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## Continuous Well-being and Ecovillages as Means of Achieving It

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### Abstract

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Human welfare depends upon our ability to satisfy the vital needs, i.e. provide everything necessary for supporting the human life. At the same time, human needs implied by the necessity of close interaction between man and natures (need for natural resources) are dictated by aesthetic and other contacts with nature. These needs may be called ecological. The problems of environmental protection are the most important among the first-priority problems of the society. At the present moment they are becoming more and more global. Industrial development results in increasing of ecological problems which, in their turn, result in deterioration of the human living environment. On the other hand the society has reached the stage of development which allows setting new economic and political tasks. The constantly growing part of population count on improvement of their welfare and is ready to pay for preservation of the environment, for improvement of the aesthetic standards of living. In the paper the authors determine some conception aspects of estimation of subjective well-being of a person and indicate their connection to the phenomenon of ecological well-being.

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**Key words:** Quality of life, subjective well-being, ecological well-being, conceptional approach to human welfare estimation, ecovillage.

### 1. Introduction

Human welfare depends upon our ability to satisfy the vital needs, i.e. provide everything necessary for supporting the human life. At the same time, human needs implied by the necessity of close interaction between man and natures (need for natural resources) are dictated by aesthetic and other contacts with nature. These needs may be called ecological.



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Industrial development results in increasing of ecological problems which, in their turn, result in deterioration of the human living environment. On the other hand the society has reached the stage of development which allows setting new economic and political tasks. The constantly growing part of the population counts on improvement of their welfare and is ready to pay for preservation of the environment, for improvement of the aesthetic standards of living associated with it.

Relevance of the subject of the given paper is also determined by the fact that, on the one hand, the environmental problems in the world tend to increase, their growth resulting from increase in consumption rate and size in the developed countries. On the other hand, the problem of human welfare improvement cannot be solved only through the governmental measures, without active and conscious participation of the citizens and without changing of present-day lifestyle.

## **2. Purpose of the study**

Therefore, the object of the research is subjective well-being of a person with reference to his/her ecological well-being.

The purpose of the given paper is studying the ecovillages as a form of the environmental movement and developing conceptional aspects of estimation of subjective well-being of a person on the base of its connection with the phenomenon of ecological well-being.

Achieving the given purpose appeared to be possible after solving the following problems: 1. Studying the ecovillages as a form of the environmental movement a means of improving the level of human welfare; 2. Considering the notion of an ecovillage, revealing its main characteristic features; 3. Studying the basic types of the ecovillages in Russia and in the world, analyzing their main principles, aims and experience; 4. Revealing similarities and differences between the ecovillages in Russia and in the world.

## **3. Research methods**

During the process of studying the ecovillages we applied the method of comparison to compare the forms of ecovillages being founded in Russia and in the world, and the method of questionnaire survey.

## **4. Findings**

Modern domestic and foreign literature presents a wide range of multiple studies of various aspects of human well-being. At the same time the conceptional aspects of subjective well-being of a person with consideration to its connection with the phenomenon of ecological well-being are presented insufficiently.

The methods of studying social and economic well-being, measuring and analyzing the life quality are studied by many authors (Boyarinova, 2015), (Egorova, & Anorina, 2015), (Baturin et al., 2014), (Nol, 2014), (Gurban, 2015), (Gurban,&Myzin, 2012), (Aivazyanyan, 2003), (Kudryavtseva, 2012) and other. For example, in the paper (Gurban, 2015) the author suggests applying the ratings where various aspects of regional well-being in the Russian Federation are analyzed as the base for estimating social

and economic well-being and the quality of life. The author views ratings as the instrument of monitoring the way social and economic systems function using the aggregate of heterogeneous criteria.

The scientists pay much attention to the current state of the studies of subjective economic well-being (approaches and results), for example (Khashchenko, 2005). The question if a person and the society become happier as their welfare improves, if income growth increases subjective well-being has been the subject of interdisciplinary research in different countries for many decades (Ackerman, & Paolucci, 1983; Andrews, & Witney, 1976; Argyle, 1999; Diener et al., 2010; Easterlin, 1974; 2001; Huppert et al., 2009; Huppert, & Linley, 2011; Graham, 2011) and other.

