

Findhorn: The Routinization of Charisma

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THE FINDHORN FOUNDATION¹ in the north of Scotland is now in its 30th year. For that reason alone, it ranks as one of the truly exciting success stories of contemporary, Utopian experimentation. But of even more significance than the mere fact of its longevity is the change process which this community has experienced. While many alternative communities collapse when their charismatic leaders depart, Findhorn reorganized and has emerged as a soundly managed and well organized "new age" community. The management depends not so much on bureaucratization, as foretold by organization theorists such as Max Weber, as on a form of consensual decision-making, within which intuition and spiritual guidance are routinely accepted as the norm.

This article briefly describes the history of the Findhorn Foundation, and details its current status, and its unusual, but highly effective, style of management and decision-making.

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1. While "Findhorn", "Findhorn Foundation" and "Findhorn Community" are often used interchangeably, it must be pointed out that it is primarily the Findhorn Foundation which is being discussed. There is some antagonism within the nearby village of Findhorn, to the usurpation of their name by the "new age" folk who are largely seen as interlopers. The 1990 Findhorn Foundation Trustee's meeting clarified these terms as:

The "Foundation" has responsibility for the Education Wing, Development Wing and NFD (New Findhorn Directions).

The "Community" includes the Foundation and all those drawn to the area by the spiritual impulse which it serves.

We do not wish to use the term "Village" for any part of the Community, out of respect for the fact that there has already been a village nearby of that name for hundreds of years.

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Introduction

During the course of one day during my sociological research at Findhorn, I attended a meeting of the Findhorn Foundation Trustees and the business managers as they looked at an annual budget of over \$1.5 million (U.S.), and then later overheard one senior member telling another that the way to detoxify rat poison which had been used some years earlier was simply to conduct a "cleansing meditation". The juxtaposition of the rational, bureaucratic and logical with the paranormal, affective and metaphysical is an everyday occurrence at Findhorn.

There is so much about this Utopian community which suggests that by all reasonable predictions it should have collapsed some years ago. Any "rational" business manager would predict imminent bankruptcy, given Findhorn's method of making far-reaching decisions with heavy financial implications, often solely on the basis of "attunement" and intuition. Instead, the community thrives and prospers and is more secure now than it has ever been during its 30-year history.

Methodology

Participant observation research was conducted at Findhorn for 1 week in 1982, 2 weeks in 1988, 2 months in 1990, and 2 months in 1991. Using Gold's classification,² my research mode was basically "Participant as Observer", since I was able to be a full participant, in my own right, and my sociological observations were secondary as a reason for my presence. Unstructured interviews were conducted with a number of the key people within the community. My position as a member of the "Findhorn Fellowship" allowed me access to the inner circles of the Foundation. Sitting on the Board of Trustees in 1991 also helped in detailed data collection.

Brief History

Findhorn Community was established in the north of Scotland in 1962 by Peter and Eileen Caddy, and their friend Dorothy Maclean. At the time, all three of these people lived together, along with the Caddys' three children, almost destitute, in a wooden caravan, in a Council caravan park near the small fishing village of Findhorn. Their lives were dramatically changed when Dorothy and Eileen experi-

2. R. Gold, "Roles in Sociological Field Observations", in G. McCall and J. Simmons, *Issues in Participant Observation* (Reading: Addison-Wesley, 1969), pp. 30-39.

enced contact by supernatural spirits that gave them detailed instructions on solving practical problems. The issues addressed ranged from how to grow good vegetables on those barren, windswept sand dunes³ to how to form a viable, spiritually based community, and ultimately how to serve as the catalyst for the development of a "global village", thereby changing the destiny of the world.

The process by which these three rather unlikely "revolutionaries" transformed the messages from "the still small voice within" into social reality has been widely told and retold⁴. This story has, in fact, become one of the central myths of the worldwide alternative lifestyle movement, and has served as the inspiration for the development of countless other Utopian groups around the world.

There has never been a consciously devised recruitment program for Findhorn. Since the mid-1960's, however, news of Findhorn has spread worldwide through the network of alternative lifestyle as well as mainstream publications. This diffusion led to an increasing number of casual visitors and intense spiritual seekers finding their way to this remote spot in the north of Scotland. A crisis occurred in the late 1960's, when the small number of Findhorn members, still living in caravans, were being swamped by "hippie" travellers. The members could see no way to integrate, or even cope with, these people. Once again the spirits communicated through Eileen Caddy, advising the residents to let go of Findhorn as a family concept, and let it become a "global village". Under the excellent managerial control of Peter Caddy, this transformation rapidly became a reality, and a mechanism was created to allow the small community to grow and prosper.

