
In the Rhythm of Lorien: Czech Community in the Context of Alternative Spirituality

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<https://doi.org/10.14712/25704893.2026.2>

Abstract: This article deals with the Czech community Lorien, which serves as a center of alternative spirituality for many of its visitors. The first half of the article provides basic information about Lorien community, the course of the author's field research, and community members' attitudes to the concepts of religion, spirituality, and esoteric. Furthermore, the text discusses the widely shared teachings and practices of followers of alternative spirituality, which then compares with the ideas and actions of Lorien community members in the second half of the article. Residents consider the vision of the community expressed in three pillars to be the most essential aspect of their shared life. The pillars are the following: caring for common relationships, caring for common space, and organizing self-development seminars. First pillar is very strongly inspired by the principles of the book *The Different Drum* by Morgan Scott Peck, the second by the ideas of eco-spirituality and the third one with 5Rhythms Movement and other religious traditions.

Keywords: Lorien; community; Morgan Scott Peck; community-building seminars; dance celebrations; alternative spirituality; self-development

Abstrakt: Tento článek se zabývá českou komunitou Lorien, která slouží mnoha svým návštěvníkům jako centrum alternativní spirituality. První polovina článku podává základní informace o komunitě Lorien, průběhu terénního výzkumu autora tohoto textu a postojích členů komunity k pojmům náboženství, spiritualita a ezoterika. Dále text pojednává o široce sdíleném učení a praktikách následovníků alternativní spirituality, které pak v druhé polovině článku srovnává s představami a jednáním členů komunity Lorien. Obyvatelé za nejpodstatnější aspekt svého společného života považují vizi komunity vyjádřenou ve třech pilířích: péče o společné vztahy, péče o společný prostor a organizování seberozvojových seminářů. První pilíř je velmi silně ovlivněn knihou *V jiném rytmu* napsanou psychiatrem Morganem Scottem Peckem, druhý myšlenkami eko-spirituality a třetí tanečním hnutím 5 rytmy a dalšími duchovními tradicemi.

Klíčová slova: Lorien; komunita; Morgan Scott Peck; community-building semináře; taneční oslavy; alternativní spiritualita; seberozvoj

Received: 9 March 2023

Accepted: 23 November 2023

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Some researchers consider the focus on one's own self as one of the main features of alternative spirituality, sometimes called New Age, and therefore criticize it as too narcissistic, individualistic, and almost solipsistic.¹ Dutch religious scholar Wouter Hanegraaff considers the authority of the self to be so central to alternative spirituality that, in his view, it prevents it from functioning as a religious collectivity, creating institutions and binding people into one larger community.² Although followers of New Age milieu share this point of view and see themselves as non-institutionalized, they get together with like-minded people and form groups that become increasingly formalized.³ Already in the early days of alternative spirituality, various spiritual seminars were held, but it was only in the eighties that the organization of various spiritual lectures and workshops became so widespread that the whole milieu is sometimes referred to as the spirituality of seminars. Ann Taves and Michael Kinsella showed in their article *Hiding in Plain Sight*⁴ that the institutions of alternative spirituality are right in front of our eyes, but no one notices them.

To show that alternative spirituality certainly forms some sort of institutions, let's borrow William S. Bainbridge and Rodney Stark's division of organizations into audience cults, client cults, and cult movements⁵. Audience cults have the least degree of organization and are characterized by the individual enthusiastically adopting the views of teachers of alternative spirituality from reading their literature or watching their programs on television or listening to their lectures on the Internet without meeting them in person. Client cults are already based on the personal contact of the client or several clients with the service provider and require a greater degree of organization – for example participation in a group meditation, self-development seminar or lecture on astrology. Client cults leave visitors with a great deal of independence, clients may retain ties to other religious organizations, and their participation is entirely voluntary. In contrast, cult movements seek to fulfil all the religious needs of their members, sever member's ties with competing organizations, and want to change the world through conversion.

A significant role in the spread of alternative spirituality is played by spiritual communities. Communities can have an audience cult influence on someone who only reads spiritual literature, watches videos, or uses products they have created or distributed, but he never really visits them. Communities can also have a client cult influence when someone really goes to visit them and attends their events in person.

¹ HANA DOLEŽALOVÁ, "Individuální a kolektivní uvnitř spirituality New Age [Individual and Collective Inside New Age Spirituality]", *Sociální studia* (3–4, 2008): p. 111.

² WOUTER HANEGRAAFF, "New Age Spiritualities as Secular Religion", *Social Compass* 46 (2, 1999): p. 155.

