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**Living where the grass is greener:
Reflections on an alternative life in
a mountain village in Romania**

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*“Anthropology may not provide the answer to the question of the meaning of life,
but at least it can tell us that there are many ways in which to make a life meaningful.*

*If it does not provide final answers,
anthropology may at least give us the feeling of being near the big questions.”*

(Hylland Eriksen 2010, 329)

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Abstract

Nowadays there is an increasing number of people who invest (or would like to invest) in a second home in rural areas or who migrate (or would like to migrate) to rural areas. This thesis is about migration to rural areas; it addresses the question: “Which incentives and constraints do people weigh before migrating to a rural area and which challenges do they encounter once living there?”

I conducted fieldwork in a rural area in Romania. I studied a case of an international migration, namely from the United Kingdom to Romania, by a couple Timothy and Karen.

Initially Timothy and Karen had an 'idyllic' image of rural life in Romania, but while living in the mountain village in Harghita County, they had to adjust their image according to their experiences. In this (sometimes emotional) process they adjust their expectations and strategies; one example is their interactions and relationships with the other villagers, which got altered when they experienced increased frustrations while trying to become part of the local reciprocity system.

Consumption preferences and ideas about a healthy lifestyle, and a preferred lifestyle in general, like production of own food and animal-human relationships, seem to be key elements, which are given importance by Timothy and Karen in their decision to migrate to a rural area and to live there. Other factors, such as mobility and motility, and financial 'independence', are also of importance.

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1.1 Introduction

Social sciences have produced a vast body of literature on the topic of migration. Studies of migration address local/global issues; a wide range of social processes may be addressed. A vast body of studies of migration has for example been written on the flows of people to new locations and on their adaptation, adjustment and integration. Many studies focus on rural to urban migration and there has been written a lot about 'forced' displacement and exile, due to war and violence for example or due to environmental disasters or famine, etc., in other words about socio-political and/or economic refugees. A lot also has been written about people moving to urban areas in the search for 'a better life', in terms of education and/or job opportunities, etc. A smaller body of literature addresses urban to rural migration and/or rural to rural migration, but since there is an increasing number of people who invest (or would like to invest) in a second home in rural areas or who migrate (or would like to migrate) to rural areas permanently, the topic of migration to rural areas is receiving increased attention. *“In future, strong rural images, increased mobility and improved communications might lead to rural areas becoming even more marketable commodities, encouraging a larger demand for rural space for living and recreation. One aspect of rural mobility is the increasing use of second homes, and accomplishing a dream of buying a smallholding might be an example of this, but also might become part of a permanent move to the country.”* (Blekesaune, Haugen and Villa, 2010, 237)

People may have different 'images' about rural or urban places. One person may have an idyllic image of a rural place, the rural place being peaceful, quiet, spacious, green and clean, etc. (rural idyll), another person may have the a more negative image of a rural place, the rural place being dull, boring, poorly provided with services, etc. (rural anti-idyll). One person may have an image of an urban place as being diverse, exciting, progressive, etc. (urban dream), and yet another person may have an image of an urban place as being polluted, dirty, lonely, hectic, etc. (urban nightmare) (Yarwood, 2005, 24). Naturally, these are stereotypes and people may have mixed images as well, they may see an urban place as both exciting and polluted at the same time for example.

The rural idyll is not the only pull-factor for the flow of people towards rural areas; as Michael Woods points out, migrant workers, retirement migrants, health migrants, return migrants, etc., may all have their reasons for migrating to a rural area, not necessarily based

on the quest for rural lifestyle. Michal Woods also explains that idyll-seekers may have different reasons: some might pursue recreational opportunities, while others might be interested in purchasing a small-holding aiming to go 'back to the land', while others would like to form or become part of an 'intentional community', like a sustainable community, an eco-village or a religious community. (Woods 2011, 183-184) People migrate for various reasons, but those who migrate out of 'free choice' (as in contrast to those who are forced by war, law, etc.) might have in common that they believe their migration will be for the better; leading to an increased well-being in the short or in the long run.

This thesis addresses the topic of migration to rural areas. The research question for the project is: Which incentives and constraints do people weigh before migrating to a rural area and which challenges do they encounter once living there?

The research is based on fieldwork, focussing on everyday life experiences of the protagonists. Frederik Barth wrote: *"It is by attending systematically to people's own intentions and interpretations, accessible only if one adopts the perspective of their concerns and their knowledge of constraints under which they act, that one can unravelling the meaning they confer on events, and thereby the experience they are harvesting."* (1993, 105) And Norman Long wrote that actors give meaning to their experiences through representations, images, cognitive understanding and emotional responses and he explains that *"social life is composed of multiple realities, which are, as it were, constructed and confirmed primarily through experience, this interest in culture must be grounded methodologically in the detailed study of everyday life, in which actors seek to grapple cognitively and organisationally with the problematic situations they face."* (2000, 189)

Whenever I go somewhere one of the questions I ask myself is: *would I like to live here?* And then I start to play with this question; it is a way of exploring. I ask myself why I like or why I dislike the place. This helps me see the place more consciously and in more detail, and like this the place gets more meaning for me.

I also have a fascination for people who try to live 'alternatively'. It takes often creative thinkers to do things differently than the mainstream. Those creative people 'play' with the environment they are part of. To me they seem to be very aware of their environment; they experiment with their existence in and interaction with that environment. They address the question *how* they would like to live in a place and think about how to achieve that. They

often try to formulate ideas about life and how life could and/or should be lived. And they also may have the tendency to give meaning to place and to their actions as compared to the actions of others; those actions may be expressions of their ideas in one way or another. Those people are therefore reflexive by nature it seems to me.

There are trends where likeminded people intentionally (try to) form groups, so called intentional communities, and work together, share lifestyle and ideas, for example about environmental considerations and decision making processes. In 2008 I was in the USA and visited several such intentional communities. I heard about the ideas behind such lifestyles, and I saw how these ideas were materialised: the 'physical expressions' in housing, gardening, food preservation and consumption, etc. At several places in America, Europe and New Zealand, where I also visited a couple of these communities, and in other places in the world, similar intentional communities are formed. Some are striving, some are struggling, and yet others ceased to exist. From my observations in those communities, from discussions I had with community members and from the things I read and saw in books, films and on the internet, I start to recognize relationships between ideas these people have and the way that those are expressed in the 'material' world, in the living environment, the housing and also for example the gardening and related practices. I came across buzzwords, like 'sustainable living', 'off the grid', 'small footprint', 'ecological', etc. People often put emphasis on the way houses should be built and out of which materials. The materials should for example preferably be 'natural', or 'recycled', such as straw bales, cob, reclaimed wood, used tires, etc. And the houses should preferably be energy efficient, and possibly use should be made of renewable energy, such as solar panels, wind mills, wood locally grown, harvested and processed, and the water source could be from a well or from collected rain water. 'Live lightly on the earth', 'low impact on the environment', and similar slogans one can hear.

My research is conducted in Romania. I didn't conduct it among an intentional community though, but together with a couple: Timothy and Karen. Timothy is British and Karen is Austrian. They have been married for over twenty years, and they have been living together for ten years in The United Kingdom before they moved to a mountain village in Central-Eastern Europe, in Romania, Harghita county. - In Romania more and more properties are being bought by foreigners, many of which are located in rural areas, but not only foreigners migrate to the rural settings in Romania, nowadays there is a trend of Romanians migrating from urban to rural settings within Romania as well. During the 1990s economic

growth in Romania led to the relocation of rural population into urban areas. However, during the following years a shift in the direction took place, reflected in a positive migration balance in favour of the rural areas after 1997. (Guran-Nica and Sofer 2012, 88-89).¹

Timothy and Karen live in a spread-out mountain village with +/- 330 inhabitants. All inhabitants, except for Timothy and Karen, have the Hungarian ethnicity. It is built on a plateau, which is rather hilly, and about thousand meter above sea level. The 'center' consists of an old school building and a small church, and the milk collecting point. The inhabitants are Roman Catholic or belong to the Unitarian church. There are grass fields and there are some trees between the houses. Six percent of the Romanian population have the Hungarian ethnicity. Most Hungarians live in Transylvania. In Harghita county over eighty percent of the population has a Hungarian ethnicity, according to the Romanian census of 2011.

Romania has a land climate, and especially in the mountains there is a large difference between summers and winters. During winters there is snow and the temperature can drop below 15 degrees Celsius, and in the summers it can get rather warm, above 30 degrees Celsius. During my fieldwork period in June, July and August, for example, the midday temperature was most of the time between 30 and 38 degrees.

The village life is characterized by small scale farming. Most farms have a few cows, one or two horses, chicken and possibly one or more pigs. The cows wander around in a herd during the summer, guarded a herder and his dogs during the day. The herder is paid for this service by each farmer in cash and this is occasionally complemented with cigarettes, wine, hard liquor, bread, etc. In the evening the cows are collected by their owners, brought home for milking and kept in a stable at the farms during the night. In the morning the cows are brought to the herd again by their owners. The horses walk around freely in the surrounding during summer time. In the winter the horses are kept on the farms in the stables. Farmers may also grow some crops, mainly for own consumption and animal fodder, for instance potatoes and oats. The nearest town is located 35 km from the village. Timothy and Karen buy supplies there like tools, food, animal fodder, etc., and they go there for leisure activities, such as visiting a coffee shop or an outdoor swimming pool.

¹One of the factors that influenced this trend is a change in the land law, which facilitated the reallocation and subdivision of state land and so many urbanites became owners of plots of land in rural areas (Guran-Nica and Sofer 2012, 90). Other factors are an increase in freedom of movement (mobility), and economic growth, and *“the search for better living conditions under the influence of living standards introduced from abroad, and sometimes the longing for the idyllic rural life, are also main motivators.”* *“At present, the urban-rural flow of people from the inner parts of the metropolitan area is a dominant flow, where the upper and middle class of urban dwellers is in search of new life idylls [...]”* (Guran-Nica and Sofer 2012, 100).

From a young age Timothy had the dream to have a small farm one day, and he has been working towards this dream for many years. Timothy and Karen value highly the land they are living on; they praise the view, the sounds, and the smells; just to give an example, I quote Timothy from an email he has sent to me on December 6, 2012:

“The hay smells great, especially in the cold air. One thing I enjoy is standing between the two horses as they munch away. So many different smells come from the oils in the herbs and as they chew they release these aromas. I smell mint and pine for some reason and scents of July and August, it’s a total pleasure! We are also burning some pinewood at the moment and this gives off the most amazing smell out in the yard and by the back door as the smoke moves about. I love this smell as it reminds me of our earlier days here, this smell coming from the other houses. It totally reminds me of winter.”

Timothy and Karen expressed being satisfied with the fact that they more or less are able to decide when to do what, when to work and when to have leisure time, when to read and study or when to sleep, etc. They also value the fact that they have the resources to travel to other places and countries if they want to.

