

**A thesis submitted to the Department of Environmental Sciences and Policy of  
Central European University in part fulfilment of the  
Degree of Master of Science**

**The place of spirituality in the motives and values of members of  
intentional environmental communities**



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**July, 2014**

**Budapest**

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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tatiana Iurchenko', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Tatiana IURCHENKO

**ABSTRACT OF THESIS** submitted by:

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Since a change to sustainable societies is likely to require significant lifestyle change, it is important to understand the kinds of factors that are associated with shifts to pro-environmental behavior. According to environmental psychologists, values and motives are among the major factors that impact sustainable lifestyles and pro-environmental behaviors. This study uses in-depth interviews to identify the range of values and motives that encouraged members of two Hungarian intentional environmental communities to join and remain in the community, and more specifically to explore the role of spiritual values within a secular (*Gyűrűfű*) and a religious (*Krishna Valley*) environmental community.

Security, independence and community were common themes expressed by respondents. The participants from the secular eco-village emphasized more a desire to be independent from the system and this way ensure a sense of security while interviewees from the religious community considered pro-environmental behavior as an essential part of their spiritual practice.

Members of both intentional environmental communities viewed spiritual values as important in leading to a sustainable lifestyle because they help to appreciate the natural environment in a deeper way. Spiritual values were perceived in various ways. In the secular community spirituality was generally seen as connection to nature, energy, relationships between co-villages and as a lifestyle of ancestors whereas interviewees from the religious community referred to spirituality from a more conventionally religious perspective, invoking God. This study concludes that spirituality in its religious and secular form is clearly manifested in the values and motives of the participants to join and remain in the community. In the religious community it is the basis for environmental practices and concerns while in the secular community it has a side role in recognizing connections of people with nature and each other.

**Keywords:** Sustainable lifestyle, intentional environmental community, eco-village, pro-environmental behavior, environmental values, environmental motives, spiritual values.

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# 1. Introduction

Despite accelerating rates of environmental degradation, most of the current actions to protect nature have only palliative effects as they do not deal directly with the source of the problem which is rooted in human behavior, concepts of living, lifestyles and values (DuNann Winter and Koger 2004; Gardner and Stern 2002; Vlek and Steg 2007). While ultimately the transition to a sustainable society is likely to require a change of individual behaviors and lifestyles (Leiserowitz *et al* 2009), some recent research has shown lifestyles on the whole are not becoming more sustainable (Millennium Ecosystem Assessment 2005). Therefore it is critical to know what factors, values and motives form sustainable lifestyles and pro-environmental behaviors.

Motivation as the reason for a behavior or a strong internal stimulus that shapes a particular behavior is important for understanding individual environmentally related choices (Moisander 1998). Motives related to pro-environmental behavior have been less researched than values, nevertheless their significance should not be underestimated (Howell 2013). Values have been widely used for analyzing and predicting pro-environmental behavior and attitudes (Hurst *et al* 2013), and a number of studies established that values are important in influencing environmental preferences, intentions and behavior (e.g. Steg and De Groot 2012; Spark and Shepherd 1992). According to an extensive theoretical and empirical research (Hurst *et al* 2013) some specific values negatively correlate with pro-environmental behavior while other values encourage people to acquire “green” practices. For instance, according to an empirical study materialistic values are negatively associated with pro-environmental attitudes and behaviors (Maio *et al* 2009).

Some recent studies suggest that spirituality, self-transcendence and more intrinsically oriented worldviews lead to more sustainable lifestyles (Hedlund-de Witt *et al* 2011; Chairy



2012). Contemporary spirituality is generally seen as favorable in encouraging pro-environmental behaviors (Hedlund-de Witt 2011) while there is a long run discussion whether traditional religious faith positively correlates with nature protection or, on the contrary, may precipitate environmental damage (Taylor 2004). Despite the increasing interest in spirituality and its impact on pro-environmental behavior, there have been only a few empirical studies undertaken to identify spiritual values that encourage sustainable practices (Chairy 2012; Hedlund-de Witt 2011; Kamitsis and Francis 2013).

Intentional environmental communities or eco-villages can be considered as examples of radical pro-environmental behavior where members of such eco-communities choose a lifestyle that has the smallest possible ecological footprint. Even though intentional environmental communities vary in their sustainable practices, ecological footprint and self-sufficiency, on the whole this lifestyle is an environmentally benign one, certainly compared with most of the alternatives in developed countries. However, such a life style is not an easy choice as it may involve a system of values that is alien to the majority of our contemporaries. Therefore it is very important to better understand what is motivating those who are able to make and sustain this radical step which could be considered “exemplary” from an environmental point of view and what kind of spiritual values the members of such communities espouse.

Therefore, the present research attempts to understand the values and motives of members of two types of Hungarian intentional environmental communities: religious (Krishna Valley) and secular (Gyűrűfü) and specifically considers the role of spiritual values in the studied eco-villages. The study is based on qualitative research where the method of the in-depth interviewing is used for exploring such concepts as values, meanings, experiences and motivations, which are complex and difficult to articulate using the survey format.

This study aims to identify the range of values and motives that encourage members of intentional environmental communities to join and remain in the community, and more specifically to explore the role of spiritual values within environmental communities.

The aim is achieved by fulfilling the following objectives:

1. To explore the motives and values that brought participants to the community;
2. To identify whether and how interviewees' values developed since being in the community;
3. To explore how the experience of living in an environmental community may affect people's values and priorities
4. To investigate what role spiritual values play for the participants.

## **2. Literature review: role of values, motives and spirituality in forming pro-environmental behavior**

This chapter provides theoretical background on the influence of values and motives as driving forces for adopting environmental practices. The pro-environmental behavior in this case is interpreted as joining the intentional environmental communities where sustainable practices are inherent in such a lifestyle. Since the focus of this research is on values and motives that encourage members of intentional environmental communities to join and remain in the community, and more specifically to explore the role of spiritual values within environmental communities, an overview of findings from empirical studies related to this topic is also presented in this chapter as well as the existing studies on intentional environmental communities as an example of pro-environmental behavior.

### ***2.1. Factors of pro-environmental behavior***

It is a challenging task to measure pro-environmental behavior due to its multi-dimensional structure with various types of motivations involved which are hard to estimate (Stern 2000). According to Kollmuss and Agyeman (2002) pro-environmental behavior is behavior that consciously aspires to decrease the negative impact of one's actions on the world (by reducing consumption, using environmentally friendly substances, minimizing waste production, etc). There are two terms that are commonly used in the literature: pro-environmental behavior and environmentally responsible behavior (Howell 2013). This paper refers to 'pro-environmental behavior' because the term 'environmentally responsible behavior' refers to behavior that is solely driven by concern for the environment and can be too narrow for understanding the full picture, while a wider range of other reasons for "green" practices can provide more ideas to be applied in promoting environmentally friendly lifestyles.

One of the classifications of pro-environmental behavior divides it into public and private spheres where public behavior has an indirect influence on the environment through participation in environmental events, volunteering and protesting and private behavior affects the environment directly by recycling, choosing organic food and reducing consumption (Kilbourne and Pickett 2008), although in order to achieve a certain point of sustainability personal environmental behaviors must be practiced by the majority of the population. The present study takes two intentional environmental communities as an example of pro-environmental behavior which involves both private and public spheres. Often eco-village dwellers not only demonstrate sustainable lifestyles themselves but also organize environmental programs such as organic farming programs (Krishna Valley) or environmental education programs for youth and children (Gyűrűfü).

The most commonly used framework for analyzing pro-environmental behavior is the Model of Responsible Environmental Behavior (Hines et al 1987). The framework is based on a meta-analysis of 128 pro-environmental behavior research studies and the following factors that influence pro-environmental behavior were identified:

- *Knowledge of issues*: familiarity with the environmental problem and its roots.
- *Knowledge of action strategies*: awareness of possible actions available to lower impact on the environmental problem.
- *Locus of control*: a belief that the individual's actions can improve a situation, not only actions of powerful figures.
- *Attitudes*: People with strong pro-environmental attitudes are more likely to have pro-environmental behavior, although the relationship between attitudes and actions are considered to be weak.
- *Verbal commitment*: the expressed willingness to take action might be a sign of the person's willingness to actually engage in pro-environmental behavior.

· *Individual sense of responsibility*: a sense of personal responsibility is a strong motivator to acquire pro-environmental behavior.

Many of the factors from this framework are proved to be influential on individuals' pro-environmental behavior, but other approaches provide deeper comprehension of the subject, for instance, frameworks for analyzing pro-environmental behavior which are built up on Altruism, Empathy, and Pro-social Behavior (Kollmuss and Agyeman 2002). Pro-social behavior is defined as "voluntary intentional behavior that results in benefits for another: the motive is unspecified and may be positive, negative, or both" (Lehmann 1999). Referring to altruism as to an aspect of pro-social behavior Borden and Francis (1978) hypothesize that:

1. Selfish and competitive orientation in individuals makes them unlikely to act pro-environmentally;
2. More affluent individuals who have more resources (money, time, energy) are more likely to act ecologically because they are not burdened by personal issues.

The second hypothesis has proved to be rather controversial. On the one hand, people from poorer countries tend to give a lower rank for environmental issues among the most pressing problems, but on the other hand when individuals are asked to rate the severity of various problems, ecological problems get high ranks regardless of the economic state of a country. Therefore ranking arguably mainly shows economic conditions of a particular country but not the absence of environmental concern (Diekmann and Franzen 1999). Moreover consumption rates and 'ecological footprints' which leads to greater negative environmental impact is much higher in rich countries.

Various approaches to identifying factors that form pro-environmental behavior have been developed. Several frameworks are based on the theories of altruism, maintaining that altruism is influential in supporting pro-environmental behavior (e.g. Allen and Ferrand 1999;

Schwartz 1977; Stern et al 1993). The research by Kollmuss and Agyeman (2002) suggest the following factors that might have an impact on pro-environmental behavior:

- External Factors: availability of necessary infrastructure: for example, recycling services, taking public transportation.
- Economic factors: economic incentives might be effective in motivating individuals to pro-environmental behavior. But economic factors do not always affect people's decisions as they are strongly interconnected with social, infrastructural and psychological factors hence pro-environmental behavior cannot be justified by solely economic stimulus.
- Internal Factors: *motivation, environmental knowledge, values, attitudes, environmental awareness, emotional involvement, locus of control, responsibilities and priorities*. Since this study is mainly concerned about personal experiences and individual stories it is worth discussing internal factors in more detail.

#### 1. Environmental knowledge

As research showed only small amount of pro-environmental behavior is formed by environmental knowledge and environmental awareness. The study of Kempton et al. (1995) revealed that environmental knowledge between environmentalists and anti-environmentalists did not differ considerably and was comparatively poor. It suggests that environmental knowledge is not the strongest factor in shaping pro-environmental behavior. Situational factors and other internal factors take up at least 80% of the motives for pro-environmental or non-environmental behavior (Kollmuss and Agyeman 2002).

#### 2. Attitudes

Newhouse (1991) defined attitudes as the strong positive or negative feeling about an object, issue or another individual. Attitudes should not be confused with beliefs which relate to information that an individual holds about an object, issue or a person. It was established

that environmental attitudes do not play a leading role in shaping pro-environmental behaviors and this discrepancy might be explained by a low-cost/high-cost model (Diekmann and Preisendoerfer 1992).

As another research demonstrated (Gigliotti 1992), pro-environmental behavior can be influenced by attitudes indirectly. The study investigated college students' willingness to adopt pro-environmental behavior and it was discovered that those who see the solution to environmental problems in technology and growth were less likely to make personal sacrifices as they do not see the need to engage in pro-environmental behavior with the absolute lifestyle changes.

### 3. Environmental awareness

Kollmuss and Agyeman (2002) define environmental awareness as 'knowing of the impact of human behavior on the environment'. Environmental awareness is characterized by two components: a cognitive, knowledge-based and an affective, perception-based. The distinction between environmental knowledge and environmental awareness is that the first is mainly a concern and sensitivity towards the environment and its problems while knowledge includes experiences and a basic understanding of the environment and its problems.

