

*Tereza Chroňáková*

THIS  
— THE —  
COUNTRYSIDE



*Exploring  
the Czech  
countryside's  
spatial and social  
challenges through  
the lenses of one  
small village in  
South Bohemia.*

Tereza Chroňáková

# THIS IS THE COUNTRYSIDE

*Exploring the Czech countryside's spatial and social challenges through the lenses of one small village in South Bohemia.*

**Call out for  
new rural  
architecture.**

manifesto

**The time has come!**

*The time has come to turn our creative minds to the countryside.*

*We already spent too much time disregarding the rural areas, for decades leaving them behind. Out of our focus, we concentrated our fascination on the glossy sparkle of the cities.*

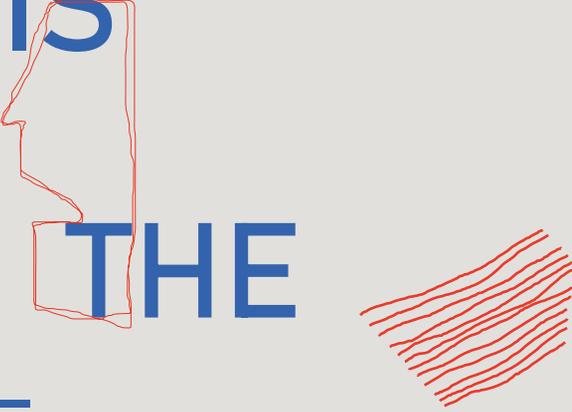
**Time**  
**Stop!** Don't romanticise the current countryside.

*The countryside is dying, but it's not dead! There is still time to save it. And this time has come.*

**COM**  
**We architects and designers need to consider the countryside as a valuable place worth saving for future generations and for the opportunities it's giving us.**

*It's a place where we can experiment.  
It's a place we can learn from.  
It's a place that can enrich us and give us solutions for our tomorrows.*

# THIS IS THE COUNTRYSIDE



*Exploring the Czech countryside's spatial and social challenges through the lenses of one small village in South Bohemia.*

**Let's create a new image of the countryside!**

- A countryside that is not purely commercial agricultural land.
- A countryside that is not only a relax zone.
- A countryside that is not only a residential suburb.
- A countryside that is not only an industrial zone.

The countryside can be all of it but much more. |||

I call out to you architects, designers, artists, and other creative minds, a new rural architecture and programme are needed.

New rural architecture that enriches the social life in the villages.

To continue to create detached residential boxes behind the gates and fences is irrelevant. ||||

**W**e need an architecture that connects!

- That connects people with people.
- That connects people with nature.
- That connects people with their surroundings.
- That connects locals with the outside world.
- That connects the outside world with locals.
- That opens and doesn't close.

Think about the past and keep the future in your mind!  
Think about the present and keep the future in your mind!

# THIS IS THE COUNTRYSIDE

*Exploring the Czech countryside's spatial and social challenges through the lenses of one small village in South Bohemia.*

→ Forget what is not relevant anymore and take what prevails.

\* Don't revive the past. Don't revive the present.

\* That's the only way to design the future.

↙ ↘  
**Buildings are opportunities.**

Spatial interventions are our tools.

They can have a massive impact. But we need to design experiences for them that last to cause a permanent change. Even one spatial intervention can have an enormous effect on the countryside and trigger the change.  
X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X

—  
let's create  
a future  
together  
where the  
countryside  
does not  
DIE!!!



## This is the Countryside

*Exploring the Czech countryside's spatial and social challenges through the lenses of one small village in South Bohemia.*

Tereza Chroňáková  
Master of Interior Architecture, INSIDE  
Royal Academy of Art The Hague, KABK  
2021

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*Thank you.*



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*What could be the future vision of rural spatial interventions in the Czech countryside in which current social trends and rural potentials coincide?*

*Research questions*

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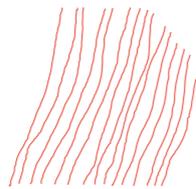
*What are the social and spatial potentials of the village Libějovické Svobodné Hory, my case study? What are the specific characteristics of this village? What are the village's current and past social gathering spaces?*

*How are the social trends affecting the architecture of Libějovické Svobodné Hory? And how does architecture enhance the social life in the village?*

*Is an atypical layout of the village responsible for the current social and spatial issues? Could field research conducted in one village apply to other villages?*

*What is needed to create spatial interventions in the countryside that are long-lasting and frequently used?*

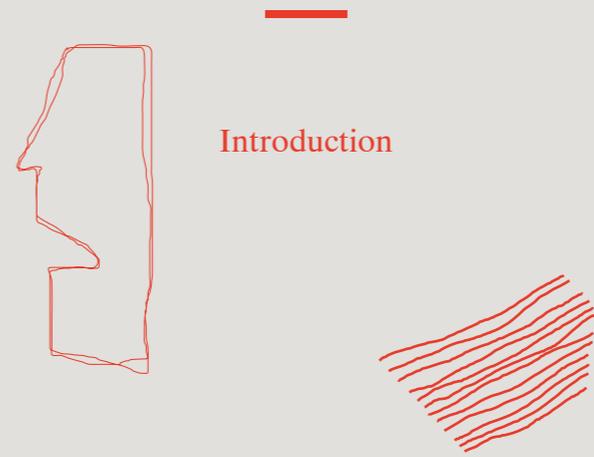
*How did history affect the current state of the villages in the Czech Republic?*



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Introduction

# Introduction

*Behind every hill, every forest, there is hidden a little village. I can almost sense how you are starting to imagine, together with me, old stone farmhouses with red roofs enclosed by the orchards, a smell of cattle, various sounds of singing birds, blooming pelargoniums in little wooden windows. Children running around the village engaged in a game. Their parents sit on wooden benches on their doorsteps, enjoying the last bits of the day's sunlight. Talking about the new village's gossip before they go to sleep to wake up early with the cockerel's first-morning crowing as the sun comes up. So they can take good care of their animals and land. Day after day. Season after season. Year after year. Generation after generation.*

Those times when people's lives were closely tied to the natural cycles and seasons when the whole village lived together as one community seem to be far away nowadays as it has kept fading away after the end of the Second World War.<sup>1</sup> When looking back to the 19th century, the rural lifestyle was hard and poor in terms of economic opportunities. However, it was rich in the rituals, traditions, values, and sense of togetherness.<sup>2</sup> *Even today, when rural life is a far cry from how it used to be one hundred years ago, I personally believe that there are still many potentials present*

*in the countryside that could positively contribute to modern society.* The values and prospects of the countryside rely on something else than materialistic possessions and money. As Ton Matton, a Dutch designer and urban planner who settled in the countryside in Eastern Germany, said in an interview:

**'if you don't have a job or money, but you have a cherry tree, you're a loser in the city. In the village, once a year, you are the king. You are walking through the village with three baskets of cherries, giving them to your neighbours. It is not about being self-sufficient. It is about producing something that is not related to money. It's just about the beauty of the product, and that's something we already forgot.'**<sup>3</sup>

The countryside is affected by the same social and economic trends as the rest of society. Yet, it keeps specific social values that you won't find anywhere else, such as the mutual help between neighbours and the beauty of a product that Ton Matton described. It is something that vanished from our fast-living society where everybody is focusing mainly on their own benefits.

These expressed values are something that makes the village environment unique and distinctive from the city.

In the book *Facing Value*, Maaïke Lauwaert argues that the current system is based on over-production, consumption, and depth instead of celebrating individuals and collectives' richness.<sup>4</sup> She claims that even when we think that we are free, liberated soles, we are not and that for the more significant part of our lives, we are forced to work without having a choice as we need the financial capital to survive (ibid). But at what price? We, modern society, spend more time at work with our colleagues than with our families and loved ones (ibid). Have we indeed betrayed our core resources like family, the community, the common and the public for having an option to buy 30 flavours of ice cream? Yes. We live in a wealthy world where we have endless possibilities that we must pay for with our time spent making money, which comes at a huge cost.

To support these remarks, I want to consider another designer and writer, Dougald Hine, who suggests that we live in a social ice age.<sup>5</sup> He argues that people who are part of modern society have lost the ability to do things together without being paid for them or being told by a more powerful state to do them (ibid). We even tend to

measure the price of friendship and all relationships (ibid). Extreme as these views might seem, I believe that they are legitimate statements with a solid foundation. We already see signs that current society is not working in the way one would imagine it should be.

*Throughout my life, I have developed a very close relationship to the Czech countryside. I'm more confident that my life and my career as a designer will be rooted within the old farmyards and the picturesque landscape with every moment that I spend there. It is excruciating for me to observe the image into which the Czech countryside has been gradually transforming in the past century. Unfortunately, the country is on a never-ending and unsustainable journey to accommodate the big cities' needs. It became a source of agriculture, relaxation, industrial zones, accommodation, infrastructure, but it has no future on its own.*

If this process continues, shortly, the countryside will serve only as a weekend relaxation zone for people to retreat from city life. It will become a residential suburb zone where the inhabitants only come to sleep while their lives are happening in the city.<sup>6</sup> As a result, the values unique to the countryside, the values it is celebrated for, will vanish forever.

1 RNDr. Radim Perlín, *Venkov, typologie venkovského prostoru (Countryside, Typology of Rural Spaces)*, (Prague, CZ: Institute for Spatial Development, 2010), 6.

2 Tomáš Winter & Pavla Machalíková, *Jdí na venkov!: Výtvarné umění a lidová kultura v českých zemích 1800–1960 (Go to the Countryside! Fine Art and Folk Culture in the Czech Lands 1800–1960)*, (Prague, CZ: Arbor vitae, 2019), 18.

3 Romy Uebel, "Ton Matton, The Net Around Us", *The Avant Garde Diaries*, 2012, video, <https://vimeo.com/48152739>

4 Maaïke Lauwaert & Francien van Westrenen, *Facing Value - Radical Perspectives from the Arts*, (Valiz & Stroom Den Haag, 2017), 24–26.

5 Lauwaert & van Westrenen, *Facing Value - Radical Perspectives from the Arts*, 179.

6 RNDr. Radim Perlín, *Venkov, typologie venkovského prostoru (Countryside, Typology of Rural Spaces)*, (Prague, CZ: Institute for Spatial Development, 2010), 12.

The social trends affect the architecture and spatial design of the villages as well. Places that once formed a communal space with many social spots for occasional or daily meetings have disappeared. The countryside's openness that I know from my ancestors' memories is fading away with every new fence raised around private property. The old farmhouses are being destroyed in search of modern living comfort. The social and cultural shifts are going hand in hand with the changes in architectural language.

**Social separation is transformed directly into architectural separation and the other way around.**

In his book *A Report of the Countryside*, Rem Koolhaas claims the countryside is a place to experiment, to act.<sup>7</sup> He is fascinated by technological developments, post-human forces shaping the countryside, the unlimited possibilities of the rural areas' open space, and uncovering something overseen for so many decades.<sup>8</sup> *I agree with him that the countryside is a place to experiment. But for me, it's about the*

*community, sustainability, and exploring new countryside typologies that would support the social coherence, all with respect to local landscape and architecture.*

*Looking at the bigger picture, I believe that investigating a future vision for the countryside is relevant to many countries in Europe and even worldwide. For centuries, architects and urban planners paid most of their attention to the cities' development, leaving the countryside out of their focus. Only lately, we are seeing more attention being paid to the rural areas. For example, a recent exhibition by OMA in Guggenheim, New York (2020) brought focus to the countryside's future.<sup>9</sup> It became a widely discussed topic even outside of the architecture community. Most rural areas worldwide, especially in the western world, face similar issues like the ageing of the rural population, suburbanisation, disconnection with nature, and the 'only return to sleep' model of the rural (urban) life.<sup>10</sup> Maybe, the time has come to create new ideas and a vision for the countryside to learn and seek alternative solutions.*

The Czech countryside and its regions are diverse, but they share some similar characteristics. *In this project, I have decided to investigate one specific village and, based on my findings, create a design that could become an inspiring case study for other villages in the Czech Republic. I have chosen the village Libějovické Svobodné Hory because I plan to move there in the near future and have a personal attachment to it. The village is in the Southern part of Czechia called South Bohemia. It is about 140 km south of Prague. The village offers an excellent opportunity for research as there are multiple social groups of people. Besides newcomers, some people have lived in the village for their whole lives, giving me a wide range of opinions to explore. By doing social and design experiments, I got to know the people, hear their stories, learn about their traditions and the village's spatial qualities and challenges.*

*Coming from the city, raised in the city, educated in the city, but being a designer with care for the countryside architecture and community, I can see great social and environmental opportunities for the countryside's future. While writing, formulating these sentences and words, I'm already on the journey of exploration of the rural world with you.*

7 AMO & Rem Koolhaas, *The Countryside Report*, (Koln, Germany: Taschen, 2020), 3.

8 Akiva Blander, "At Rem Koolhaas's Countryside, the Medium Doesn't Fit the Message—If There is One", *Metropolis*, February 25, 2020, <https://www.metropolismag.com/cities/countryside-rem-koolhaas-guggenheim/>

9 Carolyn Kormann, "Rem Koolhaas's Journey to the Countryside", *The New Yorker*, March 9, 2020, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/annals-of-a-warming-planet/rem-koolhaas-journey-to-the-countryside>

10 Sébastien Marot, "Taking the Country's Side. Common trajectories in agriculture and architecture," interviewed by Christophe Catsaros, *Volume*, April 10, 2020, <http://volumeproject.org/taking-the-countryside-sebastien-marot-christophe-catsaros/>

# Methodology

## Literature Review

To tackle and identify the complex issues the countryside is currently facing, I used several research methods. The first method was observing when I was reading and analysing literature from my literature list and watching documentaries and movies, as I believed I could learn a lot about the countryside's situation just by observing. I intended to find out more about the opinions of other architects, philosophers, and designers on the future role of the country and to find more information about my case study village - Libějovické Svobodné Hory.

## Field research

Furthermore, once I collected enough data from observing, I decided that it was time to stop being only an observer and play an active role. I did a series of spatial analyses and mapping during December 2020, when I spent a month in the village. I documented the current situation through sketches, notes, photography, and films, such as 360° videos of the village by using a drone. The findings of the field research were analysed and are included in this thesis.

## Workshop

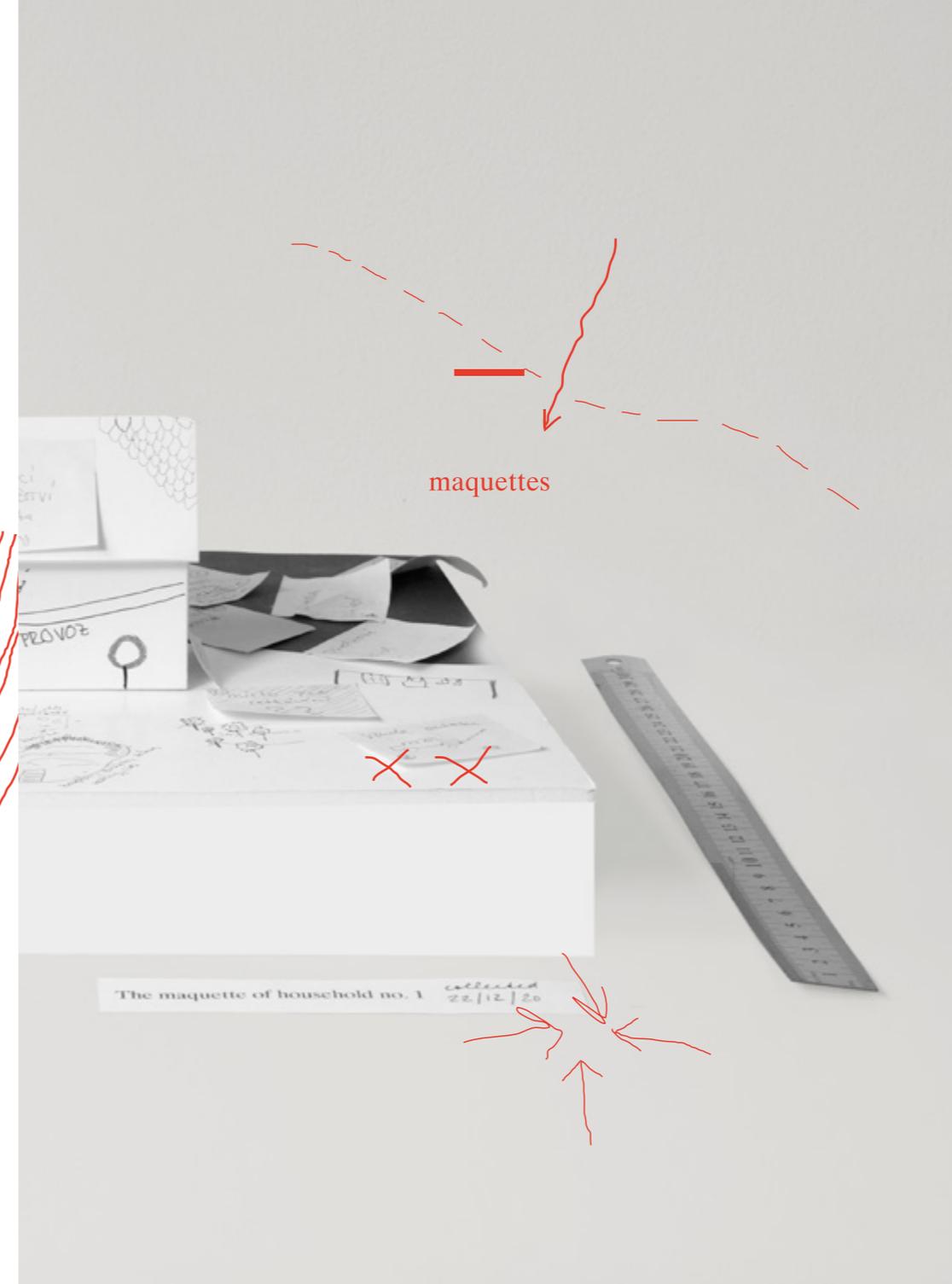
Another part of my research is a social/design workshop in the village of Libějovické Svobodné Hory in December 2020. I created two physical research tools that helped me collect valuable information from the village people. In this experiment, I aimed to connect with the villagers and get to know their personal stories and find a village's collective story.

