been discussed in *Chapter 5*, but it affects also the spirituality. New technologies are in fact combined in spiritual experimentations, such as the study of the *Selfica*.

 For instance, *Selfica* is considered a discipline that studies "the creation of 'live' objects with functions that are aimed specifically at the user to encourage personal and environmental harmony" (Ananas and Pesco, 2009: 33). *Self* objects are made of metal, especially copper, and combined with a sphere that contains "specially prepared liquids for the transformation of energy" (*ibid*: 33). The metal generally is moulded in spiral forms, with the aim to *'give a direction to this energy'* (Meissa, woman, Dh). Damanhurians have established a *Selfica* laboratory which is located in *Dh Crea* (see figure 7.3). Meissa (woman, Dh), one of the experimental craftsman, creates these *Self* objects that can be bracelets, rings, or house ornaments for Dh residents and external

customers (see figure 7.4). She explains that they are a research laboratory, constantly experimenting and improving their technologies. *Selfica* is one of the Dh examples used here to show how spirituality is dynamic, experimental and even technological, yet meanwhile connected to traditional cultures. Indeed, Damanhurians claim that "*[s]elfica* was widely used in Atlantis and traces of its use can also be found in Egyptian, Etruscan and Celtic cultures" (Ananas and Pesco, 2009: 32).

Damanhurians therefore have created a spiritual heterotopia that refers to ancient tradition although they do not identify themselves with a specific one. They have created a heterochronia that not only breaks with the present, through the rescuing of ancient traditions, but also tends to shape spirituality with experimental technologies.



**Figure 7.3:** *Selfica* shop (author, 2012)
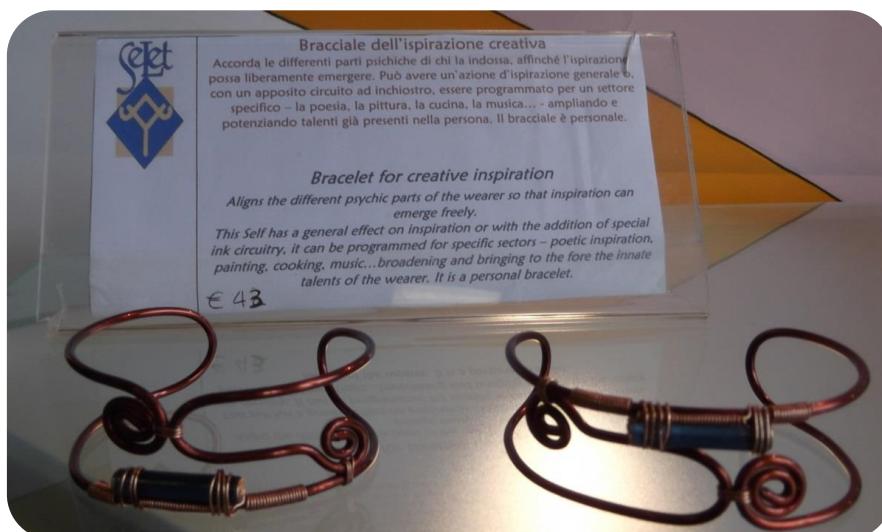


**Figure 7.4:** *Selfica* objects (author, 2012)

## 1.27  **Conclusions**

This chapter has investigated the transcendental scale. After explaining the importance of rituals in shaping the individual and community scales, the first section focused on how the transcendental scale is enacted through the Ayahuasca shamanic ritual by employing a spiritual embodied method. Four key arguments have been discussed. Firstly, it emerged how such shamanic rituals, challenging conventional ways of understanding of the sacred and ritualistic, shape heterotopic sacred space through juxtaposing, disordering and unsettling. Secondly, sacred heterotopic spaces, enacted through such transcendental practices, seek to rescue the spiritual 'border gnosis' cast away in modern times. This 'border gnosis' does not acquire the form of a universal, ordered and epistemological knowledge but rather of personal, juxtaposing, and spiritual gnosis discovered through embodied transcendental practices. Thirdly, bodies not only produce sacred spaces but also are means through which the transcendental scale is enacted in spiritual heterotopias. Fourthly, in exploring processes of embodiment and disembodiment enacted through transcendental practices, it is argued that in these sacred heterotopias, conventional ways of perceiving spaces and time are destroyed. Indeed, the individual, the community, the local and the global scales are perceived as overlapping and entangling. To expand on the transcendental scale, it can be argued that this is neither a spatial nor a temporal scale, but rather a scale that transcends the spatial and the temporal through processes of (dis)embodiment.

Though rituals are the transcendental practice *par excellence, a* repertoire of transcendental practices can take place while living closely with other people. Indeed, the transcendental scale is enacted through everyday community life, where the 'other' – functioning as a mirror – encourages processes of self-knowledge and spiritual transformation. The relation with the' other' becomes therefore one of the transcendental practices in spiritual heterotopias.

Finally, the last section investigated more broadly the spiritualities of TM and Dh. Both communities are defined spiritual heterochronies because in breaking with the conventional present time, they seek to rescue old traditions in order to shape the present and future. However, while TM enacts a postcolonial spiritual heterotopia, Dh creates an experimental spiritual heterotopia. Though the difference is very subtle, it could be argued that the former tends to be more focused in rescuing the past, the latter in experimenting with the future.

# The local: enacting and impacting spatialities

In *Of Other Spaces,* Foucault (1986) states that, if the period of the 19th century was one of history, the 20th century is the period of geography. Foucault explicitly writes that "our epoch is one in which space takes for us the form of relations among sites" (1986:23). According to Soja (1996: 163), Foucault (likewise Lefebvre) challenges the conventional modes of spatial thinking, predicting a new period in which relations assume greater significance in shaping human lives and society. By once again overcoming the limits of utopian studies, the concept of heterotopia allows these alternative spaces to be considered spatially. The first section investigates the spatialities of the communities by analysing how they negotiate estrangement, create a system of opening and closing and to establish boundaries to preserve their alterity; the second part discusses how the community scale shapes and interacts with the local scale, in particular investigating how the intentional communities of Dh and TM engage in outreach. As discussed previously, the local scale in this thesis is understood to be wider than the community scale because it refers to the surrounding area; specifically the Valchiusella valley for Dh and the Itamboatá valley for TM (see *Chapter 4* on the context). In the current chapter, key concepts such as opening, closing, boundaries, estrangement, outreach and ethics will be defined to inform the analysis. The research questions posed are: How are these communities spatially enacted? And, how do they outreach, impact and change the local cultures and economy?

## 1.28  Exploring boundaries

### 1.28.1  Maintaining estrangement

Utopian spaces have been traditionally represented as isolated, distant and remote places. For instance, islands or mountains represented the ideal spaces in which to experiment with the utopian imagination due to their inherent isolation. Sargisson (2007) identifies estrangement as being at the "heart of utopian experiments" (393), emphasising that "[u]topias are, thus; set apart from 'reality' and utopian visions are powerful because they are estranged" (395). Sargisson's analysis of estrangement in utopianism is not limited to fictional utopias but also extends to intentional communities. The author explains that spatial estrangement is essential in intentional communities in order to create a protected and isolated space; in which to promote

group cohesion, to focus on the collective vision and to encourage the process of spiritual self-knowledge. How do the intentional communities of Dh and TM maintain estrangement from the outside world?

It has already been shown that the Dh territory does not occupy a discrete, homogenous and unified acreage of land in the Valchiusella Valley. As illustrated, Dh residential blocks (divided up according to the nucleus-communities), the common areas used by all Dh residents such as the social centre (*Damjl*), the spiritual centre (The Temple of the Humankind) and the commercial centre (*Dh Crea*), are spread around the valley (see section 4.2.3). These scattered territories do have their own physical boundaries separating them from the outside world to help maintain some level of estrangement from the local surroundings.

However, the degree of estrangement in Dh varies according to the different functionality of the space inside the community: places that are dedicated to spiritual activities such as the Temple of Humankind tend to be more closely monitored and inaccessible and they require accompaniment by Dh residents; on the other hand, areas dedicated to commercial activities such as *Dh Crea* commercial centre are open and accessible in much the same way as any kind of retail activity in the outside society. The general public can use this area independently during predefined opening times. On the other hand the social centre in *Damjl* has a physical boundary in between the Temple and the commercial centre. Visitors are welcomed by the receptionists located in the welcome centre and a guide is required for a first visit. The reception is located in front of the gate and the receptionist can watch over the area and check any person who is entering in *Damjl*.

Unlike Dh, TM does not present different levels of estrangement in the common areas of the Foundation whether they are used for spiritual, political, economic or social purposes. However, some of the shamanic rituals do not take place in common territory, but instead in the adjacent land of Colmeia, where visitors generally have no access other than to participate in specific rituals or to visit the residents. Although Colmeia has a higher level of estrangement than the main area of the foundation, this area is very rarely used for community activities which instead remain centralized in the main territory of the foundation.

Like Dh, the entrance of TM's main area (where the foundation is located) has a main gate accessing the external area and is monitored by some residents who work in the

reception on a half-a-day-a-week rotation basis. According to Foucault (1986: 26), the fifth principle of heterotopia is:

> Heterotopias always presuppose a system of opening and closing that both isolates them and makes them penetrable. In general the heterotopic site is not freely accessible like a public place.

TM and Dh each have their own system of opening and closing whereby access to the community is limited to certain hours, by monitoring the entrance with gates. However, Sargisson (2007) analysing the specific case of intentional communities, explains how although physical factors, such as gates or fences are used to maintain estrangement, access in some intentional communities is further limited to certain dates or needs to be pre-arranged. In Dh and TM, visitors can enter during the day if they have any queries or want to visit. Generally, a mentor who accompanies them to show the community areas is required for the first access in TM. In Dh, no guide is required to visit the commercial centre, for the welcome centre a guide is required for the first visit, and for the Temple of Humankind a mentor or guide is necessary for each visit and for the duration of the stay.

The above arrangements prevail for one-day or short term visits. For longer term visits access is pre-arranged in both Dh and TM, and in this way the community can assign a mentor in advance. This reminds us of Sargisson's examples of British communities; the mentoring system where "a nominated individual mentors guests, contacts visitors and explains rules and conventions" is extremely important "to contribute to the maintenance of a space in which collective visions can be nurtured and pursued" (2007: 408).

During my visits to Dh and TM, individual mentors were assigned to guide me, especially during the initial period of the fieldwork. At Dh, Naos (man), who worked in external relations was my nominated mentor. We had several meetings during which he replied in detail to my numerous questions, he also arranged several interviews with other residents and drove me to some of the Dh nucleus-communities scattered around the valley. This mentoring system is important because it allows the maintenance of the boundaries by presenting and explaining the enacted alternative system to the guest and also demonstrates how the visitor can respect this.

Thus, predominantly separated by fences and hedges, Dh and TM have their own physical boundaries that are maintained and monitored by gates, opening times,

mentoring mechanisms and pre-arranged longer term visits, by which levels of estrangement are maintained from external areas. Sargisson (2007), citing Cooper (2004), explains how boundaries are fundamental for preserving alternative spaces:

> They permit intentional communities to function as utopian spaces: critical of the now and practising alternatives, providing showcases for a different life, and allowing participants to think and live differently. They need to be robust, but they also need to be porous. These boundaries need to permit a two-way gaze and flow of ideas and activities. They need in other words both to maintain and mediate estrangement (2007:407)

Although some level of estrangement is essential, Sargisson further develops this point by emphasising how it has to be negotiated. It means that estrangement is maintained but also mediated in order to not fall into what she calls "collective alienation", whereby the community becomes increasingly "introverted" (2007: 403). Indeed 'negotiating estrangement' means, on the one hand, to maintain some level of discretion and protection from the outside world to enact the alternative space, and on the other, to mediate this estrangement through controlled opening processes that make their boundaries permeable (*ibid*). How do Dh and TM negotiate estrangement?

## 1.28.2 Mediating estrangement: The outside inside

Despite Sargisson's significant contribution, the majority of recent literature on ecovillages and intentional communities has tended to focus more on the processes of opening to the outside world rather than investigating estrangement. As discussed in the literature, one of the seminal contributions is provided by Scheler (1997) who, whilst distinguishing intentional communities of the 1990s from those of the 1960s, points out that there increasing communication with the surrounding local community, and a new commitment to community outreach, through seminars, courses, books, alternative schools open to the local population, workshops and so on. There are several ways that the boundaries of intentional communities can be crossed. Specifically, this analysis has identified three indicators which highlight how accessible these spaces are: firstly, it is possible to locate these communities both physically and virtually; secondly, it is possible to communicate with them; and thirdly, it is possible to visit them.

Dh and TM are visible from the adjacent roads where residents have placed signs to indicate the community presence to the outside world (see figures 8.1 and 8.2).

**Figure 8.1:** TM entrance signposting (Jussara, 2013)



**Figure 8.2:** Dh entrance signposting (author, 2012)

Besides physical indicators, both communities are listed in the on-line database of GEN (n.d-b), which can be easily accessed, after registering. Additionally Dh and TM have their own websites (http://www.damanhur.org/en; http://terramirim.org.br); blogs, Facebook pages that provide information about their purpose, mission, activities,

events, rituals and courses. TM has also recently registered on the website 'Booking.com' which offers accommodation to the general public.
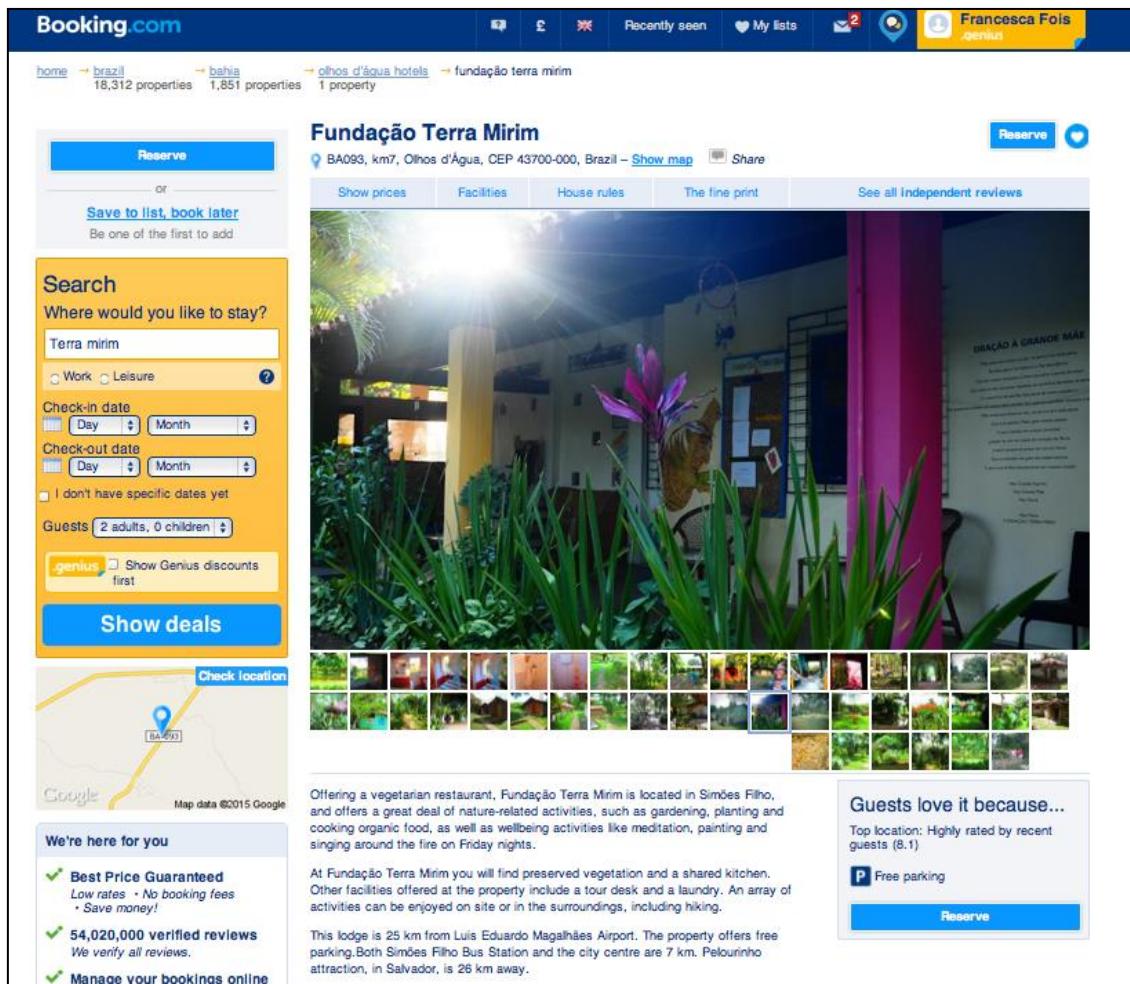


**Figure 8.3:** TM in Booking.com (Booking.com, 2015)

On the Dh webpage, available in both Italian and English, for instance, there is a section enabling the reader to learn more about becoming a temporary Dh citizen. This includes a Q&A section about the New Life Program intended for those interested in experimenting with the Dh lifestyle for a period of three months.
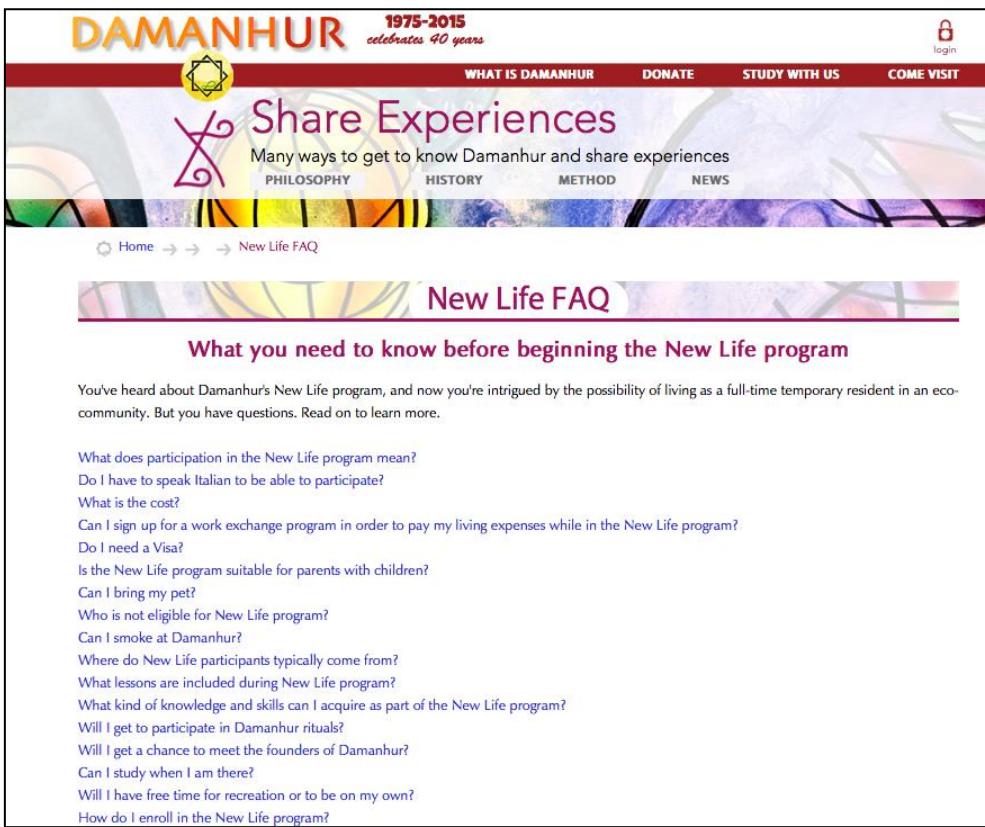
**Figure 8.4:** New Life program in Dh website (Damanhur, n.d.)

