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ECOVILLAGES IN RUSSIA: MAIN APPROACHES AND ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITES OF DEVELOPMENT

Marina V. Rybakova, Silvia O. Gomanova

Lomonosov Moscow State University

Abstract

The paper describes the main approaches to the new for Russia phenomenon of ecovillages. On the basis of the sociological research existing economic practices of residents of ecovillages were revealed and opportunities for the further development of individual families and as well the entire community were identified.

Key words: *ecovillage, sustainable development, economic practices, economic opportunities, potential of ecovillage.*

Modern social and environmental problems of urban and rural areas do not only contribute to destruction of environment, but also change the nature of personality. At the same time, an increasing number of people from Russia and abroad every year creates a friendly socio-ecological environment in the setting of ecovillages for themselves and their families. Their number is growing in different regions of Russia: according to the Poselenia.ru website, 276 ecovillages were registered so far [Poselenia.ru, 2014] (for comparison, in 2009 there were only 54 of them) [Rybakova, Shchukina, 2012]. Besides, the ecovillages of Russia reached the global level due to their active participation in the projects of Global Ecovillage Network [Global Ecovillage Network, 2013].

R. Gilman was one of the first researchers of ecovillages. In his opinion, the following features are specific for ecovillages:

- human scale (to preserve an atmosphere sense of a friendly community, the upper reasonable limit of the group size is about 500 people). Anthropologists identified that the size of stable communities or villages often does not exceed 500 people;
- a village with all the characteristics of human activity (the ideal size of an ecovillage is defined as small enough, so that all the villagers could know each other and big enough so that it could allow a sufficient diversity both of the population and activities);
- human activities are safely integrated into the natural environment (the ideal coequality between a human being and other forms of life, where people do not try to dominate nature, but rather find a proper place in it; recycling and reuse of resources instead of linear approach, where the sources of renewable energy are used and organic waste is composted, etc.);
- promotion of healthy human development (including balanced and integral development of all the aspects of human life - physical, emotional, mental and spiritual);
- principle of sustainability (aimed at indefinitely long period of time) [Gilman, 2014].

One of the main principles is a principle of sustainability which is based on the concept of sustainable development.

The need of solving the global and local environmental problems in the 70s years of the XX century has led to establishment of international scientific organizations for studying global processes on Earth.

The Our Common Future report of the UN World Commission on Environment and Development made by G.H Brundtland drew attention of the world scientific community to concept of "sustainable development", as a "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" [Ursul A.D., 1998].

Many countries, including Russia, have adopted a variety of programs, regulations, and laws promoting reorientation of society on sustainable development [Decree..., 2014]. The main objectives of sustainable development achievement were reflected in the Agenda 21 [Agenda... 2014].

The concept of sustainable development consists of a complex of components: economic, ecological, social ones (see Figure 1):

