ECOLOGICAL SETTLEMENT AS A SELF-GOVERNMENT MODEL IN RURAL AREAS

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There is a clear need in rural areas for improved methods of self-government. This study examines the most effective approaches to administration in rural communities. What are the most promising types of rural community management? We aim to assess trends in rural self-rehabilitation and development, including an international analysis of ecological and family homestead settlements as models of future society. These models represent an evolution of the traditional village capable of improving the population's quality of life. Family homestead settlements are the most common form of ecological settlement in Ukraine and foster family values, patriotism to the Homeland and effectively demonstrate successful self-government practices. Governance is achieved by way of the Veche, a collective authority, as well as through public organizations, public-private partnerships, regional and international cooperation.

Keywords: administration; ecological villages, family homesteads, family homestead settlement, rural communities, self-governance, smart-community, social cohesion.
JEL Codes: D83, O10, R28, Q01, Q18.

1. Introduction

The urbanization of the world economic system, where 70 percent of people now live in cities and urban agglomerations, leads to environmental, demographic, cultural and economic problems that prompt solutions by way of sustainable development mechanisms (Metson, 2018; Blay-Palmer, 2018), community development networks (Christian, 2003; Gilman, 2013; Meulen, 2013; Vidickiene, 2013) and improved public administration (Garnett, 2017). Among the problems of urbanization, particularly acute are health (Amoah, 2018), education and ecology (Gao, 2018, Kumar, 2018). Commonly implemented solutions include green technologies (Sulich, 2018), urban-to-rural migration (Minder, 2012) and the strengthening of communities (More, 2018).

How can the local community ensure its successful development? This paper aims to substantiate mechanisms of smart community management by 1) identifying administration challenges in rural areas, and 2) complementing existing rural development strategies with improved public administration practice. The study includes an analysis of ecological settlements and family homestead settlements around the world as models of future society. These models represent an evolution of the traditional village capable of improving the population's quality of life.

The methodological basis of this study is a dialectical and systems approach to rural socio-economic phenomena, analyzing both the influence of government authorities and local initiatives in increasing socio-ecological and economic potential. Logical abstraction has been used to determine the research problems, produce theoretical generalizations, and formulate the working hypothesis and conclusions. We have also used Acts of parliament, open access data of the State Statistics Committee of Ukraine, and academic works of domestic and foreign scientists. Definitions are based on analysis of correct terminology as well as operationalization of concepts. The fundamental aspects of multi-dimensional sustainable development in rural areas have been derived by synthesis, scientific abstraction, induction and deduction. The socio-economic foundations of the creation of ecological settlements and family homestead settlements were determined using a structured interview method. During the study period, 2013–2017, we conducted interviews with 100 rural residents in six regions of Ukraine. Respondents were aged between 22–67 years, of which 52% were female and 48% male. 80% of respondents were inhabitants of ecological settlements or family homestead settlements. Thirty-five interviews were conducted by way of a questionnaire made up of 52 questions, and twelve were unstructured conversations with representatives of Ukrainian environmental movements. Respondents had variously achieved higher education (80%), incomplete higher education (10%), secondary schooling (4%), middle schooling (3%) and other (3%). Respondents' occupations were natural construction (30%), handcraft and working from home (IT, design, online business, etc.) (29%), retired (19%), social sector (7%), agriculture (6%), forestry (1%), unemployed (temporary earnings) and industry (8%). The sample is thus representative of a wide range of people. Information about the development of family homestead settlements was collected by the authors during communication with their representatives, members of initiative groups, and gathered by way of field research and analysis of published documents, mass media and social networks. The results of the research are designed for use in the educational process of the Zhytomyr National Agroecological University and to inform improved management practice in rural communities.

2. Theoretical basis for the development of ecological settlements

The awareness that in megacities there is little or no succession of generations, no transfer of socio-cultural experience, a loss of one's own individuality, ingraining of bad habits, and inheritance of false life stereotypes and values – and therefore a need to change the methods of state governance – is mainly led by young people from

rural areas (Minder, 2012). The primary social-humanist goal of creating ecological settlements is to cultivate a careful attitude to nature, people, family, health and friendly communication (Table).