Orsolya is born and raised in the region where Timothy and Karen live. She has the Hungarian ethnicity, Romania is her home country. We have known Timothy and Karen for three years before I started to conduct my fieldwork with them. In those three years we kept contact over the phone and email, and we visited Timothy and Karen every summer.

In the summer of 2012 we got to know each other much better through the research. During April and May 2012 Orsolya and I visited Timothy and Karen a couple of times, as friends, to see each other and the farm. We talked about the things that had happened since the last time we saw each other the year before. The actual filming and research started half way of June 2012, continued in July and lasted till the beginning of August. July and August are the months in which the grass gets cut, dried in the sun, gathered and stored in the barn. They need the hay to feed their horses, cows and goats during the winter, which can last six months. Next to the haying, they needed to milk the cows, maintain their vegetable garden, look after the potato fields, and harvest their oats, all during the fieldwork period. In other words, this time of the year is a rather busy time for them, but during the warm hours, around noon they prefer to work less, and those hours we used for talking on the porch.

“Not only the personal history of ethnographers but also the disciplinary and broader sociocultural circumstances under which they work have a profound effect on which topics and peoples are selected for study” (Davies 2008, 5)

I am born and raised in The Netherlands, my parents are Dutch. At the age of twenty-seven I left The Netherlands, lived for two years in Hungary and after that for ten years in Romania, where I met Orsolya, my wife. Orsolya holds a master degree in Ethnography from Romania. We came together to Norway in 2011, where we both study visual anthropology.

The Visual Cultural Studies program (VCS) we are enrolled in had a significant influence on the applied research method(s) during our fieldwork. In both ways, on the one hand the schooling in anthropological theories, screenings of anthropological films, discussions with teachers and fellow students, etc., and on the other hand the training in using the camera, the technical aspects, but more importantly the practice and discussions about using the camera as a research tool. I studied Rural Sociology and International Development Studies at the Wageningen University, the Netherlands, and then I was introduced to an actor-oriented approach² (Wageningen School) as well as the basics of participatory research methods, but VCS takes it a step further with the introduction and usage of a camera in the research. I had experience with the camera before: I had a photo camera since I was four years old and as a teenager I got my first video-camera. I also studied a year Film at the The Royal Academy of Fine Arts, Ghent, Belgium.

Studying at VCS had an influence on the way I used the camera in the field. To give some examples: I started talking from behind the camera, something I would avoid before. I used significantly more tapes and started to take longer shots. I got somewhat less concerned with the 'visual beauty', with the aesthetics of each shot, and started to focus more on the themes, the topics of discussion, etc. I became more aware of the 'voices' of the people I am working with, their perspectives, and I became certainly more aware of my own influence on the (fieldwork) situation, on the social encounters; I became in other words more reflexive.

²*“An actor-oriented approach [...] requires strong sensitivity to the processes by which [...] the researcher [...] enters the lifeworlds of the other social actors (and vice versa), and, therefore, implies a more reflexive type of understanding [...]. In simple terms, the crux of this argument is that [...] researchers are both involved in activities in which their observations and interpretations are necessarily tacitly shaped by their own biographical and theoretical perspectives. Thus, the trick of ‘good’ [...] ethnography [...] is to learn how to turn such subjectivities to analytical advantage.”* (Long 2004, 16) *“A fundamental principle of actor-oriented research is that it must be based on actor-defined issues or problematic situations [...]”* (Long 2004, 32)

Davies explains that the relationship between researcher and researched is intimate in ethnographic research and that *“the relationships between ethnographer and informants in the field, which form the bases of subsequent theorizing and conclusions, are expressed through social interaction in which the ethnographer participates; thus ethnographers help to construct the observations that become their data.”* (Davies 2008, 4-5)

The camera and I are both part of the situation and are both also research instruments. During our studies at VCS we became aware that filming is not just passive watching and recording; it is, as Grimshaw and Ravetz point out, a conscious method, which is based on a specific and active relationship with the environment. These relationships form the foundations of *observational cinema*. (2009, 9-11) The research described in this thesis is influenced by this observational method. *“Observational method and tradition are dominant in the field of anthropological film.”* (Aaltonen, 2013) I made a film called 'Hay Days' within the framework of this research.

1.2 The rural idyll

In order to understand why Timothy and Karen migrated to a rural area in Romania it is useful to first of all try to get a better understanding of 'the image' about rural Romania they had before migrating. One thing is clear, their initial image about the rural in Romania must have been a positive image, one could even argue an idyllic image perhaps, at least an image positive enough for them to decide to migrate. *“The rural is an important concept but it contains many meanings that are not always clear, and is notoriously hard to define.”* (Bell and Osti 2010, 203) The rural can be imagined and experienced in many different ways, therefore I will first give here an introduction to the concept of the rural-idyll, and later I will relate this concept more specifically to the situation of Timothy and Karen.

The concept of the rural idyll is formulated by Michael Woods as: *“This imagines the rural to be a place of peace, tranquility and simple virtue, contrasted by the bustle and brashness of the city.”* He explains that representations of the rural idyll were popularized during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, when Europe and also North America became increasingly urbanized and industrialized. He writes that Hollywood has played a key role in the reproducing ideas of the rural idyll in the modern era, contributing to its global diffusion and that in addition to film, the rural idyll is reproduced through art, literature,

poetry, music and television productions. He recognizes that the attraction of the rural idyll can be a pull-factor in counterurbanization. (2011, 21-22).

Probably most people will easily answer the following question: if you had to choose: where would you like to live during the next five years of your life, in a city or in the countryside? This means that most people are able to immediately form an idea of the difference between a city and the countryside. As Paul Cloke writes: *“the distinction of rurality is significantly vested in its oppositional positioning to the urban.”* (2006, 18) And Michael Woods explains that the distinction between 'urban' and 'rural' may have originated from the times when the towns were enclosed and defensible spaces, as contrasted by open and uncontrollable spaces that lay outside, *“but they soon acquire greater symbolic significance as they became embedded in language and culture.”* (2011, 3)

How are those images we have of urban and rural settings formed? On the one hand through experience, by being in a city or being in the country side, and on the other hand through stories and images produced by others. Products related to rural settings and 'country living' are widely spread nowadays, as it is exemplified by the numerous magazines promoting country style living and related products, ranging from interior design, to country clothing and gardening tools. Michael Bunce observes this rightly when he points out that we are bombarded through media, *“with what appears to be an increasingly universal rural imagery, a veritable countryside industry [...] the nostalgia business, tapping into a growing attraction to rural heritage. [...] sentiments reaches its zenith in the home and garden magazine trade which has adopted 'country-style' as a motif of domestic design. [...]”* (2003, 23-24). He further puts forward that this suggests a convergence around a commodified and trivialized rural idyll which disseminates universal nostalgic images. He also believes that one can even detect a global dimension to this, in other words, the development of an international rural idyll (ibid).

The ideas of Paul Cloke seem to resonate with this thought. He suggests that the concept of rurality lives on in the popular imagination and everyday practices of the contemporary world. The rural stands both as a significant imaginative space, connecting various cultural meanings ranging from the idyllic to the oppressive, and as a material object of lifestyle desire – a place to move to, farm in, visit for a vacation, encounter different forms of nature, and generally practice alternatives to the city (2006, 18). Cloke also points it out

that literature and television programs, produced representations about rural life can influence people's perception about the rural. In his wording, "*the long fingers of idyll*" reach into our everyday lives through film, television, art, books, magazines, toys and traditional practices. We are brainwashed from birth by idyllic representational values which present a cumulative foundation for both reflexive and instinctive reactions to rurality. As such, almost without realizing, we learn to live out these knowledges in perception, attitude and practice (2003, 1).

Postman Pat is a British example of this. Postman Pat is a figure portrayed in three hundred illustrated storybooks for children, and in some forty short animation films, produced by the BBC from 1981 to the present. It is an important, iconic exemplar of the representation of 'rural idyll' in British popular culture. Each Postman Pat story follows Pat and his faithful companion, Jess, the black and white cat. (Horton 2008, 390). The imaginary village called Greendale is an icon of idyllic rurality: with a village green, a well-attended mediaeval parish church, a thriving olde worlde village Post Office, a homely unthreatened village school, and a well-maintained country manor house. It is presented as a picturesque countryside of traffic-free winding country lanes, stone cottages inhabited by 'locals', not commuters, hedgerows, dry stone walls, stone bridges over gentle streams, farmhouses, and free-range livestock, set against an unindustrialized backdrop of rolling hills, patchwork fields, and distant mountain scenery (ibid). The villagers are kind and live happily together and have their 'little daily country-life adventures'.

Shaun the Sheep, a British animated children's series, produced by Aardman Animations, is another contemporary example of a television series which is located in a rural setting, and has its influence on both youth and adults. The landscape is comparable to that of the Postman Pat animations: winding country lanes, hedgerows, dry stone walls, stone bridges over gentle streams, farmhouses, and free-range livestock, set against a backdrop of rolling hills, patchwork fields, etc. Shaun the Sheep was first broadcasted in the UK in 2007. Until 2010 eighty episodes were produced, and it has been broadcasted in 180 countries around the world. Shaun is the main protagonist of the series; he is an intelligent, creative sheep and the leader of the flock. He is clever and maintains a friendship with Bitzer, the farmer's sheepdog. The Farmer is a Welshman, who runs the farm with Bitzer at his side. The farm animals and the farmer are the main characters and experience funny anecdotes. In 2008 and 2009 two Shaun the Sheep video games were released by Nintendo. Several Flash-based games are also

available at the iOS App Store for iPhone, iPod touch, and iPad. A feature film is being developed, to be released in 2013/2014. Timmy is Shaun's cousin and the baby of the flock. Based on Timmy, Aardman Animations produce from 2009 till 2011 a spin-off show, called Timmy Time, which is aimed at pre-schoolers. (Wikipedia 2012). Furthermore, for retail sales a variety of children's toys has been produced as well.

Yet another example of how a rural idyll is portrayed can be seen in a film about the life of a Hungarian group (*Szeklers*) in Romania: in the *Savouring Europe* series, in an episode about Transylvania, published by Journeyman (Youtube 2013). The discourse the film is using subscribes in an obvious manner the image of the rural idyll: “[t]he Carpathian Mountains, the wildest part of Europe where bears and wolves still roam, where ancient machines still plough the land and a local fruit brandy is toasted at the ritual pig killing. In a Count's kitchen women create pastry and bread in surprising ways.” (Journeyman 2012). In this film we see Szekler women preparing traditional dishes in their kitchens, wearing beautiful traditional outfits, white blouses decorated with embroidery. Cookies and bread are prepared with old wooden tools and baked in large firewood-heated stone ovens. Szekler women still prepare those dishes these days, but I have never witnessed that they would wear those traditional blouses while cooking. Neither has Orsolya, who is born and raised in the same region. The use of firewood-heated stone ovens became rare as well, since most people use a smaller stove for baking nowadays, heated by gas or electricity. These ‘small’ adjustments give obviously an altered image of the rural.