Over the next decade, Findhorn grew to a membership of about 300. The original caravan park in which it all began was still the center, although a number of other properties had been purchased. The most important of these was the Cluny Hill Hotel, a massive structure built in 1864, which previously served as a "hydropathic

3. For example, *"You have overdone the watering, so cut down just a little. It need not be a nightly routine in this climate where the sun is not a daily routine. It is right to have the plants close together, because everything is intensified in the garden. We are pleased at the way the garden is being tackled. We wish you could see the forces now working in the garden: those from below are gradually being drawn up, and ours are coming in great swift waves. No, it is not necessary to put the peat in the garden . . . better in the compost . . . we are speeding up the compost . . . mix"* P. Hawken, *The Magic of Findhorn* (Glasgow: Fontana/Collins, 1975), p. 121.

4. E.g., A. Rigby, *Communes in Britain*, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974); Findhorn Community, *The Findhorn Garden* (New York: Harper and Row, 1975); Hawken, *The Magic of Findhorn*; Riddell, C, *The Findhorn Community: Creating a Human Identity for the 21st Century* (Findhorn: Findhorn Press, 1990).

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Figure 1. Cluny College, Findhorn Foundation. All photographs by the author.

spa" and an exclusive hotel, but now was used to accommodate many Findhorn members, and most of the thousands of guests and visitors. Peter and Eileen Caddy had at one time been managers of the Cluny Hill Hotel, and had operated it very successfully, before being sacked for their "strange" managerial style⁵. While the 200-room Cluny Hill Hotel was purchased for only \$120,000, it was in such a state of disrepair that it proved very expensive to maintain; just to upgrade the heating system cost more than the original purchase price.

In 1973, a decision was made to construct a "Universal Hall" which would function not only as a meeting place and conference venue, but also as a tangible demonstration of the achievements that could be realized through faith and manifestation. While Eileen Caddy's divine guidance indicated a simple, functional building, others received guidance suggesting a more elaborate "monument". In the

5. Hawken, *The Magic of Findhorn*, pp. 96-99.



Figure 2. Universal Hall, seating 300, Findhorn Foundation.

end, the Universal Hall took over a decade to complete and added greatly to the community debt. It is a truly magnificent building, however, and no doubt serves as a tangible symbol for one of the Findhorn sayings, that "work is love in action".

The rapid acquisition of several neighboring properties was undertaken with confidence that "God was guiding the process, so all we had to do was acquire, and He would make sure of the funds"⁶. In 1978 Drumduan House, a Georgian manor house overlooking Findhorn Bay, the large, original railway station in Findhorn (known as "Station House"), and Cullerne House and gardens were all acquired. The result was a community debt approaching \$1 million.

At the same time, there was increasing unease at what many members perceived to be Peter's dogmatic leadership style. Eileen's guidance, which had directed Peter, and through him the community, was withdrawn when Eileen received the following divine message:

6. Riddell, *The Findhorn Community*, p. 85.

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Let go, stand back and allow all those in the community to live a life guided and directed by Me. Let them learn from experience to live positively, demonstrating the laws of manifestation in their own lives. If this means that the work is held up for the time being, let it be held up. Until life is lived, lessons are not learned, and these lessons are far more important than expanding without learning, living on what others have learned.⁷

The rift that had been developing between Peter and Eileen Caddy resulted in Peter's leaving the community in 1979. The next several years are referred to by long-term community members as "the deep dark night of the soul". The massive debts that had been incurred, and the absence of the charismatic leadership of Peter Caddy, caused a dramatic fall in membership, and the real possibility of bankruptcy. The cautious approach of Francois Dusquesne, the new Findhorn "Focaliser," was essential to the group's survival and developing maturity.

The role of "focaliser" is to draw together and "focus" the ideas and collective energy of the community. It implies the notion of enabler and facilitator rather than director or manager. A sociologist who is also a long-term member states,

Fundamentally, focalisers have responsibility without authority over others in their working groups. They should be aware of the overall context of whatever is being done, seek to balance different demands for time, energy and finance, make sure people's states and situations are considered, stimulate effective group interaction and act as a link with other groups. Focalisers are also responsible for what we call "holding the energy"—connecting with, and making sure that others connect with an inner, spiritual significance of situations, so that things can happen "from the inside out".⁸

In late 1983, just as the community was beginning to reorient around the new leadership directions, the Findhorn Foundation, after an elaborate, worldwide fund-raising venture, was able to purchase the original caravan park, thus ensuring the future of the site where the Findhorn story began. By this time, because of the faith of Findhorn members, they had already erected many permanent buildings on this site, such as the famous "Universal Hall", where not only the community meets and local functions are held, but even international events such as the Third World Wilderness Congress have been held.

