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# Organizational Challenges for RINGING CEDARS Ecovillages

## Turning Stumbling Blocks into Stepping Stones

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### Continuation: Part II of an Ongoing Series

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**T**he issues which cause conflict among permanently living settlers and part-time townspeople are not of an ideological, but rather of a specifically practical nature:

1) Numerous important issues related to surveying, infrastructure, income, schooling and interactions with the outside world need to be dealt with immediately if at least a few families in the newly developing ecovillage intend to live there full time. All of these require as much strength as they require resources, and most importantly, unity and consistency of action. However, it is very difficult to reach consensus in a consistent way with those people who visit the ecovillage only occasionally and know little about its daily life. Not only is it simply impossible to physically gather the entire membership in one place, because for example in our ecovillage, a meeting where 25% of the people are present is considered to be quite representative, because it is basically impossible to gather 40-50% of village members in one place. But even the preferences on many issues by townspeople versus settlers are often diametrically opposed because of very different levels of familiarity with the local conditions. Townspeople more frequently tend to propose idealized solutions based on the guidance taken from books, the Internet and other such resources and they will passionately defend their views. But for the settlers, who are left with the basic burdens of carrying or not carrying out these suggestions, down-to-earth and proven, practical solutions are much more acceptable. Therefore, it is very difficult to come to agreements in such cases: people simply speak "different languages". It is quite common that townspeople, just because they don't live there full time, see absolutely no need for certain improvements (e.g. electricity for the settlement), which leaves the settlers struggling with nothing but their own resources.

2) Under such conditions, when the land-area of the settlement is expansive and the population density low (for example, 10 permanent residents on 200 hectares), the implementation of certain projects in the village by way of the settlers' own efforts alone becomes very difficult. For instance, if the settlement territory is large, it may be necessary to service (clean, mow, repair, or snow-plow in winter) 5 to 10 km of internal roads, or to wire as many kilometers of electrical conduit via the resources of only 10-15 families. If the settlers of all 100 domains (reg-

istered for the 200 hectares) participated in the project, it would be considerably easier to do. If those active 10-15 families lived on only 15-20 hectares of settlement territory (and consequently with the roads extending no more than 1-2 km) – all that would be much more easily accomplished. In such a situation, when almost half of the 100 families might not appear on the land at all, another 25% of them only visited occasionally and did not consider it necessary to spend money on development, but again, roads, bridges, wiring, the community building and more needed to be created so that the village could function well to support the full-time settlers, the domains of the townspeople literally would become a burden for the settlers.

3) There is another example related to the same predicament: When some settlers have invested their resources in creating something new and then others simply arrive and use it (or just wait until "favorable conditions will be created"). Here as well, the probability of conflict is very high.

4) All issues listed above are representative not only for those ecovillages that decide to have a state power supply system and to service their roads. But for those who install a local power supply (including alternative power sources), similar predicaments may occur. For example, in our ecovillage many power their houses from storage batteries which are charged in different locations. However, carrying storage batteries over great distances is quite inconvenient. With a larger popula-

tion density, our solar panels could also serve to charge the storage batteries of our neighbors. However, the nearest living full-time neighbors are located at more than a kilometer distance from us, and now our solar panels run idle most of the time. To have a solar panel (and also charge-controls) in each separate house, the majority of which are occupied by single women who know little about electricity, is much more expensive.

Low population density creates other problems for settlers. The further away one's neighbors live, the less possible or likely becomes the joint use of any general amenities. Let's say, if all of 4-8 neighboring hectares are populated, then it is completely sufficient to have, for the entire village: one water well (bore hole), one benzene generator, one gasoline-powered saw, one electrical screwdriver, one vehicle with a trailer, etc. However, when one neighbor lives 500 meters away, another one 700 meters, and it is already more than a kilometer to the third one, then here, each of them has to spend money for a personal water well (bore hole), and buy their own tools and generator, because it is a real challenge to try to move a tool weighing 30-40 kilograms over such distances when transport may not always be near at hand. Transportation of construction materials from one domain to another also turns into a problem. At a distance of 50-100 m to the neighbor one can carry some things such as wooden boards by hand, but for a kilometer...?

Furthermore, in a large settlement with a low population-density, the settlers have to use transportation and various means of communication more frequently (and, correspondingly, spend more for gasoline, telephone fees,

***"It is very easy to create eco-villages, but very difficult to keep them going."***

**Seasoned Ecovillager**

etc.). In a more concentrated settlement (like Kovcheg, for instance) it is possible to reach any end of the settlement by foot in 15-20 minutes; therefore the use of vehicles around the internal territory of the settlement is not common. However, when a settlement is stretched out over several kilometers (with only a few families living there permanently), there is a much greater temptation to take a trip to the neighbor by car. This is true about communications as well. In our settlement, for instance, we have been seriously discussing the possibility of each settler carrying a portable radio along (mobile phones are not working everywhere) - and all this means additional expenditures. Never mind that all this equipment would need to be recharged somewhere, which would create yet another problem. Thus, even speaking in only financial terms, it appears that the low density population over large distances (caused by the absence of townspeople from their land) quite clearly increases expenditures for the settlers living there full time.