It is also eloquent the example of Charles, Prince of Wales, who has a stake in Transylvania, owning land there. He was asked in an interview in the film 'Wild Carpathia': “What do you love the most about Romania?” And The Prince of Wales answered: “*It is the timelessness of it which is so remarkable, and almost out of some of these stories when you used to read as a child, it is quite remarkable, people are yearning for that sense of belonging, and identity and meaning [...]*” In the same film Count Kálnoky, who is restoring properties for The Prince of Wales in Transylvania, was asked in front of one of those properties why The Prince of Wales fell in love with this place and the Count answered: “*I suppose it is because it is a place where the local population still lives in total harmony with the environment, with nature and it is not complete and total wilderness like up in the*

mountains, it is actually hand made, but is the perfect cohabitation of men with nature.”

(Vimeo 2013)

To return to the participants of the research, Timothy’s image of the rural was influenced at a young age, when he was reading children’s books written by Enid Blyton. He read some of her books describing adventures in the countryside, farms and animals, and the accompanying happy family life. These stories formed the foundation of his dream to have a farm one day.

Enid Blyton is considered to be part of the canon of ‘classic’ texts in the UK, written for young children (alongside with Beatrix Potter’s stories, A.A. Milne’s *Winnie-the-Phooh*, Kenneth Grahame’s *Wind in the Willows*, Arthur Ransome’s *Swallows and Amazons* and Richmal Crompton’s *William stories*). Paul Cloke claims that this small exclusive shelfful of books has come to stand for ‘Children’s Literature’ per se and thus a few evocations of rurality have come to stand for ‘the represented countryside’ (Cloke 2003, 74). He writes that Enid Blyton painted an idyllic vision of rural England. *“In the most widely read of the series, ‘The famous five’ (21 books), Blyton and illustrator Eileen Soper portrayed rural England as a milieu of isolated farmhouses, country lanes, wild-flower meadows, patchwork fields, hills, moors, hedgerows, haystacks, windmills, lakes, streams, waterfalls and coastal paths [...]”* (Cloke 2003, 76). Cloke further states that Enid Blyton’s *Farm Series* portrayed *“‘snobby town cousins’ newly entering this pastoral idyll, coming to ‘delight in helping out, learning all about and adapting to farmlife ... and life in the country’ through horse riding, haymaking, mucking out, and mucking in together [...]”*. (Cloke 2003, 76 quoting Forsyth 1989, 4). Cloke concludes that these ‘classic’ texts are similar in their envisioning of England’s countryside, and as he puts it, *“more precisely, a particular nostalgic version of countryside characterized by the absence of anything other than happy, white, chivalrous children growing up in happy, patriarchally organized families in idyllic, homely rural settings”*, this countryside being unquestionably the idyllic place for childhood (2003, 78).

Michael Bunce underlines the influence that children’s literature may have in relation to the formation of an image of the rural idyll in people’s minds. He states that generations of children have absorbed images of a countryside occupied by a:

“variety of anthropomorphized wild and farm animals, of an environmental benign farming overseen by jolly farmers and their wives, and of happy children enjoying free-roaming adventures in fields and woods in which the countryside often transforms into an imaginary place (the latest vision of this being the Harry Potter novels). [...] To a large extent, much of the imagery is absorbed in childhood. Given the formative significance of the early years, exposure of even small amounts of children’s literature must result in the subconscious absorption of stereotypically idyllic perceptions of rurality.” (2003, 22-23)

Michael Bunce addresses the ‘commercialization of the countryside’, the ‘nostalgia business’, ‘the commodification of the rural idyll’ and he explains that the significance of the image of the rural idyll may vary from person to person. He believes that perhaps most people have no sense of and no interest in a rural idyll. For other people it represents an image of the countryside with which they readily identify when prompted, but which does not play a significant part in their lives. For yet another group it may influence what they read and watch and the ways in which they decorate their houses. And for some it will translate into action in the search for actual experience of a rural idyll in countryside recreation or country living (2003, 26). Timothy and Karen belong to the latter group of people.

As mentioned above, not only the media has influence on the creation of an image of the rural idyll, also life experiences can contribute to this. Timothy has been working with cows for many years, for example. Through his work and by living in rural settings in the UK Timothy had an idea of what the rural was like in the UK. The question naturally arises: what ideas about the rural in Romania made Timothy and Karen decide to migrate?

Let us first briefly look at what Timothy and Karen did not like about their living surroundings in Wales. Timothy disliked the fact that all the houses seemed abandoned during the day, since most people living there were commuting to a nearby town for their work. Karen had one horse in Wales, which she took to Romania as well, but the horse could not wander around freely in the UK as Karen wanted. Timothy and Karen also wanted to have more land and more animals, so that they could be more self-sufficient regarding food production. They wanted to be able to produce organically farmed products, possibly free of pesticides, medication, like anti-biotics, and hormones.

In 2003 Timothy and Karen saw a film on television, *The last peasants: A good wife*, directed by Angus Macqueen. The film “*depicts the agony of the peasant culture that has survived two World Wars and half a century of communism, but is threatened with extinction after just a decade of democracy*” (Astra film 2012). After seeing this film, in which they saw farmers working the land, using horse and cart, Timothy drove to Romania and travelled around to see the countryside. He saw people working together on the land, families working together, and often using horses and carts. He liked the beauty of the landscape and he returned to the UK enthusiastically about what he had seen and experienced. As a result of this, Timothy and Karen started gathering information and preparing their migration to Romania. It was clear to them that for European standards they would be able to buy land and a house relatively cheap in Romania.

In other words, their image of the rural in Romania was the following, briefly summarized: a beautiful landscape, with affordable smallholdings, inhabited by people who were working the land together, with ‘traditional methods’, often using horsepower. Thus, this was in contrast with rural Wales, where properties were more expensive, the agricultural techniques modern, and people virtually absent during the week days. Finally but importantly, the land climate of Romania was also more attractive to Timothy and Karen than the ‘rainy’ weather in Wales.

In the BBC series called *Countryfile*, in an episode about Romania produced in 2007, the migration of Timothy and Karen from the UK to Romania is presented among other themes. Again, in this documentary the rural is portrayed in a certain way. The narrator is talking about Romania in terms like: traveling back in time, unspoiled countryside, villages untouched by the centuries, the main transport is still the horse, etc. Authenticity, old ways and going back in time are considered to be assets, with the potential of attracting tourists. Certain aspects of Romania are presented as commodities in the tourism business: the locally made brandy is named 'firewater' and is 'the taste of Romania'; forests of Romania are now as the forests of the UK might have looked like five hundred years ago. It is stressed that in Romania one can find things which are lost in the UK. A comparison is made between the farming in Romania and the UK: the work is done by animals and hand, which is hard labor, but 'charming'. While the presenter is walking through a village he states that he 'absorbs the gentle life' there. We see a Romanian who is fixing up old houses as guesthouses, putting in bathrooms for the guests. They will serve locally grown and prepared dishes for potential

guests. We see an old woman knitting socks; we see many cows and sheep and a herder. The narrator says: *“machines don't feature at all, except for the old moped.”* We see a passing horse and a moped, but the attentive viewer sees a parked car in the background as well, which the editor might have overlooked. The tendency is that everything is ‘ruralized’, made seem more rural than it was, in a rather romantic way.

Timothy and Karen are shown leaving their house in Wales, and the narrator tells the viewer: *“They pack up their western way of life and head for a simpler existence in Romania”, “sold all their furniture and modern gadgets.”* As such, their life in Romania is presented as being *simpler* as compared to their life in Wales, but simpler in what sense one may wonder. Then a jump in time follows, we find ourselves six weeks later, in the village where Timothy and Karen moved. The narration continues: *“the day now starts not with commuting to the city, but by chopping wood, gathering water and crossing the garden to go to the loo”, “the neighbours helped to unpack their stuff and gave information”*. In the film, Timothy and Karen explained that some electricians came to connect them to the electricity network, and that they did not expect money or anything, and this in contrast with the image they had about Romania, that you had to bribe people for almost anything. They conclude that people are helpful and friendly. The interviewer from the BBC asks Timothy and Karen why they choose such a remote place, Karen answers: *“We just wanted something Olde Worlde”*, and Timothy says: *“We like the idea that people have horse and carts, and farm with ploughs and that they carry on with their traditional ways”*, that it appealed to them that the neighbours lived there for six generations, that they didn't really move on in time. (BBC 2007).

What strikes me in this documentary is the terminology used in relation to the rural, words as: unspoiled, untouched, charming, gentle, simpler, and remote. And the notion that the time *“stopped”* in Romania, expressed in sentences as *“traveling back in time”*, *“villages untouched by the centuries”*, or developments even being frozen in time, as Timothy said about the neighbours that *“they didn't really move on in time”*, and he likes *“their traditional ways”*. Karen uses the saying *“Olde Worlde”*. In this BBC documentary it seems therefore that developments in rural Romania having more or less been frozen in time, and that this point of view is shared by both the narrator and Timothy and Karen, they seem to have similar outlooks on rural Romania.

While discussing this documentary with Timothy and Karen in the summer of the fieldwork however, Timothy mentioned that ‘the people from the BBC’ were skilful in having Timothy and Karen say those sentences, which would fit the overall tendency of the documentary. - This was also a reason why they welcomed warmly my method of doing research, which obviously let them express themselves freely and the way they wanted. - Thus, on the one hand Timothy and Karen did say these things, but in fact they might have had more nuanced ideas about rural Romania back then already, realizing that time is not standing still anywhere.

1.3 Participants in the research

Timothy has an English, and Karen an Austrian nationality. Karen has lived in the UK together with Timothy for 18 years; at the time of the research they were married for 22 years.

Timothy is born in 1966 in Kent, South East England. He moved to Exeter in the southwest where he attended three schools up to the age of 11. His family moved to the country in 1977, where he attended Primary and Secondary school. After this, he had a year of practical experience on a dairy farm before attending agricultural college in 1984. Employment began in 1985 with the then named Ministry of Agriculture. The same year he was offered a position with the Milk Marketing Board, which took him to work in North Devon as a cattle breeding technician. Subsequently, a promotion took him to Swindon, Wiltshire where he also met Karen in 1990. They both moved to Lancashire, Timothy continuing his career with the 'Genus' company. Their next move was to Mid Wales until 2001 when they moved again for Timothy to take up a job as Herdsman of a large dairy farm in Shropshire. From here the idea of moving to Romania began, starting in 2003 with Timothy taking a trip to Maramures, Romania. They moved to Romania in February 2007.

