

## Eco-Villagers (Novolazníci) in Slovakia

### Abstract

The aim of the SAL project, focused on eco-communities in Slovakia, was to explicate the patterns of development and the perspectives of such communities for transforming society under particular socio-economic conditions. It showed up that different social, historical or settlement predispositions significantly limit the overall character of the community and manifestations of everyday life of its individual members as well as the relations within the community. The existence of such a community in the environment of Slovak society points to different patterns and particularities of its development which are contrary to similar communities in the western part of Europe.

**Keywords:** isolated environment, utopian community, eco-village, social heterogeneity, interpersonal conflict

### Introduction

In the scope of the SAL project, I studied and mapped utopian (ecologically-oriented) communities in Slovakia, particularly the way of life of the community members and the community cooperation and cohesion as well as the issues relevant to the application of community principles and ideology in real, everyday life. The community of neo-cottagers in Zaježova constitutes the dominant part of my research.

The previous research to which I had devoted myself since 1999 had focused on revealing the present-day perspectives of a dispersed settlement in Slovakia. During the field research, I noticed that unproductive, deserted and isolated settlements are gradually becoming objects of interest for settlement by various groups of the population who then adapt them for their own activities and, in several cases, for permanent community residence. Due to this, I focused on an overview of the situation in Slovakia, on mapping individual communities and on gathering the widest spectrum of information on communities and their way of existence, all within the first part of the ethnographic fieldwork.

### Methods and results

Partial discovery of my research was the fact that, in the Slovak environment, new intentional communities with a short life span are relatively frequently formed.

The communities usually do not survive their first two critical years of existence (Forster & Wilhelmus, 2005, p. 378). The exception, however, is an inconspicuous community in Zajezova which had formed in 1991. The existence of this community is based on the principles of a “sustainable way of life” and the possibilities of its application to a particular environment and life. In this way, it is the dispersed settlement that offers a range of possibilities for its primary application thanks to social, economic and mostly geographic conditions (Huba, 1997, pp. 64-65). Another interesting discovery was that several newcomers have preferred life in a distant, isolated environment to the stereotypical life in the city in accordance with a notion regarding the defence of their own personal identities (Farkašová, 2001); they proclaim the return to one’s own roots, to the values of ancestors and to the native environment. Such newcomers lived more or less independently (they did not associate in communities) and dispersed in the whole territory with a similar type of settlement. Their typical feature was social and age heterogeneity. On the other hand, the formation and intentional development of community life required a concentration of people not only of the same worldview but also of a similar social background – young people with university degrees, mostly up to 40 years of age, originally with no commitments and willing to undertake the risks and experiments in accordance with the needs of the community. A more detailed analysis of the community life, organised within the next part of the fieldwork, was made possible by the concentration of a central, eco-villager community in Zajezova. I had to overcome problems of distrust and admittance into the community with repeated research by repeated participation in community activities and with a widening network of contacts within the community.

Long-term involvement within the community enabled me to penetrate more deeply into the structure of the community and analyse particular issues which were not apparent at first sight, from inside the community. In this context, the process of constant solving of interpersonal problems as a part of community development cannot be neglected (Christian, 2004). The extent and intensity of such conflict situations increase proportionally with membership growth, including within the so-called associative membership (Forster & Wilhelmus, 2005, p. 372) or relative to the marital status changes of individual members. Community parental pairs with children have diametrically different requirements for community cooperation and existence from the individually prospering members. Such disproportions currently polarise the community at the opinion and value levels significantly. For now I do not presume to estimate the impact of such polarisation on the future of the community. Time will show. So far these phenomena proved to be fresh issues, and I had the possibility to observe them during my research. These tendencies point to the nonlinear development of such communities, mostly during generational changes within the group.

## Conclusions

Regarding the contribution of this project, it can be said, I managed to reveal several interesting aspects in part regarding the development of this community which, in many ways, reminds of situations from well-established community lives in Western Europe or on the American continent (e.g., the increase of interpersonal conflicts with the development of the community, two-year critical period of existence, round tables and such). On the other hand, these also point out the dissimilarity in the development of utopian communities under conditions of the present, socio-economic development in the former Eastern bloc countries (e.g., possibilities for economic prosperity). It is also worthwhile to mention that, within the framework of SAL activities, I managed to draw attention to several aspects of the proclamation of utopianism in Slovakia, a matter that is a novelty in the academic literature of our country. My partial achievements can serve as primary methodical data for a further comparative study of such communities. Last but not least, certain possibilities for comparison appeared during the last conference presentation on issues of young Neo-Cossacks in present-day Russia (with A. Popov).

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## Slovakijos ekologinio kaimo gyventojai (novolazníci)

### Santrauka

SAL projekto rėmuose buvo tyrinėtos ekologinės bendruomenės Slovakijoje. Tyrėjo tikslas buvo išaiškinti tokių bendruomenių plėtros galimybes ir perspektyvas, ypač besikeičiančios Slovakijos visuomenės socialinėje ir ekonominėje situacijoje. Tyrimas atskleidė, kad Slovakijos ekonominė situacija gerokai apriboja bendruomenių veiklas ir nulemia pagrindinius jų skirtumus nuo Vakarų bendruomenių. Ilgalaikio stebėjimo metu buvo išanalizuota Zaježovos kaimo bendruomenės struktūra ir jos vystymosi charakteristikos, susijusios su tarpasmeninių problemų sprendimu. Tokių konfliktų gausa ir intensyvumas proporcingai auga, didėjant bendruomenės narių skaičiui, jie taip pat susiję su bendruomenės narių šeimyninio statuso pasikeitimais: šeimos kelia kitokius reikalavimus bendruomenei negu prisijungiantys atskiri nariai, nekuriantys šeimų. Slovakijos socialinėje aplinkoje veikianti bendruomenė kuria „tvaryjį gyvenimo būdą“ (harmoningas santykis su gamta) ir išsiskiria vystymosi tendencijomis, kurios skiriasi nuo panašių Vakarų Europos bendruomenių.

**Raktažodžiai:** izoliuota aplinka, utopinė bendruomenė, ekologinis kaimas, socialinė įvairovė, tarpasmeninis konfliktas.