



**Global  
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# **Voluntary Governance in Small, Green Communities**

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The submission proposes creating green communities all over the world in the range of 50-500 people in each. This would be in line with human biological limits on maintaining meaningful relationships, thus providing a scale where the political system would gravitate towards participation in the community, communal decision-making and consensus driven policy. The communities would be formed around a shared green space, where the participants incorporate more of a natural system of reuse and renewal in their lifestyle. The inhabitants are to self-collect data, to be used for analysis in order to create measurements over time and provide tools for improvement, according to their own stated definitions. Community-dwellers would choose their own representative, or representatives, based on that person's abilities and resources available to carry out their duties, which would also be determined by consensus.





# 1. Abstract

Top-down styles of governance have inherent limitations and contradictions which often result in lack of equality and civic participation, financial conflicts of interest, and politically induced inability to address long-term threats to social and environmental stability. International governing bodies and non-government organizations have good intentions and superficially address growing social and environmental issues through voluntary programs and binding agreements, but are limited by the lack of sustainable funding and thorough societal penetration and participation. Grassroots movements are likewise short-lived and subject to attrition due to economic and daily survival needs of involved individuals. A mixed model of governance which incorporates instinctual community scale participation, decision-making, and control with municipal, state, national and international resource partitioning is the most rational approach to addressing the serious long-term societal and environmental threats bearing down on us today.

Over most of human history, we lived in small, egalitarian and self-governing communities. As can be seen in such traditional communities today, leaders were generally chosen by popular decree based on their abilities and willingness. Their terms were indeterminate and based on performance, and their position often implied a responsibility and a burden, rather than a bestowal of power or privilege. Regular community gatherings allowed members to voice their opinions, and decisions were made by consensus. Because of this long history, most of us have an instinctual need for such an arrangement. We want to be heard, participate, and feel a semblance of control over our immediate environment.

Despite the enormous variety and diversity of human societies today, it is still possible to return to a community focused system of governance. The scale and methods of doing so will also likely be various and diverse, but our biological limitations on maintaining meaningful relationships would suggest that a range of communities from 50 to 500 inhabitants would work best. To avoid politically motivated districting, communities would self-determine their size and boundary. In many cases, the limitations imposed by geography and demographics would assist decision making. Many communities are already organized, whether it's through a neighborhood association, a building, or a small village.

To systematically address each community's priorities and needs, they would have to self-collect relevant data on the inhabitants, which they would use for a community analysis. This would serve as the basis for measurement over time of change, improvements, successes and failures, etc. They could choose from the numerous frameworks available internationally to do this, based on the suitability to their culture and locale. They would choose their own representative, or representatives, based on that person's abilities and resources available to carry out their duties, which would also be determined by consensus. The representative would only be compensated for their work to the extent that the community determines necessary to cover costs of activities engaged in. Representatives could be replaced at any time by community vote, and would be responsible for maintaining communications between the community and the relevant government and non-government personnel and authorities they deal with.



The best way to factor in a means of addressing major environmental threats around the globe to this framework would be to require a shared green space for each community. This will address several phenomena simultaneously. First, the green space will guarantee a natural setting where residents can go to enjoy the increasingly many benefits that science tells us we receive from exposure to nature. In too many places around the world, even in developed nations, many people are deprived of easy access to any kind of nature, and have no real connection to or relationship with nature. Being a shared space belonging to the community, members would be encouraged to maintain it and discouraged from degrading it. They would be unable to cut trees or take plants unless that's a specific part of green space rules the community adopts. Second, the green space could serve as an extension center where people can freely drop their green waste, learn how to make and use compost, participate in and learn locally appropriate gardening methods, and foster tree or other plant seedlings which they can take and plant at home or in their neighborhood. Ensuring that the governance system incorporates more of a natural system of reuse and renewal is vital, since planting trees and reducing waste that contributes to methane emissions in landfills are two proven ways we can help mitigate global warming. Also, in many areas people don't have enough access to cheap fruits and vegetables, and need to be encouraged and guided to participate in their own food production. Finally, the green space will provide one definite and attractive option for a community meeting place.

Finding a suitable green space for each community will likely be a challenge in many localities, and in some circumstances, particularly cities, communities will have to start with several small green spaces instead of a single, large one. In any case, this needs to happen globally in order to help ameliorate widespread habitat loss. Communities could be assisted and encouraged by government and NGO expertise in using locally appropriate and native species of trees and other plants in their green spaces as well as in green space design and maintenance, and sustainable agriculture (permaculture).

Depending on local rules and regulations, many communities will likely have to be formally organized or incorporated to receive government assistance and outreach. They may also be limited in what they're allowed to do, such as where they can plant trees in their neighborhood according to existing infrastructure, ownership and plans. They will be dependent on voluntary participation of community residents, but the chance to participate and have a sense of control over their surroundings will enhance quality of life. Finally, depending on what the circumstances are for each community, they can decide what other areas of support they need assistance with. This will help ensure that government and international extension and outreach is appropriate, needed, targeted, and more efficient.

