

Part-time Farmers in Klikov



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Studying Local Rural Systems

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1 INTRODUCTION

Klikov

The village of Klikov is situated in the South Bohemian region of the Czech Republic and belongs to the district of Jindřichův Hradec. From the administrative point of view it's not an independent village but a part of a bigger town Suchdol nad Lužnicí. The village itself has no significant square and the houses are spread along the main roads. There are exactly 157 houses in Klikov which are inhabited by 200 people. The biggest dominants in the village are an old school and in the northern part of the village the Chapel of Our Lady of Snow.



Main road, local pub and the Chapel (source: wiki).

Brief history of the village

The village has been founded at the end of the 16th century. First inhabitants were German pitmen and smiths from the nearby ironworks Františkov. After the closure of ironworks in 1880 many local inhabitants switched to the production of ceramics because of local clay resources. The population of the village before 1938 was around 1000 inhabitants but most of them left during and after the war. Wide change in the surroundings of the village also happened during the era of socialism – a lot of land has been drained off and changed to agricultural fields despite of the bad soil conditions in the region.

Part-time farmers

Kateřina & Petr are a young couple from Czech Republik. Both were born in other places, but at the present time they are living in Klikov as part-time farmers. They complement the income of their jobs by working on the farm and selling products from it.

Kateřina has studied Landscape Ecology. She is working in a Research Faculty of the South Bohemia University in the area of Landscape & Agriculture. Petr is working at the Building Ministry of Třeboň.

Three years ago, they wanted to start farming and they looked for a farm somewhere in Czech Republic. Through internet, they found in Klikov the opportunity to work as part-time farmer and they decided to move there. The main reasons why they have chosen this place were the connected land, the price of the property and the charming village. They had no practical experience about farming before they arrived at Klikov and learned everything about farming by internet and advices from other people.





Until the 1990's the farm was a classical "Vierkanthof". Nowadays there is only the half of the building in between other houses left. The size of their land is about 14 hectares: 6 ha agricultural land and 8 ha forest. The soil is so poor that it only supports meadows. They are growing mostly organic products but they have no certification of it because of the bureaucracy. They bought a Tractor to work in the farm. It is used for cutting grass and transportation about one hour every week, half a year. They are buying other additional machinery services which they need.

The farm activity is focused mainly on sheep. They have between 20 to 40 sheep, depending on the season. The average is about 2 lambs per female. Moreover, they are starting to work with bees in a small scale, only a few boxes. They also have 2 horses and 1 cat.



2 ECONOMIC SITUATION

The economic situation of the farm is stabilised but the couple has no strong financial background or other resources. When they bought the farm and moved to Klikov they had to take a mortgage and they are still repaying it. Because the income from the farm (which is more than 100.000 CZK per year) is nearly covering the payments, it's possible to claim they live from their main jobs outside of the village and are fully dependent on them. Despite the fact we didn't investigate any details about salary's we can assume (according to what we know about their jobs) that these are about average or probably lower.

Economy of the farm itself

The farm itself represents several different sources of funds for the couple's budget. The most stable income (in short term) is represented by subsidies for proper meadow management. The farm contains about 6 ha of meadows which provide the profit of about 40.000 CZK per year.

Another income comes from the sheep breeding. The height of this income is not the same every year but still relatively stable. They sell about 20 lambs per year for 3.000 CZK per lamb and so make an annual profit of about 60.000 CZK from this activity. They also sell the lamb meat occasionally.

Last farming activity is beekeeping. Because the farmer has only few hives nowadays it's more a hobby than serious business. Still they get some money in exchange for the honey and would like to extend this activity greatly in the future.

Limits of growth

The state agrarian policy orders the farmers to have a livestock on their land if they want to get subsidies. On the other hand this farm has almost already reached the upper limit so there is no space for expansion until they rent or buy any additional land. This seems to be the most important limit of growth of the farm. Virtually all the surrounding land is rented by only one big farmer. Even if the owners of the land would like to rent it to the couple, the period of notice is several years long and it's quite sure that the farmer could try (and afford) to overpay the couple.

The couple is relatively inconsistent in their opinion how much land they would need to become self-sufficient and able to quit their jobs. The man says that the minimum size of the farm should be at least 20 ha. His girlfriend speaks about almost double size.

