

814.529 Analyzing Local Rural Systems, 2013 Summer Semester

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1. Introduction:

Our interview partners were Kateřina Křováková and her husband Petr Křovák, a part time farmer couple, who moved to the village of Klikov in 2008. The reason they moved to the Třeboň area was because they wanted to live on the countryside and do agricultural work. Aim of the interview was to understand how they organise their daily life and what that means referring to questions of sustainability in the village of Klikov. Therefore we wanted to learn about their agricultural production system in terms of material and energy flows from a systemic perspective, as well as time use and income flows in regard to the role of subsidies. We were also interested in learning about their opinion and as may be the case participation in nature conservation activities and their scale of involvement concerning the biosphere reserve. Last but not least we aimed to define the social and economic system boundaries from the information gathered.

When it comes to aspects of sustainability it is important to take the historical background and development of the village into account. The village of Klikov, a former settlement for mainly workers of iron ore and pottery industries has experienced a population decline during the past decades. The young 'part-time' farmer couple settled in an area where most of the people tend to leave rather than move to due to economic reasons. In our point of view important aspects of sustainability regarding the village of Klikov are that new inhabitants like Kateřina and Petr Křovákovi are sustaining and transforming the village and its surrounding landscape physically and culturally by transferring new ideas, approaches and lifestyles.

In the following section we will first outline how we proceeded to conduct the interview. Following up with some information about our interview partners Kateřina and Petr Křovákovi and present the findings gathered from the interview. Finally we will summarize some reflections regarding the case-study in terms of sustainability.

2. Method:

2.1. Members and backgrounds

Our Team consisted of five students coming from very different backgrounds. Kathrin Wabnigg studied Environmental Pedagogy, Viktoría Soder has a background in Cultural and Social Anthropology, Anna Rosa Vollmann's former study was international development, Lucie Jahnová studied Systematic Botany and Ecology and Andreas Magerl has a bachelor degree in landscape planning and architecture.

2.2. Division of Labour

We divided tasks for our interview as follows: We chose Lucie and Viktoría as the primary interviewers. Since Lucie's mother tongue is Czech we had the possibility of offering our correspondent a contact in her own language which we thought might create a more comfortable situation for her and could in case overcome any language barriers. Viktoría had already conducted interviews so she was nominated second primary interviewer, due to her practical experiences. Anna Rosa, Andreas and

Kathrin were to take the minutes. Kathrin's additional tasks were taking pictures and observing the whole process.

2.3. Preparatory Work

When preparing our questionnaire we soon figured out that categorizing our questions into sub-groups would help structuring the interview. According to our aims we decided to name the following categories: Income flows, nature conservation, time use, agricultural production and social and economic boundaries.

2.4. Interview setting

We met Kateřina Křováková and her husband at their farm, shortly after they got home from work. She walked us around their farmland while answering our questions. We started conducting the interview with Kateřina Křováková alone but her husband would join occasionally to help her out when she encountered questions she could not answer completely. Due to her good English skills there never was a language barrier at any point. The atmosphere was very relaxed and we found our correspondent to be very open-minded and talkative. Soon our informant had answered all our prepared questions and as the minute takers had joined the conversation, the situation had emerged into a very relaxed talk.

3. The Informant:

Kateřina and Petr Křovákovi are a couple in their mid-thirties who moved to Klikov in 2008 from the northern part of the country. The couple bought a farm and surrounding land from two brothers. One of them moved away, the other one is still living next door. Our respondents originally never wanted to live in this area, however, they found the farm on the Internet "by coincidence".

Neither Kateřina nor Petr Křovákovi have any agricultural background. Their original intention of moving to Klikov came from their wish to live on the countryside and do agriculture. Both of them have to work in the city besides working on the farm. Kateřina Křováková works as a researcher at the Faculty of Agriculture at the University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice and Petr Křovák is doing administrative work in a construction office in Třeboň to generate additional income and sustain their livelihood. Kateřina and Petr Křovákovi are working, living and shopping in different places and they spend a lot of time commuting to work every day.

Our correspondents' work at the farm includes renovating the house, ecological agriculture and permaculture gardening. Their motto in gardening is: "I do not cultivate anything that I cannot eat." By all means practicing agriculture in an organic way is crucial to them.

4. Findings

This section outlines our findings from the conducted interview. We focused our research on the main issues as defined in the preparatory work. The outcomes of our research are being discussed in the following subsections.

4.1. Background

During the communist era, the land around Klikov and the neighboring villages was organized in collectives. Due to this fact, all land in this area is very wide and large scale structured. The researched farm is a relic from the communist era and a former community farming building. The farmland is originally organized into pasture stripes.

