

## Research Ethics and Fieldwork at New Consumption Communities

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### Introduction

It is hard to deny that marketing practice has changed considerably during recent years. This is reflected in its increased focus on customisation, co-production and interactive marketing, much of which has been enabled by new information technologies. While marketing has remained innovative there has also been much rhetoric and little reflexivity about what has been done (Szmigin, 2003). Although marketers may have been listening more to consumers (e.g. through qualitative research), efforts have almost always been directed at controlling consumers; ranges of products pre-determined by producers have been pushed through with little real involvement of consumers in the process, at a time in which we, consumers (*are we not consumers as well as marketers?*), are ever more aware of what is being done to us (Szmigin, 2003). In fact, many of these issues are also reflected in current consumer research practice. Consumer research has been of paramount importance to the development of marketing theory and practice, yet control over the research process remains entirely in the hands of marketers and academic marketing researchers alike. Consumers are seldom, if ever, involved in the research design and analysis processes, which raises issues that go beyond ethics and into an epistemological arena. These issues are particularly problematic when participant-observation is employed, as little is (and little could be) addressed by research guidelines and codes of ethics relevant to marketing research. Adopting an ethical standpoint of care and responsibility based on feminist theories (Edwards and Mauthner, 2002), I address some of the relevant ethical issues pertinent to participant-observation that arise from the lack of inclusion of the consumer in the research process (as well as the potential issues that may be involved in participatory and emancipatory research designs), the shortcomings of the available marketing research guidelines and codes of ethics as far as participant-observation is concerned, alongside the several issues that may arise during fieldwork. To illustrate the discussion a reflexive account of my own fieldwork at six distinct New Consumption Communities (Szmigin and Carrigan, 2003) is presented. Although some authors have put reflexivity as *the* means to achieve ethical fieldwork conduct and relationships (Guillemin and Gillam, 2004), such argument disregards the real-time and context-bound nature of ethical circumstances at the field, where the researcher must often respond to unexpected situations immediately. Reflexivity is a tool but cannot be used alone; it is not completely exempt from its own political, philosophical and epistemological stances and paradoxes, as well explored by Harley, Hardy and Alvesson (2004).

This paper therefore does not aim to construct yet another set of guidelines for researchers that will engage or are already engaged in participant-observation; what goes on in the field can be unpredictable and fluid. Rather, the aim is to discuss the key issues that may be encountered while in the field through practical examples. This should prove valuable in alerting consumer researchers on the breadth and depth of ethical issues in the field, and on the

all encompassing epistemological issues that we face, as researchers, on a daily basis. As put by Birch *et al.* (2002, p.3), the aim here “is to suggest ethical ways of thinking rather than to provide answers or rules to be adhered to”. In this study such ethical ways of thinking will be placed within the particular context of participant-observation.

### The Ethics of Care and Responsibility

In order to suggest ethical ways of thinking it is important to recognise that ethical dilemmas arise not only ‘in the field’ but throughout the research process (Edwards and Mauthner, 2002). Indeed, even “the epistemologies of the theoretical perspective informing research have also been discussed as generating ethical questions, allied to debates around research as involved empowerment or distanced knowledge production” (Edwards and Mauthner, 2002, p.19). This is well argued by Edwards and Mauthner (2002), and Doucet and Mauthner (2002), who discuss the issues of power that can arise from the researcher’s own ontological perspective, as well as from the consequences of simply doing research (even if the intentions are inherently good), and from the fact that our knowledge system is necessarily linked to other forms of structural power (e.g. gender, race, development, the system).

Edwards and Mauthner (2002) and Gillies and Alldred (2002) put forward several feminist theorists, which advocate ‘thinking from caring’ as an alternative (to the deontological and consequentialist) way of thinking about ethical issues. According to the authors, thinking from caring comprises a focus on responsibility and care rather than duties, outcomes or rights; there is an emphasis on the researcher’s values, situation, context, and dialogical negotiation, as opposed to abstract ethical principles and rules. The emotional and power issues present in research relationships are also acknowledged, and this is where the key issue of ‘using’ research participants for data collection comes in.