Evidently, the boundaries of TM and Dh are permeable and people who are interested in experiencing community living can book their short or long stay in various ways. The idea of an isolated place, remote and difficult to access, might remain in the imaginary world of utopian fiction, but it is definitely challenged by contemporary intentional communities, recently conceived as ecovillages. It is possible to know about these spaces through their websites or by driving along adjacent roads, to contact them and ultimately to visit them. For instance, a Dutch anthropologist, a Mexican visitor, a New Lifer from the US were just some of the many visitors that I met during my fieldwork, who were interested in the Dh community experiment.

As in Dh, in TM there were several visitors coming from different parts of the world. The majority of these were interested in shamanism. During my visit, some Brazilians attended for specific rituals, staying one or two days. Others who were there to develop their shamanic initiation, generally Europeans, usually stayed longer. There were also 3 volunteers visiting the community from Chile, the Netherlands and Great Britain/Morocco. They were all university students who had decided to work on a voluntary basis in the community. They were not interested in shamanism or the spiritual side of TM but rather in its environmental and social features. Certainly, TM

and Dh can be considered as intentional communities that offer workshops, events, courses, spiritual journeys, community holiday packages and volunteer programmes, which all act as opening mechanisms whereby outsiders can enter, visit and dwell for a period in the communities. I define this opening process as 'the outside inside'.

As discussed above, researchers such as Schehr (1997) and Fischietti (2008) have already pointed out how recently intentional communities and ecovillages have an open approach towards the outside world. Fischetti explains how ecovillages influence the mainstream society through practices of 'soft activism', whereby participants seek to effect change by promoting their collective and sustainable lifestyle. This is done "through Eco Village's educational mission, its outreach, its on-site workshops, its tours, its notoriety, and its openness to visitors" (2008:177). Inviting visitors into both Dh and TM shows the potential of an alternative lifestyle mindful of nature and respectful of living beings, and also shows that sustainability is possible. Furthermore, this is a way to mediate estrangement and not to isolate or detach from the rest of the world, thus avoiding falling into what Sargisson calls "collective alienation" (2007:403).

These last sections have analysed how TM and Dh 'maintain', 'mediate' and thus, 'negotiate' estrangement by activating heterotopic systems of opening/closing. Yet, what if, when critically reflecting on the spatial enactment of these alternative spaces, it appears that being inside the physical boundary does not necessarily mean being 'inside' the community? In the next section, extracts from the ethnographic diary provide additional evidence to critically reflect upon the negotiation of estrangement, the meaning of boundaries and the heterotopic system of opening/closing.

### 1.28.3 *Not only physical boundaries*

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**Box 8.1 Ethnographic diary – First day in Dh**

10/04/2012: I arrived at Ivrea at 6.45pm, a bit too late to catch the bus to Damanhur. Naos (Dh, man) picked me up at Ivrea train station to head to the Dh welcome centre and to the Guest House where I am sleeping this first night. It is cosy, comfortable and simple. It seems that there were 5 other rooms (with guest name printed and attached to the door), two bathrooms and a common kitchen. On arrival, I received a paper with several instructions and my keys. I haven't met anyone other than Naos, I guess because it was late in the evening. Naos told me that the next morning I would meet the doctor for a medical examination because that is routine when new visitors arrive in Dh. He also explained a few Dh rules such as the smoking ban and said that on Friday evenings the spiritual leader, Falco, holds Q&A sessions where visitors or citizens can ask anything about Dh. On Monday evening, no Damanhurians will be around because they are engaged in some sort of spiritual activities, he said.

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**Box 8.2 Ethnographic diary – Second day in Dh**

11/04/12: It has been a long day! After Breakfast taken in the bar below the Guest House, I met Syrma (aware of my arrival) who told me that the doctor was not available and I would meet her tomorrow. Soon after, Naos texted me saying that he could do an introduction visit in 30 minutes. When we met, he started to explain the history of Dh. Later we went to the commercial centre *Dh Crea*, and he showed me the area. I met Naos again in the afternoon for another interview about Dh. Only in the late afternoon did I manage to go to my hosting nucleus-community (Dishna). Naos arranged a lift for me with Nunki, who lives in Dishna, as it was too far to walk from the welcome centre. At 4.30pm Nunki came to the welcome centre in *Damjl* to pick up the kids that had just finished school; together we went to Dishna.

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**Box 8.3 Ethnographic diary – Third day in Dh**

12/04/12: The doctor visited me in *Dh Crea*, in the underground floor where the Health Centre is located. There, I saw the Mexican girl who arrived yesterday who was also waiting to have the 'entrance' medical examination. Once inside, the doctor – also a Damanhurian – explained that she does the examinations for two reasons: to protect Damanhurians and the people that live in my nucleus-community and to protect myself as a visitor, because if I am sick it might be difficult to get an ambulance to arrive quickly enough from the hospital. She asked me if I have any illness such as hepatitis or HIV or anything else. We had a quick chat and she gave me the o.k. to stay in Dh.

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During the first night in Dh I was accommodated in the Guest House in *Damjl* and only the day after could I go to the nucleus-community.

> There are others [heterotopias], on the contrary that seem to be pure and simple openings, but that generally hide curious exclusions. Everyone can enter into these heterotopic sites, but in fact that is only an illusion: we think we enter where we are, by the very fact that we enter, excluded. I am thinking, for example, of the famous bedrooms that existed on the great farms of Brazil and elsewhere in South America. The entry door did not lead into the central room where the family lived, and every individual or traveller who came by had the right to open this door, to enter into the bedroom and to sleep for a night. Now these bedrooms were such that the individual who went into them never had access to the family's quarters; the visitor was absolutely the guest in transit, was not really the invited guest. (Foucault, 1986:26)

Was my experience of the first night in Dh similar to the example just quoted from Foucault? Does being inside the physical border necessarily mean entry is gained? During my first night in Dh, I was inside the community but I could not access the community space. Foucault calls it a sort of illusory entrance, when individuals imagine themselves to be inside a place when, despite being physically present, they are instead in an excluded area. Even if this conceptualisation of illusory entrance could be applicable to my first night in Dh, it would not be the case for the rest of my stay because I did join the nucleus-community thereafter.

The obligatory medical examination also requires further attention. According to Foucault (1986: 26), the entry into a heterotopic space is either compulsory or "the individual has to submit to rites and purifications" where this purification can be religious and/or hygienic. Although in Dh the purification was not specifically hygienic or religious, the medical examination could signify this entrance checking point. It was a requirement before moving to the nucleus-community. In my case, the examination took place two days after I arrived because the doctor was not available earlier, although I should have been checked before entering into the nucleus-community. The medical examination was limited to gathering general information about my health and, perhaps rather than a medical examination it should be referred to as a meeting intended to learn more about me. Despite it not being possible to have the medical interview on the second day, spending several hours with my mentor Naos was probably ensured

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sufficient time to get to know me well enough to allow entry. It seems to confirm the general principle that underpins heterotopic spatial enactment, whereby to gain access it is necessary to pass certain rituals or, more broadly, stages. The mentoring system and the medical supervision could be seen here as a way to both maintain and mediate estrangement, as mechanisms to pass from an illusory entrance to an official one, where it is possible to gain 'access to the family's quarters'.

Yet, reflecting further on the idea of illusory entrance, and given the disjunction between being inside the community and having the feeling of having officially arrived, once all the 'stages' are passed , what does it mean to be inside that heterotopia? For example, does living in the nucleus-community (the social unit and the heart of the Dh federation) mean one has fully 'entered' into the Dh heterotopia? For instance, when I was in Dh I did not know what was happening on Monday evenings. It was something related to the spiritual path taken inside the School of Meditation (explained in *Chapter 4*) however nobody ever fully explained what it was about. Around 8pm everyone seemed to 'disappear' from the common areas or from the nucleus-communities and only the children and the person on shift to care for them remained.

It is possible to find some similar examples when drawing on my TM experience. As mentioned above, while I was at TM, three students were volunteering in the community. The Ayahuasca ceremony (explained in *Chapter 7*) was scheduled to take place one evening. Even though the ceremony was taking place a few hundred meters from their accommodation, surprisingly, the volunteers were not aware of it. One of them 'heard' something and asked what was going to happen and someone explained what it was about but in any case he was not interested. Clearly, these students were not there because of an interest in shamanism or in TM spirituality, but rather in the sustainable features of the community.

Based on these examples, I argue that having passed the physical boundaries and being inside the community does not mean to fully enter into that space. Therefore, apart from physical boundaries I argue that other sorts of boundaries are present in these alternative spaces, and that these could be conceptualised as spiritual boundaries when considering spiritual heterotopias. Estrangement therefore is not only physical. A visitor can be physically inside the community but perhaps is not aware of what is happening. The emphasis on participating with the shamanic rituals when I was in TM (explained in *Chapter 3*), was an invitation to pass through this other 'spiritual' boundary. Only by

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engaging at a deeper level with the community would it have been possible to fully enter that alternative space.

Reflecting on scales, passing the boundaries and being physically inside the community scale does not mean to be fully entered into the spiritual heterotopias. I would argue that only when the three scales overlap – the individual, the community and the transcendental – is the individual in the 'real' rather than the 'illusory' heterotopia. The community scale has material boundaries, but also immaterial boundaries through which the individual has to pass in order to fully be in the heterotopic space. However, even recognising this requirement of overlapping scales to facilitate access to the "real" heterotopia, it could be argued that there is a further stage. Despite engaging deeply and passing through spiritual boundaries, the ultimate stage of engagement can only be achieved through initiations by means of which an individual becomes a 'true' citizen of the alternative space. It might be the case that a level of estrangement is always maintained in order to preserve the alterity of these intentional heterotopias.

## 1.29  The inside outside

The previous section explored levels of estrangement, the meaning of boundaries, and the opening/closing mechanisms of the intentional communities of Dh and TM. Openness has been analysed in terms of the communities' visibility, accessibility and welcoming. Openness however can be studied from another perspective: the capacity of the community to reach out, to impact, to change and to upscale from the community scale to the local scale. Clearly the fact that visitors go to the community to participate in workshops, spiritual programmes, and to experiment with community life constitutes a form of reaching out, beyond the community scale. However, I argue that community accessibility – 'the outside inside' – characterizes only one of the ways in which the intentional community opens to the outside world. Beyond being accessible to outsiders, accessibility can also be understood as the will to take their 'gnosis' beyond the community boundaries.

Fischetti claims that the "ecovillage aims to catalyze change beyond the boundaries of the village itself" (2008:138). As previously observed, several recent contributions have considered intentional communities and ecovillages as "living laboratories of demonstration" (Jarvis, forthcoming), "models of sustainable living" (Fischetti, 2008; Ergas, 2010), "pedagogic spaces" of sustainable daily life (Santos Jr., 2010:23) and have studied their "transition potential" and how the "niche practices need to be 'up-

scaled' and transferred to the mainstream practices" (Avelino and Kunze, 2009:5). They observe that ecovillages aim to create a sustainable model, "to be the change they seek" (Ergas, 2010:50) and to demonstrate to the external world that it is possible to live differently. Educational programmes, the creation of Learning centres, engagement with social media, and publication of alternative magazines are some of the ways in which these communities seek to promote change to the wider society. However, how do these communities impact the immediate local area that surrounds them through bringing 'the inside outside'?

The following sections focus on a few examples from each of the communities to demonstrate how Dh and TM have embarked on up-scaling processes and attempted to outreach, impact on and shape the areas in which they are located. The two case studies will be analysed independently beginning with Dh.

### 1.29.1  *Dh in Valchiusella: heterotopianization of the local scale*

The emergence of Dh has certainly affected the local scale of Valchiusella valley. The arrival of approximately six hundred new Dh citizens in the last 40 years has had a demographic impact on the rural villages of the valley. As discussed in the contextual chapter, the population of municipalities such as Vidracco and Baldissero Canavese have almost doubled in the recent decades due to the arrival of the new Damanhurian neighbours. Apart from the impact on population registers in the Canavese, how has Dh shaped the surrounding local scale? This section will reflect upon two manifestations of Dh activity: *Dh Crea* commercial centre and the political party '*Con Te per il Paese*' (With you, for the Country).

*Dh Crea* commercial centre is housed in the former Olivetti factory situated in Vidracco. For more than 20 years the building was in disuse until Dh purchased it for 1,200,000 euros in 2004 (see *Chapter 6* for details about the funding). For 8 months Damanhurians worked intensively to renovate it, to discuss what type of businesses could be established there, and to provide training for those who, despite having entrepreneurial ideas, were not familiar with running a business. Once open, the former Olivetti factory was entirely renewed and fully incorporated the Dh style, art and ethics. Several businesses were established in the centre including a grocery shop, restaurant, bar, hairdressing salon and also several offices occupied by ethical insurance and renewable energy constructions. A conference room, called room 'Adriano Olivetti', was provided where Dh hold weekly meetings and where economic, social and political

activities take place. *Dh Crea* reflects Damanhurians' interest in arts and therefore the commercial centre (see figure 4.9, p. 115) also offers a wide range of artistic spaces such as Falco's painting exhibitions, *Selfica* artisanal shop, Dh jewellery, the Temple of Humankind historical exhibition, restoration and painting laboratories. Furthermore, in the basement floor there is a space dedicated to health and beauty.

The economy of Vidracco has been reactivated and regenerated; firstly with the arrival of Damanhurians; and secondly with the commercial centre *Dh Crea*. The number of tourists interested in visiting the intentional community, which has gained international fame, has increased over the years. It could be argued that the money that enters in Dh tends to be reinvested in Dh activities and that it circulates predominantly inside Dh and does not affect the local area. This was a claim made on a website hostile toward Dh (Damanhur alla Rovescia, n.d). However this seems unlikely, considering that Dh is not a totally isolated system and that it needs to interact with the local businesses and communities. It would be interesting to analyse and measure the 'direct' economic impact that Dh has on the local area using quantitative indicators; yet, it is not the focus of this research. This section instead argues that the commercial centre of *Dh Crea* by attempting to take Dh heterotopia beyond the community scale – the inside outside – it shows to the local communities how an alternative way is enacted.

However, *Dh Crea* is a controversial space. At first glance, it could appear as a typical capitalist space that simply seeks to maximise profit. Indeed, the aim of *Dh Crea* is to make a profit and Damanhurians are working to generate income from their economic activities. Yet, *Dh Crea* presents an alternative model to other businesses and, I argue, it is an 'intentional community economy' as conceptualised by Gibson-Graham (2006). Gibson-Graham (2005:121) defines a community economy as "an ethical and political space of decision where economic interdependence is negotiated" when interdependence is understood as the combination of capitalist and non-capitalist economic practices. Drawing inspiration from Gibson-Graham's articulation of 'enterprise', 'labour' and 'transactions' in constructing a language of diverse economy upon which to establish the foundation of a "community economy", I will briefly analyse 'enterprise', 'transactions' and 'labour' and add consideration of a further theme, 'products and services'.

*Enterprises*

Dh's enterprises located in Dh Crea have differing legal forms. Some are private limited companies, others are cooperatives while others are sole traders. What distinguishes them is that they constitute another Dh nucleus-community which is obviously not residential, like the other nucleus-communities, but is a parallel and transversal social unit called a *'community of enterprises'* (Dubhe, man, Dh). This is regulated by the 'Ethics Chart', a document that establishes the rules of conduct inside the community of enterprises (Dubhe, Dh, man). *Dh Crea* 'community of enterprises' is atypical because although the enterprises operate to generate income, it emerged from interviews that entrepreneurs, despite having the choice about how to use the profit generated, they first use what is necessary to cover personal needs and second, reinvest the social surplus in the business itself or for other Dh social activities.