Table. Stages of development of ecological settlements

Period	Essence of the ecological movement (representative countries)	Main conceptual paradigm
1940s	Local initiatives and resistance to war (USA, Europe)	Ecological settlements as self-sufficient systems, preserving natural resources and ensuring the self-development of inhabitants, seeking cooperative solutions and safe technologies.
1960–1970	Local initiatives to counteract the technocratic development of society, resistance to Vietnam War (USA, Europe)	
1970–1980	Condemnation of modern civilization and searching for alternatives (USA, Europe, Turkey)	Development of spirituality, personal psychological and physical improvement, formation and development of a healthy harmonious society.
Early 2000s	Attempt to transition and transform society through understanding the need for sustainable development (USA, Europe)	Change of outlook through understanding the significance of environmental problems and their consequences; migration from cities to rural areas
Early 2000s	Family homestead settlements (post-Soviet states)	Rational use of local resources (encouraging energy-saving practices, livelihood sufficiency, waste elimination, conservation of natural places, renewable energy sources) and the enhancement of natural potential (permaculture practices, watershed restoration, natural construction, multifunctional development, improved public administration)

Sources: GEN, 2018; Kulyasova, 2008; Minder, 2012; Rybakova, 2012; Walker, 2005.

Ecological and spiritual movements have spread in the United States, Europe, Australia, Canada, South America and the post-Soviet states as a way of overcoming the asymmetries and contradictions of technocratic development, to solve environmental problems, and satisfy people's interest in their historical and cultural roots. The overwhelming majority of successful ecological settlements (e.g. Ithaca, Fidhorn, Ferma, Zegg, Auroville, etc.) are engaged in creativity, art, crafts, and physical and spiritual work in harmony with nature (Meulen, 2013; Pranskevičiūtė, 2015; Vidickiene, 2013). Prioritizing sustainable development and self-government at the community level has also allowed some settlements to obtain official status (for example, Kovcheg settlement in Russia).

The main motivations for ecological settlements are both ideological and material, to encourage others towards an ecological way of life and to achieve self-sufficiency. The aspiration to self-sufficiency involves both the material needs of residents and effective self-government. It aims to restore the natural potential of local resources, as well as to promote physical and moral health among people, achieve spiritual development, raise the level of social responsibility, employment and fertili-

ty, and attract investment. Urban residents who create settlements outside city limits attempt to materialize a model of their own ideal future society through interaction with nature. They establish partnership and cooperation between people and organizations both in the settlement and outside, thus remaining connected to broader social processes (Figure).

Ecological settlements		
Basic forms of employment by frequency	work from home	**Community Activities**
	seasonal labour	
	rotational method	
	full-time work outside the settlement	
	full-time work inside the settlement	

	limited to the local area and involve intrinsic and extrinsic projects according to community values
	nature-centric tasks
	self-organized
	self-identified
	socially active

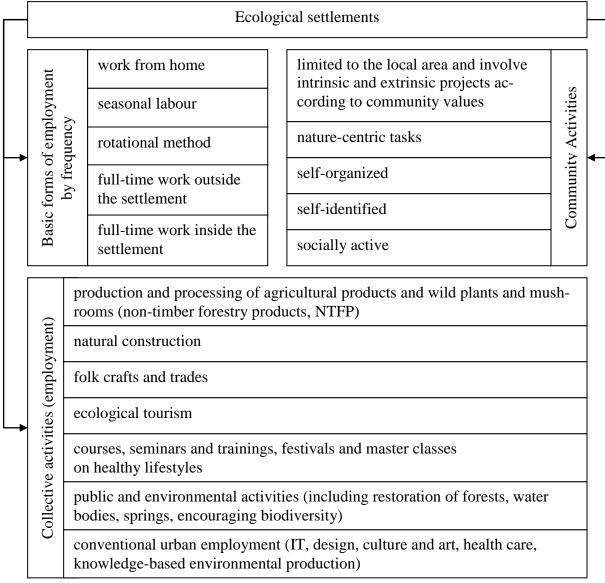| **Collective activities (employment)**	production and processing of agricultural products and wild plants and mushrooms (non-timber forestry products, NTFP)
	natural construction
	folk crafts and trades
	ecological tourism
	courses, seminars and trainings, festivals and master classes on healthy lifestyles
	public and environmental activities (including restoration of forests, water bodies, springs, encouraging biodiversity)
	conventional urban employment (IT, design, culture and art, health care, knowledge-based environmental production)