³ DOUG OMAN, "Defining Religion and Spirituality", in RAYMOND F. PALOUTZIAN – CRYSTAL L. PARK (eds.), *Handbook of the Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*, New York: The Guilford Press 2014, p. 37.

⁴ ANN TAVES and MICHAEL KINSELLA, "Hiding in Plain Sight", in STEVEN SUTCLIFFE and INGVLID S. GILHUS (eds.), *New Age Spirituality*, New York: Routledge 2014, p. 84–98.

⁵ WILLIAM SIMS BAINBRIDGE and RODNEY STARK, "Client and Audience Cults in America", *Sociological Analysis* 41 (3, 1980): p. 199–200.

And they can influence some at the level of a cult movement if they demand a greater degree of devotion. Communities can arise spontaneously, sometimes they are deliberately established, some exist within a city or village, and some exist outside of them in complete solitude. There are communities which are highly communal, “members pool their assets, their incomes, their living spaces, their jobs, communal domestic duties (cooking, cleaning), their childrearing, and just about everything else but their toothbrushes.”⁶ And there are also communities where members only share ownership of land or sharing can disappear entirely. Well-known communities with global reach are, for example, Findhorn in Scotland, Sedona in the United States, Glastonbury in England, Damanhur in Italy, Auroville in India, or many others. We will now deal with one specific example of alternative spirituality’s organization, which is the Czech community Lorien.

Lorien Community

Lorien community, located in the Nenačovice village, not so far from Prague, is one of the centres of alternative spirituality in the Czech Republic. The place is well-known thanks to its regular dance celebrations of solstices and equinoxes, community-building seminars inspired by psychiatrist Morgan Scott Peck and many other self-development events.

The community consists of eight adults (five men and three women) and three children. They live in area about 7 hectares in two family houses, a dome, and a cabin. The owner of the complex, who wants to be mentioned by his pseudonym Premesh, lives with his partner Bronislava Bučková and their daughter Tara in a two-story house and rents out the remaining apartment units to other members of community. Residents share a common space, spend their free time together at least once a week, plan and prepare events for the public, and borrow garden equipment and tools from each other. However, they wouldn’t call Lorien a community, because in “a true community”, they felt, they would have to share far more things and activities. Premesh would imagine a much greater involvement of members in common events. Therefore, everyone for Lorien prefers the label “conscious neighbourhood” rather than community. Nevertheless, it is evident from the statements of the residents, that they mostly understand their coexistence very positively as being with people who are united by a similar worldview, cooperation on the same goal, “mutual tolerance”, “full acceptance”, or even “love”. According to them, living in Lorien gives them an unmistakable feeling of “safety”, “harmony”, “peace”, “sharing”, “understanding”, and “closeness to nature”.

The official establishment of the community dates to the winter of 2010, when Premesh and his friends organized the first winter solstice dance celebration and

⁶ TIMOTHY MILLER, “The Evolution of American Spiritual Communities”, *Nova Religio* 13 (3, 2010): p. 28.

decided to organize other celebrations at least once every three months during the transitions of the seasons.

The name of the community refers to the elven forest of Lothlórien, which appears in J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy. Premesh is very fond of the Tolkien's works, he read them at least seven times and in the book *Silmarillion* he looked for other connections in the fictional world of Middle-earth. This is the main reason why when we enter the Lorien we are welcomed by a carved statue of Galadriel, and we can see a miniature of the door to Moria in the corridor before the ballroom. Originally, Premesh wanted to name the community Rivendell, but the web domain of that name already existed, so he chose the name Lorien instead. However, for the other inhabitants of the community, the connection to the narrative of *Lord of the Rings* is not important, except that they like to be symbolically part of the hidden forest Lothlórien.

The community chooses all the rules by consensus, when only such a decision is passed that all members of the community agree with or at least undertake to respect it. This rule is not always fulfilled, because Premesh has the last word in matters related to his property and he does not have to give in to the will of the community. Members agreed on several unwritten rules, including regular attendance at Monday circles where organizational matters are shared and agreed upon, at least once a year participate at Peck's weekend seminar and at least one hour a week dedicate to working in the area. If someone new wants to join the community, he must participate in the Monday circle seven times within three months. If this way of life suits him and no one is against it, then he can move in. Since then, he has been on a probationary period, when the community will finally decide whether to accept him among them or not. The whole process can take up to nine months.