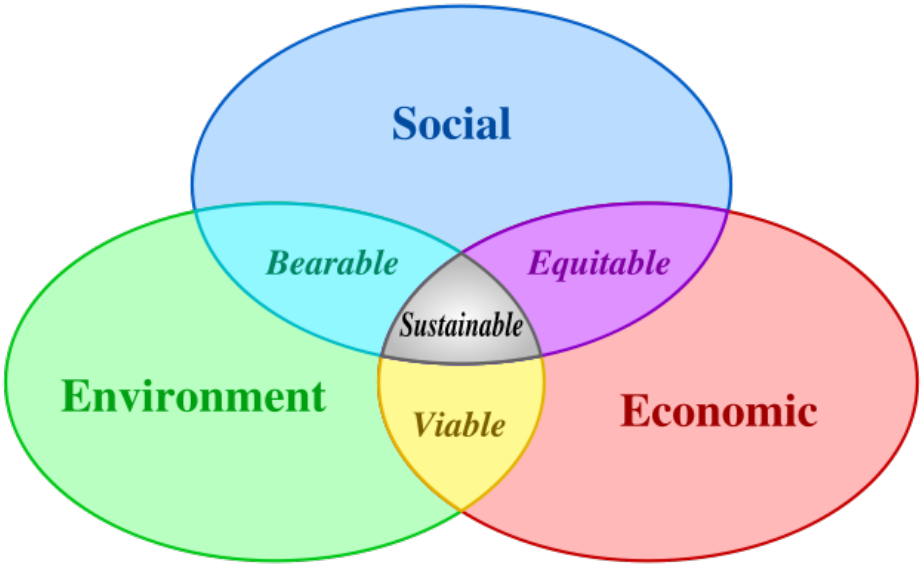


Figure 1. Concept of sustainable development



Figure 2. Model of implementation of sustainable community

Source: [Gaia..., 2014]

- The economic dimension involves application of the comprehensive approach to stimulation of the long-term economic growth.
- Ecological dimension is a search for economically acceptable solutions to global environmental problems and preservation of natural habitat.
- The social dimension involves active participation of a human as a responsible coordinator of activity in the processes that form the scope of his life.

Based on the model of sustainable development, Global Ecovillage Network created a scheme, which includes social, ecological, economic, and attitudinal aspects (Figure 2), explaining the necessity of considering all of four complex aspects [Gaia ..., 2014].

The GEN gives the following definition of the ecovillage term: it is an intentionally created traditional community with all the characteristics of human activity, using local participatory processes to holistically integrate ecological, economic, social, and cultural dimensions of sustainability in order to regenerate social and natural environments. [Global..., 2014].

There are also other definitions. The concept of an "electronic cottage" by E. Toffler [Toffler, 2013] can become one of possible approaches to understanding of ecovillages. According to Toffler, modern civilization is in contradiction with the traditional one and brings a brand new way of life based on renewable energy sources, nuclear family and the structure of this new phenomenon called "electronic cottage." The concept of an "electronic cottage" can be compared with the concept of ecovillages, as they are both high-tech and anti-industrial. According to Toffler, the emergence of "electronic cottages" is closely related to the development of information and communication technologies. All this is going to change the nature of labor: "... the new production system could shift literally millions of jobs out of the factories and offices into which the Second Wave swept them and right back where they came from originally: the home» [Toffler, 2013], just like it happens in ecovillages.

The emergence of "electronic cottages" will contribute to a number of positive developments in various areas of public life: it will strengthen the family and increase the trend of attractive life in small towns and villages; it will also lead to creation of civil society and social activity. It is important that the "electronic cottage creates conditions for spouses and children to work together as a whole ... house work involves deepening of emotional relationships, both at home and in the community" [Toffler, 2013].

The futuristic concept of the "electronic cottage" by A. Toffler anticipates the emergence of the idea of ecovillages construction around the world and reflects their basic principles. A. Toffler believed that if the "electronic cottage" became widespread, it would cause a number of consequences that would affect the general development of society.

The emergence of ecovillages in the Russian scientific communities was discussed within the Noospheric Society Movement as well as in the framework of the Ecopolis Socio-Ecological Union. In these discussions, they attempted to create a unified model of ecovillages, which still has not been implemented. Many works of foreign literature are dedicated to best practices and research of the existing ecovillages (Bouvard, 1975; Gilman, 1983-1992; Kozeny, 1996; Metcalf, 1998; Jonathan Dawson, 2007; Sarah Kessler, 2008; Laura Sevier, 2008).