### 1. Part: Maquette

= personal motives, issues, dreams, personal life in the village

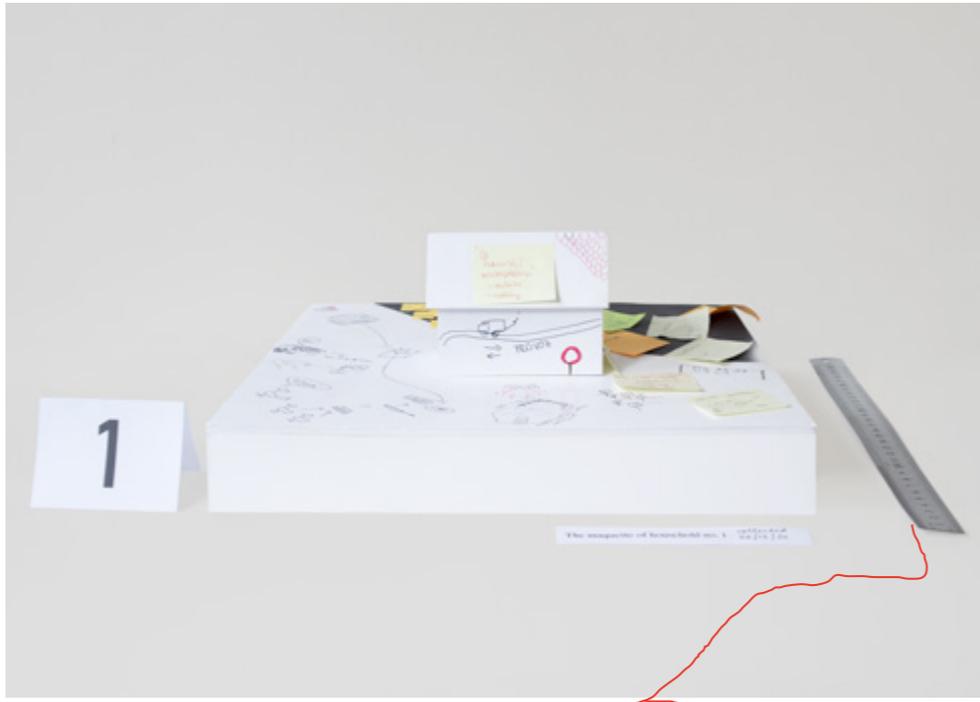
I prepared fifteen white maquettes of unspecified houses and land for the workshop's aim in the first part. One for each household in the village. Together with the maquettes, I created a list of instructions that contained five questions that I asked the interviewees to answer by filling in the maquette with notes or sketches.

1. Draw on the maquette places and things you consider essential for yourself in your garden or property's land. Please state why are they necessary for you, and what do you use them for?



*I see my role as an explorer, guide, and designer to the countryside's unknown land in the research phase. I am in the same position as most of the city dwellers, maybe one little step ahead. I, too, am a stranger to the situation. This thesis will be one big journey of learning, listening, realising, exploring, and connecting.*

①



maquette no.1

collected  
22/12/2020

*I see my role as an explorer, guide, and designer to the countryside's unknown land in the research phase. I am in the same position as most of the city dwellers, maybe one little step ahead. I, too, am a stranger to the situation. This thesis will be one big journey of learning, listening, realising, exploring, and connecting.*

2 - 3

16 - 17



①



maquette no.2

collected  
28/12/2020

*I see my role as an explorer, guide, and designer to the countryside's unknown land in the research phase. I am in the same position as most of the city dwellers, maybe one little step ahead. I, too, am a stranger to the situation. This thesis will be one big journey of learning, listening, realising, exploring, and connecting.*

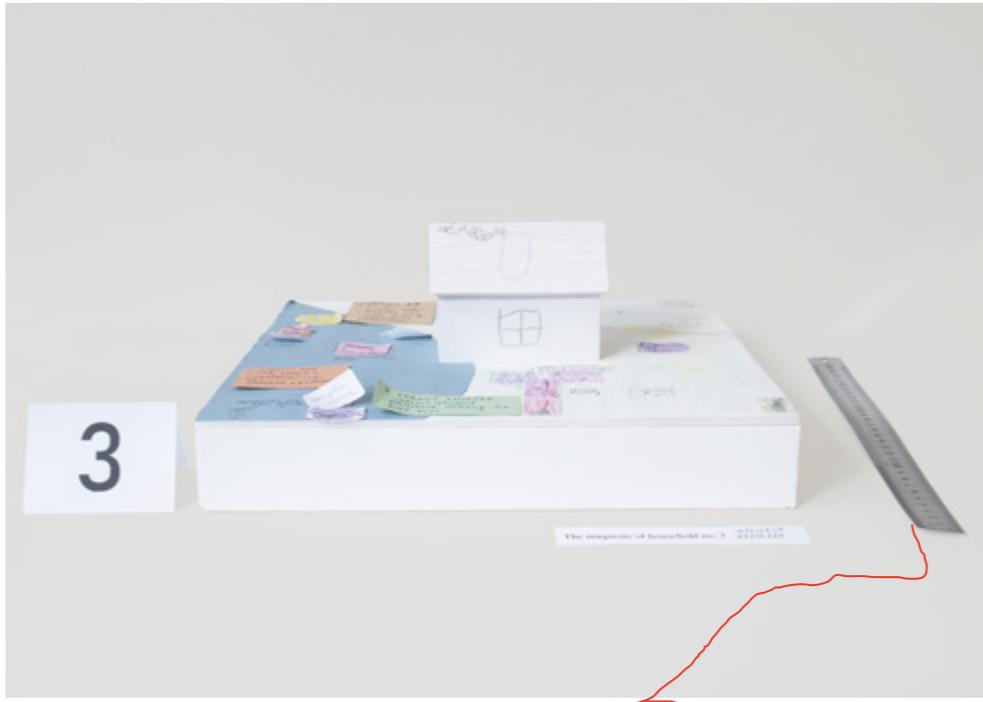
4 - 5



The maquette of household no. 2 collected 28/12/20

16 - 17

①



maquette no.3

collected  
30/12/2020



6-9

16-17

*I see my role as an explorer, guide, and designer to the countryside's unknown land in the research phase. I am in the same position as most of the city dwellers, maybe one little step ahead. I, too, am a stranger to the situation. This thesis will be one big journey of learning, listening, realising, exploring, and connecting.*

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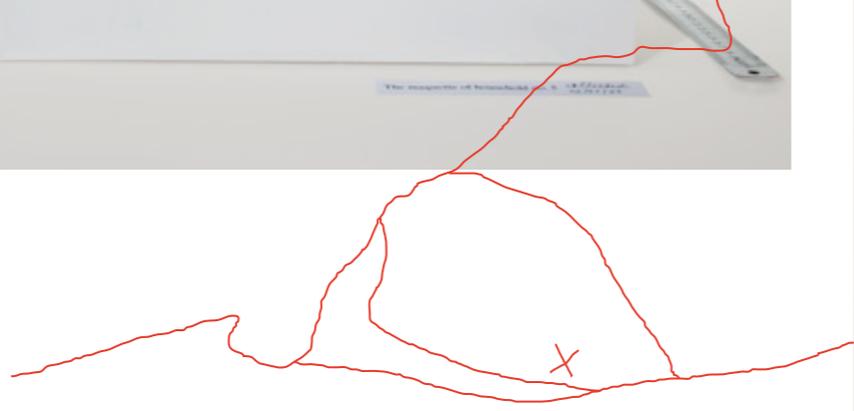
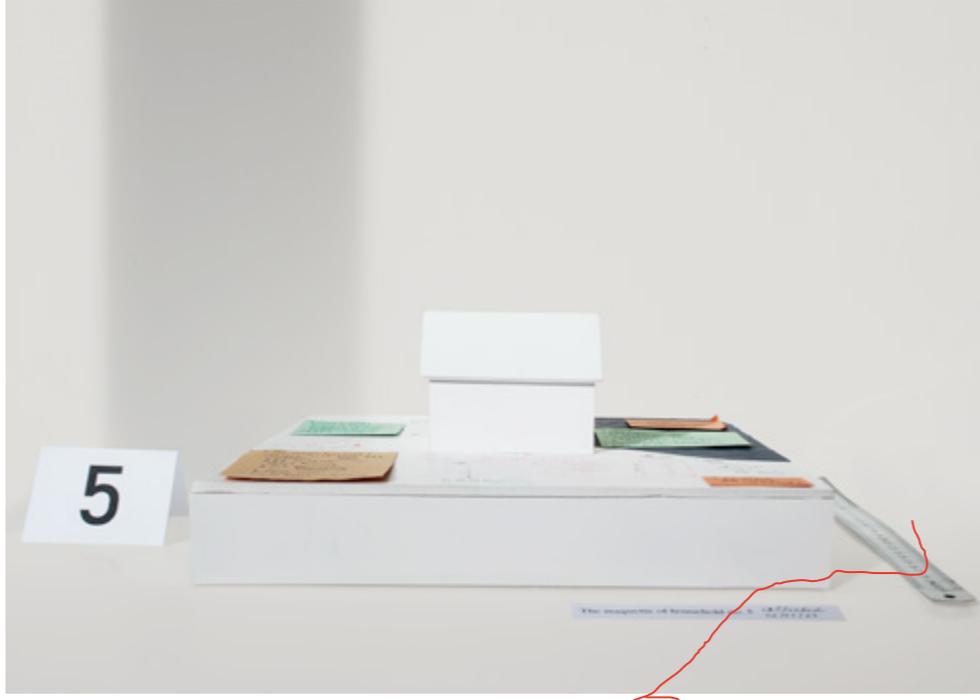


the process of filling of the maquettes

*I see my role as an explorer, guide, and designer to the countryside's unknown land in the research phase. I am in the same position as most of the city dwellers, maybe one little step ahead. I, too, am a stranger to the situation. This thesis will be one big journey of learning, listening, realising, exploring, and connecting.*



①



maquette no.5

collected  
02/01/2021

*I see my role as an explorer, guide, and designer to the countryside's unknown land in the research phase. I am in the same position as most of the city dwellers, maybe one little step ahead. I, too, am a stranger to the situation. This thesis will be one big journey of learning, listening, realising, exploring, and connecting.*

12 - 13

16 - 17





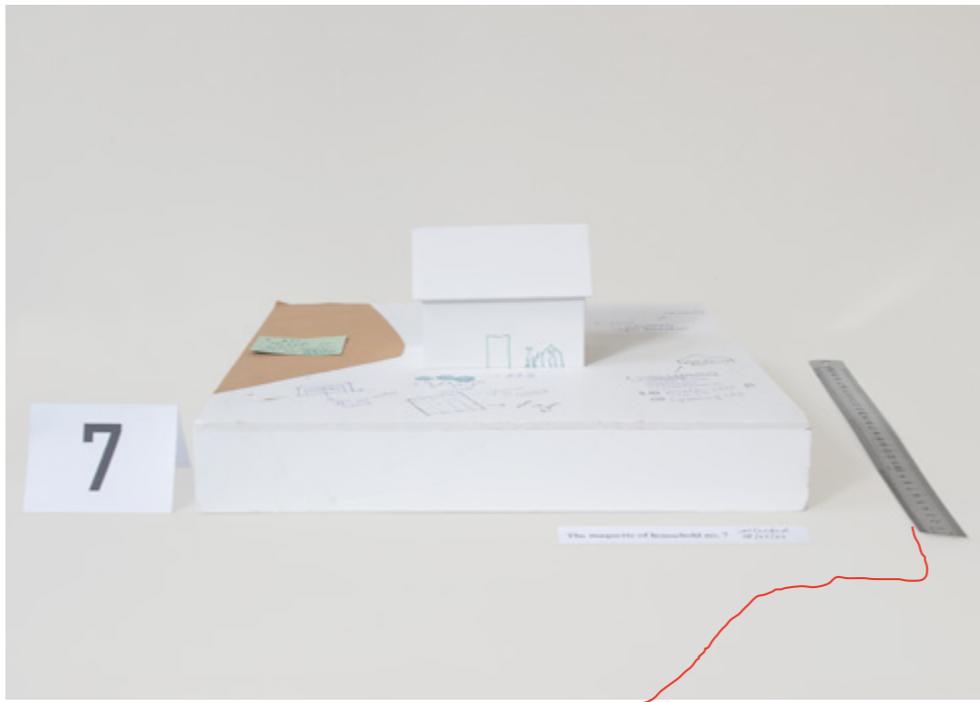
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16 - 17

