very local scale but the whole question of relative levels of economic development of different nations and groups of nations could be subject to a similar analysis.

REFERENCES


SOCIAL ASPECTS OF SUSTAINABILITY: KITEZH CASE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Kitezh case study explores how several families with adopted children are building a sustainable village "Kitezh" in Kalujskaya region, Russia. Qualitative research has been conducted using 22 in-depth biographical interviews and participant observation during the expedition, which took place in December 1998. "Kitezh" community is the first example of an alternative institution for child development in order to help parentless children. It is a rural working spiritual community and eco-village that provides an education and home with foster families for orphaned Russian children from extreme social situations. Kitezh is a real alternative to the institutionalized care provided by the state.

1. INTRODUCTION

The non-governmental organization (NGO) "Non-profit Partnership of Foster Families "Kitezh" " (hereafter NPFF or "Kitezh") represents a settlement in the form of a community or a commune. As follows from the name, the organization unites people who are prepared to take in and bring up children who have been left without parental care. In essence, this is an attempt to create a system of raising and educating orphan children as an alternative to state-run children's homes. At present the NPFF is attempting to receive official status as an ecological settlement. Thus in Yanitsky's terms of classification it can be assigned to the alternative wing of ecological NGOs (Yanitsky, 1996).

According to official statistics there are nearly two million orphan children in Russia. The majority of them are not real orphans but children whose parents have been deprived of parental rights because they lead an anti-social way of life. The system of state children's homes are not equal to the task of socializing such children. Teachers are not able to devote sufficient attention to each child, since the children are brought together in large groups. Due to social neglect, many children remain behind in development and are not motivated to learn. Therefore, the level of education in schools within children's homes, oriented toward children with low aptitude and motivation, limits the opportunities for acquiring knowledge for those children who possess natural talent. After graduating from such a school it is very difficult for a child to enter an institution of higher learning. The children's constant residence in a specific closed milieu hampers their development of elementary, everyday social skills. The children do not know how to take care of their clothing, prepare the
simplest kind of food, keep their living quarters clean and orderly, use household appliances (because in a children's home these matters are looked after by the service personnel); make use of transport and shops, and observe the regulations of living together in a large society. In addition, the educators in a children's home are responsible for the child only until he/she completes school, after that the 16-year-old individual remains alone with his/her problems and has no one to turn to for advice and help.

Since 1989 people have started to place formerly institutionalized children with families. Socially successful families adopt and raise three to five children, receive state payments as educators, and are fully responsible for the children's upbringing and education. This process was confronted a multitude of difficulties: the payments and allowances for the children are small, psychological help for the children and foster parents has not been developed, the separate family children's homes have not formed a unified system and also can not help each other. Kitezih is an attempt by foster families to unite and help each other to adapt the foster children, struggling together against objective difficulties.

This paper represents a qualitative sociological study of Kitezih settlement. Qualitative research has been conducted using 22 in-depth biographical interviews and participant observations during the site visit, which took place in December 1998. We will focus on the history of Kitezih, organizational structure of the settlement, system of administration, financing, process of adopting the children, farming activity, gender roles, ecological practices, rituals and plans for development.

11. HISTORY OF THE ESTABLISHMENT OF KITEZIH

In 1991 Dmitri Morozov, a commentator for the radio station "Mayak," began to realize his dream of creating a settlement in the form of a community consisting of families prepared to adopt and bring up children who were deprived of parents. A radio marathon was broadcast in order to raise funds and attract possible participants to the project. In Moscow an initiative group was formed of people who were interested in this project. They got in touch with Morozov via a contact telephone, and went through psychological tests to ascertain their aptitude for becoming foster parents. Meanwhile, D. Morozov was engaged with searching out and developing the necessary tract of land, which was found in the Baryatinsk district of Kaluga Oblast. In 1992 the first settlers arrived there, rented houses in the closest village, Chumazovo, and began to build the "Kitezih" settlement. Marina Maksimova, a physician, became the leader of the initiative group in Moscow. She organized the firm "Kitezih Agency" based at the All-Russian Foundation for Education in order to earn money for the construction of the settlement. The firm was not successful because it turned out that the members of the initiative group did not have the aptitude for commercial activity. But the All-Russian Foundation for Education granted quite a large sum which subsequently was used to build the settlement.

