



# CASE STUDY

By

B the Light Consulting  
Brenna St. Onge

*Ecovilla*

SANTA MATEO, COSTA RICA



**Why?** We are living in a time of system breakdown. The structures we have depended on for generations are changing rapidly and we can no longer rely on them for stability (food, healthcare, government, infrastructure etc.). As the polycrisis (multiple crises that fuel each other) intensifies, how we organize locally to strengthen community fibers will determine our experience and well-being in the years to come.

**What?** Regenerative Living represents a way of living in deep connection with self, each other and the natural world. It is a paradigm shift beyond extraction, and consumption that represents a way of being, acting, governing, and living in deep harmony with nature. It is the fullest expression of self-sufficiency and resilient community design. Rather than simply mitigating future climate impacts, regenerative living seeks to enhance the vitality, abundance, and long-term health of social, economic, and ecological systems; creating the conditions for all life to thrive through holistic management.

**How?** The systems break down we are living through was human generated and we can recode the systems to create shared prosperity on a healthy planet. This way of living is alive all over the world, it is just not evenly distributed or widely known.

The Regenerative World Quest (Quest) is an immersive research project to study and uplift communities all over the world that are living in a regenerative way. We will explore the systems, successes, challenges, and insights to create a database of scalable solutions. How can we redesign human systems that are healthier, more resilient and holistically managed? By honoring indigenous wisdom, and modern innovations, the Quest seeks to uplift and replicate best practices to craft a blueprint for shared prosperity on a healthy planet.

**Who?** The project was founded by Brenna St. Onge and is fiscally sponsored by Savory International, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. This case study is part of a series of ten projects researched in Costa Rica as part of the Regenerative World Quest's 2025 fieldwork. There are three phases to the Regenerative World Quest: 1- immersive, international research, 2- content creation and awareness building and 3- local implementation.





