

## **“Fairyland”: Kin’s domain as a place of utopia and experiment**

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*Abstract.* The article focuses on kin’s domains — plots of at least one hectare, which became so called since the early 2000s, after the publication of the series of books by Vladimir Megre — *Ringing Cedars of Russia*. Megre described his meeting with the Siberian hermit Anastasia and her nostalgic stories about the kin’s domain settlements of the Vedic Russia. Readers, inspired by this narrative of the ‘golden age’, tried to create this utopia in different Russian regions — according to the followers, there are more than 500 such settlements. Kin’s domain is usually organized on agricultural land and needs the entire infrastructure, so practical skills, technical knowledge and creativity are valued by the participants. In many ways, such settlements follow the global trend of ecovillages as laboratories of sustainable development, autonomy, harmonious coexistence of man and nature, spiritual development and healing. The author shows how the economic and ideological crisis of the 1990s determined the rise of alternative teachings and the enthusiasm of builders of a bright future. At the same time, many active participants of first ecovillages and kin’s domains followed the Soviet discourse, emphasizing the significance of Soviet morality and creative self-activity. The article is based on the field studies conducted in 2008–2021 in kin’s domain settlements and at the meetings of Anastasians, and on the Internet sources.

*Key words:* kin’s domains, ecovillage, *Ringing Cedars*, intentional communities, leadership, utopia, experiment, commune, New Age, do-it-yourself

DOI: [10.22394/2500-1809-2023-8-4-121-136](https://doi.org/10.22394/2500-1809-2023-8-4-121-136)

The article focuses on the territory far from the usual interpretation of the ‘rural’. Certainly, contemporary village is not a standardized settlement. Even when it is considered not just as a geographical concept, a certain location on the map, but as a social representation — how a certain settlement is perceived and inhabited by individuals and groups, old-timers and newcomers (Horáková, 2018: 15), ecovillages form a separate category. Both the internal view of the insider and the external interpretation of the outsider make the kin’s domain project stand out and opposed to the city and the village.

Kin’s domain is an idea of the writer and entrepreneur Vladimir Megre, which was proposed in his series of books *The Ringing Cedars of Russia* published in the mid-1990s — 2000s. The books were reprinted several times in large numbers and translated into many languages. Their main message is the need to leave the city and urban lifestyle and

to create kin's domains (Space of Love) and a new healthy society as a settlement of kin's domains. These settlements are sometimes called 'Anastasian' after the name of the main character of the books, who told the author about the mysterious estates of Vedic Russia<sup>1</sup>. Such settlements were established en masse in the early 2000s, when those parts of the book series were published that describe the steps of kin's domains' construction and an alternative history of the past.

According to Megre, kin's domain is a plot of at least one hectare, which ensures a family a full and preferably as autonomous existence as possible. A settlement of kin's domains consists of different number of them — less than ten or several hundreds. In addition to the family project, such resettlers emphasize their environmental orientation — they take care of land, forest and animals, limit the use of plastic and other artificial materials, use a variety of alternative farming techniques; therefore, kin's domain settlements are often put on a par with 'ecovillages' and 'intentional communities'<sup>2</sup> that spread in Europe in the 1990s (Liftin, 2012: 130).

Famous Western ecovillages were established in the 1960s — 1970s on a wave of counterculture, many of them were created by hippies and followed the ideals of a communal lifestyle. The New Age ideas made the interested move to ecovillages which often applied strict selection of future neighbors based on the ideological conformity: sometimes it was a multi-stage process (Farkas, 2017: 70), including probation and compliance with various conditions. The most famous projects are Findhorn in Scotland, Auroville in India, Damanhur in Italy, Tamera in Portugal. One of the most famous communities, the Findhorn Foundation, was created in the 1960s in Scotland as a center of the New Age movement. From the very beginning, founders of this community were 'guided from above' to build 'heaven on earth'. Over time, the original plan was modified as followers of theosophy, spiritualism and UFOs joined the pioneers. In the 1990s, the community's core consisted of the highly educated women aged 30–50 from the UK, USA and West Germany, and there was a clear shift from the alternative approach to the mainstream ideology (Sutcliffe, 2000: 216–217). Such a transition happened in many intentional communities: they gradually adapted to capitalist values that initially rejected (Meijering, 2012: 37).

