

Transformation of Pasture Utilization and Management. An Example from the Bazar Korgon Rayon

The pastoral household as object of research

This paper discusses the transformation of natural resource utilization and its management in post-socialist Kyrgyzstan. The main focus of this study is directed on the livelihood of rural societies and how their dependency on natural resources is affected by change through the transformation process in Kyrgyzstan. Keeping in mind that “for hundreds of years, animal husbandry has played a crucial role in Central Asian economies, societies and cultures” (Dörre 2012: 128), pastoral practices are seen here as an indicator for change, reflecting the socio-economic and institutional changes during transformation processes. Pastoral households have the flexibility to adapt to changing socio-political conditions (Kreutzmann 2012: 2), and this paper will explore and compare aspects of continuity and change in strategies of pastoral households within the transformation process in Kyrgyzstan. The household is a “socio economic foundation comprised of one or more individuals who share living quarters” (Katz 2009: 345). In the context of the present study, households are often organized in camps that are erected seasonally on pasture areas. Coping with numerous changes, households have to organize their labour, time and other resources to meet the daily costs (De la Rocha 2000: 3; Ellis 1998: 4-5).

The paper focuses on pastoral livelihoods and mobility aspects on one specific pasture area, namely *Kichi Kenkol* of Bazar Korgon District. Three main objectives guide the argument presented here are the analysis of pastoral mobility strategies, the examination of different types of pasture utilization, and an analysis of social structures on the pasture. In order to examine those objectives, the research was guided by gaining an understanding about the different fundamental aspects that characterise a pastoral household and its members. According to Scoones (2009: 186), households can be best examined on the micro level by “asking the basic questions: who owns what, who does what, who gets what and what do they do with it?” Geared by this argument, certain knowledge about the household’s seasonal journey to and from the pasture and their intra-seasonal movements on the pasture was required. Other questions included the subsistence strategy, the generation and diversification of income, the ownership and tenure structure of livestock and ground, the social structures on the pasture in one single camp, the social relations to other camps and their daily routine amongst others. In regard to our main objectives, the empirical findings will be integrated in the framework of transformation and it affected the pastoralists’ daily life.

After a short summary of the historical development of today’s Kyrgyzstan, the comprehension of the term ‘transformation’ and its integration in the pastoral context will be addressed. This is followed by the third part, which comprises the research area and our empirical findings summing up with a conclusion.

Historical precedents

Using the social process of transformation as explanatory framework requires looking at the situation in Soviet Kyrgyzstan. In the late 1920s the Soviet government implemented the collectivization of agricultural production as a major project of social and technical engineering. Collectivization was interpreted as an essential part of the communist ideology and an opportunity to establish a new and alternative society besides the dominating capitalistic systems (Hobsbawn 1994: 80). Collectivization included the expropriation of former land-owners, the forced organization of the population in agricultural production units and a rapid mechanization (Eriksson 2005: 1-2). Accompanied by the processes of collectivization was the forced settlement of the nomadic pastoralists that played an important role in Kyrgyzstan (Bacon 1966: 118; Giese 1982: 219). The agricultural production and animal husbandry of Soviet Kyrgyzstan was predominantly organized in three different agricultural types: collective farms (*kolkhozy*, rus.), state farms (*sovkhoby*, rus.) and the farm members' private agricultural production and animal husbandry (Giese 1973: 6, 467; Khan & Ghai 1979: 103).

After gaining formal independence in August 1991 the then president of Kyrgyzstan Askar Akaev initiated certain reforms, which were supposed to lead to "one of the most radical programs of privatization in the region" (Abazov 1999: 218). Kyrgyzstan implemented a transitional approach to a market economy known as 'shock therapy' and adopted the structural reform measures promoted and supported by international policy advisors and the donor community (Bloch 2002: 53; Steimann 2010: 56). The main point of this strategy was the immediate liberalization of prices, the dissolution of former administration structures and the introduction of market-based finance conditions (Trouchine & Zitzmann 2005: 9). President Akaev implemented two laws to enable the creation of private peasant farms, and he established the first National Land Fund and commissions for the distribution of former *kolkhoz* lands. This was the first step towards privatization and a restructuring of the dominant sector of the *sovkhob* and *kolkhoz* system (Steimann 2010: 55; Trouchine & Zitzmann 2005: 33). The rapid privatization of the agrarian sector, as well as the collapse of productivity after 1991 and the incomplete reforms of the administrative structure, gave rise to "a number of challenges which shape agropastoral practices today" (Steimann 2012: 146).

The definition of the term 'transformation' is crucial to understand the challenges regarding the utilization of natural resources and the subsequent adaptation strategies of the pastoral households.

'Transformation' in the pastoral context

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union and gaining of independence in 1991, the five Central Asian states were subject to radical changes subsumed under the term 'transformation'. This paper uses the definition of Fassmann (1999), which quite generally specifies the post-socialist transformation as a "fundamental change of the political, economic and social system" (11).

Over the last decades various academic and policy-oriented debates on development in the post-socialist societies and economies have thrown up contrasting approaches to

conceptualizing ‘transition’ or ‘transformation’ (Fassmann 1999, Stadelbauer 2000, Steimann 2010, Schmidt 2013). The early 1990s were dominated by approaches informed by the neoliberal principles of the Washington Consensus, specifying ‘transition’ as a rapid and linear change from the former inefficient socialist system towards a modern market capitalism (Steimann 2010: 3). These economic and relatively functionalist approaches recommended the rapid privatization of state assets, liberalization of prices and deregulation of markets for the fast progress in transformation (Dietz 1995: 5; Henzler 1994: 13-16). The neoliberal concept of transformation was also heavily criticised (Carothers 2002, Fassmann 1999, Schmidt 2013, Steimann 2010). Schmidt (2013: 75) argued against the teleology of the paradigm, the assumed linear and evolutionary process of transformation and its obvious euro-centrism. Steimann (2010: 3) commented that the post-socialist transformation cannot be seen as a “linear process from socialism towards free market capitalism”. Others point at the paradigm’s normative character and its orientation towards the purpose of the transformation rather than the course of the process (Klüter 2000: 35; Steimann 2010: 3). A few years later the impairment of neoliberal hegemony cleared the way for alternative approaches embedded in new institutional economics, property rights theory and legal pluralism, trying to adequately describe and explain the apparent diversity of transformation processes. These approaches built on the idea of

“[...] ‘transformation’ as a bundle of evolutionary, multi-directional and open-ended processes, in which actors recombine and improvise on the old and the new in order to cope with the numerous challenges ‘transition’ poses [...]. These alternative approaches promoted a shift away from the previous macroeconomic focus towards the multi-level analysis and particularly emphasized actor research at the micro level” (Steimann 2010: 4).