> *We do not aim to become rich managers, these are not things that interest us, we live in the community. I am a businesswoman but it is not that, for example, I want to have a house with all expensive things, so I save from this point of view. From the economic perspective I chose a life of savings because I believe in a different social relationship, and then I might have a little more money to invest in my business and what is left I give for donations.* (Diadem, Dh, woman)

This closely corresponds to the four coordinates of ethical decision-making identified by Gibson-Graham for "community economies" (2006:88) where, after covering the basic needs, surplus is equally distributed and invested rather than consumed. It does not appear to be the case that personal enrichment underpins the values of the 'community of enterprises' of *Dh Crea* but are rather an attempt to rescue the neglected social dimension of the economy.

> Resocializing (and repoliticizing) the economy involves making explicit the sociality that is always present, and thus constituting the various forms and practices of interdependence as matters for reflection, discussion, negotiation and action (Gibson-Graham, 2006:88)

Another example of 'resocializing' the economy is given by *Dh Crea* Art Corporation (see figure 8.5), where artworks are usually signed with the common name of the company rather than the artists' names. This illustrates how the social dimension is embedded in *Dh Crea* 'community enterprises', and often prevails over individualistic competition.

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**Figures 8.5:** *Dh Crea* Art Corporation in *Dh Crea* Commercial Centre (author, 2012)

*Transactions*

Transactions in *Dh Crea* can be carried out in Euros or using the complementary currency, called Credito (Credit) which is pegged to the Euro with 1 *Credito* equal to 1 Euro (see figure 8.6):

> *The credito has the aim to of developing a new form of economy based on ethical values. The Damanhurian complementary monetary system has a high value and has been created to give back to money its original meaning: to be a means to facilitate change based upon an agreement between the parties. For this reason it is called the credito: to remind us that money is only a tool through which one gives, in fact, 'credit' – that is to say, trust.*
> (Ananas and Pesco, 2009:62)

Investigating the number of transactions made using *Credito* it emerged that it depends on the business; *Credito* is often used for small purchases made in the bar, grocery store, restaurant or hairdressing salon. However, for larger transactions when cash can often not be used it is essential to use Euros. According to Damanhurians, around 2,000 people use the *Credito* within a wide network of local producers and consumers. They also add "*in this way, the Credito encourages the economic and social revitalisation of Valchiusella because it keeps capital inside the area which can be re-invested to the benefit of the local economy, businesses, and activities*" (Ananas and Pesco, 2009:62).

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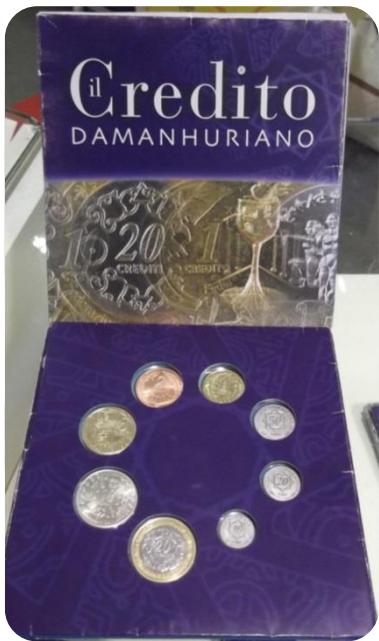
**Figures 8.6:** Dh *Credito* (author, 2012)

North (2010:37) explains that one of the reasons "why alternative currency networks can genuinely be 'alternatives' is that they seek to construct local, as opposed to globalised circuits of value. They are tools for localisation". In order to promote a social local economy the complementary currency plays a key role because it encourages the local circulation of money and is used as a means for exchange and not as a commodity itself. Moreover, *Credito* has for Damanhurians a spiritual value, as an attempt to bring the spiritual back into the material (Panda, woman, Dh). This further enacts an alternative spiritual economic space as discussed previously.

*Labour*

The importance of voluntary work in the material enactment of Dh has already been discussed in *Chapter 6*. However investigating the impact upon the local scale, it should be stressed that some of the businesses of *Dh Crea* employ local workers. For instance, the cooperative involved in renewable energy technologies in 2012 had 21 employees half of whom where non-Damanhurians from the surrounding municipalities.

*Products and services*

Dh products and services are not typical of mainstream shops. Food stocked by the Dh grocery shop (see figures 8.7) is entirely organic, with the agricultural and farming sector of Dh supplying the majority of the products. However they do not meet all

consumers' requirements, so the rest of the grocery products are purchased from locals who produce organically. Zania (Dh, woman) said that some of the Valchiusella farmers had to shift from a conventional farming to organic in order to sell their products to the Dh grocery.



**Figures 8.7a, 8.7b and 8.7c:** Grocery Shop in *Dh Crea* Commercial Centre (author, 2012)

Likewise the bar and the restaurant of *Dh Crea* respect the same organic nutritional philosophy and the hairdresser uses natural hair dyes. The *Dh Crea* construction and energy sector companies are experts in the design and construction of low energy consumption buildings, bio-houses and renewable technologies, all of which have already been tested in Dh residences. In term of services, the ethical insurance service offers advice on the most appropriate and fair insurance according to the customer's needs. This business has also developed an insurance to protect those professionals involved in holistic and integrated alternative medicines. In addition *Dh Crea* offers beauty and wellbeing services, as well as integrated health services for those customers interested in experimenting with alternative holistic and integrated practices. Finally, the very exceptional *Dh Crea* products are the *Selfica* objects (as discussed in *Chapter 7*).

I argue that by establishing *Dh Crea*, Dh has enacted a community economy which explores and experiments with the "multidimensional nature of economic existence" (Gibson-Graham, 2006:77), and contributes to constructing a proliferative heterotopic language which creates possibilities "for political acts of economic transformation" (*ibid*:77). This has a 'direct' impact in the local scale, when for instance local farmers have shifted to organic farming to sell their products to Dh, or local residents who are employed in *Dh Crea* have an 'indirect' impact in the local scale. Local residents that go to *Dh Crea* can make transactions using Dh *Credito* as well as euros. They can purchase the organic products or ethical services offered, they can experiment with the alternative holistic health services and overall they can 'breathe' that heterotopic space without necessarily being engaged in Dh community activities. If in *Chapter 6*, drawing upon Cauter and Dehaene (2008) I discussed how processes of 'economization of heterotopias' and 'heterotopianization of the economy' are deployed in the intentional communities, here I argue that, expanding the conceptualisation further, in Dh processes of heterotopianization are happening at the local scale.

Further evidence of heterotopianization of the local scale is provided by the political party '*Con Te per il Paese*' (With you, for the Country) established in 1995. Dh calls it an independent political movement which states *'to grow spiritually also means taking on responsibility for the environment around oneself, for the wellbeing of others, for the growth of society' (Damanhur, n.d.). The Dh website adds that with this political project 'Damanhurians intend to take their ideals into the world of politics'* and '*to actively contribute to changing the world during these problematic years' (Damanhur, n.d.).*

Through '*Con Te per il Paese*'*,* Damanhurian representatives gained a total of 22 political positions in the Canavese municipalities of Vidracco, Baldissero Canavese, Issiglio, Vistrorio e Lugnacco during elections in 2014. In Vidracco, '*Con Te per il Paese*' won the election in 2009 with an overwhelming majority of 85.3% votes and reconfirmed this in 2014 with a majority of 88.78% (7 seats) (Repubblica.it, 2014). Since 2009 the Mayor of Vidracco and the majority of the councillors have been Damanhurians. Interviewing the Damanhurian vice Mayor of Vidracco, it was explained how '*Con Te per il Paese*' wants to promote a territory embedded in the principle of the *Filiera Corta* (Short Food supply chains) that stimulates the local economy and supports sustainable development. This counterhegemonic political, social and

economic project that Dh is already implementing affects the Valchiusella valley through the political participation of Damanhurians in the different municipalities.

*Dh Crea* and the political party '*Con Te per il Paese'* are examples of how the intentional community of Dh is reaching out, impacting on, and shaping the Valchiusella valley. It could therefore be argued that processes of heterotopianization of the local scale have been deployed directly and indirectly through building a community economy, constructing a proliferative language of diverse economy and shaping a territorial political project.

### 1.29.2  *Knowing, educating and collaborating in the Itamboatá valley*

Schehr (2007) has underlined the increasing communication that contemporary intentional communities have been establishing with surrounding local areas as compared with previous community experiences. Another interesting contribution is offered by Meijering *et al*. (2007a; 2007b) who, comparing the early stage of the Hobbitstee community in the Netherlands (initially regarded as a hippy commune) with its most recent manifestation, explained how relations between the Hobbitstee and the nearby village shifted during these years, and how their mutual influence has constructed a new rurality. According to the authors, the Dutch intentional community, passing through an opening process towards the external village, has gained acceptance and recognition from the surrounding area.

Philodendron from TM explained that in the late 1990s, the community started a dialogue with public institutions such as the ministry, municipality, and different federal departments to propose social and environmental projects for the Valley. Finding a '*common language'* with institutions and the communities of the valley was a challenging task for TM. In order to interact with the local scale it was necessary to pass through a process of institutionalization. It meant giving an official name to the alternative space enacted and confirming a legal status by which it could be officially recognised. Processes of 'normalization' (Jarvis, forthcoming) are often required to be recognised in the local society.

> *There was a feeling that we needed an image, a legal way to relate to the world, because we did not want to stay here alone but to relate, to do projects, to interact with the outside world. [To do that] we needed a legal status that represented what we were offering; it was then that we set up the foundation.* (Eugenia, woman, TM)

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Nowadays the TM communitarian foundation has a high level of communication with the local area including the city of Salvador, the municipalities of Simões Filho and especially the neighbouring rural communities of Itamboatá valley. This is because, since 1999, TM Foundation has had the aim of promoting social-pedagogical, cultural, economic and environmental projects, collaborating with the local and federal institutions and with the nearby communities. Some of the projects have been developing over the last 15 years whilst others instead have involved temporary engagement. Although they tend to be independent, they are all interrelated in the sense that new projects have often been shaped by to the results of the old ones. This section will briefly consider three of these projects to investigate the heterotopianization of the local scale and how TM has impacted the surrounding Itamboatá valley.

*Knowing with* 'Aguas Puras' *project*

A very important project that has directly and strongly affected the local scale is *Aguas Puras* (Pure Waters), launched in 2000. This project was proposed, organised and managed by TM and founded by the National Fund for the Environment (*Fundo Nacional do Meio Ambiente* – FNMA). The impact of the *Aguas Puras* project has been significant for different reasons and it was re-launched as *Aguas Puras* II in 2009. Firstly, it investigated the social, economic and hydro-environmental state of the Itamboatá valley, producing a report which demonstrated the precarious and vulnerable conditions of the valley. Other documents illustrated the degradation of the Atlantic Forest (see figure 8.8). Secondly, it has supported activities for the re-vegetation and restoration of these degraded areas such as planting 30,000 native trees and the cleaning of the Itamboatá River. A third focus was to promote courses on environmental education for schools, farmers, local organizations and for citizens of the valley to raise awareness about the importance of the environment, and to contribute to the preservation of the remaining 7% of the Atlantic Forest (TM document 2).

The project has impacted concretely on the ecological dimension of the local scale; through actions oriented to the restoration and preservation of the Atlantic Forest; helping to establish a network with the people of the valley; and producing an integrative knowledge on the actual conditions of the valley. These documents have significantly increased understanding about how TM and other local institutions could better contribute to the social, economic and environmental wellbeing of the Itamboatá valley.

**Figures 8.8:** *Agua Pura* Project: Atlantic Forest degradation map in Itamboatá valley (author, 2012)

*Educating with the 'Ecological School'*

At the same time that *Aguas Puras* was launched, the Ecological School was developing as the main social-pedagogical project of TM. Initially the Ecological School was established in 1999 as an educational space for the children of TM's residents, later it became a complementary school for the children of the Itamboatá valley. Having observed the vulnerable and deprived conditions of the local area of Itamboatá valley and the basic educational support provided for the young children and teenagers of the Quilombos communities, TM wanted to strengthen their education through complementary and alternative activities. Nowadays, the school welcomes approximately 50 pupils (but has involved more than 150 over the years) from the rural Quilombos communities, offering classes such as notions of ecology, dance, music, sports, language, maths support, visual arts, theatre, computer science and courses for discovering personal talents (TM document 3).

Using the methodology developed in TM called 'Integrative Ecology', the school's vision is that students understand the interrelation that exists between them and nature

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(Vernonia, TM, woman, former school director) in order to build a planetary consciousness, encourage a sense of citizenship and ethics, and eventually support a fair sustainable development (TM document 3). The school service is free for the families of the valley but it is funded by external donations and municipality funds. However, the resources available are limited. In 2012 the school received only 53,000 Brazilian real (approximately 14,200 British pounds) to cover the costs for the whole year (TM document 3). Consequently, the number of students that can join the Ecological School is limited. To address this issue, TM developed another programme in 2012 called *Brincarte* (playing with arts), whereby some of the educators involved in the TM Ecological School organise weekly learning activities in five of the schools of the valley. By visiting the schools TM has widened its impact and contributed to the learning process of more children. The project reached a total of 310 students in 2012 of whom 213 were aged between 6 and 9 years old (TM document 3).

This learning support provided for 15 years has created an impact on the local scale of the Itamboatá valley, predominantly on the lives of the children who attended the TM Ecological School. Tapirira is a girl of 22 years old who lives in the Quilombos community of Dandá in the Itamboatá valley. She started to attend the TM Ecological School when she was 10 years old and now works three days per week in the TM School, and in the other external school involved in the *Brincarte* project, as an assistant teacher specialising in sacred dance.

> *Everything I learnt was thanks to the TM Ecological School. Because we*
> *[the people of Dandá community] do not go out of the village in which we*
> *live. Because it is a village far from the city, so we stay in the village all the*
> *time. When it arrived the opportunity to come to the Ecological School it*
> *was when I began to interact more, because before I was not used to speak.*
> (Tapirira, Dandá, woman)

During the interview, Tapirira stressed three times that everything she learnt and achieved in her life was due to the activities in the TM Ecological School and that before going there she rarely spoke to other people. The isolation of her Quilombos community did not encourage mobility within or beyond the valley for her or the other inhabitants. However, she is happy living in Dandá community where her family and friends live, and working in the TM Ecological School.

As discussed in the context chapter, isolation was one of the preconditions to building Quilombos communities in order to protect their occupied land. In order to overcome this issue, the TM Ecological School, in collaboration with the municipality, provides a

40-seater bus to collect children participating in the activities in the TM Ecological School. Yet, Vernonia (TM, woman, former school director) explains that some of the communities are so isolated that often children have to walk for miles before reaching the bus stops. Nonetheless the *Briancarte* project has been an effective way of bringing TM educational programmes to the official school outreaching a wider number of students of the valley.

The interview with Tapirira also revealed how the relationship between TM and her community changed over these years. She explained that initially the people from Dandá were skeptical about TM, '*everyone was speaking a lot about the foundation, but we were afraid of it*'. She adds that the perceptions started to change when Alba María and other people from TM started to visit her community to speak with the people and when the Ecological School project began.

> *Now is completely different because my community sees TM in another way, has a different point of view. Everything that my community spoke badly about TM was not true. TM is a welcoming community; it has always been very close with the communities here in the Valley from Santa Rosa until Pitanga dos Palmares* (Tapirira, Dandá, woman)

Through building the Ecological School, TM has, firstly provided complementary social-pedagogical support for the children of the Quilombos communities, and secondly, established a relationship and dialogue with rural communities in the valley that had long been isolated, diffident and often violent towards strangers.

*Collaborating with small producers of the Valley*

It was through establishing this relationship and dialogue with the local communities that the idea of the project '*Incubadora eco-solidaria dos pequenos produtores do vale de Itamboatá*' (Eco-solidary incubator of small producers in the valley of Itamboatá) was born.

> *So, we knew these communities [of the valley], and they know us and the work we do in the valley. It was from there that this project founded by FAPESB of small producers was created. Because we discovered that there were a lot of people who already had their products [agricultural goods], but did not know what to do with it [the surplus]. They had no market in which to sell, to exchange, to make money.* (Vernonia, TM, woman)

TM launched a project to create an eco-solidary economic network in the valley where small producers collaborate together. The project aimed to support three groups of farmers (20 people) who successfully produced for their personal needs but did not

know how to sell their surplus, to create a market, to collaborate together and to produce an income for their family.

During these years, TM realised that to create a more significant impact on the social and economic condition of these communities it was necessary to collaborate with the adults, the students' parents and especially to '*bring them here*' and out of their community (Vernonia, TM, woman). The project launched in 2011 and founded by FAPESB (*Fundação de Amparo a Pesquisa do Estado da Bahia* – Research Foundation of the State of Bahia) was concluded in 2013. TM was the centre for developing the project and providing support to the small producers and, moreover, it was one of the venues which hosted the monthly market of the organic goods produced by the local farmers (see figure 8.9).

The results of this project were summarised in an official article written by the Bahia Government entitled 'Solidary economy improves the lives of the small producers of the Itamboatá valley' (SEAGRI, 2013). The article reports some of the feedback received by the small producers involved in the project. A lady from the Quilombos community of Palmares says *'Now, I am even saving a bit of money by selling my okra and my gherkins to buy my car'*; another, from the Quilombos community of Dandá said *'If we did not know what to do with our production, we now know how to sell our products at fair prices' (ibid)*.

