

ON SOME ASPECTS OF THE LILLEORU COMMUNITY

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the *raison d'être* of the only proper Estonian ecovillage, Lilleoru. Exceptional in the Estonian context, this relatively small and young community is a member of three established international networks uniting similar communities. Based on fieldwork and ethnographic interviews, the present article describes some focal aspects of the community and investigates how Lilleoru functions as a community. After a brief overview of the formation of the community, the following questions are touched upon: what is its significance for its members, how are they differentiated from other similar groups, what creates coherence among its members, how is the community managed, what are the everyday practices and how does it fit into the global context. As a result of the study it might be said that although from the outside Lilleoru is mainly seen as an ecovillage, from inside being an awareness training centre is central. The ecological lifestyle is regarded as a side result of a conscious lifestyle.

KEYWORDS: community • identity • lifestyle • rituals • holism

I have a general idea about their life and some acquaintance with their language, and if I can only somehow document all this, I'll have valuable material.
Bronislaw Malinowski (Wolcott 2001: 63)

Throughout time mankind has imagined alternative ways of living – both better and worse than their present surroundings. Until the 19th century these visions existed primarily in the form of texts. Since then realising the masterplans for creating a better society in real life in forms of both secular and spiritual communities became more popular. Interest in exploring the dependence of social circumstances on the programmatic blueprints led me to study the only proper ecovillage in Estonia – the Lilleoru community. Based on my fieldwork¹ and ethnographic interviews with community members² the present article describes fundamental aspects of the community and analyses how Lilleoru functions as a community, what are its everyday practices, what is its meaning for its members and how it fits into the global context.

WHAT IS LILLEORU?

In many ways Lilleoru is something unique in the Estonian context. Depending on viewpoint it can be described as a home place for people sharing a common worldview and lifestyle, as a vigorous and growing ecovillage, as a strong community and thus a good example of civic initiative, as an awareness training centre, as a centre for practising self-development techniques from different traditions, as well as a yogic community that is a partner in two global networks of spiritual shrines (*ashrams*). As a living and growing community it is in a constant state of change and the aim of this paper is not to try to define or label it. This article proceeds rather from the viewpoint that a community as a whole cannot be defined solely by socio-geographical, economic or purely cultural indicators, but rather as a dynamical relationship between these components.

The community started to develop in 1992 around a *raja* and *buddhi yoga*³ teacher Ishwarananda (male, 1962), who started giving classes in Tallinn. A small group emerged who started visiting Lilleoru⁴ to help the teacher with preparations for building a home for his family. In the course of the preparations Lilleoru developed into and became a midpoint for the growing community instead. Meetings in Lilleoru took place primarily on weekends. There was no infrastructure and the area needed amelioration as it was wet and bosky. Recollecting the beginning of the community the initial community members use words like “wild”, “spontaneous” and “exciting”.

Over the years the initial spontaneity has gradually become more and more ordered, which is typical in the case of growing groups. In addition to common yoga practices, the people involved started to do other things together – from taking courses in ecological farming to building houses for common use. In 1995 the first house was finished and a few people started regularly living at Lilleoru. During that time regular summer-camps started. In connection to the growth of the community and especially organising the camps in which approximately 100 people took part, the need for coordination increased. In 1999, seven years after setting out, the first official administrative body was created in Lilleoru. Since 2000 a more open and active approach was taken and some of the community's activities were aimed at those outside. For example regular practices in Tallinn, which ended in the middle of the 1990s, started again. New directions of activities were also taken up, for example cultivating herbs and creating curing herbal tea mixtures, as well as publishing books and teaching *hatha yoga* across Estonia. The Lilleoru non-governmental organisation (NGO Lilleoru) was founded in 2001 for the official operation of Lilleoru and better management of the organisation. Lilleoru NGO owns and governs the whole territory and buildings in Lilleoru and is the organiser of most of the events going on there. The NGO works for public interests and through the statutes its declared aim is to contribute to the development of personal integrity by offering possibilities for learning, and by creating conditions favouring this development (NGO Lilleoru Community).

Becoming an Ecovillage

Interest in becoming an ecovillage arose at the end of the 1990s. As community members wanted to move to Lilleoru, a dwelling house for 10 people was built in 2003. Inter-

viewed community members often found that ecological lifestyle comes naturally with conscious way of living.