Actor-oriented research on the micro level is especially important when studying how the transformation process affected rural households. Conceptualizing transformation needs to preserve a critical understanding of the process as an active moment of change (Fassmann 1997: 30) that does not anticipate research findings. The transformation processes have to be seen as open developments with unknown results (Schmidt 2013: 75-76).

How can such an understanding of transformation be applied to the pastoral context? The collapse of the Soviet Union caught the attention of many scholars, creating a wide range of diverse literature on different forms of mobile animal husbandry (Farrington 2005, Van Veen 1995), and adaptation processes to changing economic, political and environmental conditions and its consequences for pastoral livelihoods (Finke 2004, Kreutzmann 1995, Wilson 1997).

When discussing the transformation of pastoral households it is important to keep in mind that the post-socialist transformation affects the whole society. In order to provide a workable operationalization of transformation it can be assessed by focusing on three dimensions: the institutional dimension, the economic dimension and the social dimension. This analytical pattern is employed to structure research observations in relation to the main objectives. The economic aspect of transformation deals with income generation and diversification and the amount of livestock amongst others. The institutional dimension is concerned with questions about management structures and laws and pasture regulations.

The social dimension deals with the social relationships of a single camp, its social networks and possible conflicts on the pasture, and the shape of mutual support systems among pastoral groups. These three dimensions are interrelated and all connected to mobility strategies and types of pasture utilization on the local level. The various transformation processes are marked by change and continuity. Some aspects of mobility strategies, social structures and types of pasture utilization within the three transformation dimensions may have changed during Kyrgyzstan's development from a Soviet republic to the independent state, other aspects may have stayed the same. There is no inevitable change, because transformation processes may also preserve conditions of Soviet structures.

Participative observation, mapping and a survey

When analysing the transformational process in its different dimensions it is important to consider the historical background. The knowledge of the social, economic and institutional background of Kyrgyzstan's pastoral history in the former Soviet Union is important for identifying the different aspects of the pastoral household transformation between continuity and change today. In the field, it was aimed to assess the shape of transformation on the pasture by means of qualitative interviews and observations. The qualitative interviews were guided by a short questionnaire to quantify some structural data and more in-depth open questions with resident pastoralists. These interviews were supplemented by expert interviews with various officials having a stake in pasture management. It was aimed to attain a better understanding of the pastoral transformation through the eyes of the affected people themselves. The goal was to recognize the 'ways of transformation' on the specific pasture. Interviews were conducted with almost all pastoral households on the pasture as well as the managers and a former employee of the local *leskhoz* (rus.), a forestry enterprise based in the settlement Kyzyl Unkur, and the owner of the central delivery point called *Saty Key* on the pasture. Additionally, the distribution of camps on the pasture was mapped, and single camp structures, mobility patterns, the daily camp routines and the familial and neighbourly relationships on the pasture were assessed. As such, the research aimed to bring the post-socialist transformation to the ground by focusing on changes and continuities at the local level.

Utilization and management transformations of the Kichi Kenkol Pasture

The research site is located in the northern extensions of the Bazar Korgon District on the mountainous pasture *Kenkol*. The *Kenkol* pasture consists of the two sections *Chon Kenkol* (Big Kenkol, krg.) and *Kichi Kenkol* (Little Kenkol, krg.). Our research area is the lower section of the latter part, which has an altitude that ranges between 1800 and 2700 meters. The distance to the next settlement Kyzyl Unkur is about 25 kilometres. Twenty-two camps were identified on *Kichi Kenkol*, as shown in Fig. 1. The pasture area itself is affiliated to the 'State Forest Fund', which is generally managed by forestry enterprises as the local branches of the 'State Agency for Environment Protection, Forestry and Hunting Resources. In our case, the agency and the *leskhoz* 'Kyzyl Unkur' are responsible for the distribution of the pasture area, the collecting of the yearly lease of pasture land and the control of the pasture utilization.

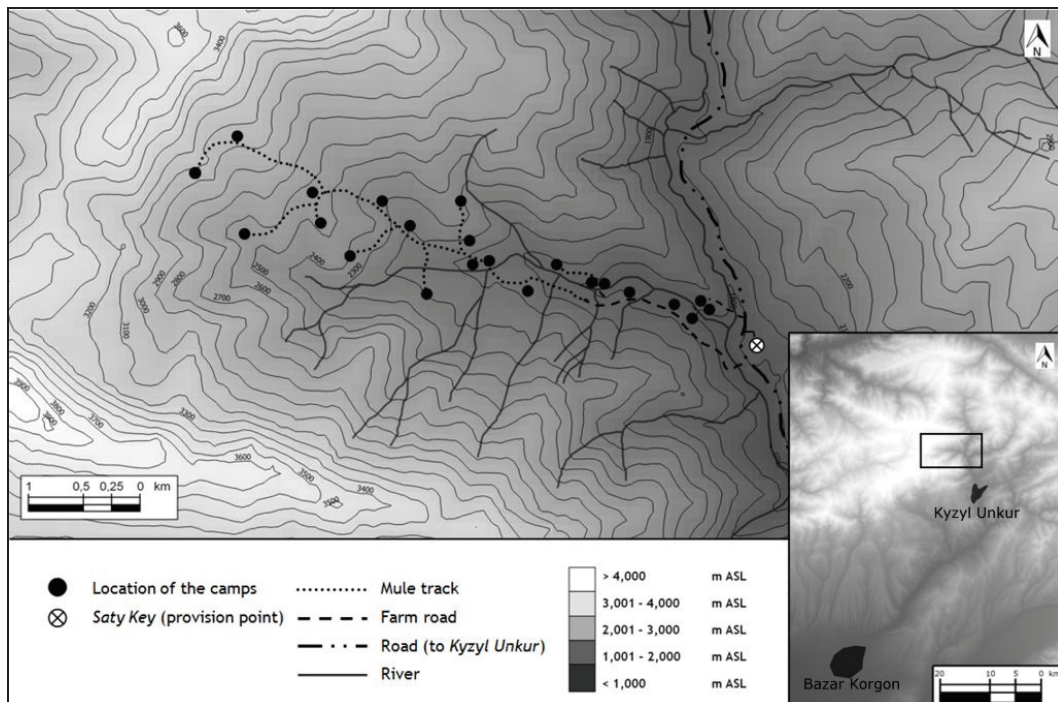


Fig. 1.1: Sketch of *Kichi Kenkol* and distribution of the camps

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Pasture utilization in the light of changing economic and institutional conditions