The interest to the phenomenon of social-economic well-being remains relevant due to a whole number of methodological and theoretical reasons. The researchers come to the conclusion that money can improve subjective well-being if it helps to overcome poverty. Moreover, the studies demonstrate high subjective importance of money irrespectively to economic position of a person. There is also a conclusion that there is no or little correlation between material income and individual well-being. In general, in spite of the fact that there is a large number of theories and suppositions, empirical facts, scientific understanding of the nature of correlation between the income and the subjective well-being is insufficient.

Many scientific works study the quality of people's life in various regions of the Russian Federation, for example (Gurban, 2015; Kos, 2009; Morozova et al., 2013; Bobkov, 2009; Kamalova, 2014; Tcherepanova, & Vasilyeva, 2011; Vasilyeva, 2013; Solovenko et al., 2015). The research work of Kos A.V. is devoted to the correlation between the social environment, life quality and health of people (Kos, 2009). The authors considers the concepts of social predicament of health differences, pays much attention to such component of good health as emotional well-being. The theoretical knowledge is supported by the empirical research completed in the form of half-structured interview with experts in the town of Saratov. The conclusions of the study conducted in the Republic of Kareliya on the base of analysis of social studies data on economic situation and social health of the population with application of such special methods as multidimensional statistical analysis allowed the authors developing the typology of the population according to the criterion of social-economic differentiation of people's life quality (Morozova et al., 2013).

The scientists suggest the systems of individual and indicators allowing estimation of the quality of life. Thus, in the study (Gurban, 2015) the author substantiates the rationality of applying ratings at the global and local levels, provides the data of a rating of life quality of population collected by the rating agency "RIA Rating". In the given survey the author estimates the situation in the subjects of the Russian Federation according to such criteria as income of the population, living conditions, accessibility of social infrastructure objects; ecological and climatic conditions; safety of living; demographic situation; health; educational level of people; development of the territory and development of transport infrastructure; economic development; small business development.

As we can see the researchers name the ecological situation as one of the aspects of personal well-being analysis (Khashchenko, 2005; Belik, & Nikulina, 2006) as for many of our contemporaries the values associated with nature are becoming more significant. As a matter of fact attitude of a person to the ecological conditions of his/her life may be determined through her/his estimation of these

conditions as of good or bad ones. Subjective ecological well-being, in its turn, is included into the system of life goals of a person by many researchers. American futurologist A. Toffler considered this problem of life quality in his book “Future shock” in the 70s of the XX century. Toffler specifies three aspects included into the notion of life quality considering the ecological aspect together with social and economic ones. According to him improvement of the ecological component of life quality supposes not only struggling against environmental pollution but also solving the problem of overcrowdedness, noise pollution, unaesthetical landscapes, etc (Toffler, 1970).

The given research studies the ecovillages as one of the forms of environmental movement, compares the current forms of this movement found in Russia and in the world, reveals the basic characteristic features of this movement, considers the main forms and types of the ecovillages in Russia and in the world and treats the ecovillages as one of the forms and means of improving the human well-being.

Until today the universal definition of an ecovillage has not been developed. One of the most popular definitions describes the ecovillages as communities “created for organizing ecologically clean environment for a group of people to live, who as a rule, are guided by the conception of sustainable development and organize their nutrition on the base of organic agriculture. It is one of the forms of ideologic community” (Wikipedia, 2014).

The people who live in ecovillages provide less “academic” definitions. For example, on the website of one of the largest ecovillages in Russia “Kovcheg” we can find the following characteristics: “Ecovillage is an experiment, active and creative search for a new lifestyle combining the conservative patterns of simple and healthy country life and modern knowledge and technologies applied sensibly and carefully” (Kovcheg, 2014).