Tara: I think the popularity comes with changing awareness. People realise that it is much more sparing to live together – it also spares time so that there might be more time to look inside yourself, to see other values in life.

Kripa Ram: In 2004 questions about how and where the living area could be built were raised. Eco came in the course of these discussions – it is popular and matches the principles of Lilleoru.

As the wish of community members to start dwelling in Lilleoru was firm, planning of the Skyearth ecovillage started in 2004. Since 2006 Lilleoru has belonged to the Global Ecovillage Network (GEN). A building permit was given in the summer of 2008 and a year after that the first houses were already completed up to roof level. All in all there will be approximately 100 people living in the village.

All the interviewed community members regarded an ecological lifestyle as important and considered it an inherent result of a consciously lived life.

Anjani: If you are in harmony with yourself, then you don't take or use more than you need. You are in fact more economical.

By some community members notions "ecological" and "economical" were used as synonyms.

Subsistence

In the middle of the 1990s there was a thorough discussion and it was decided that in order to finance Lilleoru, a voluntary tenth had to be established. Participants donated 1/10 of their income each month to the common budget. When the NGO was founded, this fee changed into a voluntary membership payment, calculated taking fixed costs into account (water, electricity, etc.). In addition to donations an important source of income are books published by Lilleoru and various training courses organised in Lilleoru and other places across Estonia.

Most community members living in Lilleoru work in Tallinn. With the help of projects funded by the European Union, new workplaces (primarily connected to various training courses – from ecological building to painting, arts and handycraft) are planned to be created in Lilleoru in the near future. As voluntary work for the good of the community is the biggest power behind development of Lilleoru, it largely depends on the input of time and skills by community members.

Place and Space

Space is a practiced place.
Michel de Certeau (1984: 117)

Places connected to Lilleoru can be found across Estonia – regular activities take place in the towns of Jõgeva, Pärnu, Rakvere, Tallinn, Tartu, Viljandi and Kilingi-Nõmme, as

well as in the settlements of Jüri and Vaida. However, there is one distinct midpoint, a place that is indeed also a space in Certeau's terms – Lilleoru centre.

Lilleoru is located on the countryside of northern Estonia, 20 minutes from, and to the south of, the capital Tallinn. During the 17 years of its existence Lilleoru has evolved from a place into an elaborate space. From a wet and bushy territory members of the community have built a well maintained park, garden and living environment, which can generally be divided into two: the ecovillage (living space) and the open training centre (teaching and learning space). According to community members, the formation of Lilleoru's territory depends largely on practical needs and the unanimity principle – decisions about organising space and erecting new buildings are settled by the members' general assembly.

From the inside (emic view) Lilleoru is seen as a very special space. Lilleoru is characterised as "holy/sacred", admitting at the same time that this is a relative term, dependent on each person, their values and worldview.

Tara: What is sacred depends on the meaning we ourselves give to a place. [...] A place becomes sacred if you actually experience some energy there and see the reaction it creates in you.

Holy places are regarded as mirroring the inner world in the outer world. Although something might be invisible, it might still exist, having value and importance.

Kashturi: If I don't see the air, I can't say that there is no air. I can't say that there's nobody, if I'm not able to measure their weight for example. Or colour them. My limitedness shouldn't rule out the existence of something.

Understanding what is sacred in Lilleoru can be aided by reference to Mircea Eliade's view that the sacred is something *sui generis* which cannot be reduced to profane explanations and which is characterised by a unique element – holiness (Gross 2008: 645).

Taking regularity as a criterion for rituals, there are many rituals to be found in Lilleoru. There is a certain rhythm within the year, within the week and within the day. Winter and summer camps have been held on a regular basis since the beginning of the community, autumn and spring camps began when Lilleoru became an *ashram* in 2002. With the new status came new ceremonies (*aarati* and *havan*) and places (producing sacred spaces) like the temple, altar, winter and summer *dhuni* (place for fire ceremonies). Through the ritual practices that make Lilleoru a sacred space the village is connected to many different places across the globe, from northern India to Switzerland by Haidakhand Babaji's line of teaching, and from southern India to Canada by Kriya Babaji's lineage. Rituals are perceived as a way to contact the elemental forces of nature. On different occasions different rituals are used as tools to achieve certain results and changes.

