

A Taste of Utopia?

Cultivating a Culture of Sustainability in Fairfield, Iowa

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I meet up with my guide in the Argiro student center just as she finishes a summer class she's teaching. She's a Maharishi Vedic Science (MVS) Ph.D. student at Maharishi University of Management and she's agreed to show me the domes today. Vastu architecture requires all buildings to be surrounded by a white fence, and as we enter the gate I have a feeling that I've just passed a metaphorical threshold. *There's no going back now, you're really in it this time!* I think as I close the latch behind us and make sure my face is composed to reveal none of my incredulity, excitement, and skepticism. I turn around and face the Bagambhrini Golden Dome for the lady meditators. *Here we go....*

We go through a set of glass double-doors and then we're in a coatroom with shelves for shoes, much like in a Hindu temple. We take off our shoes, go through another door, and we're in a small foyer with a plush rug and a few bulletin boards. The room reminds me of a modern church; the room you enter before going into the sanctuary, where the old women meet, have coffee, and gossip and community events are advertised. A sign that recommends silence greets us as we go through another set of doors, this time into the Dome itself. A vast circular room opens up in front of me, the curved wooden ceiling rising surprisingly high and ending in a glass skylight underneath the spire rising from the top that's visible from the outside. But the ceiling is not the first thing I notice.

The first thing I notice is the expanse of mattresses lining the floor of the Dome and continuing further than it seems it should. On the mattresses are vertical structures called "back-jacks" which people use as back support for extended meditation. The back-jacks are colorful in contrast to the white, yellow, gold, and brown of the mattresses, walls, and ceiling. Immediately I notice that each back-jack is unique and has been

customized by its owner - a stark contrast to the uniformity that governs the rest of the Dome. Some have blankets and tassels draped over them, pillows at the base or leaned against them, one even has a pillow-pet in the shape of a sheep sitting next to it. To the immediate left is a section reserved for guests, and these back-jacks are not customized. Around the edge of the room, near the windows, are comfortable armchairs, presumably for elderly meditators who have trouble sitting on the mattresses.

I am awestruck at the room in front of me. It's beautiful. It's the kind of vast space where you feel the quantity of atmosphere around you and speaking at normal volumes seems like sacrilege. Right now, we're the only ones in here, but in about half an hour it will be filled with meditating women. I am led to the center of the Dome and a little off to the right, where there is a section of mattresses without back-jacks. This is my guide's customary spot, the Yogic Flying ring. "For those of us Yogic Flyers who are flexible enough to achieve full lotus," she says as she plops down and folds her legs into a pretzel.

As we sit, I have more of an opportunity to look around. The Dome is oriented east, towards the door we came in, so that everyone is meditating while facing east. Over the doorway, there's an enormous digital clock that announces the time as 3:38 PM. At the other end of the Dome is a small dais, on which is a portrait of Maharishi and a couple other usual trappings of TM ceremonies. In front of the dais is a massive TV monitor. The TV allows this Dome to connect with other meditator communities around the globe.

As we continue to talk, about MVS, about meditation in the Dome, about the history of the town, and my guide's own experiences here, I can't help but think that I want to be part of a group meditation in the Dome. Nearly everyone I've talked to at this

point has impressed upon me the amazing feeling of group meditation. What would it be like to transcend while surrounded by 400 other women who are also touching that unified consciousness? As I'm thinking this, my rational, critical self (one of many personalities I have inside this head of mine) is leaning against the wall of my brain and rolling her eyes. I tell her that she doesn't know everything, and to come back later and let me enjoy the moment.

We've been in the Dome for about half an hour and people start trickling in. We head back across the Dome, back through the meeting area, where women are starting to come in and greet each other, and into the coatroom. We put our shoes on and soon we're back through the gate in the normal world again. My guide walks me back through Utopia Park and then, as we part, wishes me luck on my project.

Where am I, you might ask? I am in Fairfield, Iowa. The project on which my guide was wishing me luck is conducting research on sustainability initiatives in Fairfield and how these are related to the strong spirituality movement present in that town. My visit to the Dome, while not obviously relevant to sustainability, occurred during my last week in Fairfield after spending nearly two months in the town and was a way for me to gain a deeper understanding of Fairfield's unique brand of spirituality.

"Metals, plastic, and meditation..."

Although the history of Fairfield begins long before 1970, the main focus of this research is on events that have occurred since then. Fairfield, the county seat of Jefferson County, is an agricultural and manufacturing town, producing mainly

metals and plastics. The town had long been home to Parsons College. In the 1960's, Parsons began attracting a "bad crowd" of students, causing distress in the local community. Shortly after that, the school lost its accreditation and subsequently went bankrupt, placing the entire campus on the market. The Transcendental Meditation movement (further referred to either as TM or the "movement"), at the time based in Goleta, CA, just so happened to be looking for a college campus on which to create a school founded on the worldview of TM (Weber 2014). The movement purchased Parsons campus and created Maharishi International University in 1971 (later renamed Maharishi University of Management – MUM). Later, the movement also founded a K-12 school, the Maharishi School of the Age of Enlightenment (MSAE) (Weber 2014).

The founder and guru of the TM movement, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, called for members of the movement to move to Fairfield in the 1970's and 80's. The university attracted some young members who wanted to be able to focus on meditation while also obtaining an accredited degree. Movement members flooded into Fairfield, creating a new community within the town. Initially, Maharishi insisted all members maintain appearances that were professional and accepted by the wider U.S. society and, while the movement community may have had some unusual practices, they looked the part of young professionals (Weber 2014: 4: 14¹).

At first, the movement remained cloistered from the rest of Fairfield. As a result, there was a lack of communication between the meditators and non-

¹ Citations for field notes refer to the number assigned to each interviewee and, when relevant, the date on which information was obtained. Here, "4" and "14" refer to interviewees 4 and 14.

meditators within Fairfield, and each community maintained a separate existence within the small town. The meditators viewed Fairfield as a place where they could build a new society, a utopia if you will, and there was a “homestead” feel among many of the new townspeople, many of whom were members of the counter-culture movement of the 60’s and 70’s (1, June 12: 5, July 2). The existence of MUM (then MIU – Maharishi International University) in Fairfield and the presence of the movement was highly controversial throughout Iowa, and there were high levels of tension between the meditator and non-meditator communities in Fairfield.

Today, many people do not want to go into detail about what this tension looked like, although it seems to have stemmed from a lack of communication and awareness between the two communities. I have been told that there was bullying and violence of children in the movement who went to public schools, dramatic political problems relating to the voting rights of meditators, and tension over the traditional agricultural practices of Iowans (8, July 11). Aside from tension stemming from different beliefs and lifestyles, there was also a clash of cultures between the Midwestern residents and self-styled “immigrants” from the coasts and other regions of the U.S. (3, June 27).

As time went on, movement members became more involved in the community, mainly through entrepreneurship. There is no denying that the movement brought about enormous economic change in Fairfield – change that was much appreciated, given the economic hardships brought on by the failure of Parsons College. This was partly due to the fact that many of the movement members, many of whom came to Fairfield from the coasts or even other nations,

brought with them a large amount of personal wealth (Weber 2014). Fairfield has a huge amount of venture capital. Manufacturing and local businesses have been reinvigorated by the mediator community, the town square has been revived, private businesses and jobs have been added to the economy. Regardless of culture clashes between mediator and non-mediator, today, everyone can agree that the movement has done great things for Fairfield.

In the last 15 years, there have been many new developments in Fairfield. The community dynamics in town have shifted and sustainability has become a key component of the Fairfield identity. There were several key events in the last 15 years that allowed these changes to occur. In 2001, a mediator was elected mayor of Fairfield and has remained mayor ever since. Mayor Ed Malloy is very popular with both mediators and non-mediators (referred to by Fairfield residents as “roos,” short for “guru,” and “townies” respectively).

I will discuss existing factions and tensions within the town at a later point, but everyone I spoke to names Ed and his position as mayor as a key component of an era of peace in Fairfield and to the level of environmental sustainability the town has achieved. In 2003, MUM established the Sustainable Living Department, another key component in the story of sustainability in Fairfield and a defining feature of the Fairfield narrative in the last 15 years. But before I begin a discussion of sustainability, it is important to understand the movement and MUM and how they fit into the Fairfield culture.

