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# Organizational Challenges *for* RINGING CEDARS Ecovillages

## Turning Stumbling Blocks into Stepping Stones

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### Continuation: Part IV of an Ongoing Series Visions for an Ecovillage

#### (4) The concept of a Kin's domain and its size.

**W**hen you develop the vision and layout for your domain, it is very important to clearly define what you consider to be a domain. What will be the meaning of Domain in your particular settlement? What is a Kin's domain in *your* ecovillage? Is it simply a bordered plot of land or is it a plot where a single family lives, or else is it a plot laid out according to a uniform vision? This question, seemingly so simple at first glance, appears to be rather difficult to deal with in practice. For example, in our settlement we have cases, where:

- One family took three adjoining square plots, one hectare each, divided by private roads. Is this one domain or three?
- Another family took three undivided hectares of land without internal roads. Is this still one domain as well?
- The third family took six hectares of land, saying that they have reserved the land for descendants. How many domains are there? (Incidentally, other settlers have reasonable complaints about this family because if people are given such large plots - especially in an undivided state - various complexities arise. They create, for instance, unnecessary territorial expanse and issues with the road system. For instance: to go around six hectares hardly compares to going around one and a half hectares. And what if you need to build and maintain a road? There also is a decrease of the population density [the consequences of which I already discussed in an earlier article and will touch upon again later], just to mention a few examples.)
- Two families own three common hectares. How many domains do they have?

All these issues matter for many reasons. It is a question of internal roads convenient to the settlement, and the number of votes in general meetings. (E.g.: Who votes - a person or a domain?) For instance, if a domain votes, then a person who owns three domains has three votes? It also concerns resettlement policy and the speed of the settlement's development. Practice shows that, with expedi-

ency of land settlement in mind, it is totally unreasonable to allocate (reserve) domains for small children, grandchildren and especially for yet to be born descendants. This becomes even more relevant when people arrive, ready to move to the settlement immediately, and do not find available domains. And eventually, it is a question of fundamental ethics and community relations. When there are people in the settlement taking 3, 4, 6 or more hectares without a practical reason, then this can quickly become a sort of infectious epidemic: people begin to ask for 3 hectares, "because my neighbor has that much too," not because it is truly necessary for either neighbor. And if one lets such patterns go unchecked, people are naturally more likely to come into conflict and quarrel because someone "was given the fourth hectare for his grandson, and I was not!" Although neither have cultivated even a small part of the allocated land yet, and the grandson is still in diapers.

It also seems more common that large plots are more frequently appropriated by those who rarely appear in the settlement. In our particular case, we had a flagrant (my own opinion) case, where a woman who already had 3 hectares of land, visiting it but four to five times a year, tried to obtain two more hectares for herself, "to dig out a pond on them" - while she had already ruthlessly cut down most of the trees on her available land and wanted to plant the whole area with hybrid strawberries for sale. Must we explain that such behavior hardly reminds us of the idea of a Kin's domain and looks more like a safe place for a cheap commercial farm or summer residence?

Large size plots (less commonly visited) create a very important problem for a settlement, which can sometimes become critical for its development: Low population density exponentially and automatically increases infrastructure expenditures for the other domains. When plot sizes in a settlement are two to three times more than the one hectare size, it increases expenses in direct proportion related to internal road construction and maintenance, electrical wiring, arranging of water supply sources, etc. In addition, as I discussed in my first article, long distances complicate the use of jointly owned equipment. (In a settlement located on several hundred hectares of land, there will be a need for more than one common building, everybody will have to buy their own set of tools, etc.. And there are additional complications with security issues, to mention but a few.)

All these are serious issues which, however, very few people consider beforehand. Therefore I have very much appreciated the way they dealt with these in the ecovillage of Kovcheg. Everybody gets equal plots approximately one hectare in size. Then, let grandchildren grow up first and we will allocate them their plots in accordance with general practice at that time. We might say, that way the dispute is "nipped in the bud". And incidentally, this approach corresponds much more with the Vedic practices as described by Anastasia: It is not the parents who choose the land where their children will live, but the grown up child



selects a place to live together with his beloved mate.

