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COMMUNITIES BUILDING AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT IN BELARUS

In this paper, we give some reasons for claiming that there are no local communities in the restricted sense or local self-government in Belarus. However, public discourse and every-day argumentations are possible only within the networks of local communities. Therefore, there is the problem of deficit of logical practices in Belarusian social life. We propose a probable solution of that problem.

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1. Introduction

The idea of this paper came about after a discussion with our Danish colleagues in May, 2007, dedicated to the possibilities and ways of local community development in Belarus. The discussion started from the acknowledgement that the work on local community development within European programmes had a long history in Belarus, yet to no satisfactory results. I am leaving out the productive part of that discussion and how the sides enriched each other with their experience and knowledge; the discussion revealed that very often our Western European colleagues start working in Belarus without considering, and sometimes simply knowing certain aspects and circumstances of Belarusian life and our activity. Meanwhile, the knowledge and experience put forth for discussion by the Belarusian side are sometimes hard to line up with the social methods and techniques traditionally suggested by European colleagues for transition countries.

For these reasons, the Belarusians and their colleagues from other European countries sometimes end up in misunderstanding. Breaking through this misunderstanding and mutual education of partners takes months, which is normal, yet sometimes years which is longer than an average project runs in Belarus.

Apart from general fundamental knowledge of post-Soviet countries and societies, there are often practical problems in planning time, resources, and efforts necessary for achieving certain objectives and solving practical tasks. It also often sparks argument, European and Belarusian experts assigning main expenses of time, resources, and work to different areas of activity. Whereas theoretical, explicatory, and descriptive texts may wait, practical disputes call for instant resolution. Partners working on the same aims and objectives need to come to an agreement, and this can only be done through mindful respect to each others arguments.

The present paper contains concise analysis of what hampers the emergence and development of communities in Belarus and presents the principles and foundation of possible activity. It only claims to provide arguments for right and more accurate planning of time, resources, and human effort while working on community development in Belarus.

2. The Present State of Local Communities in Belarus: Soviet Legacy

The basic thesis on which we build our entire activity towards local community development in Belarus is the statement of the fact that **there are no local communities or local self-government in Belarus**. It is very difficult to believe and therefore it is usually viewed as either a mistaken speech form, or a provocative message. Most difficult is to perceive it as a mere statement. It is especially difficult for European colleagues for whom communities as a form of people's organization is an inherent part of their lives and thus natural like air. Communities can be weak or strong, more or less successful or organized, but they are always there. The strictness of our statement is called upon to underline the fact that communities were deliberately eradicated from the Soviet social system as a controversial element and have not been restored yet. This argument requires to be expounded on, the more so as it conditions our entire further activity which is aimed not so much at the development and strengthening as at reviving local communities in Belarus.

In this section, we will consider the major influences and mechanisms that have brought about the present state of affairs and remain in effect reproducing it. Here, speaking about local communities we will see them as associations of people connected not merely by abiding in one territory and maintaining good human relationships, yet as associations with **will** and **possibility** to independently solve basic issues of organizing and managing

their lives. That is, we will perceive local communities as, in the first place, self-organizing associations of people. Therefore relationships and territory of abode are merely a condition, but not a major characteristic of local communities. To qualify as a community demands certain human qualities: initiative, ability to set and achieve aims collectively and individually, the sense of ownership and responsibility for one's personal and collective causes, solidarity and much more.

Below we will consider how proximity of abode ceased to be a source and condition of people's interaction for managing their living space. How did it happen that people were alienated from making decisions concerning their own lives? Which way and by means of what social, political, and administrative methods local authorities were stripped of the capacity of community self-government and lost real possibilities to solve local issues? Before we go into the questions put forth above, we need to ask ourselves one more, however self-evident in may seem: "What for do we need to restore local communities?" The task of restoring communities as a way of life and social self-organization is closely related to our ideas about a democratic social system. We are based on the notion that in a democratic society people have the possibility to associate for the achievement of their own goals. A democratic social system not merely allows people to unite in communities but to a large extent relies on them and is possible thanks to the existence of strong communities. Collectivism is a generally known and recognized characteristic of the Soviet social system and way of life, as well as a character quality in wide majority of Soviet people. In an attempt to shake off Soviet totalitarian legacy, politicians and intellectuals overstated the role of the individual in a western democratic society. Interpreting the western society as purely individualistic, post-Soviet intellectuals became as if much greater liberals than their western colleagues, forgetting that democracy is unthinkable without solidarity and collective cooperation.

The destruction of local communities and local self-government that we witness in today's Belarus came as a result of a deliberate policy of the Soviet regime. It employed a lot of political, administrative, and social mechanisms and means each of which fatally targeted one or several prerequisites for the existence of local communities. The detailed review of those mechanisms and means provided below is intended, in addition to explaining the origins and reasons for the present state of affairs, to communicate the extent of the problem and show how deeply rooted it is in the Soviet way of life, mentality, and ways of thinking and behavior. Also important is that many of those mechanisms are still in effect today, habitually or deliberately, although sometimes in mutated or disguised forms. It is necessary to be aware of in

order not to fall victim of illusions or make mistakes while planning and organizing the activity for reviving local communities.

3. The Area of Public Life and Administrative Relations

Assignment of authorities: the imperial order. Throughout the history of Soviet Belarus, heads of administrations were assigned not from the respective localities, but on the national level or those of the region (oblast) or district (rayon). And it was not by chance – such was an implicit rule of Soviet management. According to it, a boss not only had to be “not local”, he had to be excluded from any social relations with the population. He had to always remain a representative of the vertical power, a mouthpiece for its ideas and decisions, and not a representative of the population. He was socially incorporated rather into the authority, administrative society than in a territorial community. The practice of assigning leaders to all levels of administration that used this principle was aimed at take away power from communities as potential participants in ruling, and make the decision-making system independent from opinions held by any local population. In fact it was an imperial rule successfully deployed in the Soviet Union.

Powerless local Soviets. The village council (Soviet) might appear as the lowest level of authority that by its placement and functions was supposed to act as a mechanism of local self-government, however, one should bear in mind the state policy in respect to village councils. That policy consisted in bringing village councils under complete control by other power bodies, in the first place, by economic entities dominating in the given territory. In the countryside those were mainly collective farms (Kolkhozes) and so-called Soviet farms (Sovkhozes). Firstly, the village councils had no budgets adequate for their territories and populations. Secondly, they could not replenish their budgets by taxing either the population, or local businesses. Their budgets were made up in a centralized way by higher-level administrations. The responsibility for maintaining roads and other elements of infrastructure was put on the village councils while only the Kolkhozes and other economic entities possessed actual resources for that. Thus, the village councils’ exercise of local authority was made dependant on Kolkhozes. Nominally, the stature of head of a local council was higher than boss of a Kolkhoz, in actuality it was the latter who had power.

Also, state-owned institutions were under the jurisdiction of local authorities, in the first place those of education, health-care, and some-

times culture (libraries). However, their staff was selected and appointed not by the local authorities but by communist party structures. As for budgets and human resources of post offices and departments of interior affairs were controlled by their higher administrations within the respective ministry. The only actual function of local authorities was to register births, deaths, marriages, etc., as well as issuing references for social security matters.

Thus, the main mechanism of seeing to the interests and actualizing the will and decisions of the population at the local level was de facto blocked. Formally, elections to local Soviets might have, or were to directly influence independent management of a local community's life. In reality, however, this preserved social mechanism of self-organization and self-government was a mere imitation inasmuch as those councils had no influence on decision-making. All those facts testify for real separation of local populations from making decisions about their lives, from local authorities and local political life. Such an alienation was gradually became to hold in people's minds and their attitude towards the possibility and ways of influencing the arrangement of their lives.

This practice of organizing the activity of "local authorities" has retained its main characteristics until today, with the exception of the party control whose function in Belarus took over the so-called "presidential vertical" [power system].

The Soviets and the Party: duplication of power. The relationship between the Soviets and the Communist Party as two power branches deserves being expounded on. It became a cornerstone of the main mechanism of ruling society that made impossible self-government and destroyed local communities. Apparently, the phenomenon of such a party power is a unique to the Soviet Union, China, and some Asian countries modelled after the Chinese pattern (North Korea, Vietnam, earlier Laos and Cambodia). In Eastern European countries and Cuba the communist parties did dominate at the national level, controlled forces, finances, economy, but they exerted their will via constitutional structures imitating democratic institutes. Meanwhile, in the Soviet Union and therefore in the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic (BSSR, Soviet Belarus), the Communist Party was given power by constitution. Structures of the CPSU (in our case the CPB, the Communist Party of Belarus) duplicated Soviet structures everywhere and at all levels. An exception was made only for village councils. Any political unit at any scale down to the district and town had two verticals of power: a Soviet, with its executive committee, and a party branch that formed a structure repeating that of the Soviet. While the party structures posses-

sed real power, the Soviets and their executive committees were subordinate to them.