In Russia, first ecovillages were established in the late 1980s — early 1990s: initially they were based on religious ideas that were

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1. Here Vedic means the imaginary past, so to speak the 'golden age' of all humanity (Andreeva, 2021: 25–42).
  2. The concept of intentional community is applied to various historical groups (Shakers, Pietists of Amana, Oneida commune) and to contemporary Hutterite communities, Israeli kibbutzim, Findhorn settlement in Scotland. Most of them are religious communities. Almost all declined and disintegrated over time (Andelson, 2002: 131–132).

later supplemented by an interest in native nature and careful use of resources. Pioneers of ecovillages were organizers of educational communities and small groups passionate about yoga, neo-Hindu religions, neo-Sufism and Slavic paganism (Sokolov, 2004). Later initiators of many ecovillages supported the Anastasian ideology. Locals and the media note the ideological commitment of ecovillagers and interpret it as ‘sectarianism’, referring to the refusal of medical (including vaccination and obstetrics) and educational services (Ivanova, 2021: 21).

Today, there are more than 500 kin’s domain settlements<sup>3</sup> in Russia but mainly in its central part and the Krasnodar Region<sup>4</sup>. The idea of kin’s domains spread abroad, and its followers inspired by the books make attempts to bring it to life<sup>5</sup>. Kin’s domain settlements look like territorially extended cottage settlements; however, such projects’ participants, as a rule, resist this identification ideologically. Moreover, kin’s domain settlements have a significant distance between plots, lack infrastructure and differ in buildings; they are usually located on agricultural land with legal restrictions on its use (often buildings with foundations are prohibited (Pozenenko, 2020: 151)). Certainly, those who plan to live here permanently somehow adapt to the changing land legislation as they need to interact with the rural administration, at least on land issues when registering the plot (Ivanova, 2021: 13), and in most cases, there is peaceful coexistence.

In general, any conversation about kin’s domain settlements implies inconsistencies as features of one settlement differ from another. One of the founders of the settlements explained to me, “*As I have already told you, today all settlements are unique... So, when we started to register them, we wanted to create a standard, repeatability, so to speak, according to the law*” (2008). This situation is determined both by the absence of the legal unit ‘kin’s domain’ or ‘ecovillage’ and by the fact that in many ways each settlement is a project of a separate initiative group and of its efforts to bring its ideals to life. This does not mean that there was no interaction between initiative groups: their leaders often visited settlements both in Russia and abroad to gain experience and organized ‘circles of representatives of existing ecovillages’. However, many leaders considered their kin’s domain settlement as life’s work, an opportunity to change if not the whole world, then at least one community. Certainly, among such ‘landowners’, there are examples of the pragmatic attitude towards the kin’s domain as a *dacha*, a country house or a place of residence, but the

3. Readers of the *Ringling Cedars of Russia* still debate on which term is correct: ecovillage, kin’s domain or kin’s domain settlement. I use them as synonyms.

4. URL: <http://poselenia.ru/statistic>.

5. For instance, in the USA, Canada, Romania, Lithuania, etc. (Davidov, 2015: 2–13; Mardache, 2016: 97–104; Pranskevičiūtė-Amoson, 2018: 285–302).

kin's domain movement is still characterized by the utopian ideals of creating 'heaven on earth'.

According to its creators' intention, the kin's domain settlement is largely a utopian project: it aims at restoring the past and at recreating the 'golden age'. I will not consider such issues as the formation, functioning and stability of such a community (*Gemeinschaft*) held together by informal rules, since they need a separate study. As I have observed in my fieldwork, many initiative groups at different stages divide or break up. However, most people passionate about the ideas of kin's domains stand out for their enthusiasm (at least initially), experimental spirit and desire to do something new and unknown. Especially leaders — initiators of ecovillages — were ready not only to face something unknown but to make it, and I will consider ideology and motivation of such projects. I will not describe the typological features of these experimenters of the late 20th century but will focus on a small part of the very diverse 'back to nature' trends in post-Soviet Russia. I will talk about settlements in general focusing on several cases — leaders of ecovillages organized in the early 1990s, when books about Anastasia had not yet been written, and initiators of the first Anastasian settlements in the 2000s in the North-Western and Central Russia, which represent the first and the second waves of such settlements<sup>6</sup>. Certainly, experiments with ecovillages in this period were not limited to these examples. The article is based on my 2008–2021 field observations in kin's domain settlements and at city events, on interviews with members of such settlements in different regions of Central and North-Western Russia, Internet sources and published memoirs. One interview was kindly provided by E. A. Melnikova, for which I am very grateful to her.

