



# Industrial Rural Development Paradigm Shift-Focused Social Movements

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## 7.1 NEW FORMS OF AGRICULTURE FOR CHANGING FARMER/NATURE RELATIONSHIPS

### 7.1.1 *Movement of Agroecology Around the World*

Various types of agroecology practices such as organic farming, biodynamic agriculture, agroforestry, permaculture movements and others are significantly increasing in recent decades as more people decide to try these practices in their daily farming. Agroecology is becoming a global movement. Global agroecology movements have called for ‘scaling out.’ Scaling *out* agroecology would support farmer-to-farmer exchange that spreads agroecological practices through existing, and expanding, networks of small-scale family producers (Roman-Alcala, 2018). The agroecology movement helps to reduce usage of external inputs and advocates for small-scale family farming as relevant to individuality.

Scale up of the Agroecology movement is an important tool that could ensure implementation of goals of the 2030 Agenda. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development calls for a transformation in food and agricultural systems. The 2030 Agenda including its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 targets was adopted on 25 September 2015 by Heads of State and Government at a special UN summit. The adoption of the 2030 Agenda was a landmark achievement,

providing for a shared global vision towards sustainable development for all (The 2030 Agenda, 2015).

Another important role for this movement is devoted to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). FAO advocates for agroecology practices. FAO highlights (2018) that agroecology brings together scientific disciplines, social concepts and practices. The scientific core of agroecology is based on applying ecological concepts and principles to optimize interactions between plants, trees, animals, humans and the environment. In addition, agroecology places social issues at the centre of solutions for a sustainable and fair food system. As a set of practices, agroecology provides multiple benefits to society and the environment, by restoring ecosystem services and biodiversity. Thanks to its integrated approach, agroecology is a key to boost food and nutrition security, while improving the resilience of agroecosystems (FAO, 2018a).

The important contribution of agroecology towards sustainable development is focused on:

- enhancing smallholder and family farmers' adaptation and resilience to the impacts of climate change;
- improving nutrition including through more diversified diets;
- protecting and enhancing agro-biodiversity in support of ecosystem services such as pollination and soil health;
- improving livelihoods in rural areas;
- achieving a transformative change in agricultural practices towards sustainable development (FAO, 2018b) (Table 7.1).

Movement of Agroecology is spread all over the world and includes various types of practices as organic farming, biodynamic agriculture, agroforestry, permaculture movements and others. The history of agroecology depends on whether you are referring to it as a body of thought or a method of practice, as many indigenous cultures around the world historically used and currently use practices we would now consider utilizing knowledge of agroecology (Johnson, 2012).

### 7.1.2 Case Study 'Natural Agriculture'

**1st stage: Emergence of social movement 'Natural agriculture'.** The main initiators of natural agriculture in Lithuania were Saulius Jasionis and Laimis Žmuida. Inspiration for such initiative for Laimis Žmuida was values proposed by his parents with focus on nature-friendly practices in

**Table 7.1** Key facts of agroecology by FAO*Key facts of agroecology by FAO*


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Agroecology relies on ecosystem services to improve productivity  
 The knowledge and practices of farmers and food producers from all over the world are at the core of agroecology  
 Agroecology can address the root causes of hunger, poverty and inequality  
 Agroecology combines farmers' knowledge with modern science in innovative ways  
 Agroecology provides local solutions for global challenges  
 Agroecology relies on the interactions between plants, animals, humans and the environment, to build sustainable and fair food systems  
 Agroecological approaches are vital for the challenges we face today and tomorrow  
 Agroecology uses fewer external resources, reducing costs and negative environmental impacts  
 Sharing and creating knowledge among food producers is at the heart of agroecology

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Source [www.fao.org](http://www.fao.org)

their daily life. When Laimis had finished his studies, then he has started to search for land in rural areas of Lithuania where he could start farming based on his proposed values. He was reading various books on agriculture principles and proposed it also to his friend Saulius Jasionis who also looked for natural farming techniques that helps to reduce usage of external inputs and advocates for small-scale farming as relevant to individuality.

The first actions to create natural agriculture movement have started in 2008. In the beginning, enthusiasts of natural agriculture in Lithuania relied on N. I. Kurdiumov books, which propagate gardening with no soil work (see reference Kurdiumov, 2012a). Kurdiumov in his books described agricultural systems proposed by other authors. The biggest inspiration for creation of natural agriculture for both initiators was from A. Kuznetsov and F. Gelcer ideas (see Gelcer, 2012; Kurdiumov, 2012b). Though eventually, by experimenting, gathering knowledge and adapting both authors advice to practice, the new unique theory was created of natural agriculture, and suggested the techniques most suitable for Lithuanian climate. Natural agriculture is different from conventional and organic farming because it is based on purely natural processes. In conventional and organic farming soil is continuously being emaciated and destroyed, whereas in nature soil its fertile layer is constantly growing, due to yearly weed harvest. Weeds fall down to the soil, are

being decomposed by various microorganism and becomes natural fertilizer and food for the agricultural plants. Surplus is being conserved as humus. Contrary to conventional farming in natural agriculture there is no digging, scratching or hoeing. This lets the soil create its own natural structure, which ensures good air circulation, humidity and wealthy environment for live microorganisms. Processes of nature could be imitated by covering the soil surface with the mulch—old organic materials like dry grass, leaves, sawdust, etc. Bacteria and fungi, which are decomposing organic cover, release carbon dioxide into the soil. CO<sub>2</sub> is heavier than the air, meaning that it is observed by the soil, where it melts down and becomes fertilizer for the plants. By using this method of agriculture, the quality of products as well as the environment is better and healthier. Moreover, eventually, the harvest in such areas should be bigger than in ploughed ones. Finally, there is no need to buy fertilizers, insecticides or pesticides, as the balance of microorganisms in the soil creates barrier for plant diseases and pathogenic organisms.

The main goal of the social movement of natural agriculture was to create a new form of agriculture changing farmers and nature relationships applying nature-friendly principles. When both initiators have tried such initiatives in practice then development of this practice at larger scale have started. More interested people were involved who also wanted to apply natural farming principles in their gardens. The next step was the creation of the website [www.gerazemdirbyste.lt](http://www.gerazemdirbyste.lt) as the platform of the movement and the forum of natural agriculture enthusiasts. However, the number of the movement members was rapidly growing, due to the society's interest to use natural and healthy vegetables and fruits. For one part of the members, natural agriculture is beneficial in financial means as to grow your own food is cheaper than to buy. For others, quality of the food was the issue, as it differs if you buy products in shopping centres, markets or grow it by yourself using natural agriculture method. Most of these people not only care for their health and eating habits but also want to live in sustainable manner, to apply nature-friendly principles.

Later, initiators of this movement have started to organize various events and seminars to introduce to this farming method as more enthusiasts were approaching them with many questions and will to start this natural agriculture practice in their farming.

**2nd stage: Coalescence of social movement 'Natural agriculture'.** During informal virtual communication via platform [www.gerazemdirbyste.lt](http://www.gerazemdirbyste.lt) between people who strive to use techniques of natural agriculture,

the need for seminars appeared, where interested ones or practitioners could exchange knowledge and share their experiences. Later initiators have started to organize lectures and practical workshops in selected place (for example, village, farming place, meeting place, etc.), with the aim to explain principles of natural agriculture and help to adapt them to the local particularities. One of the initiators of this movement Laimis Žmuida has planned that such seminars and consultations will become his main activity and livelihood.

Collaboration between movement members helped to gather best practices and experiences of natural agriculture as well as to improve the technology, convert theoretical knowledge into practices and to adapt it to Lithuanian conditions. One of the initiators of this movement and the lecturer Saulius Jasionis highlighted that ‘people who want to use new agricultural methods are scattered all over the Lithuania, but when they come together they have a possibility to share their experiences. When all the experiences and the best practice examples are put together, analysed and systemized, the result could be achieved much faster. Also, for some people it is more convenient to follow known and examined techniques, than to experiment by their selves. The network helps for them by lectures and practical workshops’ (Vidickiene, 2013).