Fig. Features and characteristics of ecological settlements
Sources: compiled from research data (GEN, 2018; Minder, 2012; Walker, 2005).

Formed as community organizations, ecological settlements typically operate according to direct democracy principles and make decisions by direct open voting. Each resident participates in the decision-making of the settlement (Dawson, 2006; Litfin, 2014). Such organs of local self-government can be registered as legal entities with the status of educational institutions, NGOs, farm cooperatives or similar. Activities in the settlement are financed both by residents' own funds and through state or local budgets, grants and targeted finance.

3. Self-government of family homesteads in Ukraine

Self-government and sustainable development of local communities in Ukraine is influenced by market mechanisms, public administration, and the activities of citizens and organizations. Development is constrained by insufficient leadership on the part of the state or civil society institutions in delivering education, providing information or representing a beneficial ideology. Increasing self-organization in rural communities reduces the transaction costs of business and life by activating social capital. Community development objectives can be implemented either through direct participation in the self-government process or by delegation of authority. At present, however, the effectiveness of self-government mechanisms is limited — 60% of Ukrainian society is largely excluded from public institutions and activities and have a poor experience of cooperation with authorities. On the other hand, the modern model of local self-government in fact requires activation of public participation in addressing issues of local importance and supporting the broader context of power decentralization.

Unlike ordinary rural communities, family homestead settlements (which make up 85% of ecological settlements in Ukraine) employ local self-government mechanisms through effective public organization and administration. The primary management mechanism of family homestead settlements is the Veche, a self-organized civil society institution that gains its authority by way of universal community-wide discussion. To a large extent, this recalls the organizational and legal practice of Slavic ancestors (Grigorenko, 2012, Kovryakova, 2014, Treskov, 2012). Operating without additional external financing, family homestead settlements are able to develop thanks to their own internal potential. Their number is constantly increasing, providing a strong example of effective governance for new rural settlement. Not only do family homestead settlements reflect the functions of good governance, they also support local eco-tourism, international cooperation and beautification of the local area.

Public organizations (NGOs) registered within family homestead settlements are another effective community management mechanism. These community NGOs unite people of similar initiative who in the course of their work reveal existing problems and identify solutions through interaction and interviews with the local population. These organizations are formed to carry out creative activity; as such, they also initiate and realize material changes. Such organizations allow for cooperation between residents and authorities and help to avoid future conflict. This can be seen in practice within the family homestead settlements "Space of Love" and "Granidub" in the Zhytomyr region of Ukraine. In these examples, the organizations specialize in specific aspects of development: in the settlement "Space of Love", the group addresses education, while "Granidub" focuses on permaculture design. These communities unite residents and like-minded people from all over Ukraine and also welcome international guests. They attract investments and donations of money, labor and practical materials which contribute to the development of the settlement, improve communication among local and regional populations, develop specialist skills

through the involvement of guest artisans, and promote volunteering as an open mode of community engagement.

