

Aspects of community

Kommune Niederkaufungen 1986 -2011
an anthology



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The search for sub-urban space

In 1983, a group of people got together with the idea of starting a large (100 adults plus children) communal housing and work project somewhere in West Germany. They formulated their ideas in a pamphlet of Principles and Aims with a group of core principles for the basis of the commune. They made this public in the left-wing press, and began to search for other people interested in a project based on these ideas. A number of meetings were organised, with large numbers of interested participants. One of the main wishes of the initiators of the project was that it should be a sub-urban project, neither in the country nor in an inner city area, but with close contact to both. There should be the possibility for agriculture combined with access to the movement and culture of a large town or small city, or even to a big city such as Hamburg. It wasn't back-to-the-land, but it wasn't urban mass squatting either. It was somewhere nearer to being the kern of a garden village or to being one of the first ecovillages.

Searches were made for suitable property, and between 1983 and 1986 two projects were begun by some members of the group. In 1986, some of the remaining members found and purchased the complex of buildings in the Kirchweg which was to become the present Niederkaufungen commune.



Kirchweg 1
the main house (now seminar centre)

This group of buildings, a former “manor farm” is right in the centre of Niederkaufungen village, seven kilometres outside the city of Kassel. The commune is celebrating its twenty fifth anniversary this year and is described in more detail in the anthology of texts below.

Contents

This anthology is based on a number of texts written at different times. Some are texts about the commune written for IC org pages (www.ic.org is the homepage of the Fellowship for Intentional Community) or the ic.wiki. Others were originally written as answers to enquiries about certain communal themes. One was originally a leaflet produced for the Solidarity Economy Congress in Vienna 2008. For this reason, some sections of texts have been used more than once.

- The first text is based on the FIC's Directory of Communes entry for Kommune Niederkaufungen at <http://directory.ic.org/records/communes.php>.
- Communal Economy in Kommune Niederkaufungen : The economic structure of the commune in Niederkaufungen has a number of elements, with both economic and social aspects. The text was written for wiki.ic.org as one of a series of articles about various aspects of the commune.
- Ecological measures undertaken by Kommune Niederkaufungen is the English language translation of a German text produced for use on guided tours of the commune or during seminars or talks. It appears at wiki.ic.org.
- Reduction of patriarchal structures : One of the core principles, the reduction of patriarchal, nuclear family structures has been partly achieved but there remain remnants of past behaviour and relationships which could be further altered. This was first written for wiki.ic.org and has had an extra section added about patriarchy previously written as a EFL school discussion text.

Communal agriculture and CSA is a comparison of agriculture at Kommune Niederkaufungen with CSA systems. It was written as an answer to an enquiry from a student researching CSA systems. Definitions and quotes about CSA in *Kursiv* script come from

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Community-supported_agriculture
Wikipedia:CSA]

The text about governance is based on my answer to an enquiry about rules and regulations in the commune. Governance relates to consistent management, cohesive policies, processes and decision-rights for a given area of responsibility. Governance is the kinetic exercise of management power and policy.

- Text seven is the original leaflet for the Solidarity Economy Congress in Vienna Feb. 2008. It uses parts of other texts.
- Political communes in 21st century Germany is an ic. wiki text ammended to include the translations of the Kommuja statements of principles from 2005 and 2009.



Kommune Niederkaufungen

"From each according to ability, to each according to need."

Kommune Niederkaufungen in the village of Niederkaufungen near Kassel in Germany was started in 1986. It now has sixty adult members and twenty children

and young people. It is the largest income sharing commune in Germany. It is a left-wing community and it is a member of the Kommuja network of political communes. It is based on five main principles.

They are:

- consensus decision making,
- communal economy with collective ownership,
- collective work,
- reduction of patriarchal family structures,
- left-wing politics.

In addition, the members of the commune try to live and work in an ecologically sustainable way. The members of the commune live in 14 living groups, with a men's group, two women's/lesbian groups and one group living on the farm outside the village. They share all the meals. There are weekly general meetings.

There are 13 commune collectives

- a seminar center, with courses on commune themes and non-violent communication
- a building firm doing interior and exterior construction, timber work renovation, and with a metal-workshop
- a carpentry and joinery shop
- a kitchen/catering firm
- a Bioland-certified organic market-garden with a farm shop
- an EU-certified organic dairy farm with cheese-making
- a kindergarten
- a fruit growing, orchard care, and juice-making team
- an administration/consulting group with counsellors for other communities
- a physiotherapy practice
- a psychological counselling, supervision and therapy practice
- a daycare center for old people with dementia and Alzheimer's disease
- an electro-mobility project with electric assisted bikes and electric powered motor cars

A couple of people work outside the commune. A couple of people are away on sabbaticals.

The commune members try to satisfy as many of their own basic needs as possible. They also offer ecological products and social services to the local population. Where possible, they consume organic, regional, and seasonal products and fair trade goods.



**The commune's house in the Mittelstrasse
(showing stored firewood)**

Communal Economy in Kommune Niederkaufungen

Reasons for having a communal economy

Our communal economy, with collective ownership, pooling of capital and income sharing, ensures us a high degree of both security and freedom. Whatever the situation of the individual, each member has housing, clothing, food, transport and money to spend outside the commune. She or he is not isolated and alone within the competitive, capitalist system, but part of a cooperative relationship based on solidarity. In communities such as co-housing or eco-villages, each member or family is, to a great degree, responsible for her or his own financial survival and that of their dependents. This results in some inequalities in these communities, inequalities in income, working conditions, and the resulting stress. In those projects, some are well paid, others less well paid, some communitarians are self-employed, while others are employees. Some members of these communities have job security, others are in precarious employment. They are generally living and working under normal capitalist conditions, with all that that implies, and usually there is a clear division between wage earning, community duties and free time. To some degree, this has been broken down in the commune in Niederkaufungen. Access to goods, services and facilities is not directly related to what each member "earns", but on what the commune as a whole can provide. This, in turn, is not based solely on money earned "outside", but also on the crops we grow, the foodstuff and goods we produce, the services and skills which we share with each other and with the wider community. In many situations there is no longer a clear division

between “work” and “leisure”, but communards are often involved in personally satisfying activities which are also for the common good.

Income sharing

"From each according to their abilities, to each according to their needs".

Income sharing is one economic form of mutual aid. It is one way of breaking down economic inequalities within our communities. As in other communities where members work in communally owned businesses, in Niederkaufungen it breaks down the inequalities which exist between the more successful enterprises and the ones which either only break even or need subsidising.

All earnings, no matter where they come from, go into one fund out of which all daily expenses are paid. There are no fixed wages and there is no personal allowance or pocket money. People decide for themselves what they need and take the money directly from the cash box in our administrative office (and write it down themselves in the cash book there). This has worked for twenty five years now, though, of course, not without discussion when our expenditure exceeded our earnings. Our financial situation has been quite stable through most of the commune's existence and our material standard of living has slowly but steadily risen; a fact which is applauded by some members and criticised by others.

Communal property

All of the major property in the commune is collective property. The commune is organised as a registered association, the Kommune e.V. (eingetragener Verein – registered association). All communards are members of this association. The association is not primarily an economic association but an association to promote our ideals. It does not directly offer goods or services on the market but can legally have some economic aspects. It is this association which owns all the property, land, buildings, means of production, and motorvehicles.