The platform of the movement serves not only for collaboration and communication among users of natural agriculture methods and products, but also as an informational tool for those, who want to buy products of natural agriculture. From 2011, *the commerce system of natural agriculture products was established* and some of the growers have started to sell their products.

Movement members of natural agriculture also have *prepared requirements for the products’ certification*, including obligatory growing conditions, strict agro-technique control and products’ expiry date. According to natural agriculture certification rules, products should be sold in a period of 24 h, counting from the moment, it was picked. Most of the products are sold in the growing places, when berries, vegetables and fruits are picked only when the actual customer comes. It helps to ensure that the product is the most fresh and of the best quality.

Members of this movement are continuously searching for new attractive ways how to spread the knowledge about natural agriculture. One of the examples of their activities, *‘Tasting fest’ of natural agriculture products* was organized at the beginning of natural agriculture practices. The

idea was suggested by one of the movement initiators Laimis Žmuida. He wanted to select the most delicious potatoes for the future growing and started to taste 13 different kinds of potatoes, grown by him. So he cooked them, fried them, compared the tastes and made notes. 'I loved the process of tasting, so I thought that it would be a good idea to share such experiences with others and to organize a public event'—says Laimis. The first Tasting fest in the restaurant 'Gurmė' situated in Kaunas was organized with doubts, excitement and a bit of fair—what if nobody likes it? This event was successful and participants were excited to taste different kind of potatoes grown by principles of natural agriculture. Because of this reason, these people could easily distinguish the differences between potatoes. 9 different kinds of potatoes were prepared for tasting. Participants were served 9 pieces of different cooked and 9 pieces of fried potatoes. Potatoes were cooked and fried without any salt or oil. It was done on purpose to reveal the real taste of the potatoes (Vidickiene, 2013).

*The event of exchanging seeds and sprouts* became an annual tradition. The idea of the event is to exchange between network members seeds and sprouts of good quality, examined and grown in their own garden. Sometimes people bring for exchange imported seeds unknown to most Lithuanians. Seeds are the main currency in the market and only in rare cases, you can buy desirable seeds for the real money, as all participants want to exchange their seeds for some new plants for their garden.

Membership of the movement of natural agriculture is informal. Annually one gathering of members is organized to share their experiences with the number of participants approximately around 200. Every year 20–30 lectures and practical workshops are organized with 10–15 participants in each event so potential members of this movement count from 200 to 300 annually. Members are people from cities and rural areas that would like to apply natural agriculture practices in their farming activities. Many interested new members join this initiative with already some knowledge of natural agriculture. Another part of people was inspired by neighbours or friends who already are part of this movement. Most of the members are small farmers, inhabitants of other professions from cities or rural areas who want to have their garden where principles of natural agriculture would be applied. Both females and males, equally, support these ideas and are practicing this type of agriculture. More than 50% of participants are young people, with age less than 35 years. Every year is continuous growth of new members who firstly try to get more

knowledge on natural agriculture in practical seminars and then to try this activity in their daily lives. The remaining part of members is stable with informal communication via platform or in annual meetings.

**3rd stage: Biureaucratization of social movement ‘Natural agriculture’.** *Resources of the movement.* Human resources are the most important resources in the movement of natural agriculture. The role of initiators of Saulius Jasionis and Laimis Žmuida are of great importance to maintain this movement in the past, today and in the future. Using human resources, the new unique theory was created of natural agriculture, which supplemented N. I. Kurdiumov’s teaching and suggested the techniques mostly suitable for the Lithuanian climate by experimenting, gathering knowledge and adapting his advices to practice.

Other resources:

1. IT service: (a) creation and maintaining of the website [www.gerazemdirbyste.lt](http://www.gerazemdirbyste.lt) as the platform of the movement and the forum of natural agriculture enthusiasts; (b) Facebook platform as a tool for information and communication with members of movement;
2. financial resources to organize seminars, workshops and events. The amount is not high as the initiator of the movement Laimis Žmuida is searching for supporters of natural agriculture who could provide their settlement as a place for seminars or workshops and usually, expenses are very low. No additional resources are needed at this stage of development.

*Structure of the movement.* The structure of the movement is decentralized informal network. Website and Facebook platform are used for communication among members. Annually one gathering of members is organized to share experiences of members with the number of participants approximately around 200. Membership in the movement is open to any person who supports ideas of natural agriculture and wants to apply this practice in their garden.

*Roles of the movement.* The main role from the establishment of the movement was provided by both initiators. Laimis Žmuida is responsible for organizing events and practical workshops and spreading this information on the website [www.gerazemdirbyste.lt](http://www.gerazemdirbyste.lt) and Facebook platform. Roles for other members depend on event, practices that are going to be organized and are discussed beforehand.

*Identification of the movement.* Natural agriculture is becoming more popular in Lithuania every year since establishment of the movement in 2008. Members of the network are the main actors that spread information about natural agriculture in Lithuania using various channels as platforms, TV broadcast, websites that help to create the identity of the network. The movement covers the whole area of Lithuania as an enthusiast of natural agriculture are from different places from Lithuania in rural areas and places close to cities (as community gardens, city gardens, etc.). The traditional event is organized every year as the annual meeting involving about 200 participants.

*Communication channels.* Platforms [www.gerazemdirbyste.lt](http://www.gerazemdirbyste.lt) and Facebook are tools used for (1) internal communication among members of the network; (2) spread information about the movement to the wider society; (3) tool to organize work. Both platforms are used very actively. Initiators of movement are responsible for maintaining the work of both platforms.

Members of the network also participate in some other movements as ecovillage movement where members of the movement also support ideas of nature-friendly practices, ecological way of living with no impact on environment, etc.

**4th stage: Decline of social movement ‘Natural agriculture’.** The current stage of development of social movement ‘Natural agriculture’ is successful with the prospect for bigger growth in the future. From the beginning in 2008 until 2020 every year new enthusiast participates in lectures and practical workshops on natural agriculture with 400 to 600 participants every year. Initiators of the movement have no intention for bigger growth and they let movement develop in natural way. If there would be a need for more participants in this movement, additional resources would be needed as (1) education of society on nature-friendly ways to live with nature, new form of agriculture changing farmer and nature relations, etc.; (2) new programmes in universities and at schools; (3) new requirements for farmers using the EU and/or national support, etc.

This social movement has an impact to the society by proposing (1) new form of agriculture changing farmer and nature relations; (2) advocating of new small-scale family farming as relevant to individuality, (3) creating and/or strengthening new food consumption habits and requesting new quality of food.



## 7.2 NEW QUALITY OF FOOD FOR CHANGING CUSTOMER/FOOD RELATIONSHIPS

### 7.2.1 *Food and Consumers' Movements Around the World*

Food movements are rapidly growing social and political phenomena almost all over the world. In many countries, there have been surges of interest in heirloom seeds, in craft beers, in traditional bread and baking, in the demand for city garden plots, in organic food and in opposition to GMOs. Simultaneously, there has been a massive growth of interest in food on social media and the initiation or renewal of initiatives such as Slow Food and many others (Latham, 2016). There are a huge amount and even bigger variety of food consumers' movements across the world, an absolute majority of them are fighting for better, more sustainable, cleaner, and fairer food. Food consumers' movements can be divided into several groups: slow living, slow food and down-shifting; local, organic, sustainable and fair food; and finally food that does not contain dangerous chemicals, pesticides and genetically modified organisms (GMOs).

Slow Food International is one of the worldwide known global, grass-roots organization, founded in 1989 to **prevent the disappearance of local food cultures and traditions, counteract the rise of fast life and combat people's dwindling interest in the food they eat**, where it comes from and how people's food choices affect the world around us. Since its beginnings, Slow Food has grown into a global movement involving **millions of people in over 160 countries**, working to ensure everyone has access to good, clean and fair food. According to Slow Food International Philosophy, food is tied to many other aspects of life, including culture, politics, agriculture, and the environment. Through food choices, people can collectively influence how food is cultivated, produced and distributed, and change the world as a result (Slow Food International).