Comments about sustainability

The economic situation of the couple is relatively stable but strongly dependent on the income from outside. This brings a risk of losing a job into account. If they could extend the farm and farm for their living it would be a more stable option. On the other hand it would be unwise to base their living on the income from subsidies. The agrarian policy of the EU could change and cause them serious existential problems. From this point of view it looks that the best option is probably to orientate the farm on the livestock production and beekeeping. This corresponds more or less with the future plans of the couple. The mosaic of economic activities could be perhaps completed by cultivation of some undemanding crops (such as buckwheat) but it's questionable because of poor soil quality and necessary investments. At the end there is still at least one significant factor of unsustainability. The whole farming activity of the couple connected to the sheep breeding is not official (that means no taxes etc.) at this time - despite the fact it certainly fulfils the definition of business. This is unsustainable in the long time period, especially if they would like to extend the farm and base their living on farming.



3 RESSOURCES AND WASTES

Petr and Kateřina have different resources they can use. They have the farm house, fields and meadows and also considerable amounts of forest. As has been already discussed in previous sections of this paper, they have also different kinds of livestock including sheep, horses and bees, as well as a cat.

Petr and Kateřina try to use as many self-produced resources as possible. They are producing most of the fodder themselves and also try to use wood from their forests to build stables and storage facilities. The problem is that the wood is too wet and therefore not well suited for building purposes. But although they can produce many of the things they need, they also have to buy other things to make their farming enterprise work.

They had to buy a tractor to support them for the main duties they have on the farm. They bought a used tractor and they are very proud of it and discussed it very detailed with Dominik and Zdeněk. They are also buying agricultural services that other farmers in and around Klikov provide. This is often cheaper than buying their own machines. For their sheep herd they also have to buy lambs, to build their own stock. In the first years they were experimenting with the breeds, but it seemed as if they had found a breed that suits them well. At the moment they are working on adapting the physical structures of the farm to help the business. They will have to put concrete in the yard since they have troubles with the wet ground.

But they are not only buying materials and services; they are also selling to other inhabitants in Klikov. They are selling sheep and will also start to produce honey commercially. People from Klikov are also coming to get some sheep excrements as fertilizer for their gardens. They have tried to trade other things like for example horse hair. The potter has tried to use the horses' hair to cut the clay but this hasn't worked out. They are thinking about providing accommodation for tourists that are on horse trips, as they already did for some friends who have been travelling like this.

Another resource they have, but one that can also be a limiting factor, is time. Since the farm isn't their only occupation, they have to use this resource wisely. They have to choose their farming activities so that they can manage the farm and their jobs. Kateřina told us, that reducing her day job could be an option in the future, but she also made clear, that she doesn't want to give it up for good. Until now they are running the farm in a way, which it is even possible for them to go on holidays occasionally. During this time other people are doing the most important tasks for them.

A resource they have problems with is water. The proximity to the river is good and bad for them. The wet ground makes certain forms of agriculture impossible and makes operating machines more difficult too. There are left over structures from former owners, which were already kind of dealing with this challenge. Now they are thinking about using some of these structures. Another issue that came up was the sewage system, which they are not connected to yet, but we do not have enough information to discuss it in detail.



4 COMMUNITY AND CONFLICTS

Everywhere where people live together there always arise connections and conflicts within a community, as well as in Klikov. Our part-time farmers Kateřina and Petr described the differences in the community predominant through the age structure and local vs. non-local people. For them there are the old people who welcome the non-locals and the middle-age-people which doesn't. The latter were described as people with less identification to the Village and its surroundings, who aren't interested in farming or cultivating the land and which are the ones who are most against the new inhabitants.

When our part-time farmers first arrived in Klikov and started their farming they got support from the older people by their knowledge and traditions about farming and the village. Now their social connections within the village are mostly to the non-locals, especially the potters, where they participate regularly at their "local meeting" but without the attendance of any local people (yet). In case of other community activities, they are members of a local bee-club, which is held in a neighbour village. But they haven't yet attended any local community activities, like the yearly carnival procession, going to the pub or games of the villages' football club. They pointed out that their absence on these events is the main cause why they aren't that integrated in the villages' community, why they don't know that many inhabitants and respectively the people don't know that they even live there or that they are breeding sheep. Other connections to the local people are through the so called "shit & sheep connections", which means that the people come to them and take the manure of the sheep for their gardens or fields, or that they lend some sheep for grazing.