A second registered association, of which we are also all members, the association for ecology, health and education (Verein für Ökologie, Gesundheit und Bildung e.V.), is responsible for running our seminar house and kindergarten, and has a number of economic sub-functions, such as being the legal structure for our horticulture enterprises. It is not intended or possible to privatise our communal property. The commune will continue even if there are less than 7 members left, which is the minimum number of members to start a registered association in Germany.

Socialization of capital and goods

The set up is fairly simple and clear: new members joining the commune hand over all their assets to the commune association, which owns the property and all means of production. The association, consisting of all adult members of the commune, decides in consensus what to do with the money, where and how to invest it.

The socialization of production and centralization of capital that takes place lays the foundation for a socialist economy. Socialism entails ownership of the social production by the workers engaged in the production. Socialization of the workplace is contrasted

to rigid hierarchy and bureaucracy, as workers gain more autonomy, collective decision-making power and control over the output they produce in a socialized work environment.

Self-sufficiency

While it is not an island outside capitalism nor an ivory tower, the commune in Niederkaufungen has a number of areas where it approaches self-sufficiency or could become more self-sufficient when the worsening economic situation makes it necessary.

The ownership of our buildings and some land means that we have a certain security which projects which rent or lease their property (or squatted projects) do not have. We see access to land as being very important. A large part of our foodstuff is from our own agriculture, horticulture, orchards and beekeeping. If we had more people who wanted to work the land, we could increase this food production. See Agriculture in Kommune Niederkaufungen.

In addition, through the use of our gas-fired domestic combined heat and power (CHP) plant, our building integrated photovoltaic (BIPV) plant with c. 59 kWp maximum capacity - equalling the electricity use of c. 12 four person households, and our log-burning central heating plant for winter heating which uses left-over regional firewood, we are able to satisfy quite a large proportion of our energy needs. See the article *Ecological measures undertaken by Kommune Niederkaufungen* .

Internal Exchange, Giving, Sharing

Generally, no money changes hands within the commune, although occasionally there is transfer of funds from one work collective to another, or between collectives and the central communal account. One sector where there is regular internal exchange is in the kitchen duties; weekend cooking, washing dishes and cleaning up after meals. It is not always possible for communards to fulfill their duties in the weeks originally chosen for this work, either due to illness, other work or holidays. Communards will often exchange duties on a one for one basis, but some communards also help out without wanting compensation or without trading the duties. It is normal for members of the commune to give each other things without recompense and sharing plays a large role in the internal economy of the commune.

Similarly, giving of services is an important aspect of the communal economy. Many services from which all or many communards benefit are done voluntarily. Much of the cleaning round the commune and in the living groups is done by communards who have the time, energy and wish to support the commune that way. Others take on the work of snow clearing in winter, looking after a certain motor-vehicle, or running the wood burning central heating. Washing clothes is also something where we all help one another.

One reason for the high living standard at relatively low cost is the sharing of motor vehicles, computers, tools , facilities and many other things. Just as sharing motor vehicles brings us economic and ecological benefits, the pooling and common use of many other things enables us to have various facilities which most people living alone or in couples cannot generally afford. The commune has an extensive library of several thousand books, well organised into various sections. Similarly, we have a media room

with a large collection of videos and DVDs and a couple of video recorders and DVD players which can be used by all communards. One communard has made a list of the (many hundred) CDs that we have throughout the commune, making it possible to see what other people have in their collections before buying new ones and making borrowing much easier. For those communards who prefer to make music, there is a music room with a large collection of musical instruments (both collective and private) plus a PA system with mixing desk for discos and concerts. We have a room for meditation and being still.

In addition, we have a large collective “wardrobe” room, with a large collection of clothes that everyone can take from or contribute to. (As well as this, there is a big collection of clothes for dressing up, with costumes for parties and festivals). In addition to the commune administration office, there are two office rooms for all communards that have computers and other necessary equipment for communication and writing (Fax, photocopier, typewriter, stationary and postage stamps). Finally, as well as the workshops used by our work collectives, we have a couple of workrooms for “private” use, with wood-working tools, painting and decorating materials, camping gear and other useful goods.

Transparency and Trust

There is a high degree of economic (and also social) transparency within the commune. Larger economic transactions are debated in the commune beforehand and agreed to in consensus. All the smaller (private) transactions are open to inspection as they are written down in the cash-book in our commune administration office. The administration collective reports to the commune on a weekly basis at our plenary meeting on Tuesday evenings. There is also a small supervisory group of non-administrators which meets regularly to advise and support the administrative collective. Each month a different work collective reports on its activities with a written annual report and a presentation of the work at the plenary meeting.

In addition, there is a good deal of openness in the social sphere, and communards experiencing problems usually have quite a number of people whom they trust who they can turn to in times of crisis.

This transparency combined with consensus decision making and our legal structure as a registered association make it very difficult for individuals to either misuse or appropriate communal funds or property, although it is certainly not impossible. However, as the members of the commune are relatively homogenous in their ideas and ideals and there is great trust in each other and in the administrative collective, it is unlikely that anyone would want to cream off cash into a secret private bank account or personally enrich themselves. The system is perhaps not one hundred percent immune against someone with enough criminal energy to exploit it, but due to the trust which exists it is unlikely that the communal economy would be endangered.



Commune is found to be good!

Ecological measures undertaken by Kommune Niederkaufungen

In order to reduce their [ecological footprint](#), the members of the commune have introduced various types of environmentally friendly technology and behaviour.

Technology:

- [Cogeneration](#): A gas-fired domestic combined heat and power (CHP) plant.
- A log-burning central heating plant for winter heating, using left-over regional [firewood](#).
- A building integrated [photovoltaic](#) (BIPV) plant with c. 59 kWp maximum capacity - equalling the electricity use of c. 12 four person households.
- A [solar panel](#) on a residential building for warm water in summer.
- Two rain water cisterns containing up to 41,000 litres for use in washing machines, toilets and gardens.
- Water and energy saving devices, including energy saving light-bulbs and domestic appliances, water saving equipment on taps, showers and in toilets, heat insulation on and in buildings ("Iso-floc").

Behavioural changes:

Mobility:

- Avoidance of many journeys through working in the commune.
- Most local journeys by bicycle and public transport. Almost no air journeys. 6 motorcars shared by 75 people.
- A number of motor cars run on rape seed oil (a [renewable resource](#)). A new electro vehicle and electro-bike project with testing through usage.

Building:

- Renovations and rebuilding using environmentally friendly materials ([Green building](#)).
- [Recycling](#) of materials used in plumbing, electrical installations, flooring (parquet), and tiling etc.
- Careful room heating in winter with closed windows.

Sharing:

- Shared use of many objects and facilities by many people.

Consumption:

- Use of second-hand goods, such as clothing, textiles, furniture, household goods and appliances, and bicycles.
- On purchase of new goods: choice of durable, high-quality, repairable and ecological consumer goods.
- Purchase and use of ecological washing powders and liquids, cleaning products and body-care products.
- Consumption as a substitute for satisfaction of needs is questioned.

Nutrition:

- About 35% of the commune's foodstuff (vegetables, fruit, milk products and meat) comes from its own [organic agriculture](#) (dairy farm and market gardens).

- Purchase of foodstuffs which are, where possible, fair trade, organically produced, regional and seasonal. Promotion of these production and trade structures.
- Bulk purchases. Avoidance of over packed products and rubbish.

