



*Proceedings of the Sixth International Permaculture Conference
September-October 1996, Perth, Western Australia*

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Crystal Waters and Other Eco-villages

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[Presentation Report]

Crystal Waters was never advertised until the people involved actually had something to sell. It took more than fifteen months before the land was secured, it had council support and it actually had something to sell. Large numbers of other projects get lots of early support but lots of people, too impatient, leave the project and the project collapses. There is a real need to be patient, not to build up too much hype. It is really important to keep up good communications.

Organisation of Crystal Waters

There are two organisations within Crystal Waters – the Body Corporate and the Co-op. The Body Corporate is purely legal whereas the Co-op is purely entrepreneurial. The Co-op comprises everyone who owns land as well as some friends of Crystal Waters. The Co-op is the entrepreneurial aspect of Crystal Waters. Manages the resources, the camping area and the village area. It meets every three weeks, with its directors empowered to make decisions on behalf of the entire community.

Co-ops date back to the early part of this century. They were predominantly started by farmers. The Crystal Waters co-op is used for a business which is run by a very few people. The large numbers of members pay a twenty dollar membership fee.

Legal issues and dispute resolution

The Body Corporate is a legal requirement whose members are elected once a year. It has the role of administering common land, eighty per cent for the member's benefit. The Body Corporate has sixteen by-laws. If someone is in breach of a by-law, there are firstly attempts to resolve the dispute amicably. If the dispute is not resolved it can be taken to the community "elders". These elders have total community support. They have the necessary talents and skills to help resolve conflicts within the community. If this fails to work then the Body Corporate gets involved. If this still fails to work then the dispute is taken to an arbitrator which the State Government provides. The ultimate recourse is to take the dispute to court. There has only been one instance where a dispute has reached the state arbiter.

Children

The interests of children are paramount. Some people bring children along to meetings while other people pool money to pay for child minding. There are many interest clusters within the community. The people with small children form a cluster. The people within this cluster look after each others children. As a result of these interconnected clusters, messages get around the community very fast.

Meeting places

Meeting places are very important for the transmission of information. In a Switzerland community there was a baker's oven where only women were allowed to go. All of the women in this village would use this oven. In the process lots of information was shared amongst the women. It was easy to ascertain who needed help and support. In our society all of the meeting places have been destroyed. At Crystal Waters there is no one place where everyone can meet.

Size of the community

There are approximately one hundred and seventy people living at Crystal Waters. Including visitors, there are about 200 people at Crystal Waters at any one time. Quite a lot of literature states that three hundred people is a good size for a community. It is an economically stable size for the community.

Decision making

People are able to vote from the age of sixteen. However not many of the sixteen year olds do actually participate. When Max's son was fifteen he wanted to have a bow and arrow but there was a by law which prohibited the keeping of fire arms. The young people applied to use bow and arrows. The adults making the decisions felt that they could be doing something more meaningful. and decided that the young people couldn't use bow and arrows. Decision making authority is passed on to the executive and the Body Corporate. Everyone can attend the meetings which are held every three weeks. The community holds forums when large issues are at stake. Any person can call a forum at any time. The forum doesn't have the authority to make decisions as such. However if a vote is taken then that is a strong indicator to the decision makers of the community's wishes.

Raising development funds

The project started out as a small group, developing Crystal Waters on paper. Some leaflets were distributed, describing the dream. These leaflets invited people to become part of a unique project. When people inquired about the project they were sent out a package including a deposit form. This form asked people to put their money where their mouths were, asking for \$8,500. Without these people, without such trust, the project wouldn't have been possible. The money was put in to long term deposits with an ethical investment bank. When approximately forty deposits had been made, it was possible to enter in to the necessary contracts for the development of infrastructure. If the project coordinators had gone to a bank the cost of developing the land would have been approximately twenty five per cent more expensive.

The process used to raise funds was not strictly legal but not strictly illegal either. At any given time people were able to request the return of their money plus interest earned, less one per cent management fee within three months. The people who put down money for the project were asked to become part of the management team. When the lots were sold \$330,000 profit was made which was put back in to the project. The Co-op spent the money on projects such as a business area, a bunk house and a children's creche, projects which benefited the people who made the project possible. It is necessary to remember that any project which does not make a profit makes a loss.

Schools

There is no plan to build a Primary School. There is however space if there is the desire or need to build a school in future. Children are bussed to a nearby school. This seems to be a satisfactory arrangement for the time being.

Once you have achieved enough confidence as a designer it is really important to leave gaps in the plans. These gaps leave options open for people further down the track. Took about nine months of observation before the design was started. Knowledge of the land has increased considerably during the last eight years. Its been good to have remaining gaps to leave possibilities open.

Differences between Crystal Waters and Kookaburra Park

In the case of Crystal Waters, three of the four designers live at Crystal Waters whereas in the case of Kookaburra Park this was not the case. There had been other developments in the mean time and you learn from your mistakes and successes. At Kookaburra Park it was a developer which visited Crystal Waters. He had done developments for ten to fifteen years. The dominant development outlook was to buy a piece of land and slice it up. This developer realised that he couldn't do that any more, there had to be a better way to develop land. He still had to make a profit and that comes from a real estate agent's viewpoint. Kookaburra Park is different to Crystal Waters, not better or worse. An advantage of Kookaburra Park is that it is near to Gin Gin. It has schools within cycling distance. It has a major centre, Bundaberg, twenty five minutes away. The soils are poorer at Kookaburra Park. Both of them are using similar design principles to develop.

People buying blocks but not doing anything with them

There are a few people who have bought blocks of land but who haven't moved yet. They probably have very good reasons for not having moved. This has not been a problem really.