Back to history, this dual system of power began to take shape during the Civil War and military communism when army officers and military experts were serving under the supervision of party commissars. Officers and experts acted under laws and army regulations, while the rule of the commissars was arbitrary and – given they were authorized to kill – absolute. Lenin's policy of military communism consisted in expanding this militarized rule onto production and administration at all levels. Upon the revocation of military communism, militarized rule was camouflaged by quasi-democratic forms and made slightly more moderate, taking away the power of commissars (or party leaders as their civil counterparts) to decide on people's live directly. Indirectly, however, they remained in the position to do so, via the troops of the KGB and interior ministry. The mechanism of this looked as follows. In each political unit, from the districts up, a department of the KGB and interior ministry was established. Those departments were neither under control of the corresponding level Soviets, nor even party branches. They were answerable to their direct commanders at the next higher level of their vertical and the party structure at the same higher level. Thus, the chairperson of a district or town Soviet or a party functionary were able to direct and control the operation of the KGB and police in their unit, while themselves liable to actions against them by those forces should an order have come from above. This situation remained in the USSR and BSSR for more than 30 years, until late 1950s, and even further in a more complex and disguised form. Overly bureaucratized relations between the party, Soviets, and forces created the liberal facade of Brezhnev's epoch.

Since a certain time, the regime began mask the duplication of the Soviet and party powers by a three-fold procedure of decision-making. At the lowest levels of authority, many decisions were to be made involving trade unions. The system of trade unions in the Soviet Union was molded after the communist party and all the grass-root level decisions, actually made by party branches, were brought to life on behalf of the local administration, party organization, and trade union and corresponding documents were signed by their leaders. Thus, the apparent duplication and later triplication of power was in fact a mere veneer on the total power of the CPSU and during the entire lifetime of the USSR kept isolating the people from influencing the authorities, equally in an individual manner or in the form of any kind of associations, communities, or organizations outside the control of the party.

This conclusion should be illustrated by a classical saying by Lenin, the author of that system: “Trade unions are the school of communism.” Lenin clearly realized the totalitarian nature of the power system he was creating. He also understood that a population organized in communities and capable of initiative cannot be ruled by such a system without brutal, violent compulsion. Aware of that, he explained to his brothers-in-arms that it would take decades and several generations to change over from violent compulsion to voluntary acceptance of such a system. It was a school for the entire population, meant to make violent reproduction of that system into tradition in the course of several generations, so that it could be passed on as if on its own. That was exactly the case in Belarus.

The transition from violent maintenance of this perverse system to tradition was only plausible at the cost of people’s resigning from personal initiative and ability to spontaneously or intentionally organize themselves into communities and viable collectives. The loss of those capacities the system of decision making used in the country with behavior norms and personal qualities of the Soviet people. Not only self-government at the local level was hampered by administrative efforts, it gradually became redundant for people who had voluntarily withdrawn from solving the tasks of managing their lives delegating them to state bodies.

Enterprize-based party structure. We have seen detailed the role of duplicating power system in abolishing self-government. Now we should also consider the organization of the communist party itself since its way of organizing was spread onto all other areas of life in the country which became of the major causes fatal for local territorial communities as well as all other forms of people’s self-organization.

Transforming from an underground terrorist revolutionary party to the ruling and dominating one, the Bolsheviks had to revise the concepts of party construction. Having gained power over a gigantic country, they, on the one hand, had to adopt legal and open forms of existence and, on the other hand, multiply their numbers manifold to penetrate all areas of life and activity. Party leaders or functionaries were to be present without exception in each and every settlement, military element, or enterprize (not merely to be present but to be included in a well-organized, instantly responding organization marked by army-like discipline and obedience). Before, primary branches of the party organizations were created by territorial proximity, but while in power the Bolsheviks began to set up their structures at enterprizes, not territories. In the city, it meant that people worked at places rather than where they lived. Thus, party organizations controlled not the daily life of the people and its conditions, but economy and finances. Party branches

were organized into territorial units at a higher level, e.g. of the town or part of a larger city with the population of several hundreds thousands.

In the country, this approach in its pure form was inapplicable, because households were run by families, and even the communists were not up to instituting family party branches. Therefore rural communities remained main actors within their territories of abode and controlled it. Moreover, the abolishment of large land ownership on the one hand, and secularization (the weakening of the Church's authority and parish communities) on the other hand even strengthened rural communities and made them better possibilities to organize themselves. In 1920s, rural communities were becoming real competition to the militarized party power, and village councils could become mechanisms of local self-government. With the maturing of rural communities and the growth of their economic well-being the communist party was losing its influence in the countryside. Having discovered that, the communists carried out mass collectivization. Then at Kolkhozes, as enterprizes, basic-level party organizations were instituted to exercise real power by using Kolkhoz's resources and economic levers. All economic reasons for collectivization were a mere ideological camouflage.

During the first ten years of their existence, the Kolkhozes were economically inappropriate, with the famine in the Ukraine being the best testimony for that. The communist party needed them to enforce its principles of ruling the country. They took over from individual households entire agricultural production and concentrated all economic resources thus taking them away from local rural Soviets. It took several decades to turn Kolkhozes from instruments of political pressure and destruction of traditional rural communities into agricultural-industrial enterprizes, and yet until the very break-up of the Soviet Union Kolkhozes in general, with the exception of several model ones, has not been made to make profit. Moreover, by the end of the 1950s, Kolkhoz's agriculture could no longer provide the Soviet Union with the amount of food it needed. However, economic troubles and outcomes of collectivization cannot compare with its humanitarian aftermath. The latter consisted in *total proletarianization of the population and the destruction of all traditional forms of co-organizing people into communities*.

The consistent expansion and deployment of enterprize-based party structure made the peasants, now bereft of property, "lose" the need for self-organization. Local communities turned into "labor collectives", life in which required, on the one hand, permanent and mandatory integration into the collective, while on the other hand, forbade any initiative or setting one's own aims.

In the city, the situation was more complex; the enterprize-based principle of party construction allowed for the exertion of party power but could not hamper co-organization of people by their interests. That was where trade unions came into play to administer a final blow to communities. The role of trade unions will be expounded below.

Using enterprizes as the basic for its organizations, the communist party consolidated its power yet it had another, long-term effects: namely, it bound people so strongly to their workplaces that their connections became virtually irrelevant. As a result, in the city neighbors became so unimportant for each other that they stopped getting acquainted. It became normal that city dwellers do not know who lives next door. In the country, where the connections between neighbors are more evident, collectivization and assignment to Kolkhozes made people resort to Kolkhozes even for helping each other. Things that used to be done by communities of neighbors, such as stocking-up forage or fuel, reclamation works, protecting livestock from predators, repairing roads or bridges, etc., were now done exclusively upon permission of the Kolkhoz bosses and by means of Kolkhoz resources. It is indicative that, upon election as president of Belarus, A. Lukashenko stopped the development of farms and the very farmers' movement and started restoring Kolkhozes, overtly admitting that the Kolkhozes for him are a political rather than economic category.

“The party's driving belts and the school of communism”: however important is for each person his or her professional activity or other (non-professional) ways of making a living, there is some free time one gives to recreation, socialization, education, hobby or interests, religious rites etc. The communist way of running the country is organic at war or while rebuilding of a destroyed country, however, with certain economic stability and people starting to enjoy some free time the communist party felt its monopoly for power jeopardized. To minimize the threat it strived for control over people's free time, leisure, education, and even religious rituals.

Through different periods of its rule, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union invented various forms of controlling non-productive parts of people's lives. One of them was to make them spend their time cultivating gardens at their dachas (a small plot of land with a cabin) which, firstly, enabled them to cope with shortage of food, and secondly, split them during the time outside their jobs. Yet the main form of free time control was the Soviet trade unions. The state transferred into their possession the entire infrastructure of recreation and most of entertainment. With their incomes, Soviet people could not afford to travel, spend a holiday at a sea, take a sanatorium treatment, or do expensive sports; however, all this could be

paid by trade unions. Thus, the latter were de facto able to control most of free time of the people. All the Soviet people without exception were members of trade union organizations at their workplace, paid membership fees, and were entitled for some tours or sanatorium vouchers, sometimes “for free”, sometimes for a symbolic price. *Therefore the Soviet people no longer needed individual initiative or co-organization to satisfy their interests or engage in hobbies.* Those were delegated to trade unions. Rare exceptions emerged only during the so-called *stagnation epoch*, when hikers, amateur singers-and-songwriters, or young people with exotic interests received a possibility for spontaneous self-organization. It was those manifestations of independence in the shape of informal, exterritorial communities that became the foundation of political and social activity during Perestroika.

