

REPORT ON MEETING OF THE GEN-EUROPE COUNCIL: THE SHORT VERSION ZEGG 18 – 21 MARCH, 2004

GEN International

The registration of GEN (International) should be transferred from Denmark to Italy by the end of May 2004. We are planning to move the GEN Information Service (website and database) to a new 'platform' where we will not need to pay for new updates and software.

EV award

Congratulations offered to Galgafarm. We agreed that the process of making the award had carried all sorts of interesting lessons. A presentation will be made on this at the General Assembly at ZEGG in July where we will decide how to manage the process in future years.

Senegal

Jonathan gave a short report on exciting developments in Senegal, following his visit there in January. UNDP funds promised in Jo'burg in 2002 may finally be about to be released. Also, we drew up a strategic action plan, visited lots of government ministries and UN agencies and funding from within Senegal looks likely. An article in the next issue of Permaculture will provide more details on this.

National networking meetings

We heard reports from network meetings over the last several months from Italy, Denmark, Poland, France, Germany and Eastern Europe. Some of these networks are thriving and growing, others are finding it more difficult to be dynamic.

Staff meeting

With GEN-Europe staff now based in three ecovillages (Jonathan in Findhorn, Ina and Gabriela in ZEGG and Kasimir in Torri), we have decided to have occasional (probably twice a year) staff meetings. There was a short report on the first of these, held at Findhorn in late February, which was felt to be hugely valuable for all concerned.

Budget

We celebrated early provisional news out of Brussels that our request for EU funding for 2004 has been successful. We recognised the need for a system for better keeping track of our spending so that we avoid the situation in which we found ourselves in 2003 with lots of money left and not enough things to spend it on!

Membership

We talked about difficulties we are experiencing in drawing up one consistent list of members – there seem to be several parallel lists in different places. We need to contact members, especially those we have not heard from for a while and who have not renewed their membership in recent years. Ina and Jonathan agree between them to contact all members and possible by telephone over the next several months.

Preparation for the General Assembly

Some (mostly logistical) discussions over the upcoming GA at ZEGG. It was agreed that a letter would go out to members by 31/5 asking for your ideas on activities and events for the GA.

Division of responsibilities between Council and staff

A list of responsibilities for the two bodies was drawn up (see full council minutes). It was proposed that in future council meetings, Jonathan and Ina should alternate – it can be wasteful in terms of time and money to have both of them attend all council meetings (three per year).

Youth and education

There is lots of energy and activity in this area: we talked about two big gatherings of ecovillage educators to take place in Findhorn in late May, Max Vittrup's ideas about youth and education, Jean-Michel's involvement with the core French environmental education body, an initiative Lucilla and Torri are undertaking with the University of Genoa and an idea of Nicole's for children's education. Much debate here (see full council minutes) but the predominant view was that patience will be rewarded in this area: that is, there are some individuals like Max who have strong visions and energies, but the work must be put into ensuring that other members of the network share this vision before GEN-Europe should become an active partner in a youth and/or education programme seeking external funding. The first necessary step is to have a concrete project proposal involving a number of member ecovillages.

Criteria for financial allocations

With a large EU grant coming in for 2004, we discussed how we should prioritise the allocation of grants between members, so as to make this process as transparent as possible. The core conditions we decided on for the allocation of funds were:

- that the activities proposed should be part of the GEN-Europe work programme (submitted to the EU as part of our grant proposal);
- affordability: that is, priority to those least able to pay;
- full members get first priority, supportive members second, others third;
- geographical spread: i.e. not all grants should go to one country of region; and
- that there should be a strategy for the benefits (of the activities funded) to go beyond the individual benefiting directly;.

Other (more administrative) criteria agreed upon were:

- there should be no 100% funding: the beneficiary must contribute something;
- reporting on activities is compulsory; and
- awards over €3,000 need to be ratified by the Council.

Urban ecovillages

We recognised the need to develop more information and experience in urban-based ecovillages. May East and Jonathan will represent GEN at the World Urban Forum in Barcelona in September where they hope to develop new alliances with other sister organisations.

Strategy

We discussed a strategy discussion paper written by Jonathan on what he sees as the failure of ecovillages to grow and spread as easily as had been anticipated in the early years of the movement. The strengths and weaknesses of Jonathan's proposal that we should focus more on promoting the development of larger living and learning centres (ideally, one in every country in Europe – and eventually also in Africa) were discussed.

Francophone node

Jean-Michel made a proposal for the development of a node for ecovillage activities in the francophone zone (French-speaking Europe and West Africa). He described the many activities that he has been involved in this area during the last four years that he has served on the council. The consensus within the rest of the council was that the time is not yet ripe for the establishment of new structures or participation in major international meetings: much foundation-laying needs to be done, in terms of getting people together and promoting ecovillage initiatives on the ground. Jean-Michel was encouraged to devote himself to getting the new ecovillage he is moving into soon up and running and he was offered fulsome support to help to organise a meeting for those interested in ecovillage developments in France and Switzerland in the late summer of 2004.

Green Week

A short report from Jonathan on GEN-Europe's participation in the EU's Green Week in Brussels in June, where the first EV Award will be made. We will try to get a senior person from within the EU to make the award.

Funding requests

The Council discussed and approved a request for financial assistance from Bagnaia ecovillage in Italy for an initiative to bring together young people from Israel and Palestine.