**Figures 8.9:** Market of local producers in the valley of Itamboatá (source: author 2012)

With its outreach activities TM connects with the local inhabitants of the Quilombos communities and Simões Filho municipality, producing an impact on the local scale and shaping the environment, the economy and the culture of the Itamboatá valley. Through activating processes of heterotopization of the local scale, TM tends to bring '*an alternative conceptualisation than the one we have in our communities*' as suggested by Tapirira from the Quilombos community of Dandá. Having explained how TM enacts this local impact, the next section discusses the conclusions and investigates why TM produces an alternative ethical project based on multi-scalar overlap.

### *1.29.3  Relational-scalar ethical heterotopias*

According to the classification of religious and spiritual communities proposed by Sargisson and Sargent (2004:69), TM would fit into the category of spiritual communities of social change by "seek[ing[ to realize change in *this* world" (see section 2.3). This mission of promoting a social, economic and environmental change in the valley of Itamboatá is the catalyst for activating processes of heterotopization of the local scale.

In their PhD thesis, Bohill (2010) and Santos Jr (2010) identify intentional communities as spaces of ethics for the type of everyday actions enacted in these places. The geographer Popke (2009:436) understands 'ethics' as:

> A field of inquiry opened up by concerns about the nature of our interactions with, and responsibilities toward, both human and non-human others. To speak of ethical geographies, then, is to consider the nature and extent of these responsibilities, both empirically and theoretically.

This thesis does not want to explore the field of ethical geography in depth, which instead could provide an interesting framework for further research, yet clearly the connection between heterotopia and ethics emerges when analysing the enactment of the local scale. Indeed, TM actions toward the local scale could be considered as ethical practices where the community feels responsible for the surrounding human and non-human beings. Is then, this 'ethical' sense of mission the catalyst for activating processes of heterotopization of the local scale and therefore, for impacting and reaching out to the surrounding communities?

Coming back to TM and investigating its enactment process, it can be argued that ethical responsibility for the Itamboatá valley was not the main reason for enacting these alternative spaces. Initially the main focus was to strengthen the social bonds among the founding group rather than interacting with the local communities. As Begonia (woman, TM) says '*the initial work was a communitarian work*'. It was a time for launching proposals, organizing the group and deciding what '*we wanted to be*' says Philodendron (man, TM). He adds that the majority of people were not aware of the reality outside. They were in TM predominantly to deepen their shamanic path through Alba María's teachings and to create '*a space dedicated to personal growth, self-discovery, self-knowledge and so on*'. Indeed according to the ethical principle of Integrative Ecology proposed by Alba and adopted in TM, the 'healing' of the planet is directly connected with the 'healing' of the human being.

Here, I argue that ethics in these heterotopic spaces starts as a process of self-transformation rather than as a missionary will for 'saving the world' or 'rescuing' what is around. Responsibility for others begins through taking responsibility for oneself, in other words by discovering, knowing and transforming (generally better identified with deconstructing) the inner self. Foucault, discussing the importance of "care of the self", refers "to ancient practices which aim for self-improvement in relation to an ethical way of life" (Vintges, 2011:102). Explaining the concept of 'political spirituality' Foucault underlines how a process of free-ethical transformation and the will to discover a different way of governing oneself and the other are essential for challenging the Western modernity's political rationality (Carrette, 2002; Vintges, 2011). Gibson-Graham explains the significance of "cultivating subject" (2005:128) and "constructing a subjectivity" (2005:129) in building a diverse community economy.

> The *politics of the subject* starts with an acknowledgment that any social transformation involves as well a micro-political project of transforming the self (Gibson-Graham, 2005:120)

In the late 1990s, after 8 years of shamanic activity focused on an inner search, TM opened out towards the external reality. The group, while consolidated spiritually and collectively, started to be aware of the area around recognising the reality of the Valley of Itamboatá, the environmental problems and the socio-economic aspects.

> *[We realised that] the situation of the region was extremely hard. From an economic and social point of view it is a very poor region, very impoverished, with high levels of violence, marginalization, and very low political participation…at that time still lower... And we came to be invaded [from people outside], theft… Much stronger things happened here in TM. So as residents, we began to realise this other reality. And we with our children born and growing here in TM, have begun to deal with this reality.*
> (Philodendron, man, TM)

Recognising this other reality and deciding to take action is when the local scale is activated. Yet, this local scale is the result of a deeper inner process. In spiritual heterotopias, I argue that ethical practices start at the individual scale, where through transcendental practices of self-transformation collaboratively enacted at a community scale, an ethical responsibility toward a wider local scale emerges. This enacts processes of "re(con)ceiving the other" (Keating, 2005, 242) through knowing, dialoguing and collaborating.

Gloria Anzaldúa's work on the 'Path of *Conocimiento*', analysed thoroughly in *Chapter 5*, is useful in connecting the first individual phase of the *arrebato*/crisis which later engages in a process of spiritual self-transformation, to eventually get to the last phase of spiritual activism where "Spiritual activism is a visionary, experientially-based epistemology and ethics, a way of life and a call to action." (Keating, 2005: 242). Therefore, this spiritual call for action, this ethical responsibility, this heterotopization of the local scale starts from an 'experientially-based epistemology and ethics'; in other words an inner realisation of the interconnectedness of human and non-human beings and the desire that others can perceive this heterotopic gnosis. Additionally, 'spiritual activism' is an alternative ethical project because it breaks the mechanism of dependency by supporting individual self-transformation through processes of empowerment. As a result of the spiritual activism enacted in TM, Tapirira from the Quilombos community of Dandá said that TM was a *'path for freedom'*, a *'door'*, *'an*

*open path for you to follow what you want to follow, for you to realise your dream, but not only to dream but to know yourself*".

Intentional spiritual heterotopias enact alternative ethical projects based on a relational-scalar overlapping, where the individual, transcendental, community and local scale combine together to shape an alternative society where individuals are aware of the interconnectedness between human and non-human beings, and take responsibility for their own path. I conclude the analysis of this chapter by quoting a passage from Anzaldúa (2002:571) about spiritual activism.

> *Las neplanteras* walk through fire on many bridges (not just the conference one) by turning the flames into a radiance of awareness that orients, guides, and supports those who cannot cross over on their own. Inhabiting the liminal spaces where change occurs, *las neplanteras* encourage others to ground themselves to their own bodies and connect to their own internal resources, thus empowering themselves. Empowerment is the bodily feeling of being able to connect with inner voices/resources (images, symbols, beliefs, memories) during periods of stillness, silence and deep listening or with kindred others in collective actions. This alchemy of connection provides the knowledge, strength, and energy to persist and be resilient in pursuing goals. *Este modo* the *capacitar* comes from accepting your own authority to direct rather than letting others run you.

## 1.30  Conclusions

To summarise, by investigating how Dh and TM maintain estrangement it has been discovered that fences, edges, gates, opening times and mentoring mechanisms are activated in order to protect the community space and to preserve an alterity. The Dh case study showed how different levels of estrangement exist according to the nature of the specific place, resulting in the highest level of estrangement in spiritual spaces, and lowest in commercial economic activities. Yet, as Sargisson suggested, maintaining estrangement can lead to being enclosed and consequently, actions for mediating estrangement are required. The section gave examples of how TM and Dh are visible to the external world, virtually and physically, and how they are accessible and open to different types of visitor. These results confirm the recent studies on intentional communities which demonstrate high levels of openness to the external world and also support Sargisson's discussion on the importance of negotiating estrangement through

balancing community mechanisms for maintaining and mediating it. However, drawing upon the Foucauldian fifth principle of heterotopias, the third section goes into greater depth, critically reflecting on what it means to be inside the community and whether an external visitor is in the 'illusory' or 'real' heterotopia. Drawing upon the ethnographic diary and other evidence, I argue that not only physical but also spiritual boundaries are enacted. Being in the 'real' instead of the 'illusory' heterotopias requires a co-existence of the three scales – individual, community and transcendental – in spiritual heterotopias.

The second part of the chapter has introduced consideration of another scale, the local, by investigating how Dh and TM outreach, impact and shape the Valchiusella and Itamboatá valleys. Considering the lack of attention given to the local scale in intentional community studies, as well as in utopian and heterotopia literatures, this part drew predominantly on literature of diverse economies and ethical geographies. In the Dh case study, it has been shown how building a diverse economy language and experimenting with alternative ethical and social economic practices influence and outreach the inhabitants of Valchiusella valley. Additionally, creating the political party '*Con Te per il Paese*', Dh's ideology and philosophy directly impacted on and shaped the valley. Processes of heterotopization of the local scale have been identified and defined as those processes that bring 'the inside outside', in other words that impact, outreach and shape the outside world proliferating their alternative knowledge, gnosis, ontologies, practices and experiences.

Moreover, by sharing knowledge, education, dialogue and collaboration, TM has established a reference point for the Quilombos local communities, municipalities and institutions. Their projects do not only activate processes of heterotopianization of the local scale but also enact ethical heterotopias that take responsibility for human and non-human beings of the Itamboatá valley. Yet, taking responsibility for 'others' does not take the form of rescuing 'others', or of applying the TM model elsewhere; this ethical project starts at an individual scale by self-ethical transformation as Foucault suggests, or building subjectivities as Gibson-Graham suggests in the politics of the self. Indeed, this ethical project is alternative because it starts with individual personal transformation through transcendental practices inside the community. In the 'Path of *Conocimiento*' Anzaldúa captures well the personal journey that leads to 'spiritual activism'. This thesis began with explaining individual scale, then investigated the community and the transcendental scales and latterly described the local and sought to

demonstrate how these multiple scales are deeply interrelated in the enactment of intentional heterotopias and perhaps of an alternative society. In order to properly understand the wider vision of this social movement the global scale needs now to be considered.

# The global: relational heterotopias

This final empirical chapter studies how the communal movement is globally enacted and how intentional communities from the global north and south are connected. Besides Dh and TM, this section will look mostly at the Global Ecovillage Network (GEN), a social movement which considers community-led development to be the key to forging a more sustainable society. As specified in the introduction, the definition of 'ecovillage' is constantly evolving. In its latest version, the word ecovillage embraces a wider range of sustainable initiatives that includes intentional communities (Global Ecovillage Network, n.d.-c). Thus, this chapter uses intentional communities but it can include ecovillages when referring to the wider social movement. Drawing upon Leitner *et al.*, (2008), five spatialities will be used to investigate the GEN movement. Moreover, the last section will investigate the role of GEN education in helping to proliferate these heterotopias.

## 1.31 Placing the global & global places

In order to understand the global movement which is best described as 'communal', a key contribution will be used in setting up the analysis. Leitner *et al.* (2008), positioning themselves as pro-scale within the recent debate in human geography, suggest a multi-spatial approach for investigating 'contentious politics'. This they defined as follows:

> Contentious politics refers to concerted, counter-hegemonic social and
> political action, in which differently positioned participants come together
> to challenge dominant systems of authority, in order to promote and enact
> alternative imaginary. (Leitner *et al.*, 2008: 157)

In understanding 'contentious politics' Leitner *et al.* (2008) argue that five spatialities should be taken into consideration: scale, place, mobility, networks and socio-spatial positionality. In so doing, they argue that by analysing the intersectionality of these five spatialities the complex empirical manifestations of contentious politics can be analytically captured. Drawing upon their contribution, this chapter will follow a similar structural analysis. Firstly, scale and places will be taken into consideration. The next section will briefly clarify the conceptualisation of the global scale and the relevance of places. The second part of the chapter will focus on the idea of relationality to uncover how heterotopias are globally connected, by exploring mobility, networks and

positionalities. The last part will instead explore how GEN proliferates through education.

### 1.31.1 The relational global scale

As previously discussed, scales are considered to be epistemological and relational; however it is important to briefly clarify where this thesis is positioned within the debate on local versus global. Since the discursive production of the global scale, scholars such as Smith (1993) and Harvey (1996, 2012) have signalled the dominance of the global scale relative to the local, and how local initiatives, in this case community initiatives, rarely make any 'powerful' change at the national or global level. This perspective is captured by Gibson-Graham (2002:27) as follows:

> We are all familiar with the denigration of the local as small and relatively powerless, defined and confined by the global: the global is a force, the local its field of play; the global is penetrating, the local penetrated and transformed.

Conversely, Gibson-Graham (2002:27) claims that these narratives are embedded in a powerful and hierarchical binary understanding of the local/global which must be challenged. They propose, firstly, seven different perspectives in order to deconstruct the local/global binary opposition, and secondly, a process of 'resubjectivation' so as to create a new culture where the local acquires powerful and political agency. Similarly, Massey (2004:7) challenges the binary opposition between place and global space, arguing that it "is not that place is not concrete, grounded, real, but rather that space – global space – is so too". Massey attempts to claim back the powerful agency of places, and simultaneously, to propose a new relational and grounded understanding of the global.

> If space is really to be thought relationally, […], then 'global space' is no more than the sum of relations, connections, embodiments and practices. (Massey, 2004:9)

Drawing inspiration from their contributions, and considering that this study argues for relational rather than hierarchical scales, the global scale is not privileged over other scales. For instance, in the last chapter was discussed how the community scale has not only impacted the local scale but also how the surrounding areas have shaped the community enactment. Moreover, it has been argued how the community scale is

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strongly shaped by the individual and transcendental which themselves are shaped by the local and the community. In addition, Herod (2011) explains how the global scale has recently been conceptualised as a sum of networks, assemblages and connections. He clarifies that "in considering the global as a scale, it is important to contemplate critically the relationship between social actors' material practices and how these are described discursively" (Herod, 2011:248). Additionally, inspired by Massey (1994), Gibson-Graham (2002) and Herod (2011) the global is understood here as a set of relations, networks, and practices. It is by looking at these relations and practices that the global scale is then analysed.

### 1.31.2 Politics of place

In order to understand the foundations of this global network of intentional communities, it is necessary to investigate the role of the 'place'. In 2015 GEN celebrates its 20th anniversary. In these two decades, '*the philosophy behind GEN is that 'community' lies at the heart of all models for sustainability, hence the term ecovillage*' (EDE document 2). Furthermore, the GEN document claims:

> *We envision the village to be a key-element in building solutions to the problems we face today. At the village level, we can more easily: step into responsibility for our future and the future of our children; oversee and express our concern for healthy relationships in and with our ecosystem; build community, and take action together. [...] Fundamentally, an ecovillage is a human-scale settlement consciously designed through participatory processes to secure long-term sustainability"*

GEN uses the words 'community', 'villages' and 'human-scale settlements' to explain what in this thesis is identified as the community scale and what, in geography, is generally referred to as place. The main idea is that by creating human-scale settlements it is possible to build a more sustainable society where members feel responsible and empowered in shaping their own future. GEN's narratives include words such as 'responsibility', 'acting together', and 'participatory process'. These are embedded in the culture of "doing-it-yourself" (see McKay, 1998) and "doing-it-together" (see Ogden, 2012). This entails a process of self-organisation and collective autonomy where "ecovillage participants accept responsibility for their own lives and seek to invent alternative social structures" (Liftin, 2009:133).

However, this should not be misread as a sort of individual autonomy that permeates contemporary individualistic society. Rather it refers to a collective project, embedded

in cooperation, sharing and solidarity (Pickerill and Chatterton, 2006). In this regard, the concept of autonomous geographies proposed by Pickerill and Chatterton (2005) is very useful in understanding GEN as a social movement. Autonomous geographies are spaces "where people desire to constitute non-capitalist, egalitarian and solidaristic forms of political, social, and economic organization through a combination of resistance and creation" (Pickerill and Chatterton, 2006:730). What is interesting about this concept is the emphasis on the everyday, and how, according to Pickerill and Chatterton, it is necessary to look at the everyday practices in order to understand such autonomous spaces – or, as here, heterotopias. It is in the collective space of the everyday that the agency of the place is cultivated, where the autonomy is negotiated and where the heterotopia is enacted. For such reasons, this thesis has placed a strong emphasis on studying the everyday practices of Dh and TM. Moreover, by uncovering such dynamics it is possible to understand not only the community enactment but also the global scale of this social movement.

This analysis subverts the local/global dichotomy that positions "the global as powerful, abstract, ubiquitous and large" and the local as weak (Herod, 2011:248). Analysing GEN narratives, the reaffirmation of 'place' emerges, where the local – in this case the community – is not the victim of global forces but rather has the agency to transform global trends. This gives further empirical support to those scholars who seek to move beyond the binary opposition between local/global, instead arguing for a political agency of places in the context of globalisation (Gibson-Graham, 2002; Massey, 2004; Pickerill and Chatterton, 2005). To add, while exploring the politics of places in social movement, Leitner *et al.* (2008:161-162) claim:

> Places are imbued with meaning as well as power, which is also of critical importance in contentious politics. Social movements often seek to strategically manipulate, subvert and resignify places that symbolise priorities and imaginaries they are contesting; to defend places that stand for their priorities and imaginaries; and to produce new spaces where such visions can be practised, within that place and beyond.

While power is undoubtedly relevant to this view, it also emerges how social movements are anchored to places and how these are used strategically. Clearly, the global and the community scales are intrinsically mutually constituted; indeed "'places' are criss-crossings in the wider power-geometries which constitute both themselves and 'the global'" (Massey, 1994:11) and the global scale is the arena in which these

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heterotopic experiments are connected. Within the global ecovillage movement, 'place' is not only strategically used for contesting the *status quo* but it lies at the heart of the movement, the key to face global ecological, social and economic problems. The place is the space for change. It is the space where new visions, practices and alternatives can be experimented. Thus the next section turns to explore what kind of connections are enacted between these intentional heterotopias by the GEN, how and with what purposes.

