

Ecological Civilization, Ecovillages, and Household Economies – from a Hungarian Perspective

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The basic aim of this article is to point out that families are by their very nature oriented towards the common good of the family like natural needs, happiness and meaningful life in a long-term perspective for all the members of the family, in contrast to western societies oriented towards privately owned commodities and governed primarily by materialistic viewpoints serving primarily the greed of a small minority in a short-term perspective. We need a civilization that serves the common good on a long-term basis. Our point here is that such a civilization should be based on the well-being of families.

Family Household Economy

We can define the 'family' as the persistently co-living, mutually interdependent parents and their offsprings, including two, three or four generations. Families are bonded together by naturally given, strong emotional, mental and economic ties, values and interests. Family life is natural directed towards harmony, health and happiness on a long-term basis.

The natural aim of families is the long-term, persistent well-being of the family, its communities and society, including material, emotional and intellectual prosperity. Families by their very nature take care of the well-being of their families and contribute to the material, emotional and *spiritual wealth of their communities. It is the family that produces the future generations of the society, with their habits, values and mentality, and prepare*

their children to fit into their communities and society. Families had a fundamental role in shaping the manners, customs and attitudes of the future generations, and these manners represented the foundations of the rules of their communities and societies.

Hungarian people used to live in 'village communities' based on families. Ancient Hungarian society had been organized as an organic union of families and their larger units like gens, preserving the natural order of descent. One of the significant ethnic groups of Hungarians, the Palóc people, living around Mátra Hills, preserving ancient traditions especially well, used to live in families including 30-50 members. The population of Palóc families decreased significantly only after the big social changes arising during the 19th century. Around 1,900 AD in most Palóc villages big families lived in community, sharing their work and cultivating their land together (Manga János 1979, 57-61). The peasant families strived to highly sophisticated, multilateral self-sufficiency and had been zealous to preserve and improve the richness of the life of their natural environment and biodiversity (Andrásfalvi 2019). Family communities carried out advanced forest-economy, by their persistent work maintaining the ecological balance of the soils, forests and the healthy ratio of the balaniferous and fruit-trees as well as all the trees offering forages and eatages for their animals, the grasslands nourished by irrigation channels and protected from the winds, creating such gallery forests and parklands that can be compared to present landscape-gardens of English nobles (ibid.). As surviving records show, the land of one small family of 6-8 members could produce, characteristically, a few tons of fruits a year a thousand years ago.

All these circumstances started to change from 972 AD, when the Holy Roman Empire, suffering catastrophic military defeats from the Hungarian army of Árpád, applied secret diplomacy, corrupting Hungarian magnates and organizing secret military interventions to Hungary in peacetime under the egis of Christianization. By such tools it succeeded to westernize Hungary in an increasing rate, replacing ancient Hungarian symbols, system of institutions, rule of law and way of economy by Western ones, and

transplanting more and more significant population of German and Roman noblemen and giving them privileges over Hungarians, and giving them huge Hungarian lands as their private property. During a few centuries the new, western-originated landocracy radically reshaped the lands of the Carpathian Basin. The ancient, natural way of life and the Nature-nourishing economy cooperating harmoniously with Nature had been gradually replaced by an artificially created landocracy and western economy based on private property and commodity production working on the principle of profit maximalization. Yet ancient Hungarian family communities survived in their largely hostile westernized society, although slowly but systematically wiping out Hungarian traits in a rate that at the turn of the 19th-20th century these large families had been largely marginalized. Commodity production has been characterized by a way of life based on the principle of minimal investments and maximal profits. This western way of life became increasingly shaped by large-scale production and industrial agriculture. This tendency led to more and more threatening consequences for the people, worsening climate, increasing the pollution of the environment and to the present ecological crisis. This kind of the 'evolution of society' had remained largely unobserved and unnoticed even when it changed the physical geography of the Carpathian Basin in a drastically large rate.

The ancient Hungarians had been conducive and boosting the favorable natural processes by their multilateral and long-term activities nourishing, enhancing and enriching the natural fauna, embellishing the landscape by protecting and augmenting it. They lived an ecological lifestyle, practiced careful water economy, including long-term grassland and forest economy, and developing their knowledge and culture. In a natural society built on families, society is built on fundamental values developing the happiness and meaningful life of their citizens.