7. Ibid., p. 80.

8. Ibid., p. 98.

Ideological Overview

It is difficult to state simply or concisely the complex ideology of Findhorn, but several extracts from the residents' own publications about themselves may help:

The Findhorn Foundation's main role is as a centre of spiritual and holistic education, developed from the same view of life and spiritual power which made the early experiments in the Findhorn garden so remarkable. We have no formal doctrine or creed. Our efforts are based on the notion that humanity is approaching a quantum leap of consciousness awareness which will, in turn, create new forms of society and promote a culture which is truly planetary.

The Foundation's educational programmes nourish this awareness by helping participants discover their own inner wisdom and spirit. Life itself is seen as the classroom and the community is a loving and supportive setting for the development of human potential. Findhorn [is] committed to deepening our understanding of life. It offers people of all backgrounds and beliefs an opportunity to discover their true nature as spiritual beings able to make a positive and constructive difference in the world.

[Findhorn] members [are] united by a desire to better their relationships with each other, their environment and their sense of higher purpose or divinity. The community is now taking a major step forward to becoming a "planetary village" in which new approaches to government, management, horticulture, the arts, food production, appropriate technology, spiritual growth, healing and education may be tested. The results may then be studied and, where successful, applied in society at large.

[Findhorn] gains access to a wide circle of international, political, religious, environmental and academic bodies sharing a desire to improve the quality of life for all beings. [Findhorn] thrives on continuous interaction with other groups, communities and individuals throughout the world who are giving their own expression to the development of a positive future. It is neither a spiritual retreat nor a place where one can 'drop out' from the challenges facing society. Members and guests deal head on with these challenges so they may discover positive, lasting solutions to them.⁹

In spite of the use of terms such as "God", "the Christ" and "the Christ within", Findhorn is clearly not Christian. Jesus, the historical figure, is seen as one of several enlightened beings from whom we can learn. Guidance is received not from some Old Testament, personified deity, but from "all that is". The "God" from whom divine guidance is received is variously defined by Findhorn members, but most see God as the divine spirit that lies within each and everything. It therefore follows that God is within me, and when I meditate, I may contact the God within. Similarly, through meditation I may



Figure 3. Nature sanctuary for meditation, Findhorn Foundation.

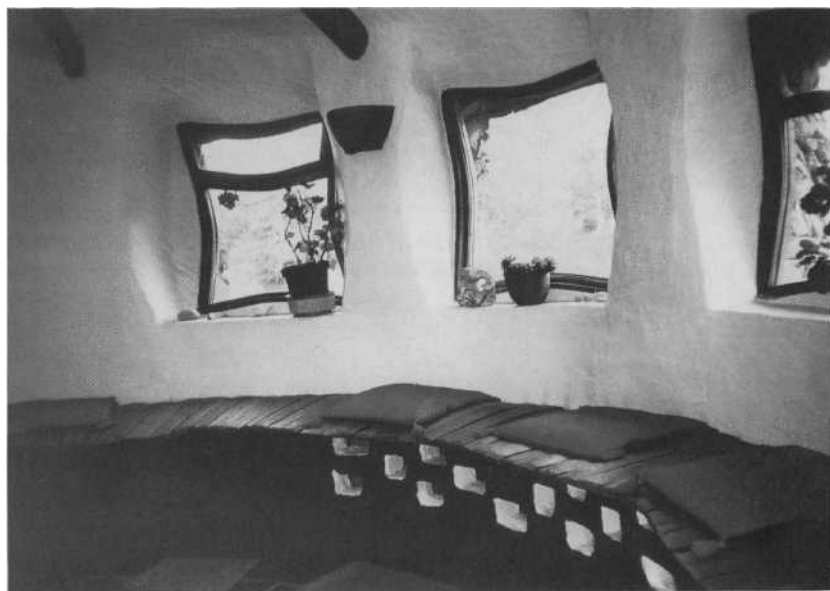


Figure 4. Inside nature sanctuary, Findhorn Foundation.

contact the God within another person, within an animal or even a plant. God, however, is not divided between you, I, and the plants but is a spiritual unity. We have the capacity to achieve heaven on earth, if we only can see inside ourselves and develop the faith to accept that whatever happens is part of some grand plan, and is for the best. Lessons are revealed in many ways. Losing one's purse teaches one to avoid attachment. Injuring oneself teaches a person to focus more carefully on the task at hand. Nature is a great teacher and must be seen as a repository of wisdom available for guidance, if only we can learn to relate openly and fully, with love. The principles of Deep Ecology¹⁰ are operationalized in many ways in, and help give meaning to, the daily social life of the community.

New members and guests are socialized into these views through twice daily meditation sessions in sanctuary as well as through talks, work arrangements and the routines of daily life. The community argot continually reinforces this view of spiritual reality, so that after staying there awhile this appears to be the *only* way to view the world.