Work:

- The enterprises and workshops in the Niederkaufungen commune try to work ecologically.

Political activities:

- Support for socially and ecologically sensible projects, both regional and international. 3.2% of commune income is donated to such projects.
- Political activity and educational work about ecology, intentional communities, alternative networks, and peace work.

Results of these measures:

Research by the University of Kassel together with members of Kommune Niederkaufungen and other communities shows that, per person per year, the CO₂ emissions of the commune members are about 37% of the German national average. As the national average is about six times too high for sustainability, also the members of the Niederkaufungen commune are "over the limit". In the same survey, the Sieben Linden Ecovillage came out rather better, at about 28% of average German CO₂ emissions. One improvement which could be made would be a change-over to vegan nutrition or at least mostly vegetarian foodstuffs.

Reduction of patriarchal structures



Patriarchy is "a social system in which the father is head of the household, having authority over the women and children." It is "a system of government by males."

Critics of the patriarchal nuclear family see it as being one of the basic building blocks of capitalist society. The nuclear family is usually structured to enable the man to go out work while the woman stays at home and cares for children and household. The man is usually integrated into a hierarchical workplace structure where competition and performance play major roles in his acceptance and position in the hierarchy. In

exchange for his wages he receives services from his female partner which include sexual services, childcare, cooking, cleaning and emotional support. The hierarchy experienced in the workplace is mirrored in the home. A simple reversal of the roles does not radically change the patriarchal nature of the relationship.

The reduction of patriarchal structures is one of the core principles of the Niederkaufungen commune in Germany. In the pamphlet of Aims and Principles, the "Grundsatzpapier", written in 1983, the structures of the nuclear family are especially criticised. New structures were proposed in the paper, and many of them have been put into practice.

- Life in small living groups
- Childcare and cooking done by collectives
- Other housework done on a rota basis.
- Work in self-managed collectives

Other egalitarian communities have similar anti-sexist principles and similar structures in place to foster equality between women and men. For example, Twin Oaks Community (USA) has Feminism as a core principle, and FEC member communities all share similar ideas.

New structures

Life in small living groups: The members of the commune in Niederkaufungen live in fourteen small living groups. Two of these groups are "Women/Lesbian" (Frauen/Lesben) living groups. There is one men's living group, the rest are mixed. One is on the farm, 2kms from the main commune. Some of the living groups have parent couples with children living together, but there are also single parents with children in some groups. Some communards have partners outside the commune. Nearly all children have one or more self-chosen adult carers extra to their parents. The commune tries to keep to a ratio of one child per three adults in order that there are enough non-parents who can help with the children.

- **Childcare and cooking done by collectives:** From the age of one, commune children can attend the commune Kindergarten in the mornings. This enables both parents to work, not just one (usually the man). The Kindergarten evolved from a self-organised childcare group and has places for children from the village of Kaufungen as well as for commune children. As most people work in the commune, parents are near their children if needed, and children regularly get to visit commune workplaces to see what is going on. Commune children get to know village children through Kindergarten attendance, and village kids and their parents get to know communal life in exchange. Many commune children have friends who are happy to visit them because there is so much to see and do, and a lot more freedom than in the nuclear family. From Monday to Friday, lunch-time cooking for the commune is done by the kitchen collective (Komm Menu). The collective is, at present, made up of three men and one woman, with helpers, both men and women. The "centralized" preparation of meals by a collective again frees up communards from some housework usually done by women.
- **Other housework done on a rota basis:** Preparation of breakfast, of the evening meal, of meals at the weekends, the dish-washing and cleaning of the kitchen are

all done on a rota basis by all communards. Cleaning the rest of the commune is done by volunteers, and each small living group organises its housework autonomously. Running the wood-burning central heating system is done by a team of volunteers who organise their own rota. Thus men do the much same amount of "women's work" as the female communards. There is a great degree of freedom of choice about whether you cook, wash dishes, or do other household and kitchen chores, but it is clear that everyone has to do their fair share. And everyone has to wash their own clothes.

- **Work in self-managed collectives:** Nearly all communards work in self-managed collective businesses. Women and men have equal rights and equal responsibilities in the collectives. The collectives decide autonomously on working hours and conditions, holiday entitlements and division of labour within the collective.



“Every society has its particular fantasies: our society uniquely encourages the fantasies of sexual stereotypes. In particular, this is achieved through advertising. The form of our fantasies and their strength in modern society is due to capitalism.”

In any discussion about sexuality, sexual relationships, gender roles and sexual discrimination, there are two main themes that we need to examine. The first is the relationship between men and women within the dominant socio-economic system; their roles at home, at school, at work, regulated by the state or by tradition and the customs of society. The second main theme follows from this. It is the theme of intimate relationships between individuals regardless of their physical differences. What goes on between us in bed depends on what goes on between us in patriarchal capitalism.

Despite some progress and improvements, in modern, western societies there is still an unequal relationship between the sexes, with men dominating women and discriminating against them to some degree. Patriarchy still exists; we are governed by men even where women are allowed participation in the political and economic

processes of society. Participation does not mean equality: nor does legal equality (which generally exists in modern, western states) mean that there is real equality.

Multi-national companies, armies, police forces, political parties, religious groups, media organisations, trade unions, and criminal associations are all lead by men. So are most immigrant communities, squatters groups and alternative communes. Few mixed groups are not influenced in some way by patriarchal structures. Few are not dominated to a degree by the male members.

Our ideas, men's and women's, have been mainly formulated by men, and confirmed and reinforced by scientific and sociological "facts" discovered by men to help men control the world in which we live. Depending on the needs of the moment, researchers look for, and usually find, proof that women are, by nature, more emotional, more instinctual, less rational, more caring, more passive, weaker, etc. etc. than men. Real physical differences, imagined "natural" differences and behavioural differences become the basis of a division into superior and inferior.

One of the main ideas formulated and propagated by men is the universal willingness and availability of women for sex, and the reduction of young women to sex objects, either for men's gratification or for the production of "their" children.

The form that this takes varies from society to society. It is generally done through the sexual division of labour, keeping the women in the home, where they have the task of serving the men and bringing up the children. It is done by dictating in various ways what is correct for women to wear, from mini skirt and high heels to the the burka and chador, from the white wedding dress to the black of the widows robes. And it is done by the continual reproduction of women as sex objects or mothers in all of the media.

In magazines, the internet, films, pop music video clips, and especially in all forms of advertising, women are still generally portrayed as young, sexy, available and willing. And mostly they are portrayed as waiting for the right man to come along. The form of the relationship is dictated as much as the role that the woman should play within it.

In modern, western, capitalist societies some forms of relationship are accepted and others are discriminated against or forbidden.

Even where there is no longer legal discrimination there is often discrimination by the conservative and fundamentalist members of society.

Intimate, physical relationships between individuals of the same sex are almost always restricted. Often they are forbidden, and the individuals are punished if the relationship is discovered. Legal changes over the last few years have not always been accompanied by changes in the mentality and opinions of members of society. In some cases, the legal changes have already been reversed.

Similarly, multiple or group relationships are not accepted and have no legal status.

Short-term relationships between males and females are accepted within certain limits, especially among young individuals. These relationships are often seen as leading up to the formation of long term relationships. For older individuals this form of relationship

is less socially acceptable, although in many western states it has become relatively common.