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Dreams of creating a world-changing community are not new for Russia. As a rule, such projects are associated with the ideology of communitarianism and appear during transition periods. Multiple attempts of intellectuals of completely different beliefs to create agricultural communities for spiritual improvement and building a world without violence are described in the book by Irina Gordeeva: these communities did not search for an image of an ideal society in the distant future but sought 'here and now' to unite with other like-minded people pursuing good and ambitious goals for the salvation of all hu-

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6. According to one classification, there are three waves in the ecovillage movement: (1) initiatives before Megre's books were published; (2) kin's domain settlements; (3) a greater variety of projects based on the ideology of a healthy lifestyle (Zadorin et al., 2014: 68).

manity (Gordeeva, 2003: 228). Such projects represented both grassroots initiatives and planned actions of the intellectual elite.

‘Intentional communities’, which usually include ecovillages, are founded for a specific purpose and are often called ‘utopian’ as people strive to realize their ideals through them (Brown, 2002: 5). Although these communities are often presented as a segregated social element, they interact with different social strata, being in the continuum between the mainstream and the marginal (Brown, 2002: 8–9). Thus, resettlers are driven from the city to the kin’s domain by environmental motives, the desire to get rid of the urban noise and bustle, and the desire to find a right society for themselves and their children. This project is not always successful, and some families return to the city or move to more lively areas. However, ideological component is a significant part of this movement. Ideologists and supporters of kin’s domain movement consider their project not only a personal activity but also a world task. By creating paradise on earth, they want to change the global consciousness and, in some cases, to achieve the rebirth and formation of a new humanity and a new society — free from injustice, aggression and selfishness (Panchenko, 2013: 471). A 60-year-old settler described his path to the settlement this way, “*Somehow it happened that the guys and I — three families — decided: there’s no point in sitting in kitchens, reading samizdat, and beating the air about various philosophical issues. If we are so smart and cool, let’s try to build the world that we consider right*” (2021).

The names of kin’s domain settlements usually reflect their creators’ idea, the so-called ‘image of the settlement’<sup>7</sup>, for instance, “Native”, “Beloved”, “Living Fairytale”, “Free World”, “Ark”, “Grateful”, “Fairytale Land”, “Vedic Russia”, i.e., the names often imply the mission to save, to show the right path, to come together to a happy future: “*Well, that is... included on the name — ‘With pure love, a jointly created image’, i.e., this love guides, a kind of shows a direction, like a lighthouse... and it was important to find a name that seems to show the path... from the current state, mostly twilight, that allows to move on without distorting the space too much. That is, it is not easy to find a name that would correspond to what you do*” (2008). Members of kin’s domains say that they were attracted to these projects, because, unlike the traditional village, there were ‘people with fiery eyes’: “I wanted to create a different society based not on sys-

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7. The concept of image is also taken from Megre’s books: “An image is an energetic essence invented by the human thought. It can be created by one person or several people... An image created by man can live in space only as long as man (one person or several people) represents it with his thoughts. The more people feed the image with their feelings, the stronger it becomes” (Megre, 2002: 147).

temic principles but on mutual trust, mutual assistance, healthy lifestyle, common attitude to the family, friendship, children”<sup>8</sup>.

In various online communities of Anastasians who dream of founding their kin’s domains, there are many fiery speeches about purity of thoughts, awareness, and the fight against selfishness. Timothy Miller, a researcher of American ‘intentional communities’ and alternative religious movements, emphasizes that such communities usually start with a burst of idealistic sentiments, when pioneers are ready to sacrifice a lot to ensure a bright future. Certainly, such ardor dries up over time and communities inevitably undergo changes (Miller, 2016: 213). This is exactly what happens to many members of kin’s domains: over time, the initial categorical and literal interpretation of Anastasia’s ideas comes to naught. High proneness to conflict, which is often determined by too many tasks, leads to the atomization of families; they stop interacting with most of their neighbors and maintain connections with a small circle of like-minded people (Pozenenko, 2020: 146).