Karen is born in 1970 in Austria. After basic schooling she attended Hotel and Catering College in Austria. She completed college in 1989 and went on to work as an au-pair near Oxford, England. She met Timothy the following year and moved to Wiltshire to be with him. They got married a few months later in 1991. A string of unfulfilling or low paid jobs led to the decision at the age of 25 to return to college, followed by University in Liverpool to study for a Diploma in Midwifery. Karen worked as a midwife for almost 5 years before moving to their farm in Romania.

They sold most of their belongings in the UK and bought a small farm in Romania, which they are running since 2007. They have five hectares of land, which consists mainly of grass land. They keep animals: two horses, two cows, three goats and a billy goat, chicken, ducks, geese, and several cats and dogs, and a pot-bellied pig. One horse is used for wood collection and when the well dries up for water collection as well. The cows and goats are for milk production, for own consumption of milk, cheese and whipped cream; the chicken for eggs, and all the other animals for company. The contact with the animals is of great importance for Timothy and Karen. They love the animals and they are unable to eat the meat of their own animals, although they are not vegetarian. On one side of their house they have a small fenced garden of about ten square meter for vegetables and herbs. There they grow small amounts of vegetables like carrots, onion, garlic, spinach, lettuce, beetroot and a few pumpkins and herbs like chive and parsley. And there are also a few red berry, blackcurrant and raspberry bushes. Nearby the house they have several old fruit trees, apple, pear and plum trees. Most of them bare fruit, especially the plum trees. Further away from the house, hundred twenty meters behind the barn is a larger plot of about thousand square meter of which the soil is ploughed, and on half of which they plant potatoes and on the other half they plant oats. The oats are mainly animals fodder, and the potatoes are both animal fodder and for own consumption. On the edge of this larger plot Timothy planted beans, all around.

Timothy and Karen bought two small cars in Romania, and they use on the farm their old jeep from the UK. They have a trailer for behind the jeep and a carriage for the horse.



Working with trailer behind jeep

They have a mechanical grass cutting machine, which runs on petrol, for hay making and they also have a washing machine, which they fill up by hand. They have a stove on wood inside and a smaller stove on gas on the balcony. They also have a TV, two laptops and mobile phones. As far as I know, this is all the mechanical and electronic equipment they have.



Timothy with the grass cutting machine



Karen cooking on gas stove outside



Timothy with laptop connected to internet

They keep contact with family and friends via internet, they write emails and occasionally they use Skype, for example to call the parents of Timothy. They use the internet also as a source of information.

Most of the time they spend on and around their farm. The main reasons for them to go off their property are: bringing the cows to the common fields and collecting them again, searching for and visiting their horses which wander around freely together with other horses on common fields during summer months, letting the goats out to eat and roam freely in the surroundings, going to the local village store, (which they only do when they unexpectedly need something for the household, like butter to make cookies for unexpected guests for example), going to enjoy the surroundings (walking, cycling, jogging, driving, etc.), going to a larger village or nearby town for leisure and/or buying goods (like clothes, tools, spare parts for machinery, petrol, washing powder, food products like olive oil, pepper and salt, cakes, etc.), arranging administrative things, occasionally visiting neighbours or friends, and of course when one of them is going abroad. On an average they go once or twice per week to a nearby village or town. During the winter they stay most of the days on their property, since then the animals are most of the time in the barn or on the courtyard, and not out on common lands.

During the summer days we were there a typical day would look the following: Timothy would wake up early around five o'clock in the morning and lit the stove and make coffee, check his email and read some news on the internet, then wake up Karen and bring her

coffee. Together they milk the cows and the goats, after which they give milk to all the dogs, the pig and the cats, the rest of the milk is kept in the house for own consumption. They collect water from the well next to the house - if the well is not dried up, other wise they have to drive out to a nearby well to get the water from there -, every day they need around a hundred litres of water for the animals and themselves. One of them cleans out the barn and the other brings the cows to the common herd, around seven in the morning. They also release the other animals, the goats, dogs, geese and chicken and feed them a bit of grain. After that they have a small breakfast, some backed eggs or sandwiches for example. Depending on the weather they might either stay inside to read and relax or they continue with farm work, like letting the goats graze outside their property, collecting firewood, or shopping wood with an axe, or flattening out moles heaps, etc.



Timothy letting goats out to graze

Somewhere around or after noon they eat lunch, which can be either bread again, or some lettuce for example. After lunch they either continue with the farm work or do some household work inside like doing the dishes or laundry, or go for a walk or bicycle ride in the surrounding for example, but when it is very warm during mid summer, then they might just relax and drink another coffee or a tea. There is often a pleasant breeze going over the plateau and they might enjoy sitting on their terrace next to the house.



Doing dishes inside

During the hay making season they cut grass on their field behind the barn in the late afternoon and evening, and they also have to collect the cows again, bring them home and milk them. Soon after they are finished with putting the animals back in the barn they shower and have evening diner, for example boiled potatoes or other vegetables and some meat, or just some sandwiches again. They might still read a bit or watch some television in the bed, before falling asleep around nine or ten o'clock in the evening.



Cutting grass



Karen milking a cow

Timothy and Karen told that financially it has been good to sell most of their belongings, their house and gadgets in the UK and exchange their pounds for RON and buy their farm. The price of the farm in Romania was a fraction of the price they got for their house in the UK. They didn't have to invest much in the new property. They invested in a few renovations, like improving the roof of the house and the barn, and they built a small terrace,

which was done with for Timothy and Karen relatively cheap local labour force. They also bought two cars of the brand Dacia, which is among the cheapest cars you can buy in Romania. The yearly road tax and also taxes on properties are low in Romania. They have no bills for water and waste collection, they only pay monthly bills for mobile and internet connection and electricity. They keep the consumption of electricity low. They do buy gas in portable containers for a small gas stove outside. They heat water and cook on a wood stove as well, for which they collect wood themselves, and in addition they might also buy some wood for heating the house during winter time. They pay for petrol for transport, and sometimes they pay for an airplane ticket. Food, like fruit and vegetables, are cheap in Romania (although prices are slowly increasing during the last few years). They are able to cover most of their expenses by the interest of the money they made by selling their house in the UK, which they have set aside in the bank. In addition, they receive European subsidy from the CAP fund in Brussels for ecological farming practices. And recently they also looked for additional income generating activities, like babysitting and cheese and honey production.

Timothy and Karen are content with the fact that they are producing their own food, and that they live a healthy life, meaning for them, among others: physical exercise and time to rest, read and study. Most of all they like the fact that they can more or less decide how they spend their time, of course within the framework of obligations of the necessary farm work. They don't consider the farm work particularly difficult or heavy.

1.4 The (adjusted) rural idyll - relations with villagers

“Images and representations (meanings) of the rural are not static; neither is the rural idyll.” (Van Dam, Heins and Elbersen, 2002, 473)

I know from own experience that it can be an emotional process to come in terms with the fact that the image (once cherished) of the rural is not fitting the reality (any longer). The realization that the reality is not as idyllic as one would have liked or imagined it to be can be hard and sometimes even painful.

For two years on a row the water well of Timothy and Karen dried up, since there was insufficient rainfall during the summer and autumn seasons. This means that they have to collect water from another well during winter. When the road conditions permit, they go by car to collect one hundred litres of water, the amount they need each day for the animals and

themselves. Occasionally, especially on windy days, there is too much snow on the road and then they have to melt snow on their wood stove, which is significantly more time consuming and labor intensive. Timothy and Karen do not complain about this situation though. I quote Timothy from an email he has sent to me on December 14, 2012:

“Here the snow did come, it’s very deep now, up to 1 meter in the corners of our yard, it’s no problem though and getting water is just a matter of routine. I am so grateful the snow-plough guys come every day. I know it would be so difficult without this road access, without water. I like this kind of survival lifestyle where the elements have such a strong impact on daily activity and what is good is that even if it’s such a cold day I know soon it will change and maybe the temperature will rise and the sun will shine and show me the most beautiful scenery. I think today will be such a day after 2 whole days of snow and fog I can see stars as I write this morning and the faint orange and blue glow around the Harghita mountain as dawn approaches. It will be a beautiful day for sure!!!!”

Over the years I myself experienced disappointments when I had to adjust to changes, sometimes conflicting with my image of the rural idyll. As an example I could give a village, not so far from where Timothy and Karen live. In the surroundings of this village one can find fine clay, and the village is famous for producing pottery from this clay. When I came there for the first time in the summer of 2000 all pottery was made by hand and backed in large wood stoves. Over the years some producers started to make use of other production methods, using electric stoves. The pottery is sold next to the road, in small tourists shops. In the past they were selling other handmade products from the region next to the pottery, like shirts and table clothes with embroidery, woven baskets, wood carved products, like flutes, chess boards and children’s toys, and also sheep skins, and little decorations made out of mushroom, etc. Nowadays they sell a number of other goods as well, for example colourful plastic balls, baskets imported from China, towels with nudes printed on them, and manufactured shirts and table cloths, plastic toys, etc. The bright colours on the plastic products disturb me, I find it difficult to get used to the new situation, and I experience nostalgic feelings towards the in my opinion more ‘traditional’ and therefore more ‘authentic’ products.

I have witnessed something similar happening to market places during the past ten years. Vegetable and other food products were often sold at small open-air market places.

Small farmers were growing a variety of vegetables, herbs, fruits and nuts, seeds, flowers, and they were also producing dairy products, eggs and meat, wine and brandy, and jam, pickles, tomato juice, rasped horse radish, etc.; they were able to sell these products at those open air markets. Over the years the open air markets were replaced by indoor markets, where sellers had to pay a significantly higher amount for renting a table, in order to sell their products. As a result, many small farmers were driven out of the business, and slowly more and more products were replaced by import products from other European countries. Often the taste of the products would suffer; imported tomatoes from greenhouses for example, were less tasty than the home grown tomatoes.

The image of the rural in the village did change in certain aspects for Timothy and Karen once they started living there as well. One of the perceptions that changed most, and especially for Timothy, was their view on family and work-relations in the village. Before living in the village Timothy was hoping to work the land together with other villagers, like he had seen on his first travel to Romania. *“Picturesque, farming, community, recreational, bucolic: these are the words of the conventional rural idyll, of the aesthetic of pastoral landscapes, of humans working in harmony with nature and the land and with each other, of a whole scene of contentment and plenty”* (Bunce 2003, 14). Back then he had the impression that *“people were happy and chatting and laughing while working the fields together”*, as he described it himself. He had the idea that in rural Romanian-Hungarian villages family ties were tight and that people were relying on those relationships. He thought that this would contribute to happiness and wellbeing, and he was hoping to become part of this, as he was missing this in the UK.