## 1.32  Relational heterotopias

As discussed previously, some scholars such as Massey (1994), Gibson-Graham (2002) and Herod (2011) have challenged the binary opposition local/global in favour of a reconceptualisation of both as mutually constituted, grounded and relational. In contemplating the relations that shape the communal global scale, it is then fundamental to look at how heterotopias, such as intentional communities, are connected. Discussing these other spaces, Foucault innovatively argued the rise of a new spatial order constituted by networks (Dehaene and De Cauter, 2008) claiming "[o]ur epoch is one in which space takes for us the form of relations among sites" (Foucault, 1986: 23). To reinforce this point Johnson elucidates:

> Heterotopic sites do not sit in isolation as reservoirs of freedom,
> emancipation or resistance; they coexist, combine and connect. They are not
> stable entities; they are contingent qualities. (Johnson, 2013:800)

So the first point is that heterotopias are relational, and I argue, the sum of such connections shape the global scale. Then, how and why are these global relations between intentional heterotopias enacted?

### 1.32.1  Mobility

The first point analysed is mobility. Mobility is understood here as "the material or virtual movability of individuals or objects through space-time, within and between places" (Leitner *et al.*, 2008:165). One of the main ways Dh and TM have created relations with other communities is by the movement of their members. For instance, the spiritual leader of TM, the shaman Alba María visited Dh a few years ago. In 2012, another member of TM – Jussara – visited Dh to participate in the EDE course. Sometimes, these inter-community visits open up to longer relations where often

members visit each other periodically. Similarly, Electra from Dh frequently visits the intentional communities of Findhorn, based in Scotland, or Sieben Linden in Germany.

Generally the main reasons for these visits are: to know how other similar spaces are enacted; to establish a dialogue to communicate best practices and to explore common challenges; to share knowledge and expertise and overall; and to learn from other community experiences. For instance, Pablo from another Brazilian community visited TM to help Philodendron (man, TM) build his earth-bag house. Likewise, Alhena (woman, Dh) explains '*we learned how to do a straw-bale house from Sieben Linden's friends, and from Zegg community [we learned how to do] composting toilet*'.

This network of knowledge exchange is extremely relevant especially when the community does not have any member expert in specific matters that require technical expertise, such as the construction of a composting toilet or an earth-bag house. In this case, it can happen that the member of another community is invited by the hosting community to spend a period where they can teach the technical know-how. In such cases, accommodation, meals and an extra compensation for the work provided are typically offered to the expert guest. The compensation can be monetary or provided in the form of know-how. If the compensation is monetary, it is generally offered at a cheaper rate than would be paid to external providers. One of the key aspects of this mobility is that the visitor aims to teach the community members how, for instance, to make the composting toilet, empowering the community in a way that they can work independently in the future and thereafter, they would not need the expert visitor to come back. This is different from if they had asked a technical expert who does not belong to any ecovillage. Most probably, in those circumstances, the company would have delivered the finished product rather than teaching the process. Collaborative dynamics rather than competitive measure are the bases of such community exchanges and one of the reasons why such heterotopic mobility takes place.

> *We, Damanhurians, are involved with GEN because we believe in the importance of finding friends, allies who are working on similar things and also to learn from diversity.* (Alhena, Dh, woman)

Cooperation and collaboration is perceived in Alhena's (Dh, woman) quote when she uses the words '*friends*' and '*allies*' to define members of another intentional community. The nature of this friendship is interesting because sometimes these community members have met perhaps only once and for only a few days, but because they belong to an intentional community they feel they share something in common. By

meeting members from other intentional communities, Electra (woman, Dh) has perceived that there are affinities and similarities between community residents. According to Electra, when she meets someone from another community, she can see straightaway that this person has been living in a community, from the way he/she takes decisions, interacts and reacts to others' opinions. From her experience, she believes that community residents, regardless of which community they belong to, tend to go through a process of personal development triggered by the community living and resulting in '*more accelerated social dynamics*'. In other words, by visiting and hosting other community members, residents feel they share a common communal, though individual and diversified, experience. What is relevant here is that mobility, while allowing learning from the 'diversity' of other communal experiences, enables the perception of 'similarities' between residents of different intentional communities. I argue that this creates a sort of heterotopic identity and stimulates a sense of belonging to a wider movement.

Moreover, relations between heterotopic spaces are reinforced by another type of mobility, participation in intentional community events. These are generally temporary events in which members of intentional communities gather together as representatives of their communities. For instance, Jussara (woman, TM) and Philodendron (man, TM) participated in the People's Summit at Rio de Janeiro (PSR+20). They were there to participate in the GEN and CASA meetings and as representatives of TM community. Similarly, Electra (woman, Dh) participated in PSR+20 as a representative of Dh but also as a representative of GEN-Europe. During the PSR+20 there were at least 100 representatives of ecovillages from different parts of the world. These gatherings can be part of wider events such as PSR+20, taking the form of temporary clusters (see Bathelt and Schult, 2008), or can be held in some intentional community. For instance, since 1996 the Italian ecovillage network (RIVE) has organised annual gatherings with representatives of Italian ecovillages. These RIVE gatherings rotate around Italian intentional communities (RIVE, n.d.); to list the last meetings, the 16th annual gathering was in Dh in 2012, the 17th in the ecovillage *Il Vignale* (Lazio) in 2013, the 18th in *La commune di Bagnaia* (Tuscany) in 2014 and this year, the 19th gathering, will be in Habitat Ecovillage (Tuscany).

According to the Italian alternative lifestyle magazine, Terra Nuova, at these annual gatherings "representatives of different Italian ecovillages offer cultural activities and share their life [community] experiences, that although different they all share the same

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perspective: ecology, practice and philosophy" (Guidotti, 2013:n.d.). Once again, words such as similarity and diversity emerge, stressing how these ecovillages share this feeling of 'common diversity', in other words a sense of common heterotopic belonging. Mobility, identified here as the participation of ecovillagers in gatherings of intentional communities, offers the opportunity to engage in dialogue, share and learn from other/similar communal experiences and, eventually, helps to reinforce these heterotopic relations.

To summarise, one way to understand how global relations between intentional heterotopias are enacted is by looking at the mobility of their members, as suggested by Leitner *et al.* (2008) in understanding social movements. Thus, mobility here takes three forms: the visit of community members to other intentional communities, consequently and secondly, receiving guests from other intentional communities and thirdly, participating in national and international gatherings of intentional communities or more broadly ecovillages. Although mobility aims to facilitate relations between these heterotopic spaces, the final aim, especially by the participation in these international gatherings, is to strengthen this heterotopic movement of intentional community or more broadly ecovillages. In order to achieve this aim, GEN was set up in 1995, to create an official platform to facilitate the connections between these heterotopic spaces; an umbrella organisation *'which builds bridges'* (EDE document 1) between ecovillages from the north and south. It is the analysis of the network which I turn to now.

## 1.33  Networks & positionality

Network is one of the five spatialities considered by Leitner *et al*. (2008) in understanding social movements. According to Bosco (2001: 309-10) "networks is a useful conceptual tool to investigate how collective action depends on social relations embedded in webs of meaning and practice". Bosco further stresses that "transnational webs that link activists together" can make "a critical difference in the outcomes of purposive collective action" (*ibid*).

From the lectures held by GEN's President, Kosha Anja Joubert, during the EDE, it became clear that the main aims of GEN are to discover and connect sustainable human-settlements in order to gain visibility and recognition as a social movement. She explained that all around the world numerous communities are enacting their own sustainable places; however they tended to be unaware of the existence of similar

initiatives around the globe. It is because ecovillages, and more specifically intentional communities, are focused on building their own collective heterotopias rather than protesting against national and/or supranational institutions, trans-communal networks are essential in gaining recognition as a wider global social movement. Thus, network becomes extremely important when studying the enactment of GEN. By building a "network of those dedicated to developing and demonstrating sustainability principles and practices in their lifestyles and communities around the world" (Global Ecovillage Network, n.d.-c) GEN seeks to scale up, according to Liftin (2014). It means "to accelerate the shift to sustainable lifestyles and more resilient societies" (Global Ecovillage Network, n.d.-c) on a wider scale by showing how single experimental initiatives can generate effective sustainable practices.

Recent geography scholarship has contributed significantly to our understanding of transnational networks (Featherstone, 2003; Routledge, 2003; Featherstone, 2005; Della Porta and Mosca, 2007; Featherstone *et al.*, 2007; Cumbers *et al.*, 2008; Routledge, 2009). In particular, this has uncovered the entangled geographies of global social movements. The main focus of these studies are the Global Justice Networks (GJNs), an umbrella of diversified grassroots global organisations, that though embedded in the local scale attempt "to forge wider alliances in protest at their growing exclusion from global neoliberal economic decision-making" (Routledge 2003:334). It gathers "trade unionists, environmentalists, indigenous people's movements and non-governmental organisations" which often have diverging and contrasting aims, ideologies and strategies (*ibid*:335). Though GEN is not representative of such heterogeneous groups, considering that it tends to bring together sustainable human-settlements, it gathers a range of heterogeneous international local experiences. Moreover, GEN is articulated in a number of sub-continental and sub-national networks, as discussed in the contextual chapter, which are representatives of their territorial local settlements. However, if "there has been a relative lack of detailed scrutiny about this 'movement's' component parts, its operational networks and their spatial dynamics, strategies and practices" (Cumbers *et al.*, 2008:184), even less attention has been paid to the spatialities, enactments and entanglements of GEN networks. In uncovering the enactment of such networks, the contributions mentioned above on Global Justice Networks will be extensively used. To further investigate the enactment of the global scale I will consider the findings that emerged at the "People's Summit at Rio+20 for Social and Environmental Justice" (PSR+20) during the informal and formal meetings between

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members of the Latin American Ecovillage Network (CASA) and the Presidents of the GEN-Int and GEN-Europe. Four analytical themes will be developed: empowering, encountering, positioning and converging.

### 1.33.1 Empowering

> **Box 9.1: Ethnographic diary – Second official meeting of CASA**
>
> 17/06/12: Approximately 50 people participated in the second official meeting of CASA and some of them, around five persons, belonged to the group that in January 2012 set up CASA in Colombia. The aim of the meeting was to introduce the recent CASA network to the participants who were predominantly representatives of other sustainable communities located in Latin America. The meeting began discussing how the birth of CASA was linked to the necessity of producing a 'new Latin American identity'. Indeed CASA also means 'home' in Spanish and Portuguese, to refer to a network where 'everything belongs to it'. During the meeting feelings of frustration emerged because the Latin American settlements did not feel involved in GEN. Even if they were part of it, there was not a real coordination within the global, continental and national networks and the communities felt they were not represented on a global scale. The birth of CASA was seen as a new start towards a mutual support among –similar, in terms of vision and culture, and different in terms of practice – sustainable experiences. The position of CASA towards GEN-Int was quite clear: CASA was born as an independent network with its own aims and strategies embedded in a Latin American culture. There was the desire, but not the necessity, to influence the GEN movement towards a more integral way of thinking that was not only embedded in a northern culture, but also in a more southern way of living.

The new social movements literature suggest that even within the same social movement, different power relations emerge when networks start to operate at a global scale (Routledge 2009).

> Networks evolve unevenly over space, with some groups and actors within
> them able to develop relatively more global connections and associations,
> whereas others remain relatively more localized. Potential conflicts arise
> from such complex geographies, which only become evident through
> analysing the operation and evolution of different networks. (Cumbers *et al*.,
> 2008: 184)

Taking into consideration the findings reported above, it clearly emerges how the Latin American members did not feel part of GEN, nor even of the American sub-network called ENA, which they claimed tended to represent the communities of North America. The diversified level of involvement of actors within social movements is a recurring

issue within global networks. Cumbers *et al.* (2008: 190), explained how "the reality is that within networks decision-making often devolves to a surprisingly small elite of individuals and groups who make a lot of the running in deciding what happens, where and when". Studies (Routledge 2003; Featherstone 2003) underlined how differences in wealth often tended to marginalise southern locations whose actors consequently tended to be less involved. This, on the one hand, generates feelings of exclusion for southern members; on the other, from a northern perspective, it can be perceived as a lack of interest in participating in a global movement.

When CASA was set up it was a crucial moment in shaping the global scale, because those who felt they had not been taken into consideration, were not represented, and did not have the decisional power, reacted by setting up an independent network. By taking this initiative, a process of empowerment took place. An alteration of the power dynamics took place, creating a network to which Latin American sustainable experiences felt they could belong, be represented by and connected to. This feeling of belonging was further reinforced by the choice of the name CASA (home) that for the members signifies a network in which *'everything belongs to it'*. Then, the second official meeting of CASA was set up at PSR+20 in order to confirm and strengthen such empowerment and to present CASA aims, strategies and positions to other Latin American delegates.

The other key point that emerged in this first meeting was the link between CASA and a collective Latin American identity. Routledge (2003: 336) underlines how "networks are embedded in territories and, at the same time, territories are embedded in networks". The creation of CASA was embedded in a common territorial identity that, though unifying across national scales of South and Central America, creates a demarcation from other networks. On the other hand, this collective network empowered the sustainable experience territorialized in Latin America to feel to be part of a wider movement. However, Harvey (1996, 2000) critically reflects how often these place-based movements become examples of militant particularism, which though global in ambition tend to shift into parochial politics. According to Harvey, militant particularism can be overcome by building "a politics of solidarity capable of reaching across space, without abandoning their militant particularist base(s)" (1996:400). Was CASA willing to *converge* with GEN to shape a supportive, collective and collaborative network, or did it prefer to stay independent? Conversely was GEN willing to *converge*

with the Latin American CASA network in order to strengthen the ecovillage movement on a global scale? Or was it rather sceptical of a network outside GEN?

## 1.33.2  Encountering

> **Box 9.2: Ethnographic diary – First informal meeting between CASA and GEN**
>
> 18/06/12: The official meeting between CASA Continental and GEN was scheduled for Thursday 21st June to be held at the PSR+20. However, the organizers of the recently established Latin America network CASA, and the group representing GEN, had never met before. An informal gathering was set up before the official meeting. The GEN President explained that she wanted to meet the CASA members to connect in a more informal and friendly way before speaking in front of an audience. Also, she proposed to think about and discuss the main points that could be approached during the formal meeting on Thursday. CASA, which at the beginning had a visibly suspicious attitude, explained why CASA network was born in Colombia and why it was important to have a Latin American identity. By observing the meeting, it was possible to feel the tensions between the two groups. On the one hand, GEN was looking for a dialogue with CASA and, on the other, CASA was happy to share, but at the same time, was careful to explain their motivations and positions. After knowing each other's intentions, the atmosphere became more relaxed. However, this was just a first introductory meeting where many points were not addressed yet. Indeed, they planned to meet again before the official meeting.

While the first informal meeting between CASA and GEN was unplanned, it was important in shaping the global network. Tensions that have proved intractable were revealed. An interesting point is that by observing such transnational movements from the outside, for instance identifying visions and aims on their website, it is not possible to perceive any tensions or controversies. Indeed, the movement appears cohesive, integrated and cooperative. This highlights the need for ethnographic evidence of the internal dynamics of this network.

Another point to be made is that often such translocal movements operate and connect through the web rather than face-to-face, due to the long distances. Indeed, the role of the internet in producing global connection between social movements is well known (see Pickerill, 2003; Castells, 2012). However, though networking technologies are essential in the age of a network society, they can be problematic. Routledge (2003, 2009) has highlighted that one of the main limits concerns the disparities in accessibility across the world, especially for those movements based in the global south. Another issue is the disembodied feature of the internet conversation which can eventually lead

to a different output than face-to-face discussion (Routledge, 2003). In this first informal meeting, it emerged how previous contact between GEN and CASA networks were made but how an in-depth conversation was missing. Indeed, this was the first meeting where face-to-face contacts were made.

> For it is unlikely that trust between individuals who have not met can be fully developed over the Internet. The depth of trust required to plan, and conduct, political action together is place- and face-based. (Routledge 2003:339)

Face-to-face meetings are crucial for becoming familiar with the 'other', presenting their own positions and, eventually, developing a collective solidarity. Indeed, in the second half of the meeting the atmosphere calmed down and the necessity to engage in further face-to-face dialogue before the official meeting was felt to be essential by both sides.

### 1.33.3 Positioning and converging

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**Box 9.3: Ethnographic diary– Second informal meeting between CASA and GEN**

20/06/12: The second meeting was planned for the evening of 20th June, the day before the official meeting. CASA representatives started to speak about concrete actions that could be developed together with GEN. The GEN-Int President remarked that it was necessary to canalize the energy of the ecovillage movement in the same direction, from both the local and global level. GEN proposed that two people from CASA would join the GEN Board to reinforce the connection and collaboration. After this proposal, CASA did not reply straightaway and later declared that initially in Colombia the idea was to be revolutionary and to create an independent network from GEN. Moreover, according to CASA, they had a more anarchic political approach than GEN, so for example while GEN believes in the rise of the green economy in order to promote sustainable development, CASA thinks that green economy discourses hide the same dominant capitalist dynamics. CASA claimed clearly that they did not want to be incorporated into GEN, but they would like to work together as independent networks. By underlining their fear of losing their Latin American approach for adopting a more northern way, they wanted to offer their Latin American culture to the ecovillage movement to remark that each context has its preciousness and value. GEN replied by saying that, from their side, there was not any intention to incorporate CASA, but rather that GEN wanted to find a way to join them and create a bridge between south and north. Eventually, the meeting finished with the intention to collaborate together, CASA would stay an independent network but two of its members would join the GEN board.