I'm not saying that equal size of plots must be a rigid rule in a Kin's village – it is not always necessary. However, if a person wishes to receive more land than the others, he should at least already live permanently in the settlement and be able to demonstrate that he has developed and cultivated all areas and does indeed need additional land.

Therefore, all these questions need to be carefully considered in advance, at the stage of discussion when the vision of the Kin's village is developed, and organizers must be prepared with appropriate answers for people who arrive with such questions into the settlement.

However, I must add that it is difficult to expect success dealing with this problem if one or more of the organizers themselves take nine hectares of land each (as it happened in one settlement near Perm city). A whole different philosophy and approach needs to be taken here.

### (5) Public Spaces in a Kin's Village

If you would like to know about a successful model for the allocation of public spaces in a Kin's village, here too, ecovillage Kovcheg may serve as a fine example. Not only one single hectare is set aside for public purposes as is common in many settlements, but a full eight hectares of common spaces, namely ten percent of the whole settlement territory. The common plots are not all in one area, but are spread throughout the settlement territory, and already, many of them are in active use. One plot holds the Community House, a parking place for visitors, a children's playground, utility room and more; the second plot serves as a service and repair area: a workshop, power-saw bench, auto repair shop, tractor parking, timber storehouse, etc. The third plot is dedicated to holidays and cultural events (with various fun and play facilities). Two more hectares are allocated for the community pond. There are also a community bathhouse and a community well in Kovcheg.

When a settlement becomes populated and its social life more active, it frequently happens that some settlers join to implement particular projects, including those not supported by the majority of the settlers. It is important that territory for such projects is allocated as well, so that people do not feel as if they have to restrain themselves. For example, a power-saw bench or a carpenter's workshop can demand much more space than might be privately available, so it is unreasonable to expect the project initiator/s to place them in their own domains. This is even more important when noise will be generated and might disturb the neighbors. It seems much more reasonable to allocate some land in the settlement specifically for workshop and storage purposes, maybe even separated from other domains by forested areas, the land for any commercial and tourist purposes or other such tracts.

In this regard, it is interesting to look at the layout of the Russky Saramak Kin's village in Udmurtiya. The plots have hexagonal shapes, like honeycombs, and every six plots make a ring with the seventh plot in the middle – for common purposes. That means that public territories occupy one seventh (14 %) of the settlement territories, and are easily accessible from each domain. In such a layout, a rich foundation for their future social life can be laid.

However, it is important not to go overboard with community plots: if they occupy too much space, or if they alternate with other domains, the same unwelcome effects of decreasing population density we discussed earlier can be created. Therefore it is desirable to create an optimal combination: for instance, a tightly arranged group of ten to twenty domains, plus one to two hectares of



community land somewhere in the middle or at the outskirts of such an area, depending on the purpose.

### (6) The integration of the vision of a Kin's village with its community

Generally speaking, it is advisable to carefully determine people's true level of commitment to this way of life at the early planning stages.

I have already written about the issue of fundamental differences among group members regarding their future visions and life-style in the community. If so, it will be much better for them to divide into separate settlements. It will be difficult enough for all the people to get along in one settlement: First of all, for "settler-practitioners" and "settler-theorists", namely those who are not ready or do not intend to move to the settlement permanently and who very seldom appear in person on the land. Secondly, for formalists, namely those who adhere to strict observance of laws and legal paperwork regarding the land, and "informalists", especially combative ones. And thirdly, for people at different levels of income, for instance when the wealthiest people vote for equal financial obligations rather than by percentage of income, which would make payments feasible for people of all income-levels.

However, it is essential to reiterate the following, no matter how unwelcome these facts may be: To be able to correctly ascertain the level of true commitment a person has to actually live in accordance with his professed beliefs, this is possible only after settling in a Kin's village on a permanent basis. More specifically, people should live there for at least two or three years, until after the initial euphoria has dissipated. As a rule, having lived closely with others for two or three years on the land, yesterday's ideological opponents miraculously begin to agree about the advantages of electricity, the necessity to purchase a tractor, etc. Or, having discovered the impossibility of immediately "living like Anastasia", such a person might promptly return to the city). However, until such a testing-time in a real Kin's village, these people can furiously duel with each other in a city club over how much time - six months or three years - might be required for a transition to Sungazing, or to achieve Anastasia's abilities, or about the capacity of a torsion field generator.