Europe's anti-GMO movement GMWatch is another example of movements fighting for the interests of consumers. In 1999, European NGOs and concerned scientists met in Brussels to discuss how to prevent an uncontrolled and contaminating of fields and seeds in Europe with genetically engineered organisms. Inspired by the nuclear-free zone movement, the idea to spread GMO-free zones and regions, declared by citizens and their local and regional governments, started to sprout. Since then, the GMO-Free-Regions movement continued to grow and

what had started as an European movement spread beyond the continent (GMO-free Europe). In 2020 GMWatch movement is acting globally and provides the public with the latest news and comment on genetically modified foods and crops and their associated pesticides (GMWatch). So even these few examples show that food and consumers' movements can be very different, but they are proponents of healthier and better living.

### 7.2.2 Case Study 'Slow Food Alytus'

**1st stage: Emergence of social movement 'Slow Food Alytus'.** The emergence of the club 'Slow Food Alytus' was initiated by the international organization 'Slow Food' when the representatives of this organization got in contact with Džiuginta Rasiukevičienė. She brought together the enthusiasts of healthy food and healthy lifestyle, representatives of the associations of eco-communities, producers of natural agriculture and local products and all together they established the Slow food *convivia* (*convivere* in Latin) in Dzūkija and Dž. Rasiukevičienė was elected its president. Movement 'Slow Food Alytus' was established in 2017.

The goal of the community is to promote the consumption of local, properly grown and produced products, to spread the word about the benefits of good food and to remind everyone to enjoy eating. Slow Food envisions a world in which all people can access and enjoy food that is good for them, good for those who grow it and good for the planet. Their approach is based on a concept of food that is defined by three interconnected principles: good, clean and fair.

**GOOD:** quality, flavoursome and healthy food

**CLEAN:** production that does not harm the environment

**FAIR:** accessible prices for consumers and fair conditions and pay for producers (Slow Food International).

Movement 'Slow Food' cooperates with other local initiatives—'Kaimas veža' ('Countryside Brings'), Healthy Club 'Determination', association 'Native Land Home'. Cooperation between these organizations brings together likely minded people and creates infrastructure between farmers and consumers. The main goal of the 'Slow Food Alytus' is to bring new quality of food and to know how the food was grown, to know the farmer and his/her philosophy. In other words movement 'Slow Food Alytus'

is changing the relationships between the farmer, the customer and the food. The goal of the movement had not been changed since its establishment and it still helps customers and farmers to reach each other and to enjoy mutually beneficial cooperation. Džiuginta Rasiukevičienė also emphasized that their philosophy is based not only on slow food, but on a slow living as a such. That is why one of the key aspects of their community is to eat food which is grown not further than 30 km from centre of their *convivia* which is based in Meteliai not in Alytus.

**2nd stage: Coalescence of social movement ‘Slow Food Alytus’.** The need to gather like-minded people and spread the ideas was a natural further step in reaching the main goal (to promote the consumption of local, properly grown and produced products, to spread the word about the benefits of good food and to remind everyone that they should enjoy eating) as it is not possible to establish *convivia* without farmers, their products and consumers. There are two types of community members of the movement ‘Slow Food Alytus’—farmers or providers and consumers or receivers and their involvement is hugely different. The first part of members is farmers and there are 12 members of ‘Slow Food Alytus’ Board. Board members are permanent, and they are producers of natural agriculture and local products, as well as they are small farmers. The number of Board members had not have changed since the establishment of community in 2017.

According to the philosophy of Slow Food International, consumers or eaters also are members of the *convivia* but first of all their involvement is much weaker and second, their number is constantly floating, as new members join *convivia* and some of the old eaters find something different where they want to direct their time and money or they simply change their residence.

However, there can be drawn some common characteristics of ‘Slow Food Alytus’ *convivia* members—the vast majority of them are people living in rural areas, who are small, eco-friendly, organic, clean and fair farmers, older than 35 years and mostly women. This sociological description of members of ‘Slow Food Alytus’ *convivia* mostly represents farmers/providers. Consumers/eaters/receivers can be described as people living in more urban areas (but not only), older than 35 years and mostly women. Also, there is a noticeable trend in growing numbers of consumers but as Džiuginta Rasiukevičienė confirmed that higher growth is welcomed and that is something that all of members of *convivia* are working hard on but they do not forget to live sustainable and slow.

However, analysing the development of ‘Slow Food Alytus’, it must be said, that an expansion or broader scope of the activities is not the main goal of this organization. The President of ‘Slow Food Alytus’ Džiuginta Rasiukevičienė confirmed that the main idea of their movement is high quality, clean, fair, and slow food and living. Because of this reason, community pays attention to maintaining its members, deepening their cooperation and looking for the new forms of cooperation. For example, ‘Slow Food Alytus’ organizes food tastings for various companies as a certain leisure activity. Club organizes healthy food tasting for those who, due to their constant busyness, seem to be forced to consume fast food instead of ‘slow’, organic food.

An important part of the community development is its activities for the members of *convivia*. Club ‘Slow Food Alytus’ also organizes food tastings for its members, promotes local farmers, prepares food, and uses that to strengthen the sense of the community, togetherness and belonging.

Another step in the development of the organization is its cooperation with other like-minded organizations, such as ‘Kaimas veža’ (‘Country-side Brings’), Healthy Club ‘Determination’, association ‘Native Land Home’. Healthy Club ‘Determination’ helps in organizing regular meetings and tastings with *convivia* members, ‘Kaimas veža’ (‘Countryside Brings’) is an online platform where farmers and eaters meet, and it helps to bring food from the farm to the customer. Finally, ‘Slow Food Alytus’ closely cooperates with the association ‘Native Land Home’, which helps oncological patients and together these two organizations help patients in providing healthy food and organizing activities lifting the spirit.

**3rd stage: Bureaucratization of social movement ‘Slow Food Alytus’.** The third cycle stage of any social movement is institutionalization, formalization and bureaucratization where every organization or social movement decides how it organizes its activities, responsibilities and recourses.

*Structure of the movement.* Organization of ‘Slow Food Alytus’ has semi-formal structure and to some level informal sharing of activities. Džiuginta Rasiukevičienė is the president of the movement ‘Slow Food Alytus’, also there is twelve members board, which makes decisions on the most important activities of the movement. Slow food movement is decentralized movement with open membership to join this initiative.

*Roles of the movement.* Main roles are clearly identified to the members of the movement, for the part of producers: members, responsible for

(1) production; (2) sales; (3) logistics (in cooperation with [kaimasvez.a.lt](http://kaimasvez.a.lt) platform); (3) tastings; (4) voluntary activities and education. As it was mentioned earlier—eaters are free to decide on the type and form of cooperation between members but their commitment and activities in the *convivia* are scarcer and weaker.

‘Slow Food Alytus’ can be called as more informal than formal movement or even community, and it offers the following services:

- sales of local food products. Local products such as large variety of seeds, herbs, dairy products, all kinds of vegetables, fruits, berries, rapeseed oil, bread and many more local organic production grown not further than 30 kilometres from eaters and/or supplied to the customers via internet platform [kaimasveza.lt](http://kaimasveza.lt).
- food tastings for community members and various companies who want their employees to enjoy slow eating and slow living.
- various voluntary work with healthy clubs, oncological patients and schoolchildren showing them the opportunities to eat healthy and local food.

The main activities of the *convivia* ‘Slow Food Alytus’ include (1) promotion of the message of good, clean and fair food; (2) promotion of the accessibility to taste and buy good, clean and fair food; (3) helping those who cannot access (because of their age or health) good, clean and healthy food.

*Human resources.* Human resources such as labour, experience, employees’ skills and expertise are the key elements in reaching the goals of social movement. The community of ‘Slow Food Alytus’ connected healthy living enthusiasts who were active in this field before and even the movement does not have formal staff, but the people who share the same values and ideas created a sustainable environment for like-minded people to reach their goals where producer and consumer meet and share mutually beneficial relationships and create informal network for further cooperation.

*Financial resources.* Financial resources are necessary at the beginning of any organization or movement; however, the founders of the initiative did not need big financial resources to start their activities and everything they did was a private initiative to reach their goals. Also, movement does

not have any membership fee, so any expenses for the development of the movement are paid by board members or earned from *convivia* activities.