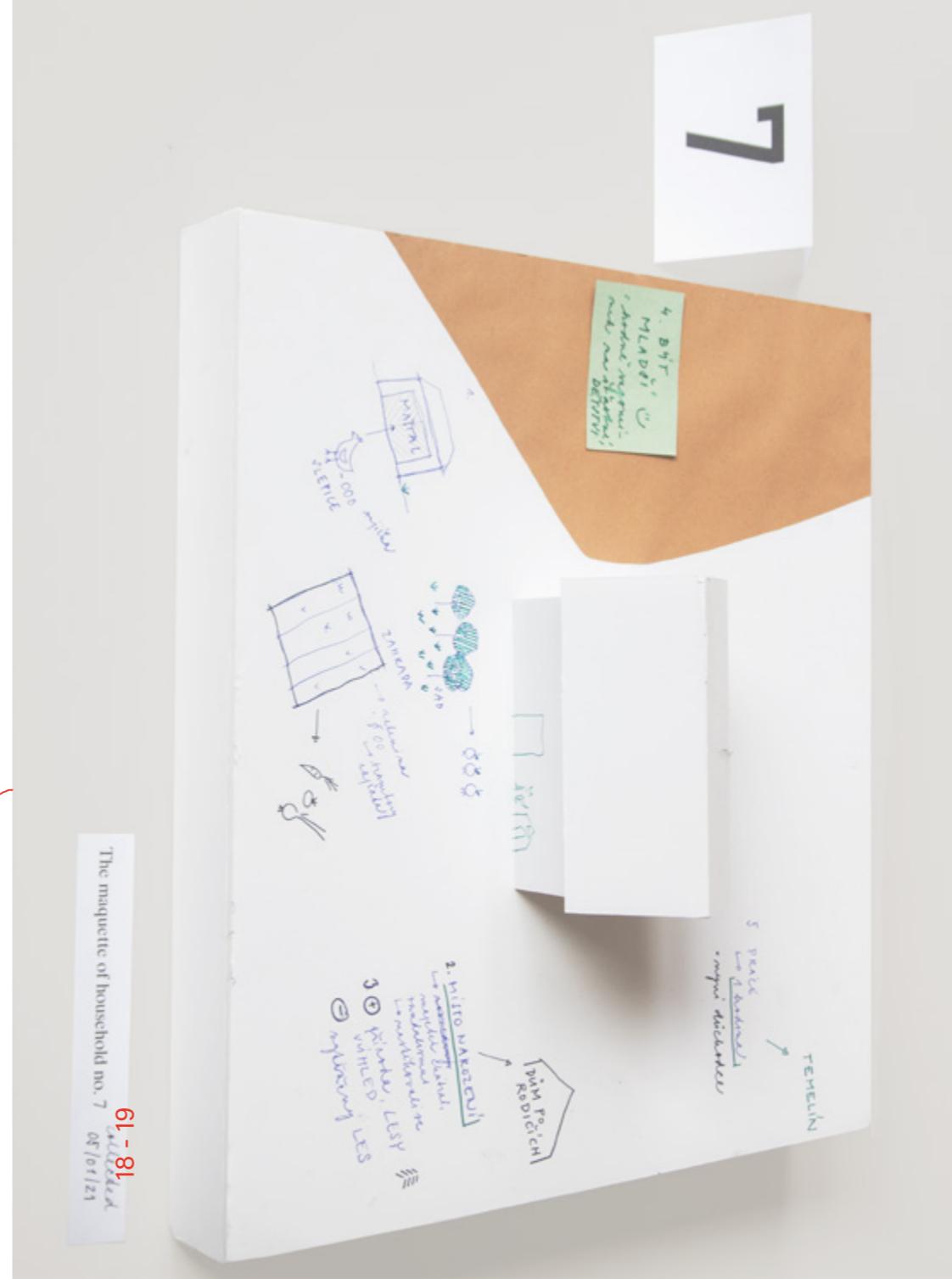
16 - 17



①

maquette no.7

collected  
05/01/2021



The maquette of household no. 7  
collected  
05/01/21

18 - 19

16 - 17

*I see my role as an explorer, guide, and designer to the countryside's unknown land in the research phase. I am in the same position as most of the city dwellers, maybe one little step ahead. I, too, am a stranger to the situation. This thesis will be one big journey of learning, listening, realising, exploring, and connecting.*

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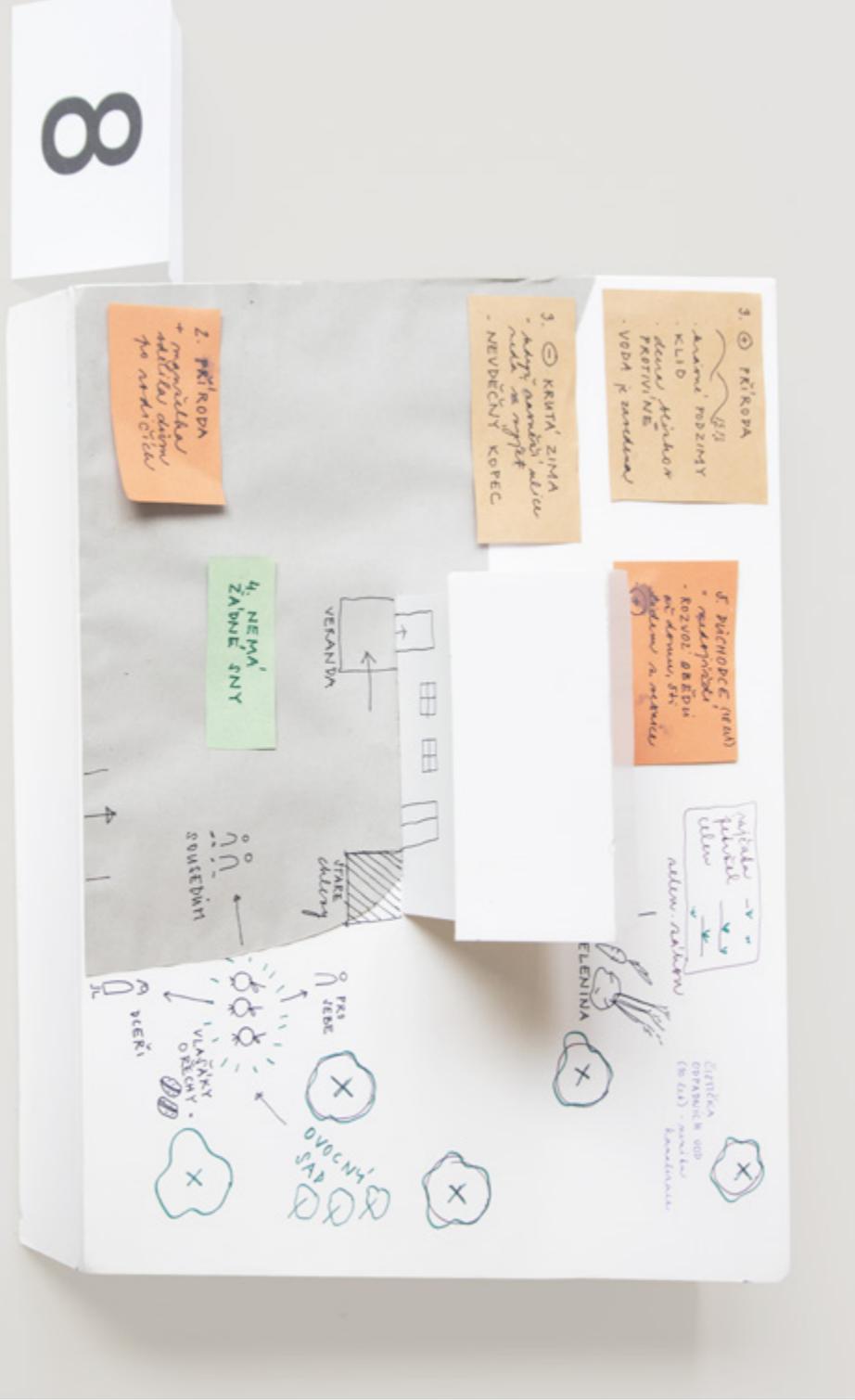


maquette no.8  
collected  
04/01/2021

*I see my role as an explorer, guide, and designer to the countryside's unknown land in the research phase. I am in the same position as most of the city dwellers, maybe one little step ahead. I, too, am a stranger to the situation. This thesis will be one big journey of learning, listening, realising, exploring, and connecting.*

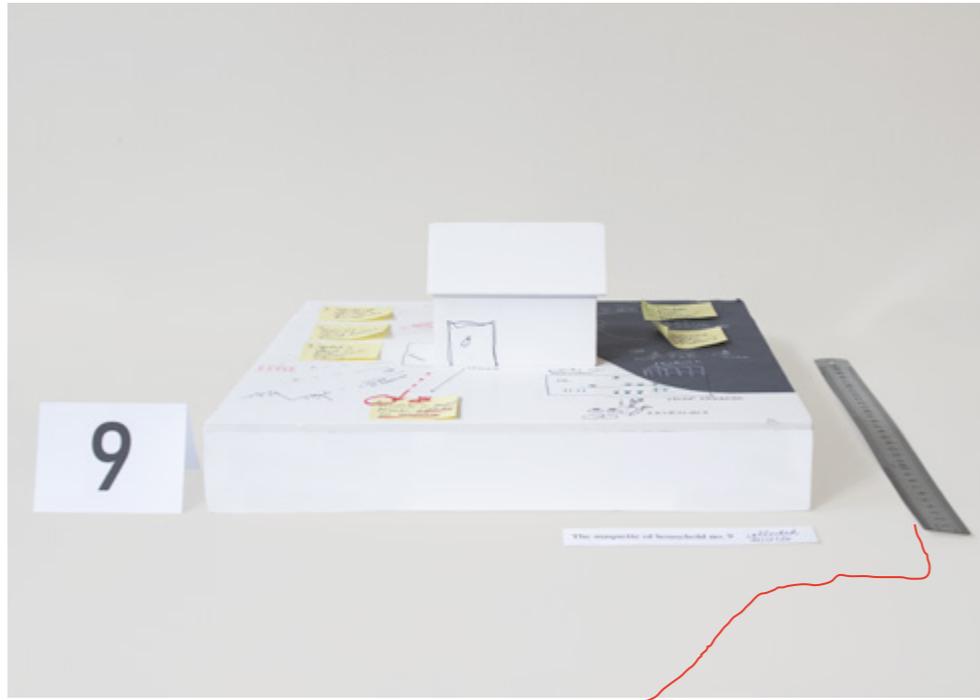
16 - 17

*This is the Countryside*



The maquette of household no. 8 collected 04/01/21 20 - 21

①



maquette no.9

collected  
30/12/2020

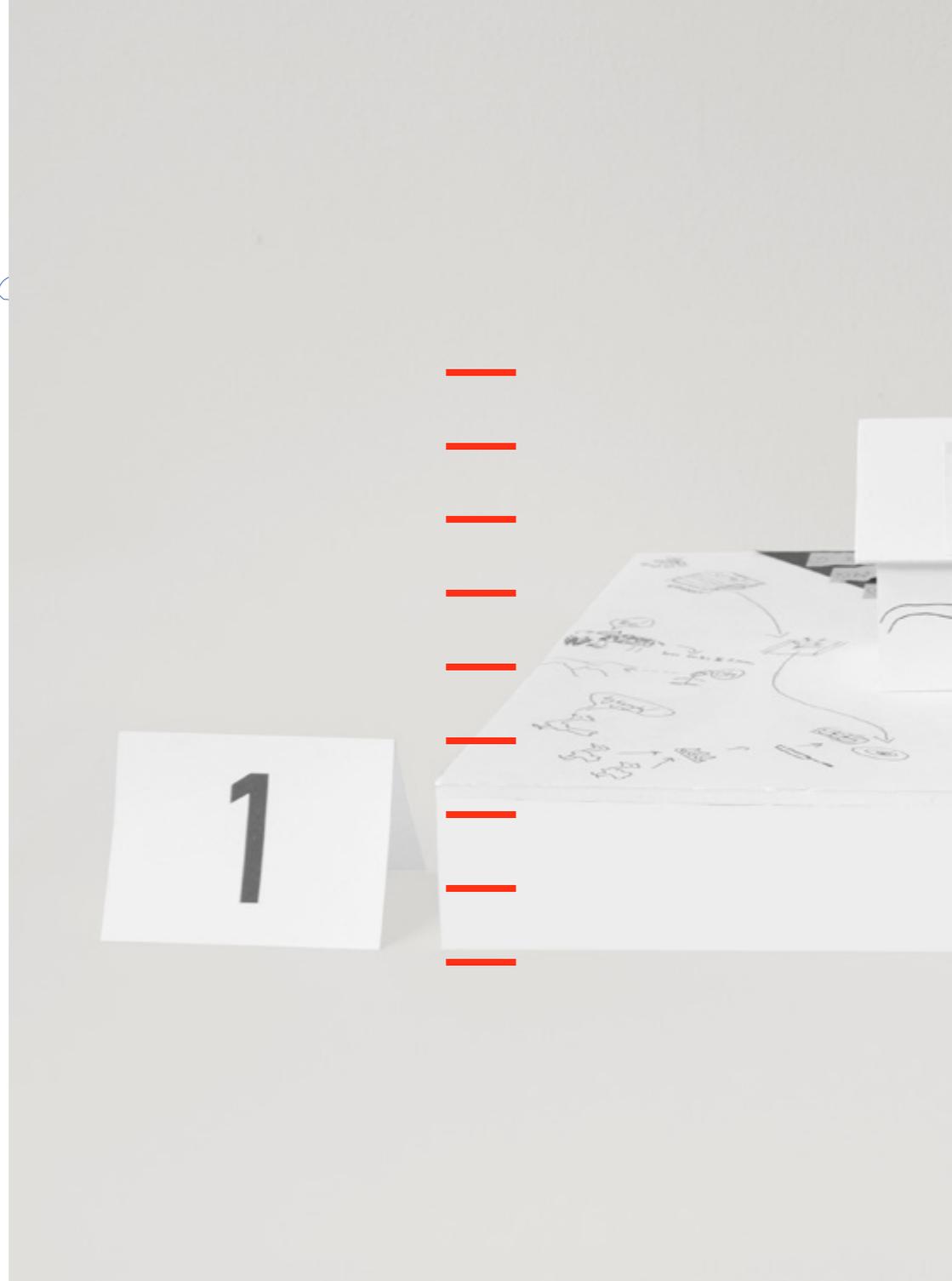
*I see my role as an explorer, guide, and designer to the countryside's unknown land in the research phase. I am in the same position as most of the city dwellers, maybe one little step ahead. I, too, am a stranger to the situation. This thesis will be one big journey of learning, listening, realising, exploring, and connecting.*



The maquette of household no. 9  
Klitzek  
30/12/20

22 - 23

16 - 17



①

2. Why did you choose to live in Libějovické Svobodné Hory?
3. What are the positive and negative sides of living in Libějovické Svobodné Hory? Please mark your answers with signs ' + ' and ' - '.
4. What are your personal dreams considering your life in the village? Where do you like to spend time in your household?
5. How much time do you spend travelling to work or school per day?

**2. Part: Collective map**  
 ≡ important points and boundaries in the village, connections within the village, significant places, psychological map of the village through the eyes of the villagers

For the second part of the workshop, I prepared a simplified map of the village that I printed out in fifteen copies in the size of A2 - each for one household in the village. Again, I created a list of questions and asked the people to write/draw the answers onto the map.

1. Where do you meet your neighbours? What are the occasions and which neighbours do you meet regularly?
2. Are there any meeting places in the village where people meet? Where could, in your opinion, new meeting places be in the village?
3. Are there any common traditions celebrated in the village? Which ones? And where do they take place? If not, were there any common traditions

celebrated in the past and where? Do you travel somewhere to celebrate traditions?

4. What are the important places for you in the village? Where do you like to spend time? Please mark your answer with the sign ' + '.

5. Are you aware of any barriers in the village's landscape that would affect you in any way? F.e.: Non-accessible paths, fences etc.

6. Are there any places in the village that you would consider dangerous? Please mark your answer with the sign ' X '.

7. It would make me happy if you could write on the map any exciting stories and memories that you have of the village or some specific places in the village.

The initial idea was to fill the maquettes and maps together with the people and have conversations about the village during filling in. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic situation, I had to come up with a different scenario. I couldn't meet the interviewees inside, so I went door by door to each house in the village to introduce myself while meeting the people outside because of the COVID-19 regulations. I asked them to take part in the workshop and explained all the information. I left the maquette and the map with them together with a list of instructions and questions. I returned after three weeks to collect them. Overall, I collected nine maquettes and nine maps. The analysed information from the workshop is included in this thesis.

Methodology

*I see my role as an explorer, guide, and designer to the countryside's unknown land in the research phase. I am in the same position as most of the city dwellers, maybe one little step ahead. I, too, am a stranger to the situation. This thesis will be one big journey of learning, listening, realising, exploring, and connecting.*

### Mapping and Spatial Analysis

Based on the workshop and field research insights, I created different spatial diagrams that analyse the current and past social and architectural situation and the boundaries in the village. Furthermore, through the mapping, I explored other spatial, cultural, and social connections within the village.