# Ecovilla

SANTA MATEO, COSTA RICA

**FOUNDER:**

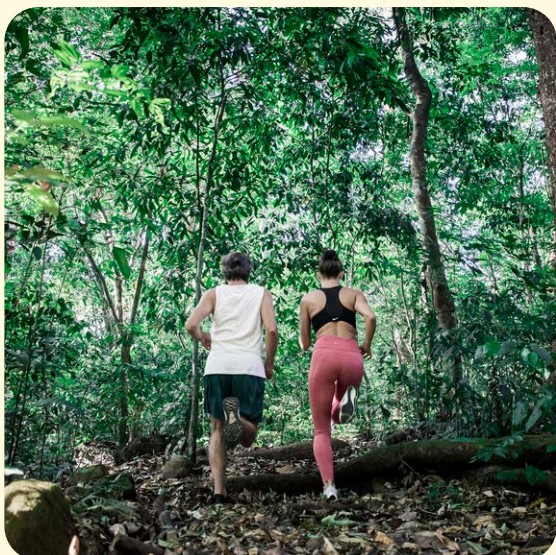
Marcelo Valansi

**WEBSITE:**

<https://laecovilla.com/>

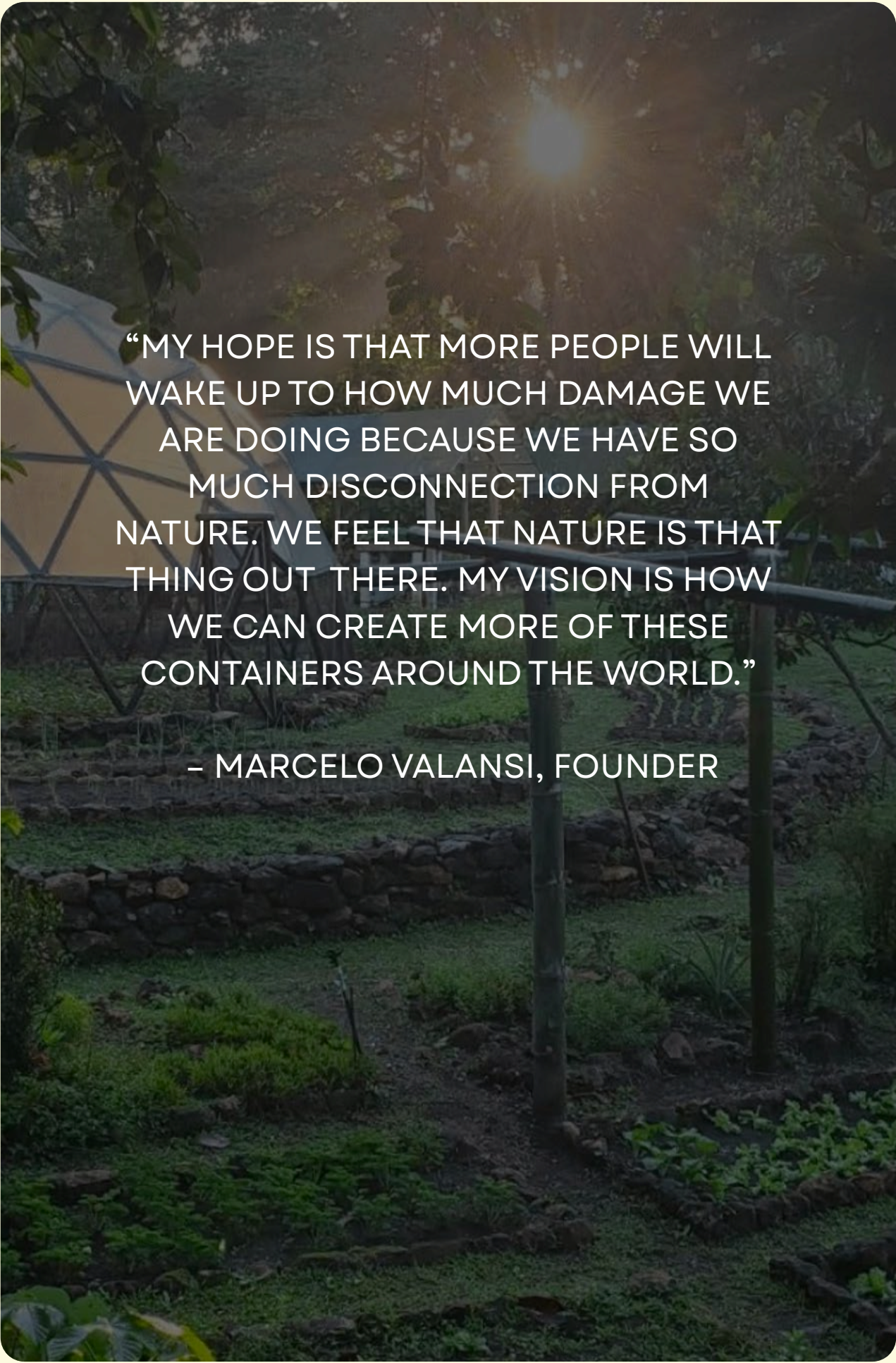
**SHORT YOU TUBE VIDEO:**

@Regenerative World Quest: Eco Villas



The Ecovillas represent two communities nestled in the hills of San Mateo, Costa Rica, about one hour from San Jose. The original EcoVilla was founded in 2012, while the newer development, Ecovilla San Mateo, began in 2021. Both Ecovillas demonstrate a strong commitment to sustainability across several domains, including climate resilience, carbon footprint reduction, biodiversity enhancement, and resource circularity. In addition to the two near San Mateo, there is a third project on the horizon about 45 minutes outside of Santa Teresa.

The communities have achieved significant reforestation milestones while fostering a culturally diverse population. Governance is organized through democratic, committee-based processes and consent-based decision-making. Oversight is provided by a central leadership team led by co-founder Marcelo Valansi. A three-part investment team guides the project and maintains an expected return on the investment.



“MY HOPE IS THAT MORE PEOPLE WILL  
WAKE UP TO HOW MUCH DAMAGE WE  
ARE DOING BECAUSE WE HAVE SO  
MUCH DISCONNECTION FROM  
NATURE. WE FEEL THAT NATURE IS THAT  
THING OUT THERE. MY VISION IS HOW  
WE CAN CREATE MORE OF THESE  
CONTAINERS AROUND THE WORLD.”

– MARCELO VALANSI, FOUNDER

## PROJECT SPECIFICATIONS:

- Both communities are zoned as “Condominiums” and governed by the Condominium Property Regulatory Law.
- **Ecovilla San Mateo:** 200 hectares, planned for 300+ families across six neighborhoods. Founded in 2021, with 95.5% green space. Shared spaces are now in construction with titles for private homes expected by summer 2025.
- **Ecovilla Original:** 17 hectares, home to 43 families from 29 countries. Founded in 2012 with 95% green space. Fully developed; some homes/lots available for resale.

