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'WHERE IS THE LARGE GARDEN THAT AWAITS ME?'

CRITIQUE THROUGH SPATIAL PRACTICE IN A HUNGARIAN ECOLOGICAL COMMUNITY

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ABSTRACT

Hungarian ecovillage dwellers are mostly 'moved-out-of-town', i.e. ex-urban, middle-class intellectuals whose narratives, besides the crisis-narrative and ecological principles, contain an urban-rural dichotomy as well. The ecovillagers' aim is to operate a settlement causing as little damage as possible to the natural environment as well as to set up an autonomous community where functions necessary for human life (housing, employment, suitable environment for leisure time, social life and trading) can be implemented in one place. The village is considered to be the most ideal form for this. One of the main elements in the ecovillage concept is therefore space and localization. Ecovillages, due to their specific condition, raise many questions in relation to space, place and identity: what motivates the ecovillage dwellers to change location and what critical elements are there. Do they experience real bonding with the new place? Do they belong to that particular land, the settlement, or rather to the ideology? What spatial practices characterize this type of settling down and how does the given ecovillage become a meaningful place and home for individuals? The aim of this study was to look for answers in one particular community.

Key words: ecovillage, radical rurality, localization, critique-through-spatial-practice

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PREFACE

Hungarian ecovillage dwellers are mostly ex-urban middle-class intellectuals whose narratives, besides the crisis-narrative and ecological principles, contain an urban-rural dichotomy as well. The ecovillagers' aim is to operate a settlement causing the least possible damage to the natural environment as well as to set up an autonomous community where functions necessary for human life (housing, employment, suitable environment for leisure time, social life and trading) can be implemented in one place. The village is considered to be the most ideal form for this.

One of the main elements in the ecovillage concept is therefore space and localization. Ecovillages, due to their specific condition, raise many questions in relation to space, place and identity: what motivates the ecovillage dwellers to change locations and what critical elements are there. Is there real bonding with the new place? What do they belong to: the particular land, the settlement, or rather the ideology? What spatial practices characterize this type of settling down and how does the given ecovillage become a meaningful place and home for individuals?

This study seeks to answer the above questions in one particular community. After outlining the theoretical framework and introducing the given community and ecovillages in general, the stages of identification (choosing a location, inhabiting the space, reserving the space) will be presented. The questions who chose this place and why, as well as what motivations they had when choosing this place will be explored. It will also be examined how these newcomers relate to the environment, the settlement and the local people. How they create their own space, how they are settling in the village and its spaces, what the role of process is of learning the history of the village and placing themselves into that history. How they themselves shape the meanings of that place and participate in the competition of meaning creation.

The author has been carrying out cultural anthropological research in ecovillages since 2008, putting an emphasis on their socio-cultural dimensions. From among the Hungarian ecovillages my main field of research is the Kisfalu² Ecocommunity. Kisfalu's history is made up of waves of people moving in and out, which makes the question of space, place and identity even more exciting.

This case study is based on qualitative and cultural anthropological methods: semi-structured interviews and participation observation. Semi-structured interviews with 22 newcomers (both women and men,

² In my paper I use false names for the settlement (Kisfalu) and for the community (Kisfalu Ecocommunity). At the end of the cited conversations I indicate the initials and the date of the interview or conversation.

between the age of 18 and 55) were conducted specifically on this topic, focusing on questions like: how did they get here, why did they choose this village and how do they live here now. Beside the formal interviews data was also collected from informal conversations with newcomers. As a cultural anthropologist the author mainly uses participation observation to understand the life of the village, and the life of the newcomers in it. Participation observation in this community has been conducted since 2009. Initially the focus was on the Eco-community, but this was later extended to the other newcomers and the whole village. Since 2009 the author has spent many weeks (from 1–2 days to 2–3 weeks at a time) at the research area. Although the author is not a member of the community, but did live with the families and participated in their everyday life and in the life of the village (festivals, meetings, courses etc.). When not in the village the author communicates with them via Skype, telephone, e-mail and Facebook.

SPACE AND RADICAL RURALITY—THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

In the last three decades (from about the late 1980s) the number of works dealing with space, place, time and culture have substantially increased, not only in anthropology or sociology, but also in geography and political ecology (Escobar 2001: 139, Szijártó 2008: 188). This interest – as Zsolt Szijártó puts it – is of course not coincidental, but *'in many ways linked to the post-modern societies current transformation processes.'* (Szijártó 2008: 188) It is therefore a part of one of the most dominant, and therefore often discussed phenomena: globalization. In social and cultural sciences, a great amount of work has been created about the relationship between space and culture and the resultant changes (see, inter alia, Castells 2005, 2006, Certeau 1984, Clifford 1997, Lefebvre 1991), but I am not taking on the task of presenting all this, only outlining in brief the main theoretical lines of support of my work. Such support is the so-called spatial turn (see Castells 2005, 2006, Harvey 2000, Sassen 1994, Soja 1990), which considers it necessary to develop a new category system for the analytical approach and socio-spatial understanding of the new social and cultural phenomena created by global capitalism, whilst it simultaneously calls for redefinition of a number of socio-cultural basic concepts (such as ethnicity, migration, culture, home) (Szijártó 2008: 195–215, 219–231). This approach looks at space as the result of human activity, social practices and communication flows, and because people are constantly forming the space around them and created by them, they assign meanings to the three-dimensional structures, and hence a major feature of space is constant transformation. The space is therefore not a priori given, but the result of social and communication processes (Szijártó 2008: 198–199).

The two dominant phenomena of contemporary transformation processes are migration and new social movements. Migration (and, definitely, mobility) makes us fundamentally rethink concepts like locality, neighbourhood, places and non-places, deterritorialization (see, inter alia, Appadurai 2001, Augé 1995, Bausinger 1991, Escobar 2001).³ New social movements enter the focus of space and place studies due to their special ways of interpreting locality (see Castells 2006, Escobar 2001).

