

PROJECTS FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF INTENTIONAL COMMUNITIES IN ROMANIA

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Abstract: *As a result of the multiple problems faced by cities, several initiatives to establish intentional communities came into being. Currently, they are at different formation and organisation stages, and they express their willingness to co-opt new members. They promote a healthy, simple lifestyle, amidst nature and in harmony with it. They intend to become self-sustainable and to constitute a genuine life model for their peers.*

Key words: *intentional community, sustainability.*

1. Flee from the city

“Let’s build the cities in the countryside” (Ferdinand Lop).

At present, because of the multiple problems faced by towns, part of their dwellers try to “escape”, considering that the city can no longer be remodelled in line with their life principles.

Goodman N. (1992, p. 406) defines cities as “permanent concentrations of relatively numerous human beings who do not produce their own food”. Of our days, most people live in towns. Beginning with the industrial revolution, an entire mass of people migrated from village to city. While the world population has quadrupled since 1850, the number of the town dwellers grew up to ten times. This growth of the city population roots in the scientific and technical progress achieved since the mid-eighteenth century (Harouel, J.L., 2001, p. 102).

Harouel J.L. (2001, p. 141) reckons urban gigantism to be an unsolvable

problem, with multiple negative effects: subsistence difficulties in the city, traffic and supply problems, the dwellers’ nervous tension, pollution and so forth.

Since the beginning of the large conurbations, in the eighteenth century, the opinions about the urban effects on social life have been polarized: on one hand, some authors reckon towns to represent “civilized virtue” (as they offer economic and cultural development opportunities); on the other hand, others labelled the city to be “a reeky hell wherein aggressive crowds swarm with mutual distrust, haunted by crime, violence and corruption” (Giddens, A., 2000, pp. 509-510).

There is no news to anyone that cities face manifold problems. Goodman N. (1992, pp. 419-421) describes part of the prevalent problems in major cities: crime and drugs, tax issues, heavy and polluting traffic. Bauman Z. (2001, p. 85) debates on the safety issue (“urban fear“, “daily-fear policy”). Environmental pollution is an ever-increasing urban problem. The

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deterioration of the water pipes, gas networks, electricity grids and transportation equipment aggravates urban life problems. Chiriac D., Humă C. and Stanciu M. (2009, p. 250) analyze the effects produced by the diminution of green spaces, “with immediate negative impact on their viability and sustainability, on the population’s life quality and health”. The same authors mention the various social agents’ involvement in multiplying the urban green surfaces (the so-called *green guerrilla*).

Moser G. (2009) considers most town dwellers to be regularly and simultaneously exposed to more stressful situations than the villagers. The city seems therefore to be a poor environment which imposes numerous constraints on its dwellers. Four environmental aspects were studied as stress sources: noise, temperature, air pollution and density. Among these stressors, noise seems to be the most harmful and disturbing component. Likewise, the incivility, vandalism (an almost exclusively urban phenomenon), insecurity and fear aroused by the former are conurbation-specific life aspects that contribute to the stigmatisation of the urban environment.

The city dwellers’ overexposure to environmental stressors causes physical and mental fatigue; and makes them particularly vulnerable and irritable. Numerous city dwellers seek to be amidst nature, either by frequenting parks and gardens during leisure time, or by their desire to live in a house with garden or even to have a house in the countryside. Town dwellers go to the countryside on weekends or holidays, in order to flee from the stressful daily life of the cities. This testifies for the green spaces having an energizing function and healthy effects, besides inducing an aesthetical pleasure, a fact which was repeatedly proven (Moser, G., 2009, p. 202).

Benefits provided by green spaces (Chiriac D., Humă C. and Stanciu M., 2009, pp. 252-255):

► *Ecological benefits*: chemical depuration of the atmosphere, physical and bacteriological depuration, urban climate moderation, phonic pollution attenuation, etc.

► *Social benefits*: intensification of social inclusion “by creating opportunities for individuals of all ages to interact”, urban population’s health promotion, recreation and leisure-time spots etc.

► *Economic benefits*: increase in value of the urban areas, rise in quality of the dwelling, tourism development, creation of a positive image of urban centres.

Urban personality: Georg Simmel

Simmel, an intellectual who lived his entire life in the city, analyzes the effects of the metropolis on individuals, especially in psychological terms (Dungaciu, S., 2003, pp. 155-164):

► “Nervous life intensification” in big towns, “which comes from the rapid and uninterrupted change of outer and inner impressions”;

► *Preponderance of the intellect on psychical life*;

► “Rationality” becomes a protective factor for subjective life. Financial economy and the prevalence of the intellect are intrinsically interrelated, having the same “pure objectivity” in dealing with people and things.

► Metropolitan life is characterized by punctuality, predictability and preciseness.