## SHARED AMENITIES:

Both communities offer the following amenities to their residents:

- Community gardens
- Recycling stations
- Composting areas
- Community Center & Kitchen
- Village center with retail shops and a coffee shop
- Hiking, running, and biking trails
- Yoga and movement spaces
- Medicinal garden
- Natural swimming holes and creeks
- Machuga River
- Chlorine-free pool



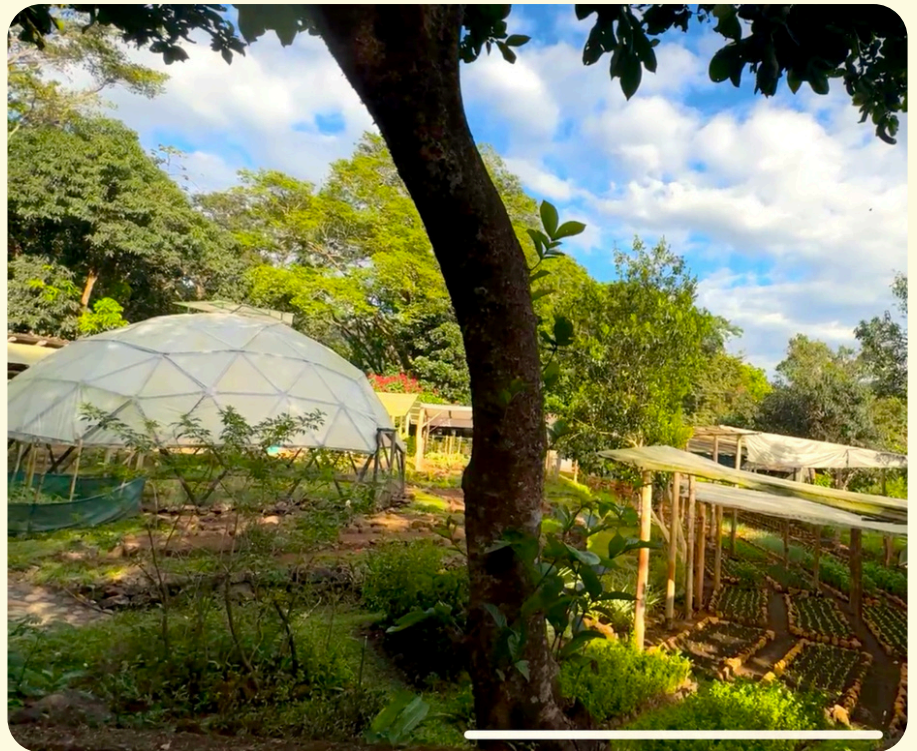
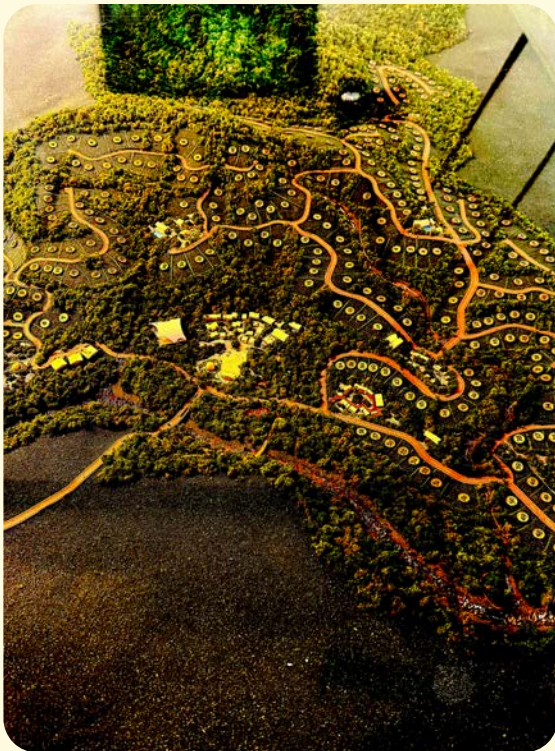
## SOCIAL STRUCTURES, GOVERNANCE, EDUCATION, AND COMMUNITY:

Ecovilla cultivates a socially dynamic, self-organizing community guided by shared leadership and committee-based governance using a consensus model. While a professional team (including co-founder Marcelo Valansi) oversees broader management, residents shape daily life through majority-based decision-making. The community is home to families from over 29 countries, and celebrates cultural diversity and inclusion. Families are supported by the Real World School's bilingual, nature-based curriculum. Intergenerational engagement, weekly markets, and discounted "Opportunity Lots" for locals further strengthen social equity, cultural exchange, and resilience.