5) Sometimes on the land of certain domains or adjacent territories, some disturbance takes place which requires the presence of the owner so as to take care of the issue. (For example, a road is narrowed or seedlings are planted outside the boundary on the road; the land has no marking; construction materials are stocked right on the road; etc.) But it becomes really difficult to deal with such problems if the owner of the land is away and appears on the settlement only occasionally. These issues then have a tendency to accumulate and can create ill will between neighbors. For example, in our settlement, which has already existed for 5 years, the plot-line markings are still absent on some domains, and even on entire land-areas, and instead of the boundaries and roads, only brush and weeds are seen, along with tracks of vehicles and tractors which proceed on their way as they wish.

6) A newly created ecovillage always attracts close attention from local authorities and from inhabitants of neighboring villages. They might come to visit the ecovillage both because of simple curiosity and because they have questions, or because of other, more hidden motives. Permanent residents have to deal with all of these issues. When 5-10 permanent residents have to speak for the whole land-area of 200 hectares (most of which is in a very neglected state) or have to take care of the safeguarding of these 200 hectares - not only from outside people, but also from possible Fall and Spring brush-fires, for example - it can become less than pleasant.

Under such circumstances, when large numbers of parcels are not maintained nor used, it becomes quite difficult to explain to strangers that an ecovillage of Kin's domains is under development here. This is quite common when journalists visit the territory of such an ecovillage which has already formally existed for several years. They may even completely sympathize with the idea, but upon arrival they find nothing on the area, except for expanses of brush and tangled weeds and maybe a few half-finished structures (such as a small make-shift hut with the only permanent resident, whom they may not even encounter). Naturally, they leave with disappointment and then they report something far from flattering about the Ringing Cedars ecovillages in their newspapers. This is understandable, because the contrast between the high-spirited declarations of the organizers and the actual state of affairs on the land turns out to be strikingly different. Moreover, as a result of such real-life examples, a feeling about Ringing Cedars people as insubstantial idealists who do not practice what they preach, can develop easily. Likewise, the local authorities relevant here observe the under-use of the land, and become distrustful, so that it becomes increasingly difficult for a handful of permanent residents to obtain ecovillage zoning for their land.

7) Townspeople who spend a large percentage of their time in other social environments have a tendency to bring thoughts, emotions, ideas and solutions

into the ecovillage that in one way or another can come into conflict with the different way of life prevailing in the Kin's village. In order to retune their approach from their urban-type of thinking so as to align more with the ecovillagers' realities, they need adjustment time, usually several days. However, visiting once a week and trying to do everything in a hurry, people necessarily think and act according to their customary patterns, in this case with "city-smarts", in the sense that they cannot realize the consequences of their actions for the land and for the settlement as a whole. For instance, for a townspeople who wants to quickly build a house, it is much easier and cheaper to hire a few jobless guys from the nearby village. However, the appearance of such people in the ecovillage - maybe a scenario with men who more commonly drink, smoke and use dirty language - can become very unpleasant for other settlers.

8) Because many activities of the settlers encounter a lack of understanding and even resistance of townspeople, permanent settlers can begin to feel the lack of support from some fellow members of the group, and it can therefore become very difficult for them to speak and act on behalf of the entire ecovillage (in their contacts with the external world). They are confused and hesitate to answer questions about their ecovillage, and their public activities and initiatives greatly decrease. When they've experience a backlash for their excitement of reaching out to the public at large once or even several times, people become shy and come to believe that "being proactive gets you punished". While such a position is very understandable, it by no means contributes to the healthy development of the ecovillage.

***In accordance with my observations, this difference of needs and behaviors between settlers and townspeople who have started to create an ecovillage together proves to be most important for the future - far more important than their beliefs and their ideas about whether or not it should be permitted to drink, smoke or eat meat in the ecovillage, and similar philosophical concerns. Therefore, this question - for what type of life the ecovillage is actually being created - must be considered and resolved first of all, even before staking out the plots of land: shall it be for permanent residence; for part time; seasonal; dacha-like living or purchased for the sake of descendants (who sometimes don't even know that a Kin's domain is being established for them). And this decision must be presented very clearly to each potential villager.*** Because otherwise, those who will be moving to live in the ecovillage and will experience that others are not ready to support them, will soon feel deceived and even betrayed by their fellow members.