*Intangible resources.* Intangible resources play a major role in the development of any movement. Movement ‘Slow Food Alytus’ developed successful informal relationships with many other like-minded movements and other actors which helps them to reach out to stakeholders—farmers and consumers, to promote their lifestyle and products, and to share their intellectual, human and organisational capital, knowledge and values about slow food and slow living.

*Identification of the movement.* Slow food movement is quite well-identified in Lithuania. Members actively spread information on local food and relationships between farmer and consumer in various places: social forums, social media, local newspapers, local and national websites, local TV broadcast and radio, meetings and conferences and discussions. Information about *convivia* ‘Slow Food Alytus’ can be found at their Facebook group ‘Slow Food Alytus’. Movement is identified by promoting local, fresh, good, clean and fair food and promoting the idea of low eating and slow living.

*Communication channels.* Facebook is the main tool used for spreading information about movement to the wider society; also, it is an internal communication among members of the *convivia*, where they can find information about future events and meetings. Finally, Facebook is a tool to organize work, as many people firstly get in touch with the organization through Facebook—whether they want to order a tasting, to know about the *convivia* or to buy products. Other platforms which are actively incorporated in the activities of ‘Slow Food Alytus’ are these:

[kaimasveza.lt](http://kaimasveza.lt) ‘Kaimas veža’ (‘Countryside Brings’) is a platform where consumers can order organic and local food products.

Facebook page Healthy Club ‘Determination’ closely cooperates with ‘Slow Food Alytus’, as they organize members’ weekly meetings, tastings and various education activities about healthy food, slow food and slow living.

All these platforms are used actively, and their cooperation shows great integration between different organizations still having the same goal and sharing the same values—be healthy, stay healthy and help others to do that.

*International activities.* ‘Slow Food Alytus’ is a part of international movement ‘Slow Food’. Being a part of a worldwide known and acknowledged organization is a great advantage for small and local movements

as they can get a lot of great ideas, inspiration and support on how to develop slow food movement in Lithuania.

**4th stage: Decline of social movement ‘Slow Food Alytus’.** Current stage of development of social movement ‘Slow Food Alytus’ is successful with the prospect for growth in the future. From the beginning in 2017 until 2020 every year new eaters join this movement and participate in tasting events, buy healthy and local food and gradually they start living slow.

When talking about future, Džiuginta Rasiukevičienė assured that even an expansion or broader scope of the activities is not the main goal of this community, but the founders of the movement have strong intentions for bigger growth as they seek to influence local political decision makes and public regarding healthy eating, especially regarding to young schoolchildren. This issue is one of the future goals for the ‘Slow Food Alytus’ movement. Also, founders of this community believe that for further growth and prosper of their organization additional resources will be needed in near future such as more steady human and material resources in educating society (especially young schoolchildren) on benefits and advantages of healthy and local food and eating and living slow.

This social movement has an impact on the society by proposing: firstly, new quality of food and changing farmer, customer and the most important food relationship; secondly, strengthening new food consumption habits and requesting new quality of food; and thirdly, empowering new livelihoods which are changing rural/urban (business) relationship.

Overall, such movements as ‘Slow Food Lithuania’ are changing the perception of rural areas to towns residents and show us that ties between rural and urban areas are connected and overlapping more than ever before not only in exchanging of goods and services but in exchanging of lifestyles and finding new relationships.

### 7.3 NEW FORMS OF ACCESSIBILITY TO FOOD FOR CONSUMERS FOR FARMER-CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIP CHANGE

#### 7.3.1 *Local Food Movements*

In the last couple of decades, the local food movement has gone from a fringe movement to a major player in the national food industries. At this time local supermarkets pretty much had a monopoly on the food

industry (Roberts, 2017). For example, people might have been able to choose fruits and vegetables over produced products, but there really were not a lot of options for how to get your food. The local food movement was born out of the industrialization of organics (Ikerd, 2017). It has emerged from the erosion of public trust and confidence in organic foods and aims to bring farmers and consumers closer together in various innovative ways.

The organic food movement emerged as a consequence of declining trust and confidence in the conventional/industrial food system (Ikerd, 2017). Almost that every major urban center around the country has several farmers' markets, community-supported agricultural programmes and other innovative ways to bring farmers and consumers closer together. The local food movement improves access to healthy, organic food, strengthens the local economy, and improves community relationships (Roberts, 2017). Many factors have contributed to the growing popularity of local foods. However, the modern local food movement was born out of the industrialization of organics (Ikerd, 2017).

Most retailers, however, consider local to be on a smaller scale than the state level and the term is often defined as products produced and sold within county lines. There are two primary forms of 'local' when it comes to food: direct-to-consumer (farmer to you) and direct-to-retail/foodservice (farmer to restaurants, hospitals, schools and organizations). Local food is the better choice if attempting to purchase and consume goods in or near your geographic location (Brain, 2012).

Demand for local food has been growing exponentially and is now reaching wholesale and institutional markets. This development is considered a potential step towards solving the above problems but has introduced another concern regarding scale: how can we bring small-scale, sustainable, local food to larger markets, given that scale has historically been inversely related to both sustainability and socio-economic justice? The local food movement entails but is not reducible only to concerns such as production methods and food miles, health and food security or economic and community development (Furman & Papavasiliou, 2018) (Table 7.2).

### 7.3.2 Case Study 'Local Food Movement by Viva Sol'

**1st stage: Emergence of social movement 'Local food movement by Viva Sol'.** The main initiator for creation of local food movement from



**Table 7.2** Main reasons to consume local food

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*Main reasons to consume local food*

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*Economic*

Farmers retain a greater portion of the value-added costs typically captured by large firms

(“middlemen”) further down the supply chain. This helps to sustain rural communities and preserve small farms

Purchase of local food ensures more income to local community

Small business are the largest employer

Consume of local products increase nation’s food security

*Environmental*

Eating locally helps to preserve local and small-scale farmland

Reducing the distance food travels cuts down on associated fossil fuel consumption, air pollution, and

greenhouse gas emissions

Supporting local food helps preserve cultivar genetic diversity

Farmers who engage in direct marketing are more likely to use environmentally friendly production

practices

*Mental and physical*

Local food systems are linked to reduced food safety risks through production decentralization

Eating locally is correlated with improved nutrition, increased likelihood of making healthier food

choices, obesity prevention, and reduced risk of diet-related chronic

disease. This is mainly because the food is more nutritious, fresher, and less processed

*Social:*

Gaining of insight into your food’s story through talking with the people who grew and/or made it

The ability to talk with producers when purchasing food allows you to ask questions about pesticides,

herbicides, growth hormones, animal treatment, fertilizers, and any other queries you may have about

how your food was produced

Getting to know your local producers gives you a stronger sense of place, relationships, trust, and pride within your community

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Source Brain (2012)

cheese products in Lithuania is Valdas Kavaliauskas, who decided to move from Vilnius to Darguziai Village in 2008 to raise goats and to produce goat cheeses. He was looking forward to collaboration with supporters of the idea in this region that would strengthen cooperation ties between the rural and urban population and support ideas of local food movement, and would offer outstanding dairy products to urban citizens. Valdas

Kavaliauskas and other cheese producers from this region who joined this activity founded Viva Sol, which means ‘long live the earth’ in French, an association to address relations between producers and consumers and between urban and rural areas. In 2008–2009 they decided to set up a Cheese Farm Market in one of the cafés of the capital city and a Cheese House in Darguziai Village. Every year more and more activities were proposed as (1) tasting fest aiming to create strong relation with consumers, (2) collaboration with restaurants in different cities and towns, (3) pick-up points of cheese production in 8 cities and towns (in food market, restaurants, small food shops), (4) cheese school in Darguziai village, (5) production of supplements to produce cheese. Later Valdas Kavaliauskas has moved to another village where he continues his work together with other members of the association. Later association Viva Sol has started to focus more on broad topics related to development of rural areas, sustainability of rural communities, topics with climate change, environment, etc.