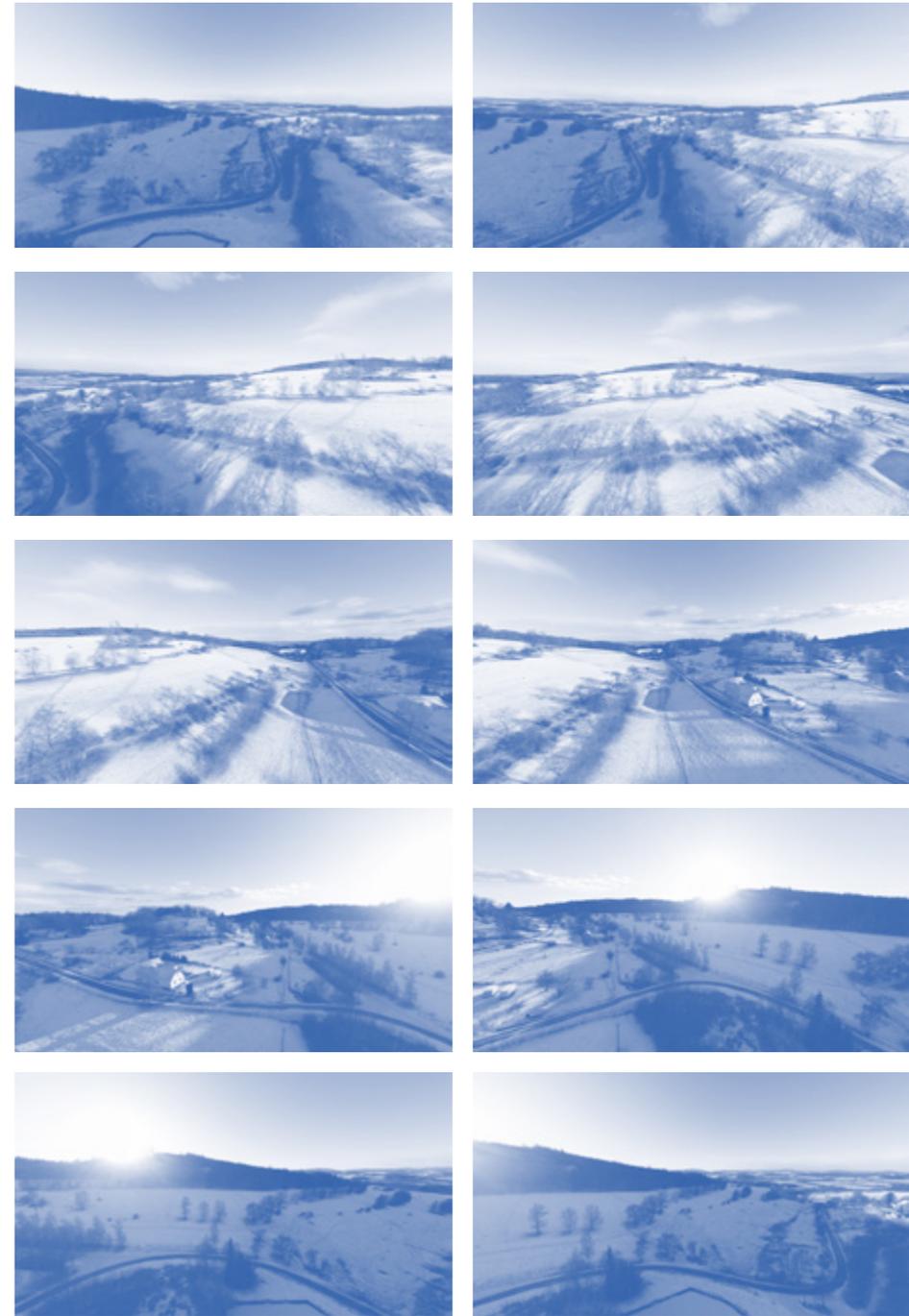
### Semi-structured Interviews

After the workshop was finished, on Saturday 9th January 2021, I went to a neighbouring village called Bavorovské Svobodné Hory to explore if the information gathered in Libějovické Svobodné Hory are relevant also in other villages with a different layout. Again, I went door to door asking people the following four questions:

1. Are there any common meeting places in the village and where? Where do you meet other people from the village?

2. Are there any common traditions celebrated in the village? Which ones and where do they take place? If not, were there any common traditions celebrated in the past, and where were they celebrated?
3. Where do you meet your neighbours? What are the occasions and which neighbours do you meet regularly?
4. What are the positive and negative sides of living in Bavorovské Svobodné Hory?

I talked to nine people from nine different households, and with three of the interviewees, I had long conversations about the village. The interviews gave me valuable information and insight thanks to direct contact with the people who live in Bavorovské Svobodné Hory.



Methodology

Libějovické Svobodné Hory on snapshots from the 360° video taken by drone in December 2020.

# Considering the past

*I believe it's important to acknowledge the social damages that occurred to the countryside and rural architecture in the past to understand the current situation.*

In the last century, the Czech countryside was a victim of radical political decisions and changes. Throughout the years of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the number of Germans in Czechia was growing.<sup>11</sup> The end of the First World War and the establishment of the first democratic republic of Czechoslovakia meant a wide range of struggles and discrimination of the German citizens who lived mainly in the borderland of Czechoslovakia's areas named Sudetenland.<sup>12</sup> The situation changed after the Munich Agreement in 1938. This agreement concluded by Germany, the United Kingdom, the French Third Republic, and the Kingdom of Italy meant an annexation of part of Czechoslovakia – the Sudetenland to Germany in hopes of preventing the war.<sup>13</sup> The Czechs and Slovaks felt betrayed by Western Europe, as it was decided without them being involved in the agreement. Till today they call the Munich Agreement the Munich Betrayal.

After the Second World War, the Sudetenland was returned to the Czech Republic. However, the complicated

relationships between Czechs and Germans after the war led to the expulsion of almost 3 million Germans from Czechoslovakia.<sup>14</sup> They left behind thousands of abandoned villages, mostly in the area of Sudetenland.<sup>15</sup> The displacement of Germans resulted in a wave of forced migration of people from all Czechoslovakia corners to populate the empty German villages (ibid). It was typical that those people didn't have any relationship to the place, landscape, or the countryside itself (ibid). This was the first nail in the coffin of the Czech countryside's future social and spatial development. But more radical decisions were still to come.

The Nazi occupation was replaced by the communist era and the Soviet occupation. Under the Soviet ideology, the countryside went through a painful process of collectivisation. Communists confiscated all the private property and land and turned them into more immense agriculture centres called "JZD", following the ideology that "everything belongs to everybody."<sup>16</sup> Private ownership stopped existing, and those who decided not to obey the rules and wanted to protect their property were detained, persecuted, or sentenced to death (ibid). Families were often broken in this process, and children left alone when parents were imprisoned in work camps.<sup>17</sup>

11 Arnold Suppan, *Austrians, Czechs, and Sudeten Germans as a Community of Conflict in the Twentieth Century*, (Center for Austrian Studies, University of Minnesota, 2003), 10.

12 Milan Sládek, *Němci v Čechách: německá menšina v českých zemích a Československu 1848-1946*, (Germans in Bohemia: the German

minority in the Czech lands and Czechoslovakia 1848-1946), (Prague, CZ: Pragma, 2002), 122.

13 "Munich Pact," September 29, 1938, <https://avalon.law.yale.edu/imt/munich1.asp>

14 Suppan, *Austrians, Czechs, and Sudeten Germans as a Community of Conflict in the Twentieth Century*, 15.

15 Jan Pešta, *Plošný průzkum lidové architektury a venkovských sídel*, (*Field Research of Czech Rural Architecture*), (Prague, CZ: NPÚ, ÚOP středních Čech, 2014), 22.

16 Jan Šperk, "Kolektivizace v CSR," *Moderní dějiny*, 2013, <http://www.moderni-dejiny.cz/clanek/>

17 Vladimír Šnidl, "Padlo první obvinění za likvidaci sedláků," (The First Charge was made for the Liquidation of Farmers), *Hospodářské noviny*, July 17, 2008, <https://archiv.ihned.cz/c1-26000790-padlo-prvni-obvineni-za-likvidaci-sedlaku-kolektivizace-v-csr/>

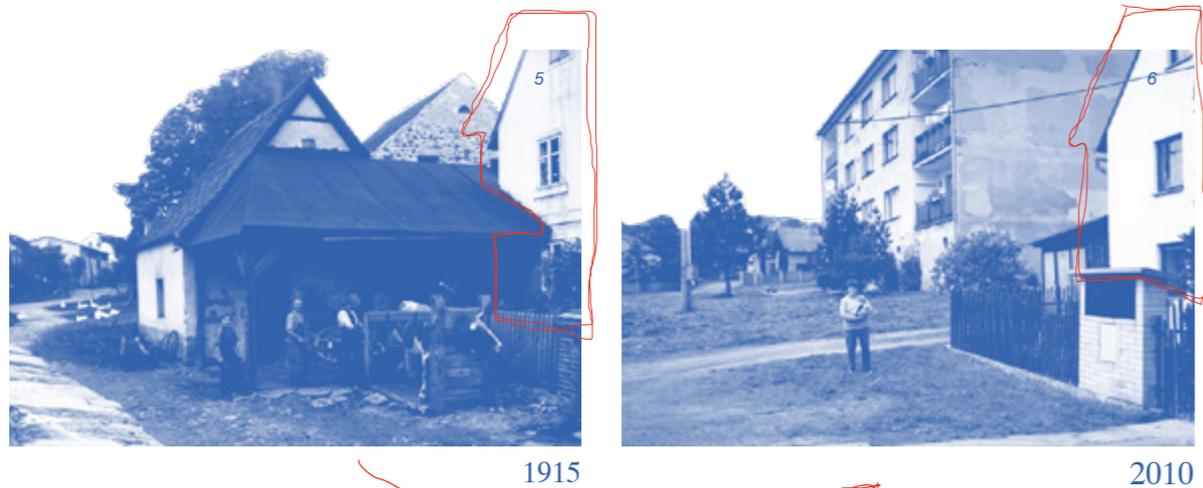
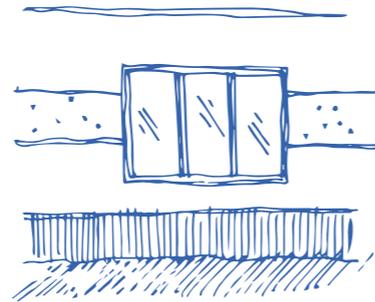
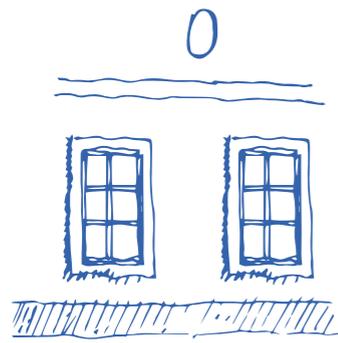


1 'JZD' propaganda, 1976. Photograph, Grossman.

2 The socialistic propaganda of collectivisation in the Czech village Havraň in October 1950. Photograph, Rostislav Novák, ČTK.

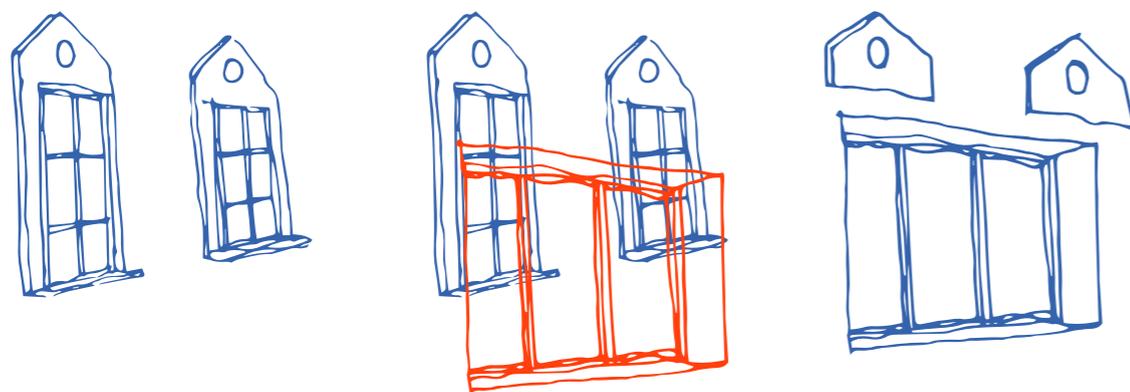
3 Expulsion of Germans from the concentration camp in Liberec. (July 13, 1946). Photograph, ČTK.

4 'JZD' United Agricultural Cooperative, 1956. Photograph, ČTK.



1915

2010



Considering the past

22 - 23

Some people are still remembered as heroes for their fight for the countryside's freedom from this period. However, their efforts didn't bring any change at that time. The traditional village hierarchy, traditions, and social life disappeared. People and families who used to be at the top of the hierarchy because of their social status and reputation were now the outcasts, while the morally corrupt came quickly to power.<sup>18</sup>

Further rural life turbulences came in the 1960s with the beginning of massive 'city life' propaganda, due to which most of the young people left the countryside for the labour in the cities.<sup>19</sup> The migration for work was the start of the ongoing ageing of the rural population (ibid). Furthermore, city life propaganda caused a spread of

modernist houses with poor aesthetical qualities in the villages. These houses had no context or relationship to the surrounding. The houses were built with an urban vision copying the city trends and replacing the traditional rural architecture (ibid). As a result of the city life propaganda, some of the local small businesses were closed, and people were forced to travel for work to regional cities.

From monarchy to democracy to Nazism to communism to socialism and finally to democracy again in 1989, within not even 70 years. These shifts of the regimes resulted in several issues that the countryside is currently facing, for instance, the loss of memories and broken relationships to the rural land and architecture, loss of traditions and social togetherness.

<sup>18</sup> Karel Jech, *Kolektivizace a vyhánění sedláků z půdy, (Collectivization and Expulsion of Farmers from their Land)*, (Prague, CZ: Vyšehrad, 2008), 45-55.

<sup>19</sup> RNDr. Radim Perlín, *Venkov, typologie venkovského prostoru (Countryside, Typology of Rural Spaces)*, (Prague, CZ: Institute for Spatial Development, 2010), 8.



7



8

5 House of farrier, Lipova, 1915. Photograph, Franz Josef Umlauf.

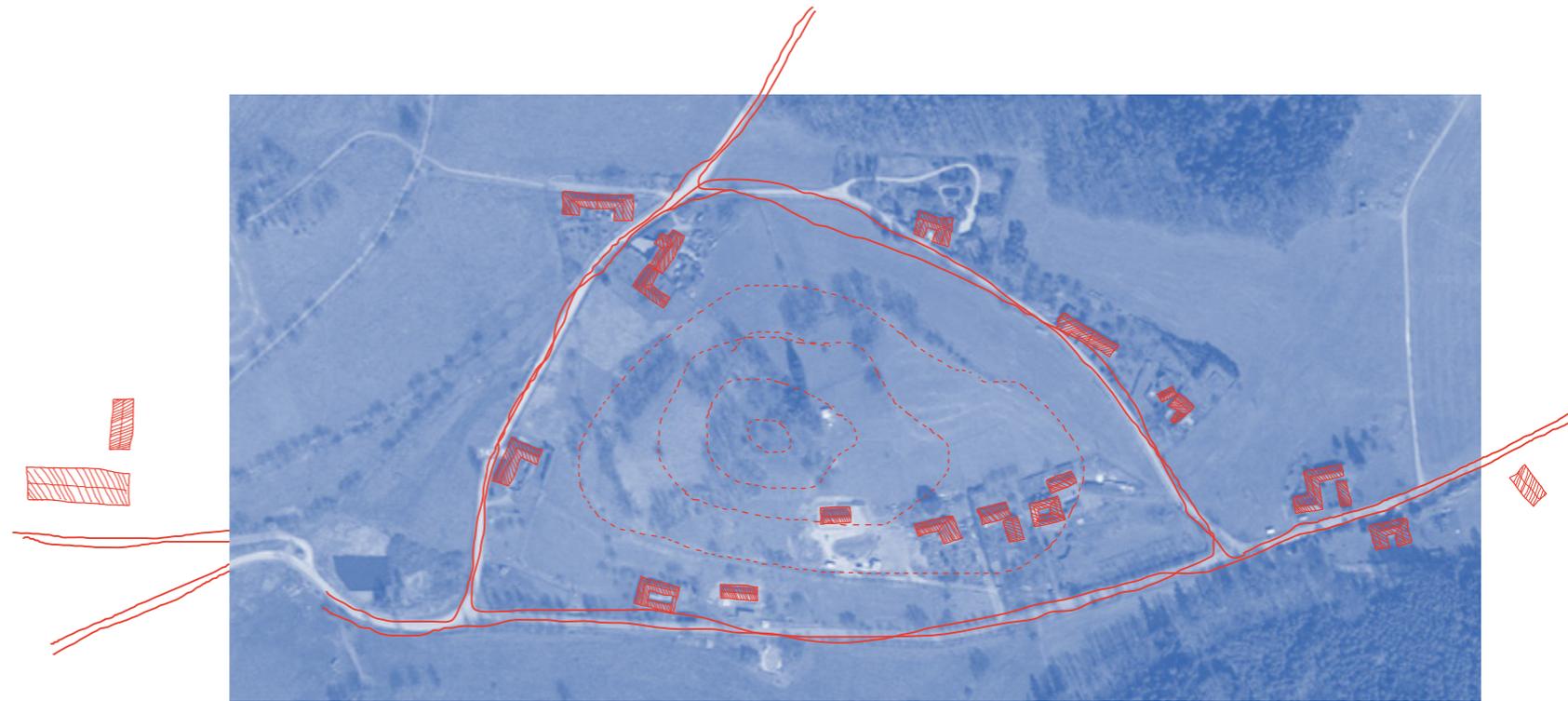
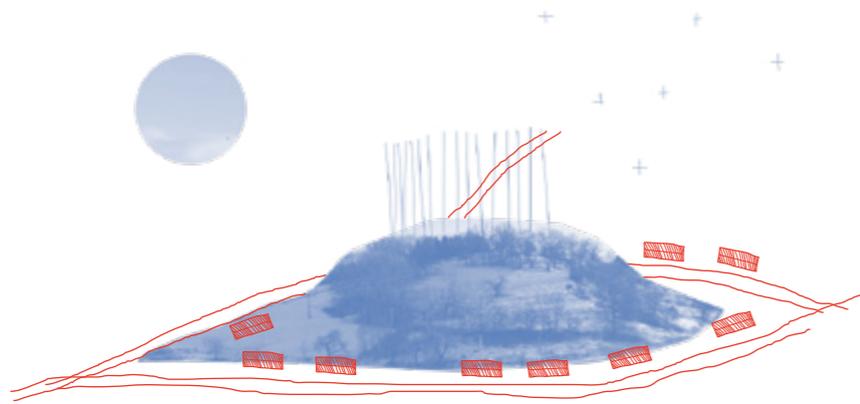
6 The socialist reconstruction of the same house with its owner in 2010. Photograph, Jan Vaca.