Current Status

In late 1991, the Findhorn Foundation had about 170 members, of whom 80 were regarded as working staff, the rest being dependents, children and older members. The 1989 membership was analyzed thus:

There were 27 children and 126 adults; 49 of the adults were men, 77 were women. . . . Among the adults 15 were over the age of 60. Only 8 were under the age of 30; 89 of us were between 30 and 50, a relatively mature group. We were all white-skinned, a large majority of middle-class origin, with the largest single group coming from the so-called "caring" professions. We came from 17 countries, with more than three quarters from the UK, the USA and West Germany.¹¹

Interestingly, this somewhat older and more "professional" group is remarkably similar to that found in a nationwide survey of alternative lifestyle participants in Australia¹². Although members

10. E.g., B. Devall and G. Sessions, *Deep Ecology*, (Salt Lake City: Peregrine, 1985).

11. Riddell, *The Findhorn Community*, p. 132.

12. W. Metcalf and F. Vanclay, *Social Characteristics of Alternative Lifestyle Participants in Australia* (Brisbane: Institute of Applied Environmental Research, 1987); and W. Metcalf, "Utopian Thought and Communal Experience in Australia: A Demographic Analysis", in *Utopian Thought and Communal Experience*, D. Hardy and L. Davidson eds. (London: Middlesex Polytechnic, 1989), pp. 60-67.



Figure 5. Dining area, The Park, Findhorn Foundation.

appear content and happy, over half the Findhorn Foundation members have been there less than five years, indicating a relatively high turnover.¹³

The Foundation has an annual income of about \$1.5 million. 80% of this income comes from the "guest programme", 10-15% from sales of calendars, books and such, and the rest from members' fees and donations. During both 1990 and 1991, approximately \$200,000 was spent on capital expansion and another \$100,000 on debt reduction. The accrued general debt of almost \$1 million has been eliminated. Staff receive an allowance of \$250 per month, plus their accommodations and food.

Education continues to be the major function of Findhorn Foundation, as well as the main revenue source. Currently, over 5000 people attend one or more of the educational program each year. Of these, % are women. Nearly 1/3 are between 35-44 years, 1/4 between

13. Riddell, *The Findhorn Community*, p. 135.

25-34, 1/5 between 45-54, and the young and the old account for 1/10 each.

Nearly half the guests come from Continental Europe, 30% from U.K. and nearly 20% from USA/Canada/Australia/New Zealand. 3% represent the rest of the world. This demography shows a dramatic shift from an American base in the '70's to a European center. Nearly % of the guests earn their living from "mainstream" occupations, and nearly half of these are business people. Only 16% now come from the "alternative" sector, and 22% live on savings or pensions. 20,000 people around the world are on the mailing list for Findhorn Foundation brochures.¹⁴ The most recent brochure to be sent to interested people states:

The [Findhorn] Foundation, a charitable trust, is a centre of education and demonstration that offers people the opportunity to visit, live and work with us in a variety of ways. Our guest programmes stem from our personal and collective search to bring about a deeper sense of the sacred in everyday life—to deal with work, relationships and our environment in new and more fulfilling ways, to create an atmosphere of honesty and love, and to be conscious in all that we say and do. Life itself is the classroom, and it is our daily life together that provides the catalyst for our spiritual growth.

One of the "wings" of the Findhorn Foundation is known as "New Findhorn Directions" (NFD). This branch operates several commercial ventures such as a caravan park, mail order business, wind generator, general store and a business to retrofit old houses in an ecologically sound manner. In 1990 NFD businesses had a turnover of about \$1.6 million, and wages of about \$130,000. All profit either is used to promote new business ventures, or returns to the Foundation coffers. A tendency has been for the more successful NFD-sponsored businesses to be taken over as separate entities by those members who are most closely associated with them. In this way, a number of local businesses have been sponsored and released by the Foundation. NFD businesses continue to prosper and grow.

Members within the nucleus of the Findhorn Foundation exist within a wider, local community of about 500 people, all of whom are associated with the Findhorn Foundation in some way, but are not full members. There are now numerous small businesses, ranging from a computer consultancy to a nursing home, which are operated by these "associate" members, with a combined annual turnover of over \$6 million.

These associates are the most obvious evidence of a process of

14. Data provided by Education Branch staff of Findhorn Foundation.

privatization and devolution which has been occurring at Findhorn for much of the 1980's. In many respects, it is a classic example of the shift from "communal" to "community" focus¹⁵, and can perhaps more easily be appreciated within Pitzer's concept of "developmental communalism".¹⁶ The tendency is for the focal core of Findhorn Foundation more and more to limit itself to a central mission of holding a spiritual focus, and communicating that spiritual message through educational programs, ranging from "experience weeks" to international conferences. The supporting functions which used to be under the umbrella of the Foundation are increasingly privately managed by associates. As well, there is a clear tendency for members within the Foundation to attempt to reduce their communality. This trend is exemplified by an increasing number of members who are building and maintaining their own, private homes, albeit on communally owned land.