An interesting approach was suggested by N. Moiseev, who noted that "the transition to the era of noosphere shall require a radical restructuring of our whole being, changing the standards and ideals" [Moiseev, 1990]. V. I. Vernadsky came to a conclusion that the process of changing the nature using power of cultural mankind "becomes the phenomenon of geological scale". This view implies a certain bundle of knowledge accumulated and learned by human, the ability to apply them, as well as strong moral standards consistent with that knowledge. V.I. Vernadsky pays great attention to the development of creative approach to work, introducing human activity as a factor of transition from the biosphere to the noosphere. Thus, the noosphere as a new evolutionary stage in the development of natural envelope of the planet is a biosphere, completely covered and transformed by human labor and active creative human thought and activity [Vernadsky, 1991]. Noospheric approach can be applied in respect of ecovillages, as the activities of ecovillages residents can be observed as a transition from the biosphere to the noosphere

Later, R. Gilman added one more criterion of an ecovillage as an initiatives center [Academic... 2014]. According to the researcher, ecovillages, unlike traditional villages, are a phenomenon of the post-industrial society. Though they also incorporate all the human experience, but they are in no way the regress to the previous way of life.

Then, there were further attempts to study and systematize information on ecovillages. Thus, J. Dawson, the former president of Global Ecovillage Network, identified five basic principles of eco-villages in his book Ecovillages: New Frontiers for Sustainability, issued in 2006:

1) ecovillages appear a public initiative, so they are not financed by the state;

2) ecovillages adhere to and practice the values of community life;

3) ecovillages are not fully dependent on government, corporate and other centralized sources of water, food, housing, energy and other basic resources. On the contrary, they try to obtain these resources by themselves;

4) ecovillages have a strong feeling of shared values (like-mindedness) sometimes defined in spiritual terms;

5) ecovillages often serve as research and demonstration grounds, offering educational experiences for others [Dawson, 2006].

Russian sociologist O.N. Yanitsky observes environmental protest movements and associates them with the emergence of ecovillages, noting that, despite its non-political orientation, the ecovillages movement "is aimed at radical change of the social order". The scientist marks out the following characteristics of the villages:

1) common values (along with individual ecological values);

2) no large-scale social basis;

3) decentralized structure;

4) developed horizontal communication;

5) non-political orientation;

6) the ruling elite is the main foe of ecovillages [Yanitsky, 1998].

In 1998, the Centre for Independent Social Research (St. Petersburg) organized an expedition to two Russian regions (Caucasus and Altai) and conducted a research initiative for creation of ecovillages Atshi (Sahrai village) and Vek RA (Mezmay village). During the expedition, 10 leaders and activists from the community were interviewed. There also an insider's view and a diary were kept. In 2000, there was an expedition to Uymon Valley and to the northern vicinities of Belukha Mountain in Altai to examine and describe the local initiatives to create ecovillages and a regional network of ecovillages and ecovillages movement. The methods of biographical semi-structured interviews, insider's view and study of documents were used for research. One of the research hypotheses was that "the transformation of rural areas to ecovillages in Russia is a manifestation of a global trend" [Ecovillages..., 2004].

A. Shubin defines ecological settlements as alternative settlements, consisting of three groups: protosettlement, settlement and megasettlement [Shubin, 2014]. The alternative settlement consists of elite society and contains features of both traditional (simple life, minimal impact on the environment, social solidarity, self-government, steady way of life), and industrial society (information richness and intellectual elite level) - these are the characteristics that make it alternative. But the most important characteristic is its creative element, a social creativity of its residents. According to Shubin, the initiative to create alternative settlements (including ecovillages) is quite attractive; it will be developed in future, which may benefit the non-catastrophic change of the whole society.

I. Kulyasov supplemented this classification (Figure 3) by describing such phenomenon as an initiative to create ecovillages (ICE). "It always precedes the creation of protoecovillage. After creating the protoecovillage, its main task is the creation of an ecovillage. It is the intention to solve this principal task that is the main difference between protoecovillage and a migrant family living in the countryside and simply trying to reproduce the lifestyle of villagers. Protoecovillage tends to grow into ecovillage to develop sustainably, implementing the alternative values" [Kulyasov, 2003].

An interesting comparative analysis of the use of resources by ecovillages, villagers and city dwellers was made by I.P. Kulyasov [Kulyasov, 2009]. The researcher compared the consumption and discharge of such resources as: water, liquid and solid waste, energy, utility systems, social resources (education, health, leisure). The result of this comparison showed that consumption and discharge of resources were significantly higher in urban areas than those used by rural residents and residents of ecovillages. In their turn, the ecovillages consume the least volume of the above written resources due to the use of traditional rural practices combined with innovative technologies.