As in parts of Norway the “dugnad” used to be an element of the social organization of the peasant community, where work was done by a group of neighbours in the interest of one man or farm, in Transylvania the “kaláka” was a similar form of co-operative work. The Hungarian word “kaláka” (in Romanian “clacă”) refers to a form of labour where members of different households came together in order to help one of the households. If there was in someone's household a larger workload or need for a special expertise than was available within the respective household, due to a peak in seasonal work or due to a disaster, for example a burned down barn, and that household could not or didn't want to pay for the labour, a “kaláka” could be organized. Building a barn, stable or house, carrying stones and

sand, chopping wood and transporting the wood, haymaking, harvesting, etc., are all activities that could be organized through a “kaláka”. (Szabó 2013, 1-6)

Szabó Töhötöm explains that there used to be two basic models, which could be at play simultaneously: 1) household A helps household B, and after a while household B helps household A in return, a direct model, and 2) household A helps household B, but B does not help A in return, but helps C, C helps D and so on, a circular model. The last model was fairly common and worked based on relationships of the villagers, like neighbourhood, kinship, friendship, etc. Nowadays the first model is still practiced, as Szabó Töhötöm writes: “*there is local cooperation the participants of which call kaláka, but in such cases cooperation refers to closely connected relatives, neighbours and friends. And because the boundaries of the cooperating group become so tight, the kaláka presents direct symmetry and balanced reciprocity.*” (2013, 7-15)

During the first year when Timothy and Karen were living in the village they accepted help from neighbours and other villagers, and they were also helping those in return as much as they could. They were aware that reciprocity is still common in the region and they tried to participate in the system of reciprocity. Especially in the beginning, almost everybody in the village wanted to befriend Timothy and Karen. At first Timothy and Karen were overwhelmed by the friendliness and all the help offered. Then one day a neighbour said to Timothy: “*don't be naïve!*” Timothy realized that the neighbour meant that everything has a price, and that it was expected that the help would be returned in one way or another.

Timothy and Karen were helping people in return. They would for example transport people to and from the nearby town with their car. In the village not everybody has their own car, and hitch hiking is a common practise. Timothy helped several neighbours cutting grass with his grass cutting machine and he would take people on a trip as a leisure activity, etc. But Timothy and Karen were not always satisfied with the help they got from the villagers. Often they had a different point of view on how things could (or should) be done. Just to give an example: in the first year Timothy and Karen couldn't produce enough hay themselves yet and they bought hay from the neighbours. The neighbours wanted to help with the transport of the hay and piled up the carriage too high according to Timothy and Karen. As Karen said to me: “*It all became wobbly, and it started to fall over*”. They would have preferred to drive over to the neighbours several times, instead of having to collect the hay which fell of the carriage on

the way home. They described several of these kind of instances, where the villagers were offering their services, but were overdoing things according to Timothy and Karen, who explained that they would have preferred to do things more calmly, and step by step.

As time passed Timothy noticed that in the village foreigners tend to be looked upon as being special, and that people from the West are often considered as being rich, and because of that tensions started to emerge. Villagers started to ask favours from Timothy and Karen: to take them to the city, to bring them this or that from the city, they were asking for petrol (without paying for it), etc. At first Timothy and Karen were trying to help whenever they could and give whatever was asked for, but the flow of requests seemed endless to Timothy and Karen. *“There was no stop-valve,”* as Timothy said. There was according to him no reasonable balance between the 'given services and goods' by Timothy and Karen to the villagers and the 'paid back services and goods' by the villagers to Timothy and Karen. And those services that they did get were often not satisfying the wishes of Timothy and Karen, as explained above. So, there was a tension growing within Timothy and Karen, since on the one hand they would like to be part of the reciprocity system in the village, but at the other hand they felt that the costs were increasingly larger for them compared to the profits. This was reinforced by the fact that Timothy and Karen were less and less dependent on other villagers, since they got their farm up and running and if they needed extra help, they could easily afford it and then they could also set the terms and conditions much easier under which the work should be performed.



Karen receiving a gift

Gift giving is important social exchange in a human society, as Yunxiang Yan writes: *“The give-and-take of gifts in everyday life creates, maintains and strengthens various social bonds – be they cooperative, competitive or antagonistic – which in turn define the identities of persons.”* (2005, 246) *“Marcel Mauss laid out the theoretical foundation for the anthropology of the gift when he published 'The gift' in 1925. He notes that gift exchange is characterized by the obligations of giving, receiving and returning. Chief among the three obligations is that of the returning [...] The bonds created by gifts are thus the mutually-dependent ties between persons. Here we can see that the fundamental issue in Mauss’s analysis of the gift is to determine how people relate to things and, through things, relate to each other.”* (Yan 2005, 248-249) James Carrier explains that in the Maussian sense, a gift *“includes all things transacted as part of social, as distinct from more purely monetary, relations, and it includes labor and immaterial things like names and ideas as well as physical objects. [...] It is not the form and ceremony of the giving and getting that make a transaction a gift. Instead, it is the relationship that exists between the transactors and the relationship between them and what is transacted.”* (Carrier 1995, 19-20) If we see gifts in this broad Maussian sense, we can say that the even though Timothy and Karen gave many gifts, in material sense and immaterial sense, many were not answered by (satisfying) gifts in return by the villagers. The returning of gifts were either unsatisfying according to Timothy and Karen, or lacking all together. As Yunxiang Yan writes: *“the core of reciprocity is the notion of equivalent return or balanced exchange”*. (2005, 251) There was no balanced exchange between the villagers and Timothy and Karen, according to them, even though the community still functions to a large extent based on reciprocity processes nowadays.

If we try to analyse the situation from the villagers point of view we might conclude that the villagers were 'investing' in Timothy and Karen from the very beginning. Many of them tried to befriend Timothy and Karen, and to help them setting up their farm. They would for example help them with information, or with putting hay on their carriage, etc. They also offered Timothy and Karen food and drinks, they invited them in their houses. The villagers were trying to build up a relationship with Timothy and Karen.

In case the villagers indeed saw Timothy and Karen as wealthy, coming from the West, then they might have tried to strengthen their relationship with Timothy and Karen by asking for gifts, which would create a 'debt', in the form of outstanding claims/expectations of return

of gifts, of Timothy and Karen towards them. The villagers might have reasoned that Timothy and Karen were wealthy enough to 'invest' in relationships in the village this way.

This increasingly growing 'debt', in the logic of reciprocity, would only strengthen the relationships further, unless the built up expectations in the chain of mutually giving and receiving is broken by one of the parties at a certain point. And that is precisely what happened: at one point Timothy and Karen decided to stop giving gifts, they consciously stopped providing services and stopped giving material goods to the villagers, since they more and more felt frustrated about the in their opinion unbalanced profit-cost equilibrium. The decision of Timothy and Karen to stop giving gifts inherently also meant that they excluded themselves from being part (or better said trying to be part) of the reciprocity system.

The fact that the villagers were asking Timothy and Karen gifts, without returning most of those in one way or another, shows that the villagers see Timothy and Karen as unequal and different from themselves, and according to the above described logic, it does show that the villagers were trying to strengthen their relationship with Timothy and Karen, based on the underlying principles of reciprocity. The fact that Timothy and Karen stopped providing gifts to the villagers was probably perceived by the villagers as a sign that something fundamentally had changed, and that the relationship was perhaps not as strong as the villagers hoped it was (going to be).

Because of their decision to stop relying on the reciprocity system in the village Timothy and Karen had to deal with all the farm work themselves, unless they would be willing to arrange for paid labour. Or they had to find other forms of help from outside the village, like assistance from family, friends and/or Woofers³, etc., which Timothy and Karen were not too keen on, since they didn't like the prospect of having to take care of guests, to cook for them for example. This inherently meant that their dependence on each other grew even more. Timothy and Karen had to be a team, without one of them co-operating they would not be able to run their farm and live their life in the same way. If Karen would drop out of the equation than Timothy could not go away from the farm for more than a day so easily anymore, and travel abroad for example, and visa versa.

³ WWOOF Organizations promote awareness of ecological farming practices by providing volunteers with the opportunity to live and learn on organic properties. A volunteer can be called a Woofers. - The term WWOOF is an abbreviation and originates from "Working Weekends on Organic Farms" (www.woof.net)

It further became clear to Timothy and Karen that in the village not everybody liked each other. Some people were getting upset if Timothy and Karen would work with certain other people. People also started to gossip to Timothy and Karen. Timothy realized that if he for example would help his direct neighbour with cutting grass, than that direct neighbour would get in trouble because others were getting jealous. Later Timothy also got to hear some of the gossip which was going around in the village about Timothy and Karen themselves, for example that they were growing cannabis, which was obviously not true. They just had some weeds in their oats because they were not using chemicals to spray against weeds and some of those weeds looked apparently like cannabis to some of the villagers. And there were also occasions where people wanted to be helpful, but did things differently than Timothy and Karen would have liked. Eventually Timothy and Karen stopped accepting help from others, and stopped helping others in return as well. They had to cope with the farm work themselves, and if they really needed external help, for putting wooden singles on a roof for example, they had to hire somebody to do the work.

In the process Timothy's image about people helping each other out happily and with joy got altered. He sees now that there can be feud among family members and villagers of all sorts, which can have an effect on reciprocal working relationships. Because of some of these negative experiences, especially Timothy went through some difficult times, emotionally. Nevertheless, during the fieldwork period Timothy told that he is no longer feels strong emotions related to the fact that the working relationships with the other villagers has ceased to exist. He would have like to work together more, but for the moment they chose to protect themselves from further irritations and disappointments.