### Turning Research ‘Subjects’ into Research ‘Participants’?

Research designs that objectify and do not ‘include’ research participants in the conceptualisation of the research study through to data analysis have been widely criticised by critical/ feminist researchers, and this issue must be considered within the scope of the ethics of care. Norman Denzin argues that research informed by such ethics is involving and transformative, participatory and empowering for all ‘equally’ involved in the research process (Edwards and Mauthner, 2002). Although several longitudinal emancipatory and participatory research designs using participant-observation have been conducted particularly within sociological and anthropological studies (e.g. Cloke, 2004; Kindon, 2003; Shokeid, 1997), and although this would be an ‘ideal’ research stance at least for most critical researchers, in practice things are always a bit hazier. Denzin’s view raises several questions and issues (see Edwards and Mauthner, 2002, p.26-27; Cloke, 2004; Bradshaw, 2001; Shokeid, 1997), not least the fact that power (and indeed knowledge) is never

equally distributed amongst researcher and research participants – something which is better acknowledged than elided (see Gillies and Alldred, 2002). Another issue is the assumption that research participants would want to be more involved in the research process in the first place (see Birch and Miller, 2002). Perhaps one way to address such ingrained dilemmas for those wishing to follow the emancipatory research route is to follow Oliver's (1992, p.111) line of reasoning: "the issue then (...) is not how to empower people but, once people have decided to empower themselves, precisely what can research then do to facilitate this process. This does then mean that the social relations of research production do have to be fundamentally changed; researchers have to learn how to put their knowledge and skills at the disposal of their research subjects, for them to use in whatever ways they choose". As for marketing practice, two unanswered questions arise: could participatory or emancipatory research approaches possibly raise even more issues than solutions given the vested commercial interests of any company's research programme, and should commercial research employing participant-observation thus continue to rely solely on ethical codes of conduct and guidelines?

### On Ethical Guidelines and Codes of Conduct

In an attempt to prompt ethical consumer research conduct several research guidelines and codes of ethics have been devised over the years; examples are ESOMAR's Codes and Guidelines (<http://www.esomar.org/esomar/show/id=103585>) and the Market Research Society's Code of Conduct and Guidelines (<http://www.mrs.org.uk/code.htm>). While they play a major role in raising researchers' awareness of their legal and professional responsibilities toward research participants, they try and juggle a balance between the different ethical models (Edwards and Mauthner, 2002). Their realm of guidance for qualitative methods of inquiry seems restricted to controlled research environments (i.e. depth interviews and focus groups), and the legality of procedures and processes for data recording and informed consent. Little is addressed on the issues and ethical dilemmas encountered by researchers engaged in ethnographic research involving participant-observation, despite its recent prominence in marketing research (an exception is Arnould, 1998). Furthermore, although the discussion on ethical issues related to participant-observation research outside the marketing and business literature is quite extensive, other codes of ethics and guidelines regarding ethnographers' moral responsibilities toward their research participants (e.g. *American Anthropological Association*, <http://www.aaanet.org/committees/ethics/ethics.htm>; and *British Sociological Association*, [http://www.britsoc.co.uk/new\\_site/index.php?area=home](http://www.britsoc.co.uk/new_site/index.php?area=home)) remain limited.

The issue with research guidelines is that although they aim to protect all of those involved in the research, including funding bodies, researchers and research participants (Birch *et al.*, 2002), and although they try to ensure "informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, reliability and validity", they still "represent ethics as an abstracted consideration", and the lack of discussion "in all stages of research projects renders the enterprise open to being

unethical” (Birch *et al.*, 2002, p.5). As put by Birch *et al.* (2002), researchers need to be able to have contextualised reasoning rather than just adhere to abstracted rules of research – thus the importance of the adoption of a responsible and ‘caring’ ethic of research.