The main relationship that is accepted and promoted by all states and societies is the nuclear family, the long-term relationship between one adult man and one adult woman, with a number of children resulting. In many western states, this no longer has to be a legally certified relationship. However, if the relationship breaks down when no legal contract has been made the woman often loses what few rights she would have been granted in an officially recognised relationship.

The nuclear family is a way of binding patriarchal society together in pyramids of authority. The intimate relationship is transformed into a social relationship where parents transmit the socially accepted concepts gender roles and of “correct” sexuality to the children.

The nuclear family is also a way of ensuring high consumption and a dedicated workforce whose physical and emotional needs are serviced by women. The parents transmit a large number of the governmental and social concepts and enforce them. The boys learn to expect a privileged part in society. The girls learn to be second-class citizens. Until they are in their teens, the children are a group of captive consumers, both of goods and of ideas.

Society expects one man to take on the responsibility to provide for several other people in a society where those other people, his wife and children, have few rights of their own. Wage structures and laws generally discriminate against women. Role changing at work and in the home has a limited effect because it is still within the narrow confines of the nuclear family. We relate to each other in an “unequalitarian” framework.

Workers self-management without a change in sexual relations is useless reform!



Communal Agriculture and CSA

In the sense that *“CSA generally is the practice of focusing on the production of high quality foods using ecological, organic or biodynamic farming methods”, “...with a much greater-than-usual degree of involvement of consumers and other stakeholders – resulting in a stronger than usual consumer – producer relationship”,* (Wikipedia), the agriculture (dairy farming, traditional orchards and market gardening) practiced in the Kommune Niederkaufungen shows some similarities to some CSA systems. It is small scale, labour-intensive organic agriculture owned and supported by an income-sharing intentional community of 60 adult members and 20 children, some of whom work in agriculture, all of whom consume the products of the agriculture. We, too, are interested in *“increasing the quality of food and the quality of care given the land, plants and animals – while substantially reducing potential food losses and financial risks for the producers”*.

(Wikipedia) This includes, to some extent *“a “shared risk and reward” agreement, i.e. that the consumers eat what the farmers grow even with the vagaries of seasonal growing”*. (Wikipedia). When there are a lot of pumpkins the members of the commune eat a lot of pumpkins.

On the other hand, there is no *“transparent, whole season budget for producing a specified wide array of products for a set number of weeks a year”* nor is there *“a common-pricing system where producers and consumers discuss and democratically agree to pricing based on the acceptance of the budget:“* (Wikipedia)

The farm and market gardening collectives have full autonomy in what they produce and in the quantity of product. This is based on the number of workers in the collectives, which changes over the years, and also on what is perceived as the needs and wishes of the commune members. The collectives also decide autonomously on the prices of their products, both for the commune and for the outside customers. (Although there is no flow of cash within the commune as we have a common purse, the commune “pays” the agricultural collectives for the food they supply by writing down the costs in the monthly commune accounts.)

The collective organisation of the commune's agriculture

All agricultural enterprises are organised as collectives, with consensus decision-making in each of the collectives. On paper, the Hof Birkengrund dairy farm has an “official” farmer, and the others, under the collective name “Rote Rübe” are part of our commune association for ecology, health and education (Betrieb der ÖGB e.V. – Verein für Ökologie, Gesundheit und Bildung). In practice, all collectives are autonomous groups without bosses or hierarchy. The members of the collectives decide who takes on the different tasks and responsibilities. At present (2010) there are four commune collectives working in agriculture: an EU certified organic dairy farm with cheese making (Hof Birkengrund); a Bioland certified organic market gardening collective with a farm shop, concentrating on regional, seasonal and GMO free production; a further collective concentrates on the production of organic and “Gentech” free seeds for “Dreschflegel”; and another collective, the “Obstmanufaktur”, is responsible for our extensive orchards, fruit trees, soft fruit bushes and juice production. The last three are all parts of the larger “Rote Rube” collective. A couple of people also look after the bees.

Products and distribution

The dairy farm and the market garden are producing organic foodstuff for the commune itself, selling some products (fruit, vegetables, jams, cheese, yogurt) over our Rote Rübe farm shop, selling some dairy products to retailers in Kassel, 7 kms away, and supplying some foodstuff to two other communal projects in Kassel (Villa Locomuna and Alte Gärtnerei). In the past, there was also a small box scheme for a number of student WGs (living groups). The products are always fresh as they do not have to be transported long distances. The dairy farm is two kilometres from the commune, the fields of the market gardeners are nearer and the orchards are scattered through the district. Within the commune, most products such as milk, fruit and vegetables will be consumed within a day or two of harvest or milking. Produce for the shop or the projects in Kassel is mostly delivered the day after harvest or milking. (Deliveries to Kassel are made by the people driving our commune children to the Free School there; there is seldom an extra delivery trip.) This is much quicker distribution than in many CSA systems, which usually have weekly distribution or collection of products.

The “transformation” of the agricultural products (freezing, bottling, jam making) is done on a voluntary basis by a number of communards, or, occasionally, by members of the commune kitchen /catering collective (Komm Menu).

Land and animals

The farm is an “Aussiedlerhof” built in the 1960s. It has ca.5 hectares of pasture around it, but no arable land. In addition, we lease about 15 hectates of pastures and meadows around Kaufungen. The present dairy herd is made up of about ten milk cows, plus heifers and calves. In addition, there are a number of pigs and piglets. The meat from the pigs is for commune consumption and not for sale. The farm has an orchard with about a dozen mature fruit trees planted when the farm was built. In the last few years we have planted about 30 new trees on the farm, partly replacing trees in the orchard, partly on the edges of meadows.

Finances and support

The dairy farm, Hof Birkengrund, was bought in 1996. From the beginning, the it was supported and subsidised by the commune. The farm belongs to the commune, not to the farm collective or the “official” farmer. Many communards have helped with work on the farm, with renovation and rebuilding work, with hay-making and many other tasks. In summer, there are often visits from communards and their children, who have picnics, play in the meadows and happily drink warm milk freshly milked from one of the cows. There is great importance placed by nearly all communards on having organic agriculture as one of the commune enterprises, even if only a few have time and energy to regularly help out. Due to the importance placed on having agriculture and self-managed food production within the commune there has rarely been a problem getting funding for new machinery or new livestock for the dairy farm. However, it is not a profit making business, despite sale of some of our products. Only once in ten years has the dairy farm collective managed to bring in the average income of other commune businesses. In the beginning, it was almost completely subsidised by the rest of the commune. At present, it is partly subsidised. Both the Hof Birkengrund and the 3 Rote Rübe collectives produce good quality foodstuff to satisfy commune and local needs rather than with the aim of making a large profit through sales. It is expected that they should be able to bring in some money from outside, but not that they should concentrate only on production for sale.

Conclusion

Despite the wide variety of production and economic sub-systems used worldwide, there are probably very few CSA systems that have such a close relationship between the consumers and the farm owners – in the commune, the consumers are the owners. Although the workers in agriculture have wide ranging autonomy in what they produce and how they produce it, they are in direct daily contact with the other communards and can respond directly to questions about quality and availability of products. They can react rapidly to problems of supply and demand, harvesting more (or less) of a required vegetable, bringing more of a certain sort of cheese out of the ripening cellar or producing special cheeses for special occasions. (This can actually sometimes be rather stressful for the commune’s agricultural workers, but has definite advantages for the rest of the communards.) Similarly, there are probably very few CSA systems that have such rapid distribution combined with such short distances. The majority of the communes agricultural products are consumed in the commune or sold by the farm shop.

