'Very Little Heroes'

History and Roots of the Eco-Village Movement[1]

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Abstract: Although the ecovillage-movement is a relatively new phenomenon (it was first formalised in the 1990s), the initiatives, which aim to integrate, do have a much longer history. The author of this article has been studying ecovillages since 2008. As a cultural anthropologist, her focus lies in the socio-cultural dimensions of the ecovillage-movement. In the present paper the history and roots of the movement are covered by positioning eco-villages within both the history of the broader environmental movement and that of intentional communities; the international and Hungarian history of the ecovillage-movement is presented; and, last but not least, an interpretation is given of the Hungarian ecovillages in the context of rural migration processes. The picture drawn up here is not intended to be an exhaustive one, since the ecovillage-phenomenon can be presented from numerous different perspectives. Yet, the paper clearly demonstrates the multiple embeddedness of the movement, and provides an insight into the aspirations of ecovillage inhabitants and the current functioning of ecovillages.

Keywords: eco-village, the history of the eco-village movement, intentional communities, environmental movements, migration

INTRODUCTION

"Ecovillages are not *the* answer to the sustainability crisis. They are just *one* answer – and we need all the answers we can get." This sentence was written by Karen Litfin, a political scientist, researcher of the international eco-village movement (Litfin 2011:139). An eco-village is an alternative lifestyle experiment, attracting relatively few people and there are even less who – beyond the good intentions – actually are able to implement it. If you take a look at the number of persons living in eco-villages in Hungary (who actually do not count more than 500 people), you can state with confidence that it was a marginal feature in society. Yet, I think, it is worth dealing with: on one hand, because

the investigation of the set of values in an eco-village – that is, what against and what for it was set up – might reflect a proper diagnosis to the problems of our current society; and also, because I find that it was an extremely exciting social experiment, offering an interesting field of research for human sciences (as well).[2]

Even though the eco-village movement is a relatively new phenomenon (the origins can be traced back to the 1990s), the ambitions which are united by it have a much longer history. In this paper, I would like to present the roots and background of the eco-village movement in a nutshell: to identify a place for eco-villages in the history of the environmental movements and of the intentional communities; also, I will outline the history of the eco-village movement internationally and nationally, and finally the Hungarian eco-villages will be interpreted in the context of the rural migration pattern. The image so obtained is far from being complete, since the eco-village phenomenon could be studied from a number of different other approaches, yet I hope this presentation will point out the multiple embeddedness of the movement.

ECO-VILLAGE – DEFINITION, GOALS

According to the definitions[3] and their own intentions, eco-villages are human settlements which fit to their natural environment most efficiently and without doing any harm. In order to achieve these goals, their inhabitants farm without chemicals, use environmentally sound technologies for building, waste management and waste water treatment, relying on renewable energy resources in the process. Consumption is characterised with frugality, which includes the recycling principle, in addition to sparing use of natural resources. They wish to earn a living, entertain and trade locally. They are communities striving for autonomy and self-sufficiency, the purpose of which is to "get detached from the umbilical chord," i.e. to get rid of the various networks causing dependence and helplessness, be they social, infrastructural or economic networks.[4]

The ideal number of such communities is seen as one which can be comprehended by the individual, where the networks of relationships based on personal acquaintance interweave and influence the settlement as a whole – this figure is assumed to be between 300 and 500 persons. The majority of eco-villages are so called 'intentional', or 'created' communities, in other words a rural community set up by the conscious efforts of a major or lesser group of individuals. Planning in a great part of the eco-villages includes decision making by the members of the community present from time to time about the admission of new members, and the candidate can only become a full member of the community when passed a multistage process. This approach is intended to exclude the possibility of speculations with the land ownership and to protect the village from

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[2] To stick to my field of interest in the narrower sense, that of cultural anthropology: the topic dealing with the relationship between the natural environment and man/culture/society can be placed in ecological anthropology, among the social movements, or as a case study of community research.

[3] See GILMAN – GILMAN 1991. The self-definition of the international movement can be read on the following web site: http://gen.ecovillage.org/ecovillages/whatisanecovillage.html. For a Hungarian summary of the eco-village definitions see the book by Béla Borsos (BORSOS 2016:26–30).

[4] For details see TAYLOR 2000.

creating other businesses or endeavours within its territory which would not fit into the concept. Such a selection may also be instrumental in the development of a properly functioning and strongly tied community.

In addition to the green thought, most of such initiatives are based on some other types of ideology, such as religion or spiritualism (historical religions, new religious movements, New Age, the so-called guardians of traditions etc.).

Even though eco-village dwellers (in fact, anybody moving to the countryside under the drive of ideological principles) are rather seen by the mainstream as emigrants and the move is interpreted as fleeing, eco-villagers protest against the stigma and they consider themselves not as *utopian fugitives* (LITFIN 2011:136), but as participants of the world deeply embedded in the social-ecological system.[5] As autonomous communities, they find that various forms of resistance might be important in case of necessity, but they still are rather proactive communities,[6] which – instead of protesting only – are looking for viable alternatives of everyday life, leading to the common good in the wider sense of the word (LITFIN 2011:9; PICKERILL – CHATTERTON 2006:737). Most of them wish to be a role model: they formulate themselves as models of a more lovable, more humane and in particular on the long term more sustainable form of life.