Another issue that arises with codes and guidelines is that, as put by Edwards and Mauthner (2002), frequently their main focus is the concern with litigations rather than the ethics of research itself, often requiring signed consent forms from participants. But such forms assume that research participants are completely informed of the research aims, objectives and ‘agenda’, and that participants are actually able to grasp what is being asked of them. It also assumes that the course of a particular research study can actually be completely predicted from the outset (Miller and Bell, 2002), and that all the ethical issues in the research process, particularly in participant-observation, are straight forward, have clear boundaries and can be fully determined in the beginning of the project (Edwards and Mauthner, 2002).

In sum, ethical guidelines and codes of conduct can be beneficial in alerting consumer researchers of ethical ways of conducting research; however they are abstracted rules that need to be aided by researchers’ own ethical reasoning in the field. Despite their broader, ‘instrumental’ concerns with litigation, they are still a good form of acknowledging, at least officially, the issues of power between those who research and the researched (Edwards and Mauthner, 2002). Perhaps a good addition to codes and guidelines for participant-observation purposes would be the encouragement of reflexivity, even in commercial research contexts, as well as the adoption of, say, some research questions about the intended or conducted research process that would evoke ethical reasoning, as proposed by Edwards and Mauthner (2002, see p.28-29).

### Common Ethical Pitfalls Encountered ‘In the Field’

As mentioned above, the discussion on ethical issues related to participant-observation research outside the marketing and business literature is quite extensive, comprising several ethical pitfalls that may be encountered in the field. Gillies and Alldred (2002) highlight epistemic issues of ‘representing the other’ for we can only tell our version about the other’s life; thus the importance of making our theoretical and political stances known (Gillies and Alldred, 2002), and the importance of recognising the researchers’ role in co-constructing knowledge by including the researcher in ‘the story’. The authors also direct attention to the importance of considering how the knowledge generated is to be used, and whether it might go against the interest of those it seeks to benefit.

Miller and Bell (2002) discuss the ethical issues that can arise from the process of gaining access and ‘informed’ consent from potential research participants, and how gatekeepers can sometimes exercise their power over a group of individuals and grant research access and consent *for* research participants. Indeed, the extent to which the disclosure of research purposes,

secrecy, concealment and informed consent are necessary and even possible has been extensively discussed by e.g. Scheper-Hughes (2004), Arnould (1998), Leo (1995), Mitchell (1993), Jackson (1983), Bulmer (1982) and Homan (1980). The politics of fieldwork both within the field (among research participants and between researchers and researched) and between the field, the researcher and the research sponsors have also been highlighted by e.g. Miller and Bell (2002), Bell and Nutt (2002), Arnould (1998) and Punch (1986); Bell and Nutt (2002) in particular examine the 'divided loyalties' (p.70) and ethical dilemmas that can accrue from being simultaneously a researcher as well as a practitioner and sponsored scholar.

Also, although full participation by research 'informants' in the entire research process is desired (or at least aspired to) by feminist researchers and most critical theorists, it does not come without its issues as well argued by Birch and Miller (2002). They highlight the importance of constant negotiation of participation in the different stages of research, how participants may not be willing (due to lack of time or even personal circumstances) to help us in the data analysis process, and how in the end our own deadlines and academic constraints may get in the way of the 'idealised' research process. Another important issue is that of the degree of involvement between research participants (or 'friends') and researchers, as well discussed by Duncombe and Jessop (2002), Amit (2000), and Emerson, Fretz and Shaw (1995). Duncombe and Jessop (2002) in particular bring up their discomfort in 'doing rapport' and actually developing 'friendships' which are so common to participant-observation and yet only fostered for the research, and the need to gather the data through the use of their research skills and thus their power as researchers.

Researchers engaged in participant-observation are often challenged by most of the ethical issues exposed above – an example is my own fieldwork on ethical consumption, which is discussed next.

