

Russia's Anastasia and Permaculture

Article by Michael Pilarski. December 27, 2010 version

On the international level, perhaps the biggest news for permaculture is the widespread adoption of permaculture by the Anastasia movement in Russia which is inspired by the nine books in the Ringing Cedar Series written by Vladimir Megre. If you haven't heard of the Anastasia movement, here is a nutshell sketch.

Anastasia is a mythical person in the Siberian taiga who promotes a back-to-the-land, self-reliant lifestyle. She promotes that every person has the right to a small parcel of land to grow their own food, build their own house, and raise their family, without taxes. She calls these family parcels "Kin's Domains", and this is one of the major parts of her message. The movement is petitioning the Russian government to give title to 1-hectare (two and a half acre) parcels to every Russian citizen who requests one. They are also petitioning the United Nations to facilitate this land reform movement around the world. In their petition to the United Nations, the international Anastasia movement clearly recommends that permaculture and the Transition Towns movement as a way to reach the desired future. A utopia on earth. With over 11 million copies of Anastasia books sold in 20 languages, the movement has been growing fast in Russia and internationally.

Upon first looking at the Anastasia publicity I thought it looked like a bunch of hype. At a later date it took a respected friend's urging to induce me to start reading one of the books. Once I actually started reading the books, I couldn't put them down and had revelation after revelation.

I have been reading the Anastasia books from the perspective of a permaculture elder. I find much of value here and highly recommend the books. I also recommend the video produced by the English translator Leonid Sharashkin, titled "Reconnecting to Nature through Spiritual Permaculture". It is a video of a talk he gave at the 2007 Earth Transformation Conference in Kona, Hawai'i. It includes lots of slides from Russia. The talk focuses on the home gardening movement in Russia, which has got to be one of the best models in the world at this point.

Here is a list of statistics that permaculturists can only dream of happening in the US. 70% of Russians are gardeners. Home gardeners grow 92% of the nation's production of potatoes, 87% of the fruit and berries, 77% of the vegetables, 60 % of the meat and 49% of the milk. Plus large numbers of people hunt, gather and fish. How long do you think it will take us to achieve that in the US?

The home gardening movement produces 54% of total Russian food production. 43% is grown by the big cooperatives with machinery and 10% is grown by independent farmers. More impressively the gardeners produce their 54% on 7% of the land in food production. The independent farmers produce 6% of the food on 10% of the land and the mechanized cooperatives produce 43% of the food on 83% of the land. The cooperatives get the best farmland and the land given to the dachniks (people who have country houses

and small bits of land where they produce food on weekends and after work, called dachaus) is generally poor-quality land. On 7% of the agricultural land footprint they are producing 54% of the food. All very decentralized and very little machinery is used. This was pretty much in place when the first Anastasia book was published in 1996, but her books have now stimulated home food production even more. The Russians may be behind the USA in the military race but they are way ahead of us in the food race. Which isn't to say it is perfect there yet.

The Anastasia movement is publicly promoting permaculture. It is unclear how much permaculture is influencing the evolution of this movement at this time and how much of it is indigenous knowledge. Certainly most of it is indigenous knowledge. The organic movement in the USA/Europe has been influencing home gardening in Russia and probably Biodynamics has as well. John Jeavon's Grow Biointensive system has been taught quite a bit in Russia. I would love to hear how many permaculture design courses have been held in Russia and former USSR countries. Joe Bullock was one of the first permaculturalists to teach permaculture design courses in Russia. Joe is one of the three Bullock Brothers from the famous "Bullock Brothers Permaculture Homestead" on Orcas Island, Washington, one of the San Juan Islands in Puget Sound. Joe speaks excellent Russian and has been there many times.

Many of our most tried and true permaculture techniques can be recognized in the Anastasia material. Here are a few similarities.

- * Multi-purpose hedgerows. One of the distinctive features of Anastasia's kin's domains is that each domain is surrounded by a hedge of trees and shrubs which provide privacy, windbreak, shade, shelter, habitat, food and medicine for humans. Most permaculture designs include similar contraptions.

- * Natural building methods. Anastasia stresses that people should build their own homes to the extent physically capable. Natural, local materials predominate. A high level of craftsmanship is displayed. Each house is highly individualized. Permaculture promotes all of these things.

- * Domestic livestock are integrated into the system. Chickens, milk and meat animals are mentioned. This reflects the real life situation on the ground. In Russia 60% of the meat and 49% of the dairy are produced at the home scale.

- * Forest Gardens. Fruit production on the Kin's domains is strongly emphasized. The descriptions leave no doubt that they are referring to species-rich, multi-story polycultures such as we ascribe to in permaculture. An average Russian gardener grows 13 different kinds of vegetables and 7 different fruit, berry, and nut crops on the same small plot.