Utopian ideas of building a new world are often combined with an idealization of non-urban natural space as embodying purity and authenticity (Pic. 1). The discourse of rural idyll is extremely attractive: popular essentialized images attract those who come to ‘consume’ the locality with their own ideas of what rural life should look like (Horáková, 2018: 18). The village is exoticized as a space, a product of city dwellers’ admiration (Brednikova, 2013: 36), and becomes in the initiatives of ‘new peasants’ an object of nostalgia for the past they did not have (Sallustio, 2021: 60–83). In the religious doctrine of the post-Soviet new movement “Church of the Last Testament”, there is also a strong motive for moving not just to the “Abode of Dawn” but necessarily to the countryside as promising closeness to nature, physical and spiritual safety (Urbańczyk, 2017: 93).

Stories about leaving the city are extremely important for the biography of members of kin’s domains. Such stories are almost always based on the division of the life path into before and after, and a certain stage which was necessary to ‘reach’ or ‘grow to’ is emphasized. Ekaterina Melnikova notes that such stories allow the narrator to describe himself as a person who “has done some work on himself and ‘has become himself’ as a result of this path and such work” (Melnikova, 2020: 91). In her opinion, the similarity of resettlers’ rhetoric to narratives about self-realization and self-discovery is a part of the ideology of self-improvement and independence (Melnikova, 2020: 97). The very move from the city to the kin’s domain is presented as a religious conversion that led to a transition, a change not only in lifestyle but also in thinking: “*When a person lives on earth... he always has different reactions based on... his values, changes, etc., that*

8. The documentary “Earthlings” is about life in the kin’ domain (2021, directed by E. Shadrin). URL: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=edirVMY\\_hbg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=edirVMY_hbg).

*is, he thinks differently, completely differently... Naturally, the crowd control, as I call it, is immediately lost... if the level of awareness increases, most settlements will be successful, and controllability will eventually go to zero over time, that is, by and large, someone says something, everyone analyzes it and have their own opinions” (2008).*

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### **Creativity and experiment**

It is hard to imagine an average ‘landowner’ as there are people of different professions, educations, genders and ages — retired engineers and young workers, seamstresses and IT specialists. Such a community values skills in construction, repair and taking care of plantings, but at the same time is always happy to accept lawyers, doctors and teachers. It is assumed that the new social organism will be able to exist autonomously: *“Well, to put it simply... when people in cities pay utility bills, they are not free, if you don’t pay, you’ll have problems... while one of the ideas in the books is complete autonomy. And this complete autonomy provides a person with complete freedom and complete realization” (2008).* Each member of such an ideal community is to fill some gap and to play the assigned role: *“It’s not a matter of foresight, but simply a matter of luck... so that exactly those who need you and those whom you need gather” (2010).*

Megre’s books and their readers emphasize the idea of creativity and freedom of self-expression through creativity. One book is entitled *Co-Creation* (2005) that means not only cosmogony but also the meaningful creation of anything, mainly a kin’s domain. When designing a kin’s domain settlement, Anastasians usually try to apply

certain principles of Megre's books, supplementing them with information from other sources. For example, members of kin's domains, like residents of ecovillages all around the world, are permaculture enthusiasts, i.e., believe that everything is right in nature, thereby, to ensure a yield, it is necessary to minimally interfere with natural processes, to breed the maximum variety of species, and to practice integration rather than segregation (Liftin, 2012: 132–133). In general ecovillages are not only laboratories of an ecological lifestyle, but also 'experimental sites for radical democracy'. They often try to solve common problems if not by unanimity, then by consensus, i.e., the minority's views are not suppressed but integrated into the common decision (Liftin, 2012: 134). However, many settlements with no legal entity do not have any regulated ways to influence neighbors; therefore, when discussing issues of self-government and self-organization, they often face intractable conflicts (Vilkov, 2021: 135).