### Fieldwork at New Consumption Communities [1]

My initial exploratory fieldwork took place in six highly-committed versions of what Szmigin and Carrigan (2003) have conceptualised as New Consumption Communities, intentional consumer communities that strive to achieve a better balance between the production and consumption processes (and to a certain extent to defy marketing's hegemony in the marketplace), and in which high levels of commitment to ethical production, consumption and voluntarily simplified lifestyles can be identified. In an attempt to follow the interlinks between these communities, their members and collaborators, I opted for a multilocal approach to construct the field (Marcus, 1995; Amit, 2000). In the multilocal approach a world of overlapping contexts and interconnectedness is perceived to exist, and the field is thus shaped by the researcher's professional and social circumstances, the interconnectedness of the research sites, as well as the shorter but multiple, multi-sited field visits (Amit, 2000). Such fieldwork design allowed for extended intervals between each

visit, which in turn facilitated the development of the fieldwork experience and the time gaps that were used as reflexive moments.

### *Epistemological Issues: Keeping Control over the Research*

Although my participant-observation research was from the start informed by critical theories and concerned with researcher subjectivity, how the informants are treated and represented, and situating the study in a wider context (Peñaloza, 1994; Thomas, 1993), and despite the fact that I saw these communities, in some ways, as best practice examples of ethical consumption, I did not give much thought to how I could make the research design more participatory and involving for research participants. Looking back at it, this is probably due to the exploratory nature of the research itself. I went 'into the field' wanting to see whether I could recognize and perhaps 'match' some of the research problems I had identified through the preliminary literature review. Although this is obviously a part of the process of learning and attaining a PhD, it prevented me from exploring how the research itself could be co-designed with research participants and used to benefit their own communities while keeping the 'ethical consumption' topic. This made me very uncomfortable at times, and I felt between following the theories informing the research and the still current academic marketing conventions of keeping total control over the research process.

### *Gaining Access and Part-informed Consent*

Interestingly, however, I did not have much problem with 'gaining access' to research participants. In fact, at first access was fairly simple. I identified some potential community participants through relevant directories, and because I knew (from looking at their websites and the directories) these communities needed volunteers to do some of their work I offered to volunteer in exchange for research. This was an overt proposition. But the access process was always mediated by key gatekeepers, and while some discussed my role as a researcher (and *by the way* volunteer) with other community members before granting access, others did not. This was very dependant on the communities' internal politics and something that I usually encountered and had to deal with after arriving in the field. Two communities were particularly problematic in this respect. At Woodland, a community with large membership, my role as a researcher was mentioned in their weekly community meeting, which does not get much attendance. Based on this brief mention the gatekeepers decided to grant access for research. When I arrived in the community (and this was the first of the researched communities) nearly all members were unaware of my role as a researcher and I had to keep informing members of it whenever I had a 'first encounter'. Later on, while talking to one of the gatekeepers, he had decided *for me* that *we* should not emphasize the research purpose of the volunteering visit because people would avoid talking to me. He argued 'Caroline, you cannot be as honest about this as you want to because you will not get anything for your research'! At Fallowfields, on the other hand, all permanent members were asking me about the research and the other communities I had visited, so I assumed all members were aware and had consented to the research. However, certain

members knew about the research while others did not. After a while in the community I realised there were deep conflicts between permanent and temporary members, and the former did not inform the latter about the research and my role as a researcher. Unfortunately I only realised temporary members had not been informed half way through the week, coincidentally when they were telling me about all the 'unfairness' (in their view) that was going on in the community. As a researcher it was a delicate situation to be in and definitely not a comfortable one, as both sides wanted to talk about their versions of 'the facts'.

