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Ecovillages as a Model of Sustainable Settlements in Rural Development Context: Principles and Main Elements

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Abstract

Sustainable rural development has many definitions and approaches especially in production regard, but this kind of development has some other aspects such as spatial and social issues. Ecovillage design is created as a response to the environmental and social problems of modern way of life and could be described as a new field of knowledge which is defined by Global Ecovillage Network (2005) as an intentional or traditional community using local participatory processes to holistically integrate ecological, economic, social, and cultural dimensions of sustainability to regenerate social and natural environments. The main objective of this paper is to identify the principles and features of ecovillages and their relations to sustainable rural development. Results of this study shows that ecovillages have some main principles that based on them sustainable rural development could take place. These principles are classified in some topics like sustainable living, environment improvement, optimal water, and soil management, improving health, cultural, social, and spiritual development, optimal management of energy resources, sewage management, and sustainable farming managements. On this basis an ecovillage has three dimensions, which related to each other in a settlement space, including ecologic dimension, socio-economic dimension, cultural/ spiritual dimension. Literature of ecovillages reveals some basic features or elements. These features which are essential for a successful development of such settlements include using new technologies e.g., solar energy, having no standard dimensions, requiring a planned architecture, and landscaping, offering onsite employment opportunities to the village residents or visitors, having local governments, having specific social management plans, and being the reflection of the consciousness of the nature. In fact, ecovillages are formed to fulfil the socio-ecological needs of the people in a sustainable way.

Keywords: Ecovillage, Rural Development, Sustainable Development