

+ville

Why Not Create a Village of Transhumanists?

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This sketchy, first-draft document presents an idea I've had bouncing around in my mind for some time now. It's not a current priority for me – according to my current life plan (which is always subject to revision!), it's not something I could participate in full-time until mid-2014 or so. But if someone else chooses to take it up before that, I'll certainly be a frequent visitor – and I'll ask you kindly to reserve me a spot!

The name “+ville” is intended as a placeholder, which I'll be happy to replace with a spiffy name when somebody thinks of one.

The basic idea is to create a small “village” of transhumanists. The idea is related to two previous trains of thought:

- Co-housing, roughly describable as a movement in which people create “villages” in the forms of apartment or condominium complexes or housing developments, with extensive common areas intended to foster a more collective style of living, more similar to the lifestyle in villages before the rise of cities and suburbs
- The notion of a “trans-topia” – a transhumanist community on an island or a seastead, where transhumanists can live outside the reach of conventional governments

To me, Transtopia is a wonderful idea, but very difficult to realize at the present time, and I'm too busy with other difficult projects to push toward something like that. Co-housing does interest me, but the community I identify with most closely these days is the broad community of transhumanists, so my ideal in this regard would be a transhumanist co-housing facility.

But then, it occurs to me: If you're going to do transhumanist co-housing, you might as well push the idea a little further, and make something a little more interesting than the typical co-housing facility.

So, here is what I'm thinking.

First, I'll define a **cluster** as a group consisting of roughly a couple dozen units (where a unit may be an individual or a nuclear family, but is generally thought of as corresponding to an apartment, condo or house).

I'm thinking of +ville as consisting of a collection of independently owned and operated clusters, possibly adjacent to each other, or possibly just nearby each

other. The first task would be to start the first cluster; then, if it's successful and fills up, hopefully other nearby clusters would emerge. One key point is to start the first cluster in an area where formation of other nearby clusters is economically and practically viable.

The clusters might differ in various ways, but the prototypical cluster I'm thinking of might consist of:

- A couple dozen housing units (could be condos, houses or apartments, or a mix thereof)
- A common building (perhaps just a large house) with rooms suitable for use as:
 - A conference room where lectures/discussions could be given
 - A couple small meeting rooms
 - A kitchen / dining area
 - A communal "home schooling" area
 - A recreation room
 - A music room (maybe the classic garage or basement)
 - A "hackerspace" suitable for hi-tech prototyping projects
 - A server room where individual or shared computing equipment can be kept
 - A few guest rooms where visitors can stay
- A common outdoors area with
 - A pleasant natural environment, and recreational facilities as appropriate to the locale
 - Picnic tables and such for outdoor recreation and discussion
 - A large fenced area for dogs to communally romp in (yes, I'm a dog lover)

If the mix of residents and visitors is right, the common building in a +ville cluster could become one heck of a powerful site for creative idea generation and collaborative work and play.

Co-housing presents easy opportunities for residents to share services, and one interesting possibility here would be for residents to cooperatively hire a system administrator to help with their home IT tasks.

If there are enough residents with children, the possibility of a communal "one room school" seem very interesting – parents could band together to hire a teacher or two to teach in the schooling area.

Of course, democratic governance similar to in many condominium complexes and co-housing facilities would seem appropriate, and there are many details to discuss in this regard.

Cost-wise, if there are 24 units and the common building costs as much as 3 typical units, then the requirement to pay for part of the common unit would increase the cost of each unit by about 12%, which seems reasonable.

Regarding the location, there are competing factors. While property values are low in remote rural areas, many transhumanists will be happier living relatively near a technology hub or at least a major urban area. Someplace within a reasonable commute of San Francisco would be appealing because there are so many transhumanists in that area. On the other hand, real estate costs are very high there. A little further out in Northern California (say, the Sacramento area) is much more affordable. Another interesting possibility is Arizona, where property costs are lower and which is a short flight to California.

The practicalities of setting up something like this would seem somewhat onerous, unless one is wealthy. The two obvious possibilities seem to be:

1. A wealthy individual or organization buys the land, builds the common building, and then sells lots to transhumanist individuals or families in the typical manner of a housing development
2. A group of transhumanists band together and form an organization that plays the role of the “developer”

Complications ensue due to the general reliance of Americans on mortgages to buy property, so Option 2 would seem to require a sympathetic bank.

Anyway, at this point, this idea is more a general future possibility than an immediate action plan. But if you're a transhumanist [or a wealthy investor or real estate developer] and find this possibility appealing, why don't you send me an email and say so (ben@goertzel.org). A lot of crazier ideas have come to fruition.