The ability to do everything as a generalist is one of the most important qualities of the ecovillager, which is determined by the fact that for comfortable living he needs to build a lot from scratch without significant support from the local authorities and without sufficient funds. This call for freedom, independence and creativity of every resettler is combined with the late Soviet practices of technical experiments and self-improvement of the urban intellectual. Therefore, both villagers and external experts treat buildings and plantings of eco-villagers with disdain, as unprofessional and of poor quality. Resettlers' houses can be of different shapes — domed, pentagonal, round, 'fox holes'; can be made from materials nontypical for the region — adobe houses, dugouts (Pic. 2). Many former city dwellers try alternative agricultural approaches (like permaculture), use nontypical tools (like Fokin's subsurface cultivator), plant family trees and exotic plants, make unusual 'high beds' and combine different plantings in one flower bed (Pic. 3). Such a rejection of everything 'traditional' applies to education: ecovillagers advocate homeschooling, prefer Waldorf and Montessori principles, consider any institutional knowledge lifeless and leading away from the 'improvement of environment'.

Zinaida Vasilyeva, who studies do-it-yourself practices of late-Soviet and post-Soviet Russia, notes that they were perceived not just as a hobby, but as a state matter that allowed all involved citizens to create a new society of technical progress and prosperity. The interpretation of labor as allowing a person to create himself as a subject and to contribute to the common cause was generally accepted. The Soviet 'handy man' treated any object as a potential material for making something useful. According to the official Marxist-Leninist ideology, people lose themselves in the capitalist production when the product of labor is alienated; thus, ecovillagers support the idea that 'one who makes it owns it' (Vasilyeva, 2012: 30–31).

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My informants mean this broad outlook when note that manual labor is less profitable but ensures ‘working with soul’. Amateur performances were important for the social-economic project of late socialism: “Self-development, mastering new skills or, as they wrote then, ‘the growing cultural-technical level’ at leisure was considered a way to counteract the rapid obsolescence of qualifications and pro-

fessions under the scientific-technological progress with no market incentives. The man of the future was to be a universalist” (Kasatkina, 2019: 106). This is what the founders of ecovillages strive for, saying that resettlers need to master different specialties — build a house, plant a vegetable garden, understand the Land Code, install electricity, and much more. Making things had utilitarian functions and was a part of the Soviet subjects’ constitution. Individualization was achieved through ‘do-it-yourself’ practices, and the Soviet amateur performances were an important field for the decentralization of subjectification practices, since the official discourse defined the Soviet person as a creative subject (Golubev, Smolyak, 2013: 539–541). Thus, the culture of amateurs opposed the mass market and capitalist standardization. In Russian ecovillages, national traditions, religion, patriotism and family values are opposed to the Western consumerism, soullessness, genetically modified products, American corn, and advertising (Bolotova, 2002: 52).

It should be noted that ecovillagers’ experiments — in agriculture, self-government, community formalization, conflict resolution, and organization of leisure — have clear limits. For instance, gay relationships and LGBT are still marginal issues for members of kin’s domain settlements. They are open to the new in most fields but remain conservative in family and sexuality issues, while European ecovillages often demonstrate complete freedom, including in this sphere.

### **Founders of ecovillages**

Life trajectories of leaders of the first ecovillages in the 1990s — early 2000s are quite similar. As a rule, these men grew up in a big city, had a higher education, were interested in esotericism and alternative medicine. Their dissatisfaction with the prospects offered by the metropolis made them conquer the unknown, and the most prominent ones sought to change not only their destiny but also the destiny of the world. Thus, the biography of the leader of the “Ark (Kovcheg)” settlement, Fyodor Lazutin, is presented as a heroic path (Polsky, 2022). The “Ark” has long been a role model for almost all kin’s domain settlements; many came to the “Ark” to gain experience and avoid mistakes in their projects. For several years the “Ark” hosted “Settlement Circles” — the conference of resettlers from different regions of Russia and abroad, who discussed urgent problems they faced. However, some participants pursued quite pragmatic goals: settlements provided them with an opportunity to earn money or with a spacious country home with like-minded neighbors.

Funders of settlements sought to implement different projects and to realize their professional skills, but they all were interested in the collective good: “I want more. The task is to build a new culture” (Fedotova, 2018). One active member of the settlement said

that after severe fires in the Moscow Region and smoke in its entire territory, she realized that even on one hectare it was impossible to be happy among like-minded people — everyone should be happy (2021). Almost all settlements try not only to improve their territory but also to develop ‘republican’ rules<sup>9</sup>, to have a common area (common house, workshops, school, bathhouse, etc.) and joint activities mainly with their own efforts, to a small extent using the existing infrastructure. ‘Landowners’ are also responsible for constructing and cleaning roads, installing electricity, organizing transport links and purchasing goods.