### 4. Emotional involvement

Emotional involvement is the degree of our emotional connection with the natural world. Research shows (Chawla 1998, 1999) that relationships with nature play an important role in shaping our environmental values, beliefs and attitudes. If environmental problems induce emotional reaction in individuals there is a bigger chance that they will engage in pro-environmental behavior (Kollmuss and Agyeman). But it is very difficult to identify why people get emotionally involved with some things but not others. The reasons may include the following:

1. Emotional non-investment can occur due to lack of knowledge and awareness or resistance against non-conforming information (avoiding information that contradicts or undermines our beliefs) (Festinger 1957).

2. Emotional reactions. An emotional reaction to environmental degradation still does not guarantee pro-environmental behavior. Feelings such as sadness/pain, anger, and guilt may evolve in individuals as a result of observing environmental degradation, moreover it is suggested that these emotional reactions can be stronger when the degradation is experienced directly (Newhouse 1991; Chawla 1999). Kollmuss and Agyeman (2002) hypothesized that guilt is less likely to motivate pro-environmental behavior than fear, sadness, pain, and anger, although these emotions must be combined with belief that individual action can make a change (locus of control).

#### Locus of control

Newhouse (1991) defines locus of control as a realization or perception of individual efforts as bringing change and making a difference. Locus control can be internal and external. Internal locus control means that individuals believe that their actions can positively influence the situation. By contrast, people with external locus control do not think that their actions can be significant and they tend to rely on outside forces such as powerful others.

#### Responsibility and priorities

Values, attitudes and locus of control influence individuals' sense of responsibility. Responsibility for a personal well-being and the well-being of one's family are commonly prioritized among other responsibilities (Stern et al. 1993). If pro-environmental behavior is not compatible with personal priorities, motivation to act pro-environmentally is very weak, whereas if personal priorities are in harmony with pro-environmental behavior the motivation to do them increases.



Values and attitudes as the focus of the present research are discussed in a greater detail in the next section.

## 2.2. Role of values and motives in forming environmentally responsible behavior

### Values

A better understanding of environmentally responsible behavior and new ways to

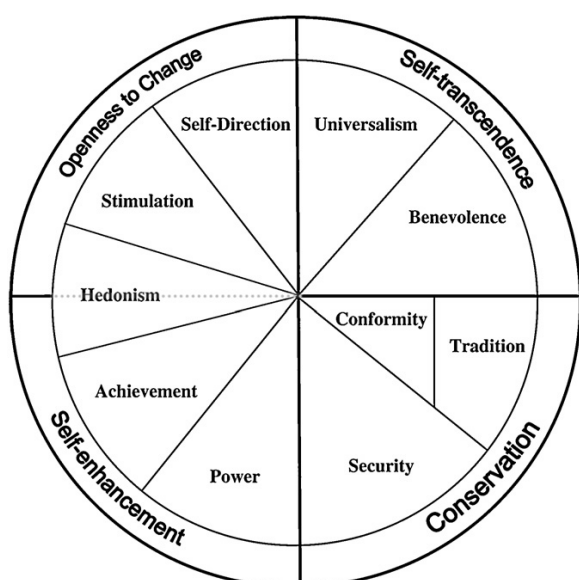


Figure 1. Schwartz values circumplex.

Source: Howell 2013

encourage conservation can be achieved by researching the motives and values that form environmentally related behavior (Thomson and Barton 1994). Schwarz (1992 p.21) defines a value as a “desirable trans-situational goal varying in importance, which serves as a guiding principle in the life of a person or other social entity”. Values are believed to transcend situations, remain relatively stable over time and affect motives, beliefs, attitudes, norms, intentions

and behaviors (Steg et al 2014). The concept of environmental values has been widely researched, mainly distinguishing ecospheric values which focus on the intrinsic value of the environment and anthropocentric values where nature is valued as a resource for humans (Stern and Dietz 1994).

Another classification of values is described by Schwartz (1994) in his Value Theory where the following four motivational value types are distinguished: Openness to Change/ Conservation (value of tradition and conformity), Self-Enhancement (achievement,

power)/Self-Transcendence (universalism, benevolence). Each pair of value dimensions is put in contrast with another (*figure 1*). Research revealed that strength of self-enhancement values (focus on one's individual interests) and self-transcendent values (focus on collective interests) are the most influential in developing environmental beliefs, attitudes, intentions and actions. Commonly all four values can be represented in an individual, but there may be significant differences in the extent to which particular values are manifested. Specifically hedonic and egoistic values of self-enhancement type of dimension and altruistic and biospheric values of self-transcendence dimension are commonly recognized to impact environmentally responsible behavior (Steg et al 2014). Using a survey instrument that distinguishes egoistic, altruistic, and biospheric values De Groot and Steg (2008) found out that those who possess altruistic or/and biospheric values are more likely to demonstrate environmentally responsible behavior. Accordingly, those who have self-enhancement values (hedonic or egoistic) do not tend to act in an environmentally conscious way.

Most of intrinsic motivation is constituted by values but it is a challenging task to identify what forms our values. One way of studying the factors that form environmental values can be explored by studying the life experiences of those who have adopted sustainable lifestyles or who are engaged in environmental activism. The latter type of pro-environmental behavior was approached by a few researchers who studied environmentalists' life histories. One of the studies was held in USA and Norway (Chawla 1998) where numerous professional environmentalists were interviewed about the experiences and individuals who influenced their decisions to become environmentalists. It was discovered that those people were influenced not by a single experience but by a combination of factors, which were the following (decreasing in relevance):

- Childhood experiences in nature
- Experiences of pro-environmental destruction

- Pro- environmental values held by the family
- Pro-environmental organizations
- Role models (friends or teachers)
- Education

Each experience was influential in a specific life stage: nature and family in childhood, education and friends in adolescence and early adulthood and pro-environmental organizations in adulthood (Chawla 1999).

### **Impact of materialistic value system on pro-environmental behavior**

The given research attempts to broaden the understanding of sustainable lifestyles and discuss the influence of materialistic and spiritual types of values and motives. Wider range of personal values may also affect environmentally responsible behaviors and desires to lead a sustainable lifestyle, for instance Hurst et al (2013) suggests that materialistic values should be considered as such values may be negatively related to environmental outcomes.

The concept of materialistic values puts acquisition of material goods and wealth in the first place in individuals' values, goals and attitudes (Kasser and Ryan 1996) and material interests are always superior to other social goals (Mukerji 1983). The superiority aspect of materialism sets the ground for competition and sometimes conflict between personal consumption goals and social goals such as environmental protection (Banarjee and McKeage 1994). Research into value conflict (Grouzet et al 2005; Schwartz 1992) has shown that some overlapping personal values are compatible and others may create conflicts.

For instance values of Power and Achievement oppose to values of Universalism, which include valuing the environment and equality thus both of these sets of values are rarely compatible in individuals (Hurst et al 2013). Burroughs and Rindfleisch (2002) made analysis of material measures in the context of the Schwartz's Value theory and discovered that

materialism was located next to Power and Achievement, and opposite to Universalism. According to further research (Grouzet et al 2005) materialism falls with other self-interested values opposing the values that can possibly be associated with environmental concern.

Research related to commons dilemma paradigms provided evidence that environmental and altruistic values are strongly associated (Kopelman et al 2002). Various studies have provided evidence that individuals with pro-social orientations behave more cooperatively and consume less environmental resources and similarly participants with environmental values behave more pro-socially in general (e.g. Kaiser and Byrka 2011; Van Lange 1999).

Different behavior derives from different values and goals and it is another way of how materialism may affect environmental behavior. As Brown and Kasser (2005) stated in their study, individuals who pursuit goals that do not depend on material goods or wealth such as deep relationships with family or community well-being are less likely to get involved in behavior that damages the environment. By contrast, materialistic goals encourage individuals to engage in excessive consumption which leads to increased negative impacts on the environment.

If materialistic values negatively correlate with sustainable practices, it can be suggested that it is the opposite for spiritual values. The present study attempts to identify the relationship between spiritual values and pro-environmental behavior in two Hungarian eco-villages.

## **Motives**

There has been less research done on motives than on values, although individuals' motives for adopting sustainable lifestyles are important to consider due to the fact that in the process of making particular choices, the various values may overlap and conflict with each

other, which makes certain values less pronounced (Moisander 2007). Similarly to a value, a motive is a goal of action therefore motives and values may coincide. The main difference between a value and a motive is that we can make conclusions about people's values based on their motives for a particular behavior while it might be misleading to do the opposite because the values are not always motives for a particular action (Howell 2013). Thence it is not sufficient to ask only about values in order to understand individuals' motives for their behaviors.

Motivation is the incentive for an action or behavior which is regulated by a dynamic psychophysical process (Moisander 1998). Choice of behavior from all possible actions is affected by intensity and direction of motivation. Motives for behavior are classified as conscious and unconscious, primary and selective. Primary motives are larger ones which lead individuals to engaging into a whole set of behaviors, for instance choosing environmental lifestyle such as moving to environmental communities as the case of the present research is concerned about. Selective motives affect one specific action, for example choosing not to buy a plastic bag today or biking to work despite the rain. Primary motives, such as social and altruistic values, are often overruled by the more urgent, selective motives formed by one's needs (e.g. being comfortable, saving money and time). For instance one may choose to drive a car to the near-by shop because of the bad weather or unwillingness to carry the bags (environmental value is overridden by personal comfort).

Some studies suggest that intrinsic (internal) motivations such as enjoyment and satisfaction must be emphasized in promoting environmentally responsible behavior rather than extrinsic (external) motivations such as rewards, as intrinsic motives are more inspiring for intensive and stable engagement (Crompton 2008). For example, it was discovered that people who are influenced by intrinsic motives are more involved in environmentally responsible behavior (Brown and Kasser 2005) The environmentalists who were studied for a

research project were more motivated by intrinsic reasons (Chawla 1999) and interviewees of another research experienced enhanced personal meaning of their lives as a result of engagement into environmentally responsible behavior (Maiteny 2002).

### **2.3. Spiritual values/ spirituality and pro-environmental behavior**

#### **What is spirituality?**

In the traditional religious way spirituality is defined as a process of mutual relationships between God and man (Waaijman 2007). Another, broader understanding of spirituality describes it as “an individual’s inner experience and/or belief system, that gives meaning to existence, and subsequently allows one to transcend beyond the present context” (Kamitsis and Francis 2013). However there is a whole range of definitions that conceptualize spirituality in numerous ways: starting from New Age mysticism to traditionally religious approaches. This broad understanding of spirituality produced a new discussion in the literature regarding the relation between religion and spirituality (King and Crowther 2004). Some authors argue that religion and spirituality are strongly interconnected and there is little chance that spirituality can evolve without following religious instructions and practices and that religion without spiritual growth can lead to an extreme fanatical behavior (Armstrong and Crowther 2002). Since religion is not in vogue these days, many other authors hold that religion and spirituality are unambiguously different, where spirituality is superior and a more personal process (Slater *et al* 2001). One of the possible distinctions between religion and spirituality is established in the following definition (Koenig *et al* 2000):

*“Religion is an organized system of beliefs, practices, rituals and symbols designed (a) to facilitate closeness to the sacred or transcendent (God, higher power, or ultimate truth/reality), and (b) to foster an understanding of one’s relation and responsibility to others in living together in a community. Spirituality is the personal quest for understanding answers to ultimate questions about life, about meaning, and about relationship to the sacred or transcendent, which*

*may (or may not) lead to or arise from the development of religious rituals and the formation of community”.*

During the last century the phenomenon of spirituality has been identified with two approaches: “the deductive one, strongly theologically oriented, and the inductive one, starting from lived experience”. These two approaches served as the basis for three basic forms of spirituality (Waaajman 2007): the schools of spirituality, primordial spiritualities, and counter-movements.