Transcendental Meditation

Transcendental meditation is a mantra-based meditation technique made globally popular by a man named Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. Maharishi was born in India and studied to become a guru under Guru Dev (or the “Great Teacher”). After a period of time spent in the Himalayas, Maharishi believed his mission was to spread TM to the world at large and not confine it to a technique passed on from a single teacher, or guru, to a single student. He traveled to the United States to spread this new technique. Originally, the movement was not called “Transcendental Meditation”, but the “Spiritual Regeneration Movement” (5, July 2). However, Maharishi was concerned at the reception of U.S. citizens to the idea of spirituality and decided to focus on the physiological benefits of the technique. TM was advertised as a mechanism for improving your body, brain, and life overall:

Maharishi comes over here in like the early 1960's and starts promoting this as like a health thing because at some point he realizes that this is the only way he can get traction. And at first he resisted it and then he's like, okay it doesn't really matter if somebody just starts doing this to get rid of their headaches and then they get enlightened. It's a win-win (4, June 29).

The movement was endorsed by celebrities like the Beatles and became very popular among college students and members of the 60's counter culture. TM was seen as an alternative lifestyle and was embraced enthusiastically. Maharishi led the movement until he passed away in 2008.

For most people, TM is simply a meditation practice and does not involve belief in anything. Meditators are free to adhere to any religion, spirituality, or worldview they wish and it does not interfere with their meditation. However, the story in Fairfield is slightly different.

The official stance of the TM movement is that it is not a religion, worldview, philosophy, or lifestyle. However, what I observed of TM in Fairfield seemed very much like an institutionalized worldview and value system,-; a set of beliefs about the way the universe is constructed and how one should live their life. Maharishi is revered as a prophet, and his image and words are hung on the walls of many buildings, both in individual homes and academic buildings on the MUM campus. Maharishi is referred to as “His Holiness Maharishi Mahesh Yogi,” and the phrase, “Well, Maharishi said...” is ubiquitous among movement members. MUM students must learn TM and the basics of Maharishi’s philosophy when they arrive at school (which I will discuss in more detail below). Maharishi’s worldview, or belief system, and the more spiritual component of TM is a large part of education at MUM.

The belief system is complex and based on Maharishi’s interpretations of ancient Vedic texts, the Vedantas, and the Bhagavad Gita. While I do not claim to be an expert, I will outline some of the main components here. I focus on the tenets of this worldview that members have described to me in connection with sustainability, although I am aware that this is not the entirety of the worldview.

An overarching theme in Maharishi philosophy is the idea of layers. Everything has many layers, and by peeling back those layers one can achieve complete knowledge. The universe itself has many layers. This belief is grounded in Vedantic philosophy, particularly the ideas of *maya* and *brahman*. *Maya* is the world we see around us; it is an illusion, ever-changing, and will end at some point. *Maya* is like a veil over our eyes, which tricks us into forming bonds with material objects - the foundations of greed (19, June 15, 17). *Brahman* is another layer, the eternal

layer of consciousness. This consciousness, also called the “unified field” or “pure knowledge”, is shared among all living things, but it is manifested into the discrete beings we see in *maya*. Through meditation, one can break away from the trappings of *maya*, reach the layer of *brahman*, and have knowledge of this unified field (19, June 15, 17).

If an individual meditates frequently enough and achieves total consciousness, usually by utilizing the TM Sidhi technique (a more advanced level of meditation which enables special abilities, such as yogic flying), they are able to achieve the state of total consciousness and maintain this state of being even while they are not meditating. However, even through “regular” TM, they believe the brain is shifted “from a random pattern to an integrated, synchronized level of function” (Pearson 2015). This synchronized level of “coherence” allows them to unlock deeper levels of creativity, ingenuity, and greater ability to see the “big picture”. In short, TM “unlocks the multi-potentiality of the adult brain” (Pearson 2015). The hope of the movement is that this will be manifested on a global scale.

Because of these benefits of TM, which movement members often say has been backed up by scientific research, movement members believe in a phenomenon called “spontaneous right action” (19; 26). Spontaneous right action is the idea that as a result of frequent meditation and achieving total knowledge, a person’s behavior will automatically change for the better. By fundamentally changing their internal selves, the external manifestation of themselves will also change (2; 4; 5; 19; 26). This includes acting positively towards others and the world/universe as a whole.

Another key aspect of Maharishi's worldview is a focus on the positive rather than the negative. By focusing on positive things and meditating on positive outcomes, an individual can manifest positivity in their lives or in the universe. If they focus on negative things, these negative outcomes will be more likely to manifest. Movement members can even pay for others to meditate on a positive outcome for their own personal issues, which struck me as similar to paying someone else to pray for you. While focus on positive outcomes is not necessarily a bad practice, some community members have mentioned feeling as though they had to censor their speech in select company lest they be chastised for "entertaining negativity" (2, June 12). Emphasis on the positive has also been taken to the extreme in some instances, with outright denial of real negative outcomes and the possibility of processing negativity in a healthy way.

Although the TM movement is relatively small, its adherents believe that simply by existing and meditating they raise the consciousness and awareness of the population around them, although I have not been able to get a clear picture of how exactly this works. Another aspect of this is the so-called "Maharishi Effect," in which violent crime is lowered as long as the square root of 1% of the population practices TM Sidhi meditation on a regular basis (Weber 2014; 26). The Maharishi Effect is part of the reason Fairfield was chosen as a site for the movement's university. Iowa is centrally located in the U.S. and a large concentration of meditators in the middle of the country will help lower violent crime rates throughout the country and bring about a nation of peace. Maharishi even sent some

meditators to troubled areas around the world to meditate for peace (Weber 2014; 8, July 11).

The advanced meditators are given a badge that allows them to enter one of two large golden domes on the university campus, one for men and one for women. Members are technically supposed to go to the domes twice a day – morning and evening – to meditate for at least 20 minutes a day. If you go through the university campus around 4:00 PM you will see people coming to meditate at the domes. Many of these individuals have been meditating for 30 to 40 years. One witness of this procession noted the wide eyes and blank expressions of the meditators, saying, “If that’s what 40 years of meditation gives you then no thank you!” (14, June 1). While I have seen the tired meditators with wide eyes, I have also been told that meditating in the domes is a beautiful and invigorating experience. The shared experience of achieving total consciousness in the presence of hundreds of other people is not something to be dismissed lightly (2; 8; 28).

As a non-meditator I was unsure of how well I could truly understand what TM actually is. What does TM feel like? Is it possible for me to comprehend TM without practicing it? I posed these questions to one of the meditators I had met and was given an enlightening answer (forgive the pun). The experience of transcendence, I was told, is something all humans have experienced before (6, July 7). It is the feeling you get when you have an intense reaction to something, be it a beautiful landscape, the sunset, looking into the eyes of someone you love, or something else. When this happens, you experience the feeling that there is something larger than you out there, for example when you lie on your back and

stare up at the stars and have the sensation that you are one tiny being in the vastness of the universe. So the feeling achieved through TM is something that we have all experienced before, even if we've done so unintentionally. TM, according to this explanation, is the intentional experience of this feeling on a regular basis. This connection with that larger entity, that "consciousness", as it is known in TM, changes your life, your mind, and your worldview.

Maharishi University of Management

Maharishi University of Management, originally Maharishi International University, came to Fairfield in 1971 after the movement purchased Parsons College's former campus. MUM advertises itself as providing a new educational paradigm through "consciousness-based education". Consciousness-based education is founded on the practice of TM and adhering to the teachings of Maharishi. Learning, then, is done from "the inside out" as the "technology of consciousness" is applied to individuals and they experience direct development through a fundamental internal change. As the Executive Vice President of the university, Craig Pearson, said, "If we don't focus on the inside, we can take everything we do on the outside and it will be too little too late" (June 20).

A key component of the consciousness-based education is Maharishi's new scientific paradigm, Maharishi Vedic Science (MVS). MVS is founded on the idea that science is completely dependent on the instruments used to perceive and measure the world around us. Our bodies, therefore, can be counted as instruments of perception and measurement and must therefore be finely tuned. According to

Maharishi, the structure of the universe is based on consciousness. Therefore, by achieving total consciousness on a regular basis, the human body will be a well-trained instrument of perception, and from this all other scientific disciplines can grow.

While MUM is an accredited institution, many people in Fairfield told me that it is nowhere near the caliber it used to be. Many of the professors who made the education worthwhile have left or retired, and the departments they were in have withered and died. The most popular degrees include bachelors' in Maharishi Ayurvedic Health & Physiology, Sustainable Living, and the graduate "Compro" program. The Compro program, a computer science masters' degree, easily makes up the majority of the student body at MUM, which totaled 1,221 in 2013 (www.mum.edu). In recent years the proportion of graduate students to undergraduates has tipped heavily in favor of the graduate students, with only 381 undergraduate students currently enrolled compared to 859 graduate students (www.mum.edu). Many of these students are not in residence, however, and only 655 are actually living in Fairfield (www.mum.edu). Many international students are drawn to MUM because the program offers them guaranteed job opportunities in the United States after only a few months in Fairfield. They are also able to attend the university with loans that are then repaid after they leave to take jobs elsewhere in the country.