Motivation to create local food movement from dairy products was based on the need for high-quality and delicious food. Conventional food system does not allow satisfying your needs for fresh locally produced food. This was one of the most important aspects that led to the initiator decision to create a movement of local food, to move to the countryside and to turn to farming. On top of that, the initiators put forward another important factor—the urge to be close to the nature and to enjoy the feeling of freedom. Such needs can be effectively met by the pattern of their life in the countryside where they practise small farming. Valdas Kavaliauskas, the initiator and pioneer of cheesemakers’ activities, says that his participation in Darguziai Village community action and his experience to a certain degree empowered him, acted as a driving force, and encouraged him to develop his activities and to bring like-minded people together. The other two important aspects are changes in the needs of Lithuanian food consumers and foreign experience. They strengthened confidence that such a pattern of relationship between the producers and the consumers may exist.

The main goal of local food movement by Viva Sol is to improve liveliness through rural areas and to create new form of accessibility to food for consumers changing farmers and consumer relationships. Association assists the survival and establishment of small farms by inviting urban citizens to come to the village and to join the activities organized in rural

areas, their festivals and farm work. Furthermore, rural people are encouraged to visit the city, to learn about the city life, the activities of urban people and to understand what people distanced from the natural environment think. These actions create a close link between rural and urban areas. Different tools used in pursuance of this objective include various events in rural settings, lectures, discussions and farmers' meetings with urban consumers when they sell their products in the urban environment.

The underlying concept of the association, which has already become a propelling slogan, is 'May the Rural Areas be Alive'! The members of the association describe their philosophy in five sentences:

1. Relationship between the consumer (an urban citizen) and producer/grower (a rural citizen).
2. Solidarity between all members of the association and supporters of the association members' ideas.
3. Certainty and stability, i.e. the consumer should know how and where to obtain a real home-grown and handmade product.
4. Trust among consumers and producers. The members of the association believe that it is highly important for the producer to know the consumer and vice versa as this gives birth to something highly important, which is trust.
5. And therefore the association is always ready to talk about its activities.

The main goal remained unchanged from the establishment of the association until 2020. Association Viva Sol has 18 members, including 2 organizations (Baltic Environment Forum, Vocational School 'Garden masters'), 5 farmers and 11 end consumers.

**2nd stage: Coalescence of social movement 'Local food movement by Viva Sol'.** The increase of the members of the local food movement by Viva Sol was very natural and based on activities proposed by the association. Producers—one part of members of association—were willing to cooperate on the distribution of production from cheese with the involvement of consumers aiming to create strong relationships with producers. Strong relations with consumers are created by various events and initiatives organized by initiators of the association Viva Sol. For example, the Cheese House in Darguziai village organizes celebrations of public holidays, community volunteering, open door days, discussions, encourages

sharing of farming and life experience, and invites volunteers, who are willing to learn about the farming and cheese-making process.

Another reason helping to expand number of members in this movement is the origin of this idea. The birth, development and implementation of this idea were set in motion by a similar worldview of the participants and examples of comparable practices in other countries. Here the initiators of the idea relied on the French practice. You could say that the Lithuanians did not only bring home French cheese-making secrets but also adopted the idea of solidarity and openness. They long to see rural areas alive with their crafts, businesses and agriculture. Moreover, the cheesemakers believe that rural viability highly depends on the relationship between rural and urban citizens. Association Viva Sol was founded by both rural and urban people, who cherish similar values. Initially they were encouraging others to develop relationship between urban and rural citizens.

Members of movements are producers and consumers. The part of producers includes small farmers from rural areas, who work towards producing high-quality and tasty food.

The Cheese House in Darguziai village has quite a considerable number of partners that can be broken down into 3 groups:

1. Small partnership of Cheese Experts engaged in cheese wholesale and retail and organization of events and tasting.
2. Cooperative 'Our Cheeses'.
3. Farmers cheesemakers.

The group of consumers embraces mostly urban citizens with various professions who appreciate and look for high-quality and tasty food. *The target group of users includes urban citizens. Consumers of cheese products are medium aged from 35 to 55 years.*

Every year is continuous growth of new members of consumers who firstly participate in cheese fest to try various species of cheeses and then continue to consume it. Remaining part of members—producers—is stable with no changes from establishment of the association.

**3rd stage: Biureaucratization of social movement 'Local food movement by Viva Sol'.** *Resources of the movement.* Two organizations were set up for the purpose of local food movement development: 5 small farmers, members of association Viva Sol, are manufacturer, and

an association Viva Sol seeks to establish relationship between urban and rural areas as well as to improve liveliness through rural areas. The main initiator of both organizations is the originator of the idea Valdas Kavaliauskas, who invited other like-minded persons to join the process.

**The members** describe their organization as a live farm of farmers cheesemakers, which offers the following services:

sales of local food products. Local products as large variety of cheeses, bread, cream, caramel and other delights produced by the cheesemakers are sold in Cheese House in Darguziai or supplied to the pick-up points in 8 cities or small towns to consumers from cities.

catering: you can order different locally made dishes (e.g. a hot vegetable soup, a Cheesemaker's casserole, salad from home-grown vegetables, home-made ice-cream for dessert and refreshing kvass, which is a drink made of bread).

Other services provided by the Cheese House include:

- cheese tasting;
- demonstration of the fermented cheese manufacturing process to groups of visitors;
- a sight-seeing tour around Darguziai Village;
- various voluntary work on the farm (e.g. goat herding and other farm work).

The main activities of the association Viva Sol include (1) promotion of the survival and establishment of small farms by inviting urban citizens to come to the village and to join the activities organized in rural areas, their festivals and farm work and (2) encouraging rural citizens to visit the city, to learn about urban life and activities of urban population.

*Human resources.* Human resources represent the key element in the development of the local product market. It is extremely important to have an idea, initiative, like-minded people and willingness to create and to make one's contribution to building sustainable environment by using other essential elements. In the case of this good practise, human resources were the keystone in the successful implementation and further development of this initiative, attracting new like-minded people and a large group of consumers, i.e. creating an informal network.

*Financial resources.* Financial resources are necessary at the beginning for buying land, livestock and machines for production, unless there is

initial capital (e.g. land, equipment, farm animals). According to the originators of the initiative, they did not need big financial resources to start their activities as in the rural areas of Lithuania land and other inventories are not expensive and thus it is not necessary to take big credits or to assume other liabilities that would render this activity less attractive.

*Intangible resources.* Intangible resources, such as the establishment of informal relations among the producers and between producers and consumers, innovative marketing campaigns, promotion of direct sales, selling to people visiting the farm, consumer involvement in different activities, events, etc., play a major role in seeking successful operations.

*Structure of the movement.* Association Viva Sol is formal organization. Local food movement is informal decentralized movement with open membership to join this initiative.

*Roles of the movement.* Main roles are clearly identified to the members of the movement, for the part of producers: members, responsible for (1) production; (2) pre-order; (3) logistics; (3) workshops at Cheese School; (4) tasting fests; (5) activities in Cheese maker house. Consumers are free to decide on the type and form of cooperation between members.

*Identification of the movement.* Local food movement by Viva sol and Cheese house is very well-identified in Lithuania. Members actively spread information on local food and relationships between farmer and consumer in various places: social forums, TV broadcast, radio, newspapers, meetings and conferences, discussions organized by various public authorities, etc. All information can be found at their platform [www.surininkunamai.lt](http://www.surininkunamai.lt). Movement is identified by promoting local food viability, mobility and establishment of relations.

*Communication channels.* Platforms [www.surininkunamai.lt](http://www.surininkunamai.lt) and Facebook are tools used for (1) internal communication among members of the network; (2) spread information about movement to the wider society; (3) tool to organize work. Both platforms are used very actively. Initiators of movement are responsible for maintaining work of both platforms.

Viva Sol also actively participates in the international projects as a main partner or project partner (for example, Erasmus plus programme). This enables them to spread their experience with partners from abroad and also to bring fresh new ideas to the movement.

**4th<sup>th</sup> stage: Decline of social movement ‘Local food movement by Viva Sol’.** Current stage of development of social movement ‘Local food movement by Viva Sol’ is successful with prospect for some growth

in the future. From the beginning in 2008 until 2020 every year new consumers join this movement so-called ‘cheese lovers’ that firstly participate in cheese tasting fest, events and finally choosing their own way how to get food basket of cheese every week. Initiators of the movement have no intention for bigger growth and they let movement develop in natural way. If there would be a need for more members in this movement, additional resources would be needed as (1) education of society on benefits of short supply chain; (2) advantages of fresh local food; (3) more distribution tools/channels/members-producers, etc.