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During this second informal meeting the contested positionality of CASA and GEN emerged even more clearly than at the previous meeting. Positionality, one of the five spatialities, is essential to understanding the entanglements of these networks (Leitner *et al.*, 2008). Positionality means "that differently positioned subjects have distinct identities, experiences and perspectives, shaping their understanding of and engagement with the world" (Leitner *et al.*, 2008:163). CASA's position is clearly embedded in a Latin American culture, which though not able to be considered a homogeneous culture, does share common features such as the indigenous heritage and a predominantly Spanish and Portuguese colonization experience. GEN is a network that, although it represents the global movement and aims to create a bridge between ecovillages worldwide, was initially set up in ecovillages located in the global north and so predominantly shaped by a Western heritage.

Moreover, Leitner *et al.* (2008:163) add how "positionality emerges relationally, through connections and interactions with differently positioned subjects." This is especially relevant in this context where both networks assumed and declared their own positions when encountering the 'other'. However, by sharing their own positions, I argue that the networks have also created 'convergence spaces' (Routledge, 2003; Cumbers *et al.*, 2008; Routledge, 2009). These are understood as spaces where heterogeneous actors, social movements, organisations that are spread across the world converge with the aim to create durable coalitions. This was empirically demonstrated when at the end of the meeting the two networks realised how, regardless of the different territorial positions, they shared a common vision, namely the desire to enact sustainable and local human-settlements to promote a fairer way of living for human and non-human beings.

So if, on the one hand, "convergence space are sites of contested social and power relations, because the diversity of groups that comprise them articulate a variety of potentially conflicting goals, ideologies and strategies" (Cumbers *et al.*, 2008:196); on the other they are also sites that "articulate certain collective visions (i.e., unifying values, organisational principles and positions), which generate sufficient common ground to generate a politics of mutual solidarity" (*ibid*:193). The concept of convergence spaces, adopted by Routledge (2003, 2009) and Cumbers *et al.* (2008), clearly captures the dynamic existing within the translocal networks of CASA and GEN. From the findings it emerges how the two positions are processual, relational and co-constituting. As clarified by Cumbers *et al.* (2008:190), "networks are, at the same

time, dynamic entities that will change their shape and focus according to the evolving social relationships between the groups and individuals within them". Indeed, GEN did accept to not integrate the independent CASA network within it, and CASA took up the offer of proposing two members as CASA delegates to sit on the GEN board. These two delegate CASA members could be considered what Routledge calls "imagineers" (2009:1890), namely key transnational activists who promote dialogue between members of different networks. They are indeed considered crucial for establishing a durable connection within the global scale.

On Thursday 21st the official meeting between CASA and GEN took place in front of a wider audience. This was a public meeting which confirmed the positions of the two networks and, at the same time, exposed to a wider public the collaboration strategies recently agreed. New operational logics were offered by GEN in order to overcome spatial disparities such as financial bursary to CASA delegates to participate in GEN conferences and events. Routledge (2003; 2009) points out how in order to create more horizontal relations it is necessary to consider how spatial wealth inequalities can be addressed.

In conclusion, this part aimed to show how GEN faces similar challenges to other translocal social movements and how the enactment of a global scale is processual, relational and co-constituting. Additionally, it showed that complex dynamics exist not only in translocal networks shaped by different social movements, but also within the same social movements. By creating spaces of convergences, northern and southern positionalities need to be negotiated so as to enact and strengthen a social movement of mutual support and solidarity, whilst not losing their identities. However to fully understand how the ecovillage movement is enacted globally another key theme should be analysed before concluding: proliferation.

1.34 **Proliferating by educating**

The GEN movement has one peculiar aspect that differentiates it from typical social movements or contentious politics. According to Liftin (2009:134) the global ecovillage movement is "politically unconventional" for two reasons, firstly because the movement does not believe that "meaningful change" can be made by top-down policy reforms and, secondly because "it is an affirmative movement, not a protest movement". Indeed, GEN members do not aim to resist by protesting in the street, participating in mass public demonstrations or appealing against national or sovra-national political

decisions. GEN believes in resisting by doing, by supporting the enactment of sustainable human-scale settlements. This might be understood as progressive forms of autonomy (Pickerill and Chatterton, 2005) or as forms of horizontal politics where decentralised geographies shape new politics of possibilities (Springer, 2014). Or, more specifically by referring to the ecovillage movement, as a sort of 'soft activism' as identified by Fischietti (2008:177) or 'domestic protest' as understood by Kirby (2004:n.d.).

> Soft activists are those who believe that the personal is political and that the collective lifestyle choices of numerous individuals who are living out their values can add up to significant social change. (Fischietti, 2008:177)

While according to Kirby, "domestic protest in the form of the creation of alternative spaces, represents the most radical form of attitudes that are already beginning to find acceptance in the general population" (2004:n.d.).

In supporting the claims that forms of soft activism or domestic protest can take place through the enactment of intentional communities across the globe, how does such philosophy proliferate? How do they make a 'meaningful change' beyond the local context? Processes of heterotopianization – understood as those processes that impact, outreach and shape the outside world by proliferating communities' alternative knowledge, gnosis, ontologies, practices and experiences – have previously been revealed in the empirical analyses of the local scales. However, by examining more closely the global ecovillage movement, it emerges that this 'soft protest' is not only taking place within the ecovillages' local context but also more globally. Arguably, visitors all around from the globe visit these heterotopias. Thus, the proliferation intrinsically extends beyond local boundaries.

Additionally, another key strategy of the GEN movement is to promote, coordinate and support educational programmes on sustainability by implementing EDE courses (EDE documents 1; Gaia Trust, n.d.; Jackson, 2004). EDE courses have so far been held more than 180 times across 39 different countries (Gaia Education, n.d.). However, scant attention has been given to the internal dynamics of EDE courses. Though some scholars (e.g. Avelino and Kunze, 2009; Liftin, 2009; Ergas, 2010; Liftin, 2014) have underlined their importance, a detailed investigation of the experience of an EDE course has yet to be conducted within the academic context. To understand how GEN's philosophy proliferates beyond ecovillages' contexts in a more systemic manner, I argue that the internal dynamics of EDE should be interrogated. The next and last

empirical section takes the challenge of uncovering the significance of the EDE course by engaging in a mainly visual analysis from my ethnography fieldwork.

### 1.34.1 Learning by doing

One key feature of EDE courses is the "Living and Learning paradigm" (Gaia Trust, n.d.:2). When the course was initially designed by Gaia Trust the idea was to create a curriculum where the ecovillage design was studied through a full-immersion experience in the community for four weeks. Jackson (2004:9) claims that "it is not possible to understand the ecovillage concept in a classroom. You have to get out there and experience it". This approach is strongly supported by my findings.



**Figure 9.1:** Classroom with Kosha Joubert (EDE pictures 2012)



**Figures 9.2:** One-to-one class discussion (EDE pictures 2012)

**Figures 9.3:** Group discussion (EDE pictures 2012)

By analysing the findings of this study, it emerges how the whole course was embedded in the philosophy of 'active learning'. Figure 9.1 shows the typical setting of the classroom. It reveals how traditional teaching methods were applied, namely when the teacher explains a topic to the students. The teacher, standing up, is the President of GEN, Kosha Joubert, and the students are the EDE participants, sat around in chairs. However, in the figures 9.2 and 9.3, it is also shown how taught topics were generally followed by one-to-one discussions and group conversations. Beside classroom lectures, which generally took the form of open discussion, the rest of the classes where in the field.



**Figures 9.4a and 9.4b:** Permaculture Design Group Work (EDE pictures 2012)

**Figure 9.5:** Permaculture Design Group Presentation (EDE pictures 2012)

Permaculture design was one of the key projects developed in Dh. Following a two-hour lecture by an expert on permaculture, the group was taken to one of the Dh lands and divided into smaller groups. This open field, used by Damanhurians for agriculture, was the scenario in which we had to base our permaculture project (see figure 9.4a). After investigating the field, setting up and designing the project (see figure 9.4b), each group had to present it to the rest of the class (see figure 9.5). Group work was one of the key strategies of the educational course. As stated by Healey *et al.* (1996: 168) "small-group teaching involves creating situations in which students will work together to maximise their own and each other's learning". By working in groups it was possible to learn from each other. Though often it was challenging, one of the skills to be strengthened was specifically 'team work' by being able to deal with group dynamics.

Moreover, the effectiveness of active learning has been widely recognised within the scholarship of teaching (Gibbs, 1988; Boyer, 1990; Healey, 2000; Healey and Roberts 2004). Indeed, the main teaching method used during the EDE was 'active learning', where "active learning is about learning by doing" (Gibbs, 1988 in Healey 2004: 1). This became even more visible while learning about ecological building. Kurha (man, Dh), who is an expert in eco-construction, as discussed in *Chapter 6*, taught us his straw-bale house technique by involving the participants in a form of 'active learning'. Again divided into groups, we engaged with the different phases of the construction (see figures 9.6).

**Figures 9.6a, 9.6b, 9.6c, 9.6d:** Eco-building (EDE pictures 2012)

The key argument of this section is that learning, within the GEN activism, passes through an active methodology, an experimental approach where the individual is actively engaging in the production of knowledge. Thus besides the content of the EDE course that was clearly addressing the four dimensions of sustainability, the teaching method plays a key role as well. One way for proliferating 'sustainable approaches' is, not only theorising about them, but also by putting these concepts into practice, as indeed shown in the recent literature on eco-homes (Pickerill and Maxey, 2009; Pickerill 2012, 2015; Chatterton, 2015; Pickerill, forthcoming).

> It is not enough just to do, and neither is it enough just to think. Nor is it
> enough simply to do and think. Learning from experience must involve
> linking the doing and the thinking. (Gibbs, 1988:9)

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This leads the analysis to the next theme of the investigation: 'discovering by creating'.

## 1.34.2 Discovering by creating

Ecovillages are encouraged to use their expertise, capabilities and interests when planning their EDE programme. Thereafter, the programme is sent to GEN to verify if all four elements of sustainability are included and sufficiently respected. If they are not well balanced, then the ecovillage needs to adjust it accordingly by reinforcing the weak aspects. For instance, Dh proposed the straw-bale house building within the ecological week because they have expertise in that field. As discussed in the theoretical chapter, arts play a key role within social and cultural enactment. Thus, the EDE planned two days reserved for artistic experimentation as part of the cultural/spiritual dimension. During the first day the course leader asked us to create a clay sculpture on the theme of 'the embrace'. It was the first time that I had worked with clay and I was worried about not being able to create something. The other participants were not professional artists and, like myself, some of them were concerned about their artistic abilities (see figure 9.7a). Nevertheless, we produced our artworks and some of us were impressed by the results produced by the group (see figure 9.7b).



**Figures 9.7a and 9.7b:** Clay artworks preparation and exposition (EDE pictures 2012)

The following day, we had to paint a circular paper on the theme 'dream'. Figure 9.8 shows the start of the process involved in the creation of the artwork. Each one started to paint one section of the paper, but at some point we had to move to another side (see

figure 9.9). So another person continued the painting. Initially, this generated a personal feeling of frustration and a sense of attachment to 'my painting', it challenged my ego. While I was painting another section, I continued glancing at my previous section, looking at how other people changed it. When moving from one side of the paper to the other, I could no longer recognise 'my painting' any more. 'My painting' had become the painting of someone else and vice versa. Finally, when the painting was complete, we had to position the sculpture made the day before over a section of the painting (see figure 9.10). Reflecting with the group afterwards, these feelings of frustration and attachment were common among participants in the initial phase of the painting. However, during the artistic process these feelings turned to a sense of satisfaction and enjoyment. Challenging our egos and individual space, we felt that we produced something collectively and for two days we were a group of artists.



**Figures 9.8:** Painting circle (EDE pictures 2012)

**Figures 9.9:** Painting circle (EDE pictures 2012)



**Figures 9.10:** Group painting and sculptures (EDE pictures 2012)

By reporting this experience, this study emphasises how the EDE, embedded in the Dh spirit, challenges the idea that in order to produce artefacts it is necessary to be an artist. Instead there were spaces of "vernacular creativity" where everyone can perform everyday creative practices (Hallam and Ingold, 2007; Edensor *et al.,* 2009; Gauntlett, 2011). It affirms that creativity does not belong exclusively to the creative class, but that each individual has the potential to express everyday forms of creativity.

This experience left a feeling of empowerment among participants. The reflections thereafter were that though it would have been impossible to produce such artworks by oneself, collectively it becomes possible. By generating unsettling heterotopic spaces of collective performative practice the messages were, firstly, that each individual has hidden talents to be discovered and secondly, that if used collaboratively these latent potentials can produce unexpected results. This, I argue, is a form of 'soft heterotopic activism' in which the ecovillage movement is embedded. It means that the enactment of alternative societies starts from an individual process of self-realisation of the collective power. Community is indeed at the heart of the ecovillage movement. The activism in GEN is not expressed through protesting, but preferably through an embodied lived experience of collective empowerment.

This experience literally became embodied, considering that the artistic expression which first took place on paper ultimately manifested in our bodies. Besides expressing the enjoyment of the group, figures 9.11 aim to show how a feeling of community emerged between the participants.



**Figures 9.11:** Embodied painting (EDE pictures 2012)

Indeed the EDE was an attempt to experiment with community living. While locally embedded in the context of Valchiusella and specifically in Dh, among participants from all around the globe it produced an individual internal shift, another sort of

*arrebato*. It could be argued that GEN proliferates by generating a sort of *arrebato*, followed by processes of questioning and searching as previously identified. Thus, 'soft heterotopic activism' operates at related scales: the individual passes through a process of self-realisation, in which recognising the power of the collectivity, uses the individuals' abilities and local resources to support the community enactment and the local development in order to overcome global ecological, economic and social challenges. Though this will not always result in the enactment of new ecovillages, the EDE generates a new awareness, a new consciousness which makes us reflect critically on the personal and societal way of living.

## 1.35  Conclusions

This last empirical chapter has explored the enactment of the global scale. In order to undertake such analysis, data have been collected across different contexts. Drawing upon Leitner *et al.* (2008) the analytical device used for understanding social movements has helped to shed light on five different spatialities. Key arguments have being made for each one of them.

By arguing that scale, the first spatiality, has been guiding the analysis throughout the thesis, this first section has clarified the conceptualisation of the global scale. By overcoming the dichotomy of global space as powerful and place as powerless, findings show that, for GEN, community is indeed the crucial element of the movement. Communities understood as places (this is the second spatiality) are not conceptualised as victims of global forces but rather as able to transform the society globally. In this sense, it could be argued that, in GEN's philosophy, places have a latent global power which can be strengthened through global relations. This is in line with post-structuralist understandings that acknowledge the political agency of places within the context of globalisation (Gibson-Graham, 2002; Massey, 2004; Pickerill and Chatterton, 2005).

This leads to the third spatiality, mobility. By exploring mobility it has been discussed how intentional heterotopias such as intentional communities create connections through the movability of their members in three different ways: the visit of community members to other intentional communities; secondly, receiving guests from other intentional communities; and thirdly, participating in national and international gatherings of ecovillages. These mobilities result in developing a sense of common heterotopic belonging, where though members perceive the differences within communities, they nevertheless feel they belong to the same heterotopic movement.

Thus, within this mobility, knowledge is shared, exchanges are established and heterotopic relations reinforced.

However, while exploring the fourth spatiality – networks – the other side of the coin is shown. Spaces of empowering, encountering, positioning and converging have been disclosed by engaging in a further analysis. The key arguments are that heterotopic relations within the global and continental networks are processual, controversial and dynamic, and that in order to create spaces of convergence, even if sharing the same philosophy, different positions from the south and north need to be negotiated to create a more effective network of solidarity. Positionality was indeed the fifth spatiality.

The last section engages in further exploration of the idea of 'soft activism' by investigating the EDE course from an insider perspective. An active learning pedagogy was used in the EDE course. This was applied across the different dimensions of sustainability. By doing and by creating, and thus being actively involved in the learning process, new ways of perceiving the individual and the community were discovered. I argue that this pedagogy enacts forms of 'soft heterotopic activisms' through which GEN proliferates a heterotopic thinking. This might result in the enactment of other ecovillages, or in developing a heterotopic awareness, or neither one nor the other. In any case, this 'soft heterotopic activism' is enacted across the different scales, where the individual, the community, the transcendental, the local and global are interconnected. Thus, the ecovillage movement could be identified as an example of 'soft heterotopic activism' which advocates the development of heterotopic thinking and doing, in an attempt to compensate for some of the contemporary societal limits by integrating and balancing sociality, ecology, economy and spirituality across related scales.

# Conclusions

Throughout this thesis, I have explored the nature and the enactment of intentional heterotopias using a relational scalar approach. This study has critically interrogated and advanced the conceptualisation of enacted utopias and has attempted to empirically contribute to the fields of social, economic and spiritual geography. By developing an 'experimental international comparativism' (Robinson, 2011), this research has provided a grounded examination of two spiritual intentional communities, Dh located in Italy and TM based in Brazil. Drawing upon ethnographic enquiry, this study has used multi-methods to capture the complex intersectionality of the enactment. This final chapter aims to summarise the main findings of the thesis, highlighting the theoretical, methodological and empirical contributions to human geography and beyond. It concludes by offering up new possible directions to undertake in future research.