All students at MUM are required to learn TM and take a course on the basics of Maharishi's teachings. As a part of this, they spend time with a TM teacher to test the "proficiency" of their meditation (3, June 27). When I asked *how* proficiency of

meditation was checked, I was told that there is a series of questionnaires given to students of TM to check their experience of transcendence, but that mostly it constitutes sitting with the teacher while meditating (3, June 27). As one interviewee said, “Nobody knows what I’m doing with my eyes closed!” (6, July 7).

Students must continue to meditate for each semester they are at MUM, according to the Developmental Consciousness (DC) policy (3, June 27; 4, June 29; 26). The DC policy governs the amount of time each student must spend meditating each semester. Failure to comply can result in failure to graduate on time. In recent years, the DC policy has been changing frequently as a result of student pushback. In 2009, the DC policy maintained that students had to meditate in the Domes twice a day with the rest of the regularly meditating population of Fairfield (3, June 27). However, too many students were failing to meet the required hours of meditation and the policy has now been changed to integrate meditation into classes, with a 20-minute period in the morning, a 10-minute period before lunch, and a 10-minute period in the afternoon (1, June 12).

The university maintains that *all* students and faculty complete the required twice-daily 20-minute meditation practices. However, as I was surprised to find, this is far from the truth. Instead of meditating together as advertised, many students simply leave the classroom during meditation time (1, June 12; 4, June 29). While there are opportunities to make up the missed DC requirements, it is unclear how many students actually do. Still other students simply sit and either wait for others to finish meditating or practice different meditation techniques, which is frowned

upon. Some professors will express displeasure to their students but seem to have little power to actually enforce the mandatory meditation (1, June 12).

The University draws mixed reactions from Fairfield residents. While no one disagrees with the fact that without the university and the movement Fairfield would not be as prosperous as it is today, they do not necessarily agree with many of the university's decisions. The university does not contribute to the town's economy as much as some would like (13; 14; 15). While the university itself says this is mainly due to economic instability within the institution, others believe they simply are not trying hard enough (13; 14; 15). The university also made enemies both within and outside of the movement when it tore down Parson's old buildings, particularly an old chapel. These buildings were protected as a national historic site, yet the university decided they needed to come down so new, Sthapatya Ved buildings could be built, including the two Golden Domes (8, July 11). This, and other actions, has made the University a controversial figure in the Fairfield community.

The People of Fairfield

The standard distinction in Fairfield is between the "townies" and the "roos". At one point in history that was the most accurate depiction of tension within Fairfield, but it is no longer quite so simple. As movement members became more involved in Fairfield, lines of communication opened between the townies and the once-cloistered roo's. This alone was very effective in lowering levels of tension between the two groups. Those who came to Fairfield in the "Great Move" started

having children, some of whom were sent to the public schools in Fairfield. Growing up as a child of the movement in Fairfield was often to be the victim of bullying and cruel pranks (8, July 11). Movement children at public schools were sometimes beat up, and one notable memory of a now-successful meditator involves being trapped in a barn surrounded by “townies” with guns (8, July 11; 24).

Tension and hostility were not limited to children and adolescents, however. Even today, some members of differing factions refuse to enter each other’s “turf,” with some non-meditators refusing to set foot on MUM campus and some meditators feeling slighted by events hosted in public spaces like the library instead of on campus (9, July 13; 15; 16; 17; 18; 21; 22). The election of Mayor Ed Malloy, a long-time meditator, has been instrumental in increasing peace within Fairfield, and everyone I spoke to has emphasized that the situation in Fairfield “...is nothing to how it used to be” (8, July 11). Mayor Malloy has worked to represent the entirety of the town and not just the meditating community. However, in his first bid for the mayoral seat he was not elected and there was open hostility and aggression towards movement members attempting to vote for him (8, July 11).

Since Mayor Malloy’s successful run for the mayoral seat in 2001, tensions within the town have taken on an entirely different nature. While before it took the form of overt antagonism and hostility, it is now more likely to be articulated quietly with one eye looking over a shoulder. Furthermore, instead of the two main groups, there are now many factions. While there are subdivisions within each of these factions as well, the dominant groups in Fairfield that I have seen are as follows²:

1. Non-meditators

- a. Long-time Fairfield residents
 - i. Lived in the town before the movement arrived
 - ii. Family has been in Fairfield for generations
- b. Younger non-meditators
 - i. Typically care less about the distinction between meditators and non-meditators than their parents

2. The Meditator Community

- a. "The Old Guard"
 - i. Those who moved to Fairfield in the 1970's and 80's **or**
 - ii. Those who have meditated and followed Maharishi for many years, although not necessarily in Fairfield initially
- b. "The Second Generation"
 - i. Children of the Old Guard, mainly born in the 80's although there are some older and younger members of this group
 - ii. Grew up meditating but do not necessarily do so on a regular basis
 - iii. Are open to other gurus, types of meditation, beliefs, etc
 - iv. There are two different groups within the Second Generation:
 1. Those who went to MSAE and/or MUM
 2. Those who went to public schools in Fairfield and colleges outside Fairfield
- c. Disenfranchised meditators
 - i. Moved to Fairfield in the 1970's and 80's but for some reason or other have left the movement
 - ii. May still meditate but do not follow Maharishi's teachings or associate with MUM
- d. The Transient Population
 - i. This includes:
 1. MUM students not born in Fairfield
 2. Individuals that somehow found their way to Fairfield and decided to stay for a while
 - ii. Associated with the meditator community more than the non-meditator community
- e. "The New Movement"
 - i. People who came to Fairfield because of the sustainability initiatives in town and not because of TM
 - ii. Includes students in the Sustainable Living Department at MUM

² With the exception of "hybrids" and "The New Movement" which were articulated to me by several different interviewees (5, July 2; 3, June 27; 14; 17; 18; 22; 24), the labels of each group were come up with independently of help from Fairfield residents.

- iii. Associated with the meditator community more than the non-meditator community

3. "Hybrids"

- a. Children of meditators and non-meditators
- b. Associated with the meditator community and the non-meditator community

With all these different factions, it can be hard for someone to know what they can comfortably say in certain locations in town. Many people articulated to me that they felt more comfortable discussing things in certain spaces, for example in the bookstore/café Revelations, rather than in the coffee shop Café Paradiso, a "meditator hot-spot" (4; 9, July 13; 12, July 22). Even in semi-private places or public places in which people felt more comfortable, there was still an atmosphere of secrecy and censorship. Interviewees communicated that they had to be careful what they said and where (1, June 12). A common occurrence during interviews was for the interviewee to look around, duck their shoulders, lean forwards, and speak in a hushed voice, often prefacing their statements with something to the effect of, "I'm going to get in so much trouble for saying this..." (4, June 29).

And yet, everyone impressed upon me the strength of the Fairfield community and the relative lack of tension in the town in recent years. What I observed was not a lack of tension, but a changed tension. Instead of overt hostility, there is covert drama, the social theatre is fraught with intrigue, dislike, and distrust in the narrative of Fairfield. Much of this is occurring between subdivisions of the meditator community. As one interviewee said, "Just because we meditate doesn't mean we're good people. There are too many meditators who are assholes." (2, June 23).

This particular person has experienced frustration with the narrative of the Fairfield community as opposed to what he perceives as the reality. While the narrative maintains that the community is strong and is committed to sustainability and philanthropy, the message he is receiving from older meditators is that they are not committed to those things and will, in fact, make it difficult for the Second Generation and other young subdivisions of the meditating community to create sustainability and community-development programs (2, June 23). But it is not only within the meditator community that these people are facing opposition. There is also still tension between meditator and non-meditator communities in Fairfield, and this is often on the bureaucratic level these days, involving policy changes and legal battles instead of outright hostility and aggression (2, June 23).

Not a lifestyle, worldview, philosophy, or religion...

TM is claimed to be a technique, not a religion, philosophy, worldview, or lifestyle, but is that really the case? Perhaps around the world, TM is mainly a simple meditation technique that does not imply any spiritual understanding, yet in Fairfield, as I've said before, the story is different. TM has become institutionalized in a way that is strongly reminiscent of religion. MUM is an institution that is based on Maharishi's philosophy, and students are required to take what Maharishi said at face value, not to mention the Developmental Consciousness requirements. Even my tour of the Ladies' Dome, as described at the beginning of this paper, was heavy in religious overtones.