Leaders, who are less represented in the media and seem more pragmatic and counting on worldly blessings, still see a mission of salvation in their activities. They do not hope for salvation here and now but expect changes from their children and grandchildren growing up in a different environment: “*I believe that children who will grow up here... will have greater freedom of thought. It seems to me that they will do much more. Because we’re still kind of like this... We still fuss about — this way or not*” (2019).

Russian pioneers of alternative communities usually know each other and started in the late Soviet era with yoga and Eastern philosophy, alternative medicine, vegetarianism, Nicholas and Helena Roerich, Carlos Castaneda, Helena Blavatsky, Leo Tolstoy, Henry Thoreau’s *Walden, or Life in the Woods*<sup>10</sup>. They were inspired by the rich foreign experience of alternative communities and artistic images, and some made attempts to create communes. For instance, in the first half of the 1990s, the above-mentioned Fyodor Lazutin founded near Troitsk a carpentry *artel* (7–8 people), also making iconostases for churches; this *artel* had a garden (Fedotova, 2018). In the 2000s, after Megre’s books were published, Lazutin tried to organize a new settlement in the Kaluga Region. In 1986–1987, the leader of the ecovillage “Nevoekovil” failed in creating a community based on the ideas of Roerichs (Living Ethics or Agni Yoga) in the Leningrad Region (Bolotova, 2002: 48), and in the 1990s, after living on Valaam, he took part in organizing settlements in Karelia.

Many leaders of first settlements unsuccessfully experimented with communal living: “*We wanted to make a community... the City of the Sun! We laughed at this, we were creating a community, almost an ashram... And we managed for a year. We shared a budget; we lived in the same old house... In such harsh living conditions with such a strict routine... we couldn’t stand it for long... the spring compressed too much*” (2021). This failure is explained as follows: “*Well... we were not ready... it wasn’t easy, let’s say... And the same applies*

9. On *veche* (town’s meeting) see: Andreeva, 2012: 101–128.

10. Nikolai Mitrokhin describes the diversity of the late Soviet, informal, religious landscape (Mitrokhin, 2020: 51–78). Registered as foreign agent by the Russian Ministry of Justice.

to today... people are so inspired, they go to earth, start working, and then the spring straightens... This is the effect of reality. People are out of touch with reality... this is true for all times... and in the 20th–21st century, we are unfortunately cut off from our roots” (2011).

When speaking about community, resettlers often refer to the ‘ancestral knowledge’, being nostalgic for the glorious old times. References to the wisdom of ancestors are combined with references to esoteric works, in particular by Roerich, whose followers create communities experimenting with lifestyle (Pozanenko, Pozanenko, 2021: 163–171): “*The way our ancestors lived... they lived in communities that were big families. Indeed, people felt like a family, and... their relationships were of family type, and children grew up in such an environment... this way of life can still be found among... the indigenous peoples... Indians, tribes... And our ancestors lived like this... I think Roerich wrote a book entitled Community*” (2011).

Vissarion’s community “Church of the Last Testament” in Siberia gradually abandoned the socialized property. They began with strict dietary restrictions and communitarian projects of ‘united families’, but later these radical demands were relaxed in diet, individual households and monetary relations were introduced, i.e., the transformation of humanity was postponed until future generations. Such a refusal of strict requirements can be explained by the decline of eschatological expectations determined by the social-economic crisis of the late 1980s — 1990s (Panchenko, 2013: 481). Practices of the Vissarionists largely repeat the Soviet type of public interaction, like Komсомол or party meetings to discuss ‘Marxist-Leninist’ texts and members of the ‘cell’. The utopia proposed by Vissarion to his followers in many ways reminds communist ideals in the ‘lands of new promise’ (Panchenko, 2003: 314–322). Both the head of the religious community Vissarion and one leader of the “Ark” settlement explain the failure of their projects and the unpreparedness of their participants by ‘selfishness’ (Panchenko, 2013: 478–479).