This question may not be easily resolved beforehand,



© Ecovillage Kovcheg

because too many urban Ringing Cedar club members have a very "fuzzy", indistinct and theoretical vision of it all and in reality do not know until they connect with the land whether they will actually be able to move to the domain and develop it or not. Many quite literally and sincerely believe that all those miracles and supernatural things described in the Ringing Cedars books will begin to happen for them concretely and immediately, as soon as they obtain the land. And if that were so, then certainly moving to the land would be a "no-brainer" to them. However, when they realize that the supernatural experiences are somewhat different from what they assumed (more about this at a later time), then plans for a life on their domain are put aside for the distant future.

*Therefore I believe that when we undertake a new and unknown creative project (especially when there will be a large collection of different types of people involved), it is unwise and not entirely honest to plan its success around issues about which we have little knowledge or information. It would be wiser to either test out all unknown dynamics beforehand by trying them out in practice or to only act concretely upon premises which are well-known at that moment. You should of course plan for and envision great success, but you must also visualize this success in detail and in the kind of images that you can believe in and support in your practical, everyday life. It is completely normal to rely on the aid of levitation and telepathy when a group of practicing yogis creates an ecovillage, but when it concerns housewives exhausted from struggling with everyday problems, it is better to build your plans upon more earthly foundations.*

Many townspeople criticize life in existing Kin's villages, pointing out that it is too far removed from the way it is described in Vladimir Megre's books, that it is being approached too technologically and even commercially at times. And so they advocate not to hurry with concrete actions for land development, but rather postpone construction activities and resettlement until such time when the general consciousness changes, when we begin to feel and understand nature better by spending all our free time there without "contaminating" it with our thoughts about construction, planting activities, etc.. "Let's not bring our contaminations to the land," they say, "let's have an entirely different life here from that in the city, so that we can feel the contrast, compare and deliberately make our final decisions. It is better not to live on the land at all than not to live according to Anastasia's principles" – or other ideas such as these.

And in the first years of the existence of an ecovillage, that approach seems to be able to work. People enjoy soulful time in their domains, and amazing and magical things really do happen to them. Often this high-spirited state remains with them for the whole week until the next



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weekend and helps them to keep a purer soul among the urban temptations. However, living in the city off and on, people nevertheless preserve a lot of everyday habits (obtaining water from urban water supplies, using state-provided electrical systems, throwing trash into trash-bins, shopping in the local supermarket, getting their salary at work, etc.), which they will have to either give up in an ecovillage or in order to preserve them, must reproduce such urban conditions in the settlement. These habits are patterned in on an unconscious level, often even on the level of body sensations (so that they are rarely conscious). Because of these realities, even for very spiritual and prepared people, it can become quite difficult to switch over to a permanent life on the land without reproducing some of the customary, modern creature comforts. You may dream for a long time about life in nature and believe that it is easy for you to give up all customary comforts. However, the physical sensations of discomfort (for example: coldness or mosquito bites) can eventually force you, regardless of all your ideals, to look for technological help.

Therefore, some compromises with the world of technology are inevitable in the process of permanently settling into a Kin's village, and it is inconsistent to compare full time living with a temporary stay in nature. They are very different activities. And, with respect to these realities, positions of settlers such as "Maybe we do not quite live here in perfect accordance with all Space of Love principles, but nevertheless it is better and purer than in the city..." begin to sound completely reasonable.

I think that both approaches (i.e. "permanent residents" and "summer residents/dachnics") offer constructive results and are embodiments of the Space of Love vision described in the books by Vladimir Megre. Existing Kin's villages create the living embodiment of a new society and way of life NOW and show a real positive alternative to the many dying rural villages. There is no doubt that "dacha-like" settlements do affect urban life very favorably. People who gain strength and inspiration from a visit to their domain carry out a lot of useful social work in the cities – educational, developmental, political and cultural.

***But regardless of the important role of both approaches, it is essential to understand the following: they co-exist very poorly in the same settlement.***

**In summary:** The fact that townspeople live outside the ecovillage and in different social environments has a tendency to prevent resolution of specific practical questions and needs of a developing ecovillage. Settlers' complaints which arise on this basis disrupt the natural evolution of the village and the activities of the townspeople on their domains, forcing them to develop projects for which they are unprepared or others which they do not want to do at all (such as installing electrical appliances, for example).

***All disagreements listed above occur because very general, basic philosophies were not clearly defined from the very beginning - for WHAT purpose these people gathered together in the first place. It is tacitly assumed that, once everyone has read the same books, everyone has the same vision. But actually, many different ideas are described in the books by Vladimir Megre. However, for successful maintenance of a Kin's village, very specific plans are essential - namely the vision for THAT specific ecovillage, which we, a group of specific people, want and are ready to create.***

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*This is the theme which we are going to explore further and in more detail in Part III of this ongoing series - in SOL Magazine issue #6*

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