111. IDEAS

The most important idea uniting the settlers is the desire to help children who have been left without parents. As one respondent noted: "Our religion is children." A small Orthodox church will be built in Kitezih. A priest who will serve in this church is leading the construction and is directly involved, since he also likes the idea of a family children's home. The community members are not religious people but recognize the role of the Orthodox church as a spiritual Russian tradition. A respondent told us: "We don't chase off anyone for that... But on the other hand, if the community goes to the church with candles at Christmas, then whether you're a Muslim, or a Buddhist, it's worth while for you to go and feel the presence of God here, isn't it?" Practically all Kitezihians share the ethical views of the Ryorikhs. (Elena and Nikolai Ryorikh were Russian philosophers who created a philosophical-religious system, "Living Ethics" or "Agni-Yoga", which traces its roots back to Buddhism). The community members think that by attaining harmony within one's consciousness, perfecting oneself and ridding oneself of evil thoughts and actions, a person promotes the harmonization of the environment. All these people left large cities because they consider that life in nature, "closer to the earth", is more natural for people than life in a large technological society. They are careful in the way they treat the milieu which they inhabit, and teach the children to love and understand nature. Kitezih community belongs to the new wave of intentional communities which can be defined as "a group of people who have chosen to live together with a common purpose, working cooperatively to create a lifestyle that reflects their shared core values" (Kozeny, 1994). People in intentional communities are usually dedicated to a mutual goal, realization of which gives participants the sense of self fulfillment and satisfaction (Questenberry, 1996).

IV. KITEZIH POPULATION

Kitezih is a settlement of the village type in Kaluga Oblast, occupying 90 hectares of land, which was allocated to the organization in 1993 for permanent possession. By now 11 houses, a school, bath house, farm, apiary, and garage have been built, a chapel is being constructed. 23 adults and 26 children from 3 to 15 years old live in the settlement. The community consists of families with children (their own and adopted children). Each family lives in a separate house and owns personal property.

The adult population is divided into two groups: members of the community and volunteers. Members of the community are people who live permanently in Kitezih for at least two years, are accepted as members of the community at the general community meeting, and have the right to vote ("Instructions for new
arrivals"). A volunteer is a person at least 18 years old, temporarily living and working in the community on the basis of a decision by the general meeting, who has concluded an employment contract for a specific period, and has the right to a consultative vote. People who come to Kitezh for a short period out of curiosity, or with the intention of moving there to live in the future, receive the status of "new arrivals", are provided with room and board, participate in general work or pay for their room and board, do not have the right to vote and are not permitted to work with the children without the permission of the general meeting.

According to the charter, those accepted into the community as members are predominantly teachers and builders, aged 30-35, with families and ready to adopt and raise foster children. In practice, the main criteria for selection of future community members with full rights is their psychological and philosophical compatibility with the main group that comprises the community. Age, profession, family situation and even the capacity to become a foster parent do not play decisive roles. This position is explained by the fact that people in a small settlement interact very closely and members of the community should find a common language among them, avoid serious conflicts, and be able to work out decisions which suit everyone. Earlier, community members tried to influence the world view of volunteers and new arrivals, to persuade and educate them. But after two families left Kitezh, in spite of all efforts applied to their adaptation (one family took three foster children with them), the community members abandoned these efforts. Now a person (or family) decides for themselves to what extent they will accept the rules and traditions existing in the settlement, and the main group observes the newcomer/s and draws conclusions about whether they can fit into the collective. Our respondent told us: "People should be free... There's a way of life which is appropriate for some, not for others. Therefore, we are the only community that has survived up till now." If the new arrivals cannot establish relations with people or violate the rules of conduct which are accepted in the community, the general assembly can carry out a decision about the undesirability of their continued residence in Kitezh, to which they should submit. Only one such case was reported, involving a volunteer who started to drink. Usually the "unsuitable" people go away themselves.