In addition to the common goal, which binds them together, eco-villages are characterised by an extreme diversity, reflecting the diverse natural, climatic and social-cultural media and environments in which they grow. Eco-villages now can be found in many different places and on each of the continents, ranging from tiny villages up to the metropolitan, so called *inner-city* eco-villages, from the jungle to the desert.[7]

Most probably no eco-village would meet the aforementioned definitions in all their entirety – the definers warn so themselves –, therefore most definitions are not a kind of synthesis of existing eco-villages, they much rather formulate objectives and directions for development.

BACKGROUND TO THE ECO-VILLAGE MOVEMENT – ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENTS

Ramachandra Guha, a sociologist from India differentiates two major waves of environmentally sound thinking and movements (*environmentalism*) in one of his works on the history of the environment (GUHA 2000):

1.) The first wave can be put to the end of the 19th century, but its roots can already be detected as early as in the 18th century. This period is the industrial revolution, the age of industrialisation, when only a very few intellectuals and artists can see the looming hazard

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[5] Imre Kilián from Gyűrűfű usually puts it like this: he did not arrive to the back of God, but in his palm. Several founders of Hungarian eco-villages told me that in their younger years they used to be green activists but they got bored with the perpetual and apparently unsuccessful demonstrations, therefore they decided to try how ecological principles can be put in practice using their own lives and own hides. The title of a paper drawn up by Imre Kilián refers to this attitude (KILIÁN 2006).

[6] Pro-active movements make an attempt to solve the problems by searching the very roots of the issues and by re-interpreting human relationships. Manuel Castells considers alternative social movements and ecological movements such proactive attempts (see CASTELLS 1997).

[7] For more information see: www.gen.ecovillage.org; JACKSON – SVENSSON 2002.

behind the seemingly unlimited potentials. You can see with surprise as some authors of the 18th and 19th century discuss the satanic mills of the industrial age, the factories destroying the Earth, poisons, air pollution, railways (and tourists) spoiling the rural English landscape, environmental and pollution related causes of diseases, etc. (William Blake, William Wordsworth, John Ruskin, Edward Carpenter, William Morris, Thoreau). Wordsworth, the poet (1770 –1850) was an ardent hiker, according to the data of Guha he walked 175 thousand miles in his life, and in the meantime he had hands on experiences of the dark side of the industrial revolution and the devastation of the natural environment. He praised rural life as opposed to city life. John Ruskin (1809–1900), painter, art writer, aesthetician maintained that air pollution was the consequence of desecration of nature, seeing correlation between environmental pollution and human diseases. He opposed the penetration of the railway because he thought it was an important cause of destruction of nature, for instance, because with the help of the railway industrialisation is facilitated. He supported the sustenance of handicrafts, created an association, a farm, a crafts shop, and found the preservation of subsistence was important. William Morris (1834 –1896) industrial designer, author, Socialist activist was one of the great prophets of the 'back to nature' idea in this period, a thinker of great influence who is considered as the father of a number of art and social movements. His influence was felt in the oeuvre of the Socialist poet and philosopher, Edward Carpenter (1844–1929), whose work *Civilisation, Its Cause and Cure* (1889) has become the Bible of the social movements. Octavia Hill (1838–1912), presented by Ramachandra Guha as the first female environmental activist, may also be included here. Hill was a friend of Ruskin, a social activist who had the idea to tackle environmental issues, the struggle for the poor and the social reforms jointly, her suggestions to solve the issues encompassed them in a complex manner and she proposed complex management. The authors referred to above had a great impact on the fledging social movements of the era, the 19th century through both their ideas and practical actions.[8]

2.) The second wave of environmental thinking and the related movements – according to Guha – can be put into the 20th century when the so called period of innocence (the era was characterised by unlimited faith cast in progress and sciences, technological optimism and, in parallel, by complete ecological ignorance) was followed by a slow and gradual recognition of the crisis situation after World War II. The second wave is distinguished from the first one by this, the interpretation of the ecological issues as a *crisis*, and the fact that at this time, not only a narrow group but the wider public also had to face the problem. Guha illustrates the difference between the two waves with a story (Guha 2000:79): in the Spring of 1969 a couple of students interrupted the class on natural sciences at the University of Copenhagen, rushing in, carrying a mallard soaked in a marine oil spill and reciting anti-pollution slogans. According to Guha this story is a good example to reflect the difference between the two stages showing the radicalisation of the movement (and indeed, this period is to become the era of ecotage and ecological terrorism),[9] and the fact that environmental issues attract the attention of a wider public now. He points out that the period to come will be dominated by bottom up grassroots initiatives just as much as lobbying forces on the top level, that is by

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[8] Beside the start of the social movements, the initial steps to preserve the natural environment with scientific rigour, the establishment of nature conservation areas can also be put to this period.