Nandi Devar: Govindan⁵ told me once that ritual might be like a telephone number of an energy, whom you want to contact. But you have to be aware while dialling. If you are too random, you'll get a false connection or you won't get a connection at all.

Kripa Ram: Man needs ceremonies. Without a form it is fairly difficult to proceed in the beginning. If you learn to concentrate, you'll discover that form is accompanied

by the formless. Form helps to concentrate. The experiences are at first emotional, mental, later you'll start discovering that there's something more. If you discover that, emotions are left aside. It might take a long time.

So rituals are perceived as practical actions, not actions that belong to the sphere of faith or magic. The results of rituals are seen as dependent on the awareness and goals of the person performing them.

COMMUNITY AND ITS PERCEPTIONS

The purpose of community studies is widely seen as investigating the role of local relationships in person's life. Social anthropologist Nigel Rapport concedes that although the concept of "community" has been one of most widely and frequently used in social sciences through the last 200 years, no generally acknowledged definition has emerged (Barnard 1996: 114–117). He remarks that the definition made by Robert Redfield in 1947 is still one of the most used. Are the 4 following criteria posed by Redfield fit to describe Lilleoru?

- Relative smallness on the social scale.

Lilleoru community started in 1992 with about ten persons and about 6–7 of them are still active members today. How many members Lilleoru community has today is a far more difficult question. How to define members? Are they people who are members of the Lilleoru NGO? Or are they people who visit Lilleoru on a regular basis? Are people who live in faraway places and visit seldom, but listen to the lecture recordings of the teacher and perform practices received from Lilleoru, also members? Taking into account the people visiting Lilleoru, then according to the reckoning of Lilleoru's accountant there are about 40 people with a more accountable role, about 60–80 who visit regularly and about 300 who visit more randomly. In a year approximately 1500 people visit Lilleoru. This criterion is therefore fit to describe Lilleoru.

- Homogeneity in the actions and states of mind of the members.

What unites people from various social backgrounds, ages and interests from all over Estonia (and also abroad) into a coherent community? In addition to solidarity and closeness, which emerges between people visiting Lilleoru on a regular basis, two aspects that create coherence are emphasised by the interviewees. Firstly taking care of Lilleoru as a place (building, developing, maintaining) and secondly participating in practices that make it a space (activities connected to teaching).

Aradhana: People who see Ishwarananda's teaching as important are the ones who become regulars.

Ishwarananda: I find that community members are those people who feel that this knowledge or this place is more or less important to them.

Existing as a community and working together are seen as important means of facilitating the processes of getting to know oneself. Working and living together bring forth many concepts (I'm better than them, he doesn't know anything, etc.) and emotions

(anger, greed, inferiority, fear, etc.), which can be disposed of using yogic techniques. On the other hand living and working in a community is a good way of sharing positive emotions. In addition it is easy to learn to do things selflessly for others without expecting some bonus or prize in a community which combines many different people. This criterion is therefore fit to describe Lilleoru.

- Awareness of their differences from other groups.

The repeated answer to the question, what differentiates Lilleoru from other ecological communities, was – the teacher and the teaching.

Aradhana: Teacher and teaching are simply the core, the reason why all the other things exist in Lilleoru. It all starts from that.

There is a clear distinction in the practice of Lilleorians between “us” and “them”, although the borders are not tangible and are located in the inner world (space, i.e. practised place)⁶ of each human being. According to community members the major identity-builder and discriminator between “own” and “alien” is the higher level of self-awareness of Lilleorians. Also being more honest (being aware of ones motives) and present in the moment (not proceeding from past memories or hopes for the future) are features which were brought up as characteristics of people connected to Lilleoru.

While studying the Lilleoru community Anthony P. Cohen’s approach to community studies proved useful. In his book *The Symbolic Construction of Community* (1985) he stated that the basis for a community is created through shared symbols: community members create the symbolic structure of their community and its borders. The fact that the meanings of the symbols can be different for community members does not pose an obstacle in being a coherent community (Cohen 1992: 57). Cohen states that as the borders between communities are today symbolic and mental rather than physical or geographical, they might also be more difficult to discover (especially when looking from the outside) (ibid.: 37). According to Cohen membership status does not depend so much on the behaviour and actions as on the connectedness with the shared set of symbols, the shared vocabulary of values.