## LAND REGENERATION EFFORTS AND MEASUREMENTS:

- 95% of land in both communities is designated for green space.
- Reforestation includes a nursery with 10,791 trees (223 native species; 743 planted).
- Community leads ongoing regeneration of the Machuga watershed.
- Syntropic agroforestry and fruit tree planting are in progress.
- Prioritize eco-construction using recycled and reclaimed materials.



## FOOD SELF-SUFFICIENCY:

- Organic permaculture gardens are maintained on-site, with a goal to support household and community food production.
- The community aims to reach 50% food self-sufficiency; current estimates range around 26%.
- Additional food is sourced from local farmers to supplement community-grown produce.
- A syntropic agroforestry system and extensive fruit tree planting further support regenerative food systems.

## WATER MANAGEMENT:

- Both communities rely on well water systems for their primary water needs.
- Water resilience is enhanced through natural water features, such as rainwater harvesting systems (including 20,000-liter tanks) and watershed restoration.
- Infrastructure plans include 9.5 kilometers of rainwater gutters to manage stormwater and support aquifer recharge.



## RESOURCE FLOWS AND CIRCULARITY:

- The community is working toward a zero-waste goal, with organic waste composted on-site. While formal waste diversion metrics are not yet tracked, recycling systems are in place for paper, glass, plastic, and aluminum.
- Reuse of topsoil during construction.
- Construction practices emphasize material reuse, including the preservation of topsoil and the repurposing of fallen trees and existing structures.
- Eco-construction methods prioritize the use of recycled and locally sourced materials.

## ENERGY:

- Both communities are connected to the national energy grid, with the option for residents to install solar panels on individual homes.
- Buildings are designed with energy efficiency in mind, incorporating passive cooling, natural lighting, and other low-impact architectural features.