Our own fruit, vegetables and milk are always very fresh, as are the fruit and vegetables sold in the farm shop. The longest delivery distance to retailers is less than 10 kms. The combination of product deliveries with taking children to school is an important factor in keeping our CO2 emissions as low as possible.

On the other hand, it is unrealistic to expect that many people will want to form communes that directly own the means of (agricultural) production, or that many farmers will want to turn their farms into communes or ecovillages with common ownership. So, compared to the usual forms of CSA, the agriculture practiced in the commune in Niederkaufungen can have only a limited application in helping to create *“a relatively new socio-economic model of food production, sales and distribution...”*) (Wikipedia)

Governance in Kommune Niederkaufungen

The commune in Niederkaufungen, founded in 1986, is a left-wing, income-sharing, intentional community of 60 adults and 20 children in fourteen small living groups and mostly working in communally owned collective businesses. It has consensus decision-making and the collective ownership of land, buildings and the means of production and transport. By taking measures to live as “ecologically” as possible, such as use of rainwater and renewable resources, insulation of buildings, car sharing, practicing organic agriculture, etc., we have a low “ecological footprint” compared to the German average. Although we are as large as some ecovillages and have some similarities to some of them, we do not see ourselves as an ecovillage, as ecovillages usually have other forms of ownership of land and buildings and other socio-economic structures. Our internal rules and regulations are fitted to other requirements and necessities than those of most ecovillages. Unlike some intentional communities and ecovillages, we have no formal rule book or book of by-laws regulating the daily life and behaviour of members. As the commune is officially a registered association (Kommune e.V.), we have a formal statute and a few elected officials as required by German law to regulate the association’s affairs. However, this statute has practically no influence on our daily lives. A part of our life is regulated by our adherence to a pamphlet of Aims and Principles (*Grundsatzpapier* – available on our website) formulated in 1983 by some members of the founding group. This contains the basic main ideology of the commune and ideas about the structures thought necessary to put the ideas and ideals into practice. Acceptance of these Aims and Principles is a condition of joining the commune. However, they are not rules as such, they are either guidelines about how we believe social and environmental behaviour should be, or are proposed structures for our work and life here. (How some of the ideas are put into practice can be seen in our German language “*Ergänzungspapier*” on our homepage.)

As one of the main principles is consensus decision making, much of our conduct is regulated by the decisions which have been made through the years of the commune’s existence. These decisions are all gathered together in a number of files stored in our commune common-room. They are all clearly indexed, both by date of decision and by theme or subject. This accumulation of decisions covers a wide range of topics, but part of it comes close to being a collection of rules. For example, there are decisions made about limiting the use of mobile phones within the commune buildings and gardens, about types and levels of expenditure which have to be approved in consensus by the commune as a whole, about the minimum quantity of kitchen work which every member has to do per month, etc. There is also the (unwritten) principle of subsidiarity: many other rules of conduct are decided at a lower level, in the work collectives and in the living groups. The work collectives have a high degree of autonomy in how they work and conduct business, as do the living groups in how they structure the life in the housing space they share. At this level, too, decisions are made in consensus, usually by discussion until a solution is found which is acceptable to all. Most collectives and living groups have regular meetings for planning, discussing themes and making necessary decisions. Sometimes “3rd party” mediation or facilitation is needed to arrive at the decision.

Proposals for new decisions, or revising/renewing old ones, can be made by individuals or by groups of individuals (work-collectives, living groups, plenary meeting discussion groups or other commune sub-groups). Proposals for communal decisions, regardless of how important they seem, are always made in writing, with a clearly worded and (hopefully) unambiguous formulation of the decision, together with the proposed date when the decision should be approved, with an explanatory text giving the reasons for proposing the decision, with supporting arguments, extra details etc. The written proposal is hung up on our main notice board in the commune common-room at least two weeks before the plenary meeting when it is to be approved.

We have a weekly general assembly (Plenum), every Tuesday evening in the commune common-room, starting at 20.30h. The second part of this plenum is made up of a number of discussion groups meeting separately. These small groups usually go on until about 23.00h.

During the period after the proposal has been made public, communards are expected to read it and think about it. If they have criticism or worries, they can delay the decision by hanging a notice up, detailing their criticism, proposing modifications or changes, or asking for further discussion. If the decision has been proposed by one of the plenary meeting discussion groups, the critical communard is expected to join that group for a period to discuss the proposal and arrive at a formulation acceptable to all. If the proposal comes from an individual or another commune sub-group, extra meetings are usually arranged between the parties involved, sometimes with mediation.

Occasionally, an extra meeting for the whole commune will be called. Each communard has a veto on decisions, but the veto, in the sense of a clear and unreversible NO, is seldom used. On the other hand, depending on the criticism, doubts or problems with the decision proposed, the discussion can take a long time before consensus is achieved. A period of several weeks can occur between the original proposal and the actual (compromise) decision. If there is no criticism, or when the modified decision is accepted by all proponents and critics, the decision is read out at the general meeting. When no voice is raised against it here, it is taken as decided. The decision is noted in the minutes of the meeting. Copies of the decision are filed and entries are made in that file's index and in a separate index file where all decisions are listed.

Only a small number of our decisions can be regarded as rules or some form of regulation of behaviour. As decisions have been made in consensus members of the commune generally adhere to the decisions, and it is in our interest to do so. On the other hand, we do not expect every communard to be an enthusiastic supporter of every decision made. It is enough that the person can live with the decision made without too many doubts or criticisms. This means that some decisions may not be followed 100%.

However, there is no form of coercion to follow rules, nor are there any punishments or sanctions when people do not stick to a decision. Should a communard in some way not follow an agreed code of conduct other members of the commune will almost certainly speak with him or her, but social pressure or criticism is the only measure that will be taken.

During the 6 month probationary test period before a person joins the commune, she or he will get to know the general codes of conduct which exist in the commune. Each new probationer has 3 communards to “look after” her/him and say where things are and what the customs and rules of the commune are. From the very first visit, it is possible for a person to look through the files where decisions are collected, but most of the information about rules and past decisions will be transmitted by word-of-mouth. If a probationer or new communard makes some sort of mistake, e.g. arriving late for kitchen duty, leaving one of our cars without fuel in it, or using a tram ticket without writing their name on the mobility plan, etc, she or he will be told by other communards who are directly effected. No one is expected to know everything during the first months here, but, by the end of the first year, the written and unwritten rules should be clear to everyone.

As mentioned at the start, an ecovillage or a co-housing project needs other forms of rules and regulation than an income sharing commune. However, some communes have more written regulations than the Kommune Niederkaufungen. For example, both Twin Oaks (USA) and Svanholm (DK) have much clearer rules about how much the members there have to work, and in other communes a minimum financial contribution and a minimum number of hours work for the community is also often clearly regulated. A lot depends on the legal structure of the project, its forms of ownership and its “housing/living structures”. An intentional community with private ownership of housing, small family structures, more financial inequality and less intensive contact between members than in a commune will almost certainly need more written rules and formal regulations than Niederkaufungen.