Additionally, we should remind the reader about a peculiarity in the Soviet trade unions, namely uniting employees and executives of enterprizes. All the co-workers of any enterprize, from a worker to the director, were members of one trade union organization, a branch of a ministerial trade union. Even the ministers, members of government, were members of their respective trade unions, with the exception of ministries without their own trade unions in which case their ministers joined the trade union of public servants. The Soviet trade unions united people at enterprizes but controlled their lives outside them and had nothing to do with settling labor disputes and conflicts.

Thus, trade unions played a crucial part in controlling individual life of the Soviet people. They filled up the gaps not covered by the party or enterprize administrations. At the same time, they also served to maintain the enterprize-based principle of management, binding all human communication to a structure beyond people’s control. In addition to Lenin’s saying about trade unions being the school of communism, there is one by Stalin in which he called trade unions “the driving belts of the party”. Their purpose was to render unnecessary, and in some cases even impossible, spontaneous association of people by their interests or any self-organization outside their workplace.

4. The Area of Private, Personal Life

Since their first years in power, the Bolsheviks tried to control social life, well aware that no forms of such a control could be stable and long-term without the intervention and modification of private life and private space. We have described some forms of control related to reorganization of production and

the structure of society management, now let us proceed to control over private and personal life. It was exercised in three main forms:

1. Direct violence and compulsion.
2. Distribution of material wealth and resources.
3. Ideological pressure in the forms of campaigning, propaganda, and, most importantly, education.

Violence and compulsion are beyond our present discourse, while two latter forms we will go into detail on now.

The housing issue. The Soviet system from its very beginning has concentrated all means of production and material resources, in order to bind each and every citizen of the country. No-one should have had the means to make living independently of the system.

Within our subject we will confine ourselves to distribution of housing. It was one of the most effective levers of interfering with the sphere of people's private lives, as well as subjugation and control, used by the Soviet system, from its early years until its very end. As early as in the 1930s Mikhail Bulgakov formulated anthropological consequences of housing distribution in the USSR by writing "Muscovites remain the same, only corrupt by the housing question."

Having nationalized virtually the entire pool of houses in the cities, the Soviet system gained control over migration processes and demographic reproduction. But that was not enough. The priority aim of the Soviet housing distribution policy was to destroy habitual social ties and relationships, which was achieved in several ways. Let us mention but a few of them, either the most mass-scale, or the most striking ones.

The communal apartments. The entire housing pool in the major cities of the Soviet Union was nationalized, including houses of higher classes, tenement buildings, and everything else, probably with the exception of private houses built for a single family. Nationalized apartments and blocks were divided into separate rooms, in each of which one family was lodged. Everything outside those "lodging" rooms was considered facilities of collective use, including the kitchen, toilet, corridor, pantries, etc. In some cases the previous owners of apartments or entire houses, usually representatives of higher classes, Intelligentsia (intellectuals), or highly skilled workers, were not resettled or repressed but left to live there just like other dwellers. It was called "compaction", and such apartments – "communal". Some communal apartments were homes for several tens of families.

First communal apartments were organized with the best intention to provide those in need with housing. With time, the shortcomings of the communal apartments became apparent, by their influence on people and their

relationships they produced no less threat than the shortage of housing. Firstly, there were problems in sharing those areas of collective use. Secondly, a discrepancy in life styles, culture, tradition, rituals, and even hygienic skills of representatives of different society layers lodged together in those apartments. As early as in the 1920s the notorious 'Kommunalka' (in Russian it is a slang-abbreviation of communal apartments) became a synonym for brawls, conflicts, interpersonal tension, and dissention. Gradually, a specific life style and a kind of human relations developed in the communal apartments. Eventually, although it had taken decades, the Soviet people learned to live in Kommunalkas and get along, yet those skill and accord were obtained *at the price of resignation from free choice of lifestyle, unification of ways of life and eradication of class, ownership, cultural, ethnic, and religious traditions*. An averaged way of life and lowered level of demand became wide-spread. It became a habit to suppress one's individuality for the sake of peace and quiet in a collective one had practically no opportunity to leave due to the institute of propiska (address registration) which we will touch below. At the same time, even the settling of peace among neighbors did not give push to the development of local communities. Firstly, the unification was arrived at not through negotiation of views and interests, but via their eradication. On the contrary, communities do organize themselves on the basis of common interests, values, and aims. Secondly, the inhabitants of communal apartments, despite living there for several generations, could not relate to that dwelling as their property that requires care and long-term planning. The fragility of material and social stature, just as life itself, and dependence on decisions beyond one's competence required rather the skill of individual search for a better life (a snug nest) than any joint maintenance, cooperation, or co-organization.

The barracks. In early Soviet years, speedy urbanization with short investment resources brought influx of migrants from backward and depressed regions to fast-developing towns. Labor force demand surpassed housing capacity for the new-arriving workers. Usually, the issue was resolved by building cheap dwellings for temporary lodging of workers. At the early stages of industrialization in pre-World War II period such cheap houses were barracks: single- or two-storey buildings made of substandard wood or construction scrap. Stationed there were workers, builders, and construction experts. However, due to the organization of the Soviet planned economy, upon construction of a new enterprise the budget for capital construction was cut which was why practically everyone who had not managed to receive a permanent abode remained to live in a barrack. Over time, insulated barracks became a permanent dwelling for several generations.

In the better-off 1960s and 1970s new-type barracks were being built for workers and migrants: the so-called hostels or “small-family” hostels. The small-family adjective came about when nobody retained any illusion in respect of their provisional character. In 1980s, updated “barracks” were being built out of the same materials as normal mass-construction houses, and even outfitted with a minimum set of commodities. Life in barracks, and later in hostels was simultaneously marked by several factors detrimental to the survival of communities: the temporariness of abode, competition for breaking away to more comfortable conditions, realized futility of those aspirations, and, most importantly, the feeling and awareness that almost nothing depends on oneself. Those factors produced the parasitical and paternalist attitude in the Soviet person who never felt as a full owner of his or her dwelling. Children bred in those kinds of homes, and sometimes creating their own families in them, are marked by low self-appraisal, lowered social demands, obedience, and lack of initiative. Attempts at finding support through appeal to solidarity or mutual help in barrack neighborhoods are hopeless.

Khrushchev’s city planning reform. The housing problem became particularly acute on the turn of 1960s. To tackle it, a special programme of housing construction was deployed stretching over several decades and moulding the outlook of Soviet cities, including Belarusian ones. That outlook remains also today. The programme consisted in accelerated, mass construction of cheap blocks of compact flats with a standard set of conveniences and services. Whole areas of cities were built like this, construction sites spanning many a kilometer square. The main feature of such a dwelling is a limited space. Yet those flats were perceived as an advantage, being separate flats. Most of them were single- or two-bedroom flats designed for a so-called nuclear family: a husband, a wife, and one or two children. This programme made it possible to house most of Kommunalka’s inhabitants and get rid of most of the barrack areas. Later, in the 1970s, city areas made up of rural-like wooden houses, the so-called private sector, were brought down, the inhabitants receiving flats in blocks.

The social and demographic consequences of that programme were disastrous and hardly reversible. Those scarce flats, the popularly nicknamed *Khrushchevkas*, nearly completed the destruction of the traditional multi-generational family earlier normal for European ethnicities of the USSR, including Belarusians. By disrupting families and scattering them across the city, the *Khrushchevkas* killed the Soviet person’s last possibility to get an experience of living in a miniature community – an extended family that often included unrelated members. Extended families remained

a means of passing down tradition, values, and ways of life unrelated to Soviet norms. Thanks to their solidarity and standing for one another such big families could survive in the hardest of times.

The Khrushchevkas also limited the growth of nuclear families. It could sometimes take very long to receive a flat therefore families had to control birth to fit with the flats at their disposal. Additionally, mass construction of faceless residential areas on the outskirts of cities gave birth to the phenomenon of “bedroom districts.” Bedroom here means that they are practically deprived of an infrastructure necessary for active and diversified life; therefore people’s life is limited to their workplaces or the city center concentrating pastime venues. *As a result, at the place of abode people hardly need each other.* All domestic problems get taken care of by the state. In the 1960s, when Khrushchevkas were being built close to the traditional city center, those areas were outfitted with some yard infrastructure: sports pitches, playgrounds, and socialization areas. The more uptown, the less need was there in such an infrastructure. Yards and streets began to extinct, play and sports grounds were more and more used not for kids but for walking dogs or parking cars. Communication between people in city neighborhoods disappeared almost completely.

The institute of propiska. Strengthening the destructive effect of all housing-related factors was the institute of propiska (address registration), which constrained the Soviet people by law. The phenomenon has been well described and analyzed. It is well known in former Soviet countries and abroad that it played a crucial part in limiting the freedom of migration of Soviet people and controlling their private life. Here we will only show how it helped destroy communities and normal forms of social life.