V. SYSTEM OF ADMINISTRATION

The general assembly is the "legislative authority" in the community. Dmitrii Morozov, the community leader, is the president of the community according to the charter and has the right to pass a veto on a decision of the general assembly. However, no instances were related of his having made use of the right of veto; as a rule, they manage to reach a consensus.

The general assembly elects the community council and the leader of the council - the head of the community, currently Vadim Terentiev. The council, consisting of three people, decides all everyday matters of the community's vital activity and assigns the daily work. The council's decision must be carried out. The general assembly meets once a week, decides on strategic questions of the community's development, resolves conflicts, and distributes the funds.

VI. PROPERTY, FINANCING

In 1993 the administration of the Baryatinsk Region, Kaluga Oblast, transferred 90 hectares of land to Kitezh's possession for an indefinite period of time. Living quarters, buildings, a livestock, transport, and work tools legally belong to the community. In fact, each community member considers as their belongings, and bears responsibility for, property which they have at their disposal and with which they directly work. According to the respondent: "If the carpenter has an axe, then that doesn't mean that the axe belongs to the community, the man with the axe belongs to the community." Each family owns personal property.

The community's budget consists of allowances for children (born and adopted), pay for the teachers, and voluntary contributions. Every month, each community member and volunteer receives a small sum of pocket money, if the budget permits it. If the community member needs money for travel, medical treatment or a major purchase, he turns to the general assembly to request that they allocate the necessary sum.

NPFF has close relations with the state, because the legal basis of a foster family is a contract on guardianship which is concluded with state agencies. Apart from that, wages for the community members, teachers and allowances for the children (natural and foster) are paid from the budget.

"Kitezh" has connections with the business sector through sponsorship aid, which was regularly received from Russian businessmen up to the most recent crisis. At present the leaders of the community are trying to establish relations with foreign philanthropic foundations, in order to receive financing as a charitable organization and ecological settlement. Up until now the community has received financial and material support from abroad only privately, from its friends who are linked to the international network of eco-settlements and communities. Findhorn Foundation is a main fundraiser for Kitezh. There are exchanges of guests and delegations with kindred NGOs in the West (eco-settlements in Scotland, Australia, and North Carolina).

Food in Kitezh is a community affair. Foodstuffs are purchased centrally, breakfast, lunches and suppers take place in the common dining hall. The abundance and variety of food depends on the presence of the financial resources in the community. One of the community members has permanent responsibility for preparing meals (according to the decision of the general assembly), in addition to that, each day one of the adults is designated to be the
on-duty assistant, and several children are given the task of cleaning the vegetables and washing the dishes. Volunteers usually are assigned to be on duty in the kitchen. On Sunday the Kitezians prepare meals at home, foods for this are given out from the general store room. Shared meals make it possible to liberate a great deal of labor (predominantly women's), in part given that each family consists of 6-8 people. Moreover, the common dining room performs a communicative function.

In Kitezh there is an economic game for the children because it is impossible for children to learn in a natural way to handle money - no money circulates within the community. A special "children's currency unit" has been created - the "kiyani." The children receive compensation for their labor (duty in the kitchen, work on the farm, preparing fuel wood, etc.). "Kiyani" are paid for amusement (computer games, horseback riding school). There is also a banking and taxation system of enterprises and joint-stock companies.

VII. CONTACTS WITH OUTSIDE WORLD

The retired nature of daily Kitezh life is explained by the special aspects of the location - Kitezh is situated 300 kilometers from Moscow, 20 kilometers from the closest regional center. There is no regular transportation link. When possible children are taken on excursions to Moscow. Guests often come to Kitezh - teachers, scholars, representatives of non-governmental organizations. They give lectures and hold classes with the children and with the adults.

For several years in succession a summer school has been in operation, offered by the pedagogical group "Chimera" (the leader is Vyacheslav Zagorski, candidate of chemical sciences, lecturer at Moscow State University). Gifted children work in "Chimera," winners of the Moscow Olympiad in chemistry and physics. Such opportunities have had a developmental influence on the Kitezh school children, many of them did not know how to read and write before arriving in Kitezh.

"Kitezh" actively cooperates with the mass media to a great extent due to the fact that the organization's leader previously worked as a commentator on one of the central radio stations and has maintained his earlier contacts. A radio marathon was broadcast with the aim of raising funds and attracting the attention of interested people. As a rule, people who come to Kitezh heard about it from the mass media.