A significant part of new social movements can be characterized by the attempt to protect the area

³ And it causes the sciences dealing with these issues to reconsider themselves: see Appadurai's question: *'Does anthropology have any specific rhetorical priority in a world where locality seems to lose its ontological support?'* (Appadurai 2001: 3)

(Escobar 2001, Horlings 2015),⁴ and regaining control over the place (Castells 2006). Many of them relate to the land and the countryside and the phenomenon of radical rural spatiality, as Keith Halfacree calls it. The author defines this as follows: *'The radical rural locality identified revolves around environmentally embedded, decentralised and relatively self-sufficient and self-reliant living patterns.'* (Halfacree 2007: 132). Halfacree sees and lists many perceptions of the way of thinking on the rural world in the contemporary interpretation of it, such as the productivist countryside (which is characterized by a food production oriented industry in the typical capitalist mould); super-productivism (agribusiness, GMO, biotechnology); consuming idylls (its key spatial practices are consumption-orientated: leisure, residence, counterurbanisation, dwelling, contemplation) and so forth (see, inter alia Halfacree 2001, 2003a, 2003b, 2006, 2007).⁵ The best expression of radical rural space (or radical rural locality) is what is known as low impact development (LID), but other more specific activities that inscribe the locality belong here as well. One of these is 'alternative' back-to-the-land migration, permaculture and other forms of agricultural production, sustainable forestry, the strongly place-based practices as locally produced and consumed goods, and it has clear links back to the idea of bioregionalism. With regard to our topic, the observations of Halfacree that state, *'in the radical rural representation there is a strong 'community' discourse, communistic visions of everyday life'* (Halfacree 2007: 132) are particularly important, as they envision a landscape which is lived in and worked upon, with humans who are integral to their environment; who connect with the ecological self-conception (see Castells 2006: 213–240, Devall 1995), and who as a rule have ecocentric and deep ecological beliefs (Halfacree 2007: 135).⁶

The subject of this paper, the ecovillage, which is also the best example of a radical rural locality, stands at the intersection of migration and social movements.⁷

ECOVILLAGES. THE KISFALU ECOCOMMUNITY

The use of the ecovillage concept became commonplace in the 1990s, but the first ecovillage initiatives had already appeared in the 1970s in Western Europe and the United States. In 1994 the Global Ecovillage Network (GEN),⁸ an international network, was established. Beyond the common goals that connect them, ecovillages are extremely diverse due to the great variety of natural and socio-cultural contexts in which they have been created. From the small village to the metropolitan inner-city ecovillage, from the jungle to the desert there are now ecovillages in many environments and on all continents.⁹ The fact of their existence is a response to an expected – or developing – ecological, economical and social crisis.

The overall objective of ecovillage dwellers is to create a settlement that fits into its natural environment in the most efficient way and with the least possible damage. To achieve this, they engage in chemical-free farming, trying to apply environmentally friendly technologies and using renewable energy sources in

4 'Place' — or, more accurately, the defence of constructions of place — has also become an important object of struggle in the strategies of social movements." (Escobar 2001: 139)

5 About Hungarian thinking on rural life see Csurgó 2007, Megyesi 2007.

6 In his thinking of rural space the author uses the model developed by Henri Lefebvre (Lefebvre 1991).

7 However, Halfacree does not mention ecovillages in his examples – at least not in his works known by me.

8 For the history and origin of ecovillages, see: Farkas 2014a.

9 For more information, see: www.gen.ecovillage.org (last visit on June 24, 2015), Jackson and Svensson 2002, Taylor 2000.

construction, waste management and wastewater treatment. They pursue moderate consumption, which includes the principle of recycling besides using natural resources in the most economical way. Their aim is to maintain a local livelihood, trade and recreation, to achieve greater autonomy and self-sufficiency and to establish a community based on close relationships and cooperation. Most ecovillages are known as intentional communities; that is, village communities created through a conscious effort by smaller or larger groups.¹⁰

The ecovillage movement is characterized by a number of ideological waves out of which perhaps the most prominent are environment-centred philosophical trends (and especially the Gaia Hypothesis, Bookchin's social ecology and deep ecology),¹¹ but typically they also make use of scientific results (sustainability theories, systems theory, etc.).¹² Connection to various religious teachings also features in these communities' worldviews, most of them being based on some other religious/spiritual ideology in addition to green ideology (historical religions, new religious movements, New Age, neopaganism, etc., see Farkas 2012, 2014b). For some of the Hungarian ecovillages Hungarian pre-industrialization peasant culture is an important reference point.

However, mainstream society considers ecovillagers (and all those who move to the countryside because of ideological principles) as retreaters and their move is considered to be an escape. A significant part of ecovillage-dwellers protest against these definitions, and look upon themselves not as 'utopian fugitives' (utopian fugitives, Litfin 2011: 136), but participants deeply embedded in the social and ecological system of the world. As autonomous communities they consider various forms of resistance as important; however, they are proactive¹³ communities that instead of solely protesting, look for workable alternatives in everyday life that will lead to a broader social goodness (Litfin 2011, Pickerill–Chatterton 2006: 737). Most of them would like to provide an example: they define themselves as a model of a more liveable, more human, and what is more, a long-term sustainable lifestyle.