This section highlights the types of pasture utilization in relation to the economic and institutional dimension of transformation. It focuses on pastoral households and the economic and institutional aspects related to the management and utilization of the natural resources in post-soviet Kyrgyzstan. The exploitation rights of the pastures northward of Kyzyl Unkur, including *Kenkol*, belonged to the *kolkhozy* ‘60th anniversary of October’, ‘Engels’ and ‘Dzerzhinsky’ at the times of the Soviet Union (Blank 2007: 8). The *kolkhozes* were agricultural production cooperatives, based on existing settlements and farms (Giese 1973: 467). Although the collective farm was cooperatively administrated by the people, it was the state that owned the ground, provided the management and instituted the five-year plans. Animals, machines and infrastructure were formally owned by the *kolkhozniki* (rus.) - the cooperative community of peasants. The organizational structure of a *kolkhoz* was built up of several production units (brigades), which served as ‘new social entities’ replacing the kin-groups and village structures (Steimann 2010: 99-100). The brigades were mostly sub-divided into specialized farms with own technical experts such as herders. Every farm had its own pastures, stables and land for forage production and haymaking. The animal husbandry was mechanized and state controlled, along with breeding plans to attain maximum output (Wilson 1997: 57-59, 64). A specified amount, not the total quantity of the agricultural production (crops and livestock products), had to be delivered to the state at fixed prices. The *kolkhozniki* were paid a share of the farms product and profit, according to the number of working days. Compared

to the workers of the *sovkhoz*, the salaries of the *kolkhozniki* were rather low. Only “... leading personnel and specialists, including herders, were in full-time employment” (Steimann 2010: 100-102, 105). The livelihood of the *kolkhozniki* was secured within the collective farms, which included a dwelling, an income, social service, childcare, health care and pension payment amongst others (Blank 2007: 19). The social life, like the political and civil regime and the retail trade, was organized based on the agro pastoral production unit (Dekker 2003: 47; Yurkova 2004: 41, 43). Numerous administration allocations of jobs demanded a professional flexibility of the *kolkhozniki*. The herders were responsible for droves of 500 to 600 sheep (Steimann 2010: 101-102, 104; Schmidt 2013: 201). Every *kolkhoznik* received a basic wage, additional social benefits and a small piece of land. The individual agricultural production of the farm members played an important role in soviet Kyrgyzstan husbandry (Giese 1973: 6). The Soviet government instituted a predetermined size for private agricultural farming units, however the actual size varied (Giese 1973: 238; Stadelbauer 1991: 2). The job of herders offered good opportunities to “supplement one’s income through informal means” (Steimann 2010: 107; Wädekin 1975: 25). For most of the *kolkhozniki* the individual agricultural production as well as animal husbandry were the main reliable income sources (*kolkhoz* markets) (Stadelbauer 1991: 13). Throughout the transformation process in Kyrgyzstan many aspects concerning the pasture utilization as a source of income have changed. Two main types of pasture utilization can be distinguished on the *Kichi Kenkol*: animal husbandry and beekeeping.

Animal husbandry has played an important role both in Soviet Kyrgyzstan and today, providing an essential part of the pastoralists’ income. It mainly implies the herding of sheep, cows and horses. Additionally, pastoralists focus on dairy farming, processing almost exclusively cow milk. All camps have their own “kitchen garden” (e.g. potato field, turkeys, hens) on the pasture used for subsistence during the pasture season. Compared to times of the Soviet Union when mechanized and state controlled forms of animal husbandry predominated in order to gain maximum output (e.g. breeding plans), today’s herders might still be responsible for large droves but are no longer attached to any governmental targets. Nowadays, the herds may consist of several types of animals whereas during soviet times the pastoralists were responsible for only one type of animal (Blank 2007: 21). The livestock of a pastoralist varies greatly: some only oversee a drove of five cattle and 20 sheep, whereas others manage more than 100 cattle and 600 sheep.

Pastoralists can be divided into two herder profiles, the private herders, who only bring their own livestock to the summer pasture, and the professional ones who earn money by taking care of additional livestock of neighbours, friends and relatives. The private pastoralists often buy animals in spring and sell them in autumn after they have gained weight on the pasture, in addition to their own stock hold perennially. Sheep and cattle can easily be sold on the local livestock markets (chapter on socio-economic practices on Bazar Korgon’s Livestock bazaar). In contrast to the fixed animal prices during soviet times, the pastoralists now have to market their livestock individually. Therefore, livestock represents not only a source of income for pastoralists but also a way to save money, making investments in livestock an attractive option. Livestock gets sold in relatively rare

occasions, for instance in case of an emergency or an important event. (e.g. financing a funeral). Like professional herders, private owners process dairy products as an additional source of income. The dairy products are produced for self supply and additionally for the selling on the markets during the winter. The three most prominent products are *qurut*, *tshobogo* and *sary maj*. The fresh milk gets heated on the fireplace and afterwards processed through a milk separator. Through this process *aborot syt* (skimmed milk, rus.- krg.) and *kaymak* (cream, krg.) are produced. *Kaymak* can be processed further into *sary maj* (clarified butter, krg.) and *tshobogo* (roasted butter, krg.). The production of *qurut* takes about a day, because the *aborot syt* and the added *ayran* have to rest 14 hours before the mixture can be processed further. Due to the addition of salt, *qurut* has a high product durability. In a last step, the mixture gets rolled into *qurut*-balls and can thus be stored in the tents without the risk of decay (see chapter on). Another form of income generation is the extraction of horse milk (*kumys*, krg.). Because of the short-term product durability, the milk has to be processed directly. *Kumys* is a speciality of the area and is said to have a therapeutic effect on a variety of diseases. Therefore people from the neighbouring cities, like Jalal-Abad, Arslanbob and sometimes even Bishkek visit the pasture to drink fresh horse milk, and they are accommodated as paying guests by some pastoral households on *Kichi Kenkol*. This additional income provided by the tourists during their often extended vacation on the pasture and their regularly drinking of fresh horse milk is unique to *Kenkol* and financially very profitable. To gain a deeper insight on the production of the dairy farming products and the relevant value chains see the chapter on the organization of dairy farming.