Most people, when asked what is the difference between spirituality and religion, will say that spirituality is subjective and personal, while religion is

institutionalized and involves ritual. While much of Maharishi's philosophy may generally fall into the "spiritual" category, there is no denying the institutionalization of Maharishi in Fairfield and the presence of ritual surrounding this institution. While the official line is that TM is *not* a form of spirituality, several interviewees told me that in Fairfield the idea of "consciousness" is synonymous with "spirituality" and that part of the strength of this community is that they all share a common worldview (1, June 12; 5, July 2).

You'd think that these meditators would be the most open. You think that. But they're not.
(27, June 20)

During my first week in Fairfield I was walking around the MUM campus with an acquaintance. He was telling me about the school, the administration, TM, and Fairfield at large. As we were walking through the Argiro building, the student center on campus, this acquaintance looked around, lowered his voice and said, of the movement as an entity, "It's something that starts with a 'c' ...". That word was "cult," and if I was surprised to hear it at first, it became a very common phrase used by many people in Fairfield, both meditators and non-meditators alike, to describe what is going on in Fairfield. "It's an institution that controls the way you think and live, what else could you call it?" he continued (15, June 4). Similar sentiment was expressed to me from various sources, including a cutting example provided in interview 4:

I have students from ... Utah. And I also have a student who said the same thing who was raised – his mom was a scientologist. And they both said, "Look, we came from cults. We know what a cult is. This is a cult." And like, other students who were

Catholics, who came and were like, “Look I left my home to get away from dogma and I came here and it’s just dogma.” (4, June 29)

Interviewee 4, and many others I spoke to, also mentioned censorship of information at MUM (1, June 12; 13; 15; 16; 17; 18; 22). Guest speakers at MUM are given thorough background checks before they are allowed to come onto the MUM campus (14, June 1; 15, June 16; 16, June 16). I’ve even been told that if sustainability speakers discuss the use of mushrooms in permaculture, a taboo food among the movement, they are not allowed to speak on campus (15, June 16; 16, June 16).

Applied critical thinking in courses at MUM has also been in decline. Students in the Maharishi Vedic Science PhD program have expressed dissatisfaction in their classes because they have been ignored by professors during class (4, June 29). These students say they are passed over during class discussion because the professor does not want to engage in critical thinking about Maharishi Vedic Science. As a result, a concerted effort has been made to re-instate critical thinking into the university curriculum, but this has been difficult as many of the professors have simply been taking what Maharishi said as fact for 40 years now:

So there’s again another weird tension between, here’s this practice that can be genuinely secular and here’s this ideology that goes way beyond the practice into every facet of life. And the people who are at this institution are here because in some way he was their guru. And part of the narrative says that he was enlightened. Which means that whatever he says was true so then you just have to do it. (4, June 29)

So here we have an institutionalized worldview that has become a system that explains itself. And the recognition of this system is rampant in every subdivision of the meditator community except for the Old Guard, who are the main perpetrators of this system. This doesn’t mean that all practitioners of TM are close-minded,

though, just that a large faction of the Old Guard who is in charge is perceived by others as being so.

Many newer residents of Fairfield come for other reasons than because they believe Maharishi's teachings are the end-all-be-all of existence: "...I'm totally interested in the consciousness aspect. But as an academic, not as somebody who's looking for a guru. Not as somebody who's looking to, just, check my critical thinking at the door, right?" (4, June 29). But attempts to change the system are frustrated across the board because TM has become a "closed system," a "conservative paradigm that overshadows progressiveness" (2, June 23). It is this restrictiveness in knowledge and the lack of critical thinking, combined with punishments for failing to comply with movement standards (even choosing to meditate outside the Dome can have lasting social repercussions (8, July 11)) that has led many residents of Fairfield to label the movement a "cult".

While I will refrain from passing judgment on such labels, I believe the perception of the movement as such is extremely important in understanding the community dynamics in Fairfield, specifically the tension and fracturing within the meditator community. In the last 15 years, however, a new movement has started to supplant the Maharishi movement. Instead of focusing on Maharishi's teachings and trying to apply them to today's world, this new movement has a wider knowledge base, both spiritually and otherwise, and a different focus: sustainability.

The New Movement

The sustainability movement in Fairfield has really taken off since the early 2000's. However, it did not suddenly pop into existence at that point.

Environmentalism and environmental awareness was generally a large part of the worldview of early adherents to TM, who then brought this mindset with them when they moved to Fairfield. These early environmentalists, fresh from reading *Silent Spring* (1962), implemented small-scale grassroots environmental efforts in Fairfield when they arrived.

One of these initiatives was the founding, in the early 1980s, of a community called Seven Hills, which can be considered a "proto"-ecovillage. Seven Hills was a community whose members signed several covenants governing lifestyle based on reducing carbon footprints and avoiding the use of pollutants (8, July 11). These covenants included things like growing at least some of your own food and avoiding the use of pesticides within the area. While the technology to live off the grid did not exist at the time this proto-ecovillage was founded, it is still functioning today and the residents are working to update their lifestyles to fit current technology, such as installing solar panels on houses and switching to electric or hybrid vehicles (8, July 11).

In 1988, a small group of movement members started a guerrilla recycling movement in town. They would drive around Fairfield and collect recyclable waste, then take that to a recycling center nearby. Within a few years this was picked up by the town and implemented on a municipal level.

The Fairfield farmer's market was started in a similar way. Homesteading meditations came to sell their produce and crafts in town and pretty soon a large farmers market had developed. At first it was almost exclusively meditations who sold food at the farmer's market but that has changed (6, July 6). Today, many of the stalls are not run by meditations but by local farmers catering to the tastes of the Fairfield community. Many other small, grassroots initiatives were started as well. A lot of these included businesses which catered to the local, organic food aspect of movement lifestyle as well as providing economic revival for the town. In response to the new, niche market, businesses across the town began carrying more "sustainable" products and advertising this.

Part of the increase in sustainable practices was due to an increased awareness of environmental issues around the globe. The term "sustainable," in the sense used in this paper and by many people in Fairfield, was first defined in the 1987 Brundtland Report, which defined sustainable development as "...development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (1987). Sustainability has also been defined using the idea of the "triple bottom line" of sustainability – economic sustainability, community sustainability, and environmental sustainability.

The sustainability movement in Fairfield didn't really take off until the early 2000's, but there are already so many sustainability projects in Fairfield that I could not possibly account for all of them here. Even prominent leaders of the sustainability movement have trouble keeping track of all of it. Instead, I will give a

brief overview of *some* components of the movement that are currently in existence or being planned.

Abundance EcoVillage

In 2000, the first home was built at Abundance EcoVillage, a community just north of the MUM campus (6). It is a small collection of houses, all built in the Maharishi Sthapatya Ved style favored by the movement, interspersed with wetland reconstruction. Abundance EcoVillage is completely off the grid. Energy is supplied to the community by solar and wind power, all water comes from rainfall, and sewage is filtered through the wetland (with many more complex steps along the way). Although Abundance EcoVillage is off the grid in terms of energy, water, and sewage, there is little food production in the EcoVillage and most food is purchased in town. It's location, far from the town center and on a busy county road, also makes transportation difficult, and most residents are forced to drive everywhere. However, it is a true feat of engineering and a symbol of the level of sustainable-mindedness in Fairfield.

Sustainable Living Department at MUM

By 2002, the biology department at MUM had all but disappeared and desperately needed reform. In 2003, it was born anew as the Sustainable Living (SL) department. The name "sustainable living" as opposed to "environmental science" is an important point in understanding what the SL department teaches:

Environmental science had become this kind of institutional, conventional thing and young people didn't necessarily relate to it very well. But "sustainable living," it was

a warm, street-smart, engaging term, you know. ... Many universities had environmental science programs or environmental studies or whatever they called it. But sustainability is different. Environmentalism over the decades, I mean you could say it was basically in 1962 with the publication of *Silent Spring*. It had – it accomplished a lot but it had gotten to be seen by the public in general as kind of a general perception, and it was pretty well deserved, as being gloom and doom, guilt-inducing, uh, problems-oriented, always talking about the problems even though they did come up with solutions, confrontational, pessimistic. ... So anyway, sustainability and sustainable living comes along; cooperative, positive rather than negative, hopeful, um, solutions-oriented rather than problems-oriented, definitely not guilt-inducing, just kind of a happy, positive ... so it had a whole angle of engagement that was different. And there are actually a few more differences. Also it was much more, it was more egalitarian instead of being elitist and it tended to have a broader viewpoint, even by that time environmentalism said that they were concerned about the, you know, triple bottom line, but it was mostly ecology and maybe economy. But, so the sustainability movement really was much more genuinely concerned about the human factor. (5, July 2)

The SL department at MUM was the first such department at an accredited institution. They do not just teach environmental science and theory, but offer a holistic, systems approach to the problems of our current lifestyle. A huge part of this program is hands-on application of sustainability and innovation in sustainable living practices. As one professor says, “We are preparing you to be successful in a world that doesn’t exist yet, that you have to create” (6, July 7).