Data Collection and the Problem with "Religion"

I collected my data with the method of participant observation, semi-structured interviews and analysis of materials published on the community's Facebook profile *Tvořivý Lorien*⁷. I visited the Lorien community for the first time in June 2020 during the summer solstice dance celebration. The second time, less than a week later, I participated in the Monday circle to present to the residents my intention to write a master's thesis about the community. After that, I spent three days in the community in July 2020, two days in July 2021, and two hours in April 2022. I personally participated in two dance celebrations, two smaller Peck's seminars, meditation, a concert, and four yoga exercises in the community. For other activities that took place in the Lorien, and I did not visit them myself, I collected data from the information published on the community's Facebook profile.

⁷ "Tvořivý Lorien" [online], *Facebook.com*, accessed January 2023, available online at <https://www.facebook.com/tvorivylorien>.

I conducted semi-structured interviews with four community residents on my first longer visit during July 2020 and one on my second visit in July 2021. Interviews were recorded on a mobile device and then transcribed into text. They lasted from a quarter of an hour to an hour and a half. The selection of respondents was based on availability and voluntariness. Therefore, I conducted the interview with whoever was willing to make time for the interview. In total, I interviewed five people, three men and two women. I know the civil names of all my respondents, but two wished to be anonymized, one didn't mind giving his first name, but didn't wish to present some of his personal details, and two respondents didn't mind giving their full names and personal details at all.

First community member prefers to stay completely anonymous. We will address him as Ivan. Ivan is about 40 years old, used to work in telecommunications but is now on full disability pension due to multiple sclerosis. He has lived in Lorien community since June 2020.

I conducted the second interview with Michal, who is almost 30 years old and works as a programmer mostly from home. He came to Lorien in March 2020. Michal and Ivan are both single and childless.

The third interview took place with Premesh, the owner of Lorien, who is over 50 years old. He worked as an entrepreneur, owned a company, and then taught physics and mathematics in a nearby town. Now he lives by renting premises in the complex for accommodation and organizing spiritual seminars.

The fourth interview was conducted with Hana Perglerová (*1978). She worked as a lecturer in education and care for babies and children under three years of age. Now she is masseuse and lecturer of community-building seminars by Morgan Scott Peck. She has been living in Lorien since May 2013.

The last interview was with Bronislava Bučková (*1983), who comes originally from Slovakia. She used to work in a florist, but now she works in a sewing workshop and sometimes cooks. She has been living in the community since 2011.

When I told community members during the Monday circle in July 2020 that I intended to research religion in their community, they immediately took notice and repeatedly told me that there was no religious activity at all. Some residents saw a certain kind of threat in me because I might write and publish something that they don't think is true. After some time, they were calmer, but I have the impression that some of them never quite lost their fears. The interviewees expressly did not wish to be pigeonholed as a cult or religious organization and they many times asked if I even had anything to write about, because they couldn't imagine in what way Lorien could be interesting for religious studies. It was clear that they perceived the word religion very negatively as something too binding, blinding, and dogmatic. The term esotericism had also negative connotations and they associated with excessive simplicity, superficiality, naivety, and immaturity.⁸ On the other hand, the word spirituality they

⁸ This is typical especially for the Czech environment, where words like "ezo" or "esotericism" are perceived pejoratively, similar to how the term "New Age" has become almost a swear word in English-speaking countries.

perceived very positively as something very free, spontaneous, authentic, creative, and supporting individual development. Therefore, when I was asking about their religious ideas; I used the phrase “personal spirituality” which they found suitable.

This is something very typical for the followers of alternative spirituality. They articulate the relationship between words spirituality and religion as a stark contrast between individual and institutional, dynamic and static, or even as opposition between good and evil. The term spirituality has gained great recognition, because it is seen as “the deepest of human needs, the connection to the higher forces of the universe, the language of one’s inner or higher self and the most important and purest part of every human being,” whereas the word religion is expressed in terms of rigidity, impracticality, spiritual emptiness, moralism, dogmatism, restriction of human freedom, suppression of natural needs, rejection of sexuality, authoritarian approach towards its members and a dismissive or even violent attitude towards non-members.⁹ This simplistic view leads to a completely uncritical idealization of spirituality, which is understood as individual search for truth that is deeply meaningful, fulfilling, liberating, and associated with alternative spirituality, and demonization of religion which is associated with traditional Christian churches.