Professional herders take care about livestock of relatives, friends and neighbours of their hometown during the summer. They get paid on a monthly basis per animal (about 350 KGS/6.50 USD a month per cattle, 75 KGS/1.40 USD a month per sheep). However, if cows can be used for dairy production herders do not get paid, but are instead allowed to use and sell the dairy products themselves. The mutual trust amongst family members, friends and neighbours makes this business model attractive for pastoralists. Livestock-owners benefit from exchange in two ways. First, they do not have to look after their own animals during summer time and can profit from the gain of weight in that time period. Secondly, they can invest in livestock without spending time on the pasture. If an animal perishes during the time on the pasture, the herders are not liable for the loss. Only if an animal disappears the owner needs to be compensated. In case of a rock landslide or a similar natural accident herders bring the animal skin and the earmark back to the owner without having to refund the loss. Most households on *Kichi Kenkol* combine both utilization practices as the money they earn through professional herding is a steady income and because most of the households have the capacity to look after more animals than their own livestock.

The second type of pasture utilization on *Kichi Kenkol* is beekeeping. During Soviet times beekeeping played a significant role in Kyrgyzstan's *leskhoz* economy. The responsible employees were organized in bee keeper brigades (Steimann 2010: 101-102, 104; Schmidt 2013: 201). Nowadays, the beehives are still owned by the forestry based in Kyzyl Unkur and beekeepers take care of 70 to 80 beehives on average, each extracting the honey two

or three times a year during months of June and July. The beehives stay on the pasture throughout the whole year with two beekeepers as guardians. Although beekeepers do not have to pay for the usage of the beehives they have to dispense five kg of honey per beehive a year to the *leskhoz*. The remaining honey is sold by the beekeepers themselves. In contrast to Soviet times the beekeepers are no longer organized in brigades and are therefore responsible on their own. Their usage right is managed through a licence agreement with the local *leskhoz*. In addition, they are private herdsman taking care of small droves, and producing dairy farming for self-supply. Just as in Soviet times, beekeeping still plays an important role as it is one of the main income sources of these pasture users and is a means to secure their livelihood.

Having presented the main types of pasture utilization, the following part will give a detailed account of two exemplary camps, focusing amongst other things on the different types of pasture utilization and how they are reflected in the camps' structure. Furthermore, we will discuss how households combine these utilization strategies. Because *Kichi Kenkol* has huge altitude ranges, the structure of the camps varies greatly depending on its accessibility, the types of utilization and the terrain. The infrastructure of each individual camp decreases on higher altitudes. Fig. 1.2 shows the camps of a professional herder (3 household members, 13 horses, 11 cattle, 20 sheep) and a beekeeper (7 household members, 75 beehives, 16 cattle) on *Kichi Kenkol*.

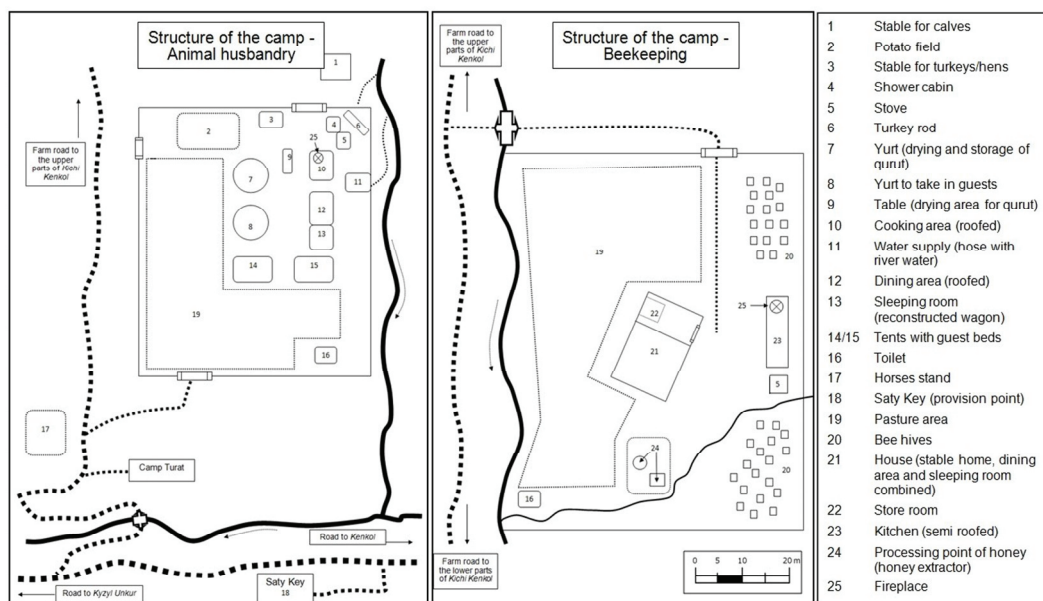


Fig. 1.2: Camp structures in comparison

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Both camp grounds are rented long-term by the households from the *Kyzyl Unkur Leskhoz*. Each household pays a yearly fee of 1500 KGS for the right to camp and to collect firewood. Therefore, the fenced area is their own rented territory, while the rest of the surrounding pasture land is open for common use of all pastoral households. Compared to pastoral herders, the beekeepers are allowed to build a solid house because they have to look after the beehives also during winter times. In contrast, the pastoral herders live in provisional dwellings, for example in a reconstructed wagon or in tents. Every camp

pursues multiple activities to secure their own livelihood (subsistence production), as well as having an additional market-orientated production. Often, household members are engaged in several jobs such as marketing dairy products and overseeing honey production. The horses and cattle of both households graze on the common pasture land and the cows are milked twice a day for dairy farming production. The calves stay in the fenced pasture area and therefore the cattle do not move far away either. The beekeepers' primary assignment is the production of honey, but they additionally care for a few cattle and produce dairy products for self-supply. Some of the household members move down to the walnut-fruit-forests in autumn, together with their livestock. For example, the beekeeper whose camp is illustrated in Fig. 1.2 has rented two hectare of walnut-fruit forest to collect and sell nuts to the local markets as extra income.