This criterion is therefore fit to describe Lilleoru.

- Relatively sustainable and independent from outside resources.

This is the weakest link in Lilleoru at the moment. As it is still a young community it is not yet very self-sufficient. Workplaces are generally located in Tallinn. There are plans to make Lilleoru more independent, but they await initial financing from outside.

Roles in the Community

Lilleoru is a community centre that has evolved around a teacher and his teachings. Space and community activities are organised according to the teaching, but not according to the words and decisions of the teacher, rather as a result of common decisions. Decision making in Lilleoru is split-level. Most important decisions are made by a board that has been selected by the members’ general assembly for three years. On the other side these decisions are generally discussed with the teacher, who might have

a different view on how it would be best to proceed. Final decisions are mainly made through a consensus of the board members.

All roles are voluntary. According to community members, the membership of the board is shaped by the willingness to participate and take responsibility – there are people who are ready to take the role of the leader and people who prefer to work in the garden. There are three main ways of assuming a role in Lilleoru:

- People wish to participate in certain activities (personal initiative).
- Someone's help is needed in certain activities (invitation).
- The teacher points at a role for developmental reasons (mission is given).

Community members don't see any hierarchy in their community. They point out that the organisation and the board are important to ensure that everything works out in a clear and well organised way.

At the beginning of the research, based on media texts and the Lilleoru home-page, I had expected to find a more rhizome structured community, but participatory field-work and interviews (emic view) revealed the centered structure (around the teacher) of the Lilleoru community, which I hadn't been able to perceive from the outside (etic view). The existence of a teacher and a board already indicates a certain hierarchy.

Rules

The people interviewed agreed that rules are necessary in order to cope with the management of a growing community. In the Lilleoru community there are no rules of admission or probation, nobody is asked to declare faith in anything, but there are some regulations, which are expected to be followed. Rules that are presently valid come from the end of 1990s and are being updated. Rules are made with the purpose of facilitating the everyday operating in Lilleoru.

There have been attempts to create a ground-learning course for beginners, but it didn't work out so now newcomers are introduced to the rules in practice, spontaneously, primarily through asking. Many people first come to Lilleoru during camp (spring, summer, autumn, winter) and as the daily schedule applies to everybody, the rules will become known in a shorter time than for the people who come during the weekends.

It is recommended to follow the rules fixed by the daily timetable:

6.00	Wake up
7.00	<i>Aarati</i> ⁷
8.30	Light breakfast and tea/coffee
10.00–12.00	<i>Karma yoga</i> ⁸
12.00–13.00	Lunch
13.00–14.00	Break
14.00–18.00	<i>Karma yoga</i>
18.00	Sauna and dinner
20.00	<i>Aarati</i>
23.00	Bedtime

The schedule has small changes depending on the season. At the weekends there is a lecture by teacher Ishwarananda in the evenings instead of *aarati* and during the camps there is a lecture by him daily in the evenings. During the camps *hatha yoga* practices also take place daily in the morning before *karma yoga*.

While doing fieldwork in Lilleoru I noticed three types of rules: stricter rules for those living in Lilleoru *ashram*, looser for those living in the Dwelling House and going to work in Tallinn and even looser for those who are visiting. Community members agreed with this classification, admitting that there should be in fact only one type of rule – *ashram* rules – applying to everybody. The reason why this is not so, is that people like convenience and cling to their habits and many would abandon the yogic path if they had to follow *ashram* rules, which require more discipline.

Ishwarananda: Our aim is not to create a military order, which would frighten people away. At the same time we shouldn't be too liberal, allowing everybody to do what they want to do. This is the tricky part. [...] It should be an open place, benevolent and welcoming, well organised, but not over regulated.

In general rules are flexible in Lilleoru. For example rules connected to food. Vegetarian food is prepared two times a day for everybody. Meat is not prepared for common meals, but one can eat it if they please, it is not forbidden. But drugs are completely forbidden as they hinder the attainment of the goal of being aware of yourself. Drugs alter the state of consciousness not according to your will, but independent of it, so they are not useful for achieving the main goal.