This process has been very controversial. While some members see it as a healthy maturation "From Community to Village,"¹⁷ others see it as sapping the lifeblood of the Foundation, threatening to weaken and destroy the very reason why people came to the area originally. This process of privatization is made all the more complex and contentious because, under Scottish law, all houses built on Foundation land belong not to the person who paid for the structure but to the Foundation. A complex procedure has evolved whereby a homebuilder lends sufficient funds to the Foundation to pay for construction of a house. In return, the member is given a "right of occupancy". If/when the member leaves, the right of occupancy must be sold to another member, or at least to someone who is approved by the Foundation, and of any increase in price, disregarding inflation, 30% is withheld by the Foundation. In this way, the Development Wing of the Foundation has incurred a \$1/2 million debt in the past year, while building two "barrel" houses¹⁸ and five more conventional homes.

15. W. Metcalf, *Dropping Out and Staying In: Recruitment, Socialisation and Commitment Engenderment Within Contemporary Alternative Lifestyles* (Brisbane: Griffith University, PhD Thesis, 1986), pp. 390-401.

16. D. Pitzer, "Developmental Communalism: An Alternative Approach to Communal Studies", in *Utopian Thought and Communal Experience*, D. Hardy and L. Davidson eds., (London: Middlesex Polytechnic, 1989), pp. 68-76.

17. A. Walker, "From Community to Village: An Economic Perspective", *One Earth* 5(3) (1985), pp. 10-12.

18. "Barrel Houses" are so named because they are constructed from salvaged oak whiskey barrels. They are round, of approximately 6 metres diameter. They are meant to house only one individual or a couple.



Figure 6. New experimental "Eco-Housing", Findhorn Foundation.

Leadership Style and Decision-Making Within the Community

Spiritual Management

Although our community is small, the way we relate to each other is complex. Yet there is a basic assumption: daily tasks are organised to express inner wisdom. In our outer structures and practices we are trying to manifest an inner purpose, meaningful for each member as an individual, and also for the future development of humanity on the planet. We do not, therefore, merely attempt to come to simple, rational decisions, based on the perceived interests of the parties involved. We seek to find "what wants to happen", by inner attunement. This practice we call spiritual management.¹⁹

As already mentioned, in the early years of Findhorn, the community operated under a clear form of hierarchical, charismatic leadership. While "divine guidance" was received and channelled by Eileen Caddy, it was interpreted and operationalized by Peter. Members recall how Eileen would share her guidance with members of the community in morning "sanctuary", but upon leaving, Peter

19. Riddell, *The Findhorn Community*, p. 93.

would stand at the door issuing work instructions for the day. By the mid-1970's, however, Peter established a core group of members to carry responsibility whenever he was absent. Each major activity had a focaliser who was responsible for day to day management, and major decisions were discussed by these focalisers and in community meetings. While Peter Caddy was actively preparing the community for self-management, many members, out of habit, still looked to Peter for direction. The breakup of Peter and Eileen Caddy's marriage in 1979 and Peter's departure provoked a crisis in community leadership.

What has ensued is a series of four members who have carried the focus of the community. Each has continued the process of devolving power. The previous focaliser retired in 1991 from the dual roles of focalising "core group" and "central management committee" (roughly seen as representing the duality of church and state). The current Findhorn Focaliser is only in charge of the core group. Each of the "wings" (Education, NFD and Development) has a focaliser who sits on a central management committee which includes the focaliser of core group. The end result is to devolve both decision-making and spiritual and practical responsibility.

In many ways, this process can be seen as a classic example of Max Weber's²⁰ "routinization of charisma". One of the successes of Findhorn during the 1980's has been to establish a managerial structure which efficiently manages this large, complex organization, without having to create or locate a new charismatic leader to replace Peter Caddy. The apparently bureaucratic structure for decision-making which has evolved, however, largely operates through intuitive guidance and divine revelation which is received during meditation. Every meeting, whether of the Foundation Trustees or the lunch cooks, will start with an "attunement" whereby spiritual guidance is invoked. If a consensus is not achieved within the meeting, further meditation will be undertaken in order for everyone to receive further guidance. If a clear decision does not emerge, then this uncertainty is taken as a sign that other issues are not being looked at, and that everything must go on hold until some clear direction emerges.