Another issue that changed the image of 'the happy villagers', is the fact that Timothy and Karen saw that many villagers suffer from depression. Timothy talked about neighbours taking anti-depressives, and about alcohol abuse in the region. People drink locally produced brandy (called *pálinka* in Hungarian), beer and other alcohol containing beverages. According to Timothy the suicide rate is rather high. "*They have no other choice than being here and farm*", Timothy said more than once. Living on farming alone is economically more and more difficult in Romania. In order to survive small-scale farmers are searching for other forms of income on the side. Dissatisfaction and depression of locals can be understood by the often lacking possibilities for alternative forms of income on the one hand and the increased costs,

for electricity, petrol, etc., and longing for modern luxury products on the other. Timothy said, “*For me the grass is greener here... Not for other villagers...*”, making a gesture with his arm, pointing to the neighbours, “*but for me it really is.*”

Timothy and Karen often mentioned the differences between the two of them and the other villagers during the fieldwork; what follows are some examples:

Timothy and Karen had ordered wooden singles to replace the roof of their barn and house. This used to be a common way of roofing in the past, but is no longer in use by farmers in the region. These days, wooden singles are only used for old churches in Romania, for renovation purposes. New materials, tiles or plastic, are in general cheaper and perhaps last longer, and are perceived more modern, and as such more desirable by most of the other villagers. The interior of the house of Timothy and Karen is looking ‘old fashioned’ as well, with wooden furniture, which they bought second hand, and without electric kitchen utilities, with the exception of a washing machine, and white, green and brown colours. In the village other households try to modernize their interiors and paint with bright colours, yellow, orange, pink, and they buy modern furniture. They have the tendency to modernize their houses, while Timothy and Karen try to create and maintain a certain ‘authentic look’, which fits the image of their rural idyll.⁴ “*There are many different ways in which the rural can be imagined, described, performed and materialized, and as such, arguably many different rurals.*” (Woods 2011, 264-265) “*This illustrates that plural rural idylls can be identified whereby each group of rural agents 'owns' its own rurality.*” (Meijering, van Hoven and Huigen, 2007, 362)

Other examples are work ethics and gender roles. Timothy and Karen have different ideas of doing things in and around the house. For example Karen is not cooking and cleaning the kitchen every day, like most women in the village do. Karen also does not cook as many soups as the other women in the village do. *Leves* (=the Hungarian word for soup) is usually the first course of the lunch in the region, quite central and unmissable in the meals. Karen goes jogging in training outfit, which is not done by other people in the village either. As she says, people think she is strange running without having a good reason for that, like fire or fleeing from the bear. Timothy is cutting the grass at the end of the day, because it is cooler in the evening than during mid-day, and even more importantly since then the glucose

⁴Orsolya and I did another research in the same village in 2009, and then we could observe how villagers were modernizing the interiors of their houses.

percentage in the grass is the highest, which makes the hay better quality food for the animals. Other villagers cut grass from morning till evening, and are done in fewer days. I once witnessed Timothy and Karen making hay stacks from dry oats, and then Karen said: *“look at these asymmetric heaps, the villagers will disagree with those”*. Timothy and Karen sometimes have the impression that other villagers think that they are lazy, but they do just as much work as the others, only differently. Timothy and Karen said on several occasions that the villagers see the work of Timothy and Karen as a hobby, and that it is therefore easy for them. Timothy explained that the villagers base this idea probably on the fact that they were able to choose this lifestyle, and that the villagers might feel they themselves have no other choice, that farming is something they simply have to do.

Timothy and Karen treat their animals different than the other villagers. They keep one horse for ‘pleasure’, they have him as a company animal and sometimes Karen is riding on him. The other villagers only have working horses, used for farming practices and transport. Timothy and Karen feel that for the villagers it is difficult to understand why to keep and feed a horse for any other purpose, as there is too much work involved from their point of view. Another example is that Timothy and Karen do not eat their own animals; they are too attached to them. They rather sell their animals and buy meat from somewhere else. Timothy and Karen say that this is not understood in the village either, but villagers buy the pigs and calves from Timothy and Karen. Yet another example is that Timothy and Karen bring their cats to a veterinarian when they are sick, which the villagers would be more reluctant to do, since cats can be easily replaced and represent no value. Timothy and Karen said that the animals in the village are sometimes exploited, treated badly, and even beaten. For example, it is difficult for Timothy and Karen to understand how people are able to sell a horse that has worked hard for many years, just because it has become old and as such can not be used for working purposes any longer. Timothy also has knowledge about cow breeding. He arranged that one of his local cows got inseminated with ‘Belgium blue’ semen. It is known that Belgium blues deliver difficult and therefore veterinarians usually come to do a caesarian section. What is less known is that if the Belgium blue is cross breed with another type of cow, a natural delivery is often possible. Timothy and Karen got a beautiful large calf, delivered naturally, which they were able to sell for a good price. Timothy is trying to share this kind of knowledge with the villagers, but so far no other villager tried to cross breed their cows with Belgium blue. On the other hand, Timothy and Karen were the first farmers in the

village who used electric fencing in order to keep their horses on their own property. This example was quickly followed though by several other farmers in the village, who saw the convenience and flexibility of electric fencing.

Timothy and Karen migrated to the village, but not with the idea that this would be their final destination. They both told me on several occasions that this village was not necessarily their final destination. Timothy was playing with the thought of "getting old" in the village though; he told me for example that he would like to replace the cows with some goats if he can no longer handle the cows anymore, physically. He explained that it is easier to handle goats, since they are smaller and less strong and less heavy. Karen told me that she likes living in the village, but that she also keeps the possibility open that they might move away one day, and do something totally else in their lives still.

I can imagine that the prospect of the possibility to be able to move away from the village again, made the initial decision to migrate to Romania easier for Timothy and Karen. I also believe that, while living in the village, the possibility to move away one day again also gave Timothy and Karen some peace of mind. They did not have to feel that they are tied down completely, and as such it could be that it made their stay easier for them. Timothy and Karen have a high degree of motility. Motility, defined as the capacity to move, can either target mobility or not. [...] motility concerns the aspirations of actors, which are not necessarily focused on career goals (Canzler, Kaufmann, Kesselring 2008, 5). They have the capacity to move, they have the required skills and finances as well, and they can make use of this capacity in the future, if they wish to do so. Whether their motility will translate into mobility depends on their aspirations. This is in line with the ideas of Vincent Kaufmann and Bertrand Montulet, who believe that motility "*serves the players' aspirations and constitutes a capital they can mobilize to realize their projects*" (2008, 46). I find it interesting that Timothy and Karen told me on several occasions that they might move away from the village one day, but that they did not describe where to, or how they imagined their lives away from the village. As far as I know, they did not develop any future plans in relation to this 'moving away from the village'. Apparently the idea of the possibility of moving away from the village one day in the future is what is important for them. Their capacity to move, their motility, seems to contribute to their mental well-being.

I can relate to similar feelings I experienced when I was living with Orsolya in our house in a Romanian village. This same idea, of the possibility to move away from that village one day, in case we wouldn't like to live in the village anymore, gave me certainly peace of mind. Without this possibility, I believe that I would have become restless, and I would probably have felt the need to at least work on creating the possibility to move away one day. In other words, our motility contributed to the ability to enjoy our stay in the Romanian village. Without it, I would have felt trapped in the situation, and therefore we would not have been able to relax the way we did. Our happiness depended partly on our possibility to move away from the village whenever we wanted. In the village where we lived many other villagers did not have the same degree of motility we had. Many villagers did not have the means to travel, many of them were never abroad. Timothy went for two months to Bali and after that he made a trip to the Balkan. Karen can travel back and forth to Austria, to visit family and friends, and go to Switzerland to babysit. I can imagine that other villagers have a much lower degree of motility. I can also imagine that it must not always be easy for those villagers to be so tied to the place. The grass might not seem that green for them, having to deal with the local conditions year in and year out.

During the screening of the film 'Hay Days' at the International Festival of Ethnological Documentary Films in Kratovo, Macedonia, I got the question why in the film I did not focus on the relationships between Timothy and Karen and the other villagers. A relevant question, since that would situate them better in their surrounding. At the time I answered briefly that this is indeed interesting to study, but that during the editing process I decided not to make this topic the focus of the film, that I chose to focus on their daily activities, the human-animal relationship, their personal life stories, etc. The longer version of the answer could be the following: in the film 'Hay Days' we do see villagers passing by in the background, namely two men on a carriage who make a short wave gesture and they exchange verbal greetings, followed by two girls dressed up in Hungarian traditional costumes (since they celebrate the last school day of the year), who exchange greetings in Hungarian with Timothy.



Villagers passing

During my days in the field, working together with Timothy and Karen I noticed that contacts with other villagers were rare and if they occurred they were short and superficial, very much like that scene in the film. This is partly due to the fact that the conversations were in Hungarian, and Timothy and Karen had limited knowledge of the Hungarian language, but mainly because Timothy and Karen chose to keep a distance themselves. Therefore the film is reflecting what I have witnessed; there was limited contact with other villagers in reality as well, which is felt in the film. The question from the audience shows that this lack is felt and

noticed, which I find accurate. That is what I was hoping for while editing the film. Why Timothy and Karen chose to distance themselves from the other villagers has been discussed during the fieldwork at several occasions, and I have parts of those discussions on tape, but I decided not to include fragments of these discussions in the film, to great relief of Timothy and Karen, who were afraid that I would include things they had said about their direct neighbours for example. I believe the reason Timothy and Karen were open to have more personal information included in the film, like the infertility between them and that Timothy is adopted as a baby, was partly thanks to the fact that I did not include fragments of discussions about their relationships with the other villagers.

2.1 Topics emerging in the field

As described above, Orsolya and I knew Timothy and Karen for about three years before we entered into the research relationship. In these three years we became friends and whenever we met we were discussing our experiences of living in a rural village in Romania. Orsolya and I have similar experiences, since we also lived under similar conditions as they do, therefore there was a common and fertile ground for sharing experiences, because a) we could easily relate to each others stories, ideas, and enjoyment and happiness, and also disappointments, frustrations and irritations, surprises, etc. and b) there was a level of trust and a familiarity between us, which allowed for personal, engaged and relaxed conversations. The fact that I knew the life situation of Timothy and Karen, that we were close friends and have spent much time together I consider therefore assets in the research. It made it much easier for us to understand their interpretations of their life-situation, since we could compare those to our own experiences; we had acted under similar possibilities and constraints and therefore our own perspective and outlook on things had been similar. In other words, we could readily relate to their experiences, and 'unravel the meaning they confer on events', as Barth wrote. (1993, 105)

The already established relationship between the four of us made it easy to communicate and discuss, including the 'negotiations' about the research project. The four of us decided that during the fieldwork period we would continue our discussions 'as usual', only that we would meet each other more often than we would do under 'normal' circumstances. This also meant that Orsolya would be included in the research as it would have felt unnatural and undesirable, to leave her out of the equation. This approach contributed not only to a more natural flow of conversations, but also to the possibility to explore topics related to the villagers for example into more depth, since Orsolya could often interpret described situations on the spot, providing detailed knowledge, since she is from the region and speaks the Hungarian language. Her being attentive to other peoples moods, and her talent to keep conversations flow, and her sense of humour contributed to diverse, nuanced and playful discussions. This way I could focus better on the filming itself, and this made it easier to film as much as possible from the conversations. The overall approach was one of participant observation with a camera, which meant practically in this research the following:

1) I was filming during conversations, and I simultaneously took part in these conversations by asking questions and giving answers to questions,

- 2) I was sometimes also being filmed myself, while the camera was running on a tripod, and I was taking part in the conversation without operating the camera during those moments,
- 3) I participated in the farming and leisure activities, which I also partly filmed in most cases.

Due to the familiarity of sharing our lifestyles and outlook on things, Timothy, Karen and Orsolya often would forget about the fact that I was filming, as they told me.