Solidarity Economy in Kommune Niederkaufungen

Kommune Niederkaufungen is one of the largest intentional communities in Germany. It is an egalitarian, income sharing commune with sixty adult members and around twenty children and teenagers, living and working together in a complex of former farm buildings in the village of Niederkaufungen near Kassel, central Germany.

Solidarity Economy, defined by the **US Solidarity Economy Network** as “ *an alternative development framework that is grounded in practice and in the principles of: **solidarity, mutualism, and cooperation; equity in all dimensions (race/ethnicity/ nationality, class, gender, LGBTQ); social well-being over profit and the unfettered rule of the market; sustainability; social and economic democracy; and pluralism, allowing for different forms in different contexts, open to continual change and driven from the bottom-up***”, is the basic economic idea in the commune of Niederkaufungen, both in the interactions within the commune and through many of its economic activities outside. As well as having a radical, completely communal economy internally, the commune can be seen as part of the "third sector" in which economic activity is aimed at expressing practical solidarity with disadvantaged groups of people, and as a participant in the struggle of those seeking to build an economy and culture of solidarity beyond capitalism in the present. Indeed, most members of the commune believe that solving our most pressing political, economic, social and environmental problems requires a revolutionary transformation on a global scale, with networks of groups and individuals working up from the grassroots to influence the wider society. The commune has been actively proposing and attempting this for over twenty years.

Since the foundation of the commune in **1986**, its **core principles** have included: **common ownership of all land, buildings, means of production and motor vehicles; income sharing; consensus decision making; work in self-managed, non-hierarchical collectives; and a reduction of patriarchal, competitive structures**. Politically, it sees itself as a **left-wing project**. In addition, a number of measures have been taken to reduce the “ecological footprint” of the commune, because “living beyond our means” is both leading to the degradation of large parts of the planet and is unjust towards the millions of poor people living in those regions.

Kommune Niederkaufungen is a member of the **Kommuja Network of Political Communes**, which has a fund for the support of new and existing communes and which helps to start and organize new communities. For more information see: www.kommuja.de



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Homepage: www.kommune-niederkaufungen.de

Common Ownership and Income Sharing

“From each according to ability, to each according to need”.

By having a completely communal internal economy, with income sharing combined with common ownership of land, buildings, means of production and motor-vehicles, the commune ensures economic equality for all of its members. All the resources of the commune are at the disposal of all of the members. Upon being admitted as a member of the commune each makes over her or his goods and capital to the commune association, and has the right to use all of the services and goods of the commune. Independently from how it is generated, either by external work or work in the commune's self-managed collectives, all income goes into a common fund, and communards can take out and use as much money as they need for economic activity outside the commune. There is no link between what a member of the commune earns and what she or he can take out of the common fund.

The reason for income sharing

The income sharing system within a commune removes the inequalities which can exist in other forms of intentional communities where a non income-sharing structure means that generally each person works a number of days (or half days) for wages outside the community (to pay rent and for foodstuff), while at the same time having to do a certain amount of work for the community. This system results in some inequalities in working conditions, income and stress, as some communarians are self-employed, while others are employees, some are well paid, others less well paid, some have greater job security, others are in precarious employment. While people in these communities are mutually supportive on many levels within their homes, sharing and exchanging with each other in many ways, they are generally continuing to work under normal capitalist conditions, with all that that implies.

Self-managed Work Collectives

“by their labours they have lifted up tyrants and tyranny; and by denying to labour for hire they shall pull them down again” Gerrard Winstanley, 1649.

Nearly all communards work in self-managed collective businesses based in the commune rather than work outside as employees in hierarchically organised economic enterprises. Men and women have equal rights and equal responsibilities in the collectives. The collectives decide autonomously and in consensus on production methods, working hours and conditions, holiday entitlements and division of labour within the collective. The commune enterprises and workshops try to work ecologically. Even when collectives and workers' coops have to deal within the capitalist market system, they do, at least, break down the relationship between boss and worker which normally exists. A small number of communards work as wage earners outside the commune, mostly in education. The collectives include: **a seminar centre**, offering courses on communal themes, Solidarity Economy, non-violent communication (NVC) and sustainability; **a group of NVC trainers**; **a building firm**, with a **smithing/metal workshop**; **a carpentry and joinery workshop**, using European wood and no tropical hard woods; **an organic food catering firm**, which also cooks for the commune; **a certified "Bioland" organic market garden** producing organic seeds and with **a farm shop**; **a fruit/orchard collective** with juice pressing and jam making; **an EU certified organic dairy farm** with cheese making; **a kindergarten** for one to six year olds; **an administration collective** and a **community consultancy group**; and a **day-care**

centre for old people with dementia. With its products and services, the commune is well integrated into the local economy.

Towards Social Equality

In an attempt to achieve more egalitarian social-structures, the communards in Niederkaufungen have tried to reduce or abolish oppressive patriarchal and competitive structures within the commune. In addition, all major decisions are made in consensus. The new internal structures include:

Life in small living groups: Rather than live in traditional nuclear families, the members of the commune in Niederkaufungen live in eleven small living groups. Two of these groups are "Womens/Lesbian" living groups, there is one men's living group, the rest are mixed. Some of the living groups have parent couples with children living together, but there are also single parents with children in some groups. Nearly all children have one or more self-chosen adult carer extra to their parents. The commune tries to keep to a ratio of one child per three adults in order that there are enough non-parents who can help with the children.

Childcare and cooking done by collectives: From the age of one, commune children can attend the commune **Kindergarten "Die Wühlmäuse"** in the mornings. This enables both parents to work, not just one (usually the man). The Kindergarten evolved from a self-organised childcare group and has places for children from the village of Kaufungen as well as for commune children. As most people work in the commune, parents are near their children if needed, and children regularly get to visit commune workplaces to see what is going on. Commune children get to know village children through Kindergarten attendance, and village kids and their parents get to know communal life in exchange. Many commune children have friends who are happy to visit them because there is so much to see and do, and a lot more freedom than in the nuclear family household.

From Monday to Friday, lunch-time cooking for the commune is done by the kitchen collective, **Komm Menu**. The collective is, at present, made up of four men and one woman. The "centralized" preparation of meals by a collective again frees up communards from some housework usually done by women. The collective also does the bulk buying of foodstuff.

Other housework done on a rota basis: Preparation of breakfast, of the evening meal, of meals at the weekends, the dish-washing and cleaning of the kitchen are all done on a rota basis by all communards. Cleaning the rest of the commune is done by volunteers, and each small living group organises its housework autonomously. Running the wood-burning central heating system is done by a team of volunteers who organise their own rota. Thus men do the much same amount of "women's work" as the female communards. There is a great degree of freedom of choice about whether you cook, wash dishes, or do other household and kitchen chores, but it is clear that everyone has to do their fair share. And everyone has to wash their own clothes and clean their own rooms..

Consensus Decision Making: Most forms of decision making and governance result in a minority of people (or some times the majority) being dissatisfied with the decisions or being discriminated against or oppressed. In order to ensure that decisions are made which can be accepted by all communards, major decisions affecting all commune members are made through a system of consensus decision making. Decisions within the living groups and work collectives are also made in consensus.

Justice through environmental action and economic activity

In accordance with the idea, “Live more simply, so that others may simply live”, the members of Kommune Niederkaufungen have, since the beginning, introduced various types of environmentally friendly technology and changed some forms of behaviour.