At present, initiative groups wanting to develop family homestead settlements in Ukraine lack a framework of official regulation at the government level. Typically, they try to use existing legislation found in the Land Code, the federal laws *On Private Farms*, *On Farms*, *On Cooperation* and others which give citizens the right to obtain land from the government. However, the procedure for obtaining land is currently complex, non-transparent and can be abused by authorities. The challenges of establishing family homestead settlements are compounded by ideological differences between people and the state. While there are many supporters, the principles of ecological movements also face opposition from within society; there is also the phenomenon of path dependence whereby consciousness retains inertia from previous habits. Sometimes settlers themselves are not patient, determined or efficient enough to achieve their goals, or else they lack experience or doubt their own capabilities.

On the other hand, several factors also contribute to the successful establishment of family homestead settlements. Settlers typically have a high level of education (80% have achieved tertiary education) and are middle aged with adequate personal assets and experience (the mean age is 35 years). Inhabitants of successful settlements are highly organized, have a desire to learn and experiment, and have the ability to attract investment and business activity from a variety of sources, creatively expanding their income streams in order to protect against the fluctuations of the market economy. Most of all, they achieve the local community's development aims through effective self-government. The most effective technique is the "foresight" method, where the settlement's inhabitants participate in comprehensive brainstorming to find the optimal solution. Through this process participants receive practical social education by forming a collective model of the future, creating a stable, positive image and devising practical means for materializing it. For example, the settlement "Granidub" uses this technique to manage permacultural space. Through discussion the settlement management authority (Veche), including both residents and invited experts and guests, identifies problems, finds ways to solve them, generates ideas, exchanges experiences (including foreign ones: there were representatives of Holland and Israel present), evaluates the available solutions, selects the best ones, optimizes them, distributes the terms of implementation, makes a plan of work, formalizes its decision, sums up, and then practically implements the planned tasks.

3. Conclusions

1. Alternative forms of society have emerged in order to overcome the asymmetries and imbalances of the technocratic world. Different forms of ecological settlement have arisen around the world as spiritual and material models of future society. Ecological settlements have developed modes of self-government based on a united ideology towards harmony with nature and a healthy lifestyle. They act on the principles of self-development.

2. Family homestead settlements are the most widespread form of ecological set-

tlement in Ukraine (85%). They represent patriotism and strong family values, operate cooperative businesses, public-private partnerships, regional and international cooperation and maintain effective self-government practices. Within these territories the Veche (collective authority) governs by jointly selecting issues, initiating discussion, creating a plan of action, and practically implementing the agreed decisions. We call this the "foresight" method. Such instances of effective self-government reduce costs for the state, increase efficiency and improve satisfaction with civic administration.

4. Suggestions and recommendations

Further research is necessary into the development of rural communities and cooperation between government authorities and residents of ecological communities and family homestead settlements. Effective self-government could be advanced by a transparent, simplified legal process to obtain land for the establishment of family homestead settlements.

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EKOLOGINĖS GYVENVIETĖS – SAVIVALDOS KAIMO TERITORIJOJE MODELIS

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Santrauka

Kaimo vietovėse būtina tobulinti savivaldos metodus, todėl šiame tyrime nagrinėjami efektyviausi kaimo bendruomenių administravimo metodai. Kokios perspektyviausios kaimo bendruomenių valdymo rūšys? Šio straipsnio tikslas – įvertinti teritorinės savivaldos plėtros tendencijas ekologinių gyvenviečių pavyzdžiu. Analizuojama aplinkos gyvenviečių ir protėvių namus (dvarus), kaip būsimo visuomenės modelio, taip pat – kaimo raida, kuri gali pagerinti gyvenimo kokybę. Protėvių namai Ukrainoje, kaip labiausiai paplitusi forma ekologinių gyvenviečių, sudaro sąlygas išsaugoti šeimos vertybes ir patriotizmą Tėvynei bei pademonstruoti savivaldos praktiką per nevyriausybines organizacijas, viešojo ir privačiojo sektorių partnerystę, per komunas ir tarpvalstybinio bendradarbiavimo veiklą.

Raktiniai žodžiai: administravimas; ekologinės gyvenvietės, dvarai, protėvių namai, kaimo bendruomenės, savivalda, protingos bendruomenės, socialinė sanglauda.

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