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Basel

## Research Project

# Ecovillages as Incubators for Sustainability Transitions: What Boundary-Bridging Arrangements Facilitate the Diffusion of Innovations in Different Settings?

### Third-party funded project

**Project title** Ecovillages as Incubators for Sustainability Transitions: What Boundary-Bridging Arrangements Facilitate the Diffusion of Innovations in Different Settings?

**Principal Investigator(s)** Köhrsen, Jens ;

**Project Members** Malin, Julius ; Buzzi, Ann-Lea ; Brühwiler, Nadine ; Sester, Amelie ; Papadopoulos, Daphne ; Kos, Lasse ; Roysen, Rebeca ;

**Organisation / Research unit**

Zentrum für Religion, Wirtschaft und Politik

Zentrum für Religion, Wirtschaft und Politik / Religion und Wirtschaft (Köhrsen)

**Department**

Zentrum für Religion, Wirtschaft und Politik

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**Project Website** <https://ecovillages.theologie.unibas.ch/de/>

**Project start** 01.06.2021

**Probable end** 31.05.2025

**Status** Active

This project studies how ecovillages contribute to local sustainability transitions in different settings by drawing upon a boundary work perspective. Scholarship on sustainability transitions regards grassroots initiatives as central sources of innovation towards environmentally more sustainable societies. Ecovillages are grassroots initiatives that operate as testing grounds for sustainable practices and seek to diffuse these practices into their social environment.

To diffuse sustainability innovations, ecovillages have to interact with their social environment. However, creating successful exchanges is challenging, as ecovillage communities are likely to differ in their values and worldviews from their social environment, organise their activities along dissimilar structures, and develop substantially different lifestyles. These differences create boundaries between ecovillages and their social environment and risk deterring the required collaboration. The boundary work perspective suggests that boundary-bridging arrangements create the needed interfaces between ecovillages and their social environment. Boundary bridging arrangements are social arrangements that facilitate the communication between actors from different social worlds without endangering their boundaries. The types of boundary-bridging arrangements (e.g. boundary objects, boundary organisations) will vary according to the specific setting (e.g. entrance points for sustainable innovations, extent of differences between ecovillage and environment).

The project raises the following research question: What boundary-bridging arrangements facilitate the local diffusion of ecovillages' innovations in different settings? To address this question, it employs a mixed-methods approach involving four empirical research phases: (1) explorative context studies, (2) quantitative survey of ecovillages in different countries, (3) qualitative in-depth case studies, (4) triangulation and comparative analysis. The project enriches the research on ecovillages and grassroots innovation with empirical insights into their innovation capacities. It presents a new boundary work perspective on the diffusion of grassroots innovations and generates knowledge about boundary bridging arrangements that facilitate the diffusion of sustainability innovations under varying contextual conditions.

**Financed by**

Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF)

**Add publication**

**Add documents**

**Specify cooperation partners**