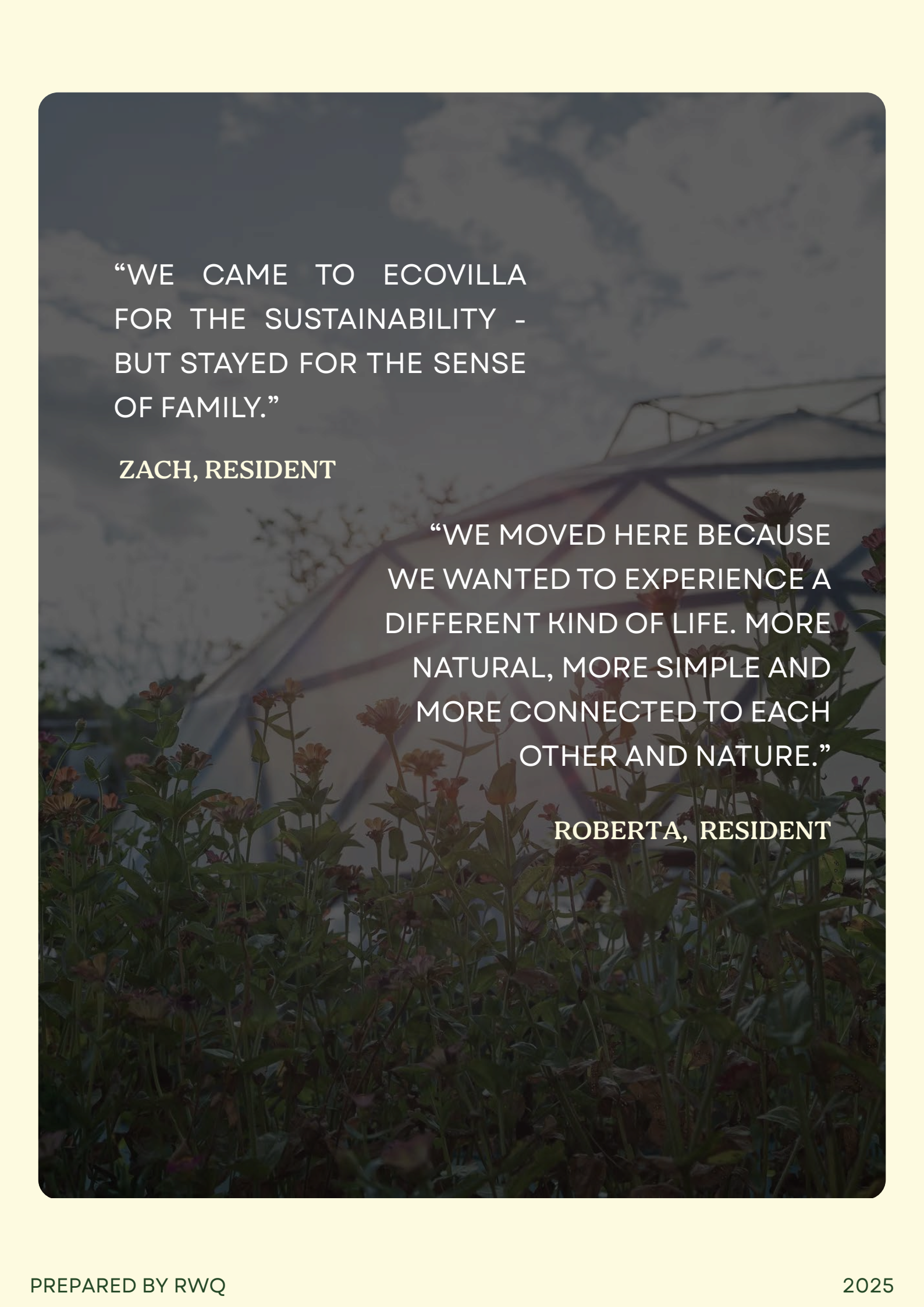
## CARBON FOOTPRINT REDUCTION: MEASUREMENT:

- The community reports sequestering a total of 16,346 tons of CO<sub>2</sub> through reforestation and land management practices.
- An additional 28 tons of CO<sub>2</sub> have been sequestered through biochar application, contributing to soil health and long-term carbon storage.

## SOCIAL EQUITY AND INCLUSION:

- Community governance is participatory and committee-based, allowing residents to engage directly in decision-making processes.
- The on-site "Real World School" offers a nature-based, project-driven curriculum that serves children from 25 different countries.
- The original Ecovilla is home to residents from 29 nations, fostering a culturally rich and inclusive environment.
- Discounted lots for local Costa Ricans.
- Several lots are reserved as "Opportunity Lots," available at discounted rates to support economically disadvantaged individuals.
- Weekly markets provide a platform for local farmers, artisans, and craftspeople, strengthening regional economies.
- The development and maintenance of both communities have generated local employment in construction, land stewardship, and household services.



The background of the entire page is a photograph of a geodesic dome structure, possibly a greenhouse or a modern architectural feature, with a network of dark lines forming its framework. In the foreground, there are green plants with small, dark-colored flowers. The overall image has a muted, slightly desaturated color palette.

“WE CAME TO ECOVILLA  
FOR THE SUSTAINABILITY -  
BUT STAYED FOR THE SENSE  
OF FAMILY.”