While the schools of spirituality is an obvious concept and refers to well established traditions, religious movements, institutions and organizations, two other types of spirituality need some clarification. Primordial spirituality is related to the following types (Waaajman 2007): (1) lay spirituality, or everyday spirituality, developed in the micro-world of the close associates such as family; (2) the indigenous spiritualities; and (3) forms of secular spirituality, outside of religious dominance. Lay spirituality might be expected to be the most common type of spirituality in a secular environmental community like Gyúrúfű which is a subject of the present study. Lay spirituality is experienced by the community as a whole thorough sharing such life moments as birth and death, children’s upbringing, marriage, sickness and dangers, and tragedies in the context of mutual helpfulness. Counter-movement spirituality is expressed in opposition to a dominant power and modern society represents a great variety of such counter movements (e.g. spirituality of oppressed farmers, the spirituality of the desert monks; the spirituality of poverty movements; holocaust spirituality etc.).

Many more interpretations of this phenomenon can be assumed under the influence of philosophical pluralism and one may find the term “spirituality” to be tied to western depth physiology, eastern meditation, Christian thought and personal experiences (Evans 1993). This liberal approach to understanding spirituality results in transforming this term into

something amorphous like "an experience of the numinous" and everyone interprets "numinous" according to personal worldviews and beliefs (Evans 1993).

This discrepancy in definition and interpretations of spirituality directed the present study into a more open-minded approach where dwellers of a secular environmental community were encouraged to share their own understanding of the subject and this way the findings will also include the most influential types of spirituality for pro-environmental behavior while the religious community has a specific understanding of the term and its characteristics will be provided in the results section.

## **Spirituality and the environment**

*“The more deeply I search for the roots of our global environmental crisis,  
the more I am convinced that it is an outer manifestation of an inner crisis  
that is, for lack of a better word, spiritual” (Gore 1992).*

As some research in the field of psychology has showed, religiosity and spirituality have always been significant influences on individual attitudes and behaviors (King and Crowther 2004). Some studies show that spirituality positively influences pro-environmental behavior, for instance Chairy (2012) discovered that spirituality and self-transcendence correspond to a stronger desire to consume pro-environmental products. Some environmentalists began to question whether the reasons of our present ecological crisis are spiritual (White 1967, Nollman 1990). There is a whole movement of Eco-theology which sees the roots of environmental problems in spiritual terms and therefore the solutions are found in the same field (Dryzek 2013). Moreover many deep ecologists and eco-feminists are also inspired by the nature-based spirituality.



Literature review showed that, so far, only a limited amount of studies explored the role of spirituality in forming pro-environmental behaviors and the connection between spirituality and green practices in general. Religious organizations of various types became engaged into protecting the environment and promoting environmental lifestyles, but it is not clear whether these public actions are transferred into personal behavior of their followers. This research tried to fill this gap by investigating whether and how spirituality is connected to pro-environmental behavior in a religious and a secular environmental community.

## **Religious spirituality and the environment**

The question about the possible role of religion in nature was raised in the second half of the twentieth century as the environmental problems began to gain their critical extent enforcing environmental awareness and concern. The hope for religion promoting environmentally responsible behavior was envisioned as a solution to constantly deteriorating natural environment (Taylor 2008). The amount of literature on this subject began to grow where the common dialectic was the discussion whether the religious ideas and beliefs were to blame for environmental crisis or praise for saving the environment. One of the most discussed works was White's "Historical roots of the ecological crisis" (1967) where he argues that western monotheistic religions became a cause for anti-nature attitudes and behaviors. However White expressed a hope that the cause of the problem which is largely religious may become its effective remedy. White was not the only one who considered religions as a possible solution to environmental problems; environmental activist Porritt (1984) expressed the same expectation:

*"I would accept this analysis, and would argue therefore that some kind of spiritual commitment, or religion in its true meaning (namely, the reconnection between each of us and the source of all life), is a fundamental part of the transformation that ecologists are talking about."*

Interestingly, at the same time Asian religions were viewed in some quarters as an antidote to the West's environmental destructiveness (though of course this raises the question of why environmental decline was observed in Asian countries as well) (Taylor 2008).

The conviction that religion can be both a cause and a response to environmental crisis stimulated the efforts on behalf of religious institutions and movements to promote pro-environmental behavior and each tradition has a particular worldview on the relationships between people and nature. Christianity and Islam see the role of humans in being stewards of nature, Buddhism emphasizes unity and coexistence with the environment and both Buddhism and Hinduism are concerned about action-reaction process called Karma (Mohamad et al. 2011). This way, world religions, each in its unique way, offer philosophical guidelines for harmonious relationships between people and nature.

Nature religions related to indigenous societies and paganism as well as new religious movements, recreational activities and scientific work are also regarded as fostering environmentally sensitive values and behaviors and can be seen as an alternative to mainstream religions (Taylor 2008). When anthropologists began to see religion from an evolutionary prospective, some concluded that religious views expressed in ethical mores, rituals and taboos evolved in such a way that assists in adaptation of humans to their natural environment, safeguarding reproduction and group survival as well as promoting environmental health (Harris 1971).

The present work includes research on the eco-village "Krishna Valley" which was founded by a new religious movement, but this movement is new only to the western society as it counts about five centuries of existence in India and derives from Hinduism. The two principle braches of Hinduism are Vaishnavism (worships Vishnu and his avatars) and Shaivism (focuses on Shiva). International Society of Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON)

follows Vaishnava branch of Hinduism, but its environmental views and philosophical background has a lot of commonalities with all other great Vedic religions (Prime 2002).

In contrast with some other religions, The Hindu religion clearly defines the sanctity of life: “only God has an absolute sovereignty over all creatures, thus, human beings have no dominion over their own lives or non-human life” (Dwivedi 1990). As a result, people are not given a right to act as vicegerent of God on the Earth and they cannot assign value to other species. According to Vedic scriptures creation, maintenance, and annihilation of the universe is completely dependent on the Supreme will. In the Bhagavad Gita, a sacred text of the Hindus, Lord Krishna says to Arjuna: “Of all that is material and all that is spiritual in this world, know for certain that I am both its origin and dissolution” (Gita 7.6). And the Lord says: again “The whole cosmic order is under me. By my will it is manifested again and again and by my will, it is annihilated at the end” (Gita 9.8). That is why, for the followers of Hinduism, both God and Nature is one and the same. The Hindu religion preaches for a renunciation of worldly goods and against materialistic values (Dwivedi 1990).

## **Contemporary spirituality and the environment**

The emergence of contemporary spirituality is believed to have an impact on of the slow but deep change taking place in the Western worldview and this change can be a path on the way to a more sustainable society (Hedlund-de Witt 2011). This change may result from the sense of duty and responsibility to care for others and for environment based on beliefs about the divine, the spiritual and the transcendent (Hulme 2009). This transition to a more re-enchanted, post-material and spiritual worldview is claimed by several social scientists (Hedlund-de Witt 2011). Moreover, this contemporary spirituality worldview is considered to be related to environmental concerns hence it should not be disregarded as a tool for shaping pro-environmental behavior (Aldridge 2000; Hanegraaff 1996, Taylor 2010).

The wide range of quite different definitions of contemporary spirituality can be found in the literature and there is no universally accepted definition (Hedlund-de Witt 2011). The emphasis is mainly put on subjective experience and can include almost any kind of meaningful activity or blissful experience or a process of transformation, but outside the religious context. The following concepts/practices can be referred to contemporary spirituality: mysticism, esotericism, eastern religions, humanistic psychology (Hedlund-de Witt 2011) as well as contemplation, kabbala, asceticism, perfection, devotion and piety (Waaijman 2007).

Environmental views of contemporary spirituality are expressed through Eastern spiritual ideas about spirit, divine origin or higher value in all of nature, which should be treated accordingly, with respect and reverence (Taylor 2010). These views are practically manifested in the switch to vegetarianism and the consumption of whole and organic food, the rise of the animal rights movement and the emergence and expansion of the environmental movement itself and generally speaking have positive effect on environmental behaviors, making individual life-styles more sustainable (Campbell 2007).

Another characteristic of contemporary spirituality is the focus on interconnectedness with the rest of life which fosters the feeling of care and responsibility for the nature and other living beings (Heelas 1996). This theme is developed in philosophical works of Leopold (1949), Macy (2007) and Naess (1989). Sense of interconnectedness also results in understanding or at least awareness of the consequences of one's action and its impact on the surrounding environment (Hedlund-de Witt 2011).

One more aspect of contemporary spirituality that helps to form pro-environmental behavior is perception of oneself as a part of a whole rather than a separate entity (Campbell 2007). This way Western individualism is gradually redirected to more communal self-

identity with a natural desire be in one's family, community or society. It results in contributing more to bringing about a better world through self-actualization in relation with others (Mitroff and Denton 1999). And finally, emphasis on inner and spiritual accomplishment rather than material terms may assist in decreasing consumption rates and as a consequence alleviate extraction of natural resources and pollution (Jacob et al. 2009).

According to research exploring the correlation of world views with sustainable lifestyles (Hedlund-de Witt et al 2014) contemporary spirituality has a positive effect on pro-environmental attitudes and lifestyles which can be observed in decreased meat consumption, action, participation and support for environmental organizations.

## 2.4. Intentional-environmental communities

It is believed that environmental awareness and concern have increased since the

1970's, however environmentally informed and /or concerned individuals do not show any consistency in adopting sustainable practices in their everyday life (Alwitt and Pitts 1996). The intentional environmental communities represent unique groups of people who acquired the most extensive “green” practices and quite radically changed their lifestyle.



Figure 2. Circle of sustainability (EDE 2012)

Therefore it is worth investigating the driving forces that encouraged eco-

villagers to make this choice such as values and motives.

Eco-villages are human settlements which intentionally avoid harming nature and try to fit in the environment in the best possible way. A long-lasting sustainable human community is based on technologies, social-economical and community-organization practices in order to use natural resources of the given environment in the most effective way (Farkas 2012).

In the past few decades, the eco-village movement has increased and became a widely-discussed alternative lifestyle to the mainstream culture which is closely tied with principles of sustainability and self-sufficiency and it incorporates a number of ideas and approaches which can be traced back to Schumacher, Gandhi, eco-feminism, and the alternative education movement (GEN 2014). The vague definition of sustainability can justify many practices that greatly differ in their impact on the environment and some represent a very distant notion of this concept. While eco-communities are described as models of practical action in mitigating degradation of our social, ecological and spiritual environments.

An eco-village can be defined in two ways. One is a more narrow approach which mainly emphasizes its ecological aspect. The definition of an eco-village by Diane and Robert Gilman (1991) was among the first ones and it is still being frequently quoted, but it omits the social and spiritual-cultural dimensions that may be critical in maintaining a basis for an eco-village as a community:

“Ecovillages and Sustainable Communities are a human scale, full-featured settlement, in which human activities are harmlessly integrated into the natural world, in a way that is supportive of healthy human development and can be successfully continued into the indefinite future.”

A more holistic and all encompassing way to describe an eco-village can be observed in a definition by Global Eco-Village Network (2014):

*"An eco-village is an intentional or traditional community using local participatory processes to holistically integrate ecological, economic, social, and cultural dimensions of sustainability in order to regenerate social and natural environments."*

Other definitions of an eco-village also mention such characteristics as maximizing human wellbeing and happiness, harmony with all aspects of life and a participatory process (Jackson 1998, Gaia Education 2012). In other words eco-villages are called intentional environmental communities, as they come together for some shared purpose or intention which logically has something to do with environmental protection or sustainability.

According to Gaia Trust Education (1998) as well as its program Seminar Gaia Education Design for Sustainability (GEDS 2012), a settlement can be considered sustainable only under conditions of equally fulfilling all of its 4 dimensions – social, economic, ecological and worldview/spiritual (figure 2).