## 1.36  Thesis Summary

Theoretically, this thesis is situated at the intersection between utopian studies and heterotopology. In C*hapter 2*, a critical interrogation of the utopian concept has been offered by underlining its evolutions, strengths and weaknesses. In emphasising its limitations, I argued that by integrating utopian conceptualisations with heterotopology (Foucault, 1986), a more integrated, comprehensive and holistic conceptual framework was provided for analysing alternative spaces such as intentional communities. I argued that the processes of enactment have not previously been fully captured nor holistically addressed by either utopian research or heterotopology. The aims were:

*- To explore conceptually and empirically the nature of alternative spaces, defined intentional heterotopias;*

*- To investigate the enactment of spiritual intentional communities;*

*- To understand how multiple related scales shape the enactment of intentional heterotopias.*

In addressing the enactment of intentional heterotopias, C*hapter 3* set up the research strategy, the research design and the methodological framework arguing for a multi-method investigation. In so doing, this study advanced a 'spiritual embodied method' to capture more in-depth the communities' practices, narratives and dynamics of such

spiritual spaces. Another key argument of the methodology chapter highlights the importance of unplanned events, field encounters, and emotions in shaping the whole research journey, and thereafter, the production of knowledge. By underlining how the relational scalar approach is the result of a grounded analysis, and considering that such an approach guided this thesis throughout, C*hapter 4* investigated the implications of using scales in human geography. Specifically, it demonstrated that scales can be understood as relational and epistemological, as spatial, temporal and even transcendental. Next, *Chapter 4* provided the contexts of the Global Ecovillage Movement, and of the intentional communities of Dh and TM, which informed the empirical scalar analysis.

The second part of the thesis engaged in an empirical investigation of the scalar enactment guided by five sub-research question. *Chapter 5* aimed to answer the following question: *Why have people moved to the intentional communities of Dh and TM?* This chapter provided rich insights into the connection between the enactment of the individual and the community scales. By investigating individuals' life journeys before moving to Dh and TM, the intention of joining such spaces emerged as a consequence of unexpected events. Drawing upon the idea of heterotopias of crisis and deviation (Foucault, 1986) and further integrating with Anzaldúa's (2002) contributions, this chapter has revealed the importance of *arrebatos*, namely unexpected events, which functioned as turning points that compel individuals to question their background cultural paradigms and to search for new frames of reference. Thus, I argued for an 'unintended intentionality', rather than 'unintentional utopianism' (Garforth, 2009; Garforth and Kraftl, 2009).

In *Chapter 6* I explored more closely the community scale by investigating its material and social enactment. By interrogating *which performative community practices play a key role in the material and social enactment of intentional heterotopias*, I discussed the significance of performative practices such as 'financial contribution' and 'voluntary collective work' in both Dh and TM and also 'games' and 'arts' in Dh. The argument, developed in the material enactment, suggested that processes of economisation of heterotopias were paradoxically taking place within these spiritual spaces. However, the data also revealed that such capitalist forms where combined with diverse economic practices such as a gift economy and that, moreover, the communities were embedded in forms of spiritual economy. Furthermore, while exploring uniquely Dh, I argued that through creative and playful practices, processes of social (dis)ordering are enacted to

avoid the danger of established structures becoming habits, to stimulate the creative potential of each individual, and to strengthen social bonds. Thus, the alterity of these spaces dwells in the dynamic, experimental, and playful nature of the community social body.

*Chapter 7* examined the transcendental scale which has not been previously analysed within human geography. One of the key arguments was that Dh and TM enact, respectively, an experimental spiritual heterotopia and a postcolonial spiritual heterotopia, by rescuing ancient traditions to shape their present and future enactments. Additionally, by tailoring the investigation to one of the TM shamanic rituals – using spiritual embodied methods – I argued that the transcendental scale transcends space and time and creates juxtaposed and disordered forms of spiritual gnosis by processes of (dis)embodiment. This border gnosis affects the spiritual life of the individuals and shapes the enactment of the community. Thus I argued that these heterotopias enact alternative orderings by integrating and considering equally important spiritual border gnosis as much as epistemological knowledge. However to answer the research question *How is the transcendental scale enacted and how does it shape intentional heterotopias?* I argue that another repertoire of transcendental practices should be analysed such as community life. Indeed, findings revealed that individuals shape each other's spiritual path by living together; in these communities the 'other' is perceived as a catalyst for instigating processes of spiritual growth.

*Chapter 8* turned to answering the following questions: *How are these communities spatially enacted and how do they engage with the wider world; what is their, impact and how do they effect change in local cultures and economies?* This chapter has discussed two main themes of spatial enactment of Dh and TM and how the communities activate up-scaling processes, outreach, impact and shape the local scale. Analysed first was the 'outside inside', namely how visitors get inside these communities and what it means to be 'inside' by investigating levels of estrangement, boundaries, and opening/closing mechanisms. Secondly, the 'inside outside' was investigated, that is, how the communities bring knowledge, gnosis, experience, practices and their lifestyle to the surrounding local territory enacting processes of heterotopianization of the local scale. Moreover, I argued, that forms of spiritual activism (Anzaldúa, 2002) can generate alternative ethical projects where the communities take responsibility for creating a positive impact on the local area.

Finally, *Chapter 9,* in *investigating how is the communal movement globally enacted and how does it connect or bridge global north and south intentional heterotopias?*, sets up the analysis using five different spatialities. The key arguments are that the 'global scale' and 'place', here understood as community scale, are co-constituting each other, overlapping and equally powerfully. Furthermore, in exploring relational heterotopias, I have argued the importance of inter-community mobility, but also revealed the controversial, political and dynamic relations when such communities engage in translocal networks (for instance, as in the case of GEN and CASA). Finally I argued that forms of 'soft heterotopic activism' are enacted through multiple and related scales.

## 1.37  Contributions to Knowledge

Overall, this research has contributed to knowledge conceptually, methodologically and empirically. These key contributions can be summed up in three sections, as follows:

*Utopia, heterotopia and geography*

Firstly, this thesis has argued for an integration of utopian and heterotopian frameworks for studying the enactment of alternative spaces such as intentional communities. It was shown how the utopian concept is limited when referring to materialised, territorialised and thus, enacted communities (Harvey, 2000; Bauman, 2003). Moreover, considering the desire to live in a better world as the only requirement for engaging in utopianism (Levitas, 1990) and taking into account more recent attempts to cast away intentions (Garforth, 2009), it becomes even more problematic to theorise intentional communities as practical utopias, or utopian experiments (Sargent, 2010). Though claiming the importance of desires in utopianism, I argued that they are not sufficient for enacting such alternative spaces, for which a 'collective bigger purpose', namely a shared intention, is required. However, the concept of intentions should be further analysed as suggested by Sargisson (2009). In so doing, I challenged previous conceptualisations of intentions, opening up to a new understanding of utopian temporalities by disclosing that while 'future purposes' are defined, established and collective, 'present means' are processual, open and unknown. Moreover, I argue for an unintended or unexpected intentionality, which also leads to an unexpected utopianism. Empirically, the findings supported this conceptualisation by revealing how, firstly, an individuals' decisions to join such alternative spaces were the consequence of unexpected life-changing

experiences (*arrebatos*) and, secondly, how the alternative ordering enacted at the community scale was unplanned, (dis)ordering and often produced unexpected results.

The other conceptual contribution was given by rescuing *topos* in utopianism and equally, retrieving the concept of utopia within geography. Heterotopia provides a significant conceptual foundation to build upon, because of the centrality of space within it. For instance, it enabled the disclosure of the spatial enactment of alternative spaces by underlining the existence of heterotopic boundaries and opening/closing mechanisms, which indeed were revealed through a grounded analysis. However, though heterotopology is strongly geographical, there are two main critiques I would like to make. The study has confirmed the findings of Soja (1996), Genocchio (1995) and Johnson (2013), which underlined both the incompleteness and inconsistency of heterotopia framework. Indeed, the six principles whilst opening up threads of investigation, were generally underdeveloped. For instance, Foucault advances a relational approach to understand heterotopias but it does not engage further. This research contributes additional evidence that suggests that though such heterotopic spaces are relational and connected, often the enactment of such global networks is controversial, dynamic, and negotiated.

The second critique instead is that, though heterotopias are considered 'enacted utopias', the utopian aspect of such spaces has received very scant attention. Scholars for instance have engaged mainly with the alternative ordering, but never fully explored the utopianism within it. Taking into consideration heterotopology incompleteness, and inspired by Johnson (2013:800) who suggests that the concept is simply "a starting point for imagining, inventing and diversifying spaces", this thesis contributed by engaging further in the utopian exploration by distinguishing between 'intentional heterotopias' and 'compulsory heterotopias'. I argue that both are caused by an utopian desire, however, the former are enacted due to an utopian desire of those who have chosen to go to, use and dwell in these spaces, while the latter are enacted by the utopian desire of those people who have forced someone else to go to, use and dwell in such spaces. While the former can be, for instance, intentional communities, the latter can be prisons. This analysis contributes to create a stronger connection between utopia and heterotopias and to thus give utopia back to geography. It has also, provided the foundation to explore intentional communities through such heterotopic framework and to further expand this by building upon empirical investigation.

*Relational spatio-tempo-transcendental ways of knowing*

The second key contribution of the thesis is the relational scalar approach used in investigating intentional communities. This study has argued that in order to capture a geographical holistic understanding of the heterotopic enactment it is necessary to expand beyond the site itself engaging with multiple related scales. Indeed, besides investigating the community enactment, this research advocated the need to provide an intimate analysis of individuals' life journeys, to explore how the local context is shaped by such heterotopic spaces and how a network of relational heterotopias expands globally. As a result, the thesis has argued that different scales contribute equally to the enactment of such alternative spaces, for instance the global creation of a network of alternative communities is the result of a community and individuals' willingness to engage in global exchanges. Equally, forms of 'soft heterotopic activism' enacted by GEN proliferate within the community context aiming to shake individuals' consciousness and understandings. This thesis has responded to calls for more grounded multi-scalar analysis of alternative sites (Pickerill and Maxey, 2009; Jarvis *et al.*, 2011), showing empirically that the enactment of intentional heterotopias is a result of the co-existence, interactions and entanglements of these multiple scales. By positioning 'pro-scale' within the recent debates in human geography, this study has argued for a relational understanding that considers scales as analytical, grounded, epistemological "way[s] of knowing" (Jones, 1998:28).

Moreover, this research expands on previous studies by including a transcendental scale of analysis. Thus, the key originality of this thesis has been its engagement with a transcendental wave across the multi-relational analysis. In this sense, I have responded to the call for the overcoming of the 'spirit-phobia' within academia (Keating, 2008). In so doing, this research provides a methodological framework for the exploration of spiritual spaces by using 'spiritual embodied methods' where the researcher undertakes a spiritual journey as part of the ethnographic research for understanding the dynamics of a community. Thus, the study argues that 'spiritual embodied methods' can enable the researcher to uncover alternative knowledges produced by feelings, visions, intuitions and body sensations that go beyond scientific epistemologies. By considering spiritual practices as forms of alternative knowledge production this research will serve as a basis for future studies in spiritual geographies and beyond. The thesis also reveals the implications of engaging in such embodied, spiritual, and academic research and how this challenges, unsettles, and shapes the life, understandings and beliefs of the

researcher and can impact on the research output. This calls for closer consideration of emotions experienced in such 'spiritual' fieldworks, but also more broadly how field encounters and events shape the research journey.

*Alternative orderings*

Empirically, this research sheds light on the nature of alternative orderings across two case studies in the north and south. By engaging in an 'experimental international comparativism', I argue that in order to conceptualise alterity it is necessary to contextualise it. Thus, what can be alternative somewhere can be popularly considered mainstream in another context. Taking this into consideration, however, it has been found that, despite the different orderings enacted in Dh and TM, significant common trends of community enactments are revealed. Interestingly, this is supported also by the fact that, members of intentional communities feel this common alterity by sharing a sense of heterotopic belonging. As specified in the methodology, the commonalities have been found within the process of enactment rather than the results.

One of the major findings contributes to an understanding of how such communities are materially enacted. Even taking into account that Dh and TM are spiritual communities, this study confirms previous findings that argue that these alternatives spaces are subjected to dominant capitalist forces (Harvey, 1989; De Cauter and Dehaene, 2008). By further exploring, I argued that conceptualising the material enactment as a result of capitalist and diverse economic practices was not sufficient and it can be argued that economy is also spiritually embedded. This work contributes to existing knowledge on diverse economy (Gibson-Graham 1996; 2005; 2006) by providing additional evidence that suggests a performative ontology that not only considers diverse economy but also as spiritual economy.

Moreover, not only have processes of economization and even financialization of heterotopias have been discovered, but also processes of heteropization have been disclosed in both local and global scales. This means that the heterotopias of Dh and TM outreach, impact and shape the local surroundings by proliferating their alternative knowledges, ontologies, practices and experiences (see for instance the "community enterprise" of *Dh Crea*). These findings challenge previous studies that considered these places as closed entities or escape attempts (Cohen and Taylor, 1992), by revealing how intentional communities of the global age are open, relational and embedded in their local contexts and at a global scale, and at the same time preserving, maintaining and

negotiating their alterity (as suggested by Sargisson, 2007). The findings of this investigation complement those of earlier studies (Schehr, 1997; Fischietti, 2008; Avelino and Kunze, 2009; Ergas, 2010; Jarvis, forthcoming) yet add to this growing body of literature by showing how these forms of the heteropianization often, as in the case of TM, can become a form of 'political spirituality' where the communities implement ethical projects for contributing to the social, economic and environmental development of the area. Supported by a relational scalar approach, evidences highlight how forms of 'soft heterotopic activism' start at the individual scale and then through transcendental practices of self-transformation are collaboratively enacted at a community scale, and an ethical responsibility toward wider local and global scales emerges.

Additionally, this research further explores the idea of transgressive utopianism (Sargisson, 2000), by investigating the nature of the alternative orderings enacted. This thesis has found out that utopian transgression is generally shaped by the heterotopic juxtaposition, it means that the utopian alternative ordering enacted are not fixed, established and permanent but rather are disordering, unsettling and juxtaposing. By experimenting these alternative orderings different knowledges are produced. The alterity is manifested in not discarding the 'border gnosis' produced through rituals or community living, but rather fully integrating it with epistemological understandings.

Finally, the findings of this research provide insights for an alternative understanding of time. In these heterochronies, not only juxtaposed space but also juxtaposed times are enacted; for instance games transcend age, arts is an everyday popular practice, time's dichotomy (working time/free time) is challenged, ancient traditions are embedded in the present to shape the future, and rituals bring another (dis)embodied spatio-temporal dimension. Taken together, these results contribute to existing knowledge suggesting that intentional heterotopias are those utopian spaces that transgress the mainstream order by enacting experimental, (de)constructing and juxtaposing orderings. Thus these spaces by challenging conventional boundaries – between the social, economic and spiritual, the temporal and the spatial, and the human and nature – could be considered as experimental heterotopic laboratories.


## 1.38 New Research Directions

To end, I wish to briefly refer to three new areas of possible research. Firstly, though this research has used a relational scalar approach it has not taken into consideration all

the possible scales of investigation. For instance, the national scale could have strongly contributed to a further understanding of these alternative spaces. Often issues regarding the legality of such intentional communities have been encountered, for instance under Italian law there is nothing that recognises intentional communities as a discrete legal entity. For Italian legal purposes, Dh federation is registered as a mosaic of different companies, cooperatives, and associations. In 2010, Italian community federations represented by CONACREIS association (National Committee of Ethical and Spiritual Research Communities and Associations) promoted a bill entitled 'Recognition and Discipline of Intentional Communities'. The left-wing deputy Giovanna Melandri sponsored the bill in the Italian parliament (Camera dei Deputati, 2010). This has yet to be considered in the Italian Parliament. Further studies could assess the relation between intentional communities (or more broadly intentional heterotopias) and the national scale, investigating the effects that the national government has on such communities; the community strategies in order to negotiate national constrictions; and, at the same time, how the national governments deal with the legislation of such spaces.

Moreover, this research, though it has considered in particular two intentional communities in the global north and south, drawn largely upon literature from an Anglo-American tradition. Further research could develop other conceptual approaches beyond this literature. For instance the conceptual framework used here, utopia and heterotopia, was originated in the north and has never been fully integrated into a global south tradition. The closest contribution to a postcolonial tradition has been offered through the work of the chicana Anzaldúa, however this research has been used here as an analytical device to discover individuals' journey but was not fully explored critically. One possible research direction could be to further integrate Latin American or more broadly southern contributions for analysing such alternative spaces. Would the key arguments change? Which conceptual framework could have been used to expand on the enactment of such spaces? Moreover, bringing closer attention to postcolonial sensibilities, as suggested by Robinson (2003), may be a fruitful way to challenge the power relation between academia and respondents in order to engage in a more ethical form of co-production (see Pain, 2004).

Finally, this thesis has made a significant contribution within the field of spiritual geography by attempting to overcome the 'spirit-phobia' within academia (Keating, 2008). It has originally developed a 'spiritual embodied method' where the researcher engages with his/her own body to discover spiritual gnosis. However this study has only

engaged with a particular type of shamanic ritual. It would be interesting to expand on further spiritual practices and to compare these findings with other studies that adopt a similar methodological approach where the researcher is actively involved in the production of such data. How do such spiritual practices produce alternative gnosis that transcends epistemologies? And, how does such gnosis affect space, places and time? Moreover, within the field of economic geography, this research has provided a base for exploring spiritual economies. Arguably, this conceptual framework could be expanded further by investigating other forms of spiritual economy. More work could be done to explore the extent to which alternative ontological way of perceiving economy and money is confined or specific to spiritual spaces. This research challenges the boundaries between the social, the economic and the spiritual within human geography and it calls for further research that opens up a broader exploration of how other knowledges shape, enact and proliferate places, spaces and temporalities.