Thus, we can conclude that the members of an ecovillage work for developing self-sufficient ecological, technological, energy-conserving life sustenance on the base of harmonic and caring attitude to the environment, developing and implementing alternative sources of energy, biotechnological systems ensuring biological recycling of waste.

The development of ecovillages in the world started in the 1960s. It was the time when the first ecological “communities” and “villages” were organized. Only in the United States of America the number of ecovillages was about two thousand. It should be noted that the leading reasons for the people to leave for such communities became the crisis processes in economic, cultural and spiritual, i.e. we can consider the ecological “communities” and “villages” of the 1960s to be a form of escapism. The term “escapism” (from the English word “to escape” – run away, save oneself) is usually referred to the tendency of person to bury his/her face in the sand in a situation of crisis, strengthlessness, alienation, run away from reality into the world of illusions or fantasy.

Transition of the communities that “survived” through the 1960s into the status of ecovillages happened in the 1970s, the people started to form communities on the base of non-urbanistic way of life and common ecological interests including the desire to use alternative sources of energy. In the 1990s the process of uniting the ecovillages into international organizations and networks was well under way. In 2001 the Global Ecovillage Network (GEN) was founded. Later GEN was given the status of a special consultant of Economic and Social Committee of United Nations Organization and

became a partner of UN Institute for Training and Research. At the present time it is difficult to name the number characterizing the amount of the ecovillages in the world as the networks include separate ecovillages together with national networks of the ecovillages (for example, for the beginning of 2007 in the European network of GEN 13 of 42 full members are the national associations of the ecovillages).

The Global Ecovillage Net (GEN) suggests the following classification which reflects the basic areas of activity of the ecovillages. The classification includes ecocities (ecotowns), such as Auroville in the South India, Federation Damanhur in Italy and Nimbin in Australia; rural ecovillages, such as Gaia Asociación in Argentina and Huehuecoyotl in Mexico. There are also permaculture places, such as Crystal Waters in Australia, Cochabamba in Bolivia and Barus in Brazil; Projects of urban regeneration, such as Los Angeles ecovillage and Christiania in Copenhagen; Educational centers like Findhorn Foundation in Scotland, Centre for Alternative Technology in Wales and Ecovillage Training Centre in Tennessee.

The first wave of ecovillages in Russia dates back to the 90-s of the last century. The most famous ecovillages of those founded during the “first wave” in the 1990-s include the village of Kitezh (Kaluzhskaya region, founded in 1992), Grishino (Podporozhsky area, 1993), Nevoecoville (Sortavala area, the Republic of Karelia, 1993), Tiberkul (Kuraginsky area, Krasnoyarsk Territory, 1994). At the initial stage of their foundation the first three ecovillages of the mentioned above received financial support from foreign and domestic organizations supporting the ecovillages in the world. Although being different it is possible to notice one characteristic feature common for these first ecovillages in the country. The people who went to live their, people who founded them were mainly intellectuals (intelligenzia) from Russian towns and cities. They did not have any significant experience of country life (if not to take into consideration their experience of having a dacha – a country cottage). Many of these people were forced to some extent to search for alternative philosophy and alternative lifestyle by the very circumstances of their lives.

The second wave of ecovillages which is dated back to the early 2000-s can be spoken in connection with the idea of ancestral homes developed in the books by Vladimir Megre. At the present moment the number of ancestral homes which are organized according to his ideas and which are called “anastasians” by the name of the main character (heroine) of Megre’s books approaches one hundred. It is worth noting that villages organized by “anastasians” cannot be called fully ecologic villages. They are similar to the ecovillages in their intention to be self-sufficient, develop sustainable living environment, create favorable environment and opportunities for sustainable development but, still, the main purpose of ecovillagers-“anastasians” is not just the environmentally friendly lifestyle but rebirth of one’s family on the earth and within the ancestral home.