The community presented here does not form an individual ecovillage: its members have been moving in and out of one of the streets of a Hungarian cul-de-sac village since 2003. The settlement's history has undergone a population exchange several times. Germans resettled here in the 1720s were forced to leave after the Second World War, and new settlers from Felvidék (historic Upper Hungary, now southern Slovakia) and mainly from Békés County took their place. From the 1980s onwards, new urban settlers entered the village, who settled in several waves.¹⁴ One of these ingoing waves is a community that belongs to the ecovillage movement. In its golden age (2008–2013) this smaller group consisted of eight households, their adult members being in their thirties and the children between a few months and fourteen years old. A significant number of the members had a profession (or a university degree) closely related to agriculture and/or environmental

10 See Taylor 2000.

11 See in Hungarian Tóth 2003. The appearance of environment-philosophical ideas in ecovillage concepts and discourses does not mean that everyone knows what social ecology is or who Bookchin or Naess are, and so on. This knowledge becomes part of everyday ecovillage knowledge and works the same way as any philosophical, ideological thought in public thinking.

12 See Borsos 2002. To see how they use the principles of sustainability and system theory when planning an ecovillage, see the dissertation by Béla Borsos (Borsos 2007: 7–48).

13 Proactive movements try to solve problems by reinterpreting human relationships while looking for the roots of the problems. Manuel Castells considers alternative social movements as such, thus the ecological movements as well (see Castells 2006).

14 According to the mayor about 40% of the population have moved to the village since the 1990s.

sciences (horticultural engineers, agricultural engineers, biologists, ecologists, meteorologists, an economist dealing with environmental issues). Continuous changes have taken place in the composition of the community since the beginning of my research, for example, some of the examined families have moved away, but there are some who have moved back. The term 'smaller group' is used above, because more and more members joined the group over the years who were loosely connected to the group and formed connections with only one aspect of the expanding range of activities of the community (for example, they are not entirely devoted to special organic farming which is one of the main features of the community, but are involved in other community activities – holidays, joint voluntary work, organizing courses, etc.).

The group operates informally; it has no officially registered form, and has no leader (either formal or informal). In their operation they apply basic democratic techniques. There were periods in the life of the group when they regularly held formal meetings to discuss the current issues of the group. These meetings were sometimes discontinued, sometimes revived depending on how much need and capacity people had for them. In addition to this they have met many times (working together, dinners, playing, playing music, children's programmes, etc.).

The community consists of different households: single young men, a single mother with school-age children, families with small children and a young childless couple. Some of the school-age children study at the local school, in lower primary classes, while the upper primary and high school pupils go to a nearby settlement. The way of life of the families living here is also affected by the income of the family members, by their tastes, and their 'ideological rigour'; that is, how much they stick to ecological principles and to the principle of self-sufficiency.

The basic organizing principle of the community is given by a special form of organic farming known as *permaculture*, as well as the lifestyle attached to it. The group is one of the bases of the Hungarian 'permaculture movement': they stand out from the rest of the domestic permaculture initiative by living together in a close-knit community in one village. The word permaculture is derived from the combination of the English words *permanent agriculture*; its inventor is the Australian Bill Mollison, who defined the principles of this organic farming method in the 1970s (Mollison–Holgrem 1978). As there is no room here for a detailed description of the history of the movement,¹⁵ I list only the outstanding elements necessary in order to understand the life of this group. These are the following: imitating natural ecological processes in the human habitat and in the process of satisfying their needs; drastically reducing consumption; energy-saving and recycling; creating systems for self-sufficiency (garden, food, energy, community, etc.); covering their own needs with their own resources as much as possible; all components of the system performing many roles, and all important functions being supported by several elements; preferring and strengthening mutually beneficial relations and symbiotic relationships; diversity; and a focus not on one's own welfare but the well-being of all living things, where the land is looked at as a whole (In Hungarian see: Baji 2011, Pásztor 2013). Their notion is that these aforementioned principles generate such a practice that serves as preparation for a future with ecological sustainability. These principles are decisive for the whole way of life: as a young woman put it, permaculture

¹⁵ See Hungarian Permaculture Movement website: <http://www.permakultura.hu/index.php> (last retrieval 2015. 01. 22.). There are several articles of social science on permaculture, see for example: Veteto–Locker 2008.

is *not just scratching in the garden*, but much more than that: it is a lifestyle, a worldview that requires the existence of the community (KE 2009).

'THE SEARCH FOR MY WAY GREW LARGER INSIDE ME.'

CHOOSING A LOCATION, MOVING OUT/MOVING IN

As we have seen above, ecovillages are typically intentional communities; that is, their residents have moved to their new location, leaving behind their own homes. So it seems worthy of investigation to start from the question of migration, since ecovillagers are in the process of creating their own homes, they are working on making the place meaningful.

In the following I will show the motivations of the members of the given community had when they started to look for a new place to live, and why they chose this place. I also show where the ecological thinking and the radical rurality in this process is and what social critique aspects it has.

Rural migration, moving out of the city to the countryside, has many different reasons and ways.¹⁶ One of these forms in Hungary dates back to the eighties and nineties, its essence being to return to cultural and natural roots, integration into the village and return to the rural way of life. This typically meant – as Zsolt Szijártó puts it – moving away by independent and system-critical intellectuals whose act was based on the concepts of crisis and a longing for another place. Accordingly these people created a counter-world, expressing their opposition to the core values of the given political, social and cultural system (Szijártó 2002, 2007). In this sense, the move was not motivated by economic reasons, but aimed at a better life in the moral, cultural or ideological sense. It included the move of urban intellectuals to small villages (for example, South Transdanubia) who had a close connection to the folk dance movement (*táncház-mozgalom*) and green movements. As I see it, one of the manifestations of this special type of migration is the creation of ecovillages in Hungary. When observing their motivation, the relocation of ecovillagers can be distinguished from other types of migration to villages by the need to create a lifestyle different from the mainstream based on an ecological commitment, and this need is not only manifested in their relationship to the environment, but also permeates individual and community life in all aspects. In terms of the goals of ecovillagers, these differ from other phenomena involving movement to a village in that they are undertaking a role model: many of them are aiming not only to achieve a socio-economically and environmentally sustainable way of life, but to transfer the experience and the model.¹⁷ An important feature of late modern societies is a sudden boost of opportunities in parallel with the growing significance of the issue of quality of life. One of the best-outlined options and quality-of-life alternatives is the ecological way of life,¹⁸ which defines itself in opposition to consumer society and interprets good quality of life in a broader context, that of the natural and social environment. That is, it considers not only one's own well being as important, but also the quality of life of one's immediate and wider environment. This is most evident in those movement activities that perceive natural and social problems

16 There is considerable literature on moving from a city to a village. Some Hungarian examples: Járosi 2007, Pulay 2002, Virág 2007, Csizmady–Csurgó 2012.