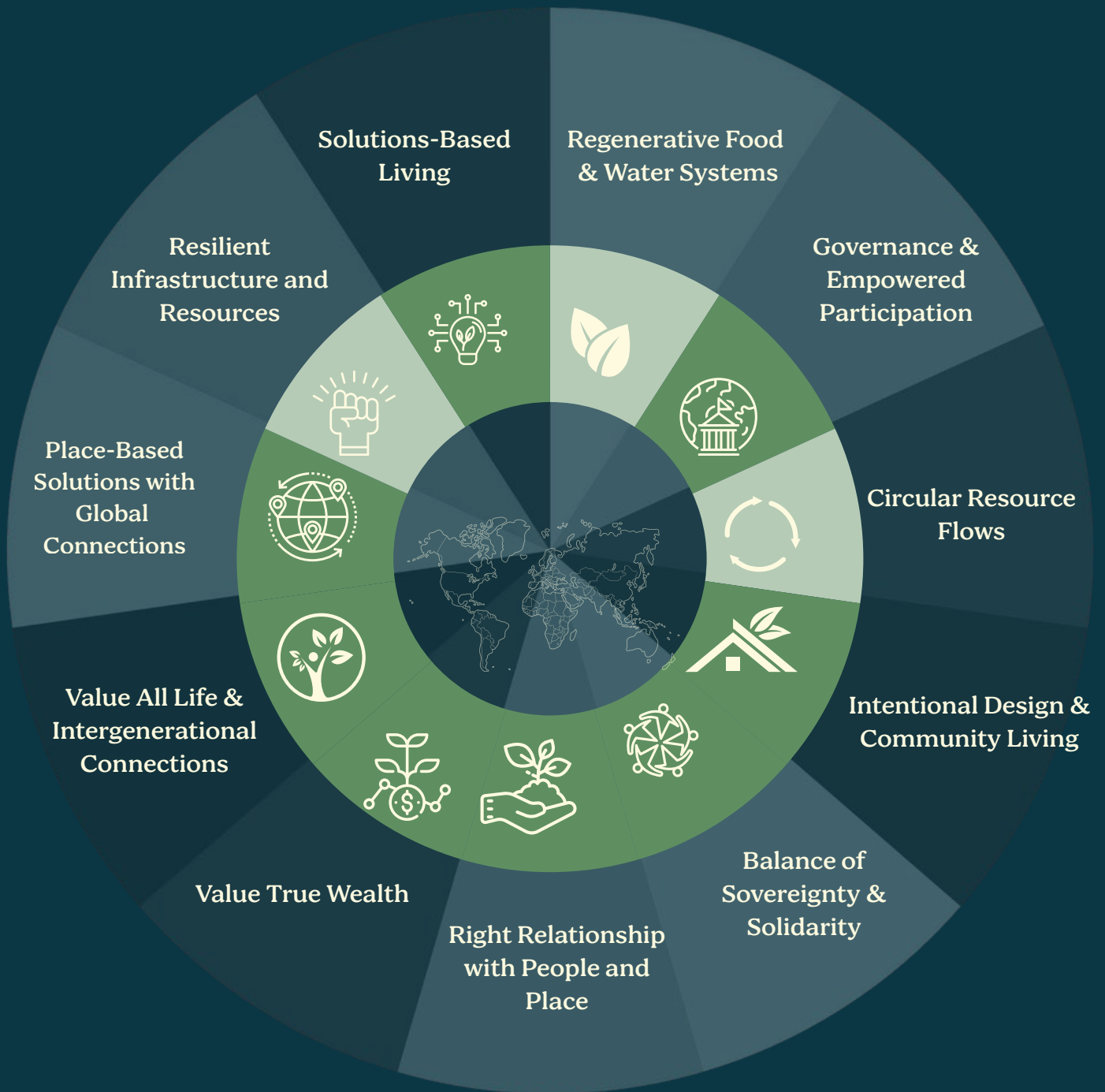
**ZACH, RESIDENT**

“WE MOVED HERE BECAUSE  
WE WANTED TO EXPERIENCE A  
DIFFERENT KIND OF LIFE. MORE  
NATURAL, MORE SIMPLE AND  
MORE CONNECTED TO EACH  
OTHER AND NATURE.”