[9] For the radical movements see Taylor 1995.

radicalisation and professionalism alike, which finally led to the current green discourse and the inevitability of sustainability issues – at least on the communication level.

Albeit there are great differences between the two waves outlined by Guha, one more common feature can be pointed out here beside the identical foundations, that is the recognition of environmental issues: the fact that potential solutions and efforts include the attempt to create self-sustaining communities in both the 19th and 20th century. Ruskin created an association, a farm striving for self-sufficiency and a crafts shop; and Carpenter – inspired by William Morris, Walt Whitman and Henry David Thoreau – created a community in the environs of the city of Sheffield, where they started to grow vegetables, baked their own bread and described their rolling, undulating countryside intersected with streamlets and grooves as a real Arcadia. And, in the second part of the 20th century, the foundation of eco-villages started.

BACKGROUND TO THE ECO-VILLAGE MOVEMENT – CREATED COMMUNITIES

As it was seen earlier on, most eco-villages are intentional communities, in other words communities which were created by the conscious efforts of a bigger or lesser group of individuals based on the ecological principles.[10] The roots of such special communities stretch back to long ago, as Louise Meijering pointed out in her work on rural intentional communities (Meijering 2006). With reference to Zablocki (Zablocki 1980), the author divided up the history of these groups into eight stages (Meijering 2006:14–16):

1.) The first community seen as intentionally set up is thought to have existed in the times of the Roman Empire, with an example of the Essenes, a religious group operating in Palestine in the first century before Christ, but the first Christian communities emerging in the 1st century A.D. are also classified here. The goal of these attempts was to retreat into their own world in order to fight the hegemony of the Roman culture and the forced assimilation. They were frequently characterised by a 'common purse' and decision making by consensus.

2.) The second stage is put to the times of the Catholic monastic communities with the 13th century as the Golden Age, and examples like the Franciscans, the Dominicans, the Carmelites and the Benedictines.

3.) The third period is described by the emergence of heretic communities. The most important of those is considered the lay Christian movement of the Brotherhood of the Free Spirit in Western Europe (or elsewhere: Brothers or Brethren of the Free Spirit). In the meantime, as North America is colonised, the intentional communities started to appear on this continent as well.

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[10] The definition of created communities according to Meijering is as follows: intentional experiment to implement a joint alternative lifestyle outside of mainstream society. Criteria listed most frequently include: 1.) the community is not or not only dominated by relationship among the kinship, 2.) it has at least 3–5 adult members, 3.) membership is voluntary, 4.) geographic and psychological isolation from the mainstream, 5) common ideology, adopted by all, 6.) common or partly common ownership, 7.) group interest dominates over individual interests. Intentional communities – adds Meijering – have reached various degrees of the aforementioned criteria, and they separate themselves from mainstream society to various degrees (Meijering 2006:19).

4.) A great part of the intentional communities of the 16th to the 18th centuries are Protestant (Shakers, Hutterites, Mennonites), persecuted by religious intolerance from Europe to North America. The New World represented a great force of attraction for these communities not only because of the freedom of religion experienced there, but also as the homeland of unlimited opportunities.[11] While these communities were attracted to traditional social models and values, such as the patriarchal family, respect of authority, simplicity and rejection of modernisation, others

5.) were mainly secular communities which started to grow in the fifth stage at the beginning of the 19th century. They were dominated by the Socialist ideology and the protest against the industrial society; the promoters of these communities were inspired by the ideas of Robert Owen, Charles Fourier and Étienne Cabet. Owen himself created a community called New Harmony, and a number of others – albeit short lived – were inspired by the example shown by Owen. In his work studying among others the roots of intentional communities Michael Blouin picked out Brook Farm from this period, created by Transcendentalists in the surroundings of Boston during the 1840s, which showed the influence of the doctrine of Charles Fourier as well (BLOUIN 2007).[12]

6.) By the end of the 19th century, yet another wave of communities based on Leftist ideologies was created, with ideological foundations provided mainly by the works of the Anarchists, in particular Peter Kropotkin and Lev Tolstoy. These communities also existed for a short period of time only, not being able to compromise between ideas and the real world and practical challenges. Meijering notes it seems religion based communities tend to survive longer than those with secular basis (Socialists, Anarchists). Blouin goes even further, arguing with the example of the Shakers – as one of the longest standing successful intentional community – pointing out that the immigrant religious groups in the New World built their communities on the pre-existing (Old World) contacts and relationships, which might have been a guarantee to success, and most of them were farmers, for whom hard work and farming was nothing new, and in addition they were able to submit themselves to their leaders. New types of communities emerged in the 19th century, the members of which were not farmers any more but Americans not having the track record of a farmer and had no experience of the land. They created their

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[11] Further examples not mentioned by Meijering can also be cited: William Penn, a key figure in the Quaker movement founded a colony in 1681 in Pennsylvania, promising free exercise of their religion to all. A persecuted religious group, the Shakers left England in 1774 and arrived to New York, then they started to organise an independent village in the 1780s under the direction of their leader, Ann Lee. Immigrant groups included German Pietists, the first one of this kind arrived to the United States in 1683. A prominent group, The Harmony Society arrived in 1804 and created three communes in Pennsylvania and Indiana states. The community called Ephrata was also created by German immigrants in 1732 and in the 1740–1750s 300 members lived there together. The Amish or the Mormon communities, established in the end of the 1800s can also be listed among them.