Handling several different jobs requires a professional flexibility. At times of the Soviet Union, there were plenty allocations and re-allocations of jobs. Today these different jobs are all managed by the same people to raise money for a suitable standard of living. The animal husbandry and beekeeping remain the major income sources for the pastoralists, and a certain kind of continuity throughout the transformation can be observed. Although the individual agricultural production on an informal basis played an important role in Soviet Kyrgyzstan, the diversity has increased and changed during the transformation process. Income is attained through several different sources and the necessary demands of day-to-day life are supplied through subsistence activities which enable the households to better deals with risks. These risks can be the death of livestock, the death or the injury of a household member, shrinking price stability on the local markets or the inflation of the local currency to just name a few. The presented types of pasture utilization (herding and beekeeping) still remain one of the most important sources of income today but are added onto by various other means of profit through diversification (e.g. nuts, tourism, dairy farming).

It is evident that the mentioned aspects do affect the utilization of natural resources in post-soviet Kyrgyzstan, making the pastoralists more dependent on the natural resources than ever before. However, the drastic changes of the organization and management structures during the transformation process made the social bonds and networks between the pastoralists stronger.

Social Structures on the Pasture

This section deals with the social dimension of transformation highlighting the pastoralists' social structures within a single camp and the social networks on the pasture. The cognitive interest is aligned with aspects of the social organization of the household, the social status of members in the household and society, the division of labour among age and gender and potential social conflicts on the pasture in the light of the transformation process. It is important to consider to which extent the social aspects of transformation affect the management and utilization of natural resources in post-soviet Kyrgyzstan.

Collectivization was interpreted as an essential part of the communist ideology facing an opportunity to establish a new and alternative society besides the dominating capitalistic system by rejecting individualism and declaring the community as the crucial reference and the key for success (Hobsbawn 1994: 100). The *kolkhoz* developed into "a system that

governed not only the production and redistribution of goods and services, but also the [...] social relations of the rural population” (Steimann 2010: 99) as well as the social community (Dekker 2003: 47). The professional herders of the livestock farms often spent the whole year on the pasture accompanied by their families. Holding the position of a specialist assuming responsibility of the farm’s capital they often had a privileged and notable reputation in the Kyrgyz society (Steimann 2010: 106). The communist system fostered good personal relationships with those in power to get a good job within the *kolkhoz*, which stimulated clientelism and patronage (Trevisani 2007: 101). The relationships within the *kolkhoz* system can be seen as a form of social cooperation based on mutual support and trust and therefore on effective social networks within the Soviet system (Steimann 2010: 104). Although the Soviet Union declared itself as a ‘workers’ state, the strong professional and social hierarchies and power imbalances of the Soviet system that were established through the strict division of labour led to social stratification and inequalities (Steimann 2010: 103). The *kolkhoz* as a ‘total social institution’ can no longer be seen as a socialist system of rational distribution but led to “far less equality and social justice than was promised by the socialist ideals” (Steimann 2010: 113).

The social organization of pastoral households changed significantly during the last decades. The average household size on *Kichi Kenkol* is between four and six persons. Some households accommodate one employee for the summer. The number of household members did not change when compared to Soviet times, but household structures and compositions did. For instance, one camp consisted of three generations working and living together as the vagaries of transformation forced the people to move closer together. During the research several camp leaders were interviewed who confirmed close kinship ties between about one third of the existing camps on the pasture. The utilization of *Kichi Kenkol* has a long tradition. The Choitov family can be cited as an example, husbanding this pasture since more than a century. Six out of twenty-two camp leaders on the pasture are sons and daughters of Kashy Choitov running animal husbandry and beekeeping enterprises. The social organization of the Choitov family is illustrated in Fig. 1.3, which shows the old and traditional family ties on the pasture.

The fact that animal husbandry still plays an important role in post-soviet Kyrgyzstan can be interrelated to the social status and the reputation of the pastoralist profession today. The pastoral herders had a privileged and notable reputation in the Soviet society, and while they are not as privileged today as in the past there is still widespread respect for the profession. Especially the herders of large droves enjoy high status in the society. Additionally, the autochthonous pastoral families with their indigenous knowledge and tradition have social prestige in the Kyrgyz society at large. The social reputation of pastoralists did not change much after independence. It is an aspect that endured during the transformation processes because of the fact that animal husbandry remains important also in today’s Kyrgyzstan.