We should emphasize here that New Age milieu’s intolerance of term religion is a characteristic that reveals more about the milieu itself than about reality as such. Even thou alternative spirituality understands itself as “non-religious”, it has characteristics typical for religion. Even thou alternative spirituality understands itself as “non-dogmatic”, we can see in its core many shared teachings. Even thou alternative spirituality understands itself as “non-institutionalized”, we can see that it creates many organizations. The “non-dogmatic”, non-institutionalized”, and “non-religious” character of alternative spirituality is a discursive strategy more than a verifiable reality.¹⁰ In next paragraph we will focus more on the teachings and practices of alternative spirituality which give us good context for the beliefs and actions of members of Lorien community.

Alternative Spirituality in Teachings and Practices

Wouter Hanegraaff in his famous book *New Age Religion and Western Culture* distinguishes between the New Age in a restricted sense (*sensu stricto*) and in a general sense (*sensu lato*).¹¹ In restricted sense he speaks about the people who are waiting for arrival of astrological Age of Aquarius which should be the beginning of spiritual transformation of the whole society. In general sense New Age can be described as umbrella term which includes many themes eclectically taken, adjusted, and simpli-

⁹ ZUZANA MARIE KOSTIČOVÁ, “Religion, Spirituality, Worldviews, and Discourses”, *Central European Journal of Contemporary Religion* (2, 2018): p. 86.

¹⁰ JAN KAPUSTA and ZUZANA MARIE KOSTIČOVÁ, “From the Trees to the Wood”, *Journal of Religion in Europe* 13 (2020): p. 193.

¹¹ WOUTER HANEGRAAFF, *New Age Religion and Western Culture*, Leiden: Brill 1996, p. 94–103.

fied from religious and non-religious traditions of West and East. We can mention for example western esoterism, mystical teachings, occult, or magical practices, romanticism, psychospiritual exercises, quantum mechanics, conspiracy theories, indigenous people, extinct civilizations and so on.

Although the alternative spirituality consists of different streams of thought and has no single umbrella organization that sets clear and universally binding teachings, there are common characteristics within it. As some of them, we can mention the effort for radical personal and collective transformation associated with emphasis on healing and self-development in the physical, psychological, and spiritual spheres, a healthy lifestyle, a positive relationship with other people and nature. Another feature is regard for personal authentic spiritual experience, belief in supernatural beings and communication with them, or belief in impersonal energy penetrating the entire universe and animating whole world.¹² Words such as alternative medicine, aromatherapy, astrology, chakra, chi, feng shui, yoga, karma, meditation, paganism, reiki, reincarnation, spirituality, shamanism, tai chi, and more are increasingly appearing in the vocabulary of our society at large.¹³

An eminent Czech psychologist of religion Pavel Říčan summarized the main themes present in alternative spirituality as follows:

“Mystical experience (a feeling of unity with something greater than human, an absolute inner peace, an ecstatic fascination with art, etc.), eco-spirituality (a feeling of unity with nature, a feeling of holy responsibility for her, Earth as a mother, tree as a brother, a respect for nature both living and lifeless), togetherness (a joy of human belonging and closeness, an amazement by unity in diversity), moral solicitude (a desire to start again and better, compassion with suffering, disgust with evil, admiration for the good in people), and latent monotheism (a fascination with the greatest truth, or the highest reality, death as returning home).”¹⁴

Followers of alternative spirituality also share dissatisfaction and fierce condemnation of contemporary Western culture,¹⁵ because according to their opinion, it is under the domination of ideological reductionism and dualism, which divides the original unity of human and nature, of male and female, of matter and spirit, of human and divine, of body, soul and spirit, of good and evil.¹⁶ The goal of new agers is to construct a new, monistic and holistic paradigm which will again bring lost peace, harmony, health and spirituality to our society. This view is supported by the astrological prediction of the arrival of the Age of Aquarius, which is supposed to replace the two-thousand-year period of Pisces characterized by the dominance of Christian-

¹² HELENA EXNEROVÁ, *Český šamanismus v rozhovorech [Czech Shamanism in interviews]*, Praha: Dingir 2018, p. 51.

¹³ PAUL HEELAS and LINDA WOODHEAD, *The Spiritual Revolution*, Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell 2005, p. 7.

¹⁴ PAVEL ŘÍČAN, *Psychologie náboženství a spirituality [Psychology of Religion and Spirituality]*, Praha: Portál 2007, p. 58–59.

¹⁵ WOUTER HANEGRAAFF, “New Age Religion and Secularization”, *Numen* 47 (2000): p. 291.

¹⁶ JÖRG STOLZ and JOËLLE SANCHEZ, “From New Age to Alternative Spirituality”, in MICHAELA MORAVČÍKOVÁ (ed.), *New Age*, Bratislava: Ústav pre vzťahy štátu a cirkví 2005, p. 531.

ity, and once and for all restore wholeness, unite opposites, and promote the values of love, tolerance, and cooperation.