While this process can be exhausting, rarely has it impaired the community's efficient operation, because of the depth of the communally held beliefs and myths, and the absence of any truly malevolent members or forces. While internal differences and, at times,

20. M. Weber, *Economy and Society*, G. Roth and C. Wittich (eds.), (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968 (first published 1956)), pp. 1121-1148.

personal conflicts arise, in all my participant observation research in over one hundred new-age communities, I have never encountered such positive interpersonal relationships. Because it takes so long to become a full member, and because of the overarching nature of Findhorn's socialization process, agreement has already been achieved on a host of ideological issues, and many apparently contentious decisions really only require ratification. While this process can be very healthy, it can also have the effect of dampening any would-be opposition by suggesting that the holder of any contrary notions is not fully attuned. For instance, many Findhorn members adhere to an obsessive adulation of monogamous relationships and children, even though most live alone. To suggest that any other form of relationship could be preferable, or that serial monogamy might be exploitive, is taken as evidence of one's spiritual immaturity. Clearly, it is asserted, if one were more in tune, if one meditated more, the "correct" position would be revealed.²¹

"Manifestation" is an important concept within the Findhorn Foundation. People believe that material items "float" in the universe, following the same cosmic laws that affect humans. A machine is seen to have a sort of personality. For example, the three Findhorn buses are named Heather, Henry and Francis, and the tip truck is called Topsy, while the Cluny dishwasher is Walter, and the spin dryer in the laundry, Dervish. As I write this paper here at Findhorn, I work on a machine known as Mac, and print on Goodie Two-Shoes, who contains the advice "Treat her with love and she will serve you well". It is important to refer to a machine by its name, to acknowledge its individuality. The principles by which material goods attach to people depend on one's proper attunement to spiritual directions. If one is clear about one's need, and acts appropriately and morally, then the item will be manifested. A humorous example is provided by Peter Caddy²².

This whole community is based on the Law of Manifestation! It depends and runs on its principles. It operates in complete faith that all of our needs will be perfectly met!

I had asked for a year for a greenhouse; I knew we were to have a greenhouse; Eileen had received positive guidance we were to have a greenhouse, and I just couldn't understand why we didn't have a greenhouse!

21. Although this was clearly what I observed during my fieldwork at Findhorn, it is disputed by Riddell (*The Findhorn Community*, p. 157) who states: "Although the community is overwhelmingly heterosexual, we accept relationship between people of the same sex without hesitation, where there is a feeling that love rather than ideology or exhibitionism is the basis of the tie".

22. Hawken, *The Magic of Findhorn*, p. 37.

And then I suddenly realized what the problem was. I had been too vague. I came here, measured the space, and asked for an eight-by twelve-foot cedarwood greenhouse. It came next week!

The communal myths of Findhorn are replete with stories of successful manifestation, such as a new piano being available for the Universal Hall, just before it was needed, and money appearing from anonymous sources to repay debts which were coming due. Members believe that manifestation will also work for them personally; so signs appear on noticeboards such as: "I am going to India for 3 months, to work and study in Auroville and Puna. I need to manifest a further £300 Gina, Room 21."

In some ways the financial history of Findhorn has given members a great deal of confidence in the Laws of Manifestation. To look at the property now owned by the community, and to consider that 30 years ago its founders were existing on \$16 per week unemployment benefits, tempt even the most hardened cynic to acknowledge the possible operation of some metaphysical force.

As with all group myths, however, there is always a way out. From the above example, when Gina did not receive the requisite

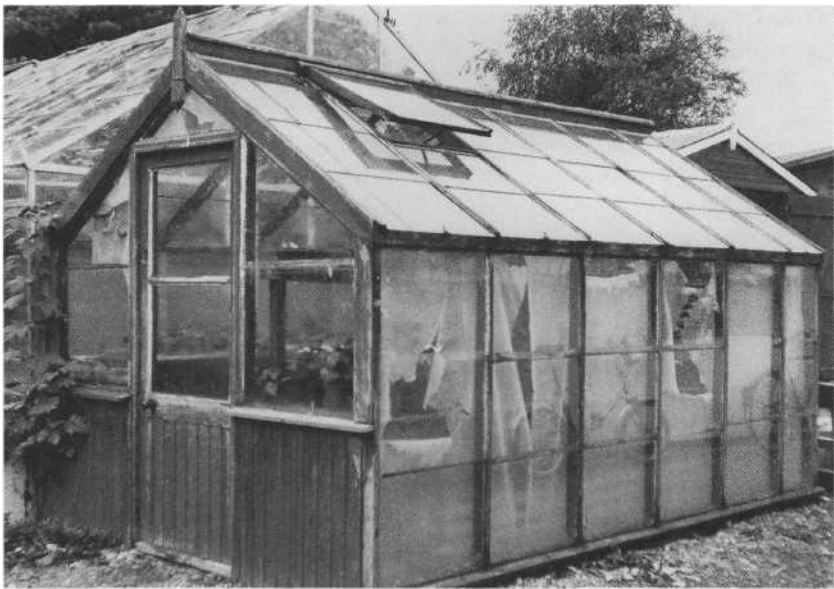


Figure 7. Peter Caddy's 8' x 12' cedarwood greenhouse.