Certainly, such accents differ from similar projects in other parts of the world, which also often criticize capitalist values: “*The present-time idea is the idea of ownership: “I can afford it”. This idea pins us to the ground because it is based on fear of losing this property. Any movement, development implies energy of freedom. Energy of freedom, development, creativity arises from a new consciousness, primarily from new priorities: taking care of nature; conscious minimalism; priority of the spiritual over the material. Feeling of unity, family, team is the main priority, while the community’s basis is formed by common goals; distribution of duties; common space valued higher than individual goals*” (Fedotova, 2018). Many ecological, utopian and moral ideas of the first wave of the ecovillage movement were a legacy of their organizers’ Soviet experience. Some leaders admit that the idea of community and collective values is in many ways close to the Soviet ideology: “*My dad is a communist, he was a sec-*

retary of the party organization. For many of our parents, our movement was a kind of continuation of the communist movement” (2021).

Thus, ecovillages remain a marginal phenomenon: despite their growing numbers and media coverage, they still attract relatively few people. Ideologists of this movement say that ecovillages are a kind of laboratory for models of sustainable development, autonomy and harmonious coexistence of man and nature (Lifin, 2012: 129–130). Russian kin’s domain settlements/ecovillages borrow and develop ideas of ecovillages in different parts of the world: environmental technologies, conscious minimalism, cooperation for reasonable consumption (for instance, one tractor/car for several families), spiritual development and healing, meditation and self-expression in art, communication with nature and recognition of the earth’s sacredness, deep ecology and so on. However, Russian builders of the new world recognize their distance from the global movement as their utopian project are often rooted in the Soviet past and in the economic-ideological crisis of the 1990s. The turning point of eras gave impetus to the implementation of the most unexpected ideas, although many ecovillagers follow the Soviet discourse: Soviet morality (self-development, priority of collective interests) and ‘do-it-yourself’ practices; in general, the same activities to create a liberating community acquire additional meanings in different parts of the world. In the late USSR, an interest in esoteric literature and spiritual practices was limited to a narrow circle of those with access to the alternative literature. At the same time, the discourse of the ‘incredible’ implied an interest in psychics, yoga, Tunguska meteorite, Bigfoot, Bermuda Triangle, etc. among the urban intelligentsia of late socialism (Konakov, 2022: 7–14). Many religious beliefs that clearly manifested themselves after the collapse of the USSR are of earlier origin; although they were specific, they were not unique, since many processes in the Soviet society were similar to the Western ones (Mirokhin, 2020: 51–78). First ecovillages were organized by representatives of the last Soviet generation, being euphoric with *perestroika* and ideas of significant public projects. Many such initiators were formed on the ‘occult’ ideas of the late Soviet Union, which they put on a par with the views of the global ecovillage movement. The boom in ecovillages construction occurred in the mid-2000s — 2010s, when their ideas became recognizable and attracted more diverse groups, passionate about the ideas of spirituality and ecology.

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## **«Сказочный край»: родовые поместья как место утопии и эксперимента**

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*Аннотация.* В центре внимания статьи находятся родовые поместья — участки земли не менее одного гектара, которые стали так называться с начала 2000-х годов, после выхода в свет серии книг Владимира Мегре «Звенящие кедры России». Мегре описал историю своего знакомства с сибирской отшельницей Анастасией и ее ностальгические рассказы о родовых поселениях Ведической Руси. Читатели, вдохновленные повествованием о «золотом веке», принялись воссоздавать эту утопию в разных регионах России — сегодня существует более 500 таких поселений. Родовое поместье чаще всего обустраивается на земле сельскохозяйственного назначения и требует создания всей инфраструктуры, поэтому среди участников ценятся практические навыки, технические знания и креативность. Во многом такие поселения следуют мировой тенденции экопоселений, которые считаются лабораторией устойчивого развития, автономности, гармоничного сосуществования чело-

века и природы, а также уделяют немалое внимание духовному развитию и целительству. В статье показано, как экономический и идеологический кризис 1990-х годов повлиял на расцвет альтернативных учений и подпитывал энтузиазм строителей светлого будущего. В то же время отмечается, что многие активные участники первых экопоселений и родовых поместий были ориентированы на советский дискурс, в частности, подчеркивали значимость советской морали и творческой самостоятельности. Статья основана на полевых материалах, собранных в 2008–2021 годы в поселениях родовых поместий и на встречах анастасийцев, а также на Интернет-источниках.

*Ключевые слова:* родовые поместья, экопоселение, «Звенящие кедры», идейные сообщества, лидерство, утопия, эксперимент, община, нью-эйдж, «сделай сам»