7, 8 Examples of residential architecture in Czech villages in 1990's. Photograph, Jan Kruml.

This is the Countryside

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Layers of today



map of Libějovické Svobodné Hory

## The place to explore

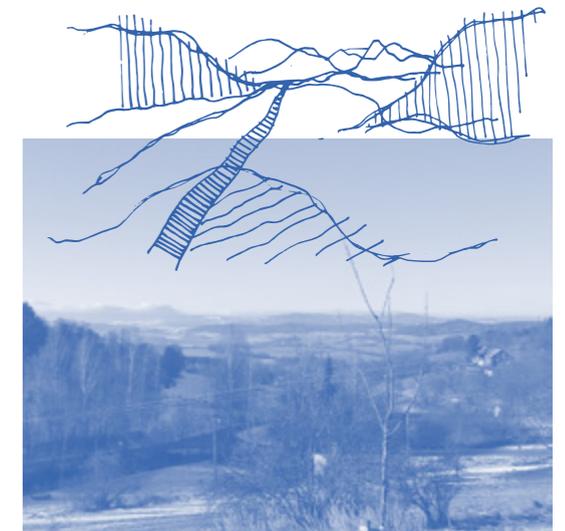
My case study, the village of Libějovické Svobodné Hory, is located in the South Bohemia region's heart on the Sumava mountains' foothills. It is on the imaginary edge of the wild mountain scenery and the peaceful rural lowlands of South Bohemia. Instead of being organised around a road or a square like many other Czech villages, the old farmhouses in Libějovické Svobodné Hory are scattered around a hill 'Vražedný', which is the central

point of the village. All the 22 houses are connected by three main roads surrounding the hill. Thanks to the village's position at the ridge of the Netonice uphill, 545 metres above sea level, each of the houses has its unique view of the Sumava mountains. The village's openness with extensive views of rural landscape to the East and the West and the scattering character of the village's layout is the core of Libějovické Svobodné Hory's identity.

Layers of today



The eastern view of Libějovické Svobodné Hory.



The view of Sumava mountains from Libějovické Svobodné Hory.

26 - 27

This is the Countryside



The statue of St. George above Libějovické Svobodné Hory. One of the few religious places around the village.

View of the village's main historical landmark 'Dvůr Jarov'.



## The story of Libějovické Svobodné Hory

The village's origin is tied to the outbreak of gold fever at the end of the 18th century.<sup>20</sup> The miners who searched for gold sought a place to live close to the gold mines at the foot of a hill called 'Svobodná'.<sup>21</sup> These miners started to build groups of cottages (called 'chalupy' in Czech) on each side of the 'Svobodna' hill, and that was the origin of three different villages – Vodňanské, Libějovické and Bavorovské Svobodné Hory. In the first half of the 19th century, after the mining stopped, the inhabitants' main occupation became agriculture (ibid).

The chalupy are not the only buildings in the village. In the middle of the 19th century, Schwarzenberg's aristocratic House built a big historical farm called 'Dvůr Jarov'.<sup>22</sup> Many people from the village used to work at the farm. To this day, it is an important protected landmark and is run and owned by one farmer family. There has never been a church in the village. However, multiple old traditional spiritual places used to be raised at the historical road crossings. Today, they can be found in the middle of meadows or the forest close by the village.

*Layers of today*

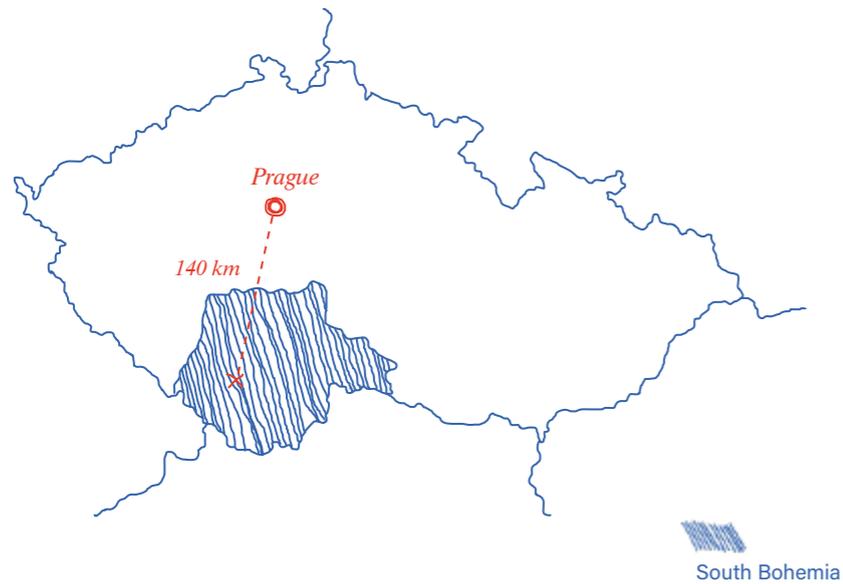
<sup>20</sup> "Historie," Obec Stožice, accessed 15th November, 2020. <https://www.stozice.cz/obec-1/historie/>

<sup>21</sup> "Stožice," Jihočeský venkov, accessed 16th November, 2020. [https://www.jihoceskyvenkov.cz/o-nas/clenske-obce/samostatne-obce/stozice-0\\_318.html](https://www.jihoceskyvenkov.cz/o-nas/clenske-obce/samostatne-obce/stozice-0_318.html)

<sup>22</sup> "Zemědělský dvůr Jarov," Národní Památkový Ústav, Památkový katalog, 2015. Accessed 15th November, 2020. <https://pamatkovykatalog.cz/zemedelsky-dvur-jarov-687214>

The cross under a linden tree in the middle of a road crossing in Libějovické Svobodné Hory. The only religious landmark in the village.





## Spatial connections of the village

The village is situated on the trajectory between the four most prominent cities in the region - České Budějovice, Písek, Strakonice and Prachatice. All the towns are accessible by car under 30 minutes driving. Good accessibility plays a big part in the lives of the 43 villagers and is also why the area is a popular tourism spot.<sup>23</sup> Multiple tourist

and cyclist routes cross the village itself. It lies on the connection line between the new observation tower 'Haniperk' on top of the hill 'Svobodná' hill and the Pilgrimage Church of Virgin Mary at Lomec, which is still a popular spiritual place to visit. All the mentioned qualities together create the village's unique identity.

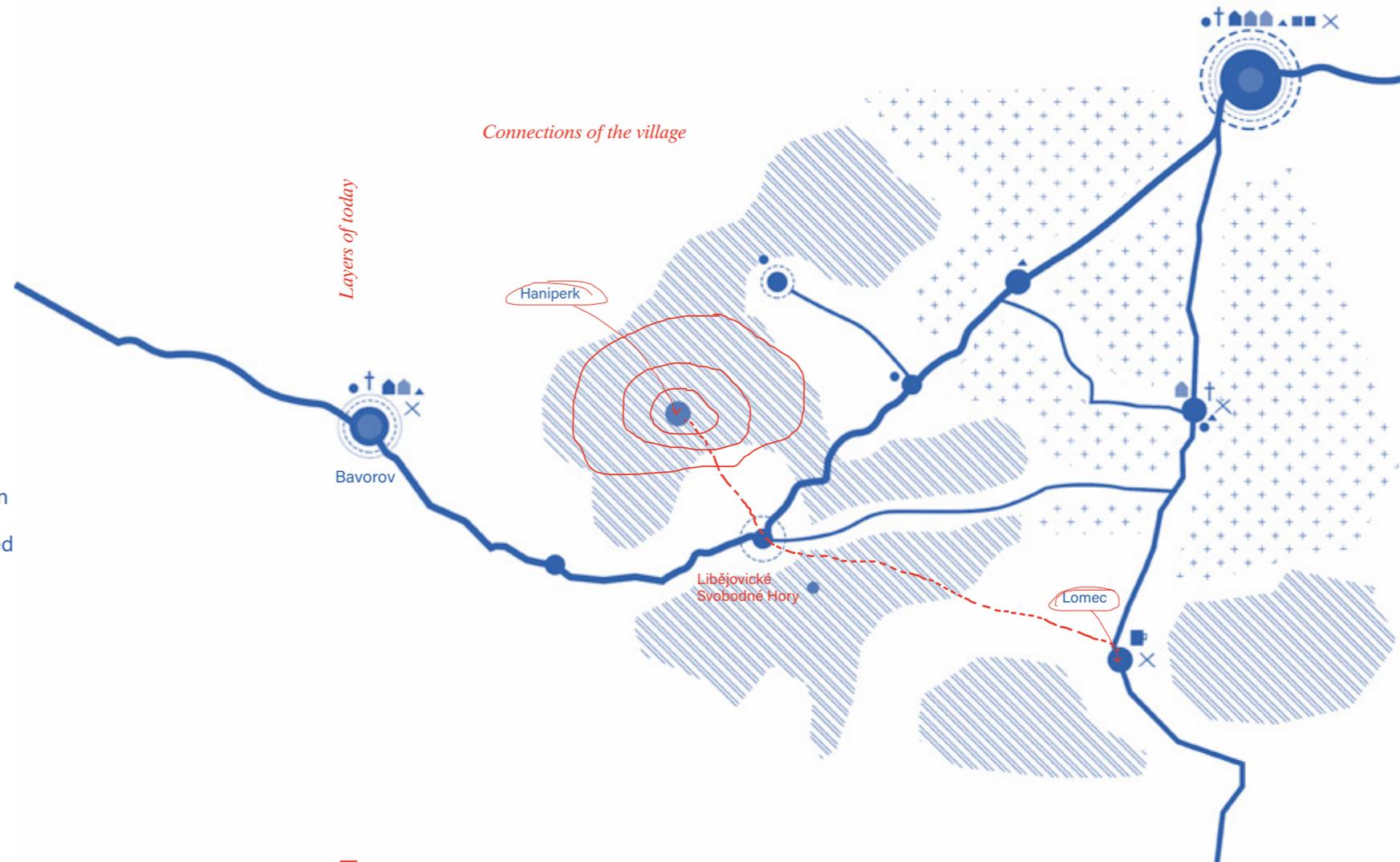
<sup>23</sup> Český statistický úřad, "Statistický lexikon obcí České republiky 2013" (Prague: Český statistický úřad, 2013). <https://www.czso.cz/csu/czso/statisticky-lexikon-obci-2013-a8m6eyff20>



09 Observation tower Haniperk on top of the hill Svobodná. Photograph, Lukáš Ptáček.



10 Pilgrimage Church of Virgin Mary at Lomec. Photograph, Jar Micolajek.

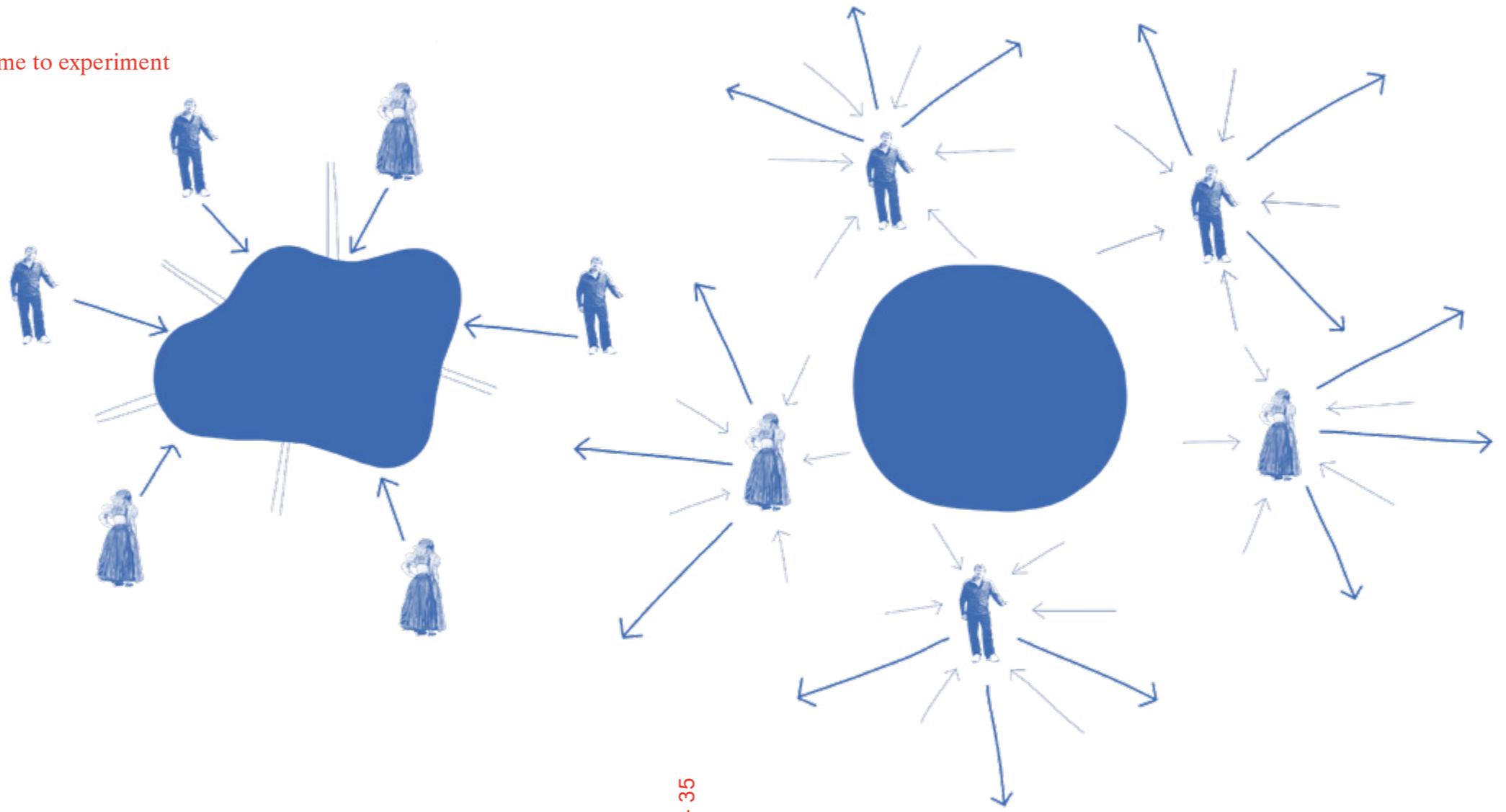


Photographs of different sites in Libějovické Svobodné Hory captured in December 2020.