## **2. Description of the model**

### **INTERNATIONAL AGREEMENT TO FRAMEWORK**

Regardless of national systems of governance, communities will require the right to some sort of formal or informal recognition or incorporation, as well as the right to use or co-own green spaces. Communities will be self-determining and



organized from within, and participation of individuals in communities will be voluntary. An internationally binding agreement may be necessary to ensure that some countries recognize and respect these rights in their communities.

### **COMMUNITY DELINEATION AND MAINTENANCE OF BOUNDARIES AND MEMBERSHIP**

Differences in geographical locations and population density of communities require flexibility in how they are defined and delineated. Demographic changes due to population growth and immigration or emigration also necessitate flexibility of community boundaries and membership. However, setting general limits on the possible size range of participatory communities is necessary to ensure that individuals can voice their opinions and meaningfully engage in meetings and activities. We recommend a community size range of 50-500 people, but in very dense situations the range could be scaled up as needed. The boundaries of the community would be set by the area needed to encompass the habitations and land of individuals in the community, or the total area shared by the community in cases of communal ownership. In cases of low or high population density, communities could be aggregated or sub-divided to provide optimal conditions of participation for individuals. Permanent residence within the community boundaries would likely be the normal condition of participating individuals, but needn't be a requirement for potential volunteers. Communities will make their own rules for who can participate in meetings and activities, but residents within the boundaries are guaranteed a right to participate. Regional or national governments could make initial boundary recommendations based on most recent census data and appropriate geospatial characteristics.

### **COMMUNITY ANALYSIS**

After community boundaries and membership are defined, each community will collect demographic and economic data of its residents. This will provide baseline measurements which will be used to gauge changes over time to the population. Initial community meetings will also help ensure consensus of participants on priorities of the community. Regional, national, or international standards on data collection, storage and analyses can be utilized to approach consistency of measures, or developed if necessary.

### **COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP GUIDELINES**

Communities will choose their own leaders to indeterminate terms based on their own requirements, but ideally these will be motivated individuals with the capacity and/or resources to carry out their responsibilities. The leaders' primary role will be to conduct periodic meetings in which participants can voice their opinions and ideas, and to communicate with regional, national, and international entities on behalf of the community. Leaders will be chosen by consensus, but are free to step down at any time, and can be replaced at any time if community participants choose to do so. Leaders will only be compensated for their time and effort according to what the community deems reasonable. Several generic categories of co-leaders (secretary, treasurer, etc.) will likely be developed by communities to deal with the common needs of collecting and maintaining records, and dealing with finances if necessary.

### **COMMUNITY MEETINGS AND PARTICIPATION**

Communities will meet regularly and formal, advertised meetings with agendas should occur at least twice a year. Actions agreed to in the past should be revisited



to keep track of progress and change, and allow for alterations in strategies or responsibilities. Participation in meetings by individuals is voluntary, and communities will decide on repercussions for individuals given responsibilities or tasks which are not completed to their satisfaction.

### **GREEN SPACE DETERMINATION AND MAINTENANCE**

Communities will decide on the size and location of their shared green space. In many cases they will have to communicate and negotiate with regional authorities in this regard, especially if there are not policies in place to allow for shared land. In some cases, individuals will have to volunteer to dedicate some of their land for the shared space, and in others a regional or national authority will have to grant permission for land use. In some dense urban situations, it may be unfeasible to obtain significant numbers of shared spaces, or permission to use public land for new purposes. In these situations, communities will have to get creative and use rooftop space, repurpose or rehabilitate abandoned buildings or vacant lots, or be allotted a space by their city outside of dense areas with high land prices. Large green spaces could also be subdivided and allotted to communities as needed. In very cold areas with long winters, or very dry areas with scarce water resources, communal greenhouses could be developed.

Communities will agree to the design and use of their green space, and may require regional, national, or international assistance to do this. These green spaces will create a place where communities can serve several possible functions depending on their needs, such as; deposit organic waste and create compost, grow tree seedlings for community dispersal and planting, produce fruits and vegetables for local consumption and/or sale, provide a safe place for relaxation and recreation, and create habitat for native biodiversity. The green spaces will be open to all individuals in the community, and will be maintained by volunteers. Ideally these green spaces will also be open to visitation by the general public, but communities will decide on visitation policies.

### **COMMUNICATION WITH REGIONAL, NATIONAL, AND INTERNATIONAL ENTITIES**

The leader of each community will be responsible for communicating on its behalf with regional, national, and international entities. With access to the community analysis, and through listening to the members at community meetings, the leader should know very well what the needs and priorities of his or her community are. As such, he or she can quickly and efficiently negotiate with any representative from agencies or organizations whose mission requires interaction with the community or its residents. Ideally a community registry system will be developed that will allow both the public and relevant representatives to efficiently locate community leaders when communication is required.

### **INCENTIVES TO ORGANIZE AND SHARE DATA**

Incentives may be required in many situations and locales to motivate communities and individuals to self-organize and work together to create and manage their shared green spaces, as well as to both collect and share data they self-collect. These could be either financial, material, or land based incentives or a combination thereof. For example, a regional or national government could offer a piece of unused or degraded land if a community self-organizes and presents its data analysis, or present opportunities for tax deductions to individuals in wealthier communities who might be willing to donate some of their land for shared green space use.