Kulyasov I.P. and Kulyasova A.A. give the following definition of ecovillage: "An alternative settlement, where the residents have consciously chosen ecologically sustainable lifestyle" [Kulyasov, Kulyasova, 2008].

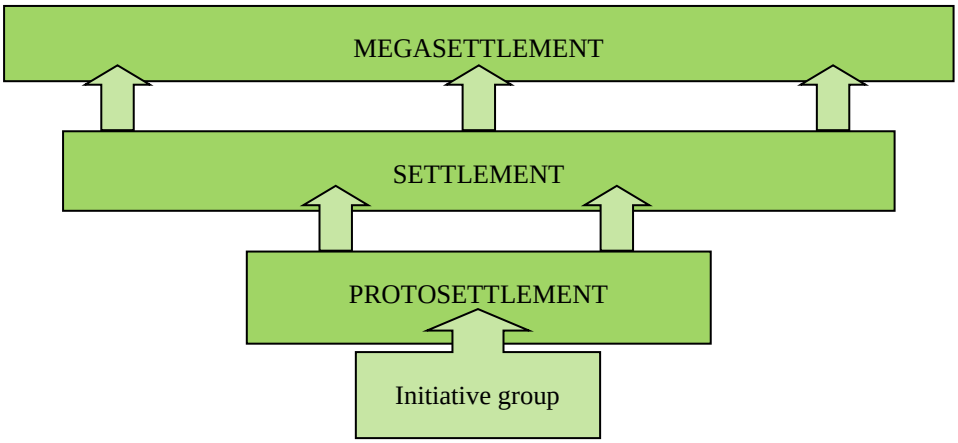
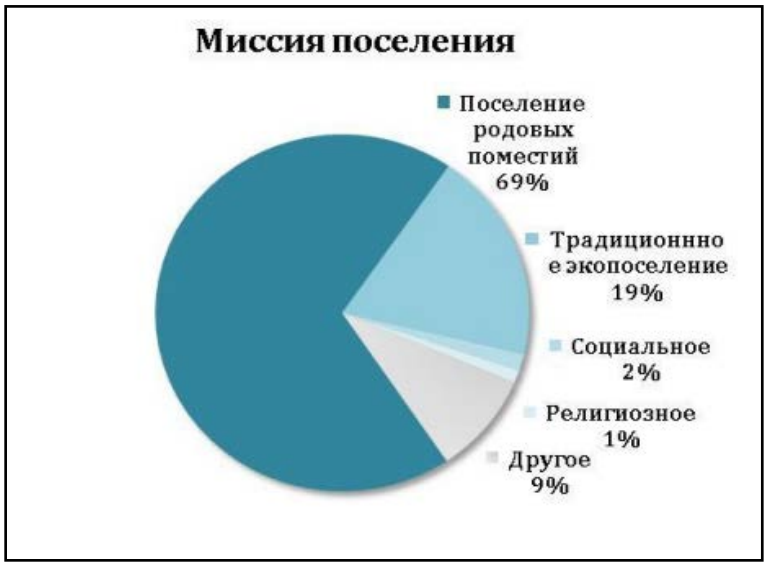


Figure 3. Classification of ecovillages by Shubin and Kulyasov

M.V. Rybakova considers ecovillages as a form of environmental practices [Rybakova, 2008]. M.Y. Shchukina is one of the followers of this concept, who considers ecovillages "as a social ecological practice for the benefits of sustainable development of the society". This group of researchers believes that ecovillages embody the concept of sustainable development in many respects. "Ecovillage, as a social ecological practice, is based on mutual understanding and participation, creates conditions for the establishment of such socio-cultural environment, which contributes to formation and maintaining of a certain lifestyle with minimal impact on the environment" [Rybakova, Shchukina, 2012].