This social movement have an impact on the society by proposing (1) new form of accessibility to food for consumers changing farmer and customer relationships; (2) advocating for new small-scale family farming, (3) helps to get a better price both for farmers and consumers; (4) creating and/or strengthening new food consumption habits and requesting new quality of food.

## 7.4 NEW LIVELIHOODS FOR RURAL/URBAN BUSINESSES RELATIONSHIPS CHANGE

### 7.4.1 *Back-to-the-Land International Movements*

Movements ‘back-to-the-land’ are one of the most interesting and most recent movements in the post-industrial movements’ era. And even in the Western part of the world, ‘back-to-the-land’ social movements became greatly popular in the post-Woodstock era in the late 1960s and early 1970s, supported by a mostly idealistic group of people who wanted to live life more simply (Jeffrey & Merlin, 1986); in Eastern part of Europe, this movement was late for at least fifty years and only in 2000s and 2010s social movements ‘back-to-the-land’ arose and are still trying to get the public attention. There are many international and regional back-to-the-land movements across the world and namely, the most known movement is La Via Campesina International Peasants’ Movement (LVC), as well as others movements inspired by La Via Campesina, such as ‘Reclaim the Fields’ and many others national back-to-the-land movements.

The pioneer movement La Via Campesina is a global, transnational movement acting in the field of food sovereignty, climate and environmental justice, international solidarity, agroecology and peasants’ seeds, peasants’ rights, land, water and territories, dignity for migrants and waged workers. In 2020, La Via Campesina unites 182 organizations,

81 countries and more than 200 million peasants (LVC). LVC was established in 1993 and it is a global alliance of organizations of family farmers, peasant farmers, indigenous people, landless peasants, farm workers, rural women and rural youth, representing at least 200 million families worldwide. In Europe, La Via Campesina unites 26 national organizations from 17 countries.

The establishment of the movement ‘Reclaim the Fields’ was inspired by the La Via Campesina and the movement is promoting food sovereignty and peasant agriculture, particularly among young people and urban dwellers, as well as alternative ways of life. The movement is seeking to create alternatives to capitalism through cooperative, collective, autonomous, real-needs-oriented, small-scale production and initiatives. By linking local practical action with global political struggles. Movement ‘Reclaim the Fields’ participates in local actions through activist groups and cooperates with existing initiatives and it is not a homogeneous group but opens up to the diversity of actors fighting the capitalist food production model. Movement address the issues of access to land, collective farming, seed rights and seed exchange (Reclaim the Fields).

#### 7.4.2 *Case Study ‘I Choose Countryside - Settlers and Similar Hipsters’*

**1st stage: Emergence of social movement ‘I choose countryside - settlers and similar hipsters’.** In Lithuania, there are at least four social movements, which can be called as ‘back-to-the-land’, but their activities and the level of formalization, organization and bureaucratization are still in the start-up phase. One of these movements is ‘I choose countryside - settlers and similar hipsters’, which was established only in 2019 as a Facebook group uniting like-minded people. The founder of this group is Kotryna Meidė. The idea to implement this initiative arose with the fundamental change in the lifestyle—i.e. moving from the city to a remote village when the leisure and the circle of friends have changed significantly (more precisely, it has decreased significantly). Therefore, she took care to find like-minded people, because it was clear from various articles on the internet that they (K. Meidė and her husband) were not alone. Kotryna Meidė and her husband have family farm where they grow asparagus and renovate their old house, because as Kotryna says and as it is written in their Facebook group—‘Here we choose a nature-friendly village with all its big and small pluses. It is more interesting for us to revive an old



homestead than to build A+++++. We try to create, grow, share... Because there is more air in the village’.

This initiative largely addressed the lack of support from others. What they wanted the most in creating this community was the support to each other and to show the encouragement to those who are just thinking about settling in the countryside. It is a big step and absolutely not following the crowd. In Kotryna Meidė opinion, hesitation can keep many people away from the dream of living in the countryside. That is why finding like-minded people is essential in seeking this dream.

The main goal of the movement ‘I choose countryside - settlers and similar hipsters’ is to bring together like-minded people, and it had not changed since the establishment of the movement. The founder of the movement ‘I choose countryside - settlers and similar hipsters’ also confirmed that it is a pity that there is a lack of time to incite topics and encourage members and settlers to share their stories.

To sum up the first stage of life cycle—emergence—of social movement ‘I choose countryside - settlers and similar hipsters’ it has to be said that the movement has a good start, it cleared its ideas and values, which shows that this movement empowers new livelihoods changing rural/urban relationships, brings new forms of rural lifestyle by changing relationship with neighbours—where neighbours can be not in their physical place but in online as well.

**2nd stage: Coalescence of social movement ‘I choose countryside - settlers and similar hipsters’.** The main reason for deciding to gather at least an online community of like-minded people and spread the common ideas more widely was the difficulties of settling in the village at the beginning. First of all, for many people, it is difficult to decide to go to live in the village as there was and there are a lot of hostile attitudes, lack of confidence and enthusiasm, discouragement. These are serious challenges for many people. Founders of ‘I choose countryside - settlers and similar hipsters’ strengthened themselves and realized that they were not really wrong and finally they decided that someone might lack the support they needed in the beginning. As Kotryna Meidė said—‘Maybe it will be the straw that a person will grab when traveling to their dream. And what is that dream - a countryside - good for? Everything! Movement, health, freedom, cheap living, freedom for creativity and business and SLOW pace of life’. So, the main reason to create a community ‘I choose countryside - settlers and similar hipsters’ was founders’ experience and need for support in moving to the countryside.

In 2020 community unites about 1700 members but not all of them are highly active. Members get involved not as actively as the founders would like. However, there are real settlers who share their extraordinary adventures in the countryside, the results of their work, seek for advice and give advice, looking for like-minded people. Members who are involved in the movement are mostly young and active people, who seek to be hosts of their lives. Advertising the movement and its members' activities are on the rise, so the growth of the community is expected. Also, it cannot be said that there is a huge change in members number—the number is slowly growing but as the group is informal it is difficult to draw any more detailed conclusions about characteristics of the members of the community. However, there are some members who share their experience, ideas or seek advice more actively and it shows that the group implements the main goal of itself—to support each other when difficulties arise.

**3rd stage: Bureaucratization of social movement 'I choose countryside - settlers and similar hipsters'.** *Structure of the movement.* Structure of the movement 'I choose countryside - settlers and similar hipsters' is informal and decentralized. Members communicate via Facebook group or individually. Organization of the movement is based on voluntarily basis and the head of the movement as well as the only one administrator of the Facebook group 'I choose countryside - settlers and similar hipsters' is Kotryna Meidė. The membership of the community is informal and open to any person who supports ideas of the movement and is looking for some advises or willing to share their personal experiences.

*Roles of the movement.* Roles of the movement are informal. Kotryna Meidė administers a Facebook group where all members can share their information, invite members of the group to various events and meetings online or in person.

*Resources of the movement.* The most important resources of the movement are human and intangible resources. The movement 'I choose countryside—settlers and similar hipsters' connected countryside enthusiasts who were active in this field before and even the movement does not have formal staff, but the people who share the same values and ideas created a community for like-minded people to reach their goals where they can share their experience, challenges and success stories. Intangible resources play a major role, as the movement 'I choose countryside - settlers and similar hipsters' is still developing successful informal relationships with many people which helps them to promote their lifestyle

and to share their intellectual, human and organizational capital, knowledge and values about living in the countryside. The community does not have any membership fee or formal financial resources.

*Identification of the movement.* In the last five years movements ‘back-to-the-land’ are becoming more popular in Lithuania and members of these movements are the best ambassadors in spreading their ideas and values. Movement ‘I choose countryside - settlers and similar hipsters’ spreads information about living in countryside by using various channels of information, such as social forums, social media, local newspapers, local and national websites, local and national TV broadcast and radio and informal meetings. At this stage of the development of the movement, Kotryna Meidė is doing the biggest part of these activities as there is still the lack of involvement of other members. In the future, the founders of the movement would like to devote more time to promoting the settlement in the countryside and everyday stories or at least to find someone to help them to manage the activities of the group. Community does not have any traditional events yet but there can be found information about various events organized by members of the movement in their Facebook group where everyone is invited.