Time to experiment



## Time to experiment

Since the beginning, there had been a task ahead of me waiting to be accomplished. I had to find a way to communicate with the villagers and gather information about their lives and the village. I didn't want to send a questionnaire around. I intended to connect with them, get to know them, listen to them. Therefore, I came up with

It's Saturday, 19th December, the first day of my social experiment in Libějovické Svobodné Hory. It's 10 a.m. The snow is squeaking under my shoes while I'm walking towards the first door of the first neighbour I intend to visit. I bear the maquette and the map in my arms. I'm breathing shakily, feeling my fingers freezing. My heart is beating fast. I don't know what to expect when the door opens. No one before me ever asked anyone in this village to take part in such a workshop. No one ever asked the people to fill a blank maquette and a village map with their personal stories. I don't know what to expect when I ask them to open their lives to me. I'm ringing the first doorbell while repeating in my mind what I should say. After a while, the door opens, an older man is looking at me suspiciously. I swallow, and I start speaking.

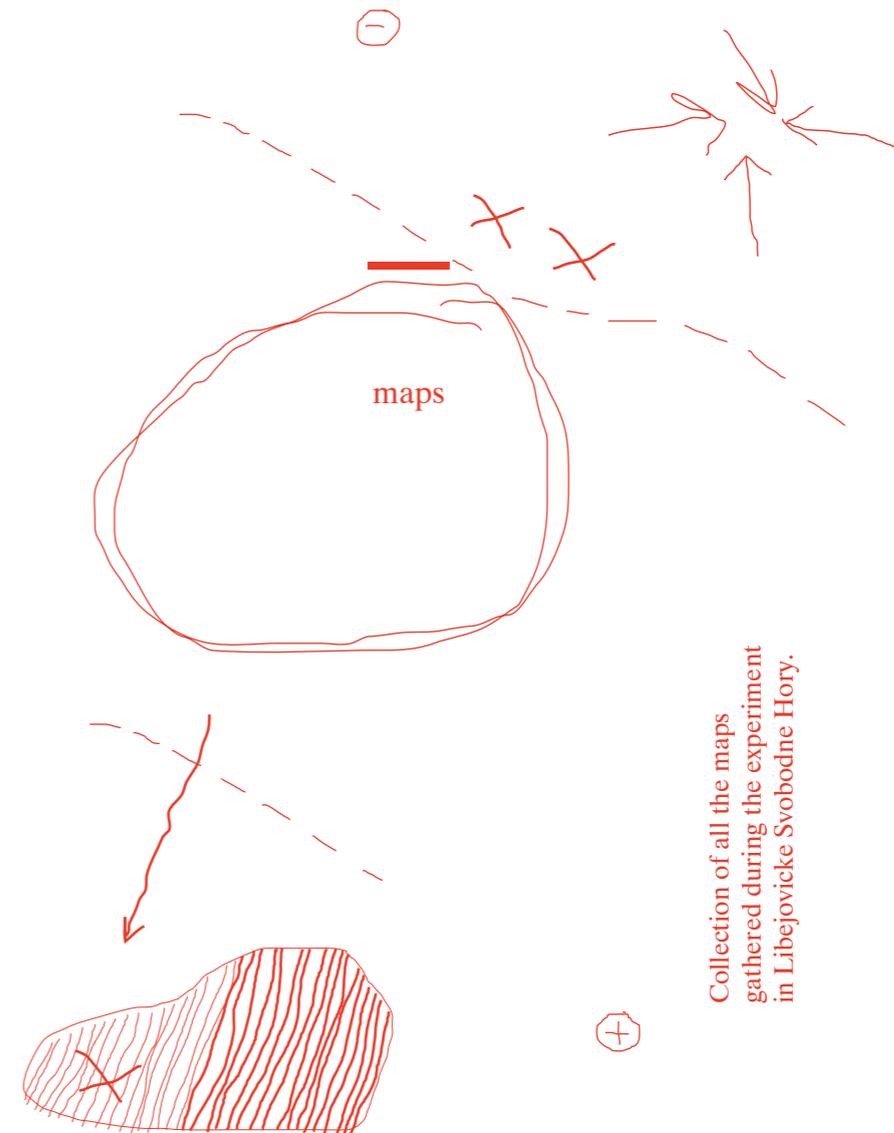
To my surprise, the man starts to smile after some time, and he agrees to participate in my experiment. Without expecting that, I'm listening to the first stories about the village from when he

using the maquettes and the maps as my communication tools. I was going around the whole village, door by door, asking every villager to fill them for me. I want to share with you what I found out on this journey.

Therefore, the moment of meeting my neighbours starts for you right now.

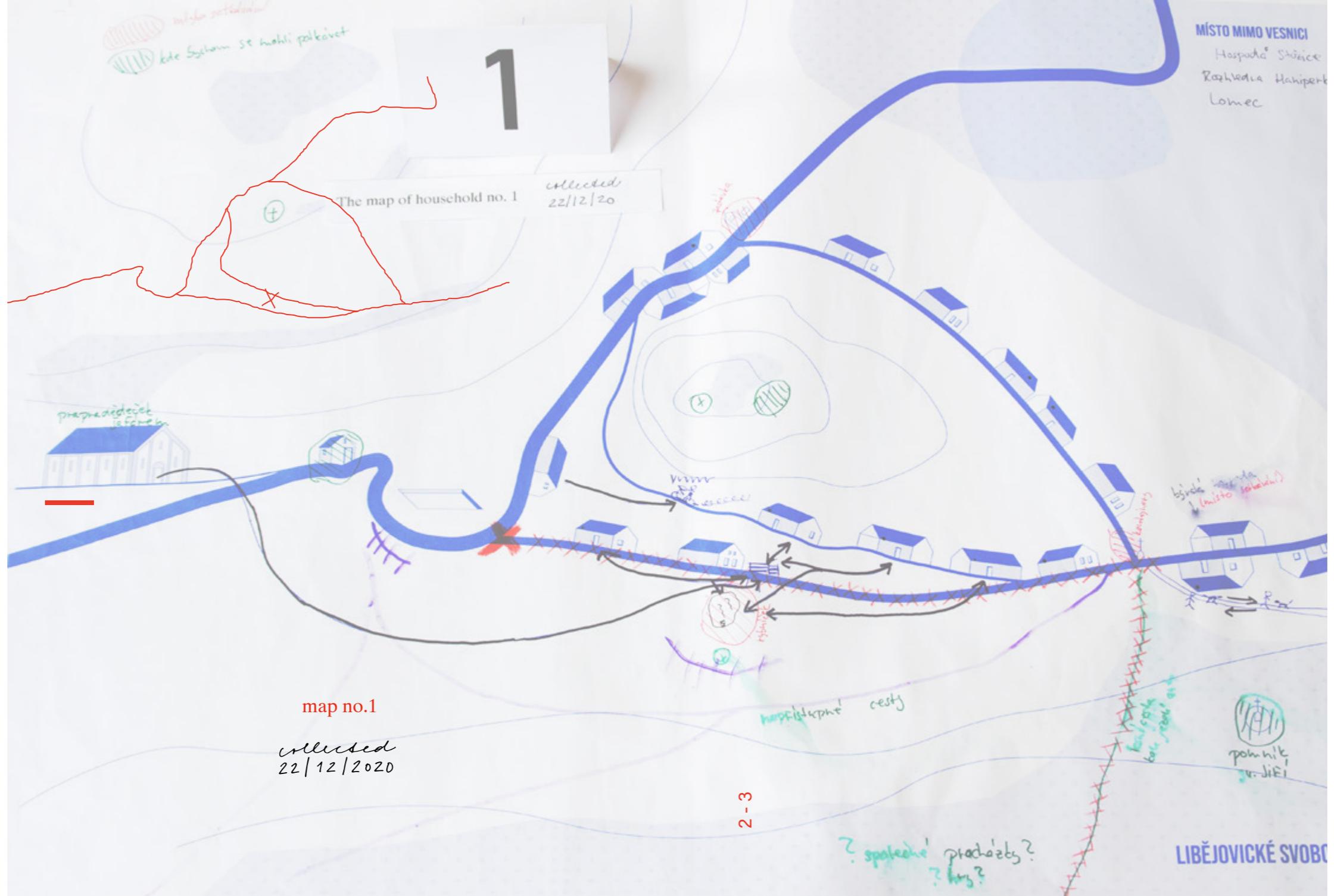
grew up. He decided to fill the map and the model in a week time. After a couple of days, he calls me and invites me for a cup of coffee to his home. He needs my help with filling the maquette. I agree. While drinking the cup of coffee on his porch, we talk about his life, my life, how the life in the village used to be, how it is now. My heart is filled with a warm feeling. I live in a village with nice people who are willing to help even if they don't fully understand the project's cause.

To my amazement, the same story happened every time I knocked on someone's door in the village. I talked to 14 people out of 15 households in the village. All the people were happy to help me out. Even if they didn't want to fill the maquette or the model, they were willing to stand with me outside in the freezing winter weather, and they talked to me about their lives and the village - all of them smiling at me. We are no longer strangers to each other; I can feel I'm becoming one of them. I'm becoming part of the community.



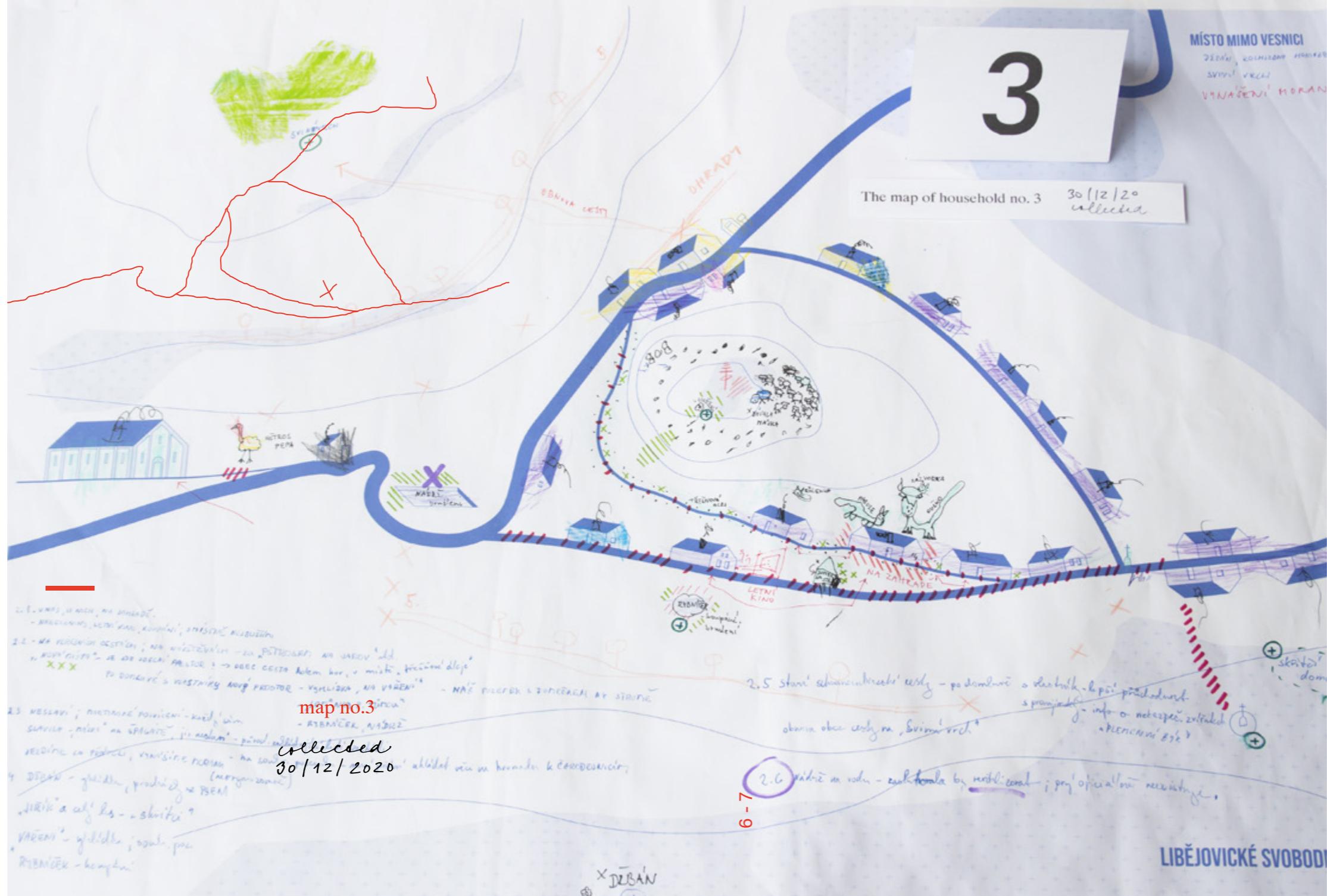
Collection of all the maps gathered during the experiment in Libějovické Svobodné Hory.

# The day has come.



The day has come.





The day has come.



8 - 9

The day has come.

