

## Transcription of Podcast

### **Joel Åstrand**

Yes, alright. So, are we ready to get started? Yes.

### **Joel Åstrand**

First of all, I thought we could start this interview by letting you, Robert, just briefly introduce yourself a bit.

### **Robert Hall**

Yeah, I can introduce myself in many different ways, but my name is Robert Hall. I am... Yeah, I've been in Surabin Echo Village for, well, like 17 years. But I've been experimenting in the last couple of years now with rewilding, and therefore I'm in France. I'm calling in from France today, in the South, up in the Pyrenees mountains, about 800 meters above the sea. My background is international cooperation, development assistance, sustainability, democracy, and human rights. I've worked for the Swedish government, for the UN, for the EU. I still, today, work a lot as an international election observer for the EU or for the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

So, it's a lot of big picture stuff. My studies—my first bachelor's is in international relations, my second one in economics, and then a master's in environmentally sustainable infrastructure. So, it's a lot of big picture stuff, and at the same time, a lot of this stuff with ecovillages and rewilding is extremely hands-on, practical, micro-level. So, they're both there, and I guess I enjoy switching between these two perspectives.

### **Joel Åstrand**

Yeah. So, yeah, like experience from each end of the spectrum with both super practical stuff and more theoretical bird's-eye perspective type of stuff as well.

### **Robert Hall**

Yeah.

### **Joel Åstrand**

Alright, so. Our first team here is on Ecovillages, which you have some experience on. We understood correctly. So, first of all, for those who are not yet super familiar with the subject, could you briefly explain what an Ecovillage is?

### **Robert Hall**

The Ecovillage movement has also been a consulting NGO partner of the UN system. That's so we were able to access the UN system and try to have some input from our perspective and, in

that way, also make connections with indigenous peoples around the world. In more recent years, we've gone together with the permaculture movement, the transition movement, to form what's called Ecovillage, which is a European meta-network for community-led initiatives concerned with climate change and sustainability.

And this is basically the advocacy—the mouthpiece of our movements in Brussels, based in Brussels, speaking to policymakers, to members of the European Parliament, to the European Commission, and that's been very successful. So, we do have a dialogue. A little wild, even though it's just starting out. We're one of the 50 climate communities in Europe, in a pilot project of the EU called the C4C Project, Communities for Climate Project. Where the European Union is interested in learning how they could support—you could say—innovative, radical climate communities in being successful.

So, I mean, it's been... Yeah, sometimes there's a lot of, you know, working close to power, close to money, and there's, you know, it's... Sometimes there's a disconnect, a dichotomy of messages about green growth at the same time as a realization that if communities are not involved, the European communities will not be able to adjust, for example, to the climate requirements. We need to have people on board, and people need to be involved. And that's why they have the climate pact or climate community support.

### **Natalia Romanoff**

When you work with these organizations and these projects, do you notice any limitations that come when you work with such big organizations or weaknesses?

### **Robert Hall**

I mean, it's direct politics. I mean, right now, we had the Commission, a very progressive Commission, saying that they wanted the Green New Deal, reform of the common agricultural policy, etcetera, to be in line with the Green New Deal, the farm-to-fork policies. There was a lot of very progressive policies coming out at the same time.

There was backlash from Member States—some Member States wanting to stop this, so. In the end, despite the Commission wanting to go forward with some very progressive green policies, it was actually the Member States that were stopping this, and now there's been some backsliding on a lot of these issues because it's not politically acceptable from a lot of national governments in Europe to do so much for the climate.

So, I mean, we have climate denialism everywhere in Europe. I mean, it's a general denialism, and this is also part of the impetus. Why I wanted to shift from just being in Ecovillage in Sweden to try to see how we can go forward despite, even if the larger society doesn't adjust as needed.

**Natalia Romanoff**

That's very interesting to know. I think that was all of our questions. Do you have something you would like to add?

**Robert Hall**

No, I'm very much looking forward to your podcast and seeing how that turns out, and to see the other participants in the podcast. I can just say that we are an educational community, so it is possible to come here on internships, to write your thesis work here. We have courses. We have a course, 18 to 21 April, on Advanced Forest Gardening. So there are things happening here all the time in Little Wild, even though we don't yet have a homepage.

**Natalia Romanoff**

That sounds really exciting.

**Robert Hall**

Okay. Thank you very much.

**Natalia Romanoff**

Thank you.

**Natalia Romanoff**

Does anyone else have... yeah?

**Joel Åstrand**

Thank you. Maybe just like a small off-the-record question, like this Ecovillage is like, if I wanted to go visit one, for example, could I just go there and walk in and, you know, say hi to everybody? Or would it have to be more formal?

**Robert Hall**

It depends on the Ecovillage. We have Ecovillages with two people and Ecovillages with 1000 people, and the larger ones are going to be much more organized. They have web pages. They have very... one of them has, like, at least one of them has a welcome center.

You come there, you exchange your money for their local currency, and you have to pay for tours and pay for this and pay for that. So, most of the big famous Ecovillages are going to have systems on their websites for how to visit. The very small ones are going to be much more receptive because they don't get so many visits. So, the smaller, the more informal, the less easy to find them, but the more welcoming they will be. And sometimes, your experience maybe depends on which experience you're looking for—the intimate experience.

Experience with the community of 10 people, you know, very open, as opposed to the very large Ecovillages that will ask you to pay, you know, hundreds of euros to go on some course to get to know them, yeah.

**Joel Åstrand**

Right. Okay. Yeah, 'cause, I don't, you really sparked some kind of interest in me in this? I'll look through this interview, so I find it really interesting.

**Robert Hall**

Yep, there's a book called *Echotopia*. If you can get a hold of that. It's available in German and in English. Maybe some other language. It has basically listings of all these communities. Ic.org, this is intentional communities. It's an American website, but they also have listings for many Ecovillages in Europe with hyperlinks, etcetera.

**Joel Åstrand**

Yeah.

**Robert Hall**

And like I said, there's an Ecovillage network in every country. So, I know you guys are currently in Finland. There's, you know, probably 20-30 Ecovillages in Finland. Many not far from where you are.

**Joel Åstrand**

Yeah, it would be interesting to see how they manage the harsh winters. If that adds a whole other layer to the survival aspect of it.

**Robert Hall**

Yeah, yeah. So that's my project for this afternoon. I'm working on a Finnish smoke sauna. I want to build a smoke sauna here in the Pyrenees.

**Joel Åstrand**

Nice. That's interesting!

Alright. Well, I think we're ready to wrap this up and let you continue with your smoke sauna then.

**Robert Hall**

Okay.

**Natalia Romanoff**

Yeah. Thank you very much.

**Joel Åstrand**

Yes. Thanks a lot for taking your time for this.

**Robert Hall**

Yep, very nice meeting you. Good luck.

**Joel Åstrand**

Nice meeting you too.

**Robert Hall**

Bye bye.