► The modern metropolis dweller is, according to Simmel, a *blasé* and *reserved human being*.

“City life transformed the struggle against nature, for subsistence, into a fight with one’s peers” and the gain at war “is not obtained from nature, but from people” (Simmel *apud* Dungaciu, S., 2003, p. 170).

2. Search for community

“The willingness to be with one’s peers and the fear of strangers are basic laws of «cultural physics». We want to be with those akin to us. We want to find a spiritual space, maybe even within a geographical area whereto we belong. The restless mobility of modernity has turned into a source of disorientation and anxiety. We want to go home. However, what does it signify to be home in this world?” (Rouner L.S., 1991 *apud* Precupețu, I., 2006, p. 71)

Definitions of community

Little Encyclopaedic Dictionary (1979) defines *community* as “the fact of being shared by several things or beings; common possession. Group of people sharing similar interests, beliefs or life norms; all residents of a locality, country etc”. The same definition is provided by the *Explanatory Dictionary of the Romanian Language* (1998).

“Etymologically, community might come from «Communitas», signifying a symbolical universe of the soul and, according to many authors, community is the place where the communion with the other human beings’ souls is achieved. Another etymological root seems to be «comunitas» in the sense of a group of people who act by its members’ consensus, this sense opposing the one of «societas» which means association, and the one of «civitas» (city). The communes represented territorial associations, sometimes based on function, such as the religious ones (Frazer, *apud* Precupețu, I., 2006, p. 73).

According to Bauman Z. (2001, pp. 3-4), the word “community”, in addition to meaning, is also endowed with “feeling”. “Community always seems to be something good”; the word induces a

pleasant feeling. Community is a “warm”, pleasant and comfortable place. “Community means the kind of world whereto, unfortunately, we do not have access, but wherein we would much like to dwell and whom we hope to regain”. It is similar to the lost paradise (however, not a paradise wherein we live or know by experience).

Park identifies “three features of community, defined as population occupying a certain territory: (1) territorial organisation; (2) relative rooting in the occupied territory; (3) mutual interdependence relations among individuals, which are rather symbiotic than societal” (Pascaru, Buțiu, 2007).

Etzioni Amitai (2002, p. 161) considers the term “community” a key-concept whereon he has relied in order to characterize successful society and he formulates the following definition of community: “community is a combination of two elements: (a) a network of emotionally charged relationships among the individuals of a group, often intersecting and enhancing one another (not merely chain or bilateral individual relationships); (b) emotional attachment to a set of unanimously shared values, norms and significances, as well as a common history and identity – briefly, attachment to a certain culture”.

The difficulty in defining community is proven by the multitude of definitions formulated over time. “In an article published in 1955, *Definitions of Community: Areas of Agreement*, George A. Hillary Jr brought together 94 various definitions of community” (*Encyclopaedia of Social Development*, 2007).

Bădescu I. (2005, p. 57) reckons “community” to be “one of the most comprehensive and genuinely fundamental sociological ideas”.

3. Intentional communities emerging in Romania – overview

Of late years, having drawn on intentional communities throughout the world, several initiatives for the establishment of such communities came into being: *Armonia Brassovia*, Braşov County, *Valea Curcubeului [Rainbow Dell]*, Hunedoara County, *Apusenii Verzi [Green Apuseni Mountains]*, Alba County, *Comunitatea Kogaion [Kogaion Community]*, Buzau County. All these emerging communities have configured their online identity and endeavour to further attract persons interested in living within. I will submit as follows an overview of these projects:

a) *Armonia Brassovia*, County of Braşov

- ◆ The community members seek a healthier lifestyle, in harmony with nature; and disagree with the direction pursued by the world nowadays (they deem the local and global system unsustainable and harmful).
- ◆ They want to live in peace, joy and harmony.
- ◆ They wish to be “one of the bricks underpinning a future system, a future horizontal network based on the free collaboration and interdependence among sustainable communities, which will gradually replace the current pyramidal structures characterized by control and irrational resource-consumption“.
- ◆ They hope for the materialisation of a similar vision to the one submitted in the *Anastasia* books written by Vladimir Megre. Currently, there are circa 50-60 persons and there is intended for each family to efficiently and healthily manage a hectare of land, in line with the principles of permaculture.
- ◆ Most of them want ecological houses in wood, cob or straw bales, whom they will build one by one, with the community’s help.

- ◆ The members’ alimentation is mainly vegetarian or ovo-lacto vegetarian and they want to integrally produce it on their own land (without pesticides and other chemicals). Many want to raise bees, fowl, goats; and there will be fish ponds.

- ◆ They hope to integrate amidst nature, a free school for the 20 children begotten in the community.