This view also found scientific justification thanks to Thomas Samuel Kuhn's work *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*¹⁷. He suggests that scientific progress is not a straight path, on which we simply keep adding new facts to existing knowledge, discovering objective reality, and reaching the ultimate truth. Our knowledge is instead interrupted from time to time by scientific revolutions, during which the foundations of existing knowledge are completely revised, and thus occurs a paradigm shift, which then completely changes our perception of the world. Followers of alternative spirituality believe in the arrival of a new paradigm that will replace the existing one and that our society will transform from mechanistic science to quantum physics, from rationalism to mysticism, from partiality to wholeness, from obedience as a primary moral virtue to creativity, from personal salvation to collective healing, from theism (God outside of us) to pantheism (God within us and we in God).¹⁸ According to the followers of the New Age milieu, the old dualistic paradigm still rules, but its values are already condemned. The old culture still exists, but the life has long been drained from it and they believe that new holistic paradigm will be here very soon or that it is here already, but it is still not recognizable for us.

It is important to say that even if followers of alternative spirituality accuse contemporary society of being too dualistic and divisive, they themselves create a duality by seeing holisms as good and dualism as bad. Any so-called holism cannot be even defined without reference to its opposite and is necessarily based on dualistic presuppositions, and therefore a holism itself is very dualistic view of the world.¹⁹ And even if new agers distance themselves from mainstream society, they themselves often draw on its achievements and are very closely linked to the practices of market capitalism.

People engaged in alternative spirituality share not only similar beliefs, ideas, and opinions, but also various sets of practices. On an individual level there is a very typical phenomenon of seekers. Seeker is someone who has no fixed doctrine or institution and eclectically uses both according to his needs. Any idea, practice, ritual, institution, or object from whatever religious or non-religious tradition, can be added to seeker's worldview and everyday life when it is perceived as useful and removed when it is not. Therefore, can seeker's engagement in any practice vary greatly in intensity and degree. One trainee of alternative spirituality can, for example, daily meditate, exercise yoga, qigong, or tai-chi, use tarot cards, read horoscope, or use products of alternative medicine. On a weekly basis he can meet with card reader, fortune teller, doctor of Chinese medicine, depth psychologist, or use psychedelics at home.

On a public level many new agers can participate at spiritual seminars, workshops, retreats, concerts, conferences, and festivals usually presented as self-development. They can, for example, work there on their self-confidence, create, deepen, or repair

¹⁷ THOMAS S. KUHN, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1996, 212 p.

¹⁸ HANEGRAAF, *New Age Religion and Western Culture*, p. 331–332.

¹⁹ HANEGRAAF, *New Age Religion and Western Culture*, p. 276.

relationships with other people, visit events involving firewalking, sweat lodge, cacao ceremony, group meditation, ecstatic dance, holotropic breathwork, shamanic drumming, men and women circles, family constellations, art or music therapy and many other activities. Another very typical shared events are rituals or celebrations of important dates of the solar calendar (solstices, equinoxes, Walpurgis Night, New Year's Eve, etc.), of the lunar calendar (full moon), or of the civil/church calendar (Good Friday, Easter Monday, etc.).²⁰

Sometimes there can be connection with an alternative lifestyle, when individuals give up some of the achievements of modern technology and go to live outside the city in the countryside, closer to nature. Intentionally they are heading the “green way of life” towards self-sufficiency, grow own vegetables, harvest fruit, keep animals, save water and electricity, prefer to use natural products rather than chemical ones, lower carbon print. They try to live a healthy lifestyle, consume organic food, start vegetarianism or even veganism, limit their food with various other diets or fasts, exercise, walk in nature, and use natural medicine. New agers can also dress in brightly coloured clothes made of natural materials and listen to meditative music.²¹

Beliefs and Actions of Lorien Community Members

Although Lorien community has no written doctrine and each member can believe what he or she wants, most residents share ideas typical for the alternative spirituality. Their statements featured pantheistic descriptions of something that transcends all and at the same time permeates everything. They believe in higher unity which connects everything together, that life does not end with death, and that in every human is something divine. Members of the community specifically mentioned various spiritual traditions neo-shamanism, Buddhism, Christianity, Tantra, psychedelic spirituality, spirituality of Native Americans, New Age, or teachings of Indian religious leader Bhagwan Rajneesh, better known as Osho, as their sources of inspiration.