Families have an enormous past

The development of bipedalism during the evolution of humanity had a

shrinkening effect on the size of the pelvis and the birth canal. Around 2-3 million years before the human cranium begin to increase and had been grown from cca. 3-400cm³ to 1300-1500cm³ in average. Due to these processes, the embryonic stage of human development led to newborn babies needing a much longer period of parenting. These evolutionary processes prolonged and strengthened family ties enormously in a rate that led to the formation of the permanent family characteristic to humans. Based on such arguments we can estimate that the era of families extends to millions of years.

It is well known that the development of the Broca-centers, responsible for the human ability to speak, can be traced down to 35 million years (Richard E. Leakey - Roger Lewin 1986; Simoes et al. 2010). As linguist Daniel L. Everett, professor of the Bentley University, Massachusetts argued, the origin of human language has at least a 1,9 million years past (Everett 2017). The development of human language, being the tool of communication, assumes the presence of large natural communities of families. Natural communities of families are the gens, tribes, and nations. This argument substantiates that families had an enormous past. Archaeological facts underpin this argument. In Area A of the Happisburgh archaeology site in Norfolk, Britain, 800-thousand-year-old footprints of humans probably forming a family had been found. "The glimpse of the past that we are seeing is that we have a family group moving together across the landscape" (Barbara J. King 2014). In the Carpathian Basin, archaeologists had found a large town giving home for 600 people near to Avas, in the neighborhood of Miskolc. It is this ancient town where a highly sophisticated heat treatment technology of flints first developed around 90 000 - 100 000 years ago and then propagated in Eurasia (Ringer 2006). It seems safe to assume that families has a past of more than hundred thousand years.

Village communities

Human communities can be classified into two fundamental types: the first follows a lifestyle in cooperation with Nature, the second a way of life which

do not cooperate with Nature. Cooperation with Nature occurs by respecting the ecological balance of Nature and biodiversity. Denying cooperation with Nature results on a long-term basis the modification of the environment out of balance. Following such an unbalanced lifestyle results in environmental and human damages proportional to the length of the unbalanced period.

Shifting out of balance and destruction of biodiversity usually starts when the local society or its governing group claim to commodities produced in other regions, and to acquire them it starts to produce commodities in a quantity far surpassing the needs of the local society. Such an activity assumes establishing large sized estates owned privately and the development of legal and technical conditions necessary. In other words, the natural system of values becomes replaced by a new one prioritizing, instead of the common need of sufficing the basic human needs for food, community and culture, it becomes shifted for a lifestyle preferring the financial interests of a small minority based on commodity production (Andrásfalvi 2009, 11). Such a lifestyle becomes alienated from the basic human need for living in community with Nature and other species by regular and harmonious everyday activities, a need of basic importance for human health, well-being and quality of life (ibid.). Natural village communities are focused on communal values, harmony with Nature and feeling of life in a long-term perspective. Village communities are usually formed by gradually more and more populous families. Life in village communities had been based on the decisions of the village community assuming the healthy sense of justice.

Human connections with the land depend on our communities. In communities where fair ethical principles developed during hundreds of thousand years become violated, the values of the community, including the basic relation of humans with the land, become get spoiled. Such a situation leads to the destruction of the land, the basic condition of human survival. The strength of the community lies in their sense of justice (Andrásfalvi 2013). It is this sense of justice that determines the usage of the environment. In Hungary, village communities ensured equal benefits for their members from their commonly owned forests, meadows, pasture-lands and flood-plains. It is

the interest of all members that the community enjoys priority, because the land is the basis for satisfying our natural needs.

Since ancient times the majority of Hungarians had been live in village communities in freedom and vigor, following a lifestyle favoring health, communal happiness and meaningful life, cultivating the land, - living in intimate relationship with Nature. Villagers obtained their food and all products needed from Nature, satisfying all its basic human needs necessary for living a well-balanced life, enriching the society by their children and social activities (Andrásfalvi 2019). They rejected all violence, contest and rivalry, murder, theft, misuse of power. They lived in durable marriage, rejecting sexual libertinage. The village consisting from one or more families, involved usually 30, 40 or more people and had been led and managed by the one who served community in the most self-sacrificing and suitable manner” (Andrásfalvi 2017).

The central role of community and awareness of its primary importance has been preserved most fully among Hungarians in the Székely nation (in Latin: the Siculs). One of the characteristics of Székely legal system is, at variance to the one familiar in the Western civilization, the central role and priority of communal rights. The legal system of Western civilization is built on the civil law based on the primacy of private property. The primacy of private property leads on a long timescale to the deterioration of the society. Time becomes shifted “out of joint”, as Shakespeare wrote. The Székely life-, community-, and Nature-centered worldview and legal system is closely related to that of the people of the Silk Road and to ancient Chinese society.