Propiska was means of binding every Soviet person to a certain place of residence, some territorial unit. Economic and cultural discrepancies between different areas can be seen as an analogue of class or feudal privileges. To get born in a capital gave privileges by birth independent from personal talents, capabilities, diligence, etc. However, even life in capital did not guarantee equally high rights, because one could not, for instance, choose a school to go to but was assigned a school local to one’s place of registration. The Soviet regime understood the injustice of the institute of propiska and tried to invent some compensatory mechanisms by allotting quotas, e.g., for entering university for people from the countryside, to somehow put them on a par with city children. There were even quotas for joining the party. Those mechanisms, however, not so much restored justice as strengthened paternalist feelings in the regions with low economic and social status and increased corruption in the privileged ones. While the “poor” grew more and

more accustomed to hoping for sop from the state, the “rich” became ever more confident that acquaintances, connections, and bribes (this phenomenon is called “blat” in Russian and “układ” in Polish) get one anywhere.

Propiska, although binding to a place of residence, merely shared rather than united a person with his or her neighbors because all everyday issues were resolved in the relation between an individual and the state, personified in a functionary, and each person was looking in an individual way of establishing and “improving” that relation.

In its legal form, the institute of propiska which Belarus inherited from the USSR, has remained for quite long, until 2007. Just recently propiska was replaced with registration. Essentially, nothing has changed, which only testifies for the importance of this institute for the preservation of social relations and structure of the society that was once the USSR. In the city, its efficiency has been long ago undermined by the emerging real estate market, whereas in the country it is still in effect, nearly as much as under the Soviets.

Interfering with country people’s private lives. We have just detailed above the institute of propiska that was originally introduced only in cities, and part of which was mandatory introduction of passports for the city population. Meanwhile, rural citizens had no passports until late 1950s. The lack of passports completely deprived them of the freedom of movement. They could leave their village of residence, even to move to a neighboring village, only upon permission from authorities. De facto, it was serfdom re-established. Every peasant family was assigned to a Kolkhoz or industrial enterprise. Collectivization of property was used to reinforce administrative binding. The original collectivization of 1930s encompassed, together with land and means of production, practically entire possessions of families. Later, peasant families were given back part of their property: gardens adjoining their houses, poultry, and smaller livestock like goats or rabbits. However, during the first three decades of Kolkhozes’ existence, the peasants were not being paid money for their labor; instead natural payment was used by means of a special unit – the *workday*. Amounts of workdays were used to determine allotments of food products, including grain, butter, sugar, etc. Peasants could only get money by selling what they received in exchange for their workdays. Once in a while, a campaign was undertaken to deprave the peasants from means of providing their families for. For example, one of Khrushchev’s reforms implied monetary tax on fruit trees simultaneously prohibiting selling home-grown fruits in the market, which resulted in large-scale felling of such trees. Thus, the peasants, despite owning their homes, ended up in a yet more difficult situation than

the city dwellers, having lost both the legal and economic bases of personal freedom. The only ways for peasants to relatively more freedom was either conscription to the army or enrolment into a higher educational establishment with the view of getting a job in a city upon graduation.

Against the backdrop of neo-serfdom, education for peasants was being deployed at a high rate, starting with the illiteracy abolishment programme in the 1920–1930s. Even elementary education enabled them to see the backwardness and injustice of their situation, and made migration to the city an aspiration of virtually every peasant. It gave rise to a widespread notion of a rural citizen as being second-class, a stature spelled as mischief and life failure. Thus, the psychological basis for rural communities was sapped.

5. The cultural revolution, the upbringing of new man, and education

Another major mechanism of destroying communities as a form of people's life and co-organization, a mechanism operating on the level of personality (in the domain of values, views, way of life, and tradition) was the Soviet culture and education. The notion of the Soviet education being the best in the world, widespread in the USSR in its last decades, had serious grounds. Probably no other government in the world has paid so much attention to education as the Soviet system throughout its history. The scope of education was very wide, and the education or more precisely, re-education of the people was a priority task in consolidation and preservation of power.

From its very beginning, the Soviet regime set the task of a “cultural revolution”, along with those of industrialization and collectivization. *Cultural revolution was understood as the education of new man, such a human who would want, be able, and love to live under socialism.* The Bolshevik leaders clearly understood that the person of the preceding epoch could not learn to like socialism, and was probably even unable to learn to live under it. In fact, the task of bringing up a new type of human was solved by three kinds of means.

1. The first type was directly derived from the philosophy of historic and dialectic materialism. Since “existence determines consciousness”, then the moulding of a certain new mentality requires organizing certain corresponding conditions of being. Actually, what we have detailed above partially characterizes the conditions created by the Soviet system. Those were the conditions of life and activity of the Soviet people in various aspects, from participation in political life (the principles of party

construction, self-government) to the regulation of private life through the organization of the residential environment. Those conditions were intended to destroy or largely modify traditional social institutes that are the cornerstones of European societies and nations: private property, law, family, personality, etc.

2. Even the most orthodox Marxist-Leninists realized that even though “existence determines consciousness”, the latter has certain tenacity, inertia, and conservatism. Therefore existence determines it not at once, not always, and not completely, and so there had to be found some other means of control over consciousness additional to manipulating conditions of their existence (life and activity). Such means of control were violence. As a matter of fact, violence had always accompanied wars, and had always been employed by the state as an institute of one group of people suppressing other. But it was the Bolsheviks (not even the Jacobean of the Great French Revolution) who first came to using violence not traditionally (for defence, punishment, or frightening) but as an instrument of consciousness control and education/re-education of large social groups. The Bolsheviks made violence industrial. For example, the introduced concentration camps, invented by British occupants in Southern Africa, but unlike short-term action in an occupied territory they used them as means of mobilizing labor resources and a school for mass re-education. Throughout the history of the USSR waves of violence would wax and wane but never cease. Partially by violence, the representatives of unfitting lifestyles were eradicated, partially terror helped build into the masses elements of the new way of life.
3. And the third kind of instruments for educating new man consisted of educational means proper. The whole education system in the Soviet Union was traditionally referred to as people’s education and enlightenment. It was a precise formulation as the Soviet leaders and ideologists were interested in mass and homogenous education for all Soviet people without exception. As for enlightenment, they interpreted it in the spirit of the French bourgeois revolution. Clearly that Jacobean interpretation implied not only “committees for public safety” and the guillotine but also free-of-charge schools for the masses, mass campaigning, and propaganda. The latter ranged from monumental propaganda in architecture to lullabies’ content. The communist leaders and ideologists oriented towards to aim of bringing up the Soviet person mass media, arts, and even religiosity, deeply rooted in the people. Cinema, theater, popular music, poetry, and prose – all genres were being recruited for cultural revolution. The period of boisterous creative quests was over by the mid-1920s

after which everybody keen on aesthetic search and experiments could continue them in concentration camps while the mainstream of Soviet art, socialist realism, was carefully monitored and controlled by party bodies.

Education itself, meaning the organization of schools at all types and levels also went through a period of creative search and experiment. The Soviet Union tried nearly every pedagogical didactic and organizational idea in fashion at that time and many were invented here. However, by the mid-1930s the Soviet system has finalized its choice and put an end to pluralism and didactic experiments. The whole education system in the Soviet Union from Minsk to Vladivostok was built as a *unified, general education polytechnic school* with highly standardized curriculum and forms and methods of teaching. It was impossible to equalize personal and professional qualities of pedagogues, and yet a standard teaching plan left virtually no space to teachers to manifest their qualities and abilities. The extent of unification was such that a student from a village school somewhere in Siberia could change over to a school in Moscow and continue studying from the place he or she had left at the previous school.

The standardization and unification of general school was a model for other types and levels of schools: preliminary, general professional, or highest. There, however, the results were not so noticeable. *The main product of the Soviet school was not knowledge, skills, or qualification of the student: it was the personality of the graduate.* That personality was described in various mythical categories such as “harmoniously, totally developed”, a “politically literate” or “morally stable.” In the early 1960s, they were compiled into an extensive description of the standard, titled “Moral Code of the Builder of Communism.” Despite the ritual-like, declarative description of a general school graduate and the impossibility of meeting an incarnation of those ideal qualities in reality, schools did fulfil their main task – that of bringing up a new model person, even if the “product” actually required different terms for its assessment. Some rough description of this personality type are well known long ago, from artistic images by Elias Canetti to grotesque characters of J. Orwell [4] and to formal, mathematical formulas of V. Lefebvre [3]. The Soviet personality is marked with lack of initiative and dependence on a collective. *The Soviet person is practically incapable of autonomous individual life and needs a collective, yet on the other hand a collective made up of such individuals is incapable of self-organization.*

This peculiarity of Soviet collectivism is especially important within our subject. Upon joining a Soviet collective, an individual member lost

subjectivity, that is, one subdued one's interests and aims to those of the collective. Neither did the collective become a subject; it always remained directed from outside. It is important to understand that both a person and a collective lose the ability to set their own goals, as a result of Soviet education and the cultural policy pursued. Both the person and the collective love the capacity for reflection, therefore they do not understand the origin of goals, take them for granted and naturally inherent to collectives (sic, a goal is ascribed to the collective, not an individual). Therefore, once put together in a collective, Soviet people easily and humbly work towards the achievement of goals none of them shares.