Considering these debates, it is very useful to remember the basic statistics about Kin's village living: In all Kin's villages that I know about, experience has shown that most of the "esoteric-minded" and "scientifically progressive" people, even after having obtained a plot of land, continue to live in the city. And they rarely come to their domains. Therefore, if the organizers have a more down-to-earth vision, they should not invest their time and efforts to reason with "esoteric-minded" people, for they will most likely never live in the settlement. And if they will, they will get engaged in other matters. In general, all disputes, unless of course they are just started for the pleasure of the process itself, it is most advisable to transfer them to a practical level. HOW to specifically accomplish a certain task, WHO would actually be willing to take on the organizer's duties, etc. This makes people sober rather quickly.

***In general, I believe that to establish a Kin's village, it is best to form a small group consisting of concrete and practical thinkers right from the beginning, capable of considering and coordinating all fundamental issues regarding the future settlement in the most practical way. Only thereafter should the information from the core founders group be shared with others so as to recruit new members which are ready to accept and work within the limits of the vision which has been already gener-***



ated in its basic form. (This is what the organizers of Kovcheg and SvietoRusie did).

**When a large group of twenty or thirty people first gathers around the common experience of having read the Ringing Cedar books, trying to share their mutual identification with the Space of Love ideals, when such a group then attempts to discuss any practical questions, this type of a discussion inevitably degenerates into the chaos of disagreements and philosophical schisms.** As a result, organizers might conclude that "in our collective, we will have no customary charters and rules, declare "full freedom of opinions and democracy" in the settlement and stop any attempts to discuss a vision for the settlement. Practical questions then tend to be resolved by a small circle of competent individuals. (Maybe they bring in outsiders for these purposes, such as lawyers who might, however, know little about the unique issues of a Kin's village and who will give advice on how to "legalize" the land without the slightest understanding of how their recommendations will affect the Kin's village's development). The rest of the members receive explanations that the best method has been chosen by the expert, and they are invited to take advantage of its benefits. This way the land is offered to all - to those who were in agreement with the Kin's village's vision as offered by the organizers, as well as to those who disagreed with it but who nevertheless remain on the list for plot-land.

*In just such ways, Kin's villages without a vision come into being when there is no integrated, collective thought behind anything, but only fragments and shreds of different opinions (including those made by professionals unfamiliar with the Space of Love idea) which creates disunity amongst them. Each person comes onto the land to build their separate domain without realizing that in two to four years it will inevitably become clear that even their immediate neighbors had something very different in mind for themselves. So now, when a settlement question comes up, it may become more difficult to solve.*

The questions oftentimes debated in city clubs, about spiritual practices in a Kin's village, whether or not to eat meat (smoke, drink alcohol or use strong language), ethical standards in the collective, etc., actually prove to be the least important of the things that need to be discussed with the vision of a Kin's village in mind. When people move to live on the land, they frequently become much more tolerant towards each other with such concerns. (This tolerance, noted by myself as well as others, is perhaps one of the first real effects of the positive influence that life in a Kin's village has on moral social behavior.) As a rather reliable rule, fanaticism disappears.

What does not disappear, however, but increases even more are the financial issues connected with moving onto the land permanently. A general rule for the resolution of financial issues is this: The less compulsory dues you create, the better. Actually, numerous problems in a Kin's village can be resolved via voluntary, specific donations. For example, in our settlement, a house for our teacher, Nadya Rubtsova, was built by such donations of

the settlers. And all people both donated money and also worked with pleasure on the construction site. Whereas unreasonable policies of organizers, such as focusing on compulsory financial dues and compulsory labor, may easily lead to conflicts in a collective.