[12] The following data can be read from Blouin: 119 utopian and commune type communities were established in the United States of America between 1800 and 1859, 60 of them in the 1840s. In the next phase, between 1860 and 1914 140 communities were founded which were more of artist colonies, new communes, religious communities and so called social experiments (they included for instance the Oneida community operated between 1848 and 1881 in New York State). They are typically smaller and less hierarchic than former intentional communities, and private ownership (land) and the profit gained more ground, the reason for which – according to Blouin – was the fear of Communism.

communities because they were not satisfied with mainstream society, had enough of an institutionalised world and the American way of life in general.

Meijering focused primarily to intentional communities of the West, and touched upon the Israeli Kibbutzes only shortly as significant intentional communities with a great impact. The first Kibbutz was founded in 1909 and the related movement (United Kibbutz Movement) was formed in 1927.

7.) Returning to the classification scheme set up by Meijering: the seventh phase in the 1960s brought a huge wave of intentional communities surfacing from the counter-culture of the period, in the United States of America alone, more than 2000 communities were founded at this time. They consisted of young and highly trained people who refused to accept the cultural standard and set of values held by their parents and wanted to resist consumerism, wishing to live a life with more freedom. The communities emerging in this period are very diverse, pending on what the emphasis was put on: you can find some striving for spirituality, sensible life, self-accomplishment, closeness to nature, self-sufficiency, Socialism, etc. Their members are frequently motivated politically, are involved in the counter-culture movement, raising their words against poverty, social and economic inequality and the Vietnam war. One of the best known such community building on a life close to nature and nature related spiritual values was the Findhorn Foundation established in 1962 Scotland, which later has grown into one of the most significant communities of the eco-village movement.

8.) Finally, Meijering dates the eighth stage from the end of the 1990s, within which period the communities established can be divided into two distinct types: cohousing[13] and eco-villages.

Communities following the teachings and spiritual views of their respective religion and trying to live an environmentally conscious lifestyle started to grow from the 1960s on, thus becoming later on a kind of role model for the ecological communities and the international eco-village movement – what is more, eco-villages themselves. Such a community is the Scottish Findhorn, referred to by Meijering, or the South-Indian Auroville, and The Farm in the United States. These communities were set up in the impetus of the counter-cultural, spiritual period in the 1960–1970s,[14] and put a great emphasis on harmonious co-existence with nature, therefore ecological awareness

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[13] Co-housing is a movement of close community life from the 1970s in Denmark and The Netherlands. Members are neighbours, living in their own houses but carry out most possible activities jointly (such as preparation of food, cooking, child care, gardening, community management), and use common premises (kitchens, dining rooms, playgrounds/rooms for children, offices, guest rooms, recreational premises). The Jacksons, who played a dominant role in launching the international eco-village movement, lived in a co-housing arrangement for a while themselves, therefore it was apparent that the movement had an influence on the emergence of eco-villages. On the other hand, no significant co-housing movement exists in Hungary. For co-housing see McCamant – Durret 2011.

[14] The first inhabitants of a forming community settled in the village of Findhorn in Scotland in 1962. Auroville (City of Dawn) was established in 1968 by Mira Alfassa (or, as she is named by her disciples: The Mother), a woman of French origin. Auroville was built on the teachings of Shri Aurobindo Hindu teacher, and turned towards the implementation of the ecological principles. The Farm was created in 1971 by San Francisco hippies in Tennessee State, advocating non-violence and the respect of the Earth.

and lifestyle, and the concept and term of eco-village caught up with them later on.[15] Thus their early operations can be seen as a self-fulfilling prophecy and shows a close relationship with sustainability, the key issue of the 21st century.

INTERNATIONAL HISTORY OF THE ECO-VILLAGE MOVEMENT[16]