From their childhood, the Soviet people were taught to live in a collective, surrender their will to a collective, follow a collective, and sacrifice a lot for the sake of a collective. Yet never, nor in childhood, nor as adults, they were taught to create communities, set or analyze aims.

The first attempt to teach Soviet students management (the professional qualification of a manager includes the capability of setting aims as well as creating and managing collectives and communities) was undertaken in the mid-1960s by the Academician Trapeznikov who, on return from a trip to the USA, founded a management institute under the patronage of Khrushchev. Several years later, while retaining the name, the institute began teaching the same as other Soviet higher educational establishments: production technologies. Soviet people received management skills by pursuing a career in children's and youth wings of the communist party (Oktyabryata, Pioneers, and Komsomol). Such career undoubtedly developed practical skills of commanding people but not those of managing them as it requires some theoretical knowledge of one's own managing activity. The lack of such knowledge was the characteristic of Soviet party leaders of all ranks. The Soviet and party hierarchy were therefore built through natural selection rather than education and training.

The only, and common, goal for all Soviet and party functionaries was promotion up the hierarchy, which was achieved through the success of the collectives they headed. Each Soviet leader aimed for the success of his or her collective, the indicators of which were not the own aims or needs of the collective but the demands of the next higher leader. Such practice required corresponding attitude and education from a leader. *The Soviet people learnt to ignore their own needs, goals, and aspirations for the sake of achieving other aims imposed on them from outside.*

The cultivation of such a type of education yielded in a state of shock and helplessness at the end of Perestroika, during the period when former Soviet republics gained independence and had to determine their goals and

development strategies themselves. In Russia and some other countries the sole category of population capable of setting aims and self-organization was the criminal elements who came to dominate public life for several years in the early 1990s. In the three Baltic countries, collectives and social structures assimilated foreign goals held by old generations that had been too old to go to Soviet school or by returning emigrants. Meanwhile in Belarus, quite soon an authoritarian paternalist state was restored that became the source of goals and aims for individual collectives and the entire population. It did not take long to bring the whole education system to the original Soviet shape. As a result, the only elements more or less ready for initiative and self-organization are the generations that finished school in the beginning and middle of the 1990s as well as marginalized people, “scrap and waste” of the Soviet education system.

These are the conditions and factors that created the situation we are facing now in Belarus. This brief excursus into the recent past reveals the picture of total and elaborate extermination of local communities. Not only were they ousted by other kinds of social organization, the ability of self-organization was being eradicated as a way of life, thinking, and action. And it was de facto destroyed to the extent that the lack of own goals, consumerism, and expectant attitude are perceived by the inhabitants of today’s Belarus as natural. We need this extensive statement about the absence of local communities in order not to mistake our wishes for reality while applying methods of community development designed and tried out in democratic countries. On the other hand, it is not a reason to resign from working with local communities in Belarus: by being aware of the state of local communities in the country we will take it into account as a circumstance of our activity.

6. The Ways and Techniques of Working with Local Communities. Studying by Doing

Any reasoning about the existence, non-existence, or wrong existence of something must end with a conclusion. The whole range of conclusions can be spun from two logical poles: from “if something is not there it is the way it should be” to “we cannot put up with this status and need to change everything.” We tend towards the latter which in this case means that we need the above detailed explanation and argumentation that there are no communities in today’s Belarus in order to come to a strategic thesis: it is impossible to develop that which does not exist, however, it can

be re-created or just created anew. Numerous attempts at community development in Belarus that have been undertaken over the past fifteen years were not successful for the very reason that attempted to develop Soviet collectives (or other associations of people) mistaken them for communities analogous to those in European or pre-Soviet Belarus. On the contrary, we, by concluding that the Soviet forms of people's associations differ radically from communities inherent in open society or even traditional European society, understand that Soviet kinds of collectives can only develop or change within the Soviet forms and limitations. When it comes to communities as elements of democratic or open society, they need to be created anew, even though from the same people who used to make up former Soviet collectives.

However, whenever we arrive at such a formulation of the task we run into the problem of creating communities where they do not exist and have not existed. What can they be created from? This is a serious methodological problem experts in Europe practically never encounter. There, each time they deal with communities that are already there, maybe underdeveloped, sometimes primitive, sometimes with deviations and flaws. Unlike that, we face the necessity to create communities out of something that is not a community. We could put forth this problem in a theoretical plane, that is, give them a definition (along with definitions of other kinds of groups) and try to develop a theory of communities. Without dismissing the theoretical approach altogether, at present we are more interested in the methodological and activity aspects. How and from what can we organize communities?

We are based on the notion that the theoretical and methodological aspects of the problem can be considered independently of each other and solved in parallel enriching each other if need be. Thus, selectionists had bred new species of animals and plants centuries before Darwin's theory of natural selection or Mendel's genetics. In the development of their theories, both Mendel and Darwin took into account the methods of selection, while the latter broadened and developed their methods thanks to those theories.

Now we have a theoretical dilemma under which either everything that happens to people is conditioned either by rules, norms, principles, and outer conditions of people's activity or by their own human qualities. If the former is the case then a lack of communities in Belarus is only due to some peculiar conditions or factors within Belarusian life or some norms and principles that hamper the appearance of communities. In the second case, we will have to admit that the Belarusians are charged with some peculiar qualities that prevent them from uniting into or creating communities.

We do not have a satisfactory research or empirical knowledge or ma-

terial to make the right choice here. However, we suppose we can involve in the practice of creating communities without waiting for theorists and researchers to give a precise explanation of the absence of communities in Belarus. At the same time, we understand the importance of such a research, and see a possibility for our contribution to it via what is known as *research by doing*, or obtaining knowledge in the course of implementing practical ideas.

At the common sense level it is clear that knowledge should precede activity. In its turn, there must be a way of obtaining knowledge. In social projects, reforms, and even local social transformations an actor often deals with an environment or objects not studied. Should an actor always wait for ready knowledge from researchers most actions would be impossible. In a situation like this, actions precede knowledge. Common sense adjusts itself to this violation of consequence with the help of the principle we can formulate below.

Prior to setting off on a journey, modern tourists and travellers make up a route on maps at their disposal. A map is knowledge preceding a real travel. However, those maps were drawn up by people who once visited those uncharted areas. Pioneers and explorers can be said to typify studying by doing.

Planet is limited in space, therefore we can have maps of any territory. Imagine that relief and landscape of the planet were changing over a lifetime of one generation of people, not over geological epochs. Then every generation would need its pioneers and explorers. Clearly, it is not needed in geography, but the situation is more like this in social studies. Every new generation of actors faces uncharted society. Stable, unchanging society exists only in dreams and ideals of closed society adepts. Actors holding ideals of open society understand that they are to act in the situation of permanent change dealing each time with a new form of society. Hence research by doing is the only possible method under the situation of societies undergoing transformation and reform, also widespread among other methods in open society. Following are several aspects by which research by doing differs from a usual action preceded by knowledge about the object:

1. There is insufficient knowledge about the object.
2. The researcher is ready to act with uncertain or inadequate knowledge.
3. Reflection and feedback are vital in the structure of action.
4. Duality of objectives. An action is aimed both at achieving a result and obtaining new knowledge.

Applied to our subject, this general argumentation implies the following:

1. We know very little about communities and social life in Belarus, especially outside the capital, and we should not present this inadequate knowledge for full-fledged and sufficient.
2. We should be ready to act, that is, create or develop communities in Belarus, while admitting the insufficiency of our knowledge, and not postpone our actions until the missing knowledge is produced by someone else.
3. We should design and plan our actions so carefully as to not go for irreversible actions, so that any mistake we discover through feedback can be timely corrected.
4. We should understand that the value of our actions lies not only in the achievement of a result, which here means the creation and development of communities, but also in new knowledge, including that of mistakes and failures, which we will be able to share with other actors in civil society who create and develop communities.