The Székely's constitute an independent, self-contained people speaking a more ancient version of Hungarian language. They have their own legal system and institutions. They live at their ancient homeland, the Székely Land, in Latin ‘Terra Siculorum’, in Transylvania. The Transylvanian Székely Land had been the exclusive property of the Székely nation, to which Hungarian kings had no rights. When the “rooted Székely” sells its estate, he is obliged to offer it to it first to his “ancestral relatives in his bloodline” (Székely Archives V. 139); if he sells it to an outsider, the blood relatives have the

right to take it back. The Székely nation has been a separate national entity by their public law and political constitution since the most ancient times until the XLIII. law article in 1868 became promulgated (Ákosfalvi 1937, 20). It had its own freedom (*libertas Siculorum*), right (*lex Siculorum*), custom (*consuetudo Siculica*) and law (*ius Siculicale*). In top of all these, all of them had been considered as nobles, and they enjoyed tax exemption. Besides the Székely's, no other nation of the world enjoyed such privileges collectively in the medieval ages (Rugonfalvi 1939, 151). In antiquity, we know only one such people: the people of the Magi. We note that Werbőczy in his book *Tripartitum*, written between 1504 and 1514, writes that the people of Transylvania are the Scythians, who now call themselves in a somewhat modified form of the name 'Scythians' as Siculs or Székelys (the Hungarian pronunciation is very similar to 'Siculs').

In the Székely nation justice is measured by the national assembly. Justice is what the ethical sense of the community tells (Rugonfalvi Kiss István, 1939, 116). The court of justice sits in circle outdoors, and the people is all around them, listening in rapt attention. The arbiter who deteriorates from the laws of God and country under the pression of pray or gifts and becomes biased, should be exiled, all his estates should be burnt, livestock given to the community, and should never live in the Land of Székelys. Anybody who would make efforts to his [the faulty arbiter] stay or return should be punished in the same manner" (Székely Constitutio, 1505). A very similar law in Hungarian legal history is known as the Scythian law. Village communities had an open eye on their environment, they respected, defended its well-being and cultivated it, contributing to its well-being. They had the right to initiate, gave their opinion and decide collectively. The task of reckoning did not belong exclusively to the arbiter. Punishment could be initiated also by the people of the village and regulated by the laws of the village.

Laws of the village are well known from the archives (Imreh István 2011). These laws represent strategic, long-term perspectives. Long-term perspectives can be realized only by people creating a suitable order in their life and environment (Balázs Lajos 2016). The arbiter had been selected by its merits

and competency. Laws tell that when the laziness of the arbiter causes harms or damages to the village, he has to pay a penalty to the village, an amount necessary to regain the unharmed, intact state. If somebody does not show up at the village assembly, he has to pay a fine. Unhandsome, boisterous, disturbing and fatiguing behavior, and neglect was prohibited at the assembly; self-righteousness was strictly prohibited. The oath, the handshake and the spoken word had been such a high respect that it put its signet the agreement. Laws punished people littering on the streets or the streams. Centuries ago streams had been rich in trouts. They strongly punished anybody polluted the rivers e.g. by dung water, dirt or waste. The healthy state of the community depended sensitively on the cleanness of the streams. Livestock get their water from the streams. If the water of the stream had been polluted, it damaged the animals.

Village laws obliged villagers to maintain their porta clean and tidy. Székely villages had been closed communities. Admission becoming a new member of the village had been a strictly regulated ceremony. Newcomers must present their request at Christmas time, and they had to pay the entrance fee at that time. New members had been carefully selected. When somebody gained admission, he received the right to use to common grassland, mowing, forest, and the assets of the community. Public work is a natural ingredient of communal life. The village had three kinds of barriers. Grasslands where livestock graze had to have closed barriers in order not to make harm in the regions of the nearby village. The village itself had a barrier. All the roads going out of the village had a gate to ensure that livestock does not go uncontrolled and make harm for the citizens of any other villages. They needed also a pastor controlling the barriers. If the barrier pastors cannot give account of the cause of any harms, they had to pay the fine. Winter forages had been supplied mostly by hay. This is one of the reasons why the grassland had been so highly respected and defended. But when somebody drove their animals to the grassland despite this prohibition, he had been punished for 25 blows by staff. Another law commanded that the midwife make oath before the court to work in the most careful, suitable and

responsible manner. The village had all kinds of workmen, including smiths, securing an almost complete self-sufficiency. Village laws had been instructive in preventing all kinds of harms, impairing any villager, the community or the neighborhood regions.

