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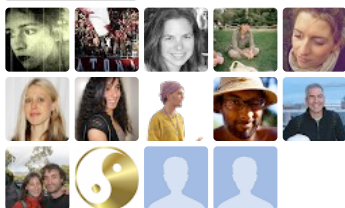
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February 22, 2010

## visit to Longo-mai Co-operative in the Alps...

Visioning Necessary Alternatives:  
Visit to Longo-Mai in Southern Austria



Hi there,

I just came back from a short visit to a Longo-mai community in the South of Austria, on the border to Slovenia, a beautiful and rare spot to visit, nestled in among lush forests, rivers and mighty mountains...

Its been great being there though for a short time and to learn some about the history of its place, its present and future...

Longo-mai is a group of agricultural cooperatives with a basic grass-roots, alternative, rural, laic and sustainable ideology. The name Longo-mai stays for '*that which last long*' and the concept was formed following the cultural revolution of '68 in Europe. At that time a collective of young austrian students with the name 'Spartakus' met another fellow group and political organization in Switzerland called 'Hydra' to join rank and form a swiss-austrian axis. They started to elaborate common strategies and investigations over all Europe to fight on common ground for the mobilization of the unprivileged, oppressed and exploited classes. Europe at that time was undergoing structural reforms, the introduction of modern automatized machineries and motors created a big number of unemployed people and social degradation. Hydra and Spartakus started to organize regular annual meetings to bring together youth from many countries that were directly involved in some social fights. They solidarized with mine workers in the Netherlands, farmers in France and the worker class in England.

The trend in youth at that time however was generally characterized by two aspects: an increasing interest and consume of drugs - the sympathy for violent actions and protest.



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Facing this dilemma the group started to seek more tangible and concrete answers to the social problems. They engaged with utopic thoughts and sought new ways and forms of existential and communal living.

Agriculture, Economy, the Threat of War and Social-Ecological Crises were among the key aspects and priorities of the group that met in Basel to discuss this. They started to elaborate *basic considerations and key points in order to find concrete responses*:

- The view of Collective as a agricultural-industrial set of co-operatives
- Agrarian Self-sufficiency as a basic foundation
- technical and manual production of crafts based on the needs and priorities of the collective and based on the limited resources present in nature
- responsibility of each working-group towards its field of activity
- no one-sided division of labor but wide general education
- Autonomous administration and general overview over the aspect and life concerning the community through democratic planning and realization of all relative affairs.

After this and other considerations were made the planning of its first 100 member community went on with the search and acquirement of proper land in the Provence/France in 1973. Pierre Pellegrin, a shepherd that lived near the first settlement bought in by the Longo-mai co-operative remembers:

*"They wanted a farmyard. Politics was another issue they cared, however it didn't matter me. Not their discourses brought them to Longo mai. They simply wanted back to the land to build a solid basis, to do something different. They really came to work. And this has saved them. Along with the fact, that they had some money. The brother Busch owned two houses in Basel (CH) that were sold. With this money they became owner of this land. That didn't fit in with their anarchistic world-view - an anarchist does not want to be owner. However this assured them not to be expelled by the authorities, as later happened in Germany and Switzerland."*



'longo-mai 1982'

From the early days in France to Germany, Austria, Switzerland - Longo Mai developed soon to a growing Network of 30 International Co-operatives with a central 'office' in Switzerland. Most recent settlements have been established in Costa Rica and the West Ukraine. In between all places relationships of mutual exchange persist, may it be human resources or production and material goods, the well-being of all individual cooperatives is set over any single one. Every co-operative keeps a certain self-regulating autonomy in its inner aspects and individuality. "The ties in between the co-operatives lie on mutual support, solidarity and personal friendship. Often services are rendered without the need of equivalent reward:

*"4 french people help by the construction of a repair-workshop for agricultural machinery in Austria; another co-operative delivers the surplus of fresh vegetables for the annual meeting and cultural activities and celebrations - for members of other co-operatives all food, drinking and admission is naturally free."*

The substantial micro-economy that characterizes Longo-mai comprises the production of meat, milk, fruits and vegetables, herbs, bread/cereals, clothing and wood. They keep bees for honey, pigs and sheep for meat and clothing, goats and cows for milk and derivatives, fruit and nut trees and of course an intensive production of vegetables in the

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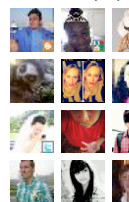


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gardens.

I was visioning the 'Plant diet version of Longo-mai' on my sojourn in the Austrian Mountains , however keeping myself not-overly-judgmental but open yet critical in my observations.

Longo-mai today has changed and grown, the political context and reality of our time too - to imagine that the problems present in our society can be resolved or answered by similar social and economic experiments alone is surely not a realistic consideration. The character and spirit of Longo mai however offers us a tangible vision and outlook to a possible, different and responsible, ecological and economical sustainable, democratic, fair society. In front of increasing major economic, social and environmental degradation, violence, repression and control by the State and Police, in front of major centralization of powers in a hand of few oligarchs and special interest groups, in front of a growing general disorientation and precarious work-relationships as unemployment, the search for alternative solutions in Society is unavoidable and necessary.

One of the many objectives and aims of Longo-mai is and always has been *the agricultural reform*. The source of its engagements lies in the concrete activities of various co-operatives and in the local and regional collaboration with similar group of interest and organizations as the trial to bring this work into a wider, national and international context. The publication of books, articles and press via a newspaper called *European Citizenshship Forum* (EuropaeischerBuergerForum) along with the political engagement and regular meetings with other organization as [Via Campesina](#) certainly represents a great step forward and hope towards a truly sustainable, democratic and peaceful civil society.

Though just learning a little 'piece' of Longo Mai I'm glad to know of its existence and engagement. I was lucky to reside in the little guesthouse above the main house overlooking the mountains and valleys surrounded by a deep silence and a beneficial natural rhythm hard to find this days in our civilization. The snow was falling heavily making it hard to go much around abouts so I spent most of my time in the warm kitchen doing studying and readings and time-traveling imagining the times and stories as faces described in the historical books and epochs. The fresh mountain air provided good rest and sleep and on Sunday a beautiful sunny picture greeted the start of a brand new day.



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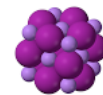
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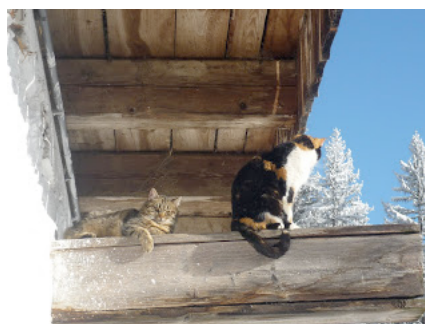
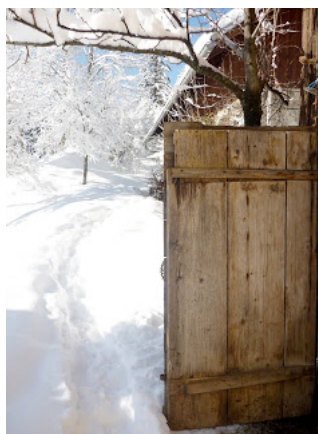
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## References and Recommended Readings:

*Longo mai - Revolte und Utopie nach '68*  
Beatriz Graf (german)

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~ [Luc Willette](#)

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