The content of the worldview dimension (cultural/spiritual) depends on the type of an intentional community. In the religious communities the worldview dimension is linked to a particular tradition of belief while in secular communities there are diverse ways of spiritual or cultural self-realization. In general, the worldview dimension encompasses the following meanings: shared creativity, rituals and celebrations, cultural activities, artistic expression, sense of community, unity and mutual support, understanding of the interconnectedness and interdependence of everything on the Earth, respect and support for various forms of spirituality etc. Eco-village Design Education by Gaia Trust (2012) not only recognizes spiritual and cultural patterns in environmental communities but also admits that these patterns may strongly influence and even predetermine economic, social, and ecological relationships. The subcategories on this dimension include:

- **Holistic Worldview** is a current transition to the synthesis of science and spirituality

- **Reconnecting with Nature** as a spiritual practice
- **Transformation of Consciousness** is change of values and behaviors during the spiritual journey
- **Personal and Planetary Health is interdependence and interconnectedness** between planetary and personal health
- **Socially Engaged Spirituality** is a spiritual life manifested in an active social position

Therefore, there is some evidence that spirituality and spiritual values may affect not only individual choices and values but the well-being of a community itself. The previous research on Hungarian eco-villages (Hári 2011) aimed to investigate which Hungarian eco-villages match all three criteria of sustainability (economic, social and ecological). It was revealed that only three intentional environmental communities among all Hungarian initiatives (Gyűrűfű Ecovillage, Visnyeszéplak and Krishna-Valley Indian Cultural Centre and Biofarm) function in accordance with these three criteria mentioned above (worldview dimension was not part of the research). Interestingly, two of the villages that are regarded by the author as the most successful sustainability initiations of the study have religious roots whereas a secular eco-village was discovered to have a weakened social aspect which is detrimental for existence of the community. These findings suggest that spirituality may indeed be a key factor in maintaining healthy intentional environmental communities.

Another study on Hungarian eco-villages established that the family has a distinguished value for its inhabitants, who assign an important role for the institution of the family and put emphasis on strong community connections, self-sufficiency for the family, and families with many generations or many children (Farkas 2012).



Generally different themes related to the intentional environmental communities have been researched such as co-housing and sustainability (Marckmann et al 2012; Elfors and Svane 2008), environmental education in eco-villages (Pathiraja 2007), the relation between eco-villages and sustainability (Ardzijaускаite 2009), the quality of life and happiness in eco-villages (Xu 2008) and many other works on various aspects of eco-villages. Despite the wide range of literature on this subject, no empirical research has been found on values of being part of an eco-community and motives to acquire a sustainable lifestyle of this kind.

So far, no studies that explore motives and values of members of intentional environmental communities have been found whereas eco-villages can be seen as an exemplary pro-environmental behavior that can establish a transition to sustainable communities. Similarly to the study on the motivations of committed environmental professionals (Chawala 1998), this research contributes to the understanding of values and motives of pro-environmental behavior in intentional communities and more specifically the role of spirituality in leading a sustainable lifestyle.

## 3. Methods

### 3.1 The research design

#### Choice of the method

The qualitative type of the research appears to be the most appropriate for answering the main research question and achieving established goals of the study as they involve such concepts as values, meanings, experiences and motivations which are complex and difficult to articulate in using the survey format. The extensive quantitative studies on values and attitudes may not include the whole range of influential factors shaping individual values, choices and pro-environmental behavior. As White et al (2010) correctly points out, qualitative methods are more successful in identifying the meanings and interpretations of actions or choices made by individuals, which reveals information about their values and motivation.

#### The interviews

The conversations were held face-to-face in a convenient place for the interviewee. They were semi-structured with open questions encouraging participants to tell stories of how they came to live in an eco-village, what were the reasons behind the significant change in their lifestyle, whether and how environmental aspects of living in an eco-community are important to them and other questions (*table 1*). Apart from the guiding questions from the *table 1*, many follow up questions were used in order to get the meanings of some concepts and better understanding of participants' ideas. This approach helped to find out what participants see as important in being part of an environmental community and in this way understand the factors that formed their pro-environmental behavior (in this case joining and living in the eco-village is interpreted as pro-environmental behavior) and the role of spiritual values in forming and maintaining this behavior.

Table 1. Guiding questions for the semi-structured in-depth interviews

Question	Objectives of the question
1) Could you please tell a little bit about yourself and about when, how and why you joined the environmental community?	<i>To get background information about the participant and motivation to join an intentional environ-mental community</i>
2) Has your lifestyle become more environmentally friendly since your joined the community? In what way (examples)? Are these changes important for you? Why?	<i>To identify values of sustainable lifestyle/sustainable practices</i>
3) What do you value the most in being part of this environmental community? What do you think is the main thing that unites people in Gyűrűfű? What are the benefits of being part of this community?	<i>To explore other values of this lifestyle</i>
4) a) Have your life priorities changed since you moved to Gyűrűfű/Krishna Valley eco-village? If so, how? b) Did living in Gyűrűfű/Krishna Valley change your relationships with the nature and people? How? Have you	<i>To see whether transformation of values took place as a result of living in an eco-village</i>

personally changed? In what way?	
5) Has your quality of life changed? How?	<i>To explore what the experience of living in the village means to them.</i>
6) Are there spiritual values in living in an eco-village? What are they? Are they important to you?	<i>To identify spiritual values and their significance to the interviewees</i>

In Gyűrűfű a couple of families preferred a group interview format and this option was considered as an interesting option. There were two group interviews with two and three people in each group in order to see the advantages of this type of the interviewing. The positive side of this experiment was that interviewees had more time to develop their own thoughts on the question while others were speaking; these two interviews seemed to be much more relaxed, and involved a lot of stories and anecdotes. The negative side of this approach was the possible impact of the first speaker on the wording or even ideas of the interviewees who spoke next and a few times there were disagreements and arguments which could influence the content of the interviews by bringing up issues in the relationships rather than personal opinions. The length of the in-depth interviews varied from 30 to 100 minutes, where the two group interviews were naturally the longest.

### Observations

The additional source of data for this study is field observations which were taken during field research in both villages. The field trip to each community took approximately two weeks which allowed time for informal conversations, communal activities and

observations. Volunteer work in each eco-village provided more opportunities for interaction with the participants and other village dwellers. All the observations during informal conversations and activities were recorded in field notes.

### **3.2. Sample selection**

#### The Eco-villages

The interviews were conducted in two Hungarian eco-villages in May 2014: Gyűrűfű and Krishna-Valley. As the present research is stressing spiritual and value aspects, two contrast types of a community were chosen: with a more explicit and formalized spiritual dimension (a religious eco-village Krishna Valley) and one that does not have that (a secular community Gyűrűfű). This choice allows the comparison of different types of spirituality and its various connections to sustainable lifestyles. Moreover, according to a previous research these two eco-villages were recognized as the most successful examples of sustainability and self-sufficiency among other intentional environmental communities in Hungary (Hári 2011).

Both communities are relatively recently established (Gyűrűfű -1991, Krishna Valley-1993), meaning that all the residents moved there from some other places. The Gyűrűfű community was found on environmental premises to establish a settlement in harmony with the natural environment in a former village which was deserted from 1970 until the early 1990s. Krishna Valley is a religious community that focuses on spiritual life and simple living as opposed to western lifestyle based on materialism and high consumption. The population of the eco-villages differs significantly: around 30 people in Gyűrűfű and 130 in Krishna Valley, but this does not represent a limitation for the given study taking in consideration its qualitative character.

#### The Interviewees

In total 20 people from two eco-villages were interviewed. 11 individuals were interviewed in Krishna Valley and 9 people from 8 households in Gyűrűfű (out of 11). The sample size was purposefully small, because the goal was to explore interviewees' experiences and thoughts profoundly which cannot be achieved by quantitative methods. Moreover a too large sample size would generate so much data that the relationships between the factors, experiences and values would be difficult to analyze, interpret and generalize (Yardley 2000). Generalization of results in qualitative research is characterized as theoretical rather than statistical (Maxwell 2009). The selective process in Gyűrűfű was based on covering most of the households due to the small size of the village whereas in Krishna Valley sampling was carried out based on a snowball technique when each interviewee recommended another person. Six interviews in Gyűrűfű were translated from Hungarian to English and the rest were taken in English. In Krishna Valley two interviews were translated into English, two were taken in Russian and the rest were in English.

### ***3.3. The analysis of the interviews***

The interviews were recorded on a device, transcribed, conceptualized and coded. More general coding themes were predefined from the interview questions whilst other codes were worked out by an inductive method of reading and re-reading the transcripts, distinguishing common concepts within and between the interviews and grouping relevant topics and words under specific concepts. This approach is based on the grounded theory of Glaser and Strauss (1967) according to which hypotheses derive from the data instead of using research data to confirm or reject an already articulated hypothesis. For the purposes of confidentiality and respect for the participants of the research, all the quotations, responses and references to responses are provided anonymously.

### **3.4. Challenges and limitations:**

The first interview seemed to be too brief and some level of tension could be felt in the participant. The participant said at the end that the interviews had a wrong approach but this person could not articulate what was exactly wrong. After that incident it was decided to spend more time on ice-breaking questions about each interviewee, which were not contributing much to the research goals but helped to establish a friendly atmosphere. All the other interviews went well and participants seemed to be more relaxed and open in their answers. Since this challenge occurred only once, it is hard to tell whether it was really a matter of insufficient introductory questions or it is related to participant's mood or other personal circumstances.

In Krishna Valley there were more opportunities for informal conversations and observations because they do a lot of things collectively and it was easy to join them for the activities. Gyűrűfű inhabitants live more separately, each family or individual has a private household and no communal work was occurring during the time of research. The interviewees were offered help in their gardens and households but only one family accepted the offer. Therefore it was harder to make observations and have informal conversations in the secular village. As a result, there are more insights and observations about participants in Krishna Valley which derived from personal communication and group activities whereas in Gyűrűfű most of the data was received from the interviews. As a consequence, the data collected in Krishna Valley can be commented on to a wider extent in relation to other observations.

Another limitation of this study is the foreign language (Hungarian) which is not spoken by the researcher. 6 interviews were translated from Hungarian into English and two from Hungarian into Russian by a volunteer. Therefore some information and details could be

lost or misinterpreted in the process of translation. Other participants who spoke English are not native speakers; hence some careless or imprecise formulations could be misleading.



## 4. Results

This section discusses the main finding of the study. Based on the themes/concepts pre-established in the questions and the ones that derived during the interview the following categories of findings are presented: past experiences of living in nature and education/work related to environment, participants' motives to move to an environmental community (external driving forces and internal driving forces), system of personal values associated with living in an intentional environmental community, spiritual values of living in an intentional environmental community, community as a one of the main values in the studied eco-villages, Transformation of values and attitudes as a result of living in an eco-village and shared values inside the community.

First, possible premises for change in lifestyle will be discussed such as previous experience of living in a natural environment, studies or work associated with nature or nature protection. Then the full range of motivations and values will be introduced including both directly pronounced values/motives and those implied in discourses and concerns. Due to the fact that values and motives often overlap and it is hard to make a sharp distinction, the approach was to use questions as a guiding element. For instance, the answers about the reasons to move to an eco-village were considered to be motives while questions about what is important in living this lifestyle were considered as values. Obviously the responses could be the same in some cases.

Additionally motivation was divided into external driving forces (circumstances, events, accidents) and internal driving forces (beliefs, ideas, thoughts, attitudes) in order to find out if and how events influence people's thinking. And then the role of spiritual values and their meaning for the participants is distinguished in the context of all values and motives revealed as well as by analyzing personal change during living in an eco-village and the

change in relationships with the surrounding world (co-villages, other people, relatives, nature). In order to have a deeper understanding of participants' values and attitudes the value of community and sustainable lifestyle is discussed in more detail as these are the main attributes of an intentional environmental community and were identified as important during the interviews.

#### ***4.1. Past experiences of living in nature and education/work related to environment***

As mentioned in the above section the residents of both villages came to live there from somewhere else as these villages are relatively newly established. This fact encouraged a question about what kind of lifestyles interviewees had before, whether this experience of living in an eco-community and pro-environmental behavior is totally new for them or they had some previous experiences that encouraged them to make this choice.

The majority of participants in Gyűrűfű mentioned growing up and living in cities before coming to the village and the rest spoke about some limited experience of nature like having gardens within a city or spending time in nature with parents during their childhood. Two interviewees had an experience of growing up in village-like communities close to nature. Concerning studies or work related to nature or nature conservation five villagers were engaged in such activities as: organizing sustainability training in Hungary, acting as nature activists, education in eco-housing, landscape design and biology.

