# Final report of the project „Studying Local Rural Systems: From Theory to Practice”, No 63p9

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**Realized activities**

Seminar was split into two parts. First part was organised as a block half-day long preseminar at Klagenfurt University in Vienna in March 12. During the lecture basic concepts of social ecology were introduced to those course participants, who do not study social ecology as their major, by lessons of Simron Singh and Willi Haas. Lecture was followed by logistic information about second part of the seminar by Jitka Strakova. Presentations can be found on the attached CD. Viennese block seminar was attended by 17 students of Klagenfurt University and 5 student of University of South Bohemia. Copy of the attendance list can be found on the CD. All students actively participated in the formation of conceptual model of society-nature relationship and most experienced ones explained some of social ecology concept byselves to avoid frontal tuition and promote interactive form of education. Moreover, all students presented their expectation about the course that were reflected immediately or in the second part of the course.

Second part of the course was organized as 5-days-long block seminar in south Bohemia, Czech Republic. Locality of stay – village Klikov and neighbouring Protected Landscape Area Třeboňsko, became case study area of the field work. Natural and economic conditions of the case study area were introduced to participants by presentations of ecologist Miroslav Hátle and economist and local Jan Těšitel. Answer to question “why to study local rural systems?” was answered by students themselves with supervisions of Simron Singh and Willi Haas. Both lecturers also introduced social ecology of farming systems, transition from agrarian to industrial farming system or human time use as one of the biophysical variables. All presentation can be found on CD. Course was attended by 18 students of Klagenfurt University, 5 student of University of South Bohemia and 1 hosting student from Masaryk University in Brno. Attendance list of participants can be found on the CD. Mentioned 24 students were split into 5 working groups to exercise on conceptualising contemporary environmental problems, analysing data sheets on time-use, energy, and material flows of different communities. Besides theoretical background and verification of knowledge through data processing during group work, participants followed half day long field lecture led by Tomáš Kučera. His CV is included on the attached CD. Land use and specific material and energy flows were introduced and demonstrated in the landscape of the case study area. Afterwards each working group was encouraged to prepare research question and interviewing questions for a local stakeholder. One group proceed interview with pension owner, other with sawmill owner, farmer, and potters. Interviews were analysed, interpreted via final presentation inducted in the last day of course by members of working groups. All participants evaluated what they have learnt and provided feedbacks to lecturers.

In the environment of home universities students elaborates final assignment – written report concluding all gathered information during the field work in the context of sustainability and provided knowledge.

**Achieved results**

The project was designed in the form of a university seminar including active participation of both Czech and Austrian teachers and students in the study of local rural systems within the framework of sustainability. Taking a systems perspective, the students were encouraged to look at rural systems as coupled socio-ecological systems with materials, energy, land, labour and technology as interdependent and dynamic variables that influence sustainability. The course provided the theoretical and operational framework of conceptualising, developing field research methods and analysing local systems, along with practical experience in how to establish contact, build rapport and interact in a culturally sensitive way with local communities.

Students got insights and methodological training in studying local communities through the use of anthropological and social ecological field methods, and interpret the results within the framework of sustainability and development studies. Participants also learned to design innovative field methods of generating data that provided relevant information on the functioning of local rural systems (supplemented by interviews). Participants then analyzed and reflected on their own experiences and results, and made an attempt to interpret them within the framework of sustainability and what it means for development interventions.

During group work sessions a need of going beyond student’s major and integration of various approaches in one corporate output improved mutual understanding of individual participants, different disciplines, and cultures. Moreover field work was situated in a culturally challenging environment of the Czech Republic where direct contacts with locals were established. Interviews with stakeholders and analyses of society-nature interactions of the region narrowly interlinked participants of the course with local communities and supported mutual understanding.

As a result 5 group student assignments were elaborated, submitted to teachers and graded.

**Evaluation of course realization and mutual collaboration**

Analysing sustainability at local scales becomes highly relevant especially as rural systems world-wide undergo a major transformation leading to massive land-use changes and loss of ecosystem services.

The course introduced the concept of sustainability with particular focus on changes in society-nature interactions in both theoretical framework and practice. Theory and methodological background was provided by lecturers from the Institute of Social Ecology, Klagenfurt University and properly supplement by inputs of Czech lecturers of landscape ecology and agricultural economy. Interdisciplinary approach proved by lecturers from both Austrian social-ecological and Czech biological research environment contributed to students understanding of the complex issue of sustainability posted on three pillars – social, economy, and environment.

In each of working groups at least one Czech student was participating. The group worked together on everyday basis, shared knowledge and expertise. Besides personal expertise Czech students were used to bring insight into how things are working in Czech Republic and explained circumstances of cultural habits of Czech rural people, what improved mutual understanding between Czech and Austrian students. Another reflection of Czech culture and specific decision making was provided during interviews with local stakeholders.

The organising of the seminar was another milestone in strengthening research and teaching collaboration not only between the two institutions but also countries.

**Annexes in electronic format on CD:**

Copies of attendance lists

Copy of the confirmation about ECTS credits award

Teaching materials

Student assignments

Photographs

CV of RNDr. Tomáš Kučera, Ph.D.