TM is a huge component of the curriculum in the SL department. Some courses, such as “Environmental Philosophy”, “Spirituality and Sustainability”, and “Social Justice and Sustainability” mesh perfectly with the practice of meditation, and the time spent meditating in those classes actually seems to be a continuation of the classwork. In fact, there may be a higher proportion of students who comply with the DC policy in sustainable living courses:

I feel like students in my classes, at least in those classes, probably disproportionately meditate more than I hear them talk about in other classes just because I make it so explicit because it’s also a part of the class; a part of the actual content of the class, the discipline that I’m teaching you (4, June 29).

Another professor says that meditation and the understanding of consciousness is another way of understanding the course material. There is the abstract, theoretical framework of sustainability, there is the hands-on application, and then there is the spiritual/consciousness side, which gives students an understanding of the importance of what they're doing.

The SL department quickly became one of the most popular programs and is probably the most widely advertised undergraduate degree at MUM. Within just a few years, the new department had become the largest undergraduate program at the university. While numbers have declined, partially due to other institutions following MUM's example and starting their own sustainability programs, it still remains popular. MUM, by extension, has become known for sustainability and draws students and experts from around the world, bringing new ideas and practices to Fairfield.

In 2012, the university built the Sustainable Living Center (SLC), an amazingly engineered building to house the sustainable living department. The building is covered in solar panels and has many other feats of engineering rendering it one of the most progressive buildings I have ever seen. The SLC has surpassed LEED certification at the platinum level, complies with the Cascadia Living Building Challenge and Bau Biology, all rigorous environmental certification programs (www.mum.edu). They have even managed to integrate these standards with Maharishi Sthapatya Ved architecture. Out front there is some edible landscaping, which is available to students and faculty for harvesting. While the SLC is an amazing building, it has led to lack of support for other sustainability initiatives

on campus, the idea being that since the SL department is taking care of it no one else has to worry about sustainability (6; 14; 15).

The existence of the sustainable living department and its national renown has brought a new type of student to MUM:

...they [the movement] move here in the 70's and they set up the school and they're coming here because they're already meditators and they want to get a degree and also meditate. They want to learn Maharishi's knowledge, that's why they're coming here, and they want to meditate but they also want to be able to get a 4-year degree in psychology at the same time, an accredited one. ... And then you had 80's and 90's let's say children of meditators, right? So it's like their parents have been meditating their whole lives they might have been meditating their whole lives, so they're interested in going to a school that takes meditating seriously. But those things are not true anymore. The pedagogy surrounding it to connect with people who are specifically here for this framework but now the student body is not the same. The student body is now interested maybe in meditation in general and maybe spirituality more in general. And then in our particular case, like, sustainability. (4, June 29)

People are now flocking to Fairfield because of the sustainability movement in town and this has snowballed; even people who do not attend the university are coming to Fairfield because they want to live somewhere with strong sustainability initiatives.

Go Green Strategic Plan

We believe it is our obligation to be stewards of the natural resources entrusted to us and our responsibility to protect our environment and eco-system for all future generations. We believe that we can fulfill this obligation through listening, communicating, and acting collectively, while honoring the diversity of opinions and interests in our community.

(<http://www.fairfieldiowa.com/2020-fairfield-go-green-strategic-plan>)

In 2009, under the leadership of Mayor Malloy, Fairfield inaugurated the Go Green Strategic Plan, a town-wide initiative to make Fairfield a sustainable community.

The entirety of the plan is available for perusal on the town website, where one can see every individual, organization, business, and institution that pledged to be a part of this new mission for the town. The key components of the plan are:

- Demonstration of sustainable practices
- Focus on education and leadership
- Increase in recycling
- Reduction in energy emissions
- Increase in green building
- Emphasis on forestry and agriculture
- Sustainable water resources and management
- Volunteer engagement
- Building a “culture of sustainability”

There are many examples of where this plan has been implemented in Fairfield, more than I could discuss here. In order to make the Go Green plan reality, the town hired a sustainability coordinator (a rare event in such a small town), whose main job is to write grants and organize volunteer groups.

Most of the initiatives taken on under the Go Green plan are volunteer-driven. There is a strong culture of volunteering in Fairfield, and connecting that with sustainability helps create that “culture of sustainability” that is a key component of the plan. Another key aspect of the plan is demonstration of sustainable practices to raise awareness about what sustainability can look like. As a result of these demonstrations, as well as direct education through workshops, there has also been an increase in private sustainability practices, such as installing solar on private homes (11, June 30).

The Go Green plan has undoubtedly been a success. The plan was supported by a broad cross-section of the town, mediator and non-mediator alike. Even corporations like HyVee Food Stores agreed to be part of the plan, building a LEED Gold certified building in Fairfield. With 72% of Go Green’s goals currently being worked on, there have already been incredible changes in Fairfield since 2009.

According to the review of the first 5-year plan (Go Green Commission 2014), the achievements of the Go Green plan to date are:

- 500+ trees planted, including a community orchard
- 50+ educational workshops hosted
- 67% increase in recycling after implementing single-stream recycling
- \$1,394,936 added to the Fairfield economy
- \$81,216 annual reduction in energy costs

A second iteration of the Go Green commission is working on a second 5-year plan to keep the Go Green initiative moving forward, with the next focus being sustainable water resources and water treatment for the town.

Trees Forever/Community Visioning Project

Trees Forever and the Community Visioning Project have worked together to provide volunteers from Fairfield with the platform on which to create sustainable development plans for the town. Once plans are drawn up, an open house is held for community members to come provide feedback about potential development projects, feedback that is taken very seriously. The most recent of these open houses exhibited plans for intersection development, edible landscaping, increased outdoor community spaces, rain-catchment gardens and swales, and bike-friendly roadways.

Sky Factory and the “BSA”

The Sky Factory is a company in Fairfield that manufactures virtual windows for office buildings to provide synthetic nature and sunlight for those who have limited access to the outdoors during the day. Like many other companies in town, is

at least partly powered by solar panels. What is truly unique about the Sky Factory is the 1-acre farm located next to the building. Modeled after a CSA (Community-Supported Agriculture), this is a “BSA” – Business-supported agriculture. The farm provides produce for Sky Factory employees as well as a platform for experimental, small-scale agriculture. Any surplus produce will be sold at the farmer’s market at the end of the season. The company hired a graduate of the SL department at MUM to maintain the farm, and they provide opportunities for further education in the realm of experimental agriculture. The farm also hosts community workshops on a semi-regular basis, which draw interest from across the Fairfield community.

Ideal Energy

Ideal Energy is a solar panel company that has provided solar energy for many homes, businesses, and buildings in Fairfield. It was founded by alumni of the SL department at MUM and has provided jobs for other alumni who want to remain in Fairfield. The town of Fairfield has a \$1 million revolving loan that individuals can use to install solar on their homes as an effort to make alternative energy more affordable.

NatureWise Academy

NatureWise Academy is an experimental garden near the town square that was started by two MUM alumni from the SL department. They host community workshops on sustainable gardening and foraging. The workshops emphasize a

reinvention of the way people think about weeds and interjecting science into “back to the land” philosophy.

Grassroots Initiatives

There are so many small sustainability initiatives going on in Fairfield it's hard to know where to begin. It seems as though every other person you talk to has some idea about how they want to bring about the sustainability revolution. A lot of the grassroots initiatives have their base in entrepreneurship and the local foods movement, culminating in a lot of small, organic, Fairfield-based food and drink production companies.

Sustainability is also seen in the small, daily choices people make. Many people drive hybrid or electric cars (if they can afford it) or simply choose to bike or walk instead of driving. Composting is part of daily life for many people, admittedly more prevalent in the meditator community, but gaining traction in the rest of the town as well. Along with composting, many people grow at least some of their own food.

Alternative living situations are also popular in Fairfield. There are several plans in the works for tiny houses, and even plans for a community that consists entirely of tiny houses. Some people have designed and built permaculture homesteads, which, like Abundance EcoVillage, are completely off the grid but are personal residences and not part of a village.

Perhaps my favorite grassroots practice is that of guerilla gardening, or the practice of covertly hijacking public spaces to grow edible plants. Several Fairfield

residents have utilized their prodigious plant knowledge to graft different fruit species onto public fruit trees and utilize public space to expand edible landscaping in Fairfield.

“Sustainability is a dirty word in Fairfield...”