As for Krishna Valley, half of the participants either grew up in a village or had experience of spending a lot of time in nature or working in a family farm while living in a city. Another half of the interviewed villagers lived an urban setting before and did not have much exposure to nature or a village lifestyle previously. Four participants out of eleven were involved in an environmental field, in such activities as work for environmental NGOs and

national parks, professional gardening, education in biology/ environmental science and a college course in recycling and water treatment.

## **4.2. Participants' motives to move to an environmental community**

### **a. External driving forces**

Among dwellers of the secular community the most frequently mentioned reason for moving to an eco-village was the “unhealthy” and “unnatural” environment in the city for themselves and for their families. They pointed out that the atmosphere in a city is far from pleasant (“...*there was more concrete than trees, there were more houses than trees, more cars than people...*”) and already had or might have a negative effect on their health. Two interviewees were concerned about the harmful impact of air pollution on their health while biking in a city and one stated that it served as one of the stimuli to move. Other aspects of unfavorable conditions in a city mentioned by participants are dependence on external resources (“...*if you need to fix heating or anything else, you can't do it by yourself, you have to call a special company to repair it...*”), and the high costs of healthy living (food and clean environment). Attraction to a natural environment and associated activities is another side of dissatisfaction with living in a city. Some participants also expressed a desire to be close to nature and related activities such as to keep horses. In Gyűrűfű a few interviewees referred to their horse as a reason for coming to the village. In one case a horse was ill and it was necessary to take it out of a city, in other cases it was participants' desire to keep horses. One of the participants said that growing up in a village-like community was one of the motives to move.

Another commonality observed among responses of the interviewees in Gyűrűfű is the economic situation in a city such as lack of jobs, economic crisis and a crisis in Hungary

called the taxi blockade<sup>1</sup>: “...*there was not anything in the shops. And I experienced it living in a block of flats when it was not possible to get much food apart from jam and tomatoes...*”

The interviewees give an impression that because of economic instability and high dependence on external resources people were seeking a place where they could rely on themselves and to some extent on support from the community and be self-sufficient.

In case of the religious community, for many the main external driving force had a religious source: instructions of a spiritual teacher, good environment for spiritual practice or God’s will: “*It was Radhe-Syama [deities in the local temple] who arranged it because I had a very small desire to come here*”; “*I did not come here because it is an eco-village. Krishna arranged it for me.*” Among other external motives were that it was a good place for raising children and a good environment for healthy life.

#### **d. Internal driving forces**

In Gyűrűfű the main commonly stressed internal motive is the sense of security that a natural setting with its resources can provide. The sense of security is perceived as independence from the system that can collapse any time or as self-sufficiency: “... *a city dweller cannot imagine what could happen if he or she turns on the light and it does not work or what could happen if water does not come or if there is no gas... That dependency is something that I do not want to have*”. This motive in some cases is caused by economic reasons mentioned above; therefore external driving force can be reflected in internal motives such as a sense of security. But not all the participants associate their desire for security with economic factors hence this motive for security should be distinguished. It is also interpreted in terms of not being a cause of nature destruction because “*it will have a revenge on us*”. This

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<sup>1</sup> Striking taxi drivers and teamsters paralyzed Hungary for three days by barricading roads, bridges, borders and public transport in 1990.

concern is mainly expressed as a negative feeling such as fear rather than striving to make a change: *“The security that you have in a city pops like a bubble and it is frightening”*.

Only three interviewees distinctly emphasized nature protection as a motive for conscious change of a lifestyle. Within this theme there are some sub-motives for choosing this way of nature conservation. First, it is a practical application of environmental ideas to change the perception of environmentalists as *“...crazy people who don’t work just demonstrate. And we wanted to change this feeling by doing something positive... to show what we really want to do or how we would imagine our life”*. A second motive is to have more potential for fulfilling and demonstrating environmental commitment: *“...if water is dripping, it just goes back to the ground, so it is not a damage, we just make water cycle a big quicker”*. This motive was also named by some participants as a clear conscience meaning that they do all they can to protect the environment and it gives them a good feeling that helps to overcome challenges: *“Clear conscience, because even though it is more difficult and there are more hardships here, we know that this is the right thing to do”*. While some were clearly motivated by a desire to act pro-environmentally, others were simply attracted by the beauty of nature.

Community was mentioned by a few as a motivator to join an eco-village where the greater levels of cooperation can be experienced as well as sharing the same worldviews, ideas and concerns about the future: *“We were interested in this thing [eco-community] as people thought the same about the future as us, about what will happen [in the] next 15-20 years in the world”*. One participant saw an opportunity for deeper relationships with other people in this lifestyle due to the slower pace of life and availability of time for others. Also acting as an example for others and showing that it is possible to live sustainably was stressed by two participants: *“... it is possible to change and show other people that it is workable and livable this way”*. For one villager the model and education aspect of living in Gyűrűfű represents a

special goal of life: *“Moreover this lifestyle has a goal. I teach a lot about building techniques, composting toilets and electricity, water treatment and riding”.*

Other motives referred to by certain individuals included change in thinking due to a crisis (*“awakening experience”*), a personal need for a quieter place and a personal preference for this lifestyle: *“And the main reason is that I like this lifestyle. This is the most important for me. I can combine working at the computer and working outside”.*

In Krishna Valley most people indicated religious/spiritual reasons for coming to an eco-village. All participants but one were already seriously practising Krishna Consciousness before they came, therefore the main motivation was to be part of ISKCON in a different context. Some interviewees deliberately chose this lifestyle as a result of personal qualities and preferences and for others it was more of a coincidence or combination of factors. Those who came to live in Krishna Valley intentionally, stated that this village attracted them because it is the best place to practice spiritual life within a community of like-minded people, raise children in a *“pure”* place and have an opportunity to live in accordance with the principles of the movement: *“It is such a place where we can fully put into practice those principles that Srila Prabhupada writes about in his books: simple living high thinking. Krishna is in the center of life. We create good conditions to practice Krishna Consciousness. We arrange the house to practice Krishna Consciousness.”*

It is important to note that the devotees call Krishna Valley New Vraja-dhama which means a new holy place that is transcendent to the material world. Hence a special spiritual atmosphere of this place is frequently mentioned by participants. As was stated in the previous quote, simple living is one of the principles of Krishna Consciousness, as it is considered not only beneficial in terms of better concentration on spiritual practice but also

helps to avoid karmic actions<sup>2</sup>: *“You cannot have many activities and things here that will make your life more complicated because of the law of karma. For instance, electricity, it requires a lot of resources. So this kind of things, which make our lives more complicated. And they steal our attention from spiritual life and from community. Also from really important material things”.*

Since Krishna Consciousness can also be practised while living in a city, the interviewees gave explanations of why they chose living in a farm community. Many participants talked about their childhood experience or past experience of having a similar lifestyle, which is why they were looking for something similar within ISKCON. Some interviewees suggested that this lifestyle is closer to their nature or more natural for them personally as opposed to living in a city: *“So cows and simple life was not far from me. While the Budapest lifestyle was very alien.”* A couple of respondents who were not that determined about resettling to an eco-village initially were inspired by the books of Srila Prabhupada and their Guru: *“Maharaj once said during his lecture that 75% of problems of the mind is due to living in a city, if you come to the village, 75% of the problems will be solved naturally. It was very inspiring for me.”* One respondent who was not a complete member of ISKCON upon arriving in Krishna Valley was interested in farming and nature in addition to religious/spiritual reasons.

#### ***4.4. System of personal values associated with living in an intentional environmental community***

The most common value concepts mentioned among village dwellers in Gyűrűfű were independence/freedom and security. In many cases these values were interconnected. Independence from the system stood out as the most frequently cited value and various senses

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<sup>2</sup> Karma means that one gets a reaction for any activity that is performed within the material world, in other words, it refers to the law of action and consequent reaction (ISKCON 2014)

of ‘independence’ were used. First of all it was implied in terms of self-sufficiency as the use of local sources of water, energy and food as well as independence from external economic and social pressures such a necessity to earn enough money to pay the bills or dependence on an employer and other obligations: *“We do not earn much money but we know what is important, we can pay our bills, we do not have a loan on the house, we are free from loans; We just have to pay the taxes and health insurance. So we are earning money for that”*. The concept “freedom” was also used a lot as the ability to be fully responsible for one’s life, make one’s own decisions and not depend on others: *“You know, if you are living in a city, you are living a kind of incubator life. So you are getting everything and what you produce is taken somewhere else. And at the same time everyone tells you what to do and when and how. It is a life for children; you are not responsible for anything as long as you follow the rules”*.

Interestingly, participants connect freedom with the sense of security which again ties back to independence from external resources and a fear of environmental threats: *“Freedom gives you a huge taste of security. In the city, all you hear about is unemployment or global warming. Whenever I come back to this place I think: “oh, what can happen to me?”. Firewood will always be there and this gives me existential security, it is not something that you can have in a city.”* Some participants feel that the village is secured from the outside harmful impacts: *“You really feel safe here because we see how the things go bad or in wrong directions and we cannot imagine that we could not sustain this place. I think we will not be affected by global processes”*.

Community is the second most commonly mentioned value among inhabitants of the secular eco-village. This value is expressed as personal loving relationships between villagers, common views on environmental issues and significance for others: *“When I am in*



*a city I am an insignificant no one, but when I come here I know that I am important, people count on me here”.*

Nature is another central value among the majority of interviewees, its beauty, interaction with nature, nature as clean and healthy environment, its recharging effects on people and the role of nature in self-realization were all pointed out during the conversations: *“That you are close to nature and what a human really is. That is what you can feel here inside and that is nature. It does not have to be like this in wild nature, but living more in contact with the Earth makes you conscious”.*

Environmental protection also has its place in the value system of Gyűrűfű respondents, but it is distinct only in three participants and expressed as a desire to have a clear conscience, respect for and coexistence with other living beings, a concern about the negative effects on the Earth (ecological footprint) and as a desire to have an active standing in nature conservation: *“What I see with many nature conservation or environmental protection people [is] that they tend to think more and act less. They talk a lot, but they live in a panel building, during winter it is district heating and in summer it is air conditioning. And they are environmentalists. And they go and demonstrate against electricity power plants, nuclear power plants and at the same time they use a lot of energy.”*

Apart from some frequently mentioned and emphasized values there were some minor values mentioned by the participants: belief or faith, healthy organic food, peaceful environment, a value of this lifestyle: *“There are also other values and if you look around a little bit and look differently then maybe you will not see yourself as poor but as rich. People in the countryside are poorer but they should see the value of the way they are living.”*

In Krishna Valley the main values circulate around spiritual/religious themes and the benefits of a simple lifestyle and environmental practices for spiritual practice and development. First of all this lifestyle helps to get away from all the disturbances and anxieties

of living in a city and to concentrate on God: *“It is much easier to liberate your mind from all the material anxiety and all this impurity which is in the mind to focus on the spiritual in the environment like this rather than in the environment filled with modern technologies and unnecessary things. It is much easier to see God in such a natural environment.”* Almost every participant pointed out that living in this place makes them closer to God and according to sacred scriptures (Vedas) it is Krishna’s lifestyle and His instructions are to do the same: *“It is natural for jiva<sup>3</sup>, because Krishna lived this type of life. That is why we can be closer to Krishna by leading this lifestyle.”*

All the other concepts mentioned by Krishna devotees were closely related and served the goal of spiritual practice. For instance, security, so often mentioned in Gyűrűfü, was quite sharp in Krishna Valley as well, but had more varied meanings. Similarly with the other village, security was perceived as self-sufficiency: *“I understand that economically, financially and from other perspectives this kind of lifestyle we try to live here is the solution to all the material problems in the world, for all the economic problems for example. Today we know that anything can happen in the world, we have nice cities, like Dubai with its high buildings, but if there is no electricity, no gas or water then they will not be able to do anything while here we have everything to live on our own and it is a big treasure.”* Additionally security was perceived in social and spiritual perspective. Krishna Valley provides very good social protection for people who cannot contribute to ongoing work in the farm, temple or eco-valley foundation due to their health conditions, age or other valid reasons and interviewees seem to value this social care a lot. Moreover, they find security in being surrounded by like-minded people and living in a religious community which helps them to

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<sup>3</sup> A *Jiva* is the immortal essence or soul of a living organism which cannot be destroyed by physical death (ISCON 2014).

overcome difficulties on the spiritual path: *“Maya<sup>4</sup>, illusionary energy of God, is so strong that you can change the direction and still think that you are on the same path. This is the value of the community because one person or one family can be in Maya, but it is very rare that the whole community is in Maya at once. So people get trapped by Maya but the community can help and bring you back on the right path”*. Social security strongly overlaps with the value of community here. It is illustrated in the above quotation: the community ensures spiritual stability for all the members as well as helping to raise children without negative impacts of the outside world.