Settlement mission

- patrimony settlements 69%
- traditional ecovillages 19%
- social settlements 2%
- religious settlements 1%
- other 9%

Figure 4. Classification of ecovillages by the ZIRCON group *Source: [Analytical..., 2012]*

The Zircon research group analyzed the alternative settlements in Russia and classified them on the basis of their mission and purpose:

- traditional ecovillages, which mission is "ecological", aimed at restoration and conservation of nature;

- patrimony settlements, which main idea is the concept of self-sufficiency of a family by means of accommodation on their own land;
- social settlements based on the synthesis of two trends - ecological and social, aimed at solution of difficult life situations of unprotected groups of population (for example, orphan children);
- religious settlements - the settlements that combine environmental and spiritual ideas, and settlements representing religious communities - the followers of both traditional and "new" religions.

According to the Zircon research group, most of the settlements registered in the database are the patrimony settlements (69% of the total selection); traditional ecovillages are significantly less in number (19%); social and religious settlements are in the minority - 2 and 1%, respectively. There were also other types of settlements (Slavic, creative, profile communities), which were referred to the category "other" (Figure 4) [Analytical..., 2012].

The analysis of the different theoretical approaches allowed specifying the definition of ecovillages in Russian society: ecovillage is a sustainable patrimony community, creating a uniform sociocultural space and realizing social ecological practices

The authors of this paper performed an empirical research in the January-March, 2013, the object of which were the residents of ecovillages Staroselye, Milenki, Kovcheg and Rodnoye, Ladnoye, Zavetnoye, Solnechnoye, Mirnoye, Chudnoye. The selection of the target group was based on belonging the communities to ecovillages; the important criteria for selecting a settlement were: 1) permanently residing families with children (family coming for summer or weekends were not considered); 2) age of the settlement - at least 5 years (minimal conditions for winter residence were important); 3) territorial remoteness of settlements from Moscow - not more than 300 km (a condition for easier sociological data acquisition). All the selected settlements are in the territory of the Central region of Russia (Figure 5).