£300, it was accepted by her as a sign that she was not meant to go to India. "Whatever happens is meant to be and is perfect" means that the same spiritual forces, which could have manifested the needed money, instead choose to teach her a lesson, perhaps to not be attached to a need to travel, or to continue with some personal growth process at Findhorn. In other words, the Angel of Findhorn can never be wrong!

Routinization of Charisma?

How then do we interpret what has occurred at Findhorn? While the charismatic leadership of Peter Caddy is now absent, and has not been replaced by a new guru, the community, while developing some bureaucratic structures, resolutely refuses to operate along anything like classic bureaucratic lines as has happened in so many other new age communities²³. There are three possible explanations:

First, perhaps the sense of "awe" which is essential to charisma has been transferred from an individual to a mythological ideal, in such a way that mere mortals can manipulate situations to invoke a sort of residual charisma in order to maintain their covert leadership aims. In other words, while individual focalisers will clearly disavow that they are leaders, insisting that they are merely there to "hold the energy" on a project, it may well be that the Findhorn myth is so inculcated that a focaliser thereby borrows and utilises the latent charisma. This is similar to Weber's²⁴ notion of "Office Charisma", whereby Findhorn focalisers, by virtue of their position, are assigned a degree of charismatic leadership, even if they try to disavow this.

Rosabeth Kanter²⁵, in her seminal work delineating the processes by which Utopian communities evoked commitment from their membership, identified sacrifice, investment, renunciation, communion, mortification and transcendence. The Findhorn emphasis on "sharing" certainly fits into Kanter's notion of mortification. Their communal eating, working and sleeping arrangements promote communion. Meditation and their spiritual teachings can be considered as leading to a feeling of transcendence. All three processes

23. W. Metcalf, "Anarchy and Bureaucracy within the Alternative Lifestyle Movement", *Social Alternatives* 6(4) (1987) pp. 47-51.

24. Weber, *Economy and Society*, pp. 1139-41.

25. R. Kanter, *Commitment and Community* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972), pp. 75-125.

certainly promote commitment and a spiritual solidarity which allows for the sense of awe to be generalized. The ensuing social and spiritual solidarity helps generalize a mystical sense of wonderment, and helps explain why the group has endured.

Second, we must examine the possibility of conscious and blatant exploitation of the Findhorn Myth by certain individuals, who, using terms such as "focaliser", "attunement" and "divine guidance", manage to manipulate and control other members, while maintaining an image of equality. After all, if one disagrees with a decision that has come out of the collective attunement and meditative process of the core group, it can be seen as evidence that one is much further back along the spiritual path. There is, after all, no way one can argue with God!

Third, even as cynical scholars, we must accept the possibility that the Findhorn myth may simply reflect reality. In other words, it may well be that the Laws of Manifestation do indeed work. It may well be that there is an Angel of Findhorn who looks out for the overall wellbeing of the community as well as for the individuals therein. It may well be that through attunement, a group of people can get in touch with a higher level of consciousness, and that wise decisions can be collectively revealed and implemented. The obviously successful decision-making process at Findhorn, in other words, may not depend on humans making decisions, but on humans learning to get in touch with decisions that have already been made on a spiritual plain, and then implementing the revealed wisdom, with faith that all needs will be provided for through manifestation.

Findhorn is well known for the stories of forty-pound cabbages, of flowers blooming in the snow, and of abundant produce from sandy, windswept coastal dunes²⁶. While these stories have a mythical component, there clearly do appear to be unusual plant growth patterns²⁷, and that might be explained through the third option above. Interestingly, however, the stories of miraculous plant growth and the inability of scientists to explain or understand are now played down by Findhorn members, and examples of human growth are emphasized.²⁸

26. Hawken, *The Magic of Findhorn*, pp. 107-130.

27. Metcalf, *Dropping Out and Staying In*, pp. 42-44.

28. Part of the Findhorn mythology concerns soil scientists and agronomists undertaking a host of different analyses in laboratories, and all admitting an inability to explain the phenomenal growth, within accepted bounds of scientific knowledge.