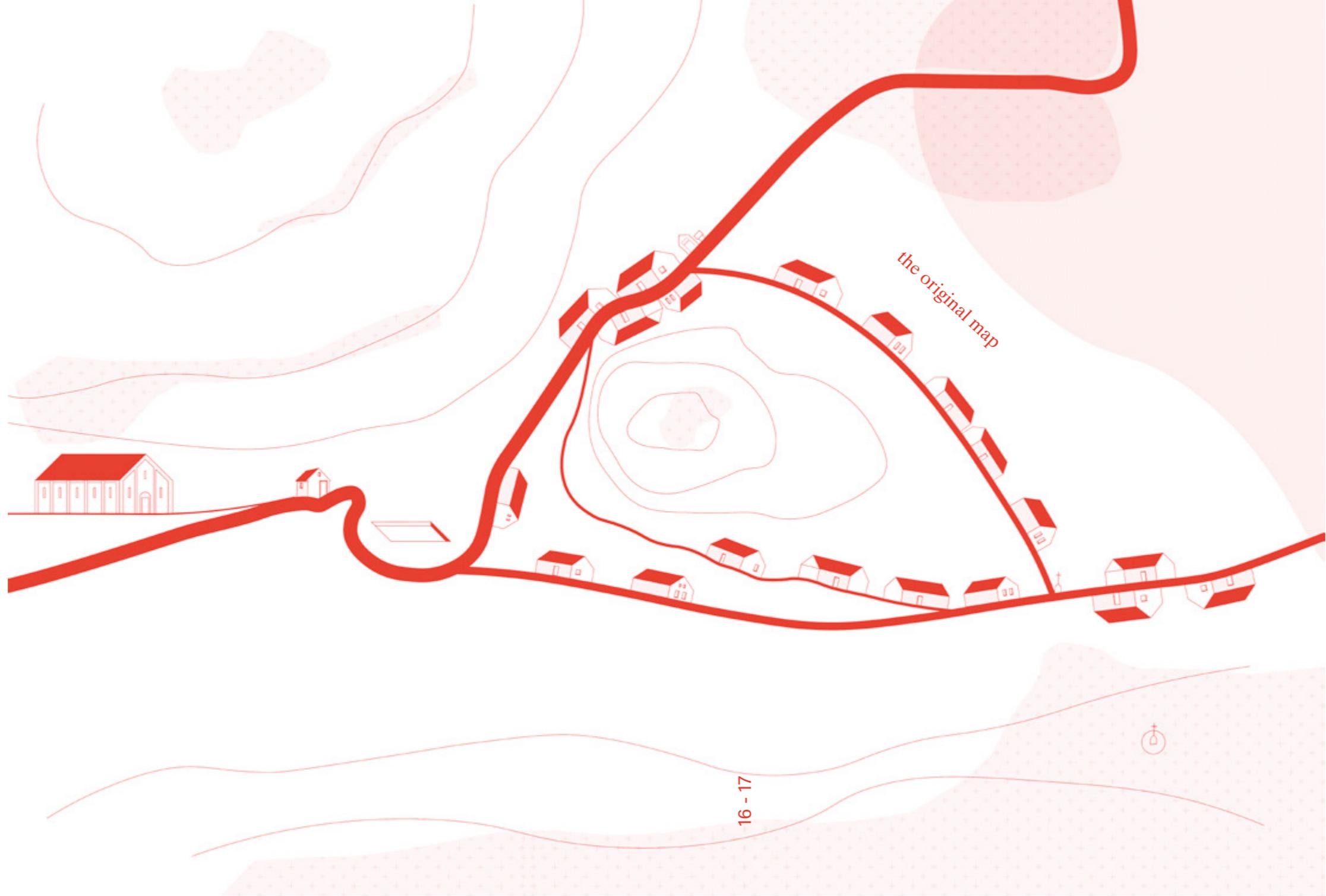




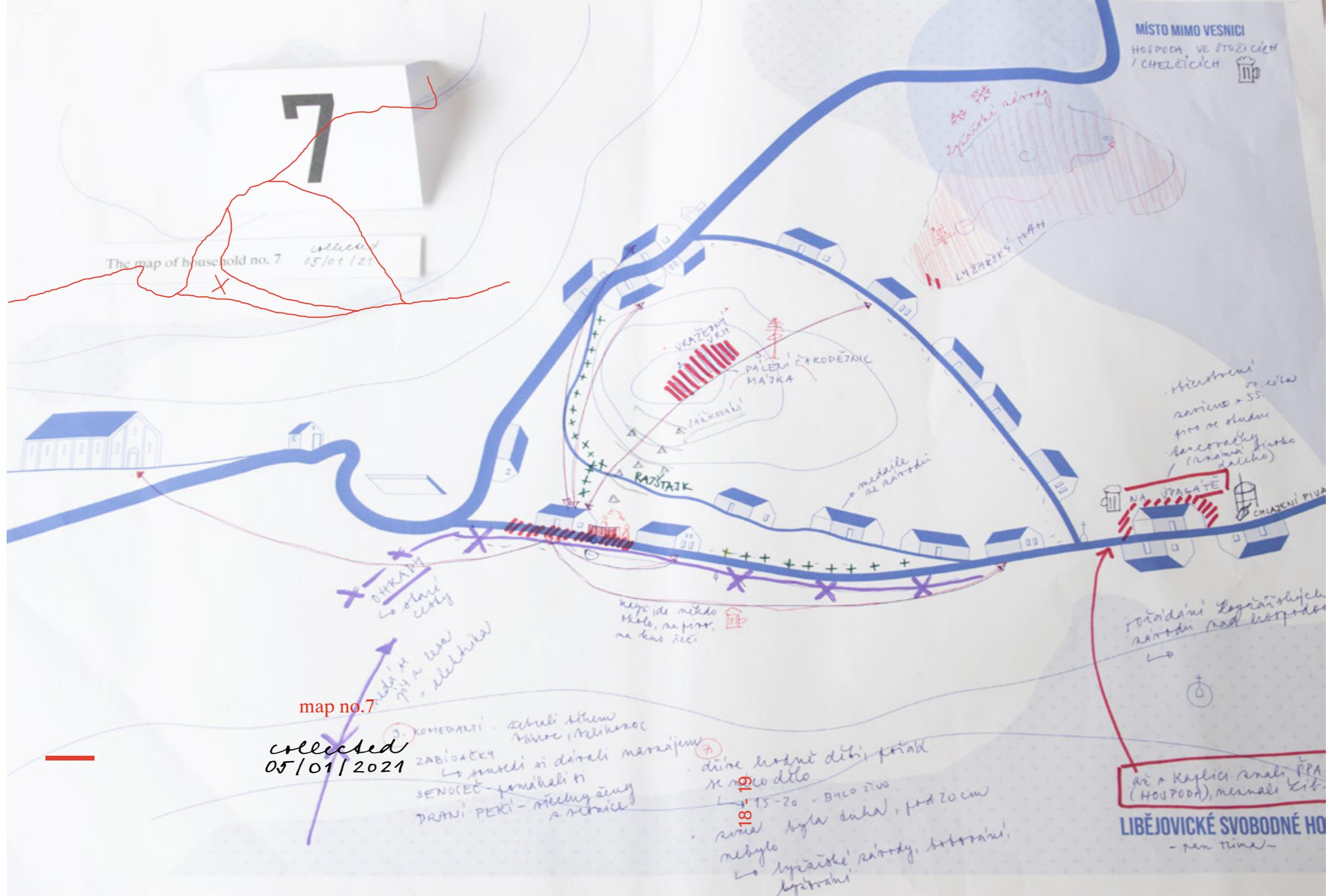
The day has come.



The day has come.



The day has come.

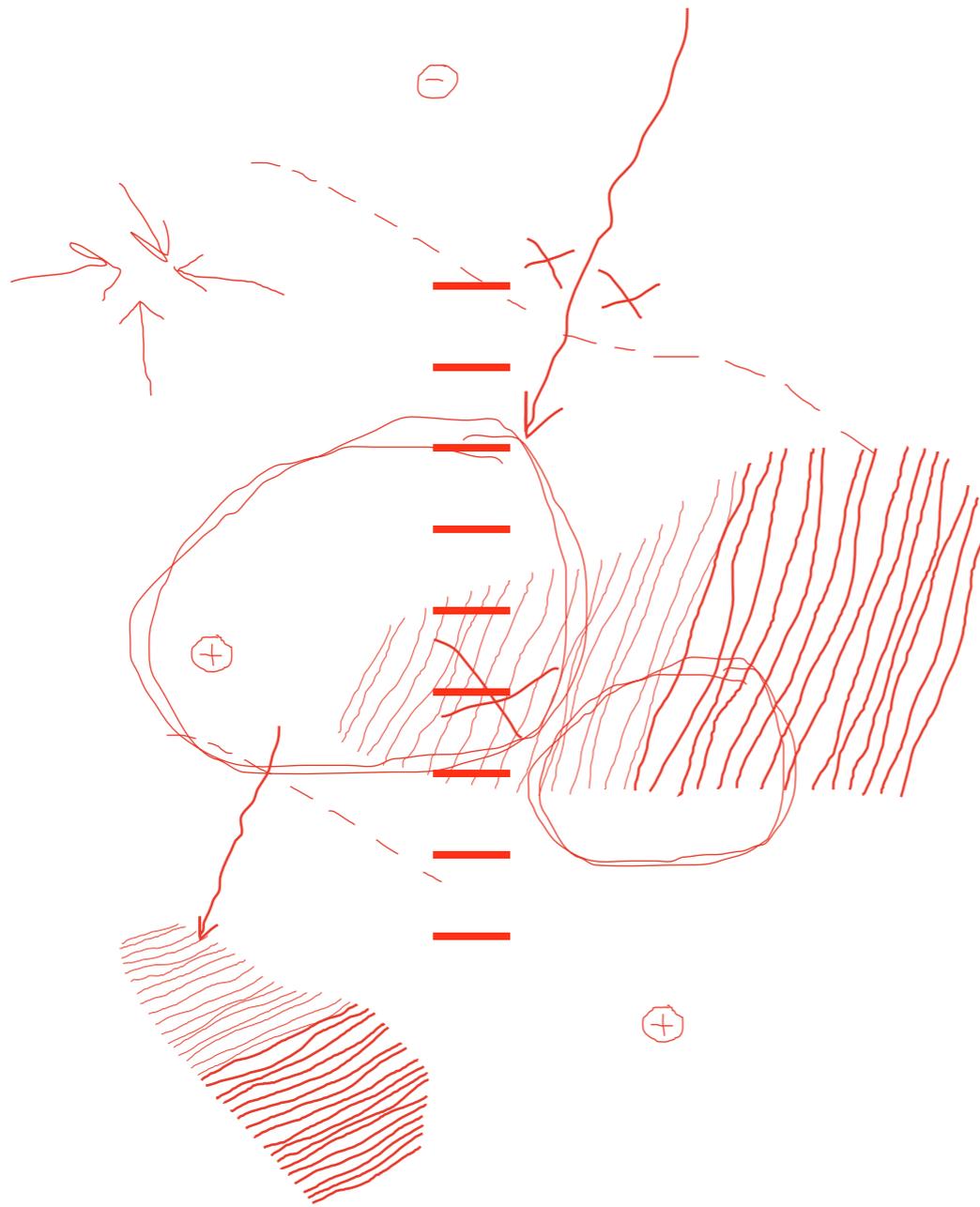


The day has come.



The day has come.





*Time to experiment*

Me, leaving for the second walk to visit my neighbours.

**The day has come.**

## The loss of collective public places and their impact on daily social life

*'I have no memories of the village for the past five years, as nothing was happening.' One of the villagers said this sentence that resonated with me powerfully, realising that it underlines all the conversations I had in the village in those three weeks when I was walking from one door to another, giving away and collecting the maquettes and the maps. Once a very lively village, with a rich social life, feels very separated nowadays. The best example to support this statement is a story of one couple living in the village for the past five years knowing no one else than their two direct neighbours.*

The process of separation is not sudden. It's a long going societal transformation that has been happening for decades. From what I could observe and from the stories I heard, I can say that there are two different causes of individual separation - intentional and involuntary. Some newcomers chose the village to spend their last working years and mainly their future retirement in a peaceful and quiet environment. They don't have any collective needs considering the village, and they focus their time on the surrounding nature, their families, their friends from the towns, their gardens, and their happiness. For other people in the village, the collective separation is unintentional and caused by a personal situation - having a job

far away, change of family situation or simply ageing that caused the gradual drifting apart. But this doesn't mean that there is no need for social life. All interviewees mentioned that they would welcome some common events or occasions to meet others as there are none in the village today. Furthermore, most common traditions or social experiences were closely tied to specific collective places that sometimes don't exist anymore.

*To understand better the evolution of these social places in the village, I visited and analysed their condition today.*

Every year, the village used to meet on 1st May to raise the maypole on the central hill's top. It was an opportunity for everyone to meet all the neighbours and update on everyone's life while sitting together around a fire. This tradition was the only one that lasted till five years ago when the last younger generation moved away because of work. The only reminder of the convention is a wooden shed left on the hill's top where the wood and furniture for the celebration used to be stored. Now it's in the middle of sheep pasture divided from the rest of the village by an electric fence.

*Time to experiment*

Similar stories continue for other common places in the village. The local pub 'Na Spagate' was closed at the end of the '60s, while it was a prominent place in the region. In summer, there were concerts and dancing nights where all generations would meet. In the winter, the publican organised skiing competitions hosting people with warm wine and grilled meat. After the closure, the pub's space was turned into a private garage. At that moment, the village lost a place to meet not only with the villagers but also with the travellers. Even today, the older generation still misses this place, as there is no such space to gather in any neighbouring villages anymore.

Nearby the pub is a road crossing with a linden tree in the middle. There used to be a bench where the older women would meet at the end of the day, enjoying the Sumava mountains' evening view and sharing the last moment of a day. Together with this generation of older women passing away, the bench too disappeared. Only the linden tree stands there still, remembering these days of the past, as it listened silently to the women talking day after day, like their mothers used to do. Now it's standing there alone in the middle of an asphalt road crossing surrounded by recycling bins. The bins have a very particular social role in today's village as it's the only public

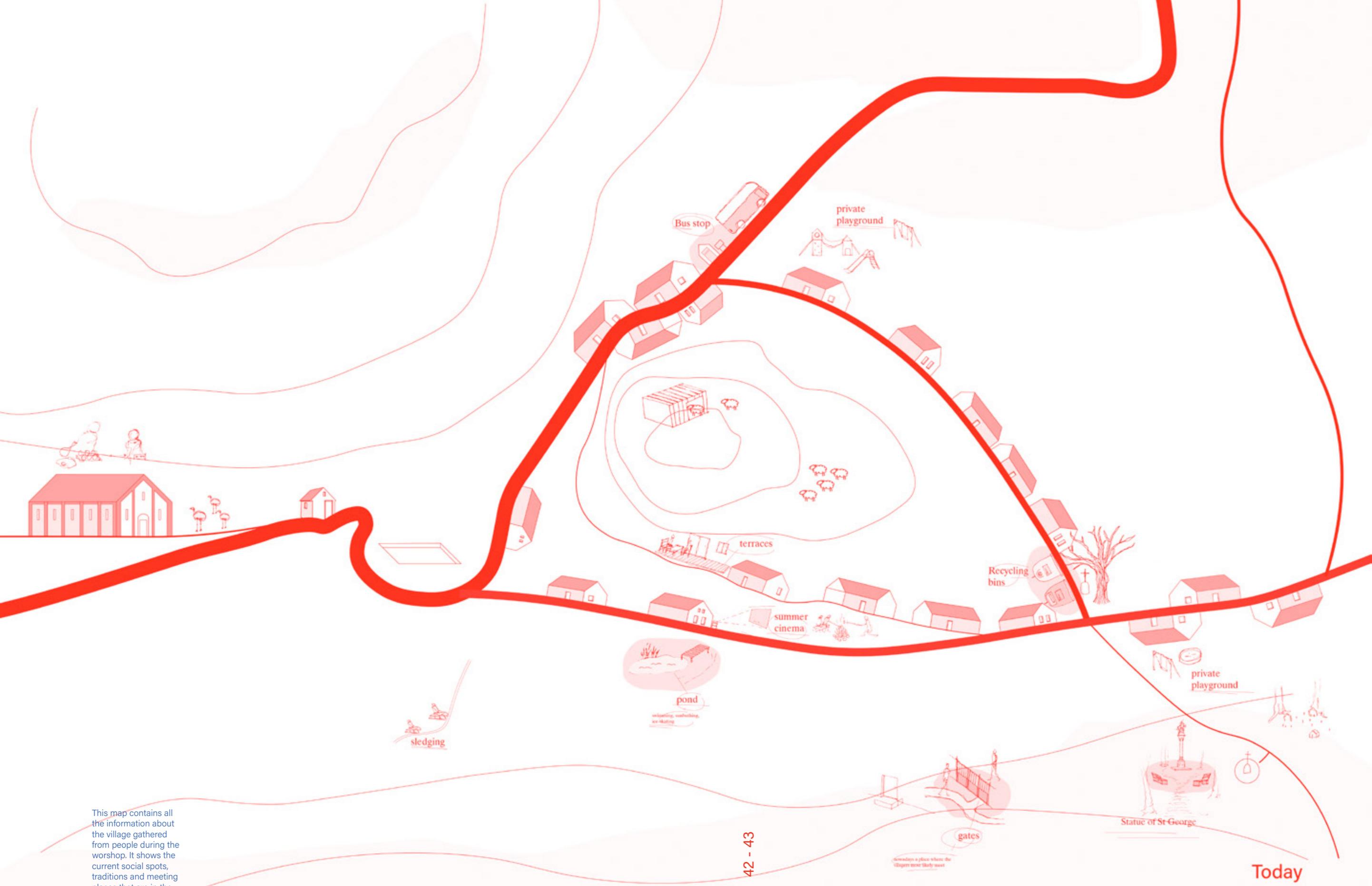
place where every person from the village regularly comes.

Based on the field research, places like recycling bins or a bus stop are necessary for people's daily lives and, therefore, are the most frequent meeting places in the village. People concentrate more on the comfort of the inside of their homes and gardens than the outside public areas. The meetings between the villagers became accidental and rare. Some of the people don't see each other for years. However, based on our conversations, everyone misses more regular social contact with the rest of the village. Curiously enough, there is no ongoing action towards changing the current situation from anyone, and the older generation keeps living in their memories.