Another important rule is to be tolerant and respectful towards yourself and others.⁹ This also means that one should not criticise oneself or others. If you find something you dislike, look inside yourself and ask why it bothers you – do you need this emotion/concept? One of the main principles in Lilleoru is to change yourself before trying to change others. Slandering and criticising others or yourself is seen as useless and is thus not favoured.

TEACHING IN LILLEORU

During their 17 years of existence, yogic practices have been central in Lilleoru. But as the methods of *raja* and *buddhi yoga* (which presuppose good skills of concentration and awareness) proved to be too elusive for the majority of pupils, many different flows of spiritual practices have been used in Lilleoru (including Native American, Buddhist, Dzogchen, Hindu traditions). In 2002 Lilleoru became a member of the Haidakhan Babaji line and in 2004 Babaji's Kriya Yoga line. Why such faraway methods? To the question why use Indian traditions in Estonia, teacher Ishwarananda replied:

Hinduism has preserved an exact description of the man, the universe, the world and how it all fits together. It is possible to use it with high efficiency. It is like a good manual, which can be browsed in order to change yourself.

Although these methods stem from India, they have been adapted to Western understanding and environment – they have creolised. In accordance with easternisation of the west, a holistic view of the world is gaining more and more popularity – traditional

occidental dualism is replaced with unity (Altnurme 2005: 44). The truth is seen as universal – not high and alien, but inherent and close to all people.

It is important to note, that the understanding of human beings in Lilleoru is completely different from the ordinary concept and therefore values and goals are also different. According to the Lilleoru (yogic) view a human being consists of 5 bodies: physical, emotional, mental (memory, thoughts, imagination), intellectual (intuition, insights) and self. The last body (self) is considered to be the real you.

Teaching functions on two levels. On the first level are people who are interested in yoga as a means of facilitating everyday life, and on the second level those who have dedicated themselves to following a yogic way of life. On both occasions conscious self-observation is a starting point that helps a person to realise what motives, habits, concepts, thoughts and emotions rule their everyday actions. On the first level one learns to know and steer one's inner processes. The yogic methods gives one the possibility to mould oneself (the ego) easily according to present needs to improve the quality of life. The second level sets as its goal the achievement of independence from the ego (a certain set of emotions and thoughts that is constantly used) and to understand how causality (*karma*) works. The goal of life is to stop identifying oneself with the rest of the (both inner and outer) objects and learn to stay identified with the fifth body, self. In order to achieve these goals a certain set of activities is performed on a regular basis.

Inward activities:

- Regular yogic practices – meditations, etc.
- Differentiation – noticing the inner and outer processes that affect a person and learning to know them. Understanding causes and effects and, through this, becoming more aware.
- Defamiliarisation – deautomatisation of the habitual and customary and, through this, becoming more aware.
- Withdrawal – letting go of needless and useless actions, values, standpoints, thoughts, emotions, reactions, habits, and through this becoming more aware.

Outward activities:

- Regular yogic practices – *hatha yoga*, etc.
- Shared activities in the community, voluntary work for the common good (*karma yoga*).
- Wage labour.
- Conscious participation in rituals (*aarati, havan*).

New Age and Lilleoru

In the Estonian context Lilleoru has gained public attention mainly as an innovative and growing ecovillage, a little less so as a centre of alternative spirituality. What does this mean – alternative spirituality? Since the beginning, different practices from different parts and ages of the world have been used in Lilleoru, which in the context of Estonia is rather unusual – i.e. alternative. Why talk about spirituality or New Age philosophy and not religion or faith? Both the New Age approach and religion are symbol sys-

tems, but they are essentially different: religion is something fixed that strives to signify something absolute and true (Geertz 1990: 2303); New Age is something more rhizomic, experience-based, more personal (Altnurme 2005: 44). When spirituality emphasises personal experience, faith emphasises the creed. New Age regards different practices as interchangeable tools, which are to be used to achieve certain goals, while religion sees them rather as inviolable dogmas, which are to be believed in. Religion mainly has holy texts as the source of authority, New Age does not have such core texts, although it has a certain set of repeating elements and it cannot be called a random melting pot of different spiritual traditions (Tago 2009: 47–48).