Mobility: There is avoidance of many journeys through working in the commune and most local journeys are by bicycle and public transport. Six motorcars, two minibuses and two small trucks are shared by 75 people and there is one mini-electro vehicle. Members of the commune make almost no air journeys. Most of the commune's motor cars run on rape seed oil but there is some discussion in the commune at present about the use of so-called biofuels.

Green Building: Renovations and rebuilding of our properties is done using environmentally friendly materials and there is recycling of materials used in plumbing, electrical installations, flooring (parquet), and tiling etc. Buildings are centrally heated with 2 wood-burning stoves.

Ethical Consumption: Within the commune, there is wide use of second-hand goods, such as clothing, textiles, furniture, household goods and appliances, and bicycles. On purchasing new goods there is the choice of durable, high-quality, repairable and ecological consumer goods. In addition, there is the purchase and use of ecological washing powders and liquids, cleaning products and body-care products. Consumption as a substitute for satisfaction of needs is questioned.

Nutrition: Where possible, fair trade, organically produced, regional and seasonal foodstuffs are purchased, and there is promotion of these production and trade structures. About 35% of the commune's foodstuff (vegetables, fruit, milk products and meat) comes from its own organic farming (dairy farm and market gardens). The commune makes many bulk purchases and there is avoidance of over-packed products and rubbish.

Political activities: The commune supports a number of social and ecological projects, both regional and international. 3.2% of commune income is donated to such projects. Many communards are involved in political activity and educational work about ecology, intentional communities, alternative networks, solidarity economy and peace work.

Results of these measures

Research by the **University of Kassel** together with members of Kommune Niederkaufungen and other communities shows that, **per person per year, the CO2 emissions of the commune members are about 37% of the german national average.** As the national average is about six times too high for sustainability, also the members of the Niederkaufungen commune are "over the limit". We still have some way to go before we near a sustainable life style which is in solidarity with the majority of the world's population and is in harmony with the planet.

More details (**German**) about the research can be found at: www.usf.uni-kassel.de/glww/

For a more detailed description of Kommune Niederkaufungen in English see the article
“Somewhere over the rainbow...” about twenty years commune life, 1986 – 2006, at:
<http://www.kommune-niederkaufungen.de/englisch/englisch.php>

Political Communes in 21st. century Germany.

All intentional communities are to some extent political. Whether eco-villages or monasteries, hippy land communes or urban co-housing, all have political aspects, political directions and political effects on the behaviour of the members. Some groups are more capitalistic or conservative in their values, others are collectivist, cooperative and practice mutual aid. Some intentional communities promote freedom, others preach obedience to a dogma, an ideology or/and a leader. With the simple definition of a commune as an intentional community with 100% income sharing, the FIC online directory lists under 200 communes world wide. Some of these are religious institutions such as abbeys and monasteries, others are anthroposophic Camphill villages.

Income sharing is no guarantee of complete equality in a community, as other (hierarchical) factors such as patriarchal structures or racism may work against it. Thus, it is possible to have conservative, authoritarian and right-wing communes, and there are a number of historical examples and some modern ones. The Völkische settlements such as Donnershag, Heiland and Eden are examples of how right-wing ideas, widespread in Weimar Germany, such as anti-semitism and anti-bolshevism, and the conservative idea of the sexual division of labour could combine with cooperative enterprises and communal life on the land. The AAO Friedrichshof commune in the nineteen eighties is an example of a formerly left-wing commune coming under the increasingly authoritarian influence of a leader and his elite circle willing to financially, psychologically and sexually exploit the commune members.

==Political.....==

The communes in the Kommuja Network of political communes are mostly made up of communarians who believe in emancipation, egalitarianism, solidarity and cooperation. They are green, libertarian communists whose left-wing ideas are based on some Marxism (alienation at work), some of the sixties/seventies New Left ideas, writings and actions (extra- and anti-parliamentary opposition), lots of Feminism, Anti-militarism and Environmentalism, some late twentieth century counter-culture and some anarchism. In contrast to the militant communes of the late nineteen sixties and early seventies, non-violence has become a major core value and political strategy.

==.....Communes==

Most of the nearly thirty Kommuja groups have income sharing and a communal economy as their ideal. About two thirds of the network are rural communes. With a few exceptions, the communes have less than twenty adult members.

In the German commune book, "Das Kommune Buch", communes are defined by Elisabeth Voß as communities which:

live and work together,

have a communal economy, i.e. common finances and common property (land, buildings, means of production),

have communal decision making - usually consensus decision making,

try to reduce hierarchy and hierarchical structures,

have communalisation of housework, childcare and other communal tasks,

have equality between women and men,

have low ecological footprints through sharing and saving resources.

==The Network.....of political communes==

The Kommuja Network communes are also in contact with a number of intentional communities and eco-villages outside the network and with other networks. However, there is a certain amount of scepticism about the sense in having contact with groups which have a radically different view of the world from our own or, indeed, whose ideas are in opposition to ours, just because they are intentional communities.

“As we see ourselves - 2010” -A Work in Progress.

For a number of years now, members of the German political communes movement have been working on a statement of common principles that to some degree defines the network.

A number of discussion meetings have taken place, there's been an internal Internet forum, and the “Kommuja” periodical has also been used for an exchange of ideas and proposals.

The network has existed for a number of years and is slowly growing. At present about 30 communes are members, with a wide variety of structures and sizes. Altogether, there are about 500 communards in the movement.

Each issue of the movement's “Kommuja” periodical is produced by a different commune on a rotation basis, as a regular medium for coordination and information. There is a commune solidarity fund, which can give financial help to member communes or new projects. Every year there is a commune meeting where members of the various

communes get together for a couple of days for discussion, improved contact and exchange. In addition, there is also an annual Commune Info tour where members of several communes visit a number of towns and cities to present the communal idea, and talk about the projects they live and work in. Until 2004 there had been no statement of principles about how we see ourselves.

The documents presented below are the first attempts in this direction. They are still being discussed, both within the movement and within the individual communes themselves. Some of the wording is also still being discussed. (Bracketed words). Moreover, a number of themes have not yet been dealt with, and it is to be expected that a final statement of common principles will include passages dealing with the patriarchal nuclear family, equality, personal relationships, and our solidarity with other alternative and self managed projects that are attempting to get away from the capitalist system.

It is not enough that we want to live in a different way; our task is to learn how to do it.

The political self-conception of the Kommuja communes:

the statement of principles 2010.

We are attempting to draw near to our (political) Utopias through our life in communes, yet do not see community as an end in itself. The groups are inspired by solidarity, and by libertarian, emancipatory, and ecological ideas and thoughts. The communes in the network share the following basic ideas:

We want cooperation with one another on an equal footing; we reject hierarchical power structures.

Therefore, structural equality exists within our communes; discriminatory structures are to be uncovered and changed. We strive towards straightforwardness, transparency and traceability in all communal procedures. We make our decisions in consensus in order to find solutions that everyone can support. It is important for us that the people in the commune can develop themselves further and that there is a basic willingness towards debate, communication and participation in what is happening in the group. The basic idea of our life together involves direct communication; we don't want to solve conflicts and differences through structures. We want an attentive interaction with one another. We seek to give children space where they can develop and unfold at their own speed in accordance with their inclinations and aptitudes, and where they can independently choose relationships with further people. People with various sexual orientations live in the communes in differing forms of relationships which set themselves in contrast to the social standardization of nuclear families, single-households and heterosexual couples.