**ROBERTA, RESIDENT**

# Ecovilla

## REGENERATIVE ECOSYSTEM ASSESSMENT



### Key



Not Present



Early Stage



Operational

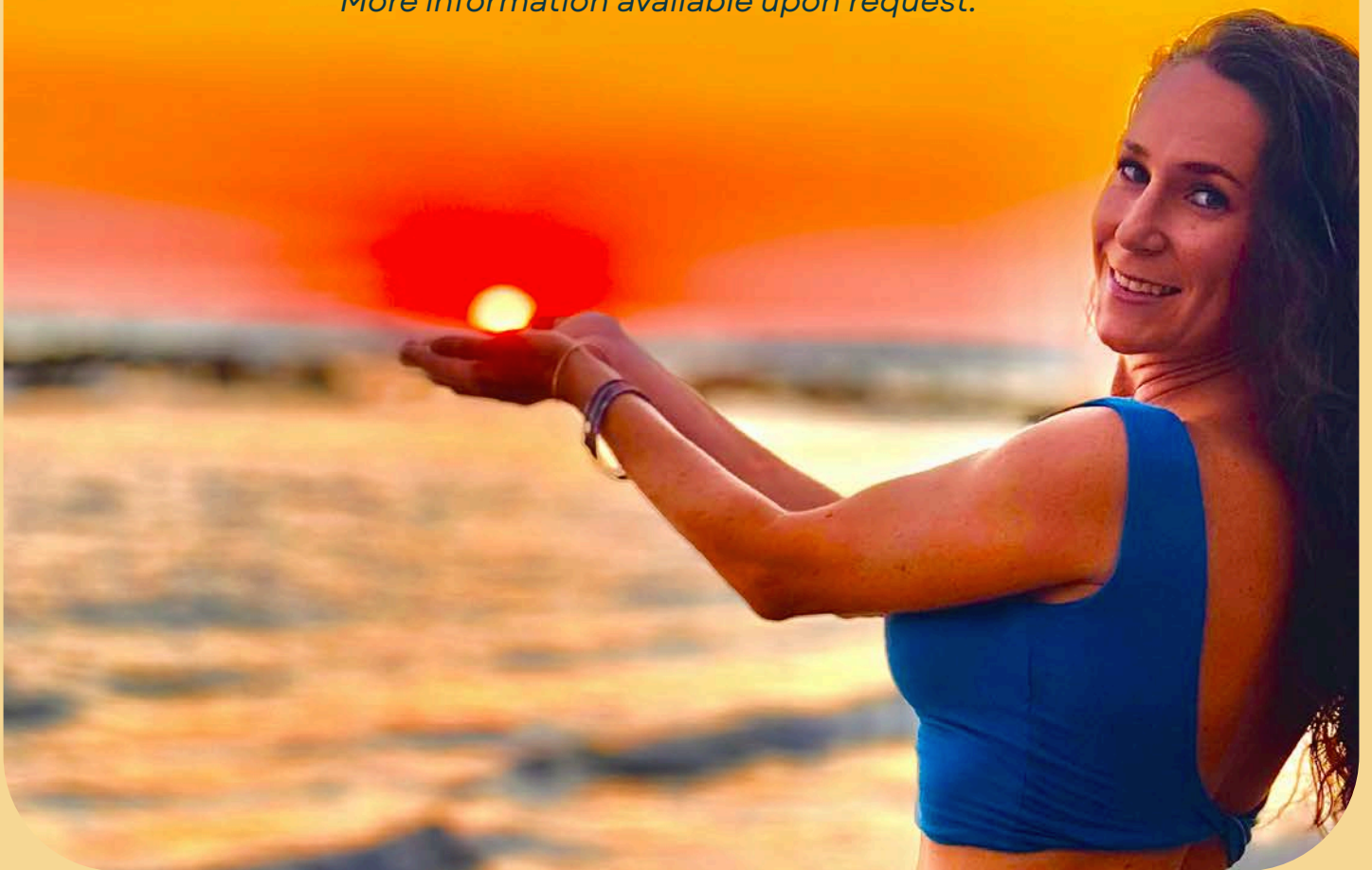


Thriving

### **A NOTE ABOUT THE ASSESSMENT:**

There are many ways to assess communities. Each person must identify their own best use case. This assessment was created by studying leading regenerative frameworks and mapping them to regenerative living (defined on page one) and holistic management. The community's ability to maintain a thriving lifestyle if/when global supply chains are interrupted is a key element in all areas. Aspects of community life and culture are essential parts of resiliency, as well as food, water, education, healthcare and infrastructure systems etc. The Quest has a weighted numerical scale to assess each project which provides the qualitative and quantitative data behind the assessment.

*More information available upon request.*



# REGENERATIVE ECOSYSTEM ASSESSMENT

## DEFINITIONS AND SCORING



**Regenerative Food and Water Systems:** farming as a service to restore landscapes, connect people with nature and provide a healthy and holistic diet in a way that restores the carbon cycle, builds soil, heals watersheds and ecosystems. Healthy soils=healthy communities.