This phrase was something I was surprised to hear, given Fairfield’s fame as a community with a strong environmental sustainability movement. In Fairfield, the phrase “sustainability” has become indelibly associated with MUM and seen as “a mediator thing” (16, June 16). One interviewee cited a study, recently conducted by Iowa State University, which found that non-meditators in Fairfield have negative opinions on sustainability because of the connection to meditation (4, June 29). As a result, some grassroots initiatives have seen pushback from neighbors who dislike un-mowed lawns or simply do not want to see what they perceive as an extension of the movement in their neighborhood (2, June 23; 15; 16).

To combat this, municipal-level sustainability initiatives have been rebranded as “green” or “eco-friendly” to distance them from association with one particular community in town. This has been successful, and sustainable practices are spreading throughout the community. The phrase, “Well, we are supposed to be a ‘green’ community...” can now be heard around Fairfield (11, June 30), and non-meditators are becoming more involved in sustainability initiatives. Indeed, there are many sustainability initiatives that are not associated with the movement at all. So while there is some tension, it is mainly about the labels used for the practices and not the practices themselves.

Why Fairfield?

There is no denying that the sustainability movement in Fairfield is coming out of the mediator community and institutions affiliated with that community. It is spreading throughout the town these days and is even a common ground on which meditators and non-meditators can come together. My questions, though, were: how did it start, why did it take off so successfully, what is the Fairfield story, and why Fairfield? Specifically, how does the presence of the TM movement in Fairfield inform the existence of the sustainability movement and what does this look like? I've spent many pages here attempting to give an understanding of Fairfield and to set the stage for what, at this point, I think is the answer to my question. I have broken down the "why" of sustainability in Fairfield into nine factors:

1. The University

MUM is undoubtedly a big component of the sustainability movement in Fairfield. The existence of the Sustainable Living department and its overwhelming popularity among students has brought sustainability experts and young people interested in sustainability to the town with great success. Many of the grassroots initiatives in Fairfield were started by students of the sustainable living department. For example, Ideal Energy, the solar panel installation company in Fairfield, was founded by alumni from the SL department and now provides both job opportunities and green energy for the town. MUM also brings in internationally-renowned guest speakers and lecturers for sustainability and advertises both the SL

department and the SL center. Although there were grassroots efforts in Fairfield prior to the opening of the SL department in 2003, this was one of the first institutionalized sustainability initiatives in the town.

Outside the SL department, the university is not involved in many sustainability efforts. However, Maharishi believed in eating vegetarian, organic, and local, and as a result the university serves locally-sourced food and has two large greenhouses on campus for growing food. Aside from actual practice, the university is perceived as a beacon of sustainability both in Fairfield and outside of it, due in some part to advertising campaigns for the SL department and in some part to the people brought to Fairfield because of the strong sustainability component of education at MUM.

2. Maharishi's Teachings

Initially I was not sure if Maharishi's teachings specifically emphasized sustainability. I was, in fact, surprised to find that they do not, considering the strength of the sustainability movement in Fairfield today. While it turned out to be more about the people who practice TM and not TM itself that informed sustainability, there were some aspects of the movement that laid the groundwork for being sustainably minded.

First, Maharishi Vedic Science requires that each individual take care of their body, their instrument of perception. This means they must eat well, be vegetarian, avoid pesticides, and eat local and organic. Sustainability is deeply connected with personal health and maintaining one's health, both through food and lifestyle

choices, which are both components of MVS and Maharishi's teachings/movement lifestyle. Therefore, the basis of sustainable living was built into some of Maharishi's teachings.

Second, some meditators claim that the act of meditation and reaching the unified field is an impetus for being more sustainable-minded. For them, understanding the unified consciousness of all living things gives them greater respect for the living entities of the world and provides a sense of responsibility for caring for the earth and all living things.

Maharishi also believed it was important to focus on positive outcomes and to not dwell on the negative. By dwelling on negative things, he claimed, those negatives would be drawn to the individual and manifested. Positive-minded sustainability, then, was far better poised to gain traction in the movement than the pessimism of environmentalism. Instead of focusing on the negative outcomes of past actions, sustainability gives hope for the future through focusing on the positive aspects of our lifestyles that we can change. Sustainability is non-confrontational, it's peaceful, it focuses on what the individual can do to develop themselves. In short, it aligns very well with Maharishi's teachings and because of this fertile ground in Fairfield, sustainability was able to take off on a large scale.

3. Open-mindedness and the Second Generation

"...Certainly people who practice TM overall are more open-minded. Otherwise they wouldn't take up a practice that's associated with a guru from India, for heaven's sake!" (5, July 2).

Even before the movement arrived, Fairfield was known for innovation.

According to one town history buff, Fairfield was home to the Loudon

Manufacturing Company, which was known for innovation in farming machinery:

Fairfield, just as a point of geography on this planet has a long tradition of innovation and entrepreneurship. Long tradition from when it first became a city, back in 1839, I think it was. ... They pioneered all this sort of stuff ... And any place could have done that but it happened in Fairfield. So I kinda feel like, on whatever level, this little piece of geography is fertile ground for innovation. And that's why – part of the reason our sustainability efforts are getting good footholds and making progress. There's just a receptivity that comes from wherever ... you could just say the people are open-minded (8, July 11).

Change and innovation, then, are not new phenomena in Fairfield. There is a higher level of open-mindedness and openness to change in Fairfield that is hard to come by in other places. Now, there is also a strong conservative push and resistance to change that is coming from the Old Guard subdivision of the meditator community, but the rest of the subdivisions are grinding the wheels of change. The Old Guard was pushing for an alternative lifestyle, and while I believe they were not as successful as they believe themselves to be, the Second Generation has been far more successful than their parents. The Second Generation does not discount practices and beliefs that disagree with Maharishi. Instead of Maharishi being the entirety of their worldview, he is one facet of their identity and how they have crafted their beliefs about the world, society, and life in general.

As a result, there is a generational divide in sustainability initiatives in Fairfield. Most of these initiatives are carried out by young people who are more concerned with action than with conversations about how to think about sustainability. The older generation is certainly concerned with sustainability, but they are far more steeped in the ideas of “spontaneous right action” and that

through meditation and self-discovery the external problems of the world will be righted because the awareness and consciousness of those around them will be “enlivened” as a result of their meditation. The Second Generation understands the importance of self-development, but has the desire to *actively* extend this to the rest of the world to a greater extent than many of the older generation, both meditator and non-meditator alike.

The divide between action and thought is also seen on the MUM campus in “the two sides of the highway” (15). The Old Guard and much of the MUM administration believes that spreading a new paradigm of thought and ways of achieving knowledge are the most important while those across the highway in the SL center are more focused on action. There is a reason the Sustainable Living degree is one of the most popular undergraduate programs at MUM, and that is because of this action component.

4. “It’s a tribe...”

It is hard to put into words the strength of the meditator community in Fairfield. One informant, who had grown up in Fairfield and gone to MSAE and MUM, put it this way, that when you think about the fact that you spent hundreds of hours of your life achieving transcendence with these people, it is hard to give that up. The act of meditating together brings community members closer together and allows them to feel a sense of connectedness with each other that is not seen in many small-town communities. The meditators feel that the bonds they form during group meditation are uniquely strong.

Fairfield was described to me as “comfortable” by nearly everyone I spoke to. While problems certainly exist between different subdivisions of the community, it is overwhelmingly a place where people feel they can have “crazy ideas” and get support for them. As I heard many times, Fairfield is a place where you can tell a group of people your idea and be guaranteed that at least one person will be willing to help make that idea happen. And while some have expressed feelings of censorship, as I discussed earlier, people overwhelmingly claim that they feel comfortable socially in Fairfield.

Feeling comfortable and connected aside, I believe the strongest part of the Fairfield community is the willingness to challenge themselves as a single entity and the belief that they can accomplish those challenges. A few years ago, Fairfield participated in the Hometown Rewards program, a program sponsored by Alliant Energy in which six towns were to lower their energy consumption by 4%. Out of those six towns, Fairfield was the only town to complete the challenge. Furthermore, they not only met the goal, but they lowered consumption by 8.5% (11, June 30; 9, July 13; 12, July 22). I asked one person why Fairfield was able to do this when the other towns in the program were not:

You know, we are a very confident community. And we also love to complete a challenge. We also have, you know, people who love to be involved and engaged, we have very high volunteerism, we have good philanthropy within the community so if there are projects that need money there is money available for them, too. But when we took this project on we were fresh off our own plan and we saw it as a vehicle to show what we could accomplish as a community. And I think we just took it more seriously than the next community and we take great pride in our ability to meet a challenge. (11, June 30)

Belief in the power of the community and maintaining the narrative of what the community can accomplish has made this narrative a reality in Fairfield.