7. The “Alive from Alive” Practice

So, our approach to the task of recreating locus in Belarus will be based not on the knowledge of the essence and structure of communities, laws of their appearing and development; instead, we will use the simple practical assumption that *the people who have lived in communities are able to and will transmit their experience, norms, and rules of such life while solving everyday problems*. This is based on the notion of people being adaptable and able to learn. If one's destiny brings one into an existing community, he or she adapts to it and learns the rules and norms necessary to live in the community. This is an ancient practice known as cultural assimilation or, in more modern forms, integration. In Europe and America the practice of integration has been used for years; it is usually described and interpreted as an alternative to apartheid. We are now considering a different aspect of this practice, the possibility of spawning communities through, metaphorically, a kind of “budding”. We have seen successful practices of integration when representatives of other races or people with disabilities are included into collectives and through joint activity or education learn and adopt new group norms and principles of life; simultaneously, older participants in the group learn to accept representatives of another race, culture, religion, or people with disabilities as equal. This allows us to presume that the following practice can be successful in Belarus in respect to the creation and organization of communities:

1. People integrate into already existing, living and functioning communities;
2. Those integrated communities grow;
3. Upon reaching a certain critical mass, the community buds into two or more which continue to live and function on their own.

Such a practice appears to be simple and obvious. We call it “alive from alive”, and thanks to its simplicity and obviousness it may prove successful. There is, however, one problem: where to obtain the original mother communities into which we can begin integrating people with no experience of life in communities. In the previous sections we gave a detailed and hopefully convincing description of how the Soviet system deliberately and consistently destroyed communities. The conclusion we make that the destruction succeeded hold fully true as far as territorial and local communities are concerned. In order to apply the practice “alive from alive” we need to find some communities that managed to survive the Soviet cultural revolution in any form, or appeared after the actions by the Soviet regime ceased to be effective.

The task of discovering such communities also requires serious study. As for practical needs, we can suggest the following. There exist at least several types of communities that have not fallen under the Soviet regime despite its efforts.

Predominantly, those are **religious communities**. There may be other similarly stable kinds of communities, for example, tribal groups in Central Asia or on Caucasus, but they are not to be found in Belarus. The Soviet system did not manage to have done with **criminal communities**. For several times throughout its history the Soviet authorities claimed to have eradicated organized crime (e.g., after the abolishment of NEP in the 1930s and upon recovering from war damages in the 1950s), however, soon after the proclamation of those doubtful victories organized crime reappeared in new forms. We do not pretend at judging whether those communities adjusted themselves to new conditions or reappeared from ground up, yet this is irrelevant for us as we cannot appeal to communities of this kind anyway.

Throughout the Soviet history the regime was trying to suppress professional communities, however, it also needed them and therefore did not crush them but brought them under as much control as possible. However, even if professional communities have survived until today, they are too weak to be of much interest to us. Actually, none of the professional communities has demonstrated any viability over the entire history of independent Belarus.

During Perestroika, the driving force of the process of changes were

groups of people that received a collective name of “Neformaly” (in Russian, this means “the informal ones”). One can suppose that **associations of Neformaly** were at least to a certain extent communities, at least, some of them showed signs of self-organization and activity in relations between themselves, with the state and local authorities, etc. Many Neformaly groups disappeared with the end of Perestroika. Some of them dissolved in political movements, some gave push to the emergence of third sector. Some of them may even have survived until today. The history of Neformaly goes back to Khrushchev Thaw (the end of 1950s). It started as purely outward imitation of certain western movements or trends (the beatniks, hippies, etc.). Later, as the Iron Curtain was gradually getting thin, Soviet Neformaly started to contact their likes in Europe and if their prototypes were extritorial communities or proto-communities then Neformaly slowly adopted their norms and principles of behavior. Not always those movements had positive follow-up, some simply died out, some were weak in numbers, yet nonetheless they are not to neglect.

Another group of peculiar phenomena that at a stretch can be seen as a communities or proto-communities encompass **dissidents and some clubs uniting people by profession or interests**. The examples of those are scientific circles, hiking clubs, amateur singers-and-songwriters, etc. Even though they can be considered as communities with certain reservations, they were schools, however basic, of an alternative lifestyle, the school of self-organization, initiative, equality, democracy, and solidarity in defending their interests.

Thus, for the application of the “alive from alive” practice we may count on cooperation with some communities or proto-communities. Our partners may be religious communities, extritorial professional communities, viable clubs with a history, as well as those third sector organizations that either came out from some communities or were created by them. Our “enemies” and competitors are criminal communities and pseudo-institutions passed down from the Soviet times, such as Kolkhozes, Soviet trade unions, and so-called “governmental NGOs” (the Voluntary Society for Assisting Army, Air Force, and Navy; the Veterans Society, the Union of Women, Red Cross, Pioneers, Komsomol, the Belarusian Republican Union of Youth – BRSM).

8. From Extritorial to Local Communities

The technique and practice of organizing communities alive-from-alive implies that people receive experience of life in communities by becoming mem-

bers of or participants in already existing, mainly exterritorial communities and then pass on and build in the experience in their local area by organizing local communities. For the success of our practice we ought to be confident the experience of living in an exterritorial community can be applied to a local community. Let us see what exterritorial and local communities have in common and where do they differ. We assume that both are:

1. based on mutual interest;
2. capable of self-organization and growing autonomous structures for managing the community;
3. capable of reproduction and viable in the long run through change and inheritance of generations;
4. capable of accepting responsibility for something the community owns or has at its disposal, that is, the communities can handle matters within their area of responsibility and interests.

At the same time, exterritorial and local communities are essentially different from each other:

1. the interests of local communities lie more often within the area of providing for life, whereas exterritorial communities are rather interested either in activity, or in the areas of ideas, spiritual search etc. Therefore participants in exterritorial communities to a smaller extent need each other, are attached to each other, or feel loss on departure or expulsion of a fellow member.
2. Common ownership or management in exterritorial communities is rather virtual unlike evident and tangible in local communities (roads, land, real estate, natural resources). The virtual possessions of exterritorial communities lie in the domain of ideas, norms, cultural and spiritual values. Therefore communication in exterritorial communities is more complicated and intense compared to clearer and more mundane in local communities. The specificity of communication and discourse to some extent complicate understanding between members of exterritorial and local communities and may hamper the transmission of experience from the former to the latter.

In a usual situation, people can be (could also be in Belarus if the above-described historic background) members of exterritorial and local communities simultaneously without transferring the experience of one onto another. Similarly, one can be a member of several exterritorial communities, for example, a member of areligious community, a sports or hiking club, and a professional community and yet distinguish between them and not confuse the norms of different communities. Recognizing this, we should also understand that the transfer of experience into new situ-

ations does not occur automatically but is only possible through reflection and realization. Therefore our situation requires some new actions compared to usual situations when people have experience of community life from as early as childhood. *At every stage of community organizational activity we should stimulate people to discuss the experience they get, exchange their ideas about it, and plan transferring it into a different situation.* At every of the above steps, discussion should be held in a different way bearing in mind that the discourse of exterritorial communities' virtual objects and values is by far different from that of local communities.

Without going into subtle theoretical and methodological differences between exterritorial and local communities or their discourses, let us try to find something in common that makes it possible to transfer experience. In the broadest possible sense, a hint towards an answer can be found in the sustainable development slogan formulated in 1992: *think globally, act locally.* To some extent the reason why exterritorial communities are not bound to a territory is that they target general, global problems. This, however, only holds true as long as they do not set achievable, practical aims. For example, thinking of anthropogenic interference with the climate system implies the global scale and involves the history of civilization and technology in general. However, signers of the Kyoto protocol can be governments of specific countries, hence a specific programme for reducing greenhouse gases emission is related to a territory. More specifically, the implementation of the Kyoto protocol goes down to the local level. This example shows that literally any programme can have several dimensions: the global or exterritorial, the national, and the local levels. Note that the way of solving such problems is through an integral approach at all levels and cannot be actualized at any single level (i.e. only at the national or only at the local level).

Applied to our subject, this can look as follows: *the viability and effectiveness of exterritorial communities in Belarus is to be secured through their involvement into global, trans-national processes.* Through this involvement, Belarusian exterritorial communities retain continuity of norms and traditions and can survive even the hardest of times. Therefore only those communities managed to live or revive thanks to the fact that the bases and norms that unite their members have been being transmitted outside the Soviet society. This is the reason for their viability, unlike territorial communities the basis of which is a relation to a specific territory. This relation was actually destroyed under the Soviet regime. However, true for the survival of exterritorial communities, it does not apply to their activity

and practice. *Successful activity requires defining the area of responsibility or localization of a community.* This is where Belarusian exterritorial communities encounter great problems.