One of the first things the couple mentioned was the conflict with their neighbour and his "ugly" new house. For them that kind of new architecture and the buildings from the communist era don't fit in the original townscape of Klikov, which should be retained. Furthermore they are upset about how less their neighbour, a middle aged man, is connected to the village. They described him as one of those typical inhabitants, as mentions before, which have less identification with the landscape and are most against the non-locals.

In case of their farming activities they have some conflicts with another farmer in the area, who owns and rents a lot of land. On one hand, the farmer is upset about our part-time farmers because they own land that he likes to have. On the other hand the part-time-farmer-couple likes to expand their farming land, but almost all is in the possession of the other farmer. So the property within the village is quite unbalanced.

One of the most remarkable things we observed in the village was what was described as community, who is a part of it and who isn't and which activities constitute a community. The latter seems to be the most important part to even consider, that something like a community even exists. So going to the pub or watching the local football games, are the basic requirements to build and get into something like a community.

In case of sustainability it is good that new people come to Klikov and try to develop the village, but the conflicts between the people who are considered as local and non-locals are strong. At this point it is indeterminable how the integration of the new people will develop and what the future will be like.



5 FUTURE OUTLOOK

As mentioned before, Petr and Kateřina have chosen a farm life in a small village like Klikov. Somehow it seems that being a farmer was their dream for a long time and so they have chosen to adapt to this lifestyle. Because they started with almost nothing and had to take loans to buy the farmhouse and connected land, they are still dependent on the other income from their jobs.

As far as Petr's future is concerned, he would love to become a full-time farmer and is keen to extend the farm to a size at which the farm can sustain itself in the long term. For him it is important that they can support themselves from farming alone and that he doesn't need to work somewhere else anymore. He doesn't want any touristic activities, besides accommodation in a small scale, on his farm and so his plan is to grow the farm business to a self-supportable level.

Kateřina on the other hand side seems to be satisfied with her work and life as a part-time farmer. She plans to stay in her job for the future and is happy to spend the other available time with farming. But like Petr she also wants to extend the farm business.

Although Petr and Kateřina seem to have some differences about their future in Klikov, they both agree on the extension of the farm size and business. In the times to come, they like to keep chickens for egg and meat production. Both like to transform small parts of their land back into wetland, probably for subsidies. Their plan is to extend the size of land they can use but must wait for the opportunity to rent more land. To run a self-supporting farm business they would need to extend their land from 14 hectares now, to a bigger size. Interestingly their opinion on how much land they would need is very different. As already mentioned above, Petr thinks that 18-20ha should be enough whereas Kateřina thinks they would need 20-40ha. It probably depends on how they are going to use this land and how big the financial output will be. Both plan to extend the bee business to 39 bee-boxes. This number is interesting and someone could ask why not 40, 41 or 38 boxes? There is a simple answer to this: 39 is the maximum number you can have without paying taxes for beekeeping. Their plan is to sell honey from bees which could be a good business because it would be harvested in a biosphere reserve. Both do agree on extending their sheep business by selling wool products, sheep milk products and meat. Both also agree on not developing a horse riding tourism, due to the welfare of their horses.

Although it seems that they have some different opinions on their future, the concept of extending the farm business is clear and it looks as they are working on turning their dreams into reality. In context to sustainability issues their future plans seem to go into a positive direction. They like to develop a local business with products from the region and for the region. They can also benefit from other regions by selling their products over the internet and so their concept seems to be a sustainable concept for a small village like Klikov. But they depend on issues like land and income and so the future is not yet set and it is open whether they can support themselves or not. Right now it is more a hobby than a business but if their plans become true and they can run a small but self-supporting farm business, it can be sustainable for them and the region.

It is also obvious that being in a biosphere reserve doesn't have any disadvantages for them right now. There are restrictions but both don't think that these restrictions have bad effects on their business. Especially when they plan to sell products from the region it could turn into a great advantage if they can advertise these products with some background connected to the area.