17 For locating ecovillages within migration, see Farkas 2014a.

18 Or sustainable, low-scale, degrowth, etc. lifestyle – various names and movements can be found here.

(poverty, equal access to resources, human rights, etc.) together and which offer a complex solution to them (see globalization-critical movements, green movements etc.). The inhabitants of the Hungarian ecovillages use similar, but perhaps less spectacular, considerations; they aim at the same goals in their use of the natural environment and community activity. To achieve this goal they take the first step of moving from the city to the countryside. When deciding about migration, those who wish to move are – to borrow a term from environmental psychology – making a double assessment; the first step is seeking a destination and the second the evaluation of all possible locations selected (M. Horváth–Dúll–László 2006: 134). In ecovillage circles the familiar 'seeker' category is applied to those who have already made the decision to move but have not yet selected a migration target and are visiting potential places to gain experience. It can take up to several years of searching, during which time individuals spend extended periods of time in one potential area, living for example as volunteers, as a means of choosing their place of residence. The local community has a prominent role in their choice: no matter how beautiful the place in question, even if it is perfect for the ecological way of life, if the place-seekers do not find the community to be to their liking they will usually continue their search.

In examining the motivations at the core inhabitants of the Kísfalu Eco community it turned out that all were so-called 'questing-type people', who defined themselves as people thinking differently than the mainstream,¹⁹ looking for an ideal place to live their preferred ecological and social way of life (*'Where is the large garden that awaits me?'* KE 2010). Most of them had lived in another, similar type of community (Agostyán, Visnyeszéplak, Gyűrűfű) earlier.²⁰ Nearly everybody mentioned the community and the same way of thinking as the main reason for moving to Kísfalu²¹: *'we are here clearly because of the personal connections'* (HL 2010). *'Why here, and why was this so obvious? The things radiated by M could be felt well enough to see what kind of people they are.'* (BG 2010). Only after that did they mention the settlement's characteristics (location, cul-de-sac village character, the beauty of the landscape, a beautiful view of the village, unique architecture, organic farming ability, great for bringing up children, good schools, etc.).²² While the rest of the people who moved into the village talked about the beauty of the landscape, they went beyond this, carrying out a kind of assessment made possible because of their profession or their experience in permaculture they could observe what 'lay people' could not. There were some who thought this area was ecologically degraded: *'Then we were*

19 Not fitting into the mainstream society is a recurring motif in life-stories: *'With my way of thinking I was quite out of place there.'* (KE 2010) *'I was somehow always out of place, both in my age group as well as in the society; somehow I always had a different outlook on life. And somehow I could never fit into the system and the search for my way grew bigger inside me.'* (JA 2010)

20 Those who were loosely connected to Kísfalu Ecocommunity had this place as their first place after leaving the city. They were motivated by and attracted to the escape from the city and the beauty, silence and tranquillity of rural life.

21 This required a 'starting point', with initial people later attracting others. This couple (who have since moved) were known for their outstanding credibility and wisdom in the ecovillage movement, and members of the Kísfalu Ecocommunity met them later at an ecovillage meeting. They moved into the village in 2003, with an earlier incoming wave through acquaintances. They attracted a young couple, who then attracted more people and so on, and then the whole community became an attractive target among people looking for a place to live. The importance of their role in this story is indicated by the fact that there are people who separate incoming waves by the people who have attracted other individuals. Thus, there are J-s' newcomers (moving in with a previous wave), and M-s' newcomers, who are the members of the eco-community.

22 All the members of the group came here through acquaintances (not just by accident), but family roots tie only one family here, a young woman whose father lived nearby. *'Roots are pretty important. I mean, the old roots. My family is from here on my father's side, from two villages away. I spent every summer there when I was in primary school, and I always had a feeling of what it would be like to move here with my family.'* (KE 2010).

looking for a place, which is why we came, we connected it to a meeting with permaculture. We wanted to look at Kisfalu and get to know the residents. The community made a very positive impression on us. The village and the natural environment less so. Because it was November and everything was bleak. The houses were beautiful, the village was attractive, but it seemed that this was a very dry land, and ecologically degraded.' (FJ 2014). On the other hand, others were attracted by the ecological diversity: 'The natural conditions are good enough: at the road there is a wooded area, and the conditions, diversity and the wet area as well. There is a forest, there are pastures.' (JA 2010) This practical attitude – as Halfacree also found during his research in England – 'challenges the abstracted and aestheticised idyllised vision of a neatly manicured and commodified rurality, since it prioritises permacultural concerns about more holistic connections between people and their environment over superficial appearances.' (Halfacree 2007: 134). As a result of this their relationship to nature and the landscape is not just an aesthetic but also a moral relation – which is fitting with ecological thinking – , and they consider its productive functions (also ecologically based) as well (for this see Csizmady–Csurgó 2012).²³ This attitude is a fundamental and typical feature of radical rural locality, this special rural-perception. While Kisfalu and its region with its hilly landscape, folk architecture and tranquillity is admired by the average layman, those who have more experience in land-use and are more holistic-ecological thinkers can see, in addition to the overtly positive features, the degraded land elements (forest conditions, monoculture used on the fields of large farmers) and a depressed local community alienated from their natural environment.²⁴ Nevertheless, they found the settlement and its street suitable for their lifestyle ('It's not a spoiled village, where people live in small cages like in a city, there is space here.' PG 2014). As we have seen above, the community started to move into one of the streets of the village. It is a village-end edge of the settlement, where they could buy houses relatively cheaply and former inhabitants of the houses had carried out minimal modernization, which suited their organic principles perfectly; also, the area was suitable for organic farming. At the back of the properties in the loess wall centuries-old cellars, storage rooms and kilns could be found, the land stretched as far back as the high bank (hostel), and sometimes more land was available at a relatively good price. A further advantage for them was the less central location of the place, so that – they hoped – they would be able to live there peacefully, far from the mainstream way of life: 'I thought that in a village with a bit more natural environment what we do is not so unique. The neighbour's garden is quite different from ours, but it's all right' (KE 2010). The family who comprised the starting-point of the community also lived in this street. Living near one another had a positive impact on community life (they could see one another's houses, they could take a look at one another's gardens, within a minute or two they could reach each other if needed). The group very quickly formed its own meaning and character, at the same time their dominant presence (not really their number but their different way of thinking and lifestyle and activity) started to shape the meaning