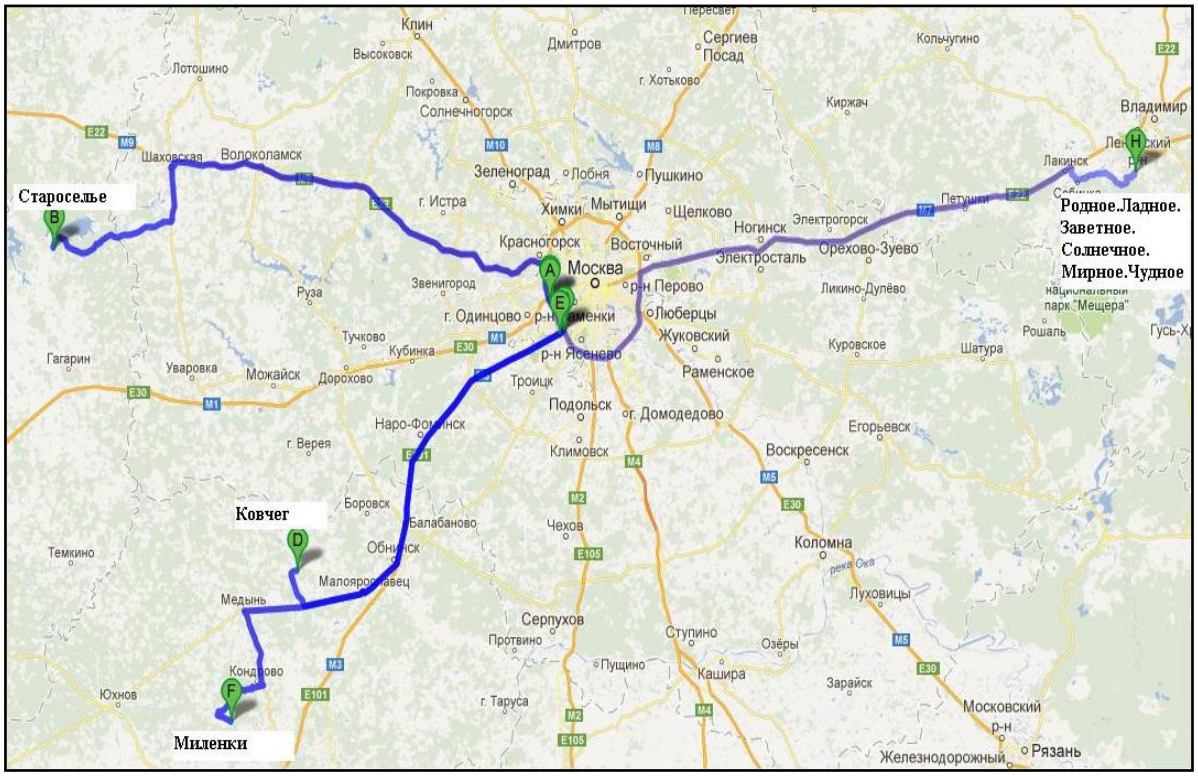


Figure 5. Location of ecovillages relative to Moscow

The settlement Kovcheg is an ecovillage. The settlements Staroselye, Milenki and Rodnoye, Ladnoye, Zavetnoye, Solnechnoye, Mirnoye, Chudnoye describe themselves as patrimony community settlements; however, the definition of ecovillages formulated in the framework of the graduation work, allows us to unite them. The difference in the names is not so important for their residents (except for the residents of the

settlements Rodnoye, Ladnoye, Zavetnoye, Solnechnoye, Mirnoye, Chudnoye, who insist on recognition of their settlement as a patrimony settlement). It is important to mention a reversal tendency that some residents of the Kovcheg ecovillage call their land parcel the "patrimony". "The patrimony settlement" is a Russian interpretation of western "ecovillages".

The selection of respondents was performed using the snowball technique and the analysis of the websites of the settlements and eco-initiatives in Russia. The research included an attempt of multimethod and interdisciplinary approach:

1) analysis of the websites of the ecovillages in the Central region of Russia to find the main characteristics of settlements.

2) deep interviews with the residents of the ecovillages (40 people);

3) "I am in the city, I am in the ecovillage" projective technique accompanied by an additional questions for children to reveal the extent of satisfaction of the children living in the ecovillage (15 children).

The short characteristics of parents and children living in the ecovillage:

Age: 30-58.

Years of marriage: 7-21.

Number of children: 1-5.

Age of children: 1-33.

You can see a brief characteristic of each ecovillage below (Table 1).

The uniform sociocultural space of ecovillages has a positive effect on people, solving some of the problems that occur under urban conditions. The main uniting values for the residents of the settlements are ecological, social and spiritual ones. At first sight, it may seem that the economic opportunities are sidelined. Despite of this fact, the issue of profit is quite acute in many settlements. The author's research of profit issues as such did not reveal them; it may probably be due to the fact that the settlements exist for a long time and the residents has already solved the general problems of living arrangements.

The system of economic activity is based on a combination of personal and collective labor. There are relations within the settlements, which are performed in the form of barter, metering of work or gratuitous donation. We can distinguish sharing of knowledge, craft practices and seminars for the residents of the settlements among them. Most of the classes within the ecovillages are free for their residents: *"This is our common activities, our common goal, and exchanging paper pieces is just pointless*" (Ilham and Anna, Kovcheg), part of activities includes the cost of expandable materials (for example, for classes in felting, students bring wool themselves, or the teacher buys it and they return the money spent on materials). There are some classes that are paid, but they are very few and mostly, they are individual sessions, and the payment is not fixed but agreed. Sometimes the teacher does not set the price, and people decide how and how much to pay for themselves, because they know whether the person needs money or products, and they can share. It is especially important that if a family has no money to pay for the classes, but the child wants to attend them, he or she will be included into the group for free.