*Communication channels.* The Facebook group serves as a platform for internal communication among members of the community also it is a tool to spread information about the movement to the wider society. Many members of the community, as well as the founder Kotryna Meidė, use their private Facebook accounts and/or their agricultural business’s accounts to promote living in the countryside. Movement ‘I choose countryside - settlers and similar hipsters’ is not a member of any international organization yet.

**4th stage: Decline of social movement ‘I choose countryside - settlers and similar hipsters’.** It is difficult to evaluate the fourth life cycle of this movement as it was established only one year ago—i.e. in 2019. The current stage of development of social movement ‘I choose countryside - settlers and similar hipsters’ is quite successful with continuous growth for their first year of activity. The founder of the movement expressed her concerns that the activity of the movement is quite vague at the moment. However, changing relationships between urban and rural areas and young enthusiasts of the countryside have all possibilities to expand their activities, to promote living in countryside and help each other at the same time. Timing is favourable for the movements ‘back-to-the-land’ and as this case study and the case analysing ecovillages

show—Covid-19 revealed the countryside has to offer much more than cities in the time of crises.

Founders of the movement would like the greater growth of the movement in reaching out for more members and in deepening the cooperation between members, organizing more activities together, uniting members of the movement and sharing each other's experiences and success stories. Also, founders of this community believe that for further growth and prosper of their organization additional resources will be needed in near future such as human and material resources to reach more persons interested in living in the countryside.

Kotryna Meidė is quite precocious in evaluating the impact of the movement 'I choose countryside - settlers and similar hipsters'. She assured that she and her husband have heard that like-minded people decide to move to the countryside (or started dreaming about it more boldly) following their personal story on moving to countryside and starting their asparagus farm ([meidukis.lt](http://meidukis.lt)). The influence of the group has not yet been heard. However, from the reactions to the shared stories, it is quite clear that people are interested in the life of rural settlers and people are looking for ideas and courage. Looking from more scientific perspective it is clear that social movement 'I choose countryside - settlers and similar hipsters' has an impact on the society by proposing: firstly, empowering new livelihoods which are changing rural/urban (business) relationship; secondly, it helps to reorganize rural community life; thirdly, it creates new forms of rural lifestyle-changing relationships with neighbours where neighbours are not only next to each other physically but also the creation of 'online neighbours' where you can get some help, support or advise.

## 7.5 NEW FORMS OF RURAL LIFESTYLE FOR CHANGING RELATIONSHIP WITH NEIGHBORS

### 7.5.1 *Ecovillages Movements*

Creation of global ecovillages movement goes back to the last decade in the last century and counts about 30 years of experience. The impulse for the Global Ecovillage Network (GEN) evolved from an initiative taken by Gaia Trust in 1990 where Ross and Hildur Jackson from Denmark were the driving forces in creating the GEN network. In 1991, the

Gaia Trust convened a meeting in Denmark of representatives of eco-communities to discuss strategies for further developing the ecovillage concept. That led to the formation of the Global Ecovillage Network. In 1994, the Ecovillage Information Service was launched. In 1995, the first international conference of ecovillage members, entitled Ecovillages and Sustainable Communities for the twenty-first century, was held at Findhorn, Scotland. The movement grew rapidly following this conference. Currently, the network is made up of approximately 10,000 communities and related projects where people are living together in greater ecological harmony (GEN History, 2015; Global Ecovillage Network, 2020a). Network members share ideas and information, transfer technologies and develop cultural and educational exchanges.

The Global Ecovillage Network (GEN) catalyzes communities for a regenerative world. GEN is a growing network of regenerative communities and initiatives that bridge cultures, countries and continents. GEN builds bridges between policymakers, governments, NGOs, academics, entrepreneurs, activists, community networks and ecologically minded individuals across the globe in order to develop strategies for a global transition to resilient communities and cultures. GEN is composed of 5 regional networks: (1) Latin America (CASA), Council of Sustainable Settlements of Latin America; (2) North America (GENNA); (3) Africa (GEN Africa); (4) Europe (GEN Europe); (5) Oceania Asia (GENOA), Global Ecovillage Network Oceania & Asia. The fifth network also was created in October 2005 with a focus on youth arm, NextGEN, spanning the globe (Global Ecovillage Network, 2020b).

*Goals of GEN.* The following goals are identified by the network:

- To advance the education of individuals from all walks of life by sharing the experience and best practices gained from the networks of ecovillages and sustainable communities worldwide.
- To advance human rights, conflict resolution and reconciliation by empowering local communities to interact globally, while promoting a culture of mutual acceptance and respect, effective communications and cross-cultural outreach.
- To advance environmental protection globally by serving as a think tank, incubator, international partner organization, and catalyst for projects that expedite the shift to sustainable and resilient lifestyles.

- To advance citizen and community participation in local decision-making, influencing policymakers, and educating the public, to accelerate the transition to sustainable living.

*Definition of Ecovillages by GEN.* An ecovillage is an intentional, traditional or urban community that is consciously designing its pathway through locally owned, participatory processes, and aiming to address the ecovillage principles in the 4 areas of regeneration (social, culture, ecology, economy into a whole systems design). Ecovillages are living laboratories pioneering beautiful alternatives and innovative solutions. They are rural or urban settlements with vibrant social structures, vastly diverse, yet united in their actions towards low-impact, high-quality lifestyles. (Global Ecovillage Network, 2020b). Ecovillages provide models for a lifestyle that reduces ecological footprint while delivering a better quality of life: one, which is possible in all countries of the world, and can lead to global justice, solidarity and cooperation. Ecovillages are aiming to learn how to solve conflicts how to develop a global consciousness, how to create places where children can grow up naturally, how to use renewable integrated energy systems, 100% of organic food productions and how to live lives full of love and compassion (GEN History, 2015).

Some examples of ecovillages, network members:

- Sarvodaya (2,000 active sustainable villages in Sri Lanka);
- the Federation of Damanhur in Italy;
- REDES in Senegal;
- small rural ecovillages like Gaia Asociación in Argentina and Huehuecoyotl in Mexico;
- Network also includes urban rejuvenation projects;
- Los Angeles EcoVillage;
- Christiania in Copenhagen;
- permaculture design sites such as Crystal Waters, Australia, Cochabamba, Bolivia and Barus, Brazil;
- educational centres such as Findhorn in Scotland, Centre for Alternative Technology in Wales, Earthlands in Massachusetts, and many more.

### 7.5.2 Case Study *Lithuanian Network of Ecovillages and 'Kin's Domain' Settlements*

**1st stage: Emergence of social movement 'Lithuanian network of ecovillages and 'Kin's Domain' settlements'.** Initiators of Lithuanian network of ecovillages and 'Kin's Domain' settlements were inspired by the ideas in the series of books 'Ringing Cedars of Russia' by Vladimir Megre and his heroine Anastasia. First meetings of initiators for discussion on their vision have started in 2002. Known as 'Kin's Domain' settlements, they are often called new generation of ecovillages with a focus on sustainability for future generations of families (see more at Kin's Domain Concept, 2020; Megre, 2020). First settlements based on this 'kin's domain' concept were established in 2001–2002 in different post-soviet countries (Russia, Lithuania, Latvia, Belarus, etc.). Idea proposed in the book was attractive because it proposed individual living instead of completely collective living and this was more appealing in these countries because of the experience of forced collectivization during the Soviet era (Vidickiene, 2013). Some years later, Vladimir Megre's books have been translated into other languages and these types of settlements have become popular not only in Europe but also in the whole world. Ecovillages based on the 'kin's domain' concept are developed as settlements consisting of individual homesteads. Each family or individual has at least 1 hectare of land, developed as a self-sustainable ecosystem. One hectare of land is large enough to allow a complete, closed cycle of energy and matter. The boundary of a 'kin's domain' is a living fence consisting of trees, bushes and shrubs. It ensures protection from the wind, gives shelter to wild animals and serves as a natural demarcation of the person's realm of the family. One-quarter to three-quarters of the area is covered with perennials: forest and fruit trees and bushes. Rich native species are planted on the principles of enhancing biodiversity. Hundreds of plant species are linked by the principles of permaculture to facilitate the coexistence of the different plants. Recycling of natural materials provides plants with nutrients and increases the quality and quantity of the crop. If no natural water resource is in the territory of settlement, a small pond is dug. Houses are constructed from natural materials. Food is produced using permaculture principles: without ploughing, weeding, pruning, fertilizing or spraying with chemicals. The inhabitants of the ecovillage preserve their natural heritage, taking into account cultural traditions and the ancient knowledge of our ancestors. The idea of a

‘kin’s domain’ is also an idea of a ‘little homeland’ for many generations. The domain should be a ‘space of love’ where men, women, children, plants, trees, birds and animals should live in love and care for each other (Vidickiene, 2013).