23 In the course of examining suburbanization (and gentrification) processes Adrienn Csizmady and Bernadett Csurgó found that the newcomers' aesthetic and moral relations to nature greatly differ from those of the locals, whose priority is production (Csizmady–Csurgó 2012: 161). In our case all the three aspects are equally important.

24 Newcomers express their criticism towards this lifestyle with the image of a village person who does not cultivate his garden, sits in front of the television and buys vegetables in the shop. This, however, is not their opinion alone; local residents also criticize this phenomenon. 'When I first saw they sold vegetables in the shop, and I saw people buying them, I found it very strange, I could not understand it.' (KÉ 2016). Members of the study group – in addition to those above – formulate more criticism along ecological principles, and dislike chemical farming, clear cutting or burning forest litter.

of the village as well. While their street was soon identified with young settlers, nicknamed the 'bios',²⁵ prior to the ecovillage scene Kisfalu was identified with permaculture and its largest living and well-functioning community in Hungary. Previously we have seen that the move to the countryside and settling is preceded by a lengthy search for a suitable environment. The long process of moving out and the careful consideration of the choice of location also means that by the time they select the right place, the ecovillagers have partly become acquainted with the essence of the given place and they have already begun to integrate its meaning into their identities before actually moving there. Hungarian ecovillages have had little time to consolidate a composite meaning, for even the oldest among them are only 20–22 years old. Although meaning-creation has taken place (even if it is constantly changing and being formed), in ecovillage discourse (which is made up not only of the individual ecovillages but their considerably larger collective scope) identities can be traced that are strongly linked to one or the other village.

In the case of Gyűrűfű this is a complex symbol of rebuilding (see Farkas 2009), Visnyeszéplak appears in these discourses as a place reviving traditional peasant culture and preserving traditions. Krishna Valley is naturally identified with the Krishna faith, but their significant results in self-sufficiency are also dominant in the interpretation of the community (Farkas 2011). In the case of this village it is the permaculture and the reputation of the community as being a 'good community'. Those who moved here in the 'golden-age' knew this prior to their arrival: indeed, that was the reason they came here and, having settled, it was to this that they endeavoured to adjust.²⁶ The fact that the majority came because the community had an influence over how they felt about being Kisfalu people. One of the core members after 2–3 years of searching regarded Kisfalu as a final homecoming: *'I prefer to say it is not us who found the place, but the place that found us. Both of us [his wife too] felt that this was the place where we have to live. Here we had things that were very important to us then, and luckily still have, and we felt that we had to choose this place.'* (JA 2010). Others do not necessarily identify with the village; in other words it is not the village they feel attached to. One young woman made a statement during our conversation that was a surprise to me: *'During three and a half years I realized that my aversion to villages had not disappeared. The fact that I live in the last house of one of the last streets makes my life here very easy. I'm not in Kisfalu, I relate to the Kisfalu Ecocommunity. And I relate to my friends who live nearby the most. For me, this Kisfalu life is not really a Kisfalu life.'* (PK 2014). One young man (who has since moved) said something similar: *'I was not so convinced about the place. I liked the people, but if the company had told me to go on somewhere else, because there was an even better place, I would have gone with them.'*

25 Local people started to call the street Zöld utca (Green Street). This refers to the end of the street where the gravel road ends and a grassy road continues, as do the people coming here with green ideas. Those who disapprove of these young people and their lifestyle use more pejorative expressions: 'seed-eaters' or 'grass-eaters' and so forth. This does not necessarily refer to their vegetarian way of life (only the minority of the group is vegetarian but locals may not know that), but to the fact that they eat a lot of vegetables, fruit and cereals, or even some plants that are commonly known as weeds (goosefoot, dandelion, etc.). Besides, they do not consume ready-made food or the 'classics' like coke and crisps. For the nutrition of this group and ecovillages see Farkas 2015.

26 This image became an expectation, which placed a serious burden on the group. There are families who moved here because of the reputation of the Kisfalu Ecocommunity, without having previously got seriously involved in its lifestyle. They became disappointed very quickly, so much so that they have kept little or no connection with the community. The group therefore tried to convince everyone to spend more time to get to know the community to avoid cases like that, because not only those individuals, but the community were frustrated as well.