Despite the typical alternative spirituality's condemnation of Western society, no one in the community is having a negative view of the world or society around him. There is also no strong expectation of the astrological arrival of the Age of Aquarius, but many Lorien members think that future is in their hands. They are involved in activities that are presented as trying to bring the values of a new, holistic paradigm such as harmony, peace, understanding, cooperation, tolerance, health, love, and spirituality.

Premesh, the owner of the complex, has very rich background in alternative spirituality. He tried many different spiritual traditions and met many different spiritual teachers, of which he explicitly mentioned the follower of Osho – Michael Barnett,

²⁰ HELENA DYNDOVÁ, “Praxe alternativní spirituality [Practice of Alternative Spirituality]”, *Dingir* 26 (2, 2023): p. 54.

²¹ IVAN O. ŠTAMPACH, *Na nových stezkách ducha [On New Paths of the Spirit]*, Praha: Vyšehrad 2010, p. 190.

who gave him the spiritual name Premesh. But nowadays main source of his spirituality is the book *A Course in Miracles*²², text allegedly dictated by voice of God to Helen Schucman. Premesh for himself repeats and try to remember passages of this book every morning.

Bronislava Bučková, Premesh's partner, thinks that there is some kind of "unity of everything", which somehow "connects all things together" and "gives them the proper place". She also believes that there is "higher power, divinity, which is in us, but also transcends us at the same time." She thinks that "the world is created by us".

Hana Perglerová is a lecturer of community-building seminars by Morgan Scott Peck. She had many times some kind of "extrasensory experience", felt "energy of the group", experienced "group meditation", or "common resonance" and was able to predict what will happen in a few seconds during Peck's seminar. She thinks that proper communication according to Peck's principles could improve global relationships and maybe even bring world peace.

Michal considers himself as "the least esoteric member of the community", because he needs a lot of arguments and proofs before he starts to believe anything. He considers other members sometimes as too naïve, because they hold many opinions without any good scientific reason. Although he is open to the idea, that "miracles can happen in Lorien," and that "dance celebrations add spirit to the community."

Ivan is a member of Roman Catholic Church, but he doesn't agree with all the teachings, he rather likes "freedom than doctrines" and he thinks that what people do is much more important than what they believe. The most important thing for him is "faith in God of love", that he understands as "unity of all with everything". He considers Jesus Christ to be his spiritual teacher, but he doesn't believe that Christ is a Son of God.

All the members of Lorien community agree on three pillars, which include caring for mutual relationships, caring for common space and caring for self-development events held on the premises.

The first pillar dealing with the caring for mutual relationships is supported by the principles of psychiatrist Morgan Scott Peck (1936–2005), who was very intensively devoted to the creation of communities and in December 1984, together with several colleagues, he founded the Foundation for Community Encouragement (FCE). This non-profit organization has set itself the goal of supporting the creation of communities in an environment where none exist and helping existing ones to strengthen relationships between its members and to other communities, thereby cultivating greater global understanding. Peck also wrote a book *The Different Drum*²³, the principles of which were brought to the community in 2012 by Hana Perglerová. Residents try to communicate according to Peck's principles at least during regular Monday circles and once a year during Peck's weekend seminar and reach a state of true community. Principles of proper communication include, for example, avoiding general

²² HELEN SCHUCMAN, *A Course in Miracles*, Omaha: Course in Miracles Society 2009, 1103 p.

²³ MORGAN SCOTT PECK, *The Different Drum*, New York: Touchstone 1998, 334 p.

statements or trying to change someone or exclude them from the group. Participants should talk about their own experiences, present ideas, and feelings, and listen carefully to others, so that they can fully accept them. Peck believed that the state of true community is usually reached through a process that passes through the phases of pseudocommunity, chaos, and emptiness.²⁴ In the first phase of community formation, people approach each other very friendly and kindly. They try to avoid conflict, so their conversation tends to be polite, skim over the surface and don't dig into anything too personal. They talk about things they expect everyone to agree with. No one wants to offend anyone, so they keep their opinions to themselves, and if any differences occur, the group either ignores them or tries to hide them. This phase does not lead to the experience of true community because nobody is honest and express their true self. But once someone starts to be authentic, the shared facade of superficial contentment and pretended conformity breaks down. Chaos ensues.

In the second stage, individual differences are shown quite openly, but the group tries to eliminate them at all costs. There are many exchanges, arguments, and verbal fights. Opinion factions arise, which are defined against opponents. Everyone tries to convince others of their truth and change them. Peck characterizes this phase very positively, because clarifying opinions is a good way to move to the next phase. From chaos to emptiness.

