

Background

Without immediate, rapid, and comprehensive reduction in greenhouse gas emissions, limiting global warming to 1.5°C or even 2°C by the end of the century will not be achievable. Climate change threatens human health, causing about 250,000 additional deaths per year between 2030 and 2050. However, local initiatives – like ecovillages* – are far ahead in putting climate solutions into practice while striving for a healthier life.

This study was conducted as part of a master's thesis at MCI, Austria.

Objectives

Our aim was to uncover which climate practices are implemented in ecovillages and to explore the perceived health implications of these practices for the ecovillage residents.

Methodology

- A single case study was conducted in 2022 of an ecovillage in southern Germany.
- Through qualitative semi-structured interviews and participatory observation during an 8-day stay in the ecovillage, data about the implemented climate practices in the community and their perceived health implications was collected.
- Data was analyzed according to inductive qualitative content analysis.



Fig.1: Picture of the Ecovillage Sulzbrunn

*Learn more about ecovillages: ecovillage.org

Results

Interviews: n=9 (22.5% of adults living in the ecovillage)

1) Categories of implemented climate practices:

Energy supply & Buildings	Sustainable food production & ethical husbandry	Village store & social agriculture concept
Resource management (reduce, reuse, recycle & regionality)	Sharing models (e.g., cars, tools, living spaces)	Education (e.g., permaculture, community living)

2) Categories of perceived health effects:

	Physical Activity • Gardening, walking, biking, construction work, taking care of animals
	Mental Health • Connection to nature & animals, high amount of green space, physical activity
	Diet • Organic, local, pesticide-free, high in vegetables, low in meats, accessible
	Other Health Effects • Social interactions, daily structure, variety of tasks

Limitations

- Single case study
- Small sample size of interviewees
- Self-reported health effects

Conclusion

Ecovillages take climate action in holistic ways, effecting many parts of their daily life. Residents report health improvements, including increased physical and mental health, a healthy diet, while benefiting from social interactions.

Our study underscores the vital role of ecovillages as catalysts for sustainable living and advocates for their broader recognition in addressing the pressing challenges of climate change, urging policymakers and communities to implement similar practices while encouraging scientists to conduct further investigations into ecovillages and their practices for a more resilient future.