[...] There are some who would put Kisfalu on our common flag, but I wonder whether these people could do the same thing somewhere else? So is Kisfalu needed for this? There are some who say yes, it is, and they are probably right; I think it can be done elsewhere too. So I do not think that this team is defined by Kisfalu, no, I don't think so.' (BG 2009).²⁷ One part of the group therefore looks at the village as the home they have found, while others do not, or think '*it is not clear yet whether it was just one stage, or a final destination.*' (PG 2014)

'A LIFE MORE ROUNDED.' INHABITING THE SPACE

In the following I examine how members of the community form their spaces and how they are settling in the village and use it as a space and what ecological aspects it has.

In the introduction I have already emphasized that a significant part of the new social movements is characterized by the attempt to protect and regain control of the place. Manuel Castells in his well-known work (Castells, 2006) writes that two types of spatial logic work in the network society: the space of flows and the space of places. While the former organizes distinct social practices with the help of telecommunication and information systems, the latter prefers social interactions resulting from the physical contact and contiguity. The thing that distinguishes the new social structure, the network society, from the old is that most of the dominant processes are organized in the space of flows by concentrating power, economy, and information. However, human experiences and the majority of the goals are still locally based. In connection with the emphasis placed on locality and regaining the control over the place, he underlines: '*What the environmentalists' localism and "favouring the place" is actually questioning is the loss of relationships among different functions and interests, alongside the principles of representation mediated by abstract technical rationality produced by uncontrolled business interests and the unaccountable technocracy.*' (Castells, 2006: 229). In contrast to this, they favour and try to create local communities and civic participation, grassroots democracy, self-management, small-scale production and self-sufficiency (which also leads to moderate consumption); they criticize conspicuous consumption and emphasize the value of life instead of the value of money (Castells, 2006: 228–229).

Castells also argues that green movements create a new global identity: '*the culture of the human race with biological identity and as a component of nature.*' (Castells, 2006: 231). This kind of ecological self is clearly displayed in the mind of the community studied here; for them, community is not just a community of people, but also includes humanity and all living things:

'The sense of community for me means that I can feel the community not only through neighbours, but also with African children who do not have drinking water. [...] If we say we live in a community of flora and fauna, and here we are with each other in the world, a different world will be created around this idea. So I usually say that the community feeling is not just a human feeling.' (HL, 2009)

The community's image of locality should on the one hand be understood in a global context, but on the

²⁷ This specific non-binding is probably the reason for the large fluctuation in the population, in that about half of the group no longer lives here. A specific reason for moving out is commonly some family problem (disintegration of the family due to a divorce; one member of the couple cannot get used to living here, and so leaves etc.). Until 2013 four households (three families and one single young man) moved away from here, but two (one family and the young man) had moved back by 2015. I am planning to deal with the issue of moving from here and the relevant questions (why and where they move, what impact it has on those who stay here, etc.) in another study.

other the lived landscape, human beings integrated into this landscape and the natural environment are the basis for this localism. That is, they have to build the place with their own hands both figuratively and in reality.

The first and most important step of the process is always to create a home. The ecovillage lifestyle greatly relies on physical work, which makes a number of non-sustainable resources and methods redundant. However, this physical work means much more than cutting trees, hoeing, washing by hand or drawing water from the well: it is attuning to and appreciating one's place within the natural world (Halfacree 2007: 135). As one woman put it: *'I, too, feel that the close engagement with the soil, to see how the crops grow, what processes there are, and being closer to the Earth is a sort of 'rounded' life, so life is more complete.'* (HK 2014).

For us, another important aspect of locality-creation is the creation of the community, as we have seen above. A major component in this is spatiality, that is, the core membership of a community in close proximity with each other. We have seen that the Green Street identity is the dominant segment of community identity; what is more, for some members space means only a narrow slice of the street. However, this space is 'enwrapped' by the village, and certainly it is not inconceivable, not feasible to use the space without any contact with the receiving space. Even those who have the least possible contact drive through the village (weekly) when going to another village.

The fact that members of the community did not create a brand new settlement, a new ecovillage (as in Gyúrűfű), but moved in to an existing village, means that they took on board the knowledge that their efforts would be 'watched' and that they were entering spaces that had been created and lived in earlier, and where they would have to place themselves.

When examining the wider use of space (the village) we can find very different patterns and examples among the members of the ecocommunity. In a small village the most dominant locations are usually the shop and the pub. These are the two places where people come together every day and chat a little: even those who live further away from each other meet here. In Kisfalú there is no pub, and the shop's stock motivates people to do their shopping in larger nearby settlements. In addition, members of the study group need to buy a lot less than others due to their attempt at self-sufficiency. What they do not produce they exchange or acquire from a local producer (vegetables, fruit, eggs, meat, dairy products, honey, cereals, pasta etc.).²⁸ Beside this, how much people use the village depends mostly on personality, life situation and their work. Those whose children go to the village nursery or school are inevitably involved in the village life, for example through parenting conferences or gala performances of the children. One of the religious members of the community got involved in village life by 'using' the church. She also lived an active social life, so to her space meant the space not only of the community, but also of the entire village. Two male members of the group undertook odd jobs in the village, so they moved around the entire village and had a broad network of relationships. One key member of the group worked at home to make a living, and sometimes went into the village, but to him the grass-covered street was his inhabited space, and the community was of primary importance. The rest of the village – as he said – did not really interest him (he did not like the locals' hostility, envy and gossip). I met two members who hardly ever left the street, one of them being the young woman quoted above, who

²⁸ One of my hosts could only recall one occasion when they had bought something in the local shop.

said she was not in Kisfalu, but only in the 'community'. Three families are connected with multiple ties to the village: to them the whole village is a discovered and used space, a real home. Opportunities for the group to appear as a community in the village were mostly festive times, organized by themselves or together with other people, but where their presence influenced the perception of the event. This leads to our following point, the symbolic colonizing issue of forming a place.

'HERE, EVERYONE IS AN UPSTART.' SYMBOLIC RESERVATION OF PLACES

As soon as migration occurs, and the individual has moved into a selected locality, a cultural learning process starts: the person learns the history/story of the settlement and, more importantly, the history of their own community.