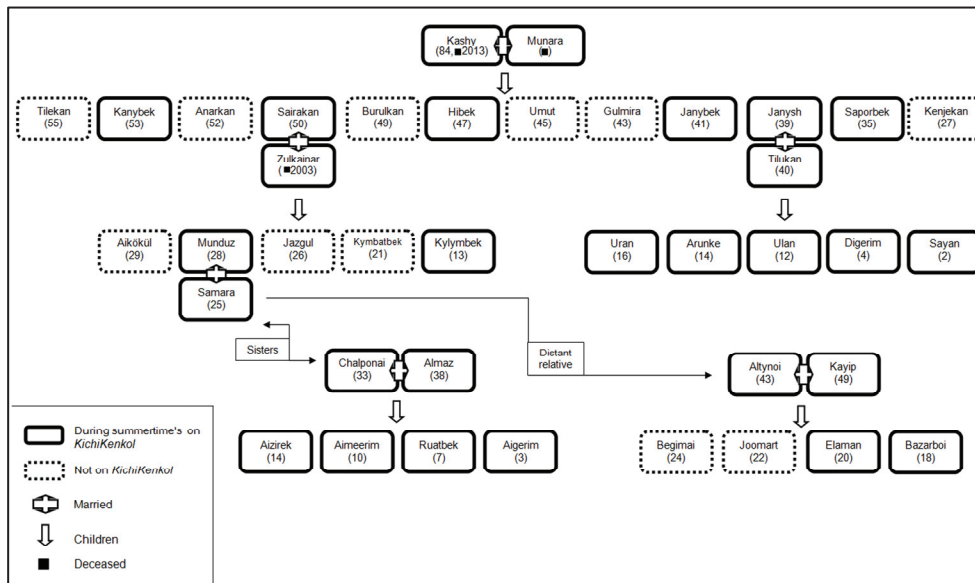


Fig. 1.3: Family tree of the Choitov family

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Another focus within the social dimension of transformation was the division of labour between men and women and between adults and children in the pastoral camp. After the dissolution of the Soviet system the former specialized workers of the kolkhoz became sudden autonomous employers being in charge of securing their households livelihood. The outcome of this was the diversification of income with diverse jobs requiring the division of labour between household members. Once the children reach the age by what they are able to responsibly execute different jobs they have to contribute to the household's income. The children are acquainted already in younger days with the different pastoral duties and responsibilities. In terms of gendered divisions of labour there is a great difference between the responsibilities of male and female pastoralists. The female household members are specialized in the dairy farming, i.e. the milking of livestock and processing of dairy farming products. Additionally, they are responsible for the cooking of meals and maintaining the camp space. The male household members usually take care of the livestock (beekeeping/herding) and are responsible for the purchase and sale of livestock, the provision and collecting of firewood and making hay in the hayfields of the residential village. Although the daily routine runs accordingly, in times of need every member of the household is able to execute all camp chores. Additionally, some members of the household are temporarily absent for the selling of livestock or hay making. This changed compared to the situation during the former Soviet Union. Today, pastoralists have to be open and flexible in order to successfully contribute to the securing of their livelihood. The transformation challenged the pastoralist former way of life, but coincidentally provided them with a necessary flexibility for today's life.

Box 1.1: The death of Kashy Choitov

A story, which supports empirical findings in respect to the important role of the children within the pastoral household relates to the death of Kashy Choitov whom we met during one of our interviews. He became critically ill, which resulted in his sudden death. Every adult family member left the pasture instantly for his funeral. Immediately the children, mainly under the age of 18, were made responsible to run the pastoral camp. One example is the 12 year old son of Sairakan Choitov, who was at that time in charge for the control of the sheep close to a mountain peak. Therefore he started his control walk during dawn, coming back long after dusk. The 16-year-old girl, who worked for the pastoral camp during the summer holidays, was responsible henceforward for the milking of the livestock and the production of the dairy produce. Additionally, she had to take care of the meals. The camps nearby were all run by Kashy Choitov's sons and daughters too. We could observe an association of the particular children of the camps. They managed the daily pastoral life in collaboration and with coping with every possible task that normally is executed by or together with the adult household members. This example shows that every child is able to perform almost all tasks related to the daily routine on the pasture.

There also several collaborations exist between the different households based on kinship, amicable bonds and neighbourly friendship. Although today the social association is not as broad as in Soviet Kyrgyzstan, the existence of social networks on the pasture is prevalent. These networks are no longer concentrated on the forced collaboration and circuitousness of the *kolkhoz*, but rather on strong bonds between the camps on a smaller scale. This implies common transport of livestock and mutual support in daily work. Social transformation evidently gave rise to increased forms of solidarity between the pastoral households. These close relations between the different camps suggest that possible social conflicts can be handled constructive between the households. Pastoralists on other pastures report conflicting use of the pasture area between long-established pastoralists, former *kolkhozniki* and 'new' pastoralists who were not in business before. Regarding to the pastoralists on *Kichi Kenkol* no social conflicts were observed and competitive situations or conflicts regarding the pasture utilization were seemingly non-existent.

There were many aspects of the social structure, which changed during the transformation, as well as aspects, which continued from former soviet structures. Considering the social dimension of transformation by comparing the social structures at times of the Soviet Union and today's Kyrgyzstan, the aspects of continuity and change keep the level. It seems to be that the pastoralists picked supporting aspects known from the Soviet pastoralism and combined them with new and diverse social strategies. This renders the possibility to cope with their pastoral life practically as possible.

Summing up, one can say that the members of one single camp as well as the different camps on the pasture are socially associated to each other. The social networks within a single camp and in between the different pastoral households became more important during the transformation process of post-socialist Kyrgyzstan. Kinship, friendship and neighbourhood significantly contribute to the coping with the daily pastoral routine and the securing of the livelihood. Today's strong company is a product of the transformation from a soviet state to an independent state with all its changes and challenges. All

mentioned social aspects do affect the management and utilization of natural resources in post-soviet Kyrgyzstan.

Mobility Strategies of the Pastoral Households

This section will take a closer look into the mobility strategies of the pastoral households of *Kichi Kenkol* that crosscut with the social and institutional-territorial dimensions of transformation. It will focus on seasonal and intra-seasonal movements interpreted in light of changes that occurred after the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

Mobility strategies have often been considered as coping responses to ecological uncertainty, and mobile herders are frequently represented as quick and flexible responder to natural disasters and general resource scarcity (Kreutzmann 2012: 6). However, it is argued here that mobility not only serves as a coping strategy to deal with ecological and environmental issues, but is also important to handle socio-economic and political challenges. Accordingly, mobility can be seen as an indicator of adaptation to transformation processes.

Historically, herders in what today is Kyrgyzstan practiced a system of migration and vertical transhumance for grazing livestock over centuries, often based on kinship structures. Grasslands were predominantly used as forage grounds by applying spatio-temporal mobility patterns between seasonal pastures (Dörre 2012: 128). Several authors have claimed the “end of nomadism” (Humphrey & Sneath 1999), however it is evident from fieldwork that pastoral practices are still applied in a very flexible manner. With the sedentarization measures that were implemented during the Soviet era, the importance of settled operational bases has grown while at the same time introducing intensified pasture utilization. Not only the allocation of grazing land and production targets were determined by the state but also the transportation of livestock and herders was centrally organized. Rail and road transport became available in various areas and made even remote pastures accessible.

The annual cycle of pastoral households during Soviet times was characterized by winter housing, intermediate spring and autumn periods and mountain grazing for a short time in the summer. Summer pastures (*jailoos*) were often located about 200 km away from the *kolkhozy* and livestock was mainly moved by mechanized transport. Herders had a specific camp site on the *jailoos* (Wilson 1997: 59).