New Age is not a random complex of practices, rather a certain type of cultural text shaped by creolisation of cultural languages. In Lilleoru there is a selector – teacher – who chooses and adds techniques and thus facilitates the growth of independence (autonomy) of Lilleoru as a cultural text.

In everyday use the term “New Age” has different connotations. Community members generally rejected use of this term about the Lilleoru community because to them it is associated with a hippy lifestyle, which they perceived as distant and alien from their own.

Ishwarananda: If you look at the content, then you see that there are very old truths, that it is difficult to call it New Age. Old age perhaps. There is nothing new there practically, this knowledge is ancient.

Traditions practised in Lilleoru are old in the global context, but new in Estonia. New Age has been defined differently – in the present article it is understood as a syncretic spirituality, which is new in a certain cultural sphere. Thus it can be said that Christianity was New Age in 13th century Estonia, as Buddhism, Hinduism or native American traditions are New Age in the context of 21st century. The knowledge might be ancient, but it is new in a certain cultural context.

There is a lot of tolerance in Lilleoru for choosing one’s practices according to one’s needs and experience. Holistic spirituality is doubtlessly practised there. So I find that Lilleoru is a New Age community. This is in accordance with the view of Christoph Bochsinger, who finds that New Age groups represent by structure very modern types of religiousness or spirituality as they encourage people to choose and combine different elements according to their experiences, not according to the dogmas of certain traditions (2005: 71). He concedes that as a general name holism can be used to designate New Age (ibid.: 72). As Lilleorians agree rather with the description “holistic” than with “New age” about their community, the first term will be thus used in this article from this point on.

Lilleoru in the Global Context

The great majority of communities at the beginning of 21st century are intentional communities.¹⁰ The creation of intentional communities became more popular in the 1960s and 1970s and although most of the attempts remained short-lived, there are exceptions¹¹ (Bang 2007).

According to the definition given by the Global Ecovillage Network (The Ecovillage Concept) ecovillages can have a cultural/spiritual, ecological or social dominant. The

Lilleoru community has a cultural/spiritual dominant. Among more prominent similar ecological communities are Damanhur in northern Italy and Auroville in south-eastern India.¹² All three are spiritual communities and the ecological aspect is secondary. All three represent a cross-religious and holistic approach and carry the idea of universal spirituality. All three have a spiritual leader and see reaching unity with the world through learning to know and reign oneself as the goal of human life. All the centres are open to visitors and members must mainly contribute their good will, time and skills.

Both Damanhur and Auroville are much older (established respectively in 1977 and in 1968) and bigger (respectively 500 and 1800 members) than Lilleoru and thus also have more fixed social and economic systems. As necessary food and textiles are produced in the villages, and both communities are rather independent of outside resources. Both have a local newspaper, a schooling system and a science park. The way these communities have developed can be seen as a potential glimpse into Lilleoru's future. All the communities share a vision of a better way of living, but Auroville and Damanhur are making more bold statements than Lilleoru – fusing Eastern and Western experiences and worldviews, they see themselves as laboratories of the future of mankind. Several Lilleoru community members found that this could also be said about Lilleoru:

Aradhana: Activities and nature are the same. In these places things are investigated, which otherwise generally are neglected. It is a unfamiliar territory that is seldom explored.

Still they stress that according to the understanding of Lilleorians it is more pertinent to change oneself before changing others or the entire world. Change yourself and the world changes, as they say.

SOME CONCLUSIONS

There is no concrete programmatic verbalised plan from which the Lilleoru community proceeds. There are collectively set long-term goals, but there is no fixed program according to which everything is ordered. Priorities are flexible and depend largely on necessity and present situation.