This is because *'the particular geographic location provides the social group or individual with an opportunity to search for, discover and redefine identity or self-expression, so that its specificity, history and environment become more and more meaningful.'* (Maase 1998, quoted by Szijártó 2008: 203). Everybody who moved to Kisfalu considered it important to get to know the history of the village, and a local historian's work proved to be greatly helpful for that. He had made extensive research into the history of the village and church, exploring family stories, making photographic archives and editing a magazine. But the most significant events in the history of the village, such as the resettlement of the German population, the village's heyday, signs of civil life at the turn of the twentieth century (secondary school, hotel, ballroom, dance lessons, early adoption of street lighting etc.), live vividly on in orality. These items are intended to present the long gone flourishing of the settlement as opposed to the decline that started with socialism and continued in contemporary economic and social depression.

In the case of our group this history-learning process starts typically from the history of the community; members learn the history of the community's foundation and its evolution before they move here. The narrative of the village's history includes the 'positioning' of the group in that history (as a kind of symbolic occupation of the place), which also contains a serious act of legitimacy: each time they talk about the village they mention that the current population of Kisfalu is made up of several incoming waves, and that they are one of those waves. I think this narrative is an attempt to eliminate the idea of their being upstarts (*gyüttment* in Hungarian): I could often hear them responding to opinions emphasizing their foreignness by saying that the 'locals' themselves have only lived here for 50–60 years. *'Everyone here is an upstart, but there are some who came 40 years ago, and some 20 years ago. Because those who came 20 years ago feel they are from Kisfalu as well as those who came 50 years ago.'* (HK 2014)

This attempt at legitimacy, this argument, is our next topic and it is of great significance in the process of redefining and occupying space.

Social science literature dealing with space and place now takes it as an obvious, basic thesis that the work carried out with and through space, human activity, narratives, images and narrative structures has a space-defining and redefining role. A number of researchers have asked the question of what happens when new social groups suddenly appear at these places with specific intentions and plans. (Szijártó 2008: 201–203).

Different social groups form spaces according to their intentions, through their social practices, assigning different meanings to them. This process is called locality reproduction by Arjun Appadurai (see Appadurai 2001). According to him, building locality, a seemingly peaceful and harmonious action, always entails colonization manifesting itself in a symbolic struggle. In our case, in this process, it is extremely important that behind the transformation of space there is an underlying criticism related to negative socio-cultural processes (consumer culture, ecological crisis, depressed rural areas, urbanization, etc.), and attempts to redefine space are made in accordance with these. The eco-conscious lifestyle elements such as the de-modernisation of houses (using clay, kilns, outdoor and compost toilets, the use of wells, showers in the garden, some houses without bathrooms, etc.) or permaculture gardens (which look 'untidy' due to their mosaic arrangement or mulch cover) embody the critique of modern society. However, all these are foreign elements when compared to the values of the villagers who prefer modernization: they create an image of disorder and disharmony and are signs of the reservations of the new residents. Neither did the village appreciate the efforts of these young people to apply ecological principles on the common land of the village. One such was not to let the rainwater flow into the trenches but for the precious water to be collected and utilized. Another was not to burn the dry leaves accumulated in public areas, but to make use of them through composting in the garden centre of the village. On behalf of the insect world and diversity the local government should not mow off the grass in all public areas even where nobody walks. In 2015, thanks to the work of some members of the community, local landraces of fruit trees were included in the Local Depository. To achieve this, they took cuttings from these very old trees that were about to be cut down, thereby preserving them for posterity. They also tried to persuade the owners not to cut down trees that were still growing, healthy, old or just in the way. This issue generated incomprehension, sometimes an explicitly hostile attitude, and preservation of landrace fruit was considered as a new fad. And so on.

With these efforts the new, eco-conscious residents were questioning the validity of established practices, and the act of questioning and the ensuing proposals were interpreted by the locals as a sign of an attempt at occupation.²⁹ Similarly signs of the settlers' reservation and symbolic colonization can be those community events organized for the village in the public areas that aim to promote community life. One such event was the baking of bread on 20th August. This tradition already existed in the village (thanks to a woman who had moved here earlier and was active in the civil life of the village), but it grew bigger when the community got actively involved in the organisation. One young man built a kiln in the middle of the village, and members of the group baked bread together with some older residents. The event was held throughout the day, from heating up the kiln early in the morning, through the process of kneading, to when the bread was blessed by the local Calvinist priest. Locals distanced themselves from this event spectacularly from the very start: they either did not attend it, or watched from a distance when they passed.³⁰ There are many more examples

29 In retrospect, more members feel that they did not take a 'good approach' to the village, that 'they were not clever enough' with the locals. They wanted to create change too fast. Some of the locals thought they were conceited and loud-mouthed, but there are plenty of exceptions too, of locals who acknowledge their activities.

30 Here the bread is not only the new bread traditionally baked on 20th August, but also a symbol of self-sufficiency, which is why it is of special importance that this community started to organize this festivity of baking bread. The feast of bread baking ended when a large number of the members moved away, and the energy to organize it fizzled out. This energy was redirected towards new holidays, thereby showing the most recent newcomers preferences, and so reservations. I examine this in

of spatial distance between the locals and newcomers, and with some experience it can be predicted quite well who will go to which event. The settlers would like to eliminate this spatial separation that takes place at festivals, and they feel disappointed each time they fail.