*In summary, I can say that from all that enters into the concept and dynamic of a "Kin's village vision", there are questions that are rather difficult to decide in advance in the absence of rural life experience - such as the acceptable degree of technological advances and ethical standards in a settlement. But still, there are questions that can be answered with logical considerations and the analysis of other settlements' experiences. For instance, the general idea of how people want to live, the definition of a domain, rules about the process of granting land, accepting new members, number of hectares allowed per person, approximate layout of the territory and reservation of community land, main principles of resettlement, management and payments in a settlement's cash account, etc.. These are the questions that must be solved as soon as possible and in as much detail as possible. It is most desirable to do this before official legal determinations of the land are made and before the founders group has grown to a size that already makes it difficult to come to any agreements. The exact place for the Kin's village and new members are preferably chosen in accordance with the created vision.*

Even if in the future any of these questions will have to be addressed repeatedly because of changing conditions, agreement around the initial decision will promote consensus around more or less uniform purposes that will lower the risk of future complications.

### **(7) The Name of a Kin's Village**

*[Editor's note: Due to the specific meanings of certain Russian names we translated most of them into English or found English equivalents for easier understanding.]*

At the initial stage of a Kin's village's organization, it may seem that the name of the future settlement has no great importance, and one might choose any more or less suitable and congenial name, especially if it contains a root like "Rod" (Kin), "Sviet" (Light) or "Blago" (Good), etc.. However, in the future, when the settlement grows stronger and enters the social environment at large, i.e. starts establishing relations with the world around it and particularly with other settlements, it can appear that the settlement's name prevents it from creating a vivid impression upon the outer world - or put more specifically, to express its individuality in interaction with other settlements and people.

I have here a list of "128 Kin's villages to be found on the Internet" from the "Creation of Kin's domains" forum on the Anastasia.ru website. It is rather curious to see which names organizers of Russian Kin's villages have chosen most commonly:

"Rodniki" (The Springs) is the most prevalent name. It is listed six times, although I know several more which are not mentioned. There are "Springs" in Kurgan, Perm, Kostroma, the Leningrad region, in Bashkortostan, Udmurtiya, Khakassia.... In addition, there are also "Korenskiye Springs" (Belgorod region), as well as multiple "Springs" and "Sources" - "The Honey Spring", "Pure Spring", "Pure Sources", "Kin's Springs", etc.. The names containing words like "Paradise" and "Heaven" are also quite common on the list. You can also frequently find names including "Native", "Kin", "Light", "Sun" and some other common words.

What can one determine from this? If there will be a dozen "Springs" across Russia (and every year new ones appear), and you live in one of them, then you are guaranteed certain complications when building external relationships. At best, each time in conversation or in letters you will have to specify your region along with the name of your Kin's village and if your "Springs" village is located in Perm or another region where several "Springs" exist, then you will also have to give some other identifying mark. But the issue is more complicated. Highly repetitive



A Kin's domain. © Photo by Larissa Ryadnova

names are perceived poorly, and hence can make negative impressions upon the external world.

In general, one can suggest the following principles of selection for a successful Kin's village name:

1) It should be original, i.e. not match the names of other settlements already in existence, or with those that might occur just because the word is so common.

2) It is desirable that it would reflect some local feature/s of the territory. For instance, "Saltlakedale", is apparently located near a salty lake.

3) It is also desirable that it might contain a reference to the idea of a Space of Love.

*[Editor's note: Here the author offers a number of names derived specifically from the Slavic/Vedic culture. Considering the cultural differences, we can suggest some English names that are most related to the idea of Space of Love and also derived from English cultural traditions: Kin-dale, Cedardale, Cedarville, Peacevale, Peacewood, Lovedale, Blue Bird, Joydale, Cedar Lakes. Please use with great care such common names as Sunnyvale and Heartland. Also please be careful using well-known words from the Ringing Cedars book series, such as Kin, Cedar and Vedic. Although a very unique name with these words may occur, such as: Vedrica (a Kin's village developing in Canada).]*

In my opinion, organizers do an outright disservice to their settlement if they give it exactly the same name in honor of another already well-known settlement. For example, someone told me recently that in Siberia a new settlement with the name "Kovcheg" was established. Surely the organizers knew that a Kin's village with the name "Kovcheg" already exists and is popular all over Russia. Perhaps they thought that the aura of success of the Kaluga region "Kovcheg" will confer success to their settlement. But regardless, such a settlement is doomed to live eternally in the shadow of their senior model.