## **INCENTIVES FOR GOVERNING BODIES TO SUPPORT SELF-ORGANIZED COMMUNITIES**

Regional, national and international governing entities would be motivated to provide community incentives through the prospect of improving and maintaining social and civic data and communication at relatively low cost. By gathering and combining resident data about resources, needs and preferences in communities, governing bodies can scale the data up to inform policy and decision making at higher levels.

## **MANAGEMENT OF CHALLENGES AND RISKS**

The model is designed to be simple and flexible enough that each community will manage the challenges and risks which are specific to its particular circumstances. Most community analysis frameworks include the elaboration and recording of specific opportunities, resources and threats as recognized and agreed to by the community members. The particular rules, decisions and management of shared green spaces will vary by community and will likely change over time according to consensus decisions made in community meetings.

# **3. Motivation**

Any model of governance that would approach universality in scope and reach will have to be very simple, but capable of extreme flexibility to work with all the world's terrestrial and cultural diversity. In addition, it will likely have to better resemble natural systems' characteristics than current governance systems do, to achieve the efficiency and unconscious emergent properties that will make it sustainable in the long term. Rather than addressing each problem we face individually and after the fact, the model should result in an environment in which we fulfill many of our unmet elemental needs, and by doing so solve problems indirectly. The model should also be possible to implement with minimum external investment and maintenance requirements.

Our proposed model system of governance would address many of our human needs which are so sorely lacking in most of the world today, by providing every human with the opportunity to become a community member. This system will bring out the best in people by giving them a chance to; speak their opinion, to be heard, to participate in something bigger than themselves, to volunteer, to learn new skills, to get outside, to interact with people and other living things, to produce healthy food they can eat, to beautify their immediate environment, and to get some physical activity. Not only will our model system provide these opportunities, it will do them with a simple framework that approaches natural systems by; reusing materials, recycling nutrients and energy, increasing structural complexity and biodiversity, and creating the emergence of new and interesting properties from simple and repeating patterns. Some examples of emergent properties from the basic model framework include increased social cohesion and communication in communities that could result in; increased opportunities for sharing resources, communal investment in infrastructure, and improved efficiency of local scale economies. For example, once a community is organized, it would be easier and more straightforward to share resources to buy a solar panel, a battery storage system for excess solar energy, a market stall to sell excess produce from the communal green space, or a bicycle cart to carry compost from the green space to community members' gardens.





Our model is so simple that in many circumstances, like in tropical developing countries, it could be achieved without any external financial investment. It is also endlessly flexible, since it would be organized by the participants themselves from within, and they would be free to choose their operating rules and priorities. Of course, financial assistance would be useful, and in some cases it will be crucial to set aside land for communal green spaces, or in providing tools, materials, or seeds to provide the initial momentum. Technical assistance may also be useful, but given the pace of technological advance, it doesn't stretch the imagination to envision communities using free satellite internet on their smartphones to access instructions and methods for community analysis, area specific gardening and permaculture techniques, species selection for tree planting, etc. Once the first communities' efforts get off the ground and show progress, their lessons learned and successful techniques employed can also be uploaded and shared via the internet to be utilized by communities in similar circumstances.

Perhaps the most attractive feature of our model is that it is community driven. Since there won't be anyone but themselves telling them what to do, they will have full ownership of whatever they can accomplish, and there won't be anyone to limit what they can imagine or achieve either. In addition, individuals can take lessons and seed stock from the communal green space to improve their own property, and areas in between. The possibilities for extending nature and her benefits into our cultural spaces is endless. If adopted universally, each community will become like a node in a network of interconnected green spaces. Instead of the current pattern of sprawling roads and concrete which create diminishing islands of natural habitat, our entire civilization could become surrounded by an ecotone between wild spaces and the garden of humanity.

Finally, the most important characteristic of our model is its indirect approach to dealing with the multifarious issues facing us today. Humans generally don't react well to being told what to do or not to do, and direct confrontation often ends disastrously. You can't tell someone to consume less, especially if they're struggling to provide for their family. You can't tell someone not to have sex or to have fewer children because our population is too large. These strategies have already been tried and failed as many times, often with unforeseen and disastrous side effects, or with temporary positive outcomes that subside as soon as program momentum or resource availability is reduced. By interacting and creating sharing relationships with small communities, and through hands-on learning, fostering and appreciation of natural ecological diversity in green spaces, the best features of humans emerge. In these situations, more expansive and global feelings of compassion emerge. And with more stable and interdependent community cores, local economies and resource use become more interconnected, efficient and therefore more stable. As can be seen in most of the developed world, women with a voice in more economically and socially stable communities will voluntarily choose to have fewer children. In addition, the constant availability of social interaction for all community members results in more emotionally stable individuals, who are less prone to addictions (be they to illicit substances, tv, internet, or overconsumption) and more likely to be positive contributing members of society. This is a genuinely feasible and perhaps the only humane path towards limiting population and resource consumption growth on a global scale, which will ultimately determine our quality of life in the near future.