Kateřina and Petr Křovákovi's farmhouse and land was formerly owned by two brothers and split after the Velvet Revolution. The couple bought it from the one brother who moved to the city and are now neighbouring the other brother. Kateřina and Petr Křovákovi's land accounts for six hectares of pastures and six and a half hectares of forests, which is, according to our interview partner, not enough to sustain two people. Additionally, they rent one and a half hectares of pastures near Františkov nad Lužnicí.

4.2. Income Flows

As mentioned in the previous paragraph the size of Kateřina Křováková's and Petr Křovák's farm is too small to sustain their way of life. According to our respondents, at least 20 hectares would be required to allow a self-sufficient lifestyle. Kateřina Křováková and her husband run their farm partly because they enjoy the work. On the other hand because they can supplement their income for

instance by selling lambs and sheep meat. The wool from their sheep is not being sold because it does not fetch an appropriate price in the Czech Republic. Kateřina Křováková uses it for her own production of knitwear. To sustain their life on the farm, the couple needs a stable income and hence depends on their salary. Besides the income from their day-to-day work, Kateřina Křováková and her husband also rely on subsidies for their farmland, which come partly from the EU and partly from the Czech government. However, it would not be possible for them to give up their jobs and live from full-time farming due to the insecurity of the future persistence of subsidies and the instability of the sheep market.

4.3. Agricultural Production

Kateřina and Petr Křovákovi's way of farming is basically organic, no artificial fertilizers are being used. At first, they started their farm with some sheep. Later two horses were added which are used for riding and occasionally for pulling. They currently own 30 sheep, for which they rented additional meadows 8 km away from their farm, as well as some goats. They take advantage of natural processes supporting the agricultural production. The horses are used for preparing the ground, for example by pulling ploughs. In addition, their manure is used as fertilizer. This means in socio-ecological terms that the material and energy inputs are quite low compared to the outputs. According to our respondents, they need "the nature to help them doing their work", not only because both of them are convinced that organic farming is a better way in comparison to conventional agriculture but also due to a lack of time. However, curing their animals from parasites such as ticks still requires the use of chemicals.

4.4. Nature conservation

Mrs and Mr Křovákovi's farm is situated in the Třeboňsko Protected Landscape Area which has been declared a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve. This area is well known for fish farming and therefore full of artificial channels that are used to fill huge fishpond systems.

According to our respondents, there are several problems with the soil around the Třeboň area. Due to the low slopes of their pastures, problems with water drainage arise. This results in muddy and unsuitable grounds for farming. To tackle this problem Mrs Křováková and her husband plan to create some small water bodies to improve the drain. Additionally, these ponds shall become a habitat for amphibians.

At the moment, Kateřina Křováková and her husband do not engage in the agricultural programme of the biosphere reserve. However, the couple plans to plant trees on their pastures. On the one hand, these trees should serve as shelter from the wind and provide some shade for the animals. On the other hand, by planting ancient fruit tree species they would become eligible for subsidies by the biosphere reserve.

A further problem which can be observed is the bee mortality. Despite the abundance of food for the bee hives they do not manage to outlive the winter.

4.5. Time use

As mentioned in the previous sections, Kateřina and Petr Křovákovi both have full-time jobs and both work eight hours a day. Furthermore, they have to commute in total around three hours a day to and from their workplaces. A private car is used to reach a nearby bus station, where they switch to public transport. The rest of their time the couple takes care of their farm and their animals.

Because Kateřina Křováková and her husband spend most of their time working, both in the office and on the farm, there is not much time left for social activities. Due to their time consuming lifestyle they only have a few friends in the village of Klikov, as for instance Marta, the owner of the pottery.

As far as labour division in the household is concerned, Kateřina Křováková is responsible for the housework and her husband helps out with the heavy physical work. All other tasks are shared equally.

We did not touch the topic of children, since it was our first contact with our respondent and it is a personal and sensitive question. What we can assume from our interview, though, is that it is almost impossible to lead such a time consuming life and additionally raise children.

4.6. Social and economic boundaries

To conduct a social ecological research it is important to draw system boundaries. However, in our case study this is not an easy task, since the geographical, social and economic boundaries do not always correspond. On the one hand, both Kateřina and Petr Křovákovi's centre of life is located in Klikov, where they live and spend their leisure time. On the other hand our informants told us that lower prices and higher quality convince them to buy their groceries across the border in Austria. Their professional life, however takes place in the Czech Republic but outside the village. Hence they

cultivate social relationships with friends and colleagues at work as well as in the area around Klikov. All these activities are geographically separated but they are linked through economic activities. Therefore we chose the village of Klikov to be our system boundary, keeping in mind that it is open for flows. For example, the income from their regular day-to-day jobs which is created beyond the boundary contributes a crucial part to the maintenance of their lifestyle within the system. Furthermore shopping across the border means that money for personal recreation is also spent outside the system boundaries. The additional pastures are not included in the system as well.