After the demise of the Soviet Union, large numbers of mobile herders had to operate as individual households and herders became private livestock owners for the first time. Accordingly, household organisation and mobility strategies needed to be adopted. Limited access to often defective vehicles as well as the lack of fuel and a deficient infrastructure constrained the mobility options of herders and complicated the access to pasture land (Wilson 1997: 58-60). According to Farrington (2005: 172), migration patterns and cultural identity among Kyrgyz herders have persisted in spite of the many dramatic changes that occurred during the last 150 years. This has found to be true for the pasture users of *Kichi Kenkol* as well, whose migration patterns have changed little since Soviet times.

Different mobility strategies as well as different annual cycles of the households could be identified on *Kichi Kenkol*. The strategies primarily depend on the pasture utilization patterns animal husbandry and beekeeping, but also on the location of the residential village of the pastoralists and its distance to the summer pasture.

One of the major challenges after the demise of the Soviet Union was the allocation of the pastures to herders since the institutional responsibilities and tenures have changed. During Soviet times, the utilization rights of *Kenkol* were distributed between several livestock *kolkhozy* of the Bazar Korgon *Rayon*. During winter, the livestock was kept mainly in barns, in autumn and spring it was kept on pasturelands in the lower *Kara-Unkur* Valley (Schmidt & Gottschling 2004: 23). Herders from the southern settlement Birinchi May, Sovetskoe and Kyzyl Oktyabr' were sent to *Kichi Kenkol*, whereas households from Kyzyl Unkur were employed in the local forest enterprise. Only few of the households from Kyzyl Unkur went to pastures during Soviet times to work as beekeepers (Blank 2007: 22). Nowadays, the pasture is still mainly used by households of former *kolkhoz* members. However, due to the lack of employment opportunities in the *leskhoz* households from Kyzyl Unkur increasingly invested in livestock and started moving to *Kichi Kenkol* during the summer season. Since the *leskhoz* is in charge of control on *Kichi Kenkol*, the enterprise demands usage fees from the herders, depending on the size of the camp site and the amount of animals that are taken to the pasture. Pastoralists with their origin in Kyzyl Unkur directly pay to the *leskhoz*. Herders coming from the southern parts of Bazar Korgon *Rayon* need to pay at the control point *Shlagbaum* before entering the territory of the *leskhoz* 'Kyzyl Unkur'. For letting their stock graze on the spring and autumn pastures around Bazar Korgon, the pasture users pay a fee to the respective local administration as the body in charge of those southern parts.

Kichi Kenkol is relatively easy accessible as a road directly leads to the lower parts of the pasture up to the central provision point *Saty Key* (Fig. 1.1). The higher parts of the pasture can be reached with horses and donkeys as means of transportation. It was noticeable that almost every household with a camp on the pasture has got access to a motorized vehicle available for the transportation of food and belongings. Herders own a car, use one of relatives or rent a vehicle.

From the Bazar Korgon region including the settlements Kyzyl Oktyabr', Saidykum, Gava, Birinchi May and Beshik Jon, it is a three to four-hour car ride to the pasture. Often female members and small belongings are transported by car. Cattle and sheep are mainly walked on the main roads for the two days commute to *Kichi Kenkol*. The animals usually walk behind the car, being accompanied and guided by horse-riding male members of the households. At night the interviewed herders either sleep in their car, while one or two household members are looking after the livestock that is allowed to graze on low pasture lands. Some herders also stay at relative's places on the way. Either way, people do not have to pay for their night-stay en route. Herders coming from the southern part of Bazar Korgon *Rayon* must stop at a control point located right at the entrance to the 'Kyzyl Unkur' forest enterprise. Here, livestock is counted and registered. Herders from Kyzyl Unkur can reach *Kichi Kenkol* within one day.

Not only the route to and from the pasture is now organized by herders themselves; they also established new ways for the organization of intra-seasonal movements on the pasture, including the regular provision of food. Women usually stay at the camp and take care of cooking, cleaning, milking the horses and producing *kumys* and *qurut* that are marketed in times of winter. During the day, the livestock can move freely even outside the camp. At certain times of the day, horses and cattle return to the camp to get milked. Younger boys gather the livestock often grazing at higher altitudes, and mother cows return voluntarily as their calves are kept close to the camp itself. Cattle, horses and donkeys are kept in lower altitudes whereas sheep graze in higher altitudes, usually staying there during the whole of summer. Male household members take smaller tents into those higher altitudes to guard the sheep. Several shepherds of *Kichi Kenkol* put their tents together and share the work in the upper heights. Only once or twice a week, shepherds move downwards to their camps to restore food provisions.

Amongst the 22 identified households on the pasture there was only one shepherd who was exclusively keeping sheep. He has got the smallest and most flexible camp in the highest altitudes of *Kichi Kenkol* and usually relocates twice during a summer once an area is exhausted. His family members visit him during the summer but generally stay at the home village. He is strongly dependent on the support of his neighbours on the pasture, especially when he is in need of food supply or livestock transportation to the market.

During Soviet times, the state farms provided the herders with inputs, such as fertilizer, fuel, forage and hay, and were also responsible for the marketing of the produced goods (Wilson 1997: 59-60). Since state-organized provision of food broke down after the dissolution of the Soviet Union herders had to find new ways to supply themselves during the summer months.

On *Kichi Kenkol* most of the food supply is managed through the central provision point *Saty Key* that is easily accessible by cars and trucks. From *Saty Key* it takes around two hours to the village Kyzyl Unkur and around five hours to Bazar Korgon. Pastoralists can buy fruits, vegetables, eggs and water amongst others items at *Saty Key*. Apart from food supply, *Saty Key* also plays a crucial role for the organization of livestock transport to markets, the transportation of hay to the pastoralists' home villages as well as food from Bazar Korgon. Some of the herders gain an additional income by regularly driving to the city of Bazar Korgon with their trucks that transport livestock of fellow herders to the livestock bazaar in Bazar Korgon and bring more food back to their own camps. Also, they help neighbours or friends to gather hay for the winter and transport it to the home villages. This valuable and profitable service is offered once or twice a week, and more and more households consider purchasing a truck as a possible means for an additional income.

Generally, pastoralists work on the pasture from early May and stay until autumn when much of the grazing land is exhausted. Households with young children leave the pasture in September when school starts in their home villages. They leave their camps and sometimes even some of their belongings on the pasture to return in the following summer to the same camp site which was also the case during Soviet times. The less steep pasture areas at lower altitudes open up the opportunity to build bigger camps as is possible in

higher altitudes. Most of the camps are easily rebuilt in case that they get destroyed during the winter. Large snow falls in winter times require that the camps located on the upper parts of the pasture need to move their equipment. However, most camp owners, who work the upper parts of the pasture, have a storage place at the local provision point *Saty Key*. In contrast to those higher camps, those dwellings at lower altitudes are equipped more extensively.