The third wave of Russian ecovillages foundation was started by the people who disliked the urban lifestyle. The amount of people who believe that modern civilization of megalopolises has outlived its usefulness becomes larger and larger every year. Aggravating of environmental problems, deterioration of health of the population, increase in crime, dependences of various kinds, background aggression and anxiety in the society are viewed by many people as the symptoms of a crisis which may lead our civilization either to a catastrophe or to transition to other forms of life arrangement. In that context the

idea of an alternative settlement which is being realized by the “third wave” ecosettlers from Russia, appears to be extremely attractive.

Alternative settlement is associated with the lifestyle of former urban residents who committed the exodus from the cities. Although the new lifestyle is no longer an urban one it can neither be called typically rural. On the hand, it inherits the cities in technological achievements of our civilization, high cultural and education levels, decent consumption level and comfortable dwelling. On the other hand, the alternative settlement of the XXI century has to be an ecovillage which supposes minimal interference with natural complexes, application of ecologically safe materials, implementation of renewable sources of energy.

The alternative settlement of the XXI century must be an informational one: the main source of its means of subsistence should be the intellectual work of its residents. Development of the internet allows most people who are professionals in creative, managerial, operator's or clerical areas work distantly. The association “place of residence – place of work”, so common to urban civilization is being destroyed. Working via the internet allows the urban residents migrate to the ecovillages without changing their usual occupation and without missing their career opportunities.

Thus, we can see that Russian ecovillages are represented by different kinds of communities and organizational forms. Analysis of the philosophic views of ecovillage residents shows that the prevailing reason for them to leave for the ecovillage is some kind of spiritual escapism, the desire to escape the problematic reality to create a new, “clean” life and new reality.

To illustrate the difference between the European and the Russian approaches of the ecosettlers towards their life arrangement let us consider such problem as building a house. In Europe the ecohouses are built with application of such methods and materials that minimize the damage to the environment. They are constructed from cheap environmentally friendly materials with application of energy-efficient technologies which may sometimes make living in such a house not very comfortable for the people. For example, because of such a house being isolated from the outside environment the air exchange may be insufficient and the atmosphere in the house may become stuffy, although the main purpose – decreasing heat losses – will be achieved successfully.

The absolute majority of Russian ecosettlers or even all of them consider natural materials as the only kind of proper construction materials to build a house. The list of proper materials usually includes wood, produced basically from coniferous trees, such as pine tree, larch-tree, ideally – cedar. Is it worth noting how can cutting down of the trees required to make one ecohouse affect the ecological situation? At the same time we should agree that a wooden house has no alternatives in terms of comfortable living. This example is a vivid illustration of the fact that Russian ecosettlers are more concerned about people, about developing a healthy and comfortable environment for their life than about realization and minimization of the environmental damage and, thus, once again emphasizes the conclusion of spiritual reasons dominating the ecological ones among Russian ecosettlers.

## 5. Conclusions

Studying of Russian and global ecovillages experience allows making a conclusion that the ecovillages are developed as a response to the person's need for improvement of his/her life in the times of economic and spiritual crisis.

The ecovillages in Russia undergo the stages which are similar to those undergone by the ecovillages all over the world. At the moment the ecovillages oriented toward environmentally sound interaction between the man and the nature, environmental footprint reducing are the absolute majority in the foreign countries.

At the same time the Russian ecovillages are less interested in solving just ecological problems. The Russian ecovillages are more focused on developing an environment which healthy and advantageous for the people to live. For the Russian ecosettlers it is also important to create an inspiring spiritual idea uniting the members of the ecological community.

Russian ecovillages are presented by various types of communities and organizational forms. Analysis of the philosophic views of ecovillage residents shows that the prevailing reason for them to leave for the ecovillage is some kind of spiritual escapism, the desire to escape the problematic reality to create a new, "clean" life and new reality.

The principal conceptual idea of the given study is that social well-being management includes the understanding of the fact that the feeling of social comfort is not necessarily associated with high income and can be balanced out by other factors. Besides, sometimes drop in the living standards may be accompanied by the growth of feeling of well-being in the society.

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