**Ecovilla scores *Early Stage*** for their active efforts toward food self-sufficiency through permaculture gardens, syntropic agroforestry, and Machuca River watershed restoration. While their goal is 50% food self-sufficiency they are currently around 26% for produce only.



Communal structures for **Governance** that enable **empowered participation** by all in the ecosystem through transparent and just decision making, holistic management, distributed authority with clear delineation of duties and responsibilities.

**Ecovilla scores *Operational*** for their participatory governance using consensus-based committees. Resident leadership is strong, but conflict resolution remains informal and evolving. The external investor model influences larger decisions and values.



**Circular Resource Flows** (energy, water, trash, recycling, compost, information etc.) where there is no waste, no extraction and all elements from one system can be inputs into another system. Communities are designed to not just minimize but neutralize and heal any negative impact to the land and surrounding areas, while flourishing economically.

**Ecovilla scores *Early Stage*** as they preserve topsoil and repurpose fallen trees. Community recycling and composting are present but full circular flows are still needed for all resources types.





**Intentional Design and Community Living** by which individuals in the community can share living, working and communal space that honors place and people while holding appropriate boundaries for the unique needs of each individual and the community through holistic management.

**Ecovilla's score here is *Operational*** for their thoughtful architectural design, natural materials, and shared amenities like yoga spaces, pools, and trails. While standard eco-design elements are encouraged, residents can design and build their homes to their own preferences with little community oversight.



**Balance of Sovereignty and Solidarity** where the good of the community does not come at the cost of an individual and the good of the individual does not impair the community at large.

**Ecovilla's Score here is *Operational*** as residents retain agency in shaping community life through committee roles and shared governance. Cultural diversity supports a broad range of perspectives.



**Right Relationship to Place and People** by honoring the natural ecosystem where the community is (healing the land through human stewardship) and by being in an intentional relationship with indigenous wisdom and locals (healing the community and human relationships), living with love of place, honoring its history and all life it supports.

**Ecovilla scores *Operational*** for prioritizing land regeneration through reforestation, syntropic farming, and watershed protection. Greater integration with local communities and indigenous practices is a key area for growth. While EcoVilla brings economic opportunities, many locals are being priced out of the area and/or asked to cater to the growing expat community.



**Valuing True Wealth** where money and finance are not the end goals. Wealth is defined as quality of life, a sense of belonging, purpose and meaning and all resources are holistically managed.

**Ecovilla scores *Early Stage*** for supporting local artisans, offering discounted lots, and prioritizing shared values over profit. Social cohesion and nature connection are central, though the real-estate model drives financial priorities.



**Value all life** and the contributions to the larger ecosystem where communities treat both the youth and the elderly with respect and intentionally create cross-generational connections. The value of ecosystem services are revered and service roles (teaching, health care, youth and elderly care etc.) are respected and valued.

**Ecovilla scores *Operational*** for supporting multigenerational living and community-led childcare through the Real World School and shared amenities. Markets and wellness spaces foster intergenerational connection.



**Resilient Infrastructure and Resources** The necessary skills, resources and infrastructure to sustain life are within the community, from growing food to energy production, to building shelters and water systems, education, health care, community economic systems, arts, and entertainment etc. Focus on sourcing locally with little to no reliance on global supply chains.

**Ecovilla score is *Early Stage*** as they still rely on external supply chains for most all materials, services, energy, and food etc. Structures are built for the climate, and residents are able to build how they want within basic green building specs. Climate resilience is a consideration but not a design requirement.



**Place-Based Solutions with Global Connections** While knowledge, connections, and sharing are connected globally; solutions, actions and projects are nuanced for local culture and climate, led by people from the area and living in the community.

**Ecovilla score is *Operational*** for being a global model of regenerative living while rooted in its local bioregion. Diversity and partnerships support global-local exchange. The EcoVilla team is actively replicating their model in Central American and Europe.



**Solutions Based Living** whereby the simple act of HOW the community lives is a solution to climate change, inequality, injustice, violence and greed. It is not about telling others how to live, rather living the solutions in day to day lives as a model.

**Ecovilla's score here is *Operational*** as they demonstrate that regenerative practices can be embedded in daily life—from land care and food production to governance and education—creating a scalable model of community solutions.





# THANK YOU

*Visit Us*

[RegenerativeWorldQuest.org](https://RegenerativeWorldQuest.org)

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