The main objective of the economic system of the settlements is aimed at self-sufficiency. In general, the residents of settlements cannot yet be self-sufficient in food grown on their land. It is difficult to obtain 100% of food for a year, but they can provide enough for autumn and winter. *"In general, life on earth is a mixed peasant life. The income consists not of one or two types of work, but of various occupations, routine for a season. <...> In summer we make construction works, everybody is in need for help, we need men; all the people are willing to pay for it, and you can make a pretty penny during summer. As for selling surplus -we have not yet reached full sustainability even for ourselves"(*Maxim and Eva, Staroselye).

Many people live off renting their apartments in the city, some people (programmers, translators, lawyers, designers) can work remotely, and young families receive help from their parents. In the ecovillage, there are also opportunities to get income:

- seminars (construction, livestock breeding, experience of life in the settlement, beekeeping, organic farming). Sometimes they invite guest speakers from other settlements of Russia, CIS countries and abroad, for example, Sepp Holzer's seminars on permaculture are very popular [... Center, 2013];
- work on projects and grants;

- construction of houses, bath-houses, digging of wells;
- assembling and sale of solar panels;
- organization of potteries;
- organization of woodworkers workshops (customized woodcarving);

Table 1. Brief characteristic of the ecovillages studied

	Criterion	**Staroselye**	**Milenki**	**Kovcheg**	**Rodnoye, Ladnoye, Zavetnoye, Solnechnoye, Mirnoye, Chudnoye**
1.	Location	Smolensk oblast	Kaluga Oblast	Kaluga Oblast	Vladimir Oblast
2	Approximate remoteness from Moscow (from MOSCOW AUTOMOBILE RING ROAD)	200 km	200 km	130 km	200-250
3	Year of foundation	1999	2006	2001	2000
4	Legal status	Nonprofit partnership	Svetlodar Nonprofit partnership	Rural settlement	Nonprofit partnership
5	Legal description	Ownership	Lease	Lease	Ownership
6	Number of families residing in winter	More than 35 families	More than 40 families	More than 50 families	More than 100 families
7	Number of children residing in winter	More than 40 children	More than 50 children	More than 70 children	More than 150 families
8	Availability of free land parcels	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
9	Official website	http://xn--80akaxnlfdf0i.xn--p1ai/	http://www.milenki.ru/index.php	http://www.eco-kovcheg.ru/	http://rodnoe.info/this.html
10	Previous residence of ecovillages	Various regions of Russia, Germany	Various regions of Russia, Greece, Germany, Canada	Various regions of Russia, Turkmenistan, Germany	Various regions of Russia, Germany
11	Professions	Constructor, economist, lawyer, teacher of Russian and literature, psychologist, lawyer, dentist, Corporate Banking manager, designer	Linguist, lawyer, constructor, engineer, massage therapist, designer, car mechanic, teacher of geography and ecology, designer, doctor, guide, philologist	Economist, electrical engineer, pianist, constructor, teacher of a flute class, doctor	Doctor, lawyer, artist, lawyer, musician, bartender, lifeguard, seamstress, athlete, chemical engineer, architect, guitarist, rocket engineer, watchmaker, police colonel

12	Education	Higher or several higher educations	Vocational high education, higher or several higher educations	Higher or several higher educations, MBA	Higher or several higher educations

Figure 6 shows the major income opportunities in the ecovillage.