*Summing up this article, I can say that from the reality I see in Kin's villages, the importance of carefully*

*considering a vision for the future settlement is more frequently underestimated rather than overestimated. And I believe that for the successful development of a Kin's village, it is only logical to define this vision before one tries to realize its end goal. Then, according to this vision, new members can be recruited and a place found for the settlement. Creating any kind of uniform vision in an already formed and diverse collective is practically impossible, and so are attempts at imposing upon an established collective a vision created by a small circle of its members.*

I do know and see that the land and a real life lived in a Kin's village might indeed sort things out in the end: some people and ideas leave, others come... But at times, sadly, it is accompanied by serious scandal and tragedy. And that demands so much time. It is sad enough to look at a settlement where several families, one after another, develop their domains, build houses, make their farmsteads, spend a winter or two, and then leave everything and go back to the city or to another settlement, leaving empty houses and plots filled with overgrown weeds.

So, maybe then it would be better to live yet another year in the city. On the other hand however, if you love adventures and are ready to learn, not via dry theories but under real "in the field" conditions, under the blue sky, listening to the singing of birds and looking at the green pines around you, if you go in good faith and do not deceive those who trust in you, there is nothing inherently bad about changing settlements several times before you create your own true Kin's domain. The third house you build will certainly be an architectural masterpiece, and your expertise with cedar planting will become proverbial among your neighbors. And the experience you obtain this way will undoubtedly be very rich and interesting. So it is possible to try this approach as well. With this approach, do remember though: "Don't bear a grudge!"

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## ***Kin's Estates Bill passed by regional Duma government in Belgorod region*** (Feb. 2010)

### **Basic concepts defined in this bill are:**

**Kin's Estate** – a plot of land with buildings, structures and other facilities on which a Kin's farmstead is being developed;

**Kin's Estate Farmsteading** - a type of lifestyle where priority is given to the land, which is protected as a fundamental aspect of nature by way of ecological approaches to agriculture, harmonious interactions and minimal negative impact upon the natural environment, as well as the furthering of healthy living, traditional folk rituals, celebrations and craft making.

**Kin's Village** - a community of citizens practicing Farmsteading on Kin's Estates, located in close proximity to each other.

In an explanatory note, the Chief of the Department of Property and Land Relations of the Belgorod Region, V. Shamaev, noted: "This initiative is a call to legalize the 'Kin's estate' concept at a regional level. The creation of Kin's estates is an effort to escape urbanization and the influence of the ecologically negative aspects which accompany city life. Many people obtain summer homes (dachas) not only to help with



home-grown foods but even more so as a place for psychological regeneration from the pressures of modern city living. Furthermore, the idea of Kin's estates and Kin's villages is constructive all around. It completely corresponds to the concept of single-storey housing in Russia which is now being fulfilled under the state housing program."

More concretely, this is a political declaration of the regional authorities in support of the idea of Kin's estates.

For the creators of Kin's estates in the Belgorod region, the passing of this bill relieves them of the struggle to explain the concept of Kin's estates to regional officials, including the fact that these are indeed intelligent

land-development projects. They can now count on organizational, informational, moral and financial support on the regional level.

For people who are developing their Kin's villages in other regions, the very fact of passing such a law represents a rather significant precedent as it will be much easier to interact with officials on all levels. There is now much greater confidence that other regions will follow the lead of the Belgorod region.

It is worth noting that efforts had been underway for almost 10 years to turn these ideas into legal bills on federal and local levels and the passing of such a bill in one of the regions

of the Russian Federation is a true breakthrough. More specifically, the first step to legalize the concept of Kin's estates in Russia has been made.

[www.bel.ru/news/business/2010/02/11/44066.html](http://www.bel.ru/news/business/2010/02/11/44066.html)

[www.bel.ru/news/business/2010/02/18/44229.html](http://www.bel.ru/news/business/2010/02/18/44229.html)