5. Culture of Philanthropy

There is a lot of money in Fairfield. Sustainability initiatives are frequently funded by donations and philanthropy, both on a municipal level and a grassroots level. This facilitates the strength of the community and the feeling that anything can be accomplished in Fairfield. There is always someone who can help you realize your dream. It just so happens that very often these days, that dream has something to do with sustainability.

6. Key Individuals

The background necessary for a sustainability revolution in Fairfield was in place; there were existing grassroots movements in the meditating community, a strong awareness of environmental issues, local farmers had been practicing organic agriculture for 30 years, the community was open-minded and prepared to take on a challenge, to create action. All that was necessary was for these rumblings to be harnessed and turned into a true movement, not just vague underpinnings of an existing lifestyle. Without key individuals who saw this opportunity and took action, Fairfield would not have a reputation as a beacon of sustainability.

The first example of this is through the founding of the Sustainable Living department and the work of individuals in that department to make sustainability a part of MUM curriculum and lifestyle. These individuals were already involved in grassroots sustainability initiatives, but it was now institutionalized as part of the MUM identity, and it took off. As I've previously mentioned, this department

facilitated the growth of a new movement in Fairfield and attracted people from around the globe.

Another key individual was Mayor Ed Malloy, who inaugurated the Go Green Initiative in 2009. Through the Go Green plan, Mayor Malloy created a platform for municipal sustainability and got an enormous cross-section of the town invested in building a new culture of sustainability in Fairfield. The initiatives carried out by the Go Green plan, often funded by grants and donations, are models of sustainability both for other communities and residents of Fairfield (<http://www.fairfieldiowa.com/2020-fairfield-go-green-strategic-plan>). A key component of this plan is education and awareness about what living sustainably can look like (<http://www.fairfieldiowa.com/2020-fairfield-go-green-strategic-plan>). As a result of this plan, sustainability initiatives have become an integral part of Fairfield culture as a whole and not just as a component of the mediator 7.

7. Timing and Historical Context

While there are *many* things about Fairfield that are unique, the history of sustainability in Fairfield mirrors the history of sustainability in the U.S. as a whole. In 1962, the environmental movement was born with the publication of *Silent Spring*. In the 1960's, Maharishi's movement began and grew in the United States, attracting counter-culture youth who brought with them environmentalist ideals. In the 1970's and 80's the environmentalist movement was mainly a grassroots movement across the country, much as it was in Fairfield, with homesteading, the founding of a farmer's market, proto-ecovillages, and the mediator recycling

movement. The 90's saw a lapse in environmentalism and sustainability initiatives both in Fairfield and the country as a whole. And just as "sustainability" was taking over from "environmentalism" in the years following the Brundtland Report (1987) "sustainability" took off both in Fairfield and the world as a whole in the early 2000's. In this sense, Fairfield has closely followed the sustainability/ environmental movement of the past 50 years.

What is unique about Fairfield is the extent to which they have embraced these movements, mostly due to points 1-5. Fairfield has been able to harness the waves of the environmental movement and now the sustainability movement and be more successful at it than many other places. The generations that are now coming into their own, those born in the 1980's and 90's, both in Fairfield and beyond, are the first to grow up with fear for the future instead of hope. We grew up with climate change, and as a result there is a large proportion of this population that is working to be more sustainable. In Fairfield, the proportion is even higher.

8. Awareness

"Awareness" is a buzzword in the TM movement. Through meditation, you will raise your own awareness and the awareness of others. But "awareness", much like other movement buzzwords, has a sort of vague, slippery quality nearly every time it is used so it can be applied to almost every situation. However, ask someone in Fairfield about why sustainability initiatives have been successful in the town and they will tell you, "awareness," and they will mean what most people mean by

“awareness”: knowledge of the topic and an understanding of what can or cannot be done about it.

The grassroots movement in Fairfield pre-2003 was because many of the incoming meditators were aware of environmental issues. Local farmers have been practicing organic agriculture for 30 years because they are aware that it is better for them and their buyers. While some meditators might say the increasing level of awareness in Fairfield between meditators and non-meditators alike in regards to sustainability is due to the continued practice of TM, most of them will also admit that it is not until sustainable practices are *demonstrated* that awareness levels actually rise. Fairfield has a very high level of awareness about what it means to live a sustainable lifestyle, and I believe that is a very intentional practice stemming in large part from the Go Green initiative.

9. Intentional Culture

One of the things about Fairfield that struck me, as I discussed earlier, was the idea of narrative versus reality. Now, the theme of narrative versus reality is not unique to Fairfield, but what is striking is the recognition of the details of narrative and reality and their interplay by members of the community. They are very aware of the narrative they have crafted for themselves and the extent to which certain aspects of this narrative are translated into reality. While I am not sure why Fairfield in particular has excelled at creating reality from narrative, this may in part be due to some aspects of TM. According to Maharishi, by creating a narrative for oneself, it is possible to manifest this into reality by attracting the positive outcome

through achieving total consciousness. Members of the meditator community have a very strong belief in their ability to manifest an ideal narrative into reality.

Whether the ability to manifest a narrative stems from the TM movement or some other aspect of the town, the culture of Fairfield has been intentionally crafted at least to some degree, especially in the arena of sustainability. An ideal narrative of Fairfield as a “green” town has been crafted through the university and the Go Green plan, which has allowed the reality of this to be manifested. Part of the mission statement of the initiative, as I described in an earlier section, is to create a culture of sustainability through education and demonstration. Fairfield wants to become a model for both its citizens and other towns.

Another example of intentionality and making the narrative of a strong, supportive culture a reality is the Bunnell Building Project/St. Mary’s Project started by members of the Second Generation. While they have run into some roadblocks, this program has given Fairfield an atmosphere of intentionality in terms of community support that many other communities simply do not have. It is organizations like this that help make the youth of Fairfield feel that they can accomplish their goals. This organization has allowed grassroots sustainability initiatives to become reality, including initiatives that focus on community education and intentionally spreading sustainable practices throughout Fairfield.

Exportability of the Fairfield Story

"We envision our community as a model showing how sustainability increases the quality of life for all by enhancing economic vitality while restoring and preserving a healthy natural environment."
(<http://www.fairfieldiowa.com/2020-fairfield-go-green-strategic-plan>)

Fairfield is a very unique town with a unique past, one that is not easily replicable. But does that mean there are no lessons to be learned from the Fairfield story? While Fairfield may have many unusual traits, there are some that can be applicable for other small towns hoping to create their own culture of sustainability.

Intentionality is a key component of the success of sustainability in Fairfield. While there was an existing platform that was ripe for sustainability to take hold, it was still a very intentional process, at least on the municipal level. The Go Green Plan is based in creating a new, intentional culture in Fairfield and not one that is just for meditators or non-meditators, but one that can be shared by all. This is being achieved through community education and raising awareness through demonstration. Education and demonstration are not unique to Fairfield, and could be embraced more strongly in other places.

Perhaps most importantly, as I mentioned before, they have a strong belief in what they can accomplish as a community. While there is some tension between the narrative of the Fairfield community and the dynamics of that community in reality, in comparison to many other small towns Fairfield is a cornucopia of possibility and is overall a very supportive community. They are lucky in that there is a lot of money available for philanthropic efforts, but it seems to me that even without the strong culture of philanthropy in Fairfield there would still be a strong sustainability movement. While I cannot directly compare the supportiveness of

Fairfield to other small towns, the culture of support was impressed upon me by many people, both by residents and non-residents of the town.

I have focused in this paper on successful sustainability initiatives, but there were many that failed or never got past the planning stage (7, July 9). This did not stop people from picking up the pieces and trying again or creating something new that actually did work. Sustainability is not going to come out fully formed, and we should not be afraid to make mistakes. Of course, in a town like Fairfield with a strong, supportive community it may be easier to make mistakes, but community strength then just has to come first.

Fairfield would never have achieved this level of success in sustainability without committed leadership. The sustainability movement in Fairfield has been a top-down process (2, June 23; 9, July 13; 11, June 30; 12, July 23). It takes strong leaders to create widespread change and charismatic ones to create the community buy-in, but it also takes prudent leaders to understand that cultural change does not occur overnight. The leaders in Fairfield are willing to wait until the culture has changed enough to implement new policies or suggest new ideas and they are committed to fostering that cultural change (12, July 23). This method of leadership can be applied elsewhere to great success.

Community at a Crossroads

Up to this point, I have focused mainly on the reasons for *environmental* sustainability's success in Fairfield and how that can be exported. I have discussed some community dynamics and economics of Fairfield, but have not touched on the

sustainability of either of these things. This is partially due to the fact that the environmental sustainability movement in Fairfield is easier to see and is the main reason I was in Fairfield in the first place. But success on the environmental front will come to nothing without economic and community sustainability.