Kitezh maintains contacts with communities and ecological settlements in other countries, community members (adults and children) have visited Australia, Scotland, and the USA. They receive visitors from abroad. The Findhorn Foundation organizes summer courses in Kitezh for students from Europe and the USA and provides help with strategic planning and management of the community. However, as it is described by Metcalf, Findhorn itself is much less intense and communal than Kitezh (Metcalf, 1998).

VIII. ADOPTING THE CHILDREN, UPBRINGING, EDUCATION

Community representatives go to children's homes located not far away, looking for children possessing the necessary intellectual potential and capacities for development. They carry out psychological tests. At first the child is invited to visit during the holidays, so that he/she can get accustomed to the community and choose a family with whom to live with. If the child likes Kitezh, an agreement on adoption is formalized. It is important that relations are established not only with the foster parents but also with the other children living in the family. The child has the chance to change families if conflicts can not be resolved successfully, but this rarely happens. As a rule, the community does not intervene in parents' relations with the children.

In the community there is a non-comprehensive school with in-depth study of the humanistic sciences, subordinate to the Baryatinsk Region section of public education. Several community members are professional teachers, but in principle, each person with higher education becomes a teacher in Kitezh. In their work, the teachers make use of the experience of Russian educators who have created their own programs of teaching (Shchetinin, Amonashvili). Apart from school lessons, the children engage in different activity circles; they practice handicrafts and perform plays.

The Kitezh teachers (who simultaneously are foster parents) consider that their task is more than just giving the children a basic education. Most important is formation of a world view, development of the personality, and social healing of the after-effects of the damaged childhood without parental love. They often talk with the children, teach them to form and express their own views, and take a respectful attitude to their opinions. The work of raising children in Kitezh goes on around the clock. Such an approach brings its fruits. The children free themselves of their inferiority complex, begin to take pride in learning. After a year of residence in Kitezh it is difficult to distinguish the former children's home residents from the "home-grown" child as to the level of knowledge and conduct. Kitezh children are sociable, friendly, and uninhibited. Several adopted children who have finished school continue to study in other population centers and come to Kitezh during holidays and on weekends to their families, where they feel at home.

IX. FARMING ACTIVITY

Maintaining the vital activity of the settlement demands much labor. The community members independently build the homes and farm buildings. The community garden produced up to 50% of the Kitezhians' vegetables. Raising livestock provides milk, eggs and meat. There are 4 cows, steers, a horse, sheep,
and chickens on the farm. There is a bee-garden; if the summer is not rainy it produces up to 200 kg of honey. Stoves provide heating. Wood stoves have been installed in the small homes, central heating uses coal in the large homes. The children perform simple farm tasks for the families and for the community.

Although the farming method in Kitez is close to the traditional village one, the community members' world view is different that of rural residents. For them, farming is not the priority field of activity. The applied value of farming is recognized as a means of earning a living. The main attention is devoted to other areas - child rearing, cultural or community relations, spiritual and intellectual activities and self-improvement.

X. GENDER ROLES

On first glance, the allocation of gender roles in the community is close to the traditionally patriarchal roles. The men perform the heavy physical work, the sphere of women's work is household management. This is explained by the fact that the Kitezians do not regard the traditional way of farming as unequal. It is considered that each should fulfill his/her own function in his/her place, and each function is equally important. Often, without reflecting, the community members follow gender-role stereotypes that have come into being. For example, in looking after the kitchen, the boys clean the potatoes and wash the floors (these jobs are done by soldiers in the army when they are on duty), and the girls wash the dishes. The importance of the womanly, maternal role in the foster children's adaptation is emphasized, although the men also spend a great deal of time with the children and participate in bringing them up.

In the area of decision-making, relations are structured on the principle of equality. Men' and women's votes at the general assembly have equal weight. Women are members of the community council.

XI. COMMON ACTIVITIES, RITUALS, CREATIVITY

Life in the community is full of rituals and unwritten rules. Each morning the community members assemble for common exercises with elements of psychological self-regulation. The general assembly is held on Fridays. On Tuesdays there is a meeting where the community members talk about psychological and philosophical subjects.