Forests had been protected and supported by strict laws. Villagers had been allowed to bring away only already fallen trunks and branches for fuel out of the forest. Cutting out a living tree had been prohibited. The villagers went together to clean the forest. Pastoring the forest had been the task of the forest pastor. Tree leaves, fallen acorns had been nourishing the animals. Pastoring the forest had been a highly responsible task. Becoming a pastor had been a village ceremony. The regulations protecting the forest and its ecological balance are telling about a significant wisdom of country lore. They prohibited trade of the trees. Carrying out wood from the forest had been strictly regulated. When somebody takes out more wood from the forest than allowed, he had to pay a fine. Villagers going into the forest picking out e.g. mushrooms or wild apples cannot be accompanied by strangers. Forest pastors had to make an oath. If somebody caused a harm to the forest, it was the forest pastor who had to pay the fine. Village regulations decided about building a school or any other public building. All buildings needed wood. This wood had been put together by all the members of the village community.

Villagers made all efforts to avoid hostility and troublesome situations. They regarded the good feeling of life as a most valuable thing. Everybody knew everybody. They made their best to avoid bywords.

Our ancients were able to live in a meaningful and ordered way necessary for the betterment of the future. Local people knew well their environment, their capacities, traditions, regulations, values and competences. Local people had been capable to judge correctly the consequences of decisions about their social life much better than high officers living far away. It is local wisdom that is the most suitable to evaluate the consequences of decisions about their life.

Peasants living in Hungary before the spread of factory farming and consumer society had been living in a largely self-sufficient way. Village households produced their food, drinks wine, spirits, honey, cheese etc. Women weaved, sew their clothes, and knew the herbs. They had no need to doctors. They knew what to do against cankerworms and other-damaging insects and solved it without pesticides. Houses had been built by the community. Villagers did not buy a lot in the shops. They did not lived their life in a way highly profitable for business circles. At the early 20th century villagers went shopping only to buy sugar or petroleum. Crimes occurred rarely. Villagers lived an ethical life. They did not need lawyers and attorneys. They did not serve the interests of gross businessmen.

Ecovillages, renewal of civic sector activities and folk administration in Hungary today

In the last decades more and more ecovillages became established in Hungary. They are called here as "”, their name translates as 'living villages'. They are characterized by protecting and nourishing the values of their natural environment, carrying forward the organic culture of ancient Hungarian traditions, vivid communal life, strong determination to act for the sake of community, self-sufficiency, and leaving the system of dependencies so powerful in the money-centered societies. These living villages are in general successful. At present, they are largely isolated.

Ancient Hungarian traditions of folk administration are also revived in Hungary in the organization principles of many villages and cities. For example, the system of neighborhoods and the closely related decadal system. It is a social organization based on the selection of the most suitable leaders from each group consisting from 8-15 people living nearby as close neighborhoods. The principle of selecting the best leader from ten is the basis of the next level of social organization in which the best leader is selected on the basis of the groups' sense of justice and ethics from ten 'tizedes' (in English: corps) etc. This system is fitted to the people living on the same

street who elect their 'street captains', in larger cities the 'quarter captains' and 'district captains' etc. This locally-built structure of folk administration when fully built represents the public administration of the people that co-operates with the other form of organization based on expertise and specialties or distribution of work. Both of these natural systems of social organization had been augmented and partially or largely replaced by the official leaders disposed by the western or power system of public administration.