The stage of emptiness is the bridge between chaos and true community. People are freed from anything that has prevented them from communicating, such as their own ideologies, prejudices, ideas, opinions, and beliefs. It's not that they completely get rid of it, but rather that they put it on the back burner so that they can better share and fully listen to others. They abandon their expectations, stop fitting others into their boxes, correcting, or changing them. They reduce their desire to be in control. They learn to trust each other, be empathetic, vulnerable and create a safe place to share their failures, doubts, fears, weaknesses, and imperfections. According to Peck members should experience the metaphorical death of the group and immerse themselves in peaceful silence and peace.

The final stage of a true community should then be a state where people are not afraid to show their differences, accept each other as they are, and communicate with each other honestly, openly and at the most authentic level possible.

Members of Lorien community see Monday circles and Peck's seminars as opportunity to "be together", "open to each other", "share feelings, opinions, and ideas", "be authentic", "listen to one and other", "accept their differences", and "resolve conflicts wisely and effectively, if it is needed". Some of the members during the circles experience almost mystical feelings of "deep connection", "understanding", "safety", "acceptance", "resonance", or "unity". Some of them used words as "group contemplation", "transformative experience", or even "intense field of unconditional love".

The second pillar stating care for the common space is based on eco-spirituality. Some residents try to be kind to nature by growing their own vegetables with the idea

²⁴ PECK, *The Different Drum*, p. 86–106.

that they would someday like to achieve the ideal of a permaculture garden. They use a root cleaner, recycle waste, compost, some try to limit their meat consumption and one of them has started beekeeping. All respondents agreed that life in nature is very important to them, they try to “live in harmony with it”, feel as “its part”, and understand it as “a source of peace and life”.

However, one of the former residents of the community confided in me with his criticism that much more could be done to protect nature and he gave the example of the Slovak community in the village of Zaježová, where, according to him, they cooperate more and buy as little plastic packaging as possible.

The last pillar states organizing self-developmental events. In its early years, the community held shamanic drumming, firewalking, purification ceremonies in sweat lodges, or chakra alchemy classes. However, most of these activities were abandoned, and today the community primarily hosts five other events each year: four dance celebrations of the transition of the seasons and Summercamp. Lorien also organize once a year the Peck’s seminar, but it is not open to public.

Summercamp is roughly week-long festival in the July or August where those who are interested can visit the community and participate in various activities. Participants who wish to stay for more days, sleep in their own tents or on a mattress in the ballroom. During the festival vegetarian food is cooked and served. Mornings usually start with a yoga exercise and breakfast. During the several years of the community’s operation they organized various kinds of activities such as moccasin making, a tour to the local glass workshop, swimming in the pond, archery, planting trees and flowers, grinding rye, making sourdough, baking homemade bread, stargazing, community-building seminar, family constellations, fortune-telling, theatre performances, shamanic travelling, massages, tea, cocoa and coffee rituals, painting, reading fairy tales or guided Osho meditation. The evening program is usually filled with ecstatic dancing, singing, chanting, drumming, listening to music or sitting and talking by the fire.

Lorien community organizes dance celebrations at least once a quarter. They try to place them on the date as close as possible to the spring and autumn equinoxes or the summer and winter solstices. It has maintained this tradition since the winter of 2010. Dances are also often held at Summercamp or at various other events throughout the year. Events usually take place in the ballroom, which is decorated with paintings representing the four elements: fire, water, earth, and air. During the dance, low tables covered with scarves are placed near the images as altars, on which angel cards, healing stones, burning candles and Buddha statues are spread out. In the middle of the hall, a small shrine consisting of a piece of cloth and a vase with plants typical for the given season is built.

Dance celebrations are often presented on the community’s Facebook profile *Tvořivý Lorien*²⁵ as “an opportunity to align with the natural rhythm of the planet

²⁵ “Tvořivý Lorien”, <https://www.facebook.com/tvorivylorien>.

Earth”, “to live freely in the present”, “to find balance”, “to realize oneness with nature and all humanity”, “to heal body, heart, mind, soul, and spirit”, and “to achieve enlightenment”, “awakening” or even “rebirth”. The dance celebrations are seen by some Lorien residents as “important milestones throughout the year”. They consider them “a natural part of their community”, which “helps them stay in touch with the public” and “bring spirit, rhythm, life, and joy to the community area.” Some community members have described experiencing “expanded states of consciousness”, “ecstasy”, or “a touch of transcendence” during dance celebrations.