Life in the Krishna Valley community is also appreciated by devotees as its social structure based on the Varnasrama system described in the Vedas allows people to work according to their natural tendencies and to organize society in such a way that everyone, regardless of their position, makes spiritual progress: *“And I have an opportunity to do the job I like. We try to find a service for a devotee according to his or her nature, give them chance to do what they want to do. Every day I do work I love; it is very rare in other places.”* As all residents of Krishna Valley are united by one religion and one goal the community appears to be strong and resistant to conflicts: *“But because we have a common goal it is much easier to get this community together. It is very hard to find this kind of goals in other communities, where the goal is actually not spiritual, but material”*. Here the spiritual aspect of maintaining a community is emphasized.

Some environmental values were quite strong although they were not observed as major ones. Krishna Valley generates only a small amount of garbage as most of the food is produced locally and there is no unnecessary packaging which means less plastic and paper goes to the garbage bin. Nevertheless one participant expressed a very strong environmental

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<sup>4</sup> *“Maya* In Vedic philosophy, is the illusion of a limited, purely physical and mental reality in which our everyday consciousness has become entangled, a veiling of the true Self” (Cremo 1995).

concern about garbage disposal: *“When I throw away one more bottle of something, I realize that it is not reasonable to use plastic. Then I go and buy dish washing powder and I have to throw the bottle again, then again and again. What will happen with it? It is not ecological, not reasonable”*.

According to observations and informal conversations, some village inhabitants avoid using “*karmic*” (harmful for the environment) cosmetics and domestic detergents, and produce home-made environmentally friendly substitutes from resources available locally. Moreover, in the community shop only eco products are available. Careful attitude to the environment and other living beings for Krishna Valley inhabitants is enclosed in their sense of the divine source of everything: *“Everything in this world is Krishna’s energy thus everything belongs to Him. That is why it is important for us to keep them [all living creatures] for Krishna.*

Another value of this lifestyle that contrasts with living in an urban place and which was cited by many participants is more time available for spiritual practice, contemplating about life, spending time with family and other devotees and more time to appreciate life: *“It is a very peaceful life, we do not watch TV but we talk to each other, we go for a walk, we appreciate everything that we have, because we have time to see things. Because when you live in a city, even if you go out somewhere for a day and you are with your phone and everything you cannot see what is in front of you.”*

Nature and connection to nature is also very valuable for the interviewees of the religious community and was referred to a few times with association to God. Nature is perceived as a favorable atmosphere for living and even a source of happiness: *“I usually tell my guests: the village was created by God and the city by man. When we try to live more naturally, in harmony with nature, it helps us to live a calmer and happier life. Since the industrial revolution we see that people did not become happier. We see the increase in technical progress, but when people want to have some rest, they tend to go to Mother Nature.*

*They come here, for example, to Krishna Valley and it shows that people want inside themselves to live in harmony with nature”.*

#### **4.5. Spiritual values of living in an intentional environmental community**

At the end of the interview participants were asked whether there are any spiritual values in living this lifestyle and what are these values. It is possible that those values were already mentioned at earlier stages of the conversations, but it was considered important to see what interviewees themselves understand under ‘spirituality’ and ‘spiritual values’ and what significance these values have for them.

In Gyűrűfű respondents saw spiritual values in living nature, connection to nature, energy and beauty of nature: *“If you turn around a little bit you will see the value of it [lifestyle] and the connection to the Earth .... That is why this eco-house is so nice because it is made of the mud and it is also alive.”* Living according to nature’s laws as our ancestors lived is another spiritual aspect of living in an eco-village: *“Another spiritual thing for us is the need to live and think in harmony with nature and stay in basic properties, because if we change the properties it will not be an eco-village any more. We need to work accordingly with nature, it is possible to change for the environment, and it is possible to live a long time. It is the main spiritual aspect for people for more than a thousand years.”*

One person considers the value of nature and the value of environmental conservation in spiritual terms as something close to a belief or religion: *“...we also have a common religion and it is some kind of nature belief. But it is not a religion, even not a church. So it is only a common feeling of people who are here... Taking care of the environment is not a scientific thing. It is much more. It is a spiritual background, or spiritual guideline.”* Sharing knowledge about sustainable living and nature protection is also perceived as a spiritual value

by one respondent: *“For me it is teaching children how to live sustainably and protect the nature.”*

In some responses it is evident that spiritual values are connected to pro-environmental behavior: *“For me spirituality is going to the heart and when you are not just busy with material things but with other things that are spiritual...And automatically you do things not against the environment but for, you are more open to your environment.”* It was also observed that some participants appreciated spiritual values more than material values by living in an eco-village: *“In a spiritual or soul sense it [quality of life] improved, it became higher. And in a material sense it became lower.”*

For another dweller of the secular community the spiritual values of this lifestyle are part of a religious worldview where everything is a divine creation: *“And here you can see how big the gift of the Creator is...We are just small parts of the machine, and we should take care of what we were given.”* Spiritual values are also seen as relationships between village members and these values become distinct during some crisis or tragedy or during the process of interaction between members of the community: *“...community is a mirror of a person and it might be difficult to cope with it ... some people have personal problems even if they are not aware of it, but the community reflects this problem. People feel a problem in a community and do not know that it is a problem inside them.”*

Some members of the Gyűrűfű intentional environmental community suggested that spirituality is a core aspect for a community and individuals and it can assist in changing people's thinking: *“Spiritual practices are great to help us wake up and they are definitely needed because people are now just slumbering in a coma, and we cannot even laugh about this because it is really serious, it is affecting our world and our world right now is falling apart”; “Spirituality is the basic needs of people, if you do not fulfill them they start to follow something else’.*

Only two participants did not see or could not articulate any spiritual values - for one of them spirituality means solely a religion which is opposed to knowledge in modern society:

*“I am not religious and I cannot really turn it into religion, for me it is mostly about knowledge.”*

In Krishna Valley the answers were more homogenous and had a religious context. It is important to note how these spiritual values affect pro-environmental behavior in case of Krishna Valley. First of all, the way Krishna devotees place a human being in nature and in the universe produces a background for respecting the living and non-living nature: *“According to the teachings of Lord Chaitanya we should try to develop spiritual qualities and see everyone as the same in its essence whether it is a Brahmin<sup>5</sup> or dog eater or a dog or an elephant, because all of us are souls, a part and parcel of Krishna. We respect all plants, flowers and animals because they are parts of Krishna. Respect is a very important quality. Love and humility are inseparable, the more we love the more humble we become.”*

The participants of the religious community did not really stress the importance of sustainable living or living in a natural environment as a spiritual value because it is just right the conditions according to this particular tradition and it comes as a by-product of following the scriptures and spiritual practice, moreover the material world has a temporal quality therefore without a spiritual aspect it will lead to dissatisfaction: *“So the nice conditions are not everything, because it is also temporary like your body. That is the most important thing to know. I am not this body and this nice village and everything in this world is temporary. We have to cultivate this spiritual vision, because when we see only with material sight, we always will be disappointed. If we lose our spiritual vision, we will be disappointed even in the best eco-village in the world.”*

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<sup>5</sup> Brahmin is a member of the highest priestly caste or *varna* in Hinduism (ISKCON 2014)

According to interviewees in Krishna Valley this sustainable and simple lifestyle was advised by the Supreme Lord himself and since God created this world He knows better what is favorable for humans and other living beings and what is not. Therefore following His instructions brings happiness and satisfaction as it is an ultimate truth spoken by God: *“Moreover He is the one who gave us the rules. There is a saying: God made nature and people made cities. This is the difference. God created nature; He made some rules, four varnas<sup>6</sup> and four ashrams<sup>7</sup>. Ok if you follow this system then you will be happy. Because He is the Creator and if you obey His desires, He will be satisfied and you will become satisfied too because you follow his instructions. If we follow Krishna’s instructions then everything will be very in harmony. But people have different ideas of what we should do and these ideas are not in harmony with Krishna and other people.”*

#### **4.6. Meaning of sustainable lifestyle to the participants**

This section evolved during data analysis as many participants talked about their views on sustainable lifestyle (living in the eco-village) and its various components such as technologies. It is important to understand what a sustainable lifestyle means to the interviewees and how their values are related to it.

There were two distinct themes regarding what sustainable lifestyle means to the participants: their attitude to technologies and importance of simple living. While the role of technologies in eco-living was discussed in both communities, simple living was a leading concept only in Krishna Valley. Inhabitants of Gyűrűfü were observed to use more technologies in their daily life: electricity, Internet and modern appliances such as washing

<sup>6</sup> Social classes: *brahmanas* (priests, teachers, and intellectuals), *kshatriyas* (police, army, and administration), *vaishyas* (farmers, merchants, and business people), *shudras* (artisans and workers) (ISKCON 2014).

<sup>7</sup> Stages of life: student life, household life, retirement, and renunciation (ISKCON 2014).



machines. Village dwellers in Krishna Valley have more modest living conditions: electricity from solar panels (enough only for lighting and charging a phone) is available only in some guest houses and personal houses, access to the Internet and computers can be found in the temple and in the administrative building, and there was an absence of washing machines in the houses and a limited amount of mobile phones (usually one per family).

In the interviews Gyűrűfű respondents were more positive about using technologies but in a restricted way, emphasizing modern green technologies and trying to find a middle way between excluding technologies from life at all and using too many: *“These technologies [solar panel, water wells, firewood] are the middle way between comfortable things and the fact that we have to heat our water. I tried this middle way that doesn’t have a big environmental footprint but still provides a comfortable lifestyle”*. In the religious community people mainly talked about renouncing most of the modern technologies for the purpose of simple living but at the same time it is justified to use technologies in service to God but frequent use of technologies for personal use tends to develop attachments and addictions that are harmful for spiritual life: *“When I joined Krishna Consciousness, devotees explained to me the principle of utility, that we can use modern technologies in service to Krishna like mobile phones and other things, but we can minimize them and not let technologies use us. Although for preaching we can use everything, cars and airplanes.”*

A simple lifestyle is the main aspect of living in an environmental community mentioned by most of the interviewees in Krishna Valley and by ‘simple lifestyle’ they mean rejection of unnecessary technologies and products which are thought to make people’s life easier but instead consume a lot of time and distract from more important values such as spiritual practice, family and communication with co-villagers: *“But when Internet is available at home, it is very easy to get on-line and read some stupid things on Facebook. If you are at home and there is no television, no electricity...What can you do? You can talk to*

*your wife, play with your children or read Bhagavat Gita*". According to Krishna devotees simple lifestyle and sustainable practices is not the goal, the goal is Krishna Consciousness which inherently implies environmental consciousness: *"If you are Krishna Conscious automatically you will live a simple life. Even in a city, the devotees try to be eco-friendly, they lead a pure life. Here we have a wider range of opportunities."*

In Gyűrűfű participants mainly talked about lowering needs and consumption rates and as a result leaving a smaller ecological footprint. They also talked about change of consciousness from greed and power to humbleness and being content with less. One participant suggested that a sense of responsibility which is an integral part of living in an eco-community can assist in changing consciousness. Notably, not everybody in Gyűrűfű believes that it is possible to remove harmful behavioral patterns in humans: *"There are some contradictions here. There are some things, like plastic for example, that were invented and you cannot really renounce them or put them aside. Those people who were born into these things cannot really separate those things from themselves"*.

