



Innovation: designing for a sustainable future

How effective are eco-villages?

Stephen Peake

Social change and technological change do often go hand in hand and if you look at alternative in inverted commas, ways of living like Findhorn or Hockerton then you see that it's not just a question of going into Currys or Dixons and buying a new green fridge or new green washing machine. It's about doing something more than that. It's about a different kind of house; a different shaped house; a house with different energy properties; perhaps with different relationships with neighbours. It's about, that's an example of lots of technologies in the different ways that people want to try to live alternatively, are wrapped up in different ways of behaving and living with each other often in communities. So they are classic examples of, of the relationship between the two.

I think communities like Hockerton, Findhorn; to that list we could add the Centre for Alternative Technology in Machynlleth, in Wales and a whole host of similar eco-communities around Europe and around the globe. There's a eco-village network for example globally. They are extremely important because all of us realize at the back of our minds, we know that certain patterns of consumption are not sustainable. Whether we've studied a course on it or not. Whether we are an engineer or somebody who studies humanities or doesn't study at all we know, we each have our own sense and stories about the finite nature of the earth and so we want to know, all of us, that places like Hockerton and Findhorn and CAT at Machynlleth they exist, because it's there that the knowledge about alternative ways of living remains and grows. If you like they're a sort of cultural and technological seed bank. We might think this, they're a sort of seed bank for that remote possibility that all these scare stories might be right and that one morning we might wake up and we might have to pick up the phone, if the phone lines still work, and call our friend at Findhorn, or at Hockerton or Machynlleth, and say – how do you build a composting loo because I need to do that? – so I think they're extremely important in motivating people.