The events are based on the 5Rhythms movement founded by the dancer and musician Gabrielle Roth (1941–2012). The movement adopted various elements of shamanism, Eastern philosophy and mysticism, transpersonal psychology, the human potential movement, and Gestalt therapy. It is based on the belief that everything, including humans, is made of energy, that everything moves in waves, regular patterns, and rhythms, and that everything is a dance. The music is designed to gradually alternate different musical instruments, styles, and genres, and to gradually go through five waves of rhythms from the phase of flowing, through staccato, chaos, to the phase of lyrical to stillness. Each phase is further associated in the following order with specific emotions: fear, anger, sadness, joy, and compassion; specific life stages: birth, childhood, puberty, maturity, and death; in the way of perception: being, loving, knowing, seeing, and healing, and aspects of the self: body, heart, mind, soul, and spirit. According to Roth, the goal of dance is to stop your mind, explore your inner self and connect with your soul, which is a source of inspiration and unlimited possibilities.²⁶

In addition, many other events are held in the community, for which Premesh rents space to the organizers, but in the preparation of which the residents of the community are not directly involved. These include, for example, concerts of indigenous music, yoga meetings, women’s and men’s circles and occasional lectures by foreign guests connected with Eastern religions or the teachings of indigenous people. Lorien was visited, for example, by Kosi Sunyata, a follower of Raman Maharshi, shaman Temok following the Aztec tradition, Tito La Rosa promoting healing using the vibrations of music, and Don Carlos José Castillejos promoting the teachings of Carlos Castaneda.

Conclusion

The Czech community Lorien was presented here as one of the centres of alternative spirituality. Lorien offers the public to participate in dance celebrations of solstices and equinoxes at least once a quarter, to visit it during the Summercamp at least once a year, to try short Peck’s community-building seminars, and many other spiritual

²⁶ “5Rhythms Cosmology” [online], *5rhythms.com*, accessed January 2023, available online at <https://www.5rhythms.com/gabrielle-roths-5rhythms/5rhythms-cosmology/>.

events focused on self-development and operating with the terms of holistic paradigm, Eastern religions, indigenous cultures, or other religious and non-religious traditions.

If we use the topology presented by Bainbridge and Stark²⁷ dividing the organizations into audience cults, client cults and cult movement, then we can find that Lorien community by offering the dance celebrations, Peck's and many other spiritual seminars, functions as a client cult to the participants and spread believes and practices of alternative spirituality among them. The community cannot serve as an audience cult, because none of the members publish books, record lectures on the Internet, or appear on television. I also believe that in case of Lorien community it is impossible to talk about a cult movement, because the level of commitment required from members is very low.

If we use the five characteristics of alternative spirituality by Pavel Říčan²⁸ we can see that all members of Lorien community sometimes have mystical experiences at the dance celebrations, Monday circles or Peck's seminars. Everyone agrees that nature is a "source of peace", they "feel as its part" and "try to be in harmony with it." All are committed to deepening their relationships and togetherness in the community by following Peck's principles. Their goal is supporting individual and social physical, psychological, and spiritual growth by organizing various self-development events. And finally, almost every Lorien members believe in existence of something beyond us, what at the same time unites everything together.

I believe that it is in the interest of researchers to observe spiritual communities and examine how they will develop over time. The American sociologist Rosabeth Moss Kanter predicts that spiritual communities like this will have a very short life because they do not generate enough commitment and place more emphasis on the personal freedom of individuals than on collective's interests, which then leads to high turnover of members, a large amount of unfinished work, various conflicts and sense of mutual alienation.²⁹ However, I think that in case of Lorien the situation will be different. Even if the community does not force its members to strongly commit or make any excessive demands on them, it has the potential to last. After all, the residents are united by the common values of the three pillars of the community. They care for their mutual relationships, for the common space and for organizing various self-development events. In addition, most Lorien members see their community as a place of "unconditional acceptance", "safety", "peace", "contact with nature", and "love".

I believe it's in our best interest to give communities like this our attention because, they offer their members the opportunity to engage in joint work, experience deep relationships and give them a higher meaning in building something that transcends

²⁷ BAINBRIDGE – STARK, "Client and Audience Cults in America", p. 199–200.

²⁸ ŘÍČAN, *Psychologie náboženství a spirituality*, p. 58–59.

²⁹ ROSABETH M. KANTER, *Commitment and Community*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1977, p. 184–190.

the lives of each of them. I think it is likely that influence of spiritual communities will grow in the future and scientists should have their eyes open, be near them, and listen to their rhythm.

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