### *Loosening Control over Data Collection*

The section above shows that power throughout the research process was dynamic and constantly negotiated. Indeed, once I was in the field much, if not all, of the data collection process was carried out according to the participants' rules and not my own desire. I was always a volunteer during fieldwork, which under a positive lens meant that I was giving something back to the communities I was researching. Nevertheless it also meant 'doing the work' full-time as well as observing and jotting notes. They were always in agreement with these procedures as long as the research did not involve getting in the way of their busy schedules, i.e. through depth interviews. This proved a challenge to data collection: throughout this first phase of research participants were not willing to be formally interviewed. They were particularly reactive to data recording, and at all times I felt recording any data would hinder the process of 'fitting in' and trying to get along with community members. Photographing was sometimes accepted, and at Stone Hall the condition was that pictures captured the facilities and landscapes, not the people. Additionally, sometimes the conditions of the volunteering programmes also hindered data collection, and this was particularly true in one of the communities, where I had to share a room with another volunteer and thus could not, at night, write as many notes as I would have done otherwise.

### *No Fake Relationships*

Of course, one could argue that 'doing rapport' is essential to gaining more access and building trust between research participants and the researcher. But should the researcher really use her skills to build 'friendships' that have no purpose other than data collection? Is that not completely misleading, and is that not acting on participants' inability to grasp the extent of our data gathering hunger? Here I must declare my great discomfort with this method of research. I did not try to 'become friends' with any of the research participants and did not keep in touch with most of them after the fieldwork period was over. Although feminist theories emphasize the importance of building relationships with research participants in order to really be able to 'care' for them and their cause, that was the adopted strategy: distance was kept and fake relationships that would end with this research project were not forged, even if that meant collecting less data than possible. However, at times I did feel that I would like to have met some of these people under different circumstances, as they would have probably been good friendships



to keep. I have, however, kept in touch with some of the people from the last community I visited. This is partly due to the fact that complete confidentiality was requested about what was said during our group meetings, in which people tended to say things that were too personal to register for research purposes. Because the 'much too personal' was considered to be off the boundaries of research, I felt comfortable about really getting to know people and discussing the research openly.

### *Uncovering Sensitive Matters*

Perhaps this uneasy feeling with the 'much too personal' came about during the first week of fieldwork. It was then that I realised some of the participants' inability to grasp the extent of our data gathering capabilities. Although we may choose not to record certain parts of the data and may be asked to keep complete confidentiality about certain issues, what was said and seen remains in our memories, particularly what may be considered uncommon or socially 'unacceptable'. Value judgements apart, I did come across some information that would have had to be reported to the police, had it not already been done so by the community themselves. How did this get to my ears? Through someone who was undermined by the community.

### *Attempting Feedback*

Regardless of what went on in the field, at the end of the fieldwork week in each community I would always have an informal, 'farewell' meeting with the member(s) in charge of granting research access. The objective was to give them some feedback on what I observed and found out in the communities. This did not necessarily mean only providing feedback on relevant findings for the research. At the time it seemed equally important to acknowledge, with much tact, the issues that in my view could possibly make life in the communities more 'peaceful' or better in some way or another. Sometimes this process worked out quite well, and one could see the interlocutor's appreciation of the discussion. In other occasions, however, members would adopt a 'selective hearing' attitude toward the feedback analysis and, while I only talked about my own views and never spoke *for* others (less powerful community members, e.g. temporary members or undermined members), I could only hope that the end result of these less positive meetings would turn out to be good.

### Conclusion

This paper has discussed some of the ethical issues of participant-observation research from the ethics of care and responsibility viewpoint as advocated by feminist theories. It has discussed issues of control and empowerment in the research process through the relevant epistemological lens and, even though "there is no pure path to ethnographic *verstehen*" (Arnould, 1998, p.73), there are certainly ways to minimise and get acquainted with the issues one may encounter while in the field. As argued by Gillies and Alldred (2002, p. 49), "without linking specific research to (...) our intentions for research in the light

of our political hopes, we miss the opportunity to develop more effective, ethically responsible, research interventions”, and risk having our research being used in the opposite way it was originally intended.