We want to free ourselves from the dominant ideas of compensation for performance and of vested rights.

Therefore, our economies are based on solidarity; e.g. with a common purse for all where we can take out sums of money based on our personal needs. In the process, we can scrutinize and question our habits of consumption and create time and

space for meeting each other as people. As private possession of capital, real estate and the means of production leads to inequalities of power and to dependence, we base our communes on common ownership of property. We don't want to define people based on their performance. Therefore, we seek to disengage ourselves from employment by others (heteronomous work). In many communes, work is collectively organised and self-managed. The communes in the network mutually support one another through the personal exchange of knowledge, goods and work.

The political communes want to change the social relationships.

Up to a certain point, we do this through our alternative way of living. Our long term objectives are egalitarian (free and equitable) structures which make an emancipatory, ecological life in solidarity possible. Thereby, we set an example against the increasing atomisation and separation in a society which is heavily based on consumerism, acquisition and the exploitation of nature, and for human cooperation and sharing. The individuals in the communes are also active in various political fields, such as anti-fascism, anti-nuclear campaigning, internationalism (BUKO), free media, international solidarity, and engagement for plant bio-diversity and against genetic modification.

(2010 translation of the provisional version from 2009)

“As we see ourselves”: A draft theses paper formulated by representatives of the German political communes movement at the commune meeting in Kassel, May 2005.

The political communes want to change the (existing) social conditions. This change is a permanent and continual process, which we take part in conscious of the fact that the starting-point, the commune, constitutes just one possibility. Our alternative way of life, which we promote, is just as much a part of our political engagement as the action against repressive conditions.

The goal is a society with structures based on solidarity, emancipation and equal rights, (in which the self-determined development of the individual is made possible).

Capitalism is completely unsuitable for this.

Our way of understanding and decision-making is the principle of consensus. For a consensus group to function it is important (necessary, imperative) that the people involved listen to each other and deal with each other in a careful way.

As private property can lead to differences in power and to dependence, our communes are based on the common ownership of capital, real estate and the means of production.

We avoid the employment of wage earning workers and wish ourselves to be employed as little as possible as wage dependent workers.

We wish to free ourselves from the dominant way of thinking where people are valued through comparison and contrast with each other. We do not want to judge people by their so-called performance. (We wish to value social, manual and intellectual abilities equally).

Our goal is that a material and social provision for all is guaranteed, and that all (socially) necessary activities can be conducted in a self-determined way.

We find ourselves within a process that gives rise to a community culture, which is based on solidarity, reliability and a consciousness of responsibility. Each and every one of us is required to look after his and her interests and at the same time to have awareness of the others.

We wish for ourselves a fundamental willingness for discussion and debate, both on a personal and on a factual level. Communication and participation by all is important for a lively group process. Communication, good will, and the careful handling of ones self and others are the personal responsibility of all of us.

Ecological behaviour is, for us, the consequence of global solidarity and the solidarity between generations, and not an additional contradiction that will automatically disappear when capitalism is overcome. Communes are a framework, which offer support in the personal coming to terms with traditional habits, and with the question, "What do I really need in order to be able to behave ecologically in the future?"

A common approach to dealing with materials and financial resources makes it possible to live more economically and to be able to favour ecologically sustainable products. In decision making and dealing with problems, taking ecological aspects into consideration is just as important as considering the social, economic and cultural standpoints.



Visiting Niederkaufungen

Like most other communities, we prefer people to contact us well in advance to ask about visiting. **Please include some autobiographical information, your reasons for wanting to visit, the date and length of visit that you would prefer.** As we sometimes accept visitors on the basis of bed and board in exchange for work, let us know what work you would like to do and how you would like to participate. We do not have a hostel/guest house for paying guests. **We keep one week every month “visitor-free” without guests.** **This means that the absolute maximum length of visit is 3 weeks.** **All guests must have their own health and accident insurance.**

Please Note: We do not have a special person responsible for visitors, nor do we have a “Visitors Programme”. Requests to visit are hung up on one of our noticeboards. Individual communards may then volunteer to host a visitor.

(This also means that sometimes no one is willing to host a visitor.)

Requests to visit in German have a better chance of being answered than those in English, but many people speak English so it also depends on how much

information you send us whether a communitard feels motivated to offer to host.

We especially welcome visits and exchange with members of other egalitarian intentional communities.

For environmental reasons, we prefer visitors to come by public transport. There is a good tram service from the main Intercity station in Kassel. We are 5 minutes walk from the nearest tram stop. We hope that visitors from outside Germany are aware of the damage being done to our planet caused by pollution from air transport. (For information about what alternatives are possible, see the Evulog section of www.economads.com)

People interested in joining the commune must take part in an orientation weekend or one of the seminars in our seminar centre. These are in German. As one of our five main principles is consensus decision making, speaking German is a prerequisite for active participation in our discussions. For more information about the membership process, the seminars and orientation weekends, please look at our website. www.kommune-niederkaufungen.de

We do not employ non-communitards and cannot offer paid jobs.

For more information in English about the commune, click “english information” at the top of our homepage. Further enquiries or questions can be sent by email to: info (at) kommune-niederkaufungen.de

Kommune Niederkaufungen is one of the largest intentional communities in Germany. It is an egalitarian, income sharing commune with sixty adult members and twenty children and teenagers, living and working together in a complex of former farm buildings in the village of Niederkaufungen near Kassel, central Germany.

Since the foundation of the commune in 1986, its core principles have included: common ownership of all land, buildings, means of production and motor vehicles; income sharing; consensus decision making; work in self-managed, non-hierarchical collectives; and a reduction of patriarchal, competitive structures. The communitards see the commune as a left-wing project. With increasing awareness of peak oil and sustainability, a number of measures have been taken to reduce the “ecological footprint” of the commune, because “living beyond our means” is both leading to the degradation of large parts of the planet and is unjust towards the millions of poor people living in those regions. Research by the University of Kassel together with members of Kommune Niederkaufungen and other communities shows that, per person per year, the CO2 emissions of the commune members are about 37% of the german national average. As the national average is about

six times too high for sustainability, also the members of the Niederkaufungen commune are "over the limit". We still have some way to go before we near a sustainable life style which is in solidarity with the majority of the world's population and is in harmony with the planet.

The commune's collectives include: a seminar centre, offering courses on communal themes, (Solidarity Economy, non-violent communication – NVC, and sustainability); a group of NVC trainers; a building firm, with a smithing/metal workshop; a carpentry and joinery workshop, using European wood and no tropical hard woods; an organic food catering firm, which also cooks for the commune; a certified "Bioland" organic market garden producing organic seeds and with a farm shop; a fruit/orchard collective with juice pressing and jam making; an EU certified organic dairy farm with cheese making; a kindergarten for one to six year olds; an administration collective and a community consultancy group; a day-care centre for old people with dementia and a research project with electro-cycles and small electro-vehicles. With its products and services, the commune is well integrated into the local economy.

Kommune Niederkaufungen is a member of the Kommuja Network of Political Communes, which has a fund for the support of new and existing communes and which helps to start and organize new communities. For more information : www.kommuja.de



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Homepage: www.kommune-niederkaufungen.de