It is also true that Belarusian organizations that represent those or other communities not always seek localization or outlining their area of responsibility. It would seem obvious that Belarus is exactly where Belarusian environmental, educational, youth, etc. organizations can be achieving their aims. However, they mostly prefer not to relate to Belarusian reality. There are also some theoretical grounds provided in favor of such an approach. For example, people refer to the activity of Amnesty International whose members are active outside their countries of nationality and thus are more efficient in achieving the organization's aims. Another example is the anti-globalist movement: the Belarusian anti-globalists are frequent participants in rallies in other countries without even trying to stage one in Belarus. The third example and argument is borrowed from the Soviet past and is related to the Communist International which was waging the "struggle for peace world-wide" with no respect to local wars and aggression, and for which "global revolution" and establishing justice globally were more important than totalitarianism and trampling justice in one's own country. Today this attitude is typical for organizations, movements, and communities on the platforms of pan-Slavism and Slavophilism.

And the last argument that the Belarusian exterritorial communities direct against localization of their activity is purely empiric: all previous attempts were not successful. Part of it is that exterritorial communities or organizations representing them simply do not want to make another doomed attempt. Another, and more important part, however, is that any localization, claiming responsibility for achieving some general aims in one particular locality weaken communities, making them more vulnerable for their opponents. The authoritarian Belarusian regime is not strong enough to eradicate all manifestations of the civil society. Some of them it has to put up with, however, it becomes utterly implacable towards any attempts to establish influence alternative to that of the state, even in the smallest local scope. In addition to suppressing exterritorial communities and their representative NGOs, the regime also acts against private business, limiting privatization and private initiative. One can even draw parallels in the regime's attitude towards business and the third sector. Among businesses, the authorities attack companies that own real estate or are somehow bound to a territory, whereas exterritorial business remains freer and off the main focus of the regime. Similarly, among the civil society structures the authori-

ties watch closer those organizations and communities whose activity leaves marks in some specific locale.

In fact, we can state that the most general policy of the regime is to prevent the appearance of any alternative actor in the territory. The state authorities strive for retaining the monopoly as the subject of action in the whole territory of the Republic of Belarus, as it was in the Soviet time. Thus, the creation and development of communities is a strategic alternative to the existing regime. The actors and ideologists of the regime understand it in exactly this way; unfortunately, their opponents not always share this understanding. Most often those who involve in community development in Belarus go into detail on technical issues and get stuck there unaware of the reasons of failure.

Back to the sustainable development principle of thinking globally and acting locally as applied to community organization and development, we have to put specific meaning and content into the ideas of “**what and how to think**” and “**where and how to act**”. Community creation and development implies radical changes at the national scale (not global but large enough to be abstracted from specific action). An action planned at this large scale will bring about drastic changes of the quality and way of life. However, those plans are and will remain unrealistic and utopian unless within it action are made very specific down to the quality and way of life of small local communities and each individual. *Influencing the quality and way of life of individual people and communities is a prerogative of local communities; however, they cannot do it unless they are connected by a common plan with exterritorial communities.* It is impossible to act without thinking. A transformation is always thought of at the national scale and that thought always comes into effect locally. One does not function without the other. Exterritorial communities are possible in Belarus and exist thanks to their involvement into global processes yet they are inactive without representation in local communities. In their turn, local communities cannot appear without the connection and support from exterritorial ones, and cannot exist independently and survive under harsh conditions without keeping such connection.

Nevertheless, exterritorial communities, small groups of people, and even individual representatives of communities and movements sometimes try to localize their activity, apply it to a certain locale. Not only these attempts get rebuffed by Belarusian authorities, they also face consolidated negative reaction of the local population that sees local activity of communities as either unacceptable innovation or an attempt at the privatization of something local inhabitants are used to considering pub-

lic which in the Soviet sense of the word means “everybody’s and nobody’s.”

Let us therefore once again review the factors hampering the organization and development of communities. Based on the above said, we have to see that these factors are more subjective than objective. Rewording a famous quote from K. Popper (‘The Open Society and Its Enemies’) we can speak about attempts to organization communities in Belarus and enemies of those attempts. Among the enemies of open and civil society in Belarus we should take into account both the regime and the consolidated opinion of a majority of local population. Local actions aimed at creating communities are brought forth by global thinking based on dominating in Europe notions of democracy, open and civil society, human rights etc. The problem is that those actions cause resistance of Soviet thinking that pretends at an equally global scale and denies all values of democracy, human rights etc. At the local level, the struggle for community creation and development goes against specific characters, functionaries, or local people of authority, while at the national level this is a clash between the European and Soviet thinking. Hence, concrete actions at the local level must be as much related and coordinated with the process of de-Sovietization as their counteraction is related and inline with the Soviet thinking and mentality.

Thus we can add another detail to the order and programme of actions aimed at the creation and development of local communities. All the participants in the local projects, most importantly their leaders, managers, and activists, should be involved into common thinking (to successfully act locally, they have to think globally), this common thinking can be referred to a de-Sovietization. Until we resign from Soviet notions and the Soviet system of values, we cannot organize local communities. As long as the Soviet system of notions and values is in place, local population in each specific case will opt for habitual Soviet ways of solving even the tiniest of problems. Solving even minor problems on ones’ own, without turning for assistance to the state and local authorities, taking responsibility for one’s decisions is much more difficult than using the patronage of the authorities bought at the price of loyalty. Independence is yet to be learnt, and even learning it does not remove risks and responsibility for mistakes. It takes strong motivation to change a habitual way of life, abandon stereotypes of behavior and the conventional way of doing things. Motivation that can give rise to a nation-wide movement, encourage and keep going local initiatives. Without it, the power and energy of local initiative groups will be unable to endure the pressure from the regime and the silent majority of the population.

9. The Tasks and Areas of activity, the Order of Actions

In order to proceed from the description of the situation, conditions, and opportunities for community development in Belarus to the tasks and methods of solving them we should once again clarify the general scheme of reviving local communities.

- The development of local communities is possible only through people's getting experience of living in communities as an experience of special social relations.
- Only certain kinds of communities, exterritorial in the first place, have retained such an experience in today's Belarus.
- Those "miraculously survived" instances of community life themselves need support and development which can be given through the implementation of ideas of uniting members of exterritorial communities under specific conditions and in a local situation.
- Involvement in exterritorial communities give people the experience of community life.
- In its turn, local work towards general (global) aims can found a basis for uniting local inhabitants around, firstly, people with experience of community life, and secondly, around a task brought in by exterritorial communities and for fulfilment of which there are no adequate local structures.
- Accepting responsibility for solving a new task by a group of people in a particular locale opens the possibility for reviving local communities.
- The presence of exterritorial communities' members in local proto-communities allows for transmitting and building in norms of "new" social relations, for the propagation of community experience.
- Cooperation between exterritorial and local communities multiplies resources and the possibilities of each of the communities on its own, allows for growing social capital and the area of responsibility.

We see this scheme as a basis whence the following kinds of activities are derived:

Firstly, we will be looking for "living" communities, integrate people into them and charge them with the experience of community life. We see the two possible options for implementing this activity:

A) To see ourselves together with the network of participants in our past activity as an exterritorial community, integrate people into us in the territories in which we carry out activity with the idea of further budding of local proto-communities.

B) To look for possible exterritorial communities or at least proto-communities as well as NGOs that can incorporate new members and transfer to them the necessary experience of community life.

Obviously, the implementation of both options takes solving many additional tasks and some actions. Among the tasks we put forth that of research. This, for example, includes defining the criteria and procedures of searching and selecting both proto-communities and people to be integrated in them. A separate task is finding out the ways and mechanisms of integrating people into exterritorial communities. Moreover, for this activity we need specific communities to recognize themselves as subjects of community development activity.

The *second* kind of activity is help and support for the cloned proto-communities in growing social capital and viability. This activity will be based on establishing mutual “infrastructural” relations between exterritorial and one or several local communities. Such relations imply that one community can provide solving some tasks and problems to another. Thus, the social capital of each one of them is increased and such a mutual interrelation allows for one community to become a co-owner of some common property owned by another community.

The *third* kind of activity is PR campaigning and communication. The popularization of life in local communities.

The *fourth* that merits a separate explication is analysis and comprehension of experience taking into account the feedback, reflection on mistakes and achievements, and crystallizing results in the form of methods, techniques, and teaching aids suitable for transmission.

The *fifth* is education and preparation, training the participants in the processes we launch with the aim of community creation and development. This mainly implies, in addition to receiving knowledge, work on the development of reflexivity, capability of setting aims and organizing one’s own and collective activity.

Translating this understanding of activities necessary for the recreation of local communities into techniques thus available for other actors we have the following streamline of actions:

1. Self-identification as the subject of (participant in) the programme for community development in Belarus.
2. Determining programme aims and the system of concepts and vies required for its implementation.
3. Defining a set of characteristics and indicators we can use while distinguish between target communities and those that do not qualify as communities but simulate or pretend to being them.