In the 1970s, thus, the environmental movements have gained strength and acquired new methods on one hand, while community building manifested in new experiments on the other. The first eco-village initiatives emerged against this social background. The term itself appeared back in the 1970s, but did not gain wide recognition at the time. According to a historian of the eco-village movement (BATES 2003) the magazine called *Mother Earth News* (Hendersonville, North-California) started to set up organic gardens and energy saving houses next to their offices in 1975, which also functioned as education centres, and they started to call themselves *eco-village* from 1979 on. More or less the same time a protest movement was launched in the city of Gorleben, Germany against the proposed nuclear waste landfill site there. Activists created a small habitation colony resting on ecological principles which they called *Ökodorf* (eco-village). Even though the police evacuated the camp, the idea remained and eco-villages sprung up nationwide. Also at this time, in the 1970s, the co-housing movement started to blossom in Denmark. Robert and Diane Gilman in their paper called *In Context* (Seattle) commenced to report on this and similar initiatives at the turn of the 1980s–1990s. They believed such initiatives may serve as a model for sustainable ways of life. The paper was soon discovered by a couple, Ross and Hildur Jackson who operated the organisation called *Gaia Trust*, and a cooperation was launched between the paper, the organisation and the eco-village projects. The 1990s can be seen as the years of prosperity for the eco-village movement, when the first meetings happened, which represented a substantial progress in the history of the movement. The first such meeting was held in Denmark in 1991, with the aim to define an eco-village concept and to formulate a strategy of propagation. The meeting showed that there are a number of similar initiatives ignorant about the others. In 1993 the Danish eco-village network was set up, the first of this kind, which later served as a model for the later launched international eco-village movement. The international network, *Global Ecovillage Network* (GEN) was launched in 1994, in which the Hungarian Gyűrűfű project has already been involved as one of the funding members. The internet, gaining ground at this time, assisted in the spread of the eco-village idea and hence, the set up of a number of eco-villages to a great extent: this is the period, when computers and the world wide web have become affordable and accessible for more and more people, allowing a wide outreach for GEN through its web site, facilitating the propagation of the movement and transfer of eco-village patterns. The first international eco-village meeting took place in 1995 in Findhorn, Scotland,

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[15] In Hungary, a similar story is that of Krishna Valley: the community created a room to live in harmony with the teachings of their religion, which fit well in the eco-village idea, therefore they also joined the eco-village movement in the beginning of the 1990s, and they started to reinforce the eco-village nature of the compound consciously.

[16] Based on BATES 2003; BORSOS 2016; HÁRI 2008; and Hungarian eco-village founders.

organised and sponsored by the Gaia Trust and the Findhorn Foundation. The title of the event – *Ecovillages and Sustainable Communities. Models for the 21st Century* – formulated and marked out the road precisely on which eco-villages intend to walk.

ECO-VILLAGES IN HUNGARY – BACKGROUND: ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENTS, INTENTIONAL COMMUNITIES

Domestic eco-villages are closely related to the Western template, the founders have incorporated their hands-on experiences obtained from foreign (mainly European, but also Australian and Indian) eco-villages in the Hungarian initiatives. Even though the first eco-villages were officially established in Hungary after the political transition at the beginning of the 1990s, but most of them – through their respective founders – shows some connections with the underground green and alternative social movements of the late-Socialist era.[17]

Environmental movements have been instrumental in the political transition in Hungary (and also in the changes which occurred in the political regime of other Central and Eastern European countries). The state of the environment in Hungary was a cause for concern, albeit still relatively good, in particular in comparison to some Western and most Eastern countries in Europe (Stanners – Bourdeau 1995). Yet, environmental problems were consistently denied by the holders of power (saying that pollution is generated in Capitalist systems only and the Socialist type of man instinctively protects nature), and all moves intended to protect the environment were seen as suspicious and suppressed to the extent possible (for details see Illés – Medgyesi 1998; Persányi 1993). In spite of this, the environmental issues played a central role in the set of problems raised by the ever stronger social movements and separatist groups of the 1980s. Thomas Homer-Dixon states with respect to environmental issues and social conflicts, which is – in my mind – true for the Hungarian political changes as well: "since in oppressing regimes the state of the environment is one of the topics in public discussions with respect to which society is able to organise political activity in a relatively unobstructed manner, opposition groups frequently touch upon environmental themes to incite discourses" (Homer-Dixon 2004:14). Environmental problems and protests against the regime were closely linked in Hungary as well and the dispute about the barrage system on the Danube united most political resistance forces with reform Communists within the party and the entire environmental movement in summer 1988 (Persányi 1993:147). Stopping the construction of the dam has become a symbol for the collapse of the political regime. That is, political and environmental opposition was tightly bound together, partly because the environmental movement functioned as a core, around which politically active members rallied, and partly because the goals of environmentalists and the forming political opposition seemed to be identical (Illés – Medgyesi 1998:148–151).

Founders and initial dwellers of the eco-villages took part or at least dropped by and informed themselves in the ecological movements, alternative social movements dealing with environmental issues, emerging and operating in the 1980s (Interdisciplinary Student

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[17] The connections between the environmental movements of the 1980s and the national eco-village movement were covered earlier on with respect to the story of Gyűrűfű, see Farkas 2009.

Circle, ELTE Nature Conservation Club, Danube Circle, the Green Circle of the Budapest University of Engineering, Circle 405, 4:6:0 Peace Group, etc.). Various illegal, semi-legal and regular papers and publications on which the great generation of the alternative environmental movement was raised had a distinct role in regular dissemination of information. Such media included the *Gaia Sajtószemle (Gaia Press Review)* of the ELTE Nature Conservation Club, *Lev-Lap* by ITDK, the periodical *Természetvédelem* (Nature Conservation), *Kari Paper* by BME and the *Kék Bolygó* (Blue Planet) (Illés – Medgyesi 1998:139–146; Maurer 1993). *Harmadik Part* (Third Shore), a periodical launched at the time of the political transition, considering a third way between Capitalism and Socialism, which finally reflected the disillusionment after the changes was also part of this set. These papers include the writings of eco-village founders (such as Béla Borsos, Imre Kilián, Géza Varga, Péter Zaja), and they were the same forums where the germinating green thought including the eco-village idea was formulated.