When leaving the pasture in autumn, professional herders return the animals to their owners. Pastoralists with their origin around the village of Bazar Korgon transport their livestock back to the residential village where it can graze on spring and autumn pastures. These areas are in the responsibility of the *Ayil Okmotu* (local self administration), whom the pastoralists pay a fee for the usage of those areas. Almost all of the Kyzyl Unkur households make a stop at the walnut-fruit forests that spread over the area. They let their livestock graze on forest land and gather walnuts for an additional income. Once it starts getting colder, they move to their houses where they stay over the winter. Livestock is kept in stalls and fed with hay that has been gathered during the summer. Only beekeepers have to revisit and check their beehives a few times during the winter months. Due to the snow they have to walk the distance as the roads cannot be accessed by cars anymore. Those visits take about one week in total. Fig. 1.4 shows a typical annual cycle of the households utilizing the *Kichi Kenkol* Pasture.

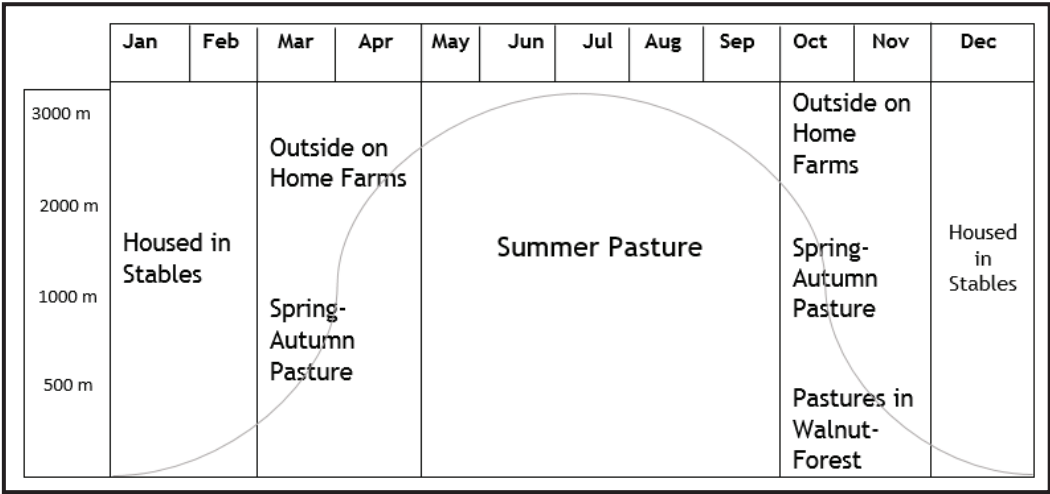


Fig. 1.4: Annual cycle of the pastoralist households on *Kichi Kenkol*

Draft: Jütte, Korte & Seliger 2014

It is evident that mobility plays a crucial role within the livelihood strategies of pastoral households. It helps pastoral households to flexibly adapt to political and socio-economic transformation and to deal with new challenges. Institutional regulations have changed as there is no centrally organized control over the pasture lands anymore. At the first glance, those regulations seem to be very versatile and confusing as responsibilities differ depending on the origin of the households using *Kichi Kenkol* pasture land. However, among the interviewed herders there were no complaints about any irregularities or non-transparent bureaucracy regarding the contribution of pasture land or the counting of animals. Even though administrative responsibilities have changed, it is mostly still the

same households that use *Kichi Kenkol*. Institutional changes thus had only a small impact on the pastoralists' strategies in the present case study.

Because transportation of livestock and food is not organized by the state anymore social relations not only with family members but also with neighbouring pastoralists have gotten more and more important when it comes to the organization of mobility. If a household is not able to bring own livestock to a summer pasture it may assign that job to relatives or professional herders. In case herders are in need of food or transport of livestock to a market professional truck-drivers need to be approached. Pastoralists have re-organized themselves and their mobility strategies and have developed the capacity to create new sources of income by adapting to new challenges.

Conclusion

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union and the gaining of independence, Kyrgyzstan was subject to radical transformations of the political, economic and social system. The transition from a mechanized and state controlled animal husbandry to individual livestock herding made the pastoralists independently responsible for the securing of their livelihood. This was reflected by reverting to the agricultural production for personal usage and the diversification of income (herding, beekeeping, dairy production, tourism, nuts) using a plurality of local land and natural resources.

The active, multi-directional and open-ended processes of transformation altered pastoral livelihood strategies. The households on *Kichi Kenkol* showed best practice in recombining and improvising on old Soviet traditions and new post-Soviet influences in order to cope with the numerous challenges that transformation poses. While certain aspects of the Soviet pastoral practice, its natural resource utilization and its management remained (*continuity*) others appeared to happen in the light of a post-socialist life (*change*).

Compared to the later socialist times, when mechanized and state controlled animal husbandry predominated, today's herders are individually responsible for their livestock and are no longer attached to any governmental targets. This is one of the major challenges the pastoralists face regarding the utilization of the pasture land. They have to organize the transport on and off the pasture individually and have to market the dairy products and livestock on their own. In contrast to the fixed prices of livestock during soviet times, the pastoralists nowadays face the challenges of the free market. Therefore the pastoral households diversify their income generation through several sources. The types of pasture utilization consist of those, which were practiced during soviet times, but changed, in its internal structure (e.g. ownership). To perceive the pastoral households as individual entities only would neglect the close social relationships between them. The social relations of the pastoralists on *Kichi Kenkol* can be described as a social network, which consists of friendly working connections between households, whole families and neighbours. In that sense the social ties between the pastoral households have strengthened through the challenges of the transformation.

Summing up, all main objectives of this study showed aspects of change and continuity converging within the different transformational dimensions. The analysis of the pastoral household on the micro level has shown that their practices and strategies can be

understood as indicators of socio-economic and political changes. It is the picture of today's pastoralists adapting to a self-contained and independent livelihood. However, this individual responsibility and the aligned diversification of income also implies a higher risk pastoral households are exposed to and a rising dependency on natural resources.

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