Unfortunately, I do not have a clear answer as to whether or not Fairfield is sustainable in either of these two areas. In terms of economic sustainability, I believe it is intrinsically tied to community sustainability, especially when it comes to Fairfield (although for the time being, Fairfield seems to be doing quite well on the economic front).

Fairfield is a community at a crossroads. Many of the Old Guard are facing retirement and have no contingency plans. Donations for the university are going to run dry, the workforce at the university will decline, and the culture of philanthropy in Fairfield will also decline. There is some talk of a retirement community being created, but many of these people have lived in university-subsidized housing for the better part of 30 years. Fairfield is hurtling towards change with blinders on and no one on the brakes; the problems they will soon be facing are recognized by many residents but not openly discussed. What will happen to the town if the university goes bankrupt and the venture capital in town dries up?

While there is less open hostility and tension in the town today than there was 25 years ago, the covert tension and fracturing of the community are worrisome from a community sustainability standpoint. Young people are getting fed up with the Old Guard and leaving Fairfield permanently. In the last two censuses, the population of Fairfield has declined. The “new movement” of

sustainability may yet save the town and continue to make it relevant, but in order for it to do so there needs to be more intentionality behind the direction Fairfield is moving from a social standpoint.

Part of the narrative of the TM movement is that it is counter-culture; the worldview and lifestyle are different than that of mainstream culture. They are clearly adhering to some sort of lifestyle associated with the practice of TM.

However, the narrative of that lifestyle may not align with the reality of Fairfield culture:

...from the mid-60's onward there's a huge cultural pushback against the establishment and so he's going into colleges and universities and giving lectures, right, and then there's like this radical group of young people who see this as a challenge but also a genuine alternative path. And all of this can be legitimately true. But there is still something about it, and this has been confirmed to me by a lot of young people here who they grew up in the movement, that they just substituted one father figure with another father figure. Like they said "fuck you" to the man and but then, I use the word "Manharishi." Like, I'm supposed to wear a tie all the time, like my hair is not supposed to go over my collar. There are things that were present here that a lot of the culture was seemingly reacting against. And some of that has still gone through because I don't think they had as radical a break as they think they had, do you know what I mean? (4, June 29)

The Second Generation, and many of the other subdivisions of the meditator community who arrived in Fairfield relatively recently, see that their parents are perhaps not as radical as they thought themselves to be. The restrictions of the lifestyle and the contradictions in the philosophy have become apparent to them.

I see the movement culture as parallel to the greater U.S. culture in the last 50 years. While the specifics of the lifestyle are quite different in Fairfield than elsewhere, they have the same tropes as everyone else. There is the "hippie" or "counter-culture" generation, for them the founding generation of the movement, that is focused on personal development and focusing on the self. And that is the

defining narrative of the movement, that through self-development everything else will be made right. There is even a great emphasis on the importance of amassing personal wealth, which is absolutely parallel to the rest of U.S. culture. The next generation, born in the 80's, sees the importance of self-development, but they also see the need for action and for action *right now*. This, to me, is really where the sustainability movement in Fairfield stems from.

At this point, it's not just about creating peace and fostering community between meditators and non-meditators, but also about making the younger residents of Fairfield feel as though the narrative they grew up with is not just a nice story, and that Fairfield is still a place where they have opportunities. If the university fails and the Second Generation moves away, will Fairfield be left in the dust like it was after Parsons went bankrupt? Or will the movement untangle these issues and maintain unity? They have fallen into a repetitive cycle and one that is resistant to change, citing Maharishi's teachings as justification for continuing to do the same things regardless of changing situations and attitudes. The irony of this is that Maharishi himself knew this would happen.

There is one class taught at MUM that Maharishi himself designed: the Science of Creative Intelligence. The course is a series of 30 lectures and includes two key parts of Maharishi's teachings. One is the "purity of the teaching" and the other is the idea that it is important to understand the current generation and meet them on their level:

So Maharishi talks about the purity of the teaching but then he also talks about meeting the current generation where they're at. And I think that's like the most brilliant tension you can put forward. Because if you do either of them wrong it dies, right? So if you don't keep the purity of the teaching then the thing that

existed before no longer really exists. But if you don't meet every generation where they're at, if you are dogmatic about you hold that purity then nobody's going to adopt it and it's going to die anyway. You have to do both of those things in order to keep it real. And so what happens right after the guru dies, you're erring on the side of the purity of your teaching but you're alienating the very people who are coming here and would be able to take it forward into the next generation. (4, June 29)

Maintaining the purity of the teaching is an enormous part of institutionalized TM in Fairfield and at MUM. But there is almost no evidence of meeting the current generation where they are, and until that happens community and economic sustainability in Fairfield will not be reached.

Maharishi's movement as it exists today is not as relevant to the current generation as it was to their parents; they want more and they have and will continue to look outside the movement to satisfy this want. Members of the Second Generation have already started to leave Fairfield for good. The movement needs to be rebranded and reorganized if it wants to survive. I was extremely impressed by the air of opportunity in Fairfield, and I think they have the capacity to survive this bump in the road and choose the right path if conversations are started now. As one recent immigrant to Fairfield said, "Iowa to me just blows my mind, I think that anything is possible here" (3, June 27).

Acknowledgements: I would like to deeply thank all those who were willing to participate in interviews with me, both formal and informal, as well as the town of Fairfield as a whole for welcoming me into their community.

Appendix I - Interviewees

Formal Interviewee

1. Female, 20's
 - a. B.S. from MUM in Sustainable Living
 - b. Grew up with parents from the movement
 - c. Does not practice TM anymore, open to other types of spirituality and meditation
2. Male, 30
 - a. MSAE and MUM alumnus
 - b. Grew up in Fairfield with parents from the movement
 - c. Heavily involved in the Fairfield community
 - d. Occasionally practices TM, but open to other types of spirituality and meditation
3. Female, 30's
 - a. B.S. from MUM in Sustainable Living
 - b. Experimental farmer
 - c. Occasionally practices TM
4. Male, 40
 - a. Professor at MUM
 - b. Practices TM, not a devotee of Maharishi
5. Male, 66
 - a. Professor at MUM
 - b. Long-time practitioner of TM
6. Male, 50's
 - a. Professor at MUM
 - b. Long-time practitioner of TM
7. Male, 30's
 - a. Non-meditator
 - b. Involved in Go Green Strategic Review
 - c. Works in economic development
8. Female, 60's
 - a. Long-time practitioner of TM
 - b. Moved to Fairfield in the 1970's
 - c. Involved in grassroots sustainability initiatives
9. Male, 40's
 - a. Involved with Go Green Strategic Plan
 - b. Non-meditator
10. Female, 50's
 - a. Involved with sustainability organizations based in Fairfield
 - b. Non-meditator
11. Mayor Ed Malloy
 - a. Long-time practitioner of TM
 - b. Initiated Go Green Strategic Plan for Fairfield in 2009
12. City Councilman Michael Halley
 - a. Involved in sustainability planning for the town

Informal Interviewees:

13. Male, 30's
 - a. Raised in Fairfield with parents from the movement
 - b. Involved in grassroots sustainability
14. Male, 50's
 - a. Practices TM but does not adhere to Maharishi's philosophy
 - b. Works at MUM
15. Male, 30's
 - a. B.S. in Sustainable Living from MUM
 - b. Involved in grassroots sustainability initiatives
 - c. Works at MUM
16. Female, 30's
 - a. B.S. in Sustainable Living from MUM
 - b. Involved in grassroots sustainability initiatives
 - c. Grew up in Fairfield with parents from the movement
17. Male, 50's
 - a. Non-meditator
 - b. Beginning the process of inserting sustainable practices into lifestyle
18. Male, 30's
 - a. Non-meditator
 - b. Beginning the process of inserting sustainable practices into lifestyle
19. Male, 60's
 - a. Long-time practitioner of TM
 - b. Close to Maharishi
20. Male, 20's
 - a. Current student at MUM
21. Male, 30's
 - a. Raised in Fairfield with parents from the movement
 - b. Occasionally meditates
 - c. Involved in grassroots sustainability
22. Male, 60's
 - a. Long-time practitioner of TM
 - b. Moved to Fairfield in the 1970's
23. Male, 80's
 - a. Non-meditator
 - b. Sustainability activist
24. Female, 50's
 - a. Long-time practitioner of TM
25. Female, 30's
 - a. Raised in Fairfield with parents from the movement
 - b. Involved in sustainability initiatives in Fairfield
26. Female, 60's
 - a. TM instructor at MUM
27. Male, 50's
 - a. Non-resident of Fairfield

- b. Practices TM technique and visits Fairfield regularly
28. Female, 30's
- a. Ph.D. student at MUM
 - b. Practices TM regularly

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