#### **4.7. Community as one of the main values in the studied eco-villages**

Since community was identified as one of the major values in both villages, it is important to consider this value in more detail, see its strengths and weaknesses in two cases in order to see the sub-values, and favorable as well as unfavorable factors in keeping the communities together. In Gyűrűfű participants stressed friendship, mutual support and a similar way of thinking as important and a lot of people thought that despite some difficulties and conflicts this community is much better than what they had in a city or other traditional villages. There were some contradicting opinions about the strength of the community: some thought that the relationships there are very close and open where people trust each other and have common values, while others mentioned conflicts ("two wars"), limited cooperation,

different backgrounds and avoiding making friends with neighbors: *“We do not get together often. Everyone can keep relationships to 1 or 2 families out of 7 or 8 who are present here, we agree on the same ideas like nature protection and ecology, but most of us come from a city and we come from very different backgrounds. So we are not like happy hippies living together.”* One person is even challenged by the forced closeness to others in a small community like Gyűrűfű: *“I do not know how to cope with it and how to keep distance from others”*. There is some evidence that the sense of community in Gyűrűfű is weakened by self-enhancement values: *“Everyone wants the best for their families, everyone is just trying to make the best out of everything... they want to take too much land, they want to take too much wood, they want too much out of everything and this leads to disagreement.”*

By contrast in Krishna valley with a population five times larger than in Gyűrűfű, the cooperation and interaction within the community seems to be more harmonious and they also seem to deal with problems more easily. As some participants indicated, this can be due to several reasons such as agreed spiritual and ethical principles, good articulation of the problem in case of conflicts and a common goal: *“If there is a spiritual etiquette, it is much easier to solve social problems. There is dharma<sup>8</sup>, or morality, which controls the exchange between individuals; there is a higher morality, which is Krishna Consciousness etiquette. Because everybody tries to reach some spiritual goal, social problems are solved much easier among us.”*

There were virtually no discrepancies in the answers of Krishna Valley participants in this area: all the interviewees stated that relationships in the community are deep, based on respect and mutual support, even though they also acknowledged that conflicts are unavoidable because people have different natures and there are ‘impurities of the heart’:

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<sup>8</sup> Dharma is the moral law combined with spiritual discipline based on duties that guides one's life (ISKCON 2014)

*“And we all live in a material world which implies all sorts of impurities of the heart, even though we chant holy names everyday and do other practices, it takes time to purify the heart. Therefore conflicts are inevitable.”* Another solution to communication problems in Krishna Valley is a strong leadership: *“I saw many communities, and there was no strong leadership there, people try to arrange everything in a democratic style. But with this kind of leadership, social problems are more intense. If there is hierarchy or some authoritative system, when on the top there is Krishna, it is much easier to run this kind of communities.”*

Ineffectiveness of democratic management system was also suggested by participants in Gyűrűfű: *“For a community it is not possible to live with democratic systems. It is only possible with a little hierarchical system which is based on knowledge, duties and production, merits of the things that you do.”* Notably, everything that interviewees in Gyűrűfű stated as missing in order to have a strong community such as a strong leadership, precise rules and regulations, duties and spiritual background is present in Krishna Valley: *“And the one thing that is missing, it could be in place here is one religion”*(Gyűrűfű member). Moreover, the causes of the conflicts that are stated in a secular village are naturally avoided in a religious community. For example, individualism, desire for power, different views, insufficient communication were mentioned in Gyűrűfű as reasons for disagreement: *“Everyone wants the best for their families, everyone is just trying to make the best out of everything and this leads to disagreement”*; *“It is over but they had strong fights about power, about votes and about what will be the future of the place”*.

By contrast, participants in Krishna valley try to overcome self-centeredness, follow a leader, share common values and goals and communicate all the problems in the community: *“Generally speaking, the individual challenge is that we should try to learn again that we are not the center of everything. We should try to work for others, not just for our own benefits.”*; *“If we have a problem then we can go to each other and talk about it.”* *“The main problem is*

*individual desires in a community. An intelligent leader should balance these desires, you cannot stop individuals from having desires, they should be fulfilled or given a possibility to be fulfilled, but at the same time something must be sacrificed as one is a part of a community.”*

#### **4.8. Shared values and goals inside the community**

In order to understand what values hold the two communities together, participants were asked their opinions about what unites them as a group of people. Whereas for Krishna Valley it was expected that religion is the main value that unites individuals in the community (a hypothesis confirmed by the interviews), it was important to see what the common values are in a secular community. Although environmental protection and sustainable practices were not distinctly pronounced as values or motives by the majority of respondents, in the discussion about common values half of the participants talked about environmental consciousness, sustainable practices, clean environment and love of nature: *“We are not using chemicals or we are collecting selectively the waste and use photovoltaic panels as well. Or we try to consume less energy. We also arrange transport in a sustainable way, we share the cars, we try to fit as many people as possible into one car. Also we exchange goods here, the ones that are produced locally. We trade what we have in surplus.”* Some people thought that the community itself unites people there because without others it is not possible to live this lifestyle: *“If I would like to live this lifestyle alone in a village it would not work, even on the level of water system or area management or organic farming.”* Others indicated that *“different thinking”* and *“a taste of freedom”* unite people in Gyűrűfű.

#### **4.9. Transformation of values and attitudes as a result of living in an eco-village**

This section tries to investigate whether participants' values and attitudes have changed since they came to live in an environmental community, and whether these changes have something to do with the pro-environmental behavior. In both villages there were individuals who felt that their environmental values became stronger: *"Yes, it did happen and these things [environmental practices] became valued, it was not a problem to fit them in (Gyűrűfű)"*; *"Before it was not important for me [environmental practices], because I had other things to do... I was not a vegetarian before, I loved the nature very much and sometimes I went to the nature...(Krishna Valley)"*. Some participants grew to appreciate the resources they have once they experienced the shortage: *"When you cannot get water from the tap for a week and then you get it, you are so happy. Then there is nothing better in the world than this. I think everybody should experience it (Gyűrűfű)"*.

In Krishna valley a participant who lived in a village for a long time noticed that it became very difficult physiologically to do something that harms the nature and any such action reflects painfully inside: *"Once our sink got clogged and I used a very strong chemical liquid, after that my heart ached, I felt very bad, I felt that I made a big sin. I even wanted to cry. I decided never use it again. When a person lives in it for many years then it becomes hard. It is the same as with eating meat...When a person stops eating meat and purifies it becomes painful to see how the animals are killed even though before it was not painful. Before it was natural now it is painful."*

Some other interviewees pointed out that their understanding of nature and appreciation of nature has changed and others became more positive about the role of humans in nature conservation (influenced by religious philosophy): *"I see much deeper the connections in the world, how the world functions. These NGOs I have experienced in the past have a tendency to be human haters, they do not like individuals. They announce that human beings are responsible for all the bad that is happening in the world. There is no positive*

goal. *Krishna Consciousness movement says the same, human beings are responsible for environmental degradation, but it strives to change it, it gives an alternative so we could live another way (Krishna Valley).*”

A number of participants in both villages indicated positive changes in relationships with other people, they became deeper and more understanding especially due to a slower pace of life and more time available to give more attention and care for others. As for Krishna Valley, most participants refer these changes to the outcomes of their spiritual practice and a few think that closeness to nature had an impact too: *“When you progress in spiritual life you understand more about yourself and the nature of other people. The first thing that you can see, and this is a sign of spiritual advancement, you become more tolerant to all the people, because you theoretically understand that all the living beings and not just people, but plants and animals and other living entities are part and parcel of God, so we are like brothers and sisters to every living beings so then you give them more respect in this way and with people it is the same.”* There was an experience of a reverse change mentioned by one participant from a secular community: becoming cautious with people and more attentive to oneself. Another participant from the secular community developed a negative attitude to city dwellers and their lifestyle while living in the eco-village.

One participant from Gyűrűfű emphasized a spiritual change that happened in him: *“I became more attentive to people, I take a better care of the people. Not that superficial type of relationships, but deeper, something to do with the soul”*. Another participant noticed a positive change in children who grew up in the community, but could not articulate what are these changes are about: *“I do not know it exactly, why changed, when changed or how changed. I know it because of children, because when they go to other places and communicate with other people, it is obvious that their priorities are different. But it is not a*

*problem. It is just a basic deep inside feeling about the children that tells me that this is a good change.”*



## 5. Discussion

These findings suggest that concern about environment and nature per se was not the main value in the Krishna Valley intentional environmental community while in Gyűrűfű it was more pronounced in some interviews but supported by many other values of living in the eco-village. The most frequently mentioned motives to join the intentional community in Gyűrűfű were the harmful environment in urban settings, economic reasons, a sense of security, independence and a desire to be a part of like-minded community. In Krishna Valley all the motives participants used to explain their choice were connected with religion in one way or another. As for values, in the secular community some coincided with the motives, such as independence, security and community. The value of community was universal for both eco-villages especially with respect to shared values and goals. In Krishna Valley the concept of simple living as part of spiritual practices was clear in many interviews. According to collected data, spiritual values of a sustainable lifestyle seem to play an important role in both communities.

### ***5.1. Motivation for joining an intentional environmental community and values of a sustainable lifestyle***

In the framework of the present research, two factors were detectable in both secular and religious communities: childhood experiences and pro-environmental organizations while an educational factor was referred to only in Gyűrűfű. These factors correspond with the previous research on motivation of environmental professionals (Chawla 1998) where the following factors were identified to have an impact on pro-environmental behavior: childhood experiences in nature, experiences of environmental destruction, pro-environmental values held by the family, involvement into environmental organizations, role models (friends or teachers) and education. However, these two factors were not positioned as critical in

motivating to change a lifestyle in the studied villages. Instead, many other motives for pro-environmental behavior were discovered.

Among participants of the secular community the leading element in motivation was safety/security. The way the interviewees talk about security is close to a “survivalist” notion, anticipating an apocalyptic collapse of society and being able to cope with it through self-sufficiency and independence from outside resources and the system. In Krishna Valley participants also mentioned security as a value but more frequently in the sense of being surrounded by people with common values and goals. This might suggest that people in the secular community are more driven by emotions such as fear and self-defense when members of the religious eco-community are better motivated by such factors as a desire to live in harmony with spiritual principles in a community with shared values.

Interestingly, not all the participants in Krishna Valley were conscious about acting pro-environmentally; for many it was a natural behavior as part of the spiritual philosophy, although some of them are quite environmentally conscious and aware of the impacts of different lifestyles. As observations and interviews in Krishna Valley showed, the participants have an active pro-environmental behavior but they do not stress environmental practices as the most important. It seemed that environmental values there are better articulated in practice rather than verbally and have a somewhat unconscious character. It can be true that environmental values and concerns per se might not be the most influential in forming pro-environmental behavior. Instead, environmental values could be a part of broad world views, philosophies and spiritual traditions which imply environmentally conscious behavior as it is represented in Krishna Valley.

Most interviewees in the religious community referred to strong links between spiritual and “simple rural living” values, therefore the opportunity of simple living was a solid motivator to move to an eco-village. Simplicity was a major theme in the religious village

whereas it was present in Gyűrűfű only to a small extent. As the field observations revealed, inhabitants of Krishna Valley also had a more modest lifestyle in terms of the use of technologies, as it was documented in the results.

The appropriateness of using technologies came up often during conversation with the participants in Krishna Valley, and there were some variations in opinion concerning the use of technologies among the respondents. Some of the participants seem to be more “anti-tech” and “pro-simplicity”, not just because it means reliance on an unreliable outside world but because they believe that it is in principle the better way to live. Specifically the participants saw the danger of dependence on technologies and distraction from more important values such as relationships with family and the circle of associates as well as spiritual practice.

The value of simplicity as part of spiritual practice in contrast to materialistic values enforces pro-environmental behavior as it implies lower consumption rates. Since the commonly used notion of simplicity and actual environmental practices coincide it can be assumed that spiritual values in case of Krishna Valley positively correlate with pro-environmental behavior.