Besides such techniques in producing spatial locality, of particular importance are the enduring symbols that might not say much to an outsider, but the meanings of which can be explored clearly in the community knowledge. In Kisfalu these symbols include the above-mentioned kiln for baking bread, as well as the village gate set up in 2015. In the literature dealing with people moving from the city to a village it is not unknown that *'a majority of these people arrive with a desire to find community life, and start an active community-creating process there. In the desire for a rural community the need for pre-modern values and authenticity is strongly present and manifests itself in retraditionalizing community life, with reinterpretations of traditions.'* (Csurgó–Szatmári 2014: 36). It is also true in Kisfalu that because the new settlers have become leaders in public and civil life, the local community's cultural life will be determined by their needs, tastes and values. Thus, environment and nature protection, cultural activities based on traditions, and organic farming, have become increasingly important, and the local identity begins to change (see Csurgó 2013).³¹ It is no different in Kisfalu, and one of the dominant factors was this given community (even if not for all the members): *'We feel that as we had moved here, we had to take responsibility for the village at some level'* (JA 2010) This sense of responsibility causes many people to think about the village's future (and thus their own future). One 'scene' of the opposition of various spatial imaginations can be the discussion between the newcomers and the locals regarding the development of the settlement (see Halfacree 2007: 130, Murdoch–Marsden 1994). This debate is therefore an ideal forum for assessing a variety of spatial imaginations. In the given settlement it contains a three-dimensional element, specifically a road, and the way people think about it. This road does not in fact exist, but it is interpreted by many as an opportunity to rescue the village. It is a road that would significantly shorten the journey to a nearby town (which is now almost impossible with public transport), thus facilitating the possibility of working there. In this way the road would mean work and prosperity, and in a broader context the future of the village: migration from the village would stop, the achievements of modernization would become more accessible, clubs could be created and a more colourful life could begin. On the other hand, the road would eliminate the cul-de-sac feature of Kisfalu, it would bring through-traffic to the village, and as a result the settlement's tranquillity, peace and security – everything that the other spatial imagination interprets as a value – would disappear. The community under our scrutiny – unsurprisingly – is clearly 'anti-road':³² they would prefer small-scale development, in which they emphasize the place's ability for a low-impact development along the images of nature, tranquillity and an artificial environment with a further step towards a more radical vision. In their development plans, the place would continue to move forward towards an economic, self-sustained lifestyle collaborative with nature; its value and attractiveness is the landscape and natural resources, used in a versatile way but not overused. The use of space in this way usually generates a

another study.

31 However, new settlers' images of the rural life and idyll diverge considerably. As a result, their ideas about opportunities and ways to develop are also various. See Farkas 2016, manuscript.

32 Even more so, because the road would pass close by them.

forgiving smile or aversion, and in the worse scenario serious resistance by a section of the local population.³³ But without doubt it can be seen by the older community as a symbolic colonization process on the part of the settlers.

SUMMARY

This study shows a community, which in its principles and everyday practice has rejected many elements of modern capitalist society. It practices strong social criticism, and attempts a local implementation of an alternative, eco-conscious lifestyle. The group manifests these criticisms in its spatial practices. The step of moving from the city to the village itself includes this critical element, which is extended through specific farming style, lifestyle and community orientation.

For the interpretation Keith Halfacree's *radical rural locality* concept provided an excellent framework, which describes a special community-based and socially critical, environmentally embedded, decentralized relatively self-sufficient form of rural life and the attitude to it (Halfacree 2007).

During the research it became clear that in the decision of moving to the country the recognition and refusal of the city and social processes and practices considered to be harmful and identified with the city (environmental and social crisis, overconsumption, wastefulness, unsustainability, alienation etc.) already appears. Members of the study group articulate all this very precisely in their narrative of looking for and finding a place, and when they justify their decision on Kisfalu, they also reflect these problems. The responses indicate that a thorough site assessment was carried out before taking the decision. An important aspect of the assessment was the settlement's capability for sustainable lifestyles and permaculture, but the like-minded community was equally important.

One aspect of settling in the space was the creation of a home, which shows different patterns from the majority: the ecological practice (mud-architecture, organic farming, water-saving management, composting toilets, etc.) criticizes and bypasses several elements of modernization. A central element of creating locality is the creation of the community, which has an especially important element: spatiality, that is the core membership of the community settled near each other. Another important aspect of the settling in the space is the use of village spaces, which has more differences, individual variation than the practice of creating a home. There are various attitudes and the related use of space practices in the community from the individual who hardly leaves the street and barely communicates with the locals to the person who is taking an active role in organizing the life of Kisfalu.

The *critique-through-spatial-practice* (see Halfacree 2006: 313) can be found in their attempts to (re) shape their chosen place of living. The symbolic colonization formulated by the literature (Appadurai 2001, Szijártó 2008) can be detected in Kisfalu, and in the practice of the new groups appearing in the given area, in the re-creation of locality. In their case, in this process it is extremely important that behind the transformation of the space-related endeavours criticism related to negative socio-cultural processes can be found (consumer

³³ Not everybody feels the same way. During a conversation the mayor said she pictured the future of this village as a small ecovillage.

culture, ecological crisis, depressed rural, urbanization, etc.) and attempts are made in accordance redefine the space. Such experiment is to put village on the ecological track, or to advocate community events in the village.

To the question asked at the beginning of the study whether there is a bond to the new residence, what do they belong to: the particular land, the settlement, or rather the ideology – there is no single answer but individual responses. For some the village means homecoming, for someone else 'the place' is not the settlement, but the ideology and the close community, and for some others it is an undecided dilemma whether Kisfalu is the right place or not.

From 2011–2012 new settlers have appeared in the settlement whose different values are forming the existing space in a different way and assigning new meanings to spatial structures. Through their community-organizing activity they play an important role in village life, and we can witness the rearrangement of conditions, which naturally affects the use of space. In this process, we can see how value preferences relate to (or go against) each other; we can also observe attitudes towards the village's past, the way national identity is harmonized and placed in the village space, the method of image creation, and other features. The assessment of this process is the subject of my further research.

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