Indeed, even critical studies may still reinforce particular ways of understanding or relations of power (Alldred and Gillies, 2002), while hindering empowerment. Nonetheless, despite the fact that unexpected ethical fieldwork issues can only be reflected upon *after* they occur (during time gaps ‘away’ from the field) and despite each field situation being unique, reflexivity can still be a powerful tool in the pursuit of ethical research conduct; reflexivity accounts value lies in their ability to raise researchers’ awareness about the range of potential ethically sensitive situations they may encounter during their fieldwork. As seen above, the break from the first stage of research allowed for reflexive moments, which in turn facilitated the inclusion of more participatory ways of continuing the research process. Participants from one of the researched communities (a community that has agreed to have me there for the second stage of the research) have been provided with a paper on some initial findings of the research so they can comment and critique the initial analysis and the way they are being portrayed in it. Although this does not reduce much of the control I am still exercising over this research project it does allow for more participation and voice in the research process.

Nevertheless, these communities were not completely powerless in the research process. As the reflexivity section of this paper has shown, much of the data was gathered according to their rules and requirements for access. Furthermore, I could see some changes in my own behaviour and attitudes toward the consumption of some FMCGs and household goods (i.e. buying from organic box schemes, local produce and even reviewing my whole lifestyle) as a result of the research.

As for ethical guidelines and codes of conduct, institutions such as the Market Research Society and ESOMAR should provide more comprehensive (yet non-restrictive and non-exhaustive) guidance to marketing researchers engaged in the practice of participant-observation research, by drawing on the extensive sociological and anthropological knowledge in this area. As argued above, ethical guidelines and codes of conduct can be beneficial in alerting consumer researchers of ethical ways of conducting research; however they are abstracted rules that need to be aided by researchers’ own ethical reasoning in the field (Birch *et al.*, 2002). Perhaps they should start encouraging reflexivity, even in commercial research contexts. A starting point would be to engage in a dialogue with marketing researchers, by discussing and publishing more accounts of the ethical issues and dilemmas faced specifically by them in their participant-observation experiences, from a reflexive stand rather than the so commonly employed positivist narratives idiosyncratic of the marketing literature.

## [1] Communities' Profiles

### *Woodland Community*

Situated on seventy acres of green land, Woodland Community is a co-housing initiative formed thirty-years ago by families and individuals who spontaneously chose to live together in a large old building. There are fifty-eight members, including thirteen children who attend the local school. This is supplemented by large numbers of volunteers during the summer, who are also the conduit to disseminating their communal lifestyle. The building is split into living units with bedrooms and small living rooms; some are equipped with bathrooms. These units are privately owned spaces for which initial capital is required. New members are required to buy stock-loans according to the value (size) of the unit in which they are interested. However, most spaces are communal and include a large, main kitchen with dining room, a small kitchen, a library, social rooms, laundry room, community office, and bathrooms. Nominal utility bills are paid, and according to a temporary member it is possible to live for less than £200 per month (including food) at the community, considerably less than it would cost elsewhere. Consequently, this negates the need for full-time employment. The community remains true to its founding members' fundamental values of self-sufficiency, co-operative living and low environmental impact. While located near a village, the nearest train station is a considerable walking distance away. There is a large amount of car ownership here but with members car-sharing whenever possible.

### *Fallowfields Community*

Fallowfields Community was founded in 1950 as an educational trust, and today the community has eighteen members (of which nine are temporary). It has a flexible approach to housing; some members live in the main building while others stay in adjacent buildings, cottages and bungalows. They have a trust that owns the buildings and sublets them to members. Rent can be paid in various forms, including a combination of money and community work hours. The original aim of Fallowfields Community was to investigate how people could achieve a more peaceful way of life. One member (Paula) said it is hard to know which came first, the adult college or the community. At the time of its formation (according to their literature) the college aimed to provide further adult education to enable people to get more involved with issues that affected their lives. Today the community appears to be undergoing a period of change or 'ethos-searching', with environmental causes having gained importance in the community. Fallowfields also sees itself as a social experiment; they are interested in social change, the challenges of communal living, and group intra-relationships.