In his work reviewing the history of the movement in this country Imre Kilián, one of the founders of the Hungarian eco-village movement and still an active representative, also refers to the green movement as one of the underlying originating factors (Kilián 2014). Beside the story of the Bős-Nagymaros dam, he indicates two more dominant groups: the Communard City Project and IGyÉSz. Communard City in his interpretation is outright the oldest similar initiative which was a source for eco-villages (Kilián 2014:1).[18] The project was envisaged by the Interdisciplinary Scientific Student Circle launched in the Rajk László College for Advanced Studies, University of Economy helyett University of Economic Sciences in 1981, where they envisaged a new type of settlement and social model using the theoretical foundations laid down by István Síklaky and drawing from the traditional rural examples of self-organisation. The plans were polished further in summer building and creative art camps and on regularly organised club events, with the help of invited speakers.[19] The other forum indicated by Kilián was the Information Gathering and Providing (IGyÉSz) Workshop, led by György Mauer and their publication called *Lev-Lap* (Kilián 2014:1).

Beside these examples, initiatives being a specific form of migration flowing from the cities towards villages, emerging from the alternative movements, should be mentioned here. They can be seen as Hungarian models of *intentional communities* in the 1980s, even though most probably their promoters did not even know this term, yet they can be seen as the forerunners of Hungarian eco-villages in a sense. Albeit in this period the ruling power did not tolerate civil organisations which were declared to be against the regime, a few such 'retreating' groups tried to create their own room to live at the edge of the alternative movements gaining ground in the slackening dictatorship of the 1980s.

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[18] In my experiences the Hungarian eco-villages do not know it, yet a very early initiative is quite similar to an eco-village, the Bubáni colony in Szentendre. People mainly from Budapest and Szentendre planned to created a colony in the 1930s based on self-sufficiency and close community ties in the environs of Szentendre, the Bubán quarter (hence the name). The scarce documentary evidence available (founding charters, newsletters) demonstrate that the participants started design with very similar motivations than the current eco-villages: their narratives show striking resemblance with the anti-urban and green discourse of these days, and design details also are almost identical with the eco-village concept. Implementation was swept away by World War II.

[19] As far as I know Communards City was envisaged in Ráckeve, but the project was not implemented at the end.

Magyarlukafa in the Zselic can be classified as such, where a lifestyle inspired by the Hungarian folk culture was followed by immigrants. And a small village near the city of Pécs, hidden in the mountains of the Mecsek, Vágotpuszta has seen the settlement of a Yoga community from Pécs, where they lived together for a couple of years.[20] According to Imre Kilián the members of this group protested with their feet: "these young people, mainly with intellectual background, seeing their former city life as false and senseless, looked for another place in the world where they took the land and built a country" (Kilián 2004:1). In addition to the examples referred to above, he also lists the experiment made by the experimental theatre workshop called Studio K in his text reviewing the story of the Hungarian eco-villages,[21] the members of which – having made a detour in Szentendre – moved to Pilisborosjenő and set up their common life there.

HISTORY OF THE HUNGARIAN ECO-VILLAGE MOVEMENT

The idea of eco-villages emerged in Hungary in the ecological, social and economic context outlined above, and after the political transition, during the 1990s the circumstances allowing the design and implementation of the first eco-villages have been settled (such as the opportunity to establish formal organisations, funding sources, cheap land acquisition, etc.).

The first initiatives were created at Galgahévíz (Galgafarm), Gyűrűfű, Visnyeszéplak and Drávafok. When the founding fathers revoked the beginnings beside the festive cake at the 20th eco-village summer meeting at Ópusztaszer this year, the meeting at Drávafok in 1993 was specified as Meeting 0, where the informal Hungarian Ecological Settlement Development Alliance, MÖTSZSZ (pronounced as MÖCCC) was created. In the second half of the 1990s further newly formed eco-villages joined the alliance, first Krishna Valley, the Gömörszőlős initiative and Agostyán-eco-village, in 2004 Máriahalom, in 2008 KÖRTE in Nagyszékely, then Magfalva, and in 2011 the Alliance of Eco-Farmsteads at Szer, called SZÖSZ. According to the memories the still informal and unregistered organisation most probably adopted the name *Hungarian Network of Living Villages* in 2009.[22]

Members of the Hungarian Network of Living Villages today include the following members (as demonstrated by their web site, see: www.elofaluhalozat.hu): Galgahévíz eco-village, Gömörszőlős, Gyűrűfű, Krishna Valley (Somogyvámos), MAGfalva (Monor), Máriahalom Bio Village, Nagyszékely KÖRTE, Ormánság Foundation (Drávafok-Markóc), Alliance of Eco-Farmsteads at Szer (SZÖSZ, Ópusztaszer and environs), Foundation for the Natural Lifestyle (TEA, Agostyán), Visnyeszéplak. Members of the movement meet twice a year, in summer and in winter, each time in

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[20] The memories of a founding member were published recently on the life of this community (see Felcser 2010). The work draws up an excellent picture on the age, where both the powerful and the mainstream society, which have difficulties in tolerating differences, try to make the life of the group impossible.