- * Creating habitat for a wide biodiversity of birds, insects, bees, butterflies (think pollinators)(think predators)(checks & balances). This is prominent in permaculture and Anastasia.

* Producing a year-round supply of food including preserving for winter use and full root cellars. Permaculture and Anastasia, ditto.

* Ecovillages. The concept of ecovillages is central to Anastasia's philosophy and is also a common thread in permaculture. Anastasia's kin's domains are not scattered helter skelter across the landscape like current homesteads in the USA. Instead the kin's domains are clustered together in little ecovillages. Everyone's zones 1 and 2 are clustered together and surrounded by a more communal zone 3, 4 and 5. The typical European village, clustered together for self defense and social interaction. Ecovillages have taken off in Russia since the publication of the Anastasia books and has made Russia one of the most vibrant areas of ecovillage experimentation on the globe.

But Anastasia is not just another dry, permaculture text. Oh no... It has elements of novel, fiction, supernatural and spiritual as well.

Anastasia is what some would call a "fully-realized human being", or at least getting close. We could also call her a super-human being. She has the ability to translocate her body, not only to other places on the earth, but to other planets in other solar systems. She has the ability to see at a distance and many other extraordinary abilities.

The story includes the classic battle between Light and Dark. Anastasia, a light-being, is doing battle with a lineage of dark priests that stretch back to Egypt and who are the main force keeping humanity in the dark. Anastasia is fighting for the whole human race. She has super-human allies, but she will only let them help her so far. Anastasia has a message similar to one attributed to Jesus Christ. She says, All these things I do, you can do and more. Anastasia says "I am human and all humans have divine capabilities".

So what is the overt link between the Anastasia movement and permaculture? The word permaculture is mentioned in the text only several times. However, Leonid Sharashkin, the English language editor of the nine Anastasia books has produced a video called Reconnecting to Nature through Spiritual Permaculture.

Leonid Sharashkin is a Russian scholar visiting the US with a doctoral degree in Forestry from the University of Missouri, Columbia and he specialized in agroforestry. Everyone knows that agroforestry is a cousin of permaculture. Leonid ties together agroforestry, permaculture and the Anastasia principles. My strong points are agroforestry, permaculture and earth-based spirituality.

Anastasia is deeply in love with the Earth. She connects with all the life forms around her. She can communicate with the wild animals and they willingly serve her. A bear is her son's maid. Wolves protect them. Squirrels gather food for her. An eagle takes her baby high into the sky to show him the earth from the air. She says that the animals serve man because of the love man bestows on them in return. Animals deeply desire and appreciate human love.

In Book 6, page 254, Anastasia says "To be healthy, one must feed one's self with lovingly grown produce". Anastasia points out many times that eating food grown on corporate, mechanized farms is not good for our health or our spirit. One often hears that it is better to eat food prepared by a happy cook than food prepared by an unhappy cook. According to Anastasia this principle applies to the attitude of the farmer that grows the food. In this I heartily concur with Anastasia.

One of the charges brought against Anastasia followers is that they are cultish. I am sure the same charge has been leveled against the perma cult urists. Like with permaculture, and many spiritual traditions, there is no harm in the core teachings, but people can, and do, become dogmatic. Dogmatism is alive and well in both the permaculture movement and the Anastasia movement. Neither should be followed slavishly.

Diet: Anastasia herself is obviously a vegan and mostly a raw foodist at that; but she doesn't enjoin all her followers to follow that path. In my opinion not everyone is suited to be a vegan or a raw foodist. Anastasia followers who believe this is the "only way" are exhibiting cultishness.

One other bit of esoteric advice from Anastasia is that gardeners should put a few seeds of a crop they are about to sow into their mouth for nine minutes and moisten it with their saliva. Then it is held in the hand for another minute. The seeds get imprinted with that person's health and nutrition needs and the plant then grows to fill that specific person's food and healing needs. All the seeds do not have to be held in the mouth, just the first ones for each crop that is sown.

Anastasia spends a lot of time talking about falling in love, choosing a partner, conscious conception, how birthing should be done (just the parents preferably, with midwives and family members hovering outside), education, selecting a kin's domain and spiritual development. A lot of things that some permaculturists call zone 0.

These are a few of my thoughts upon looking at the Anastasia material from the eyes of a permaculture spiritualist. There is much more to say and many more opinions, so I invite correspondence on this topic. I am one of the most gullible people I know and it is even hard for me to swallow all of the material in the Anastasia books.

[Disclaimer: Some of you practical, scientific types out there will not be able to handle these books. Approach cautiously. Do not ingest if you are allergic.]

Michael Pilarski
Michael@friendsofthetrees.net

For more information:

<http://www.ringingcedars.com/>
Place to buy books and videos in the US.