First settlements in Lithuania have been created in 2006–2007. The peak was reached in 2008–2010. Until 2020 there is continuous growth of ‘kin’s domain’ settlements in the whole territory of Lithuania every year. The biggest motivation for many initiators from Lithuania to join this movement was will to have good environment to grow children, to have fresh air, clean water and good quality food. Concept of ‘kin’s domain’ had all elements of their wishes. Initiators have started to purchase land and to start establishing a settlement in their way by experimenting and discussing experiences with other members in annual meetings. In 2020, there are 6 ecovillages in Lithuania and 40 ‘kin’s domain’ settlements. They all are open to invite new members to create their settlements close by to already existing ecovillages or settlements or to create a new place. The great interest to join this movement has appeared in 2020 at the time of the Covid-19 pandemic situation as more land close to already existing ecovillages was purchased. People have understood the advantages of having their own settlement and being in nature instead of living in cities.

The aim of social movement ‘Lithuanian network of ecovillages and ‘Kin’s Domain’ settlements’ did not change significantly since the first initiatives in Lithuania. It was only supplemented with the need to find more tools for socialization (with neighbours, with other members of movement, with education infrastructure for children).

The main goal is new forms of rural lifestyle-changing relationships with neighbours. The number of inhabitants of ecovillages and ‘Kin’s Domain’ settlements’ in Lithuania in 2020 is approx. 500.

**2nd stage: Coalescence of social movement ‘Lithuanian network of ecovillages and ‘Kin’s Domain’ settlements’.** Social movement of ecovillages and ‘Kin’s Domains’ settlement was increasing continuously from the beginning of the movement in 2002. New potential members were participating in annual meetings of the network or approaching residents of ecovillages individually. Platform of ecovillages [www.ekogyvenvietes.lt](http://www.ekogyvenvietes.lt) was also a successful tool for live interaction between members of movement and potential residents who were looking for land to purchase or to get more information on principles that are used by ecovillagers.



There is a big potential for growth of the movement in Lithuania as many inhabitants from cities are more concerned about their health, quality of food and environment. Additional tools should be used to increase knowledge of the lifestyle proposed by this social movement.

Currently, about 500 people actively participate in this movement. Every year movement organizes annual meetings in winter, spring, summer and autumn in different locations in Lithuania that all members would be able to join meetings. The number of participants in every meeting is about 150–200. Most of the inhabitants of ecovillages and ‘Kin’s Domain’ settlements are previous city residents with various professions. One of the initiators Raimundas Vaiciunas highlighted that many of the members have professions that allowed them to work remotely (for example, IT specialists). It is very convenient to live in nature, work remotely and travel to city only for some days per week and/or month. Inhabitants are families, so number of men and women are equal. The first inhabitants were approx. 40 years old, families with children aiming to grow their children in natural environment. Later younger people were joining the network, about 30–35 years old with already some experience and vision for their future why they are choosing this lifestyle. There is a very insignificant change of members of the network. Mostly only new people join this movement.

**3rd stage: Bureaucratization of social movement ‘Lithuanian network of ecovillages and ‘Kin’s Domain’ settlements’.** *Resources of the movement.* The most important resources of the movement are human resources. Inhabitants of ecovillages and ‘Kin’s Domain’ settlement use their own efforts in many events and cases when they are developing any activity. Financial resources are needed when they organize some events or meetings. Financial questions for each new initiative are discussed individually how to get resources or who can support it and how. Movement has no permanent place for the meeting or any other material resources. Resources for communication (as website/platform [www.ekogyvenviet.es.lt](http://www.ekogyvenviet.es.lt), Facebook platform) are developed voluntarily. Recently, there is no need for some additional resources or lack of some resources.

*Structure of the movement.* Structure of the movement is informal and decentralized. Members communicate via communication channels used by the network or individually. The organization of each event or occasion is discussed beforehand and based on voluntarily basis. Membership in the movement is open to any person who supports ideas of ecovillages

and ‘Kin’s Domain’ concept and wants to purchase land and build their settlement.

*Roles of the movement.* Roles in the movement are partly devoted. All distribution is based on voluntarily basis. There are responsible persons for communication (maintenance of website/platform [www.ekovyvniets.lt](http://www.ekovyvniets.lt) and Facebook platform), organizing movement events (each event is taking place in different settlements and inhabitants of these settlements are responsible for all organizational issues).

*Identification of the movement.* Ecovillages and ‘Kin’s Domain’ concept is becoming more popular in Lithuania every year since the establishment of the movement in 2002. Members of the network are the main actors that spread information about ecovillages and ‘Kin’s Domain’ settlements in Lithuania using various channels as platforms, TV broadcast, websites that help to create the identity of the network. Movement covers the whole area of Lithuania as inhabitants of settlements are from different places from Lithuania in rural areas and places close to cities. Traditional events 4 times a year (winter, spring, summer and autumn) are organized every year as annual meetings involving about 150–200 participants each time.

*Communication channels.* Website/platform [www.ekogyvnietes.lt](http://www.ekogyvnietes.lt) and Facebook platform are tools used for (1) internal communication among members of the network; (2) spread information about movement to the wider society; (3) tool to organize work. Both platforms are used very actively. Initiators of movement are responsible for maintaining the work of both platforms.

Some members of the network also participate in some other events internationally and have good contacts with members from ecovillages in other countries. Movement itself is not a member of any international organization.

**4th stage: Decline of social movement ‘Lithuanian network of ecovillages and ‘Kin’s Domain’ settlements’.** Current stage of development of social movement ‘Lithuanian network of ecovillages and ‘Kin’s Domain’ settlements’ is successful with continuous growth from the beginning until 2020. Covid-19 pandemic situation has opened even more potential for the movement as many city residents have expressed their interest to live in rural areas and being more independent in nature. Pandemic situation also has proved that many works can be done remotely so there is no need to spend all time in offices. A lot of free land around

ecovillages or ‘Kin’s Domain’ settlement was purchased in 2020 at the time of restrictions of Covid-19 pandemic situation.

From the beginning of the movement in 2002 until 2020 every year new enthusiasts join the network. Comparing the period from 2014 to 2020, increase in ecovillages and ‘Kin’s Domain’ settlements doubled, from 19 ecovillages and settlements in 2014 to 44 ecovillages and settlements in 2020. Initiators of the movement have no intention for bigger growth and they let movement develop in natural way. If there would be a need for more participants in this movement, additional resources would be needed as (1) education of society on nature-friendly ways to live with nature, by developing new ways of living in nature-friendly and healthy way; (2) new form of rural lifestyle-changing relationships with neighbours; (3) new programmes in universities and in schools.

This social movement has an impact on the society by proposing: (1) to reorganize rural community life; (2) new form of rural lifestyle-changing relationships with neighbours; (3) advocating of new type of living in rural areas with potential of freeing us of being so dependent on the individualistic, consumerist and commodified system in the cities. They have the potential of letting us learn how to live together on the land again in a genuinely more sustainable way, which is especially important given the climate crisis and resource shortages that we face. Ecovillages are creating low-impact, environmentally harmonious living situations, pioneering nature-friendly agriculture techniques as well as businesses and education centres; (4) creating and/or strengthening new food consumption habits and requesting new quality of food.

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