On Thursday, the women gather in the "women's salon." This meeting, which traces its roots back to the Russian tradition of the young people's gathering (women in villages used to get together, each one busy with her own needlework, and chatted). Each woman in turn proposes a subject for conversation at each "women's salon." This might be a lecture, an account of a book that someone has read, joint work on handicrafts, a game or simply conversation about some "women's" theme. The men and children are not admitted to the "salon." On Wednesday a similar "salon for the girls" is held under the guidance of one of the adult women. Twice a week the community members heat up the bath house. This procedure, in addition to its hygienic purpose, has a certain ritual sense. In the men's and women's groups there are volunteer "bath house attendants" who know how to do a massage with the bath besom (beech twigs), they can treat pains in the muscles and joints, and remove tension. The "men's club" is combined with one of the bath days - a gathering of men, analogous to the "women's salon." Once a week the children independently organize a discotheque. During the discotheque two children's cafes operate - this is part of the economic game - where delicacies made by the children are sold for "kiyani" (the children buy the ingredients from the community for "kiyani").

Handicrafts and domestic creative work are widespread in Kitez. The community members consider that creative activity facilitates a person's spiritual development. Practically all Kitezians draw during their free time, even those who earlier didn't know how to do this. The houses are decorated with pictures and articles that the community members make themselves and give to each other. Several souvenirs are made specially for sale at Scottish eco-village Findhorn in the shop "The way to yourself," which gives the Kitezians the opportunity to obtain additional funds.

XII. ECOLOGICAL ASPECTS

Until recently the community members did not identify Kitez as an ecological settlement. However, living in a rural settlement and seeking harmony with nature made them environmentalists. Communitarians of all kinds can be considered environmentalists because of their sustainable life style and acceptance the ideas of sharing, ecological balance and equality (Bouvard 1975: 29). At present Kitez is attempting to acquire official status as an eco-settlement. This happened because the Kitezians realized that their values and ideology correspond to those of the environmentalists - they strive to reduce the burden on the environment and to observe ethics with respect to nature. Moreover, in public awareness in Russia, any attempts by former urban residents to leave the city for the countryside are regarded as the establishment of an eco-settlement. In recent years this has prestige and gives the chance to obtain financing.

At present among the ecological practices in Kitez one can number the selective collection of trash (paper is burned in the stoves, organic wastes are fed to the animals or added to the compost piles, iron and glass are put into the foundations of the houses), cultivation without the application of chemical fertilizers, and explaining to the children the rules of conduct in the forest (one must not needlessly break off branches, pull up flowers, throw away litter).
Many of the Kitezhians’ ecological ideas can not be put into action without additional financing. If the necessary financing is obtained, the community members are ready to organize children’s ecological camps on their territory, clean up ponds, modernize the toilets, carry out expert evaluations of future building sites and the consequences of this or that project, or to build an eco-dome.

XIII. PLANS FOR DEVELOPMENT

Speaking at the conference on sustainable development in Findhorn in summer 1998, D. Morozov said: “Now there are two tasks before us - to live through this winter in a normal way and to secure a transformation of all systems of work with children in Russia.”

The Kitezhians think that now a working, viable model of a community has been created - the family children’s home. This model is sustainable and more successful than the existing state system of bringing up orphan children, especially considering the fact that in Kitezh, for each child thirty times less is spent than what is officially allocated from the budget for maintaining a child in a children’s home.

There are natural limits on the growth in the size of the Kitezh population. In the opinion of D. Morozov, Kitezh can grow, without harming its sustainability, by 3-4 more families and 15-20 children. The long-term outlook is for the emergence of other similar settlements, which would be linked to each other. On the opinion of the leader “Because serving one large Kitezh will cost ten times as much as maintaining three small ones.” The alumni of Kitezh could organize such settlements which will be networking with one another and represent a “team of villages”, as described by Gillman (1983). As many other intentional communities around the globe, Kitezh represents what Bouvard has described as a ”laboratory for social change” where new miniature self-sufficient, full-featured societies can be developed and reproduce (Bouvard 1975: 189).

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