Some participants from both communities expressed views which clearly match with the Green Romanticism concept (Dryzek 2013). They believe that change of consciousness is a key approach in changing the deteriorating environmental situation and if people change the way they regard and experience the world and each other towards green attitudes all necessary political changes will follow from that. Technological advancement is regarded by some participants as an obstacle to empathetic and intuitive human orientation to nature and people which also stands in line with Green Romanticism. According to Dryzek (2013), “Green Romantic” ideas are often found in radical environmentalist movements such as deep ecology, eco-feminism (etc), indicating that the values of the eco-community members are consistent with a recognized major strand of radical environmentalism. Some elements of these

movements were perceptible in conversations with the members of both intentional environmental communities, notably a strong “rural idyll” theme.

Economic independence was mentioned a lot in the interviews with Gyűrűfű dwellers, as some participants were motivated by the possibility to be self-sufficient and independent from the economic situation in the country. Economic reasons are also mentioned by the residents of the religious community, but again in the context of spiritual values: sustainability and self-sufficiency helps to solve material problems and concentrate on spiritual life. As relevant literature discusses (Crompton 2008; Brown and Kasser 2005) extrinsic motives such as economic factors are less stable and easily changed as opposed to intrinsic motives such as satisfaction, moral standing or values. However in the Gyűrűfű case the economic factors are often more akin to values – they are not at any rate the sort of straightforward personal financial gain that is often discussed as a possible stimulus for getting people to act environmentally.

Interestingly, in both villages the critiques of urban lifestyle were often observed and dissatisfaction with living in a city also served as a motive for some respondents. The participants mentioned environmental pollution, “incubator life”, lack of time for spiritual practice and maintaining relationships with others, bad quality of food and absence of a community. Participants in Krishna Valley favored rural living due to good conditions for spiritual life while for some respondents in Gyűrűfű this lifestyle is a rebellion against modern society and the system. These findings correspond with the study on quality of life and happiness in eco-villages (Xu 2008), where it was discovered that closer social and community bonds relate to higher reports of quality of life and that inhabitants of two Australian eco-villages are happier than the suburban survey participants. Therefore to some extent people can be motivated to join eco-communities due to negative experience of living in a city.

In both cases interviewees expressed alienation from the city and it would have been interesting to see the cause of this alienation, since not so many people choose to live in the country these days despite disadvantages of urban living mentioned by the participants. Possibly it can be due to the fact that some participants had an experience of living in a village before and it allows making a comparison or a previous engagement in environmental activities could affect such choice (both these factors were mentioned by some participants). The present research is limited to giving a range of possible reasons but cannot make any quantitative claims based on such small samples therefore it can be a good further research to explore how experience of rural life and nature can affect pro-environmental behavior.

The community and shared value motives are also clear from the conversations in both eco-villages. Many participants from Gyűrűfű community stressed the importance of thinking along the same lines and having common values, and a similar tendency was observed among Krishna Valley interviewees. But the strength of Gyűrűfű seems to be challenged by serious conflicts which caused a fall-out between some families. In Krishna Valley participants admitted that conflicts are inevitable but claimed they can be easily solved. In general, the community in Krishna Valley appeared to be more closely connected with each other. This may mean that a strong spiritual tradition which is shared by the members of Krishna Valley serves as a better foundation for a healthy and strong community than diverse personal interpretations of spirituality observed in Gyűrűfű.

This difference in community strength might be also partly due to a more hierarchical system in Krishna Valley and a less clear decision mechanism in case of fundamental disagreements in Gyűrűfű. The inhabitants of Krishna Valley are guided by a developed set of rules and managed by a hierarchical structure whereas in Gyűrűfű only general rules are set and the village is controlled by a board of directors. Since there are no specifics, members of the community may develop different ideas about particular practices which can create

disagreement and conflicts. As was stated by one of the participants, a big conflict occurred when one family introduced a practice that was deemed inappropriate by others.

According to Groot and Steg (2008) altruistic and biospheric values have a stronger positive impact on pro-environmental behavior as opposed to self-enhancement values (hedonic or egoistic). Judging by the interviews, Krishna Valley inhabitants seem to be more altruistically oriented whereas in Gyűrűfű there were some competing interests mentioned which led to severe conflicts. The communities also have different types of predominant shared values: nature in Gyűrűfű and the religious goal in Krishna Valley. Gyűrűfű dwellers seem to have two types of contradictory values: self-enhancement and biospheric. This clash might not *directly* influence their environmental behavior but is liable to weaken a highly important component of the eco-village - the community - while spiritual values with altruistic orientation are liable to have a positive effect on both the environment and community.

Another interesting motive for pro-environmental behavior observed in both eco-villages is locus of control discussed in the Literature Review section (Newhouse 1991). In Gyűrűfű there was a tendency of internal locus of control when participants believed that their efforts in sustainable practices will make a difference. A wider range of possibilities to demonstrate environmental behavior was one of the motives to join the secular intentional environmental community mentioned in the interviews. Meanwhile there were some individuals with an external locus of control in both villages who did not believe that their sustainable lifestyle was contributing to a change in the world.

There is another interesting category of the motives: responsibility for the well-being of dependent animals. Although it was not stressed as the main motivation, the communality observed in several interviews at least appears interesting and may suggest values related to human-animal relationships. It might be suggested that the values held by those participants go beyond pure anthropocentrism and include care for dependent animals. This case can be

also aligned with the factor of responsibility discussed in the literature review (Stern et al 1993) but apart from responsibility for a personal well-being and well-being of one's family, domesticated animals and their well-being might also influence people's choices.

## ***5.2. Transformation of values and priorities as a result of environmental community experience***

One of the goals of the research was to explore how experience of living in an intentional environmental community may change people's values and priorities. The participants from both villages indicated that their environmental values became stronger (e.g. vegetarian diet, concern for produced garbage etc.) and they grew to appreciate the resources they have for living such as water supply. There was a couple of cases when people acquired environmental values upon joining the eco-community. For many relationships with nature have changed, the interviewees felt that the understanding and appreciation of nature grew bigger as a result of living in the eco-village.

Moreover, social values underwent a transformation as the participants from both villages stated. In particular, their relationships with others (friends, family, neighbors and people in general) have improved, became deeper, more open and more human.

Some participants noticed changes in themselves such as becoming friendlier, more sociable, open, caring and tolerant to others. It might be concluded that the experience of living in the intentional environmental community had mainly a positive effect on participants' values and priorities related to nature, nature protection, social relationships and personal qualities, although there were some exceptions.

## ***5.3. Spiritual values of a sustainable lifestyle***

The two types of spirituality were observed in the villages: a traditional religious approach with focus of the divine origin of life and contemporary spirituality (non-religious)

that is related to personal experiences of various kinds (nature, art ect.). It is in line with the definition of spirituality by Koenig et al (2000), where the author suggests that spirituality is the personal attempt to understand the meaning of life and relationships with transcendent which may (or may not) lead to or arise from the development of religious rituals and the formation of community. The type of spirituality the participants mentioned in the secular community was mainly about connection with nature and one interviewee even called it “*some sort of nature belief*” and in terms of the theory (Carson 1994) this seems to express a “non-religious” form of spirituality.

In both communities a positive impact of spirituality and spiritual values on pro-environmental behavior was stressed by the participants. Interestingly, both religious and non-religious interviewees suggested that spiritual values lead to more harmonious relationships with nature and as a result to environmentally-friendly actions. Moreover, some respondents in the secular community pointed out the connection between spiritual values and environmental behavior. They expressed a hope that spirituality may contribute to the change the consciousness of people “*in coma*” since even without a specific religion involved spirituality motivates people to wonder who they are and how they are connected to other living beings, to nature and the Earth.

In case of Krishna Valley spirituality was discussed in a strictly religious context and spiritual values had a strong auspicious influence on pro-environmental attitudes and behaviors. According to Vaishnav tradition every living being is a soul who by having a free will chose to live independently from God and “fell” from the spiritual world to the material world. Therefore all living beings are spiritual in essence, but conditioned by a particular body according to the law of karma. That is why the members of the Hare Krishna movement are respectful to all living entities including the smallest ones, because even in a tiny bacteria God



is present in the form of paramatra<sup>9</sup>. Any action that damages nature is considered to be sinful and will produce a negative reaction in the future.

As was discussed above, simple living is a prominent value among the participants in the religious community. A simple lifestyle is considered beneficial for spiritual life, it is consistent with God's instructions and creates a harmonious atmosphere in social relationships by allowing more time and attention for other people. Ultimately Krishna devotees act pro-environmentally since such behavior is inherent in the religion they follow. Therefore it can be concluded that spiritual values have a dominant role in participants' lives and may be positively correlated with their pro-environmental behavior.

#### **5.4. Recommendations for future research**

The present study has explored the range of values and motives of individuals who have opted for a sustainable lifestyle in an intentional environmental community in a greater detail and depth in order to see the role of spiritual values of a sustainable lifestyle. This qualitative research offers insights gained from participants' stories and discourses about the related topics as well as from direct question and field observations. This research investigates only two examples of eco-villages in Hungary therefore it would be interesting to see the role of spiritual values in other religious intentional environmental communities as there can be significant differences in principles and perceptions as well as to explore spiritual values in other secular eco-villages.

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<sup>9</sup> *Paramatma* is God's expansion as the Supersoul within the heart of every living being (ISKCON 2014).

## 6. Conclusion

The participants from both intentional environmental communities had various reasons for changing their lifestyles and moving to an eco-village. The main difference between the interviewees from Gyűrűfű and the interviewees from Krishna Valley is that all the motives and values in the religious community are grounded on the desire to lead a spiritual life within the ISKCON movement while participants from the secular community were not discovered to have such a universal driving force behind their choice which is shared by most of the participants.

Krishna Valley inhabitants were motivated to practice Krishna Consciousness in the eco-village due to its favorable environment for spiritual life, for a having a family and raising children. Some participants felt that it was not their decision to come but God's will and they happened to live in the eco-community without any conscious efforts, while others talked about their experience of living this lifestyle before and seeing it close to their personal nature. In Gyűrűfű the main motives for sustainable lifestyle were to get away from the perceived harmful environmental situation in the cities and their general frustration with the urban way of living, along with economic instability and as a result a desire to be independent from the system. Self-sufficiency and security were thus the main concepts discussed by a number of participants. Nature protection and affinity with nature itself were also detectable in the participants' discourses but more commonly were not so strongly emphasized as leading motives.

Interviewees from the religious community mainly stressed simple living as the main value of being part of an eco-village while for Gyűrűfű members it was security and freedom which coincided with their motives to join the community. Community and its shared values were also often mentioned as a motif and as a value in both eco-villages. The value of nature

and the ability to be close to nature was tightly linked to spiritual values discussed by the participants.

Spiritual values were acknowledged as important in sustainable lifestyles by the interviewees from both communities. For the secular community spirituality is generally perceived as connection to nature, energy, relationships between co-villagers and as following the lifestyle of their ancestors. Some individuals referred to spirituality as to some kind of nature belief while others viewed spirituality in terms of a more traditional God or religion. According to the interviewees, spirituality/spiritual values and experiences contributed to greater appreciation and understanding of the natural environment, humans and self as part of the world, which is closely associated with their current sustainable lifestyles and values. In the case of Krishna Valley, environmental values and pro-environmental behavior is inherent in the Gaudiya Vaishnava religious tradition and its followers see environmental practices as an inseparable part of the spiritual life. Pro-environmental behavior and values there are based on spiritual values, therefore sustainable practices are more a by-product of living according to the spiritual principles of this tradition

Therefore it might be concluded that spirituality in its religious and secular form is clearly manifested in the values and motives for a sustainable lifestyle which is represented in the studied intentional environmental communities. In the religious community it is the basis for environmental practices and concerns while in the secular community it has a side role in recognizing connections of people with nature and each other. The most commonly observed values and motives in the secular eco-village are community, security, freedom and independence, while in the religious eco-village simple living, association with other Krishna devotees and spiritual practice is valued the most. The interviewees of both villages indicated that their environmental values, relationships with people and personal qualities have positively changed while living in the eco-village. Based on the main findings, it seems

plausible that spirituality in its religious and secular forms plays a significant role in forming values and motives for pro-environmental behavior.

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