4. Using the above determined indicators and characteristics we develop the procedure of testing the communities selected for further work (potential communities) against the chosen set of criteria.
5. Drawing up a “database” of potential communities by using available sources of information.
6. Examining the identified potential communities in the database for according to the procedure developed at Step 4.
7. (a) Establishing partnerships with the communities that passed the test at the previous step for joint implementation of the community development programme.
(b) Identifying active, initiative people in the communities that failed the test.
8. Involving the active, initiative people identified at Step 7 into the activity of existing communities so that they receive the experience of life and activity in communities.

An analysis of the above 8 steps may reveal a paradox: we have to establish connections and partnerships at Step 7 and involve activists at Step 8 while we do not have adequate and complete information at Steps 3 to 6. This paradox is widely spread in the practice of pioneers and first explorers. This is where research by doing comes into play. In this approach, characteristics, indicators, and criteria are not given a priori but produced by successful application.

Nevertheless, in our work we use certain targets, in particular, to look for people and proto-communities. Traditionally, NGOs focus in their activity on some target groups defined either by age or by social category (e.g., young people, the handicapped, pensioners, etc.). In our case, we cannot use such characteristics as they lead us astray from our tasks and blur the main problem. Target groups like these in Europe can be organized into communities with some assistance and support because their representatives have or may have experience in other communities. Meanwhile here, on the one hand, our youth or pensioners have no such experience, and on the other hand, even those who now want to help them does not have it. The main problem, however, is that target group communities selected like this are always secondary in respect to those quasi-natural communities that constitute the backbone of the civil society in European nations: the local communities.

When singling out targets for our activity, we count on people not their associations. Above we have stated that social structures traditional for European nations have been destroyed in Belarus, now we have also admit that we do not have any worthwhile picture of Belarusian society at our

disposal. While using terms young people or the handicapped etc. we can think them as the corresponding structures in a European society, yet they are different in Belarus. To think them or work with them in any different way is beyond our, and anybody's in Belarus, experience. This makes us target active and initiative people in the periphery of the country not rushing to write them into any social structures or groups.

Shifting the focus from social organizations onto individuals, we still have to figure out the criteria for selecting people we need. Such characteristics as "active" and "initiative" that first come to mind can be assessed through evaluation of the past activity and joint experience. Moreover, we cannot agree with any expressions of initiative and activity. It should be directed activity, meaning that people are to have specific problems, relevant for many or even all the people living in a certain area. Those should also be problems not solvable on one's own but only through involving many other people. And yet that is not enough.

There are practically no people in Belarus with the experience of community life, however, there must be people with a *vital need for communities*. This very need is for us the main target in selecting our "target group". This need stirs people into activity and initiative whereas our task is to be able to detect it.

However, the on-the-surface characteristics are insufficient. Important for us are at least three characteristics. The first one is the possession of free time an active person can use for social activity. Most frequently those categories of people have not much of authority and weight in society therefore we prefer to target people with an average or higher income through their major business, not tied up by overtime work and not seeking profit in social activity.

The second characteristic is independence from the regime and its ideology. Sharing or not the ideology of the present regime, a target person should be independent from the authority's support of his or her activity. For example, in most cases running private business in Belarus does not make people free and independent because its normal functioning, let alone success, is secured through loyalty or corruption. The same applies to teachers, scientific researchers, and even students. Anyway, we are more likely to find independent people among those who have their own business or income in the private sector than among state employees.

The third characteristic is related to the authority, influence, and potential of a participant in our activity, to the extent to which his or her neighbors are ready to trust the person. One of the means the regime uses against the civil society and influential people is to discredit them in the

eyes of the public. Several acts of defamation can neutralize all potential activists in a small town. That is why even such soft criteria make the selection of participants in our projects so extremely difficult.

The complication connected with these criteria consists not only in the fact that such people are rather few, the major difficulty is that an “objective” test against the criteria is not possible as we need to check the candidates by joint action. The same holds true for evaluation and measuring indicators of efficiency of communities being organized. Here one cannot guarantee results in the nearest future.

10. Conclusion

A lot in the state system and social organization of the Soviet Union appeared to be similar to institutions characteristic of Europe. On the turn of 1990s, when the disappointment of the Soviet way of life and the whole complex of social relations became widespread, many thought it was possible to switch over to European forms of life and activity without abolishing the main Soviet institutions, just by filling them with slightly different meaning. It seemed to many that it just took to teach people to work in a slightly different way, make them more active, provide with access to information, and allow to freely manage their own resources. After the break-up of the Soviet Union, some newly independent republics, especially the Baltic ones, got rid of those illusions quite soon. In Belarus they live on. The structure of courts, the police, local administrations, Kolkhozes, schools of all levels, and some other institutions remain unchanged. The main energy and creativity of Belarusians goes for improving the operation of the structures, organizations, and institutions passed down to them from the Soviet Union. The form of this improvement has undergone no change since the end of 1980s, and is usually described in simple countable categories: “more Glasnost”, “more freedom”, “more democracy”, “more resources”, or the other way round – “less bureaucracy and corruption”, etc.

It is funny to see that many Europeans think the same while honestly trying to help solve our problem. There cannot, however, be more freedom there where it has not been, and it is impossible to lessen corruption if people are not familiar with other ways of solving social problems. It is only possible to cut the sums of bribes. Behind those attempts at improvement, the shows through an obvious and simple principle of human activity: it is always simpler to continue some activity than change it radically, abandoning one type of activity and replacing it with another. With the above aid we mean

exactly such an attitude: replacing some activity or institute instead of improving or perfecting it.

The difficulties entailed by this radical approach are obvious. The main principles and activities aimed at reviving communities in Belarus, presented in this paper, are our response to that challenge. However, defining and declaring directions and order of actions do not protect us from the danger of gradually beginning to substitute the activity for reviving communities with more habitual development of that what does not exist. This danger is connected with the difficulty in correlating and aligning individual actions, which are always local, limited in space and time, with general principles, aims, and concepts. Therefore it is very important to find criteria for evaluating specific actions and their efficiency in promoting the general aim. They are called to serve as a protective mechanism against that possible substitution. It is obvious that criteria for improving something are radically different from those of creating something that does not yet exist. In the first case one usually uses well-trying empiric indicators, reflecting quantitative growth (of the number of people, events, etc.).

The second case implies a totally different approach. If human activity were only assessed by empiric, quantitative criteria no progress or innovation would be possible. For example, the first steamboats were worse than their contemporary sailing ships by all parameters. However, people made the decision to develop steamboats, invest in them, leaving sailboats in the romantic past. What drove those people? We think it was logic, analysis, and critical thinking. Experience and evidence were in favour of sailing: those ships could carry more cargo, were faster, cleaner, and simply more beautiful than the first smoking, puffing, and sluggish steamers. Reason was in conflict with experience and evidence, and won, which was later witnessed by new experience.

What does it mean for us to appeal to logic and critical thinking when we plan concrete actions for the revival of communities or evaluate their results? Let us outline the most important points.

Firstly, it is to keep the researcher's attitude to our own ideas of communities and the ways and possibilities of their revival in Belarus, as well as reflexive and critical attitude towards the schemes and concepts of activity we have and use. Hence any, even "negative" result of interaction with people or proto-communities cannot be scrapped, it is to be considered as enriching our ideas of Belarus, the state of communities, the attitudes and motivation of people, and the ways we act.

Secondly, it is keeping in mind the general aims and objectives, in particular, bearing towards radical change instead of improvement and growth.

Such understanding enables us to see and not miss something essentially new, even though barely discernible, and not fall for something flashy yet meaningless. In this respect, one initiative person who tries to actualize his or her own ideas and views on how to organize life in the district or town is more important and promising for us than a “community” grown on principles of Soviet organization that is active imitating the develop of self-government.

Thirdly, it is to understand the scale and system profoundness of the necessary transformations. When we plan and later evaluate specific actions, we build them in, find a place for them in a holistic system of tasks and courses of activity. It is only within an integral system that we can adequately evaluate each event or action. Moreover, results obtained by solving one set of tasks, for example, research ones, immediately entails changes in the understanding of other tasks and their adjustment, e.g., organizing cooperation with local activists.

All the above mentioned determines our work and the evaluation of its efficiency.

The order of actions we suggest may seem lengthy and roundabout compared to many straightforward projects. We could agree with that if we had not analyzed past experience to the conviction that straightforward project only bring illusory results, as similar to real ones as Soviet institutes were merely imitating European or open society ones. The way we suggest, roundabout as it seems, brings us to the goal in a much more direct way than methods well-tried that bring illusory results. That is why we suggest not merely an alternative view and programme of actions for community development in Belarus, but also another approach to gauging the efficiency of activity. This paper appeals to critical thinking and reason. Practice will show the rest.

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