The footage can be roughly divided in three categories: conversations, farm work and surrounding. We had most of our conversation on and around the farm; once we paid a visit to the nearby town. During the conversations I would participate in the discussions myself and ask questions; nevertheless, depending on the situation I was sometimes more and other times less actively posing questions. Sometimes it seemed more fruitful to let the conversation unfold between Timothy, Karen and Orsolya, and other times I felt that asking more questions was the better option. It also happened that Orsolya didn't take part in conversations; at such occasions, I had conversations with Timothy and Karen, or with one of them alone. In case I was with Timothy alone, Orsolya was usually together with Karen somewhere in the neighbourhood or Karen was doing something else on her own, like collecting the cows for example. The moments I had with Karen alone were rare and short if they occurred.



Karen and Orsolya talking together

We didn't have a prepared set of questions, we did not come with a questionnaire for example, but during the discussions questions were formulated and topics identified. After each meeting, thinking over what had happened and what was discussed, looking over the

footage, new topics were identified and new questions surfaced, which could be taken up during next meetings. Frode Storaas writes in this respect: *“Anthropologists don’t go to the field with prepared questionnaires. Rather we go to search for the good questions. Researchers from other disciplines that use fieldwork for data collection may have a certain topic they will follow up. In such cases the concerns of researchers, not the people, direct the activities in the field, the questions as well as the responses.”* (2013, 1)

I had the impression that Timothy and Karen enjoyed talking to Orsolya and me, which is understandable, since we speak sufficient English to follow what they say, unlike other people in the village, who hardly speak any English, and Timothy and Karen do not speak Hungarian very fluently. There is also the high level of understanding, because we are also a couple who experienced living an alternative life in Romania, and who also experienced living in the West, etc. Due to the fact that Orsolya is Hungarian and I am Dutch, we share a lot of things with Timothy and Karen, for instance being a mixed couple and living among people who do not speak our mother tongues and who have other habits and outlooks. Among many other topics we discussed a series of cultural differences between the villagers and ourselves. In many instances Orsolya was explaining certain things about the Hungarian culture to Timothy and Karen, since she has local knowledge. It seemed to me that they did not have many other people to share their experiences with at that time. They could formulate (out loud) and perhaps also reinforced their ideas about their way of life, explaining their choices to an understanding audience, to Orsolya and me and the 'rest of the world' through the camera.

During the fieldwork period I often felt somewhat frustrated though after Orsolya and I had been a day at Timothy and Karen. After a couple of visits I started to understand why. Since I was the one filming I didn't talk as much as I would have liked. After a day of actively filming hours of conversations, I felt that everybody had such a good time, chattering away, and I felt that I would have liked to be more actively involved in the discussions myself as well. But looking back this being less talkative than the rest might have been an advantage for the research. I now feel that it gave more room to Timothy and Karen, and *their* stories. If I would have talked more myself I would probably have asked more questions which would have *my* personal interest(s). I would have talked about my own experiences more, which would most likely have taken away attention from their stories. It would have taken time and energy as well, which you could consider as a loss during precious hours of research. By

literally saying less myself Timothy and Karen got more room to talk about their own experiences and about the things that matter to them. I believe that this has been beneficial because a) I got to know more facets of their lives and their experiences and I got to know them into more detail, which allows for a richer and more accurate analysis, and b) it became easier and more 'natural' to express their story in the film. In relation to the latter point Frode Storaas writes that so-called anthropological filmmaking is generally more open to what happens in the field and let that guide the filming activities, as in contrast to documentary filmmakers, who in most cases have a manuscript that guides the activities in the field. Peter I. Crawford writes about this distinction: *“Films that ‘tell’ stories are often based either on a script or at least on some idea about the basic structure of what will be the final film. Films that are involved in ‘finding’ stories, however, are in a sense trying to get what and who is being filmed to ‘tell’ the story”* (Crawford, 303).

There were of course also our own life circumstances, worries, thoughts, preoccupations and interests that were a driving force during the conversations. Just to give two examples: during that time Fruska, our nine year old dog, died during the fieldwork period. This made us more sensitive to anything related to human-animal relationships and since Timothy and Karen also have close relationships with animals, we talked about these relationships with more intensity than we probably otherwise would have done. One other example, Orsolya and I are in a phase in our life where we think about getting children, and this attention to the topic, this sensitivity to that issue one could say, most likely helped to create space for Timothy and Karen to discuss matters related to having children or not.

During the filmmaking process I have been open to find stories. I am aware that we are part of these stories. Literally Orsolya, and also our dog Ida, (daughter of Fruska), are in the film for example, and there is my voice from behind the camera. The film gives an account not only about Timothy and Karen, but also about the relationship with us. This becomes visible already from the beginning of the film where Orsolya enters the property with Ida, and Timothy gives her a hug and Karen receives the presents we brought. In this sense the film is a product of the four of us. Still, I did try to let the voices of Timothy and Karen dominate in the film, which is achieved by not having an overload of shots in the film with Orsolya, on the contrary, Orsolya doesn't say much in the film, she listens most of the time. I tried to edit the film in such a way that we mainly get to know Timothy and Karen.

2.3 Editing phase

If the protagonists are sensitive people, and if the anthropologist/filmmaker is sensitive and the editor as well, then there is a high chance that this sensitivity comes through in the film and 'radiates' to the audience, and the audience may have a higher degree of experiencing sharing, and therefore getting a better grasp of another variation of life.

During the editing process of the film with Gary Kildea I learned to be more attentive for those moments before and after the 'main action', to get a better feeling for silences and facial expressions for example, which have the potential of saying much more than words, and which may improve the transitions between shots as well.

I further learned that it can be much stronger if a film does not go into crescendo. I will try to explain this with an example: I have one shot where Karen is holding a dog like a baby and petting the dog, and then she gets up and says "*my baby*", but this shot would be too strong in a film where it becomes clear that Karen and Timothy can not have children together. Therefore I didn't use this shot in the film and instead I use a more 'innocent' shot, where Karen is intimate with the dogs, but there is no direct reference that this should be interpreted in such a way that those dogs are in a way substitutes for children they don't have. This makes it more subtle and therefore stronger on a more intuitive level.



Karen with one of their dogs

Especially Timothy has the tendency to leave sentences unfinished, jump from one topic to the other, talk associatively, for example relating to things which had been said hours or days earlier. Therefore I had to make careful cuts in sentences for either shortening the length of the talk, or for coherence purposes. The general idea was to leave the meaning, the overall message, intact as much as possible. Gary was guiding me in this respect.

During the editing phase the focus shifted gradually from their ecological lifestyle experiences and reflections to their personal and individual life experiences. At first I was worried to show intimate information, like the fact that Timothy and Karen can't get children together, and also the fact that Timothy is adopted as a baby, but these turned out to be ungrounded worries. If it wasn't for Gary who said that the protagonists could decide themselves, these intimate moments, which contribute to the depth of the film, would have been left out. Timothy and Karen were involved in the editing process, they have seen several versions of the film and I took their feedback into account. I am grateful that they were open to share an impression of their way of life and to even leave the more personal things about their lives in the film.

2.4 Screenings

'Hay Days' had several screenings until the point of writing this paper. There were rough cut screenings with teachers and fellow students at VCS, the world premiere at Verdensteater in Tromø, Norway, a screening at the International Festival of Ethnological Documentary Films in Kratovo, Macedonia, another screening at the International Festival of Ethnological Film in Beograd, Serbia, and two screenings at Astra in Sibiu, Romania.

In Kratovo I got the question: "What is your message? What is your message in one sentence!?" My first thought was, if I could answer this question then there would be no need for a film, since it would be sufficient to write down that sentence and publish it or project it on the big screen. Films can contain several messages on different layers of experience. There is the audio and the visual, which obviously influence each other. There are the non-verbal sounds and the verbal sounds, there can be the inter- en subtitles, there is the aesthetics of the editing, music perhaps, etc., all contributing to a certain level of understanding, conscious and

subconscious, rational and instinctive. When watching a good film people may experience emotions, and emotions have their own language and impact.

At several screenings people were curious to find out how Timothy and Karen were making a living, they asked how Timothy and Karen were financially managing to support themselves. People were surprised to find out that Timothy and Karen were running their farm for other reasons than financial profit. People in the audience had the pre-conception that the main reason to farm would be profit, but Timothy and Karen are not producing agricultural products to sell and make profit; for them farming is lifestyle-oriented, and not profit-oriented, (although they occasionally do sell a calf to the neighbours; in order to keep the milk production going they need to let the cows calf, but they do not like to slaughter their own animals and therefore prefer to sell them). I answered this question by explaining the audience that Timothy and Karen had had double incomes and no children, while living and working in the United Kingdom, and that they owned their own house and land in Wales, which they had been able to sell for a good price and that they bought the farm in Romania relatively cheap and that costs of living were low in Romania. I further explained that they were also receiving agricultural subsidy, and that like this, in combination with a fluctuating interest rate between eight and ten percent which they were receiving on their savings in the bank, they were able to cover their expenses. (This is not explained in detail in the film and therefore it is understandable that people start to wonder about this financial aspect.) The latest development is that Timothy and Karen did start searching for other sources of income though, because of a gradual decrease in purchasing power, due to decreased interest rates on savings and increased costs of living in Romania, like increased food and fuel prices, increased taxes, etc., over the past few years.

I also screened the film to Timothy (not to Karen, since she was abroad at that time). Timothy said that this film shows how they are, "*this is how it is*". He added that there was no need for him to watch this film very often again, since he knows what their life is like. He further said that it is difficult for him to judge what value this film could have for others, since he is so much part of the production, that it is difficult to form a more distant opinion. Timothy and Karen had the chance to comment on several versions of the film during the editing phase; there were not many surprises for him, since only some small things changed in the final version of the film.

In order to screen the film to Timothy I went to visit him in the village in Romania, and thus I found myself in the actual 'setting of the film'. I could see, smell, hear and feel 'the real' thing. I could touch the wooden gate, open it and enter the property. I could give Timothy a hug, and talk with him and he would respond and smile. I saw that things were different from the time the film was shot. It was a different season, no flowers hanging on the balcony, hardly any grass yet in the pasture, and now that Karen was not at home things felt different as well. It was less cosy, the woman of the house missing, not being there. During the short visit Timothy was talking about a new plan he had. He was in the middle of moving all the animals a few hundred kilometres away to the next County, where he was going to join two young farmers, who were producing goat cheese. Timothy wanted to start up honey production together with them and to introduce a new breed of milking cows on the farm as well. He said that Karen was supporting this new initiative and that during the hay making season they would move the animals back to their farm and make hay as usual.

At first I was surprised that Timothy took this opportunity to work together with two Romanians in an other village serious and that he was going to move all the animals there. I didn't understand this, seeing their previous experiences and disappointments with the people in the village, when it comes to working relationships. But while listening to Timothy it became slowly clear to me that there were some essential differences, like for example the two young men had studied abroad, in the West. They had been monks and studied on university level theology in France. Timothy could therefore not only communicate in a language which was easier for him than Hunagrian, namely in the France language, but the young men could also more easily connect to many of the ideas of Timothy, since they had experienced the West themselves. They understood also many of the critiques Timothy had on (Western) consumption patterns for example.