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# Appendices

## Appendix A: List of participant Damanhur

Table A.1: Residents of Dishna nucleus-community

|  | Name | Age | Gender | Country of origin | Year arrived in Dh | Citizen | Time recorded |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Mira | 30s | F | Spain | 2011 | Citizen in proof | 38m |
| 2 | Alhena | 40s | F | Germany | 2001 | A | 58m |
| 3 | Enif | 40s | M | Italy | 1997 | A | 49m |
| 4 | Porrima | 50s | F | Italy | 1996 | A | 1h8m |
| 5 | Syrma | 40s | F | Italy | 1997 | A | 49m |
| 6 | Gienah | 20s | F | Netherlands | 2012 | New Life | 23m |
| 7 | Nashira | 50s | F | Italy | 1983 | A | 52m |
| 8 | Chara | 40s | F | Italy | 1986 | A | 1h22m |
| 9 | Kurah | 50s | M | Peru | 1982 | A | 28m |
| 10 | Shaula | 40s | F | Italy | 1996 | A | 44m |
| 11 | Electra | 50s | F | Germany | 1993 | A | 48m |
| 12 | Sham | 40s | M | Italy | 1984 | A | 24m |
| 13 | Tureis | 40s | M | Germany | 2011 | Citizen in proof | 42m |
| 14 | Nunki | 30s | M | Italy | 2001 | A | 43m |
| 15 | Zibal | 50s | M | Italy | 1999 | A | 28m |
| 16 | Merope | 30s | F | Germany | 2001 | A | 1h |
| 17 | Betria | 40s | F | Italy | n.a. | A | Not recorded |

Table A.2: Dh Political actors

| Total number | Relative number | Name | Gender | Position | Other | Time recorded |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 18 | (1) | Naos | M | Dh public relations officer (my gatekeeper) | | 3h30m |
| 19 | (2) | Izar | M | Political Representative of 'Con Te Per Il Paese' | | 1h15 |
| 20 | (3) | Dubhe | M | Head of *Dh Crea* commercial centre | | 25m |
| 21 | (4) | Kaus | M | Head of one of the Dh regions and previously King Guide | | 39m |
| 22 | (5) | Sabik | M | Manager and administrator of Dh | | 53m |
| 23 | (6) | Maia | F | Dh administrator | | 60m |
| - | (7) | Alhena | F | Vice-representative of GEN Europe | Also Dishna resident | See Table A.1 |
| - | (8) | Enif | M | Accountant of Dashna nucleus-community | " | " |
| - | (9) | Syrma | F | Responsible New Life program | " | " |
| - | (10) | Nashira | F | Previously Queen Guide | " | " |
| - | (11) | Chara | F | Head of Dashna nucleus-community | " | " |
| - | (12) | Shaula | F | Responsible *Tecnarcato* social body | " | " |
| - | (13) | Electra | F | Representative of GEN Europe | " | " |
| - | (14) | Betria | F | Head of the Dh School | " | " |

Table A.3: Dh Economic actors

| Total number | Relative number | Name | Gender | Type of business | Other | Time recorded |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 24 | (1) | Zania | F | Food | | 26m |
| 25 | (2) | Diadem | F | Art | | 40m |
| 26 | (3) | Hao | M | Health | | 45m |
| 27 | (5) | Meissa | F | Art | | 21m |
| - | (6) | Kaus | M | Energy | Also Dishna resident | See Table A.1 |
| - | (7) | Enif | M | Services | " | " |
| - | (8) | Porrima | F | Art | " | " |
| - | (9) | Sham | M | Energy | " | " |
| - | (10) | Nunki | M | Services | " | " |

Table A.4: Other Damanhurians

| Total number | Name | Position | Other | Time recorded |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 28 | Beid | Dh Administrator | Lecture given during EDE course | 9h |
| 29 | Algieba | Dh public relations officer | " | 3h |
| 30 | Formichiere – | Head of the Health Dh unit | " | 3h |

Personal details:

1. Personal Journey
   a. Can you tell me something about <u>your life before moving to Dh</u>?
   b. Can you tell me something about <u>your decision to move to Dh</u>?
   c. Can you tell me something about <u>your life in Dh</u>?

2. Work and community commitment
   a. Can you tell me something about <u>your job</u>?
   b. Can you tell me something about your <u>involvement in Dh</u> activities and/or works?

3. Nucleus-Community
   a. Can you tell me something about <u>your nucleus-community</u>?
   b. Can you tell me something about the <u>social organisations</u> of your nucleus-community?
   c. Can you tell me something about the <u>economic organisation</u> of your nucleus-community?

4. Can you tell me something about <u>Dh spirituality and how do you practice it</u>?

5. Can you tell me something about what <u>Dh is for you</u>?

6. *Do you want to add anything else?*

## Appendix C: Damanhur –Interview questions to political actors

Personal details:

1. Can you tell me something about <u>your role</u> in Dh?[12]
   a. *Responsibilities*
   b. *Duration*

2. Can you tell me something about <u>Dh social organization</u>?
   a. *Political roles (responsibilities, duration, etc)*
   b. *Election system*
   c. *Conflict resolution*
   d. *Community activities and meetings*
   e. *Role of the spiritual leader*

3. Can you tell me something about <u>Dh economic organization</u>?
   a. *Residents contributions*
   b. *Entering*
   c. *Leaving*

4. Can you tell me something about <u>Dh evolution and significant events</u>?
   a. *Change of vision and values*
   b. *Future vision*

5. Can you tell me something about <u>Dh relations with the outsider world?</u>
   a. *Local area*
   b. *National state*
   c. *Other ecovillages*
   d. *GEN*
   e. *RIVE*

6. Do you want to add anything else?

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[12] These semi-structured interviews have been used as general guidelines: the key general questions of the interview are underlined, while in italics are indicated the prompts which I asked according to the interviewees' responses.

## Appendix D: Damanhur –Interview questions to economic actors

Personal details:

Company data:

1. Can you tell me something about the <u>organizational structure</u> of your company?
   a. *Responsibilities*
   b. *Legal company type*
   c. *Evolution*

2. Can you tell me something about your <u>products/services</u>?
   a. *Acquisition raw materials (if products)*

3. Can you tell me something about your <u>distribution and customers</u>?
   a. *Distribution channels*
   b. *Customers (% inside/outside Dh)*
   c. *Prices*

4. Can you tell me something about your <u>financial transactions</u>?
   a. Credito*/ euros*
   b. *Barter exchange*
   c. *External financial institutions (banks)*

5. Can you tell me something about your <u>workers</u>?
   a. *No. workers*
   b. *Damanhurians/non-damanhurians*
   c. *Payments*
   d. *Working hours*

6. Can you tell me something about your <u>vision and values</u>?
   a. *Link with Dh values and spirituality*

7. Do you want to add anything else?

## Appendix E: EDE course outline (Damanhur 2012)

# Ecovillage Design Education
## Training for Sustainability
### Damanhur, May 5 – June 2, 2012

FRANCESCA

**Basic Day Schedule:**
07.00 – 08.00 Meditational Practices (Optional)
08.00 – 09.00 Breakfast
09.00 – 12.30 Modules and Sessions
12.30 – 14.30 Lunch and Break
15.00 – 18.00 Sessions
18.30 – 20.00 Dinner and Break
20.00 – 21.30 Evening Program

| Time | 9.00 – 12.30 | 15.00 – 18.00 | 20.00 – 21.30 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Saturday 05.05 | Arrival | Arrival | Opening Circle |
| Sunday 06.05 | Overview of the course – History of GEN and Gaia Education Introduction to Forum | Tour of Damanhur | Sharing of Life Stories |
| Monday 07.05 | Building Community and Embracing Diversity - Personal Lifelines | Visit of the Temples of Humankind | Presentation: Global Ecovillage Network |
| Tuesday 08.05 | Leadership Presence | Leadership Presence | Sharing on Worldviews |
| Wednesday 09.05 | Holistic Worldview - Introduction to Dragon Dreaming | Dragon Dreaming - Participatory Methods for Project Design | Short Movie |
| Thursday 10.05 | Leadership and Co-Empowerment- Collective Intelligence | Empowered Fundraising | Design, Participation and Collective Intelligence |
| Friday 11.05 | Conflict Facilitation: Deep Listening Skills, Non-Violent Communication | Conflict Facilitation: Process Work | 18.30 Incontro con il Fondatore |
| Saturday 12,05 | Local Food ( Formichiere) | Free | Celebration Crea |
| Sunday 13.05 | Breakfast 10.00-11.30 with People from Damanhur | Socially Engaged Spirituality (Macaco) | Feedback/Debriefing |
| Monday 14.05 | Local, Bioregional and : Global Outreach (Coboldo and Husky) | Field TripLocal, Bioregional and Global Outreach (Coboldo and Husky) | Free |
| Tuesday 15.05 | Introduction to Open Space (Macaco) | Open Space (Quaglia, Karen) | Presentation of Participants' Projects |
| Wednesday 16.05 | Awakening and Transforming of Consciousness (Macaco and Karen) | Celebrating Life: Creativity and Art (Art Barn) Formica | Presentation of Participants' Projects |

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| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Thursday 17.05 | World Café | ...шng Art Projects (Formica) | Evening with the Founder of Damanhur + Dinner in a Nucleo |
| Friday 18.05 | Introduction Economy and Money (Lemming) | Shifting the Global Economy to Sustainability (Lemming) | Feedback/Debriefing |
| Saturday 19.05 | Listening to and Reconnecting with Nature – Deep Ecology | Forum | Celebration |
| Sunday 20.05 | Ecological Footprint Future Scenarios Introduction to Permaculture (Martin and Macaco) | Settlement Design: Basic Principles and Permaculture Methods | Presentation of Participants' Projects |
| Monday 21.05 | Green Building - Strawbale construction (Martin, Macaco) | Water and Waste Water Treatment Systems (Martin and Lemming) | Free |
| Tuesday 22.05 | Design Groups (Martin, Inti and Rospo) | Design Groups (Martin, Inti and Rospo) | Sharing of Songs |
| Wednesday 23.05 | Energy Systems (Martin, Macaco) | Settlement Design (Martin) until 16.45 | Visit of Aval 18.00 (Formica, Atena) Dinner in a Nucleo |
| Thursday 24.05 | Design Groups (Martin, Inti and Rospo) | Design Groups (Martin, Inti and Rospo) | Presentation of Participants' Projects |
| Friday 25.05 | Forum (Martin, Macaco) | Settlement Design | Feedback Round Celebration 21.00 |
| Saturday 26.05 | Visit at the Tree Village and Music of the Plants | Building Community Experiment in the Sacred Woods | Building Community Experiment in the Sacred Woods |
| Sunday 27.05 | Building Community Experiment in the Sacred Woods | Building Community Experiment in the Sacred Woods | Reflecting and Feed-back |
| Monday 28.05 | Designing Local Economies (Lemming) | How to link Economy to Ecology (Lemming) | Presentation of Participants' Projects |
| Tuesday 29.05 | Design Groups (Inti and Rospo) | Design Groups (Inti and Rospo) | Presentation of Participants' Projects |
| Wednesday 30.05 | Indicators of Wealth – Principles of Fundraising (Lemming) | Green Economy-Renewable Energy (Lemming) | Free |
| Thursday 31.05 | Solidarity and Economy (Lemming, Husky) | Health and Healing: A holistic approach (Formichiere) | Feedback/Debriefing |
| Friday 01.06 | Holistic World Vision, Outreach to the World (Esperide, Macaco) | Meditation in the Temples of Humankind | 18.30 Incontro con il fondatore Questions and Answers about Damanhur |
| Saturday 02.06 | Evaluation (Macaco e Capra) | Personal Outcomes and Future Intentions | Presentation of Outcomes Celebration |
| Sunday 03.06 | Optional Visit to Turin | Optional Visit to Turin | Optional Visit to Turin |

FRA

## Appendix F: List of Participants Terra Mirim

| | Name | Age | Gender | Country of origin | Year arrived in TM | Role in the community | Time recorded |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Alba Mária | 60s | F | Brazilian | Initial owner | Resident, Founder and Spiritual Leader | Not recorded |
| 2 | Peperomia | 40s | F | Brazilian | 1995 | Resident | 29m |
| 3 | Passiflora | 40s | F | Brazilian | 1990 | Resident, Founder and Massage Therapist | 54m |
| 4 | Piper | 20s | M | Brazilian | 2010 | Resident, Musician and teacher in TM School | 32m |
| 5 | Ixora | 30s | F | Brazilian | 2003 | Resident and President of TM Foundation (FTM) | 1h14m |
| 6 | Jussara | 30s | F | Brazilian | 2008 | Resident, Lawyer and Collaborator of TM Foundation | 1h33m |
| 7 | Sapium | 50s | M | Brazilian | 1993 | Resident, Editor and Farmer | 1h29m |
| 8 | Nidularium | 30s | M | Brazilian | 2009 | Resident, Musician and Farmer | 30m |
| 9 | Dioclea | 50s | F | Brazilian | 2000 | Resident, Administrator and Collaborator of FTM | 27m |
| 10 | Mikania | 50s | F | Portuguese | 2003 | Seasonal Resident and Founder of TM Germany | 36m |
| 11 | Clusia | 20s | F | Brazilian | - | Temporary Resident and Volunteer | 1h |
| 12 | Philodendron | 40s | M | Brazilian | 1991 | Resident and Teacher | 1h46m |
| 13 | Eugenia | 50s | F | Brazilian | 1993 | Resident, Founder, and Administrator of FTM | 1h28m |
| 14 | Vriesea | 40s | F | Germany | - | Guest | 25m |
| 15 | Vernonia | 60s | F | Brazilian | 1992 | Resident, Founder and Head of the School | 1h6m |
| 16 | Begonia | 60s | F | Brazilian | 1992 | Resident, Founder and Collaborator of the Environmental Space | 1h |
| 17 | Chusquea | 40s | F | Germany | - | Guest | 12m |
| 18 | Inga | 40s | F | Estonian | 2002 | Resident and Collaborator of the Nutritional Sector | 37m |
| 19 | Huberia | 40s | F | Brazilian | 2005 | Resident and Collaborator of the Environmental Space | 43m |
| 20 | Jequitibá | 30s | F | Lebanese | - | Temporary resident | 1h |
| 21 | Quiina | 20s | F | Brazilian | - | Teacher in the School | 23m |
| 22 | Solanum | 20s | M | Brazilian | 1993 | Resident and Farmer | 20m |
| 23 | Rudgea | 40s | F | Brazilian | - | Chef helper | 15m |
| 24 | Cupania | 30s | F | Brazilian | - | Secretary FTM | 15m |
| 25 | Serjana | 50s | F | Brazilian | - | Chef | 13m |

## Appendix G: Terra Mirim – Interview questions[13]

Personal details:

1. Personal Journey
    a. Can you tell me something about <u>your life before moving/coming to TM</u>?
    b. Can you tell me something about <u>your decision to move/come to TM</u>?
    c. Can you tell me something about <u>your life in TM</u>?

2. Work and community commitment
    a. Can you tell me something about <u>your job</u>?
    b. Can you tell me something about your <u>involvement in TM</u> activities?

3. Social and economic organisation (only if resident)
    a. Can you tell me something about <u>TM social organisation</u>?
        i. *Political roles (responsibilities, duration, etc)*
        ii. *Election system*
        iii. *Conflict resolution*
        iv. *Community activities and meetings*
        v. *Role of the spiritual leader*

    b. Can you tell me something about TM <u>economic organisation</u>?
        i. *Residents contributions*
        ii. *Entering*
        iii. *Leaving*

7. And, how does TM <u>relate to the outsider world</u>?
    a. *Local area*
    b. *National state*
    c. *Other ecovillages*
    d. *GEN*
    e. *CASA*

**7.** Can you tell me something about <u>TM evolution and significant events?</u>
    a. *Change of vision and values*
    b. *Future vision*

8. Can you tell me something about <u>Dh spirituality and how do you live/practice it</u>?

9. Can you tell me something about what <u>TM is for you</u>?

10. Do you want to add anything else?

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[13] These interview questions have been adapted according if the respondent was a resident, guest and/or community worker.

## Appendix H: Internal documents collected

| Dh document | Title |
|---|---|
| 1 | *Costituzione della Federazione di Dh* (1999) |
| 2 | *L'educazione di Dh* |
| 3 | Dh Guide (Ananas *et al*., 2006) |
| 4 | Damanhur book (Ananas and Pesco, 2009) |
| 5 | Ecovillage Law Proposal |
| 6 | Pictures |

| EDE document | Title |
|---|---|
| 1 | GEN: Guidelines for the recognition of ecovillages |
| 2 | Call for an international dialogue on the concept of 'Ecovillage' |
| 3 | EDE modules guide (Gaia Education) |
| 4 | Gaia Economics (Dawson *et al.*, 2010) |
| 5 | Other EDE course material |
| 6 | Pictures |

| TM document | Title |
|---|---|
| 1 | TM financial accounts (2012) |
| 2 | *Gerência de Meio Ambiente – Preservação e produção Agroecológica, qualificação e cidadania* (project) |
| 3 | *Escola Ecológica TM – Brincarte* (project) |
| 4 | Sampaio thesis (2011) |
| 5 | Santos Jr thesis (2010) |
| 6 | Pictures |