Being an ecovillage is not seen as a goal in itself, but a result of a conscious lifestyle. Also the (re)creation of a village community is not a goal in itself, as I had hypothesised at the beginning, but has to do with the phenomenon of the Lilleoru community for its members – the teaching and the teacher and the place where it is easier to be a human being. So from one point of view the *raison d'être* of Lilleoru community is a human being, teacher Ishwarananda, as a practitioner of a yogic lifestyle and an example of the possibility to change oneself using such techniques. From the other point of view it is the growth of awareness in reflexivity about oneself, about guiding one's inner processes (emotions, thoughts, habits) and as a result the ability to stay in yourself (the fifth body). So, as trivial as it may at first seem, the phenomenon of Lilleoru can be seen as the "self". But as the meaning of the "self" in Lilleoru differs greatly from the common meaning, the phenomenon becomes rather exceptional.

How Lilleoru functions as a community (emic view):

- Core – spiritual aspects (the primary cause of the beginning of the community).
- Social aspects – helping and supporting the process of learning, differentiation.
- Material aspects – facilitating the two former processes.

Why is the teacher so important? He is perceived as somebody who has reached mastery over his inner processes and is constantly himself. All the others who go to Lilleoru on a regular basis or live there have seen this as a value toward which they want to strive. Therefore, unlike the common practice in sects with a charismatic leader, in Lilleoru the teacher is not seen as a specially chosen one (personality cult is rather seen as an obstacle than a way to growing awareness), but as an ordinary person, who has learned to master his awareness, learned to know the workings of his inner world and reached the ability to remain identified with his inner self. This is something that everybody is seen to be able to do when they start practising consistently. The teacher has gone through this process already and can thus give valuable advice to facilitate the process. This is the primary source of respect towards him.

The case of Lilleoru shows that the importance of localisation hasn't decreased in spite of globalisation. Alternative communities (e.g. ecovillages) also function as centres of innovation – through being different, they make explicit the distinction between one's own and the alien, bring forth the border between them, thus creating the effect of defamiliarisation and enabling the possible alternatives for different levels of life to be seen more clearly. Using Yuri Lotman's model of the semiosphere (1999) it might thus be concluded that if a phenomenon in culture is vigorous enough to persist, it is likely at one point to become popular and move from a marginal position (periphery) in society to the centre.

NOTES

1 Six months from November 2008 – May 2009. This relatively long period is grounded on the volition to better comprehend the *raison d'être* of this community. As H. F. Wolcott wrote about fieldwork: "We cannot hurry the lives of those about us, only our own" (2001: 85).

2 From February to March 2009 I conducted 8 qualitative semi-structured interviews with community members. Aliases (Hindu names) are used in the article to protect the interviewees' privacy: Ishwarananda (male, 1962, 17 years in Lilleoru); Tara (female, 1956, 17 years in Lilleoru), Aradhana (female, 1975, 17 years in Lilleoru), Kashturi (female, 1968, 10 years in Lilleoru), Kripa Ram (male, 1954, 8 years in Lilleoru); Anjani (female, 1974, 5 years in Lilleoru), Radha (female, 1978, 4 years in Lilleoru), Nandi Devar (male, 1965, 3 years in Lilleoru). The sample is compiled so that the set of members involved would be as many-sided as possible: original members as well as newcomers, men and women, simple participants, board members, as well as unorganised members and people living and not (yet) living in Lilleoru.

3 Types of yoga of consciousness, practise of which include meditation, concentration and other inner excersises, but not *hatha yoga*.

4 The name Lilleoru means "a valley of flowers" in Estonian. The name was given at the beginning of the Soviet period (which lasted from 1940–1991), when farmsteads were divided into smaller units. Lilleoru land was one half of the former Mullikmäe farm. Today Lilleoru also owns the other half and thus old Mullikmäe has been renamed Lilleoru.

5 A *kriya yoga* master, i.e. *acharya*, living in Canada.

6 The need to learn to orientate oneself in one's inner space (mentality, emotions, reactions, habits, etc.) is one of the central principles in the worldview of Lilleorians.

7 Chanting mantras, a practice from the lineage of Haidakhand Babaji that takes place twice a day, mornings and evenings.

8 Voluntary work for the good of others with no personal gain. A practise from the lineage of Haidakhand Babaji.

9 This means also following the *ahimsa* (non-violence) principle.

10 See, for example, International Communities.

11 For example, Twin Oaks in Virginia or The Farm in Tennessee, both in the USA.

12 See the websites of these communities (Damanhur, Auroville).

SOURCES

Author's fieldwork notes, November 2008 – May 2009.

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