- ◆ As regards the community’s juridical status, most members agree with the idea of a NGO.

- ◆ The community members’ estates will be hedged and protected by dogs and even permanent security guards (solutions are still searched for).

- ◆ They search for a beautiful, energetically positive place, of minimum 50 hectares, with expansion potential, that they should purchase. In addition to the plots destined for each family, they want to set aside a common area, which will most probably comprise the reunion and group-activity centres, the visiting areas, the workrooms and the schools, the commercial and medical areas, a park and a lake, the access roads and so forth.

- ◆ They set about, in one or two years, to begin the constructions and to move thither.

- ◆ They search for energetic, educational, economic, cultural, health options that should offer them independence and self-sustainability over time.

- ◆ The constituency of the community: 50-60 persons of all ages and professional fields (physicians, architects, teachers, engineers, information technicians, economists), 20 children.

- ◆ They want to take on new members.

b) *Valea Curcubeului [Rainbow Dell]*, County of Hunedoara.

- ◆ They likewise have drawn on the series *The Ringing Cedars of Russia* by Vladimir Megre.

- ◆ They are convinced that metamorphoses are occurring all over the world; and their

community is a consequence of the changes likewise acting on Romania.

◆ They believe in tolerance and acceptance.

◆ They do not want a leader (“no one in an Anastasia-type community will ever want a leader). “People will opt for such a community, as they are ready to begin again as free humans, not as slaves. Slavery perfectly fits the city system“.

◆ They highly esteem sanity (which, they dare say, refers to the capacity of comprehending one’s peers) and they aim at living in harmony with nature.

◆ They rank first love, as the utmost element of their vision. Their work is to build a loving space. They nurture expectations from no one.

c) *Apusenii Verzi [Green Apuseni Mountains]*, County of Alba.

◆ They purpose to create “a community of good-hearted people who should live a sustainable lifestyle, in harmony with the planet and in the spirit of love for God and their peers”.

◆ They reckon the current economic, political and social system to be limited; humanity has forgotten to love both itself and nature. “Everything occurring all over the world is a call for everyone’s awakening and we all joyfully see more and more people awakening and claiming another lifestyle”.

◆ They highly esteem this new lifestyle, as the only “capable of securing material abundance and spiritual fulfilment in the years to come”.

◆ They seek self-sustainability “by wisely and rationally using Earth’s resources, by resorting to renewable energy sources, by turning to good account the various peoples’ ancient ken together with beneficial and ecological technologies”.

◆ The members seek the prevalence of the love for one’s peers, for their self and for nature, in their community.

◆ They ran across encumbrances in terms of bureaucracy and European funds raising.

◆ Community management: they aim at establishing a group of wise and balanced people (such as the Elders’ Council of old). Nevertheless, each member may express his/her opinion and cast his/ her vote.

◆ The access and integration within the community: they do not want domineering persons. In this community constitution phase, there are materially significant requirements and skills in order to receive a plot of land and to build one’s house and a garden (they considered minimal costs).

◆ With a view to implementing the project, they aim at establishing an ecological village (with low impact on the environment).

◆ They want this community to be a valid community-development model.

d) *Kogaion Community*, County of Buzau.

◆ “Romanian society, much as human society of our days, reached the point of redefining the current paradigm, which constrains and limits its members’ spiritual evolution and development”.

◆ “We are aware this system will collapse soon and will refuse to change by itself, even in case of deep crisis (*Theory of the internal resistance to change of a system*)”.

◆ “The members of *Terminus* society, aware of the aforementioned, have purposed to contribute to simulating a societal change by constructing a real community that should function in line with a few defining principles: self-sustainability, continuing education, accessibility and easiness in multiplying the project, communion and balance in relating to the environment”.

◆ A life guided by essential needs and not by ephemeral and changing consumerist desires; “re-allotting one’s time to self-knowledge, education, personal development and spiritual evolution, instead of pursuing the fulfilment of

desires improper to a human being. And it is about a free lifestyle, which provides a different perspective on life in contrast to the current perspectives offered by modern society”.

◆ The use of the overproduction of their own manufacturing system to the purpose of supporting the community’s essential needs.

◆ A reasonable swap with other entities who want to adhere to the community’s principles: fair trade of products and services.

◆ Their main purpose is to achieve generalized independence from the system.

◆ Continuing education: awareness of the necessity to spiritually evolve and personally develop, as essential human need; creation of complementary schools.

◆ They consider that “four principles mainly assume the following axiom: high-quality life by education, empathy, altruism and balance”.

These community projects aim at offering a viable alternative, namely to live far from the city and the traditional village communities. They promote a healthy lifestyle, closer to the environment, which they seek to protect through all their actions and activities. One of their guidelines is food and energy self-sufficiency.

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