I understood from Timothy that there was a better connection, intellectually spoken, than he experienced with the people in the village so far. Timothy was also impressed by what the two men had established so far, he told me that they had set up a profitable cheese production. Timothy also said that they welcomed his idea to start up a honey production as well, and to introduce a new cow breed to the farm, in order to increase the milk production. Practicalities were also discussed, like relocation of the animals of Timothy and Karen, and residence for Timothy and Karen on the farm. As far as I understood would the two young men not pay Timothy for his labour, but were they going to share profit of the cheese and

honey production. Timothy saw it mainly as an opportunity to learn new skills, but also as an opportunity to earn some money; I got the impression that the first reason was of more importance to him than the latter. Timothy told that he was glad that Karen was supportive of these new developments. May 15, 2013, Timothy sent me the following email from this other farm:

“I have been very busy these last weeks and its gone so fast. The animals have integrated so well its incredible. Our brown cow is giving so much milk and the horses look amazing with so much grass to eat here. [...] As for the bees. Next sunday we go and see the hives as the owner has been away with all the bees to the rape seed fields a long way away. He will give us some lessons and come with us and deliver the bees to the farm on sunday. I am enjoying being busy and in the company of two very motivated guys who have moved mountains to create such an interesting and profitable farm. The cheese is delicious !!!! Ok. I hope you are both really well and enjoying your extended days. Keep me posted. I am available for Cannes film festival if required but you must send the Jet darling !!!! Best wishes and love to you 3 up there, Timothy”

3 Conclusions

Urbanization, the growth of urban centres, fuelled by population growth and migration to the urban, is still the dominant trend in most of the world, nevertheless migration to the rural is simultaneously an increasing trend as well, (especially in advanced industrialised societies that have started to de-industrialize). Migration to the rural can comprise of urban to rural migration, and also of rural-to-rural migration. It can include economic and labour migration, retirement migration, return migration, etc., and can also be based on changes in residential preferences. (Woods 2011, 182) There are many reasons why people move to rural areas. Migration decisions can for example be explained by economic factors and family ties, and also by the desire to consume the country side, based on images of the rural-idyll. *“For some migrants the major attraction is the prospect of participating in rural community life, or assuming a rural lifestyle. For others, moving to the country makes it easier to enjoy the landscape in recreational activities such as walking and cycling.”* (Woods 2011, 104) Value can also be based on attributes of the country side such as historic character, view and tranquillity. *“The selection of specific properties for purchase [...] is frequently informed by preferences for visual or aural consumption.”* (Woods 2011, 104-105)

Migrant workers, 'welfare migrants' claiming benefits from the state, retirement migrants, health migrants, return migrants and middle-class ex-urbanites, etc., all migrate to rural areas. *“Migrants motivated by the quest for rural lifestyle are also a differentiated group, including not only stereotypical middle-class idyll-seekers, but also younger amenity migrants pursuing recreational opportunities such as surfing or mountain biking, as well as purchasers of small-holders aiming to go 'back-to-the-land' (Halfacree 2007).”* (Woods 2011, 183-184) And then there are also the 'intentional communities', like sustainable communities and eco-villages. (Woods 2011, 184) In other words, people migrating to the rural may have different motivations, which may be based on for example relational, recreational, economical, ideological, as well as 'imagined' incentives.

In this thesis I describe a case of two idyll-seekers, namely the case of Timothy and Karen, a couple who migrated to a rural area in Romania in 2007. They did so based on *their* 'image' of the rural, which can be called 'idyllic'. - While actually living in the mountain village in Harghita County they had to adjust this image according to the encountered constraints and experienced life circumstances. - Other incentives for pursuing a rural-lifestyle were concerns Timothy and Karen had about (Western) consumption patterns, like

food production and (over)consumption of luxury products, etc. They further value health, 'free' time, mobility, and a high level of motility, and human-animal relationships. In other words, their choice to live this 'alternative' lifestyle (as compared to their previous lifestyle in the United Kingdom), is based on multiple incentives.

Images of a rural-idyll may be influenced by popular culture, by literature, magazines, films, even computer games. At the same time, as we see in the case of Timothy and Karen, peoples outlook on life in general, for example on what they consider important in life, how to live meaningful, how to live healthy, etc., is of significant importance as well. Based on this they choose to migrate, and they were able to do so since they had the financial means, they were not constrained by legal barriers, they had no children and they were therefore quite flexible, etc. They both had similar outlooks on what is important in life and how they wanted to give this shape, they formed a team, and were dealing with the occurring challenges together, supporting and reinforcing their ideas and believes, and helping each other overcome related emotional feelings and disturbances. In terms of physical labour they complemented each other, especially related to the farm work, to such an extent that during low seasons one of them could travel abroad. This also meant a high dependance on each other. Their situation could be characterized as vulnerable, also seeing the fact that they withdrew themselves from the local reciprocity system. This last fact can be compensated by paid labour or the help of friends, family or relatives.

During the fieldwork Timothy and Karen expressed that they were happy with the choice they made, that they felt privileged to be able to live this 'alternative' lifestyle in Romani. At the same time they added that this might not be the last thing they would do in their lives. Their high level of motility seemed to contribute to their piece of mind, and therefore to their expressed satisfaction with their lifestyle.

Living in the mountain village was not without struggles and frustrations. They had for example to deal with a lack of water in the well during winter time for several years on a row, which meant a lot of unanticipated extra work. They also experienced difficulties in the relationships which were established with the villagers, and which the villagers were trying to establish with them; frustrations were mainly related to the local reciprocity system, which is based on giving and taking of 'gifts'. They had to adjust their image of the rural in the process, also based on for example the fact that villagers were less happy than anticipated and were, on the contrary, often depressed, abusing alcohol, facing financial difficulties, etc. Despite the

fact that Timothy and Karen had to adjust their image of the rural-idyll, they kept emphasising the positive sides of living in the village, like their contact with the animals, the life they could offer their animals, the freedom they were experiencing, the beauty of the landscape, the smells, etc., and also the proximity of a nearby town, where they could indulge themselves in other pleasures, like refreshing on coffee and cakes, going to the swimming pool or a fancy store. In other words, despite the fact that they had to adjust their image of the rural, the overall 'package' was apparently still offering them enough to be able to live according to their ideas about living a meaningful life.

The coffee shop which is visited in the film invokes for Karen 'the feeling of the West'. They go to the coffee shop not only to enjoy a coffee and cake, it represents more for her; “*maybe it goes down memory lane*”, as she says herself. That coffee shop reminds Karen of good times she had in the West. The coffee shop stands for something else, it has therefore a symbolic value for her, which is also 'consumed' in a way, just as the coffee and cakes.



Karen and Timothy in the coffee shop

In a literally sense Timothy and Karen do not consume many consumer goods in Romania, at least a lot less than they would do in the UK, but I would argue that they do consume their image of the rural-idyll. They bought themselves the possibility to live their 'alternative' lifestyle, they bought the farm in a rural setting in Romania. “*The process of buying a house or other property in the country is in itself an act of consumption, and is part of the commodification of the rural.*” (Woods 2011, 105) And they bought animals and equipment; therefore you could say they bought themselves the possibility 'to create their

desired identity'. *"The rural locality as a social, cultural and geographical background constitutes a repertoire of symbols that individual use in different ways in creating their desired identity."* (Wiborg, 2004, 429) While addressing the question why Timothy and Karen wanted to migrate to the village I came to understand that these symbolic values have importance, which is reinforced by the fact that many discussions were centred around their 'new' identity and what this means in their daily life. *"The farm is the site of the performance of farmer identity, and as most farmers live and work on their farm, they are connected to its landscape by a complex web of social, economic, cultural, moral and emotional interactions."* (Woods 2011, 214)

"Here we are at the beginning of the twenty-first century, with a dominantly urban readership – well-educated, electronically connected, lifestyle-oriented consumers, well aware of how the world is rapidly changing – still clinging to an old symbolic imagery of the rural world" (Bunce 2003, 15) There are of course people who cherish the dream of migrating to a rural area and start living a similar life as Timothy and Karen, based on similar aspirations, but who do not (or do not yet) make the actual move to the country side. I can imagine that those people have on the one hand incentives to migrate to a rural area, but on the other hand constraints as well, which might hold them back, like for example reservations to aspects related to 'the complex web of social, economic, cultural, moral and emotional interactions', or out of the fear of the unknown, or financial obligations and/or limitations, legal hindrances, family ties and/or children which makes them less flexible to move and keeps them stay foot, etc. They might also have seconds thoughts about the rural, seeing it not only as idyllic, but also as 'remote', backward, under-developed, in need of modernization, for example. Or they would prefer to stay close to facilities like a hospital, a cinema, a theatre or an opera house, which I can imagine. There might be many different reasons why people who cherish a dream of migrating to a rural area will not actually migrate.

There are certainly many people in the world who have dreams, and who keep dreaming and who at the same time never act upon those dreams. Some of those people might not have the desire to enact those dreams, they might prefer to cherish their dreams; perhaps some might just prefer to cherish a dream instead of running the risk of crushing that dream by trying to realise it.

The research topic and related research question, and the fact that I decided to conduct the fieldwork in Romania together with Timothy and Karen, is influenced by my own life-

history, experiences and interests, as (hopefully) becomes clear in this thesis. In an attempt to answer the research question I went through the process of conducting fieldwork, making a film and writing this thesis, and at all stages I have tried to use my personal skills and experiences, to come to a better understanding and to present my findings. At the same time Orsolya took actively part in the research, also utilizing her skills and experiences, her personality and intelligence, which contributed to the outcome of this thesis. And last but not least, Timothy and Karen shared their outlook on life and their experiences. This, in combination with the people who were supportive in the process, like Gary Kildea during the editing process, the people who gave feedback after the screenings of the film, those who gave feedback on several drafts of this thesis, etc., all contributed in one way or another to the research process, and therefore to the outcome and findings of this research.

I could relate to and sympathise with many of the ideas (and sentiments) of Timothy and Karen, since Orsolya and I have made similar choices and have lived a couple of years a similar life, also in a mountain village in Romania. Nevertheless Orsolya and I decided to interrupt this life in the village and to come to Norway to study Visual Anthropology. We felt the need to receive more mental input, other than that we could receive from the other villagers, from friends and family, from books and the internet, etc. For us the rural lifestyle was not challenging enough in a mental sense, even though we recognized the fact that we were feeling mentally strong and physically fit at the time. I do not regret our decision to come to Norway, in an endeavour to 'touch upon the big questions' and to share.

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