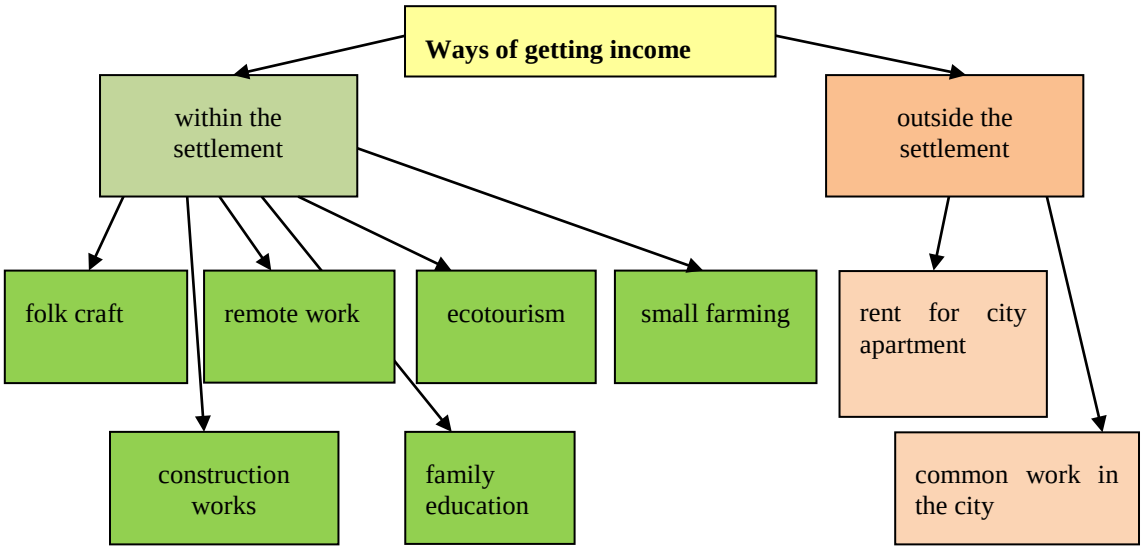


Figure 6. Opportunities of getting income in ecovillages

- organization of ecological excursions;
- sale of medicinal herbs and teas, honey, sale of seeds;
- sale of natural cosmetics;
- sale of soap and hand-made dolls;
- animal products (as for animals breeding, slaughter is forbidden in all the settlements, people sell milk, cheese, eggs, etc.);
- accommodation of guests in the and on the land.

The full range of services of a settlement can be found on the official websites. Each of the studied settlements has a section on the website, dedicated to products and services offered in the ecovillage:

- Staroselye - Our ads section: Fair and We invite to excursions [Staroselye, 2014];
- Milenki, Fair section: Woodworkers Workshop, Internet-fair, Privolye Horse camp [Milenki, 2014];
- Kovcheg: Our products and services section [Kovcheg, 2014];
- Rodnoye: Our store section [Rodnoye, 2014].

The products are sold not only through the websites, but also at fairs, organized by initiative groups in the settlement and outside. The residents of Staroselye have an opportunity to sell their products in their own shop in Moscow in the All-Russia Exhibition Centre.

Also, families whose children are on family training receive the state compensation in the amount of approximately 80,000 rubles (according to parents); this money is spent for children (buying literature, office supplies, clothes, etc.). All the residents say that in the ecovillage they need far less money than in the city.

The money the residents earn is enough to go to the city with children, buy some clothes, visit museums, theatres, exhibitions, cinemas, pay extra classes, etc. It is important that a family life with children in ecovillages takes far less money than in the city. As the respondents note, to provide a comfortable residence in the settlement, they need about 20,000 rubles a month on the average for a family up to 5 people, excluding construction costs. This amount may be reduced to 10,000 rubles, if the family is basically self-sufficient in food. These amounts are rather conventional, since the costs can vary depending on:

- season, for example, in winter trips to the city are organized more often, and by the end of winter food stocks in some families run low;
- size of a family and number of children;
- individual needs of each family;
- size of subsidiary farm, etc.

The existing economic practices promote the increasing number of the citizens, ready to build a new social reality within Russian ecovillages. But to provide sustainable life, new directions of economic development are needed, as many of the existing ones may run their course.

The possible ways of economic development of Russian ecovillages are: innovative and educational grounds of green construction, agriculture and cultivation of environmentally friendly products, research, ecotourism, creation of eco-hotels, children and youth environmental camps. The economic potential of ecovillages can let us reach a new level of development.

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