Relations between ecological civilization, ecovillages and family households

It was shown by detailed calculations using data preserved in the archives that in the ancient, natural civilization of Hungary the economy had been multilateral and much more fruitful than the unilateral modern commodity producing economy introduced later on (Andrásfalvi 1973, 2007, 2019, Takács 2001). Social organization at the country level had been highly effective in enhancing the affluence of village communities. The hills of the mountain regions around the Carpathian Basin, as well as along the Silk Road, received a large amount of precipitation while the lowlands in summertime received only a relatively small amount. Recognizing this situation ancient Hungarians decided to draw the surplus of water from the rivers and bring these waters to places where the problem was the insufficiency of water. By building a suitable, monumental irrigation canal system, they succeeded to create much better and closely optimal life conditions in the entire Carpathian Basin. They built canals guiding the waters from the hills to the Basin to irrigate the lowlands in the dry seasons. They developed a management system of water in a way suitable to avoid all the harms of floods by cutting openings on the suitable places on the natural embankments of the rivers and letting the flood to supply the dry lands with plenty of water much needed for their vegetation. As a side-effect, these waters spreading on large territories in a controlled and optimal manner enhanced the moisture content of the air, offering even more suitable conditions for the plants and animals. All these effects together made

the climate of the Great Hungarian Plain not only wet but also closely subtropical.

The system of village communities established a highly sophisticated irrigation canal system securing continuously the optimal conditions of life for plants, animals and humans. The irrigation canals of the Carpathian Basin had a total length of more than half million kilometers, unique in Europe until the industrial revolution. The continuously regulated, monumental and complex canal system working under the law of gravitation required highly organized social work. The result had been spectacular. This water management system was a crucial contribution for the flourishing of life in Hungary in an extraordinary rate, improving the number and quality of fishes in an extraordinary rate as well as the conditions for agriculture and breeding of animals. It was this special water-management economy that supported the relatively very dense population of the Carpathian basin. These canals formed a dense network. As their archaeological and historical study indicates, the number of ancient canals is ten-twenty times higher than that of the modern ones working today in the same region. In the last decades, due to archaeological excavations it became possible to obtain a detailed picture about this flood-centered economy and its water management system due to which medieval Hungary has been famous as one of the richest countries of Europe. By preserving the water surplus of floods in the more than 4000 large fish ponds and regulating it by the monumental canal network, it became possible to use the water for continuous irrigation regulated according to the changing needs. Medieval custom diaries report that one of the most important export product of Hungary had been the fishes. Contemporary traveler reported that besides Norway, Hungary had been the richest in fishes. Travelers also reported that Hungary's rivers were extremely densely populated by fishes. Medieval Hungary had been legendary about its richness in fruits, fishes and livestock.

In contrast, the climate of Hungary at the early 20th century had been categorized as 'wet continental'. Modern 'regulation of rivers' had catastrophic effects making the floods more harmful and changing the climate. Today the

climate of the Great Hungarian Plain became 'dry continental' and larger and larger regions became semi-desertified.

Water is one of the most vital factor needed for life, and the one that is most easily controllable. Therefore water management has a fundamental role for the entire country and its economy. Until the 13th century the Great Hungarian Plain had been covered by gallery forests, fish ponds and beautiful grasslands. The global organization of water management had a central role in creating optimal conditions for the flourishing of village communities and the country as well as optimizing climatic conditions.

If a western citizen do not understand why he is not satisfied with its newest cars, why his family falls apart, why his children live far away from him, and why he has no true friends, why he has to regard a religion or an ideology to respect more than our healthy self-supporting way of life, than it is time to think about the above questions.

Conclusions

Our well-being assumes a fully comprehensive care about our multilateral, short-term and long-term natural needs on a high level. Our natural needs involve healthy nourishment not only materially but also emotionally and intellectually, not only individually but also communally, including our relations with Nature. Material well-being is only one of the conditions needed for a well-balanced well-being. When well-being is reduced to material well-being, it prompts many adversities. After the Western civilization reached the highly developed state of material well-being, further efforts of exclusively materialistic way of life do not serve even the ones who are committed in it.

Commodity producing economy has its beneficial aspects. It is based on private property, and private property is beneficial in enhancing individual ambitions so important for the future of mankind. Commodity producing economy highly appreciates individual performance, promotes long-distance trade and exchange of idea. Private property and commodity production has

its place in the civilization. Communal property has also a basic importance, among others for the sense of justice and ethic of people, village communities and land cultivation. Building a healthy and ecological civilization requires the priority of the communal over the private values and harmony with the feeling of life present in all members of the society and the natural environment. Long-term perspectives, when formulated properly, must enjoy a priority over short-term ones.

Formulating it compactly, humans should work for their lives instead of living for their work. The durable health and well-being of mankind and all people can be secured by the continuous improvement of our sense of life and justice, by thinking in a life-, community- and Nature-centered, uplifting ecological worldview and building a healthy and ecological civilization in which commodity production finds its due place.

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Ecological Transition,

from Philosophy to Policy

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