[21] More precisely, the experiment of the Orfeo-group.

[22] The reason why the name does not contain the term eco-village is the degradation of the word on one hand and the existing multiple definitions of it within the movement on the other. The term living village was adopted after lengthy negotiations and discussions, but several members of the movement still use the term eco-village for themselves.

another eco-village. News are printed and distributed electronically on a quarterly basis, an electronic newsletter is published in every two weeks, a joint website (www. elofaluhalozat.hu) and a mailing list are operated.

The diversity of eco-villages referred to in this paper earlier on is typical for the Hungarian subset as well: villages based on the most state-of-the-art alternative technology (Galgafarm), phasing out high tech to the extent possible (Krishna Valley, Visnyeszéplak) and amalgamating the two (Gyűrűfű) can all be found among them; there are communities tending towards isolation and others entirely open; and also, their religious and ideological background is also very diverse (New Age, Krishna-faith, Catholicism, 'pure' green ideology).[23] Some of them were implemented as greenfield projects (Galgafarm, Krishna Valley), and there were initiatives which tried to convert an existing and functional rural settlement into an eco-village (Gömörszőlős). However, most Hungarian eco-villages were set up in the place of a formerly existing but later abandoned village site (Gyűrűfű), or in and around villages in socially and economically backward situation (Krishna Valley, Visnyeszéplak), just because these villages are relatively isolated and their natural environment is more or less intact. With the youngest member of the movement, SZÖSZ a new type of settlement, the (eco) farmsteads were put on the Hungarian map.

HUNGARIAN ECO-VILLAGES AND RURAL MIGRATION

As I mentioned before, you can not really talk about created or intentional communities from the second half of the 20th century in Hungary – with the negligible amount of exceptions referred to above. However, it might be worth to interpret the eco-villages within the migration patterns: on one hand, you can find forerunners here which are somewhat similar in their efforts to the eco-village concept, which – as I can see during my research – represents an attractive alternative for more and more (but still, not a very significant number of) urbanites.

Beside the strong migration flow towards the cities from the 1960s on, a varying tendency of moving back to rural settings could also be detected in Hungary. According to the data collected by György Enyedi, three million people moved away from the rural settlements between 1960 and 1974, but some of them settled in another village and not in the cities. What is more, from the 1970s most migrants went to the country. Moving from the cities to villages was not very usual at this time yet, between 1970 and 1973 approximately 40,000 people moved mainly to the suburban belt of big cities (Enyedi 1980:40–41). According to the data by Gábor Vági concerning the mid-1980s, 51 persons from 100 migrants ended up in a village community (Vági 1991:71). This figure included both village to village and city to village movers, where the target village usually means a major settlement of the village system which represents the centre of a district, but receiver villages also included small villages. Due to the centralisation zoning efforts of the 1960–1970s this was the time when the latter started to be depopulated and selective migration accelerated: "Houses available for moderate prices have become attractive

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[23] For this see Farkas 2012; 2014.

for those who could not get a council flat in major settlements, in particular in cities or could not buy an apartment at market prices" (Ladányi – Szelényi 2004:78). Moving to tiny villages (the so-called back filtration) is divided in three types by Gábor Vági: 1.) the first one was motivated by unemployment: agricultural cooperatives (TSZ), general consumption and sale cooperatives (ÁFÉSZ) attracted young people into these villages who wanted to accumulate funds and create a home quickly. 2.) The second type can be described by the process of ghettoising: ageing and emptying small villages are occupied by the poor, mainly Roma families. 3.) The third type can be associated with the growing strength of the second economy: people were drawn to villages by the opportunity to create family farm holdings (Vági 1991:71–72).[24]

From the 1990s on a large part of the people moving to the villages is led by two main and radically different driving forces: the first type represents classic suburbanisation, populating suburbs and settlements close to cities. The key actors of this type are social groups who continue to earn a living in the city (they work there, their children attend schools there, etc.), but they can afford to move to valuable places as residence with high natural and recreational standards. The other type includes those moving for social purposes, people with modest income who hope to save money on moving to the countryside, in a distance (50–100 km), where from they are still able to commute to their city based workplace by railway relatively easily (Kovács 2003:56). At the same time, small villages are still characterised by social, i.e. negative migration: the poorest pensioners or families with many children who are not able to maintain their city properties any more, move to the small villages (Virág 2007:143).