This myth of scientific fallibility was not confirmed, however, by those agricultural researchers whose rational scientific methods were reputedly incapable of provid-

Lofland²⁹ discusses the problem of ethnographic researchers, when using participant observation, "going native", that is, abandoning the central, scientific goals of sociology and anthropology, and adopting as one's own the alternative reality of the subjects under study. Having happily spent considerable time within the Findhorn community over the past decade, I could perhaps be accused of losing the dispassionate detachment of the ideal researcher. Even seriously suggesting option three (above) will be seen by many of my colleagues as tantamount to admitting incipient senility, or at least extreme naivete.

While I certainly observed evidence of the first, "manipulation" scenario in operation it seemed to be more subconscious than conscious and deliberate. In fact, more often than not, it seemed that the newer the member or guest, the more likely they were to project a form of latent charisma onto one of the departmental focalisers, or more likely onto the community focaliser. That this projection helps the community operate should serve as no surprise, but it is not evidence of manipulation, either conscious or unconscious, by focalisers.

I found no evidence of the second, "exploitation" scenario, although there were hints that a few rather disgruntled, newer members may have seen things this way, at least in their darker moments. As in any collection of people, there are some who never have original ideas but can follow, some who throw up new ideas all the time but can rarely follow through, and a few who can, by whatever means, lead and ensure that something happens. Those who believe they are being managed by a manipulative clique are generally mem-

ing an explanation. Dr J.W. Berridge at the North of Scotland College of Agriculture stated (pers. comm. 16/5/83):

"In the early days Peter Caddy maintained plants had spirits called 'Devas' and he and his colleagues spoke to these plant spirits. He made compost of straw and other waste plant material, he also got quantities of farmyard manure thus he was able to grow plants on the sand plus liberal quantities of the latter. He is supposed to have grown a 30 lb cabbage and other such wondrous produce. At his request I sampled the soil for him. I also suggested that I thought it would be short of potash but the sample duly analysed would tell us. In fact the sample did not show a potash deficiency. Soils in that area are low in potash but of course the FYM would have corrected this. In his early publications he made much of this event of how the expert was surprised by the results and so on. If I have any respect for the man it is as the best 'con' man I have ever known. It is typical of his methods that this could in time become a properly conducted trial with results firmly meeting his ends."

29. J. Lofland, *Doing Social Life: The Qualitative Study of Human Interaction in Natural Settings* (New York: Wiley, 1976).

bers who have demonstrated their inability to follow through on projects, and hence are not followed when they try to lead. In other words, I believe the small amount of feeling of being dominated by an elite which I encountered owed more to the people experiencing it than to objective reality.

I cannot comment further on the third scenario, except to say that for me personally it is an acceptable explanation. There does indeed appear to be a Magic of Findhorn. The longer one stays, the more one comes in touch with a deeper, spiritual sense of self. It is surely a sign of an enlightened mind to remain open to new senses, to new explanations and to new realities. To write off the spiritual, mystical explanation of the Findhorn story, is to demonstrate a closed, rigid mind.

Summary and Conclusion

Findhorn would appear to have four important roles within the global, Utopian, alternative lifestyle movement of the late 20th century:

- 1) To serve as a working model of a humanistic, spiritual community which has avoided the excesses of the numerous cults and sects with which the media is replete. Findhorn has served as a model for the development of numerous other intentional communities as far apart as Homeland and Hermitage in Australia, the twelve Emissary communities and Sirius in North America, and Kibbutz Harduf, near Nazareth, Israel. The Findhorn jargon of "focalisers", "attunement", "sharing" and "divas" has become part of the language of communal groups around the world.

- 2) To serve as an example of alternative social relationships, predominantly based on love, within a workable, sustainable, long lasting community—an alternative social reality.

- 3) To serve as an example of an environmentally sustainable community, showing that principles of "deep ecology" can be practiced, while still being able to enjoy a comfortable prosperity—an example of ethical abundance.

- 4) To serve as an example of how forms of alternative technology, such as wind generators and computer technology, can be used to promote community well being.

I conclude with one of the more lucid, Utopian statements yet made about the overall goal or metaphysical aim of Findhorn, an aim it just might be achieving.

Findhorn is projecting . . . a new myth for man [sic], projected into the collective consciousness, that will ultimately be transformed into reality. . . . The myth of Findhorn is the Myth of Creation, of a rebirth of man emerging into a new consciousness. The myth is not of a few individuals gaining a higher understanding of the spiritual and cosmic principles behind life and creation, but a period when the planet as one shall begin to strip away the old personality patterns, the old thought forms, prejudices, and neuroses that distort the collective psyche, and in its place reveal the true, divine nature of the planet. As with the individual, this new understanding and realisation releases a great wave of energy and vitality into the planetary body, energy which further sweeps away the old and brings to the surface all that has to be cleansed and purified.³⁰

30. Hawken, *The Magic of Findhorn*, p. 195-6.