4.7. Sustainability of the village

The village of Klikov and the surrounding areas do not offer high quality soils in agricultural terms. The Třeboň area has never been known for its agriculture. Traditionally, the economic drivers of the village have always been the production of pottery and the extraction of iron ore. People living in Klikov have ever since been workers, not farmers.

As stated before, Kateřina and Petr Křovákovi also mentioned that they had problems concerning the soil. The major issue is that they lack expertise of how to work this specific ground. As our informants told us, the older inhabitants still have the knowledge of how to best practice agricultural work in the Třeboň area. Due to the fact that most of Klikov's younger inhabitants leave the village and no significant agricultural activities take place in the region, knowledge gets lost. To say it in Mrs Křováková's words: "People here are disappearing" and thus all the expertise.

There is not really much agriculture in the region of South Bohemia, neither conventional nor organic. However, some small scale farming activities - to which our informants contribute - do take place in the Třeboň area. In order to support these farmers with advice and scientific knowledge an initiative called 'Daphne' has been founded by a group of scientists (biologists, agricultural scientists etc.). Furthermore, efforts have been made to adjust and stabilize the slope of the landscape through ecological landscape engineering as many people in the region have problems commonly occurring from erosion.

Nowadays, tourism is the main source of income in the whole region. Nevertheless, Mrs Křováková and her husband are not interested in earning additional income through agritourism. They do not want to assume full responsibility, since the tourists might be harmed by their animals. More important, they do not have enough time for it.

Last but not least, in respect of the sustainability of the village of Klikov, immigration is a major factor. Many young people move away from rural areas to find jobs or study in cities. Therefore, national and international immigrants are the ones who transform the structures of local systems by implementing new ideas and lifestyles as well as new practices and approaches. On the downside, there exists a gap between the new inhabitants and long-time residents because immigrants might be regarded by some as "intruders" to the established village society. The participation in the soccer-club acts as an indicator for integration into the community. It can be observed that newly arrived inhabitants mainly tend to rather not participate in this institution.

Whether or not this is the case in this study we cannot say for sure from our perception.

5. Reflection:

Kateřina and Petr Křovákovi may not be the usual mid-thirties couple living in the Czech Republic. They decided to move their center of life to a region which is not very well known for its agricultural activities. It also occurs rarely that younger people move to Klikov, a village that suffers heavily from population decline. This leads us to the following questions: why does a young couple accept the challenge to live in an area where the population is shrinking, infrastructure is poor and land is hard to be processed?

We came to the conclusion that sustainability in this case needs to be looked at from two different points of views: In the first place, sustainability in terms of personal lifestyle and ideals of our informants has to be taken into account. Secondly, the impact the couple has in terms of social, ecological and material input on their surrounding environment - the village of Klikov - needs to be looked at. In order to do this, first we needed to define the system boundaries, which turned out to be one of the most challenging tasks since the couple lives, works and shops in different places. Especially when it comes to financial issues, allocating flows arise to be difficult. Several activities, as mentioned before, take place outside of the system boundaries. This leads to an economic drawback for the region as well as longer driveways for our informants. Consequently, higher levels of fossil fuels consumption, material and monetary inputs occur.

In our point of view aspects of sustainability in this case-study refer to our respondents' activities of physically maintaining the buildings and processing the ground in an ecologically compatible way as well as transforming the structure of the local community. By planting ancient fruit tree species and by organic farming they are trying to nurture biodiversity and by their presence in the village they alter the demographic structure.

The most important motivator for our informants is their way of life. They spend nearly all their free time working on their farm. This indicates that it means a lot to them.

In regard of the village, it became clear that keeping a local system, which formerly depended on an industry that doesn't exist anymore, requires immigrants and a transformation of income possibilities. It therefore needs people like Kateřina and Petr Křovákovi's and new sources of income for example agri-tourism. Subsidies also play a crucial role in terms of new income flows for the region which, referring to our correspondents might be an insecure income source because their availability in the future is very uncertain. Ultimately, tourism might act as one of the main opportunities for the region as income provider in the future, as long as humans in the region stick to the guidelines implemented by the Biosphere Reserve authorities.

To round up our findings it can be said that Kateřina and Petr Křovákovi show that an alternative way of life can be possible. They managed to compromise between their day-to-day work and their life on the countryside, which occurs to be crucial for them.

On the level of the village it is to say that national and international immigrants can transform social structures of local systems by implementing new ideas and lifestyles as well as new practices and approaches but integration into an established social system tends to be rather difficult.