Maybe lesser in numbers, still in terms of motivation to move to the country also important is the type of migration which was investigated by Zsolt Szijártó and others on the Balaton-highlands. This process meant typically the moving out of such – in the words of Szijártó – independent and regime-critical intellectuals (artists, painters, film makers) starting in the 1980s, whose step was nourished by concepts of crisis and longing to be away, and who this way created a counter-world and expressed their opposition against the fundamental values of the current political, social, and cultural regime (Szijártó 2002; 2007). In this sense, their move was not motivated by economic reasons, but their goal was to set up a better life in terms of moral, cultural or ideological sense, and the target of their migration was interpreted by those who moved there as a declining cultural region in need of salvation (Pulay 2002:40). You can also take the story of Kisújbánya, abandoned by the 1970s and studied by László Mód. According to Mód: "Families purchasing a house or plot in Kisújbánya wanted to create a specific world in their effort to preserve the ideal value of things" (Mód 2007:129).

Experience or welfare motivated migration of Westerners towards small villages starting in the 1990s is also not very notable in terms of numbers compared to classic suburbanisation or back filtration, yet it is the more interesting. The findings of the study made by Katalin Járosi suggests that reasons include low property prices: when moving to Hungary, Western migrants are able to preserve or even raise their standard of living of their active years in retirement. These Western migrants want to live far from the maddening crowd and from locations occupied by mass tourism. Their motivations

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[24] The tendencies seen in moving to small villages was covered earlier on in relation to the story of the old Gyűrűfű village, abandoned by the 1970s, see Farkas 2009.

include experience orientation: the beauty of the landscape in question, individual expectations, harmony with the environment and liveability of the houses. They aim is to conserve, spare and retain the harmony thus discovered (Járosi 2007:190–193). For eco-villagers this kind of migration can represent a kind of competition in settlements where there is no community land ownership and it is not the community which decides who will move in the neighbourhood: Western migrants are able to pay more for the residential houses which would be ideal dwellings for Hungarians heading for the countryside.

It is an illuminating experience to find a place for eco-villages in the grouping set up by Zsolt Szijártó to illustrate three types of spatial structure and spatial practice (see Szijártó 2007:170). Due to their attitude, eco-villages could best be placed beside the example from Inner Somogy. This type is characterised by naturalisation of space, i.e. a kind of approach to space where ecology, nature conservation are important aspects; biological diversity is a key concept, space appears as the 'co-existence of biological habitats' and the goal is to protect them from human interference; in the sphere of economy they prefer mainly natural husbandry, and in tourism eco-tourism (Szijártó 2007:167–168). At the same time, a few elements of the Szijártó typology described for the Balaton-highland migration pattern are true for eco-villages as well, such as a part of the ideological foundations, the imagination of the counter-world, usage of space in a communal nature, creation of old/new festivals and holidays.

Katalin Járosi distinguishes two types of migration, classic and welfare: classic migration is characterised by the escape from something, while experience and welfare migrants are motivated by the wish to move towards something (Járosi 2007:200). Eco-villagers may also be characterised by this yearning towards something: a strong opposition to cities, moving out from the designed, pre-determined cities and into eco-villages. The eco-communities known by me are characterised by a conscious construction of their own world. Their forerunners may also include the moving to small villages for instance in the South Transdanubian region of regime-critical urban intellectuals strongly tied to the folk dance and green movements started in the 1980s.[25] Eco-villagers are also mainly urban intellectuals, from a very broad range (IT specialist and entrepreneur, teacher and agricultural engineer), but – as opposed to for instance those who moved to the Balaton-highlands – relatively few artists can be found among them. In terms of their motivations they are mainly distinguished from the other migrant flows towards the countryside by their intention to create a non-mainstream lifestyle based on ecological commitment. This need does not only manifest in their relationship with their environment, but permeates all aspects of individual and community existence. In terms of their goals, they differ from other village-movers by emphatically assuming the function of role model: their aim is – as it was outlined in the section on eco-village concepts – not only to implement a socially, economically and environmentally sustainable lifestyle, but to transfer of their experiences and practices.

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[25] For the connections between the folk dance house movement and critique of the regime see Taylor 2011.

CLOSING WORDS

As it was mentioned in the introduction of this article, domestic eco-villages don't constitute a dominant part of Hungarian society. At the same time they are exposed to a number of difficulties which are typical for the Hungarian rural setting (such as the provision of economic resources, providing a livelihood, in particular the issue of local livelihood, retention of access to educational institutions and a number of other adverse impacts of centralisation), thus their difficulties might be a kind of barometer reflecting the problems of the countryside and in particular those of the small villages and dead-end villages. On the other hand, eco-villagers – a great part being middle-class intellectuals – are generally characterised by strong reflectivity: they reflect on the global issues and express their opinions on current social issues (consumer society, globalisation, centralisation, environmental, economic, ethical crises, alienation, etc.). Their lifestyle is also a critique of the society at the same time, based – in addition the judging, evaluating intellectual thinking – on the special approach, a kind of alternative attitude providing an interpretation to the world different to that of the mainstream. This approach and attitude are not exclusively theirs, however: they can be encountered in worlds radically different from the eco-villages, which puts the eco-village discourse into a wider context again.

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