### *Sunny Valley Community*

Sunny Valley Community is a co-housing co-operative based on seven acres of rural land. The main building is simply decorated and equipped, and is inhabited by its eleven highly educated members – three of which are now teenagers – who were celebrating the community's 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2004;

this is viewed as a landmark, given the financial difficulties they experienced in Sunny Valley's early days. Adjacent to the main building are small cottages, which are mortgaged or sold to outsiders by the community trust. Buyers do not necessarily become co-op members, although they must be 'approved' by those living at the main building. Members share the community's maintenance responsibilities at all levels, and together hire the facilities out as a course venue, which brings in some (limited) income. Because of the high affinity between community members and cottages' owners there is an eco-village feeling to Sunny Valley. Their ethos comprises a strong ecological focus and respect for diversity. The community also has good links with the local village and organises their local composting scheme.

### *Stone Hall Community*

Stone Hall Community is, as self-determined, a holistic education centre set on eleven acres of land, run by a resident co-operative group and administered by a trust. The main building contains guest rooms, the main dining room, a piano room and the healing room, and is surrounded by adjacent buildings which together form a square stone rectory. In those buildings are the kitchen (fully vegetarian) and the washing-up rooms, the laundry room, a "first aid" room with communal laundry supplies, a toilet, the community kitchen and dining-room, and the kindergarten. Surrounding the main buildings are fields containing livestock, gardens, a green house and a poly-tunnel, as well as a recycling shed. There is a detached housing block for members and a caravan for visitors and volunteers. In the new library building accommodation for members is also provided. All fourteen members, except the children, work full-time for the community, each with their designated roles. All members have specific skills which they put to use in the community, and most members are either well-educated or manually skilled. Sustainability is a key driver for this community. This manifests itself in the community's own water spring, reed-bed sewage system, composting, wood burners, and recycling efforts. Materials are simple, functional, and demonstrate a strong sense of craft-based aesthetics.

### *Spiritual Community*

Spiritual Community perceives itself as a pioneering, holistic enterprise whose aim is spiritual (non-religious) education. The community is situated in a huge rural area and comprises the eco-village, several communal buildings used as workshops and housing facilities, 'ethical' shops, food and landscaped gardens, as well as a beautiful hall which is normally used for conferences, plays and performances. The site is very idyllic and, although certainly not ostentatious, very well maintained and decorated. Spiritual community has inspired many of the other communities in this study, and is well known for its diverse educational workshops and courses, which range from spiritual and personal development through to arts and ecology. It is said that about five hundred people are in some way involved with the community, either through permanent membership (currently around 180 members from many different countries), trainee membership, volunteering or experience visits. It has a non-profit, charity status, with a body of trustees and a complexly layered

administrative structure that endeavours to be consensual as much as its size allows. Community work is split into several work departments whereby members assume particular responsibilities and work alongside visitors and volunteers. Much of Spiritual Community's devotion toward sustainability is reflected on its energy windmills, the organic sewage system and its eco-houses. It also has its own community currency.

### *Green-Tech Community*

Green-Tech Community is an ecologically sound, earth-sheltered housing complex formally launched in 1998. It was partly built by its own members, and financed with the aid of some government and private grants. During both construction and occupation they have conserved and regenerated the land's fauna and flora. Green-Tech comprises five terraced 'sister' houses located in front of a large fish pond and an extensive green area. The houses are privately owned by the five member families, and have been built with high insulation to require little heating energy. The community also produces almost 100% of its own aeolian energy, some of its own food following organic principles, and has its own sewage, water collection and filtering systems. They have created a cooperative in order to manage and maintain the facilities, and all members are committed to the community businesses, which include guided visitor tours, educational and specialist workshops, information packs sales, and consultancy services. The members see Green-Tech Community as a best practice example of, and a catalyst for, sustainable communal living.

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