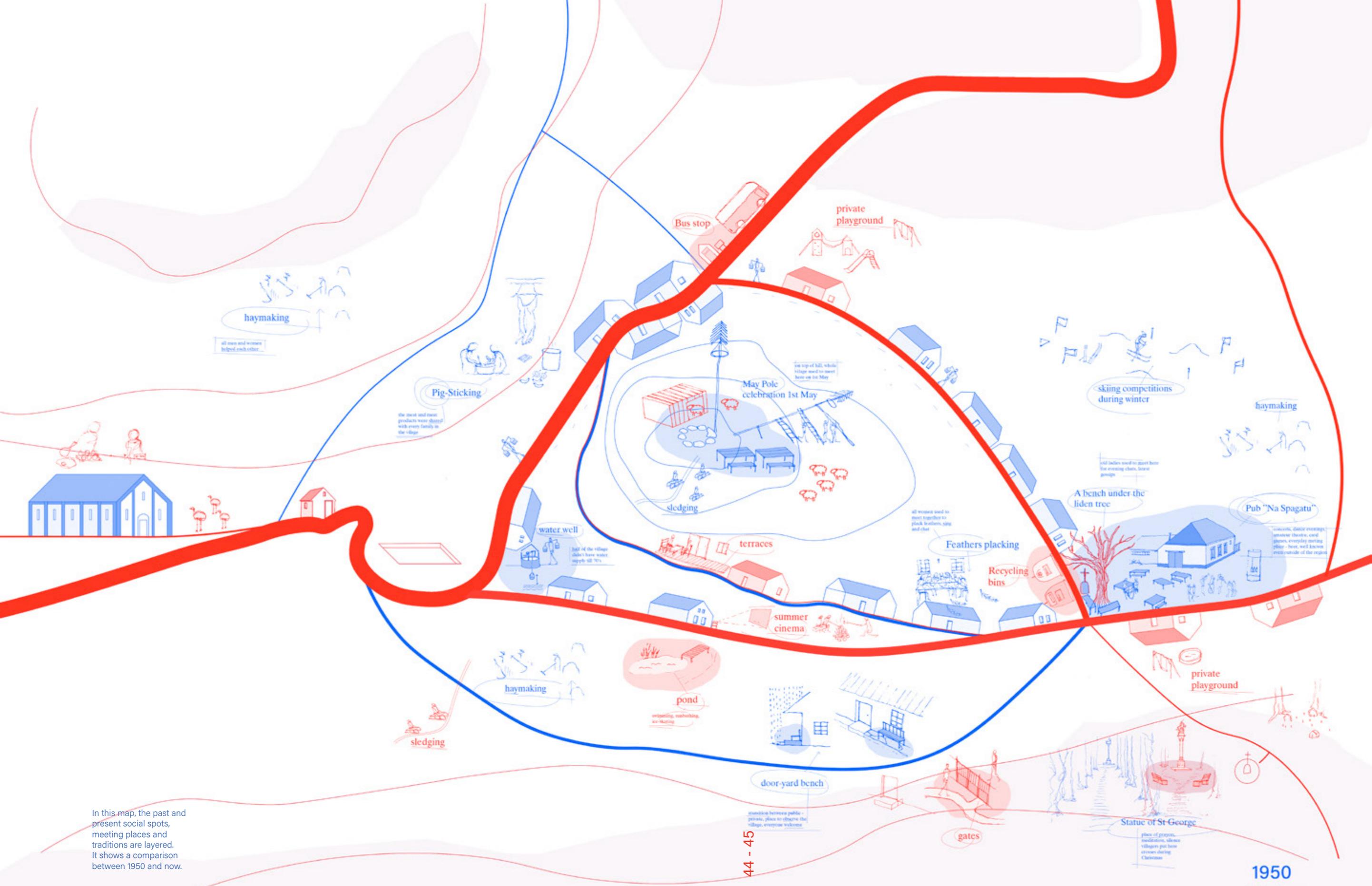
**Nonetheless, everyone I spoke to agreed that their neighbours are always there for them if they are in any personal discomfort or need of help. The exchange of fruit, vegetables or other products from the garden is no exception. It is more like a natural gesture to each neighbour.**



This map contains all the information about the village gathered from people during the workshop. It shows the past social spots, traditions and meeting places that were in the village in 1950.



This map contains all the information about the village gathered from people during the workshop. It shows the current social spots, traditions and meeting places that are in the village nowadays.



In this map, the past and present social spots, meeting places and traditions are layered. It shows a comparison between 1950 and now.

## 'Chalupa' The traditional building of Libějovické Svobodné Hory

Chalupa. One of the most critical elements that form the Czech countryside. Chalupa used to be a place where a large part of the village's social life happened. From modern terms, it is essentially a house, a private property, but back then, chalupas were somehow a part of the public village life as well. They were much more than just private houses. Many traditions and social gatherings happened inside the chalupas or the gardens, such as collective readings, Easter celebrations, feather pluckings, pig-stickings and more.

*I couldn't find the English dictionary's right fitting term to describe these typical Czech rural houses. The closest words I could find are cottage, farmhouse, chalet, but none of them fully cover the whole meaning of the phrase chalupa. Therefore, I use this term in the text.*

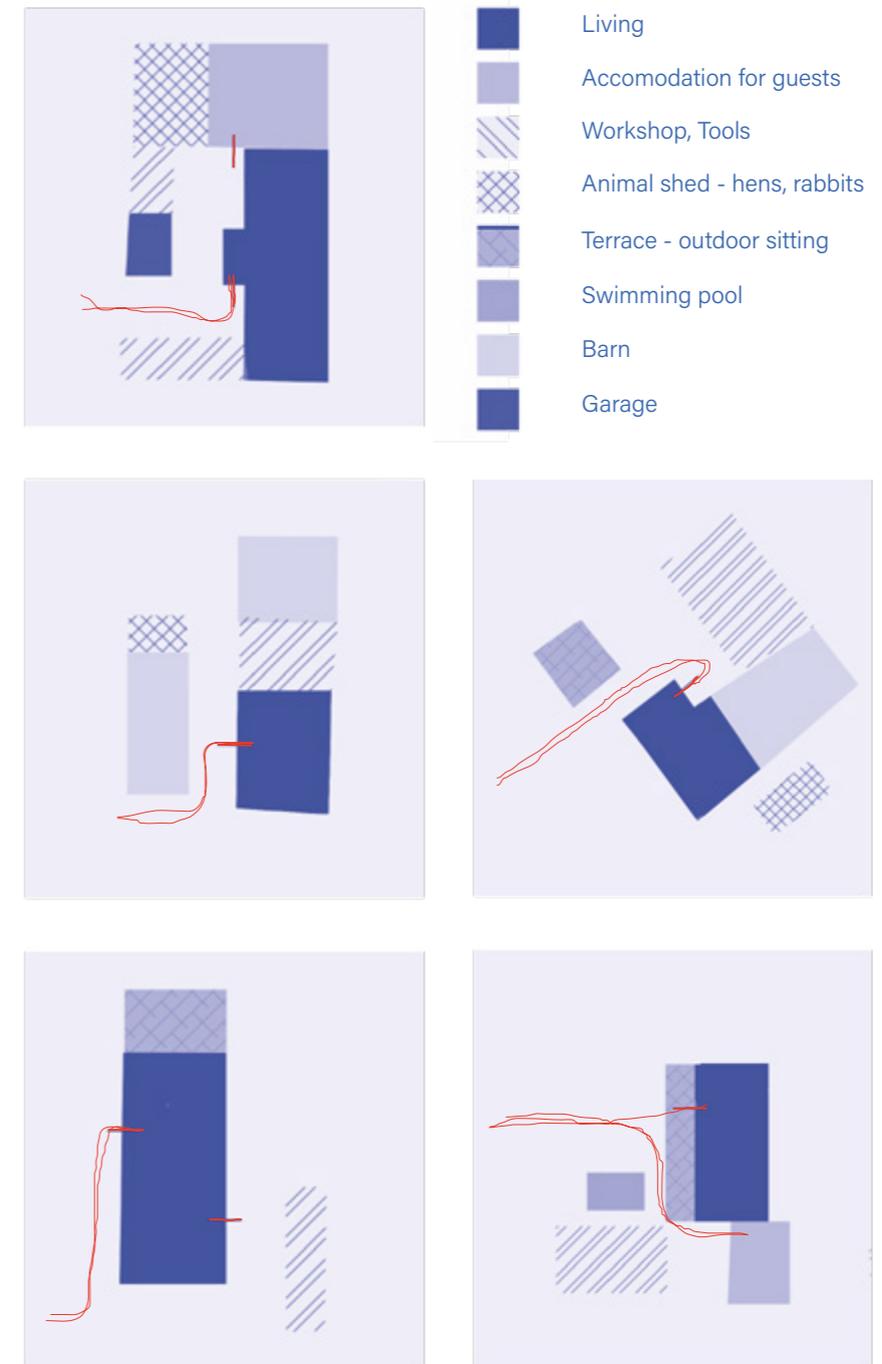
In Czech, the word 'chalupa' means a small rural dwelling usually connected to a small field and a little garden just big enough for one family to grow their food there. It was a simple house built from local materials connected to a barn and cots for a pig, hens, a goat, and in the case of a prosperous family, a cow. People had the house only big enough to build it themselves from the available material with the other villagers' support.

There is no difference with the chalupas in Libějovické Svobodné Hory. Around the hill, scattered gable-roofed houses were built out of local materials - stone, wood, mud, and reeds. The houses were simple but cleverly thought through in terms of respecting the natural conditions. They all were built parallel to the contour lines of the hill and set into the natural terrain. The main living room called 'světnice' faced the East as from the West, the cold wind from the Sumava mountains often blows. The wind, the sunlight, the water conditions, the terrain's slope, and the soil were all considered. Therefore, all the chalupa's fit almost naturally into the landscape.

The spartan interior of chalupa contained only a few rooms. The household's centre was a room called 'světnice', and it was the main living room. Světnice served for cooking, dining, and sleeping, where the whole family slept together. There were no other bedrooms in the house. Only in summer, the children used to sleep in the attic on the stored hay. The rest of the rooms were an entrance, a cellar, a scullery, and a pantry. The other parts of the house were occupied by stock and tools. All the interior rooms used to have dried mud floors, white lime plaster walls and low wooden beamed ceilings usually covered by reed and white lime plaster.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Josef Vařeka and Václav Frolec, *Lidová architektura*, (Vernacular Architecture), (Prague, CZ: Grada Publishing, 2007), 237.

Time to experiment



Examples of spatial layouts of chalupas in Libějovické Svobodné Hory in 2020.

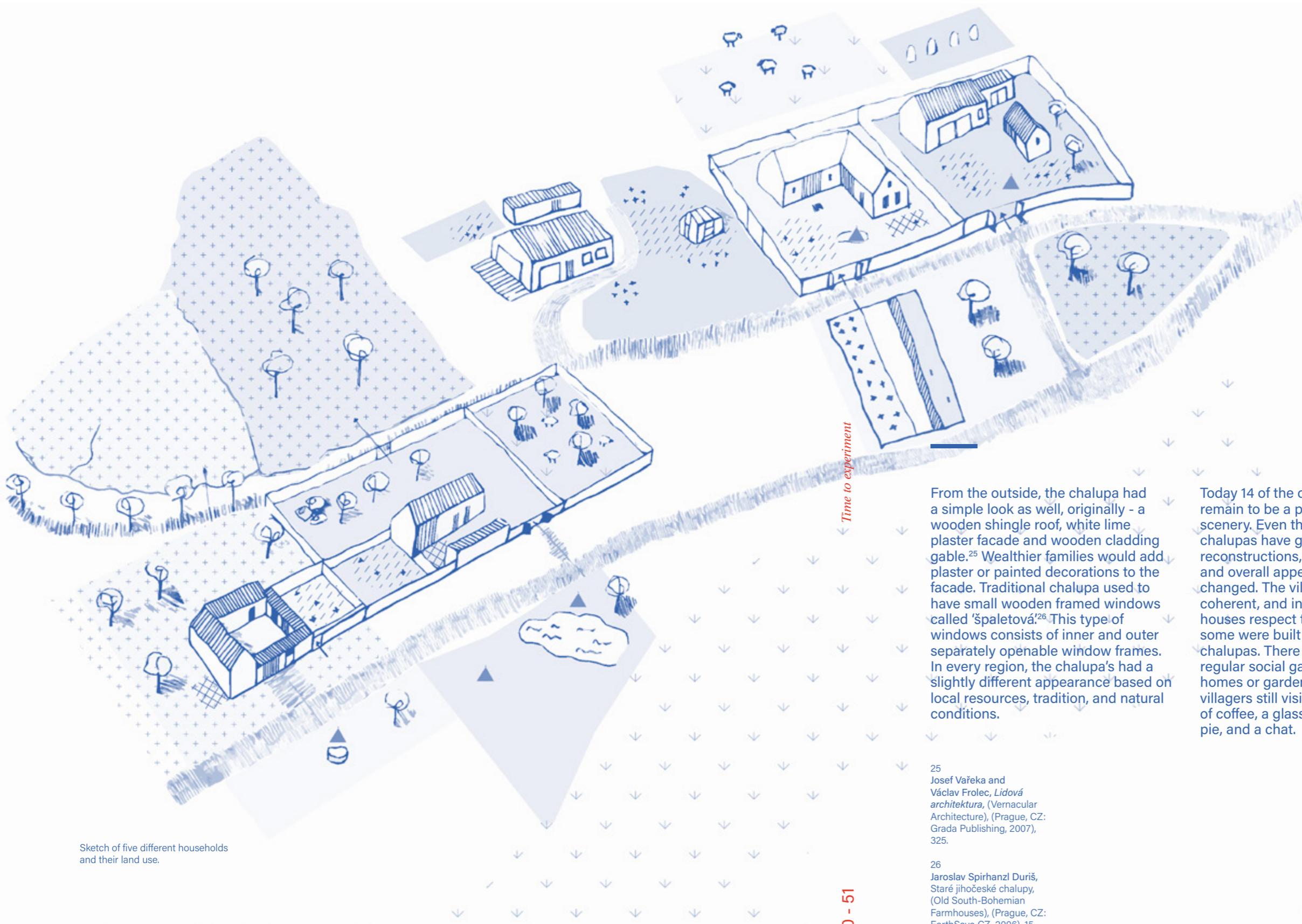


Selection of sketches of chalupy  
from December 2020.

*Time to experiment*



48 - 49



Sketch of five different households and their land use.

From the outside, the chalupa had a simple look as well, originally - a wooden shingle roof, white lime plaster facade and wooden cladding gable.<sup>25</sup> Wealthier families would add plaster or painted decorations to the facade. Traditional chalupa used to have small wooden framed windows called 'špaletová'.<sup>26</sup> This type of windows consists of inner and outer separately openable window frames. In every region, the chalupa's had a slightly different appearance based on local resources, tradition, and natural conditions.

Today 14 of the original chalupa's remain to be a part of the village scenery. Even though most of the chalupas have gone through significant reconstructions, their original shape and overall appearance haven't changed. The village's layout stays coherent, and in most cases, the new houses respect the original form, and some were built on the sites of the old chalupas. There are no traditions or regular social gatherings at people's homes or gardens anymore, but some villagers still visit each other for a cup of coffee, a glass of beer, a piece of the pie, and a chat.

<sup>25</sup> Josef Vařeka and Václav Frolec, *Lidová architektura*, (Vernacular Architecture), (Prague, CZ: Grada Publishing, 2007), 325.

<sup>26</sup> Jaroslav Spirhanzl Duriš, *Staré jihočeské chalupy*, (Old South-Bohemian Farmhouses), (Prague, CZ: EarthSave CZ, 2006), 15.

## The private character of the village

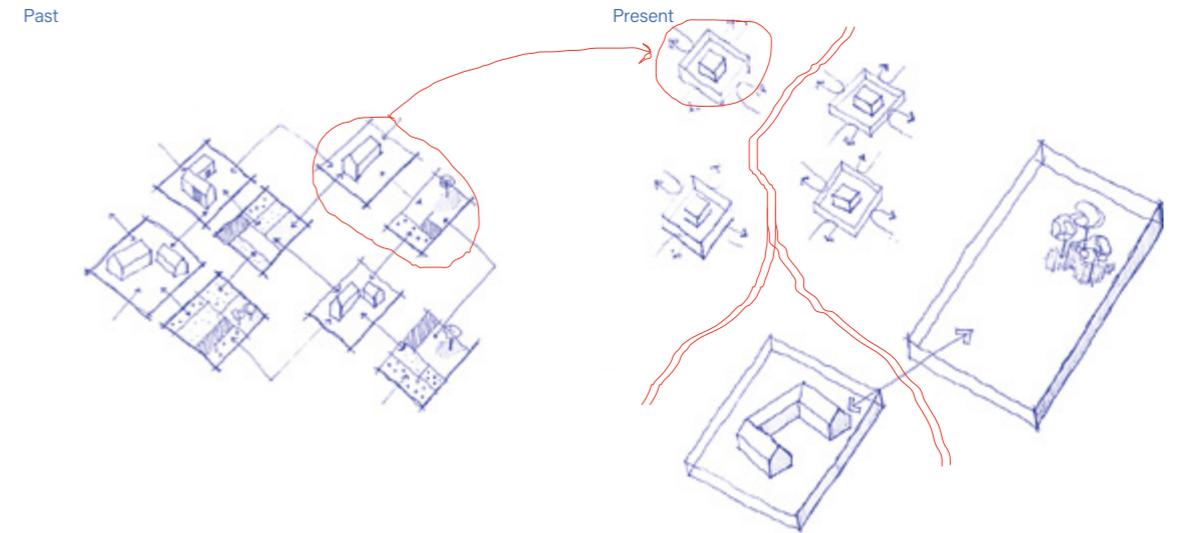
Thanks to the field research, I realised how remote and non-accessible the village and its landscape are. Gates and fences surround all three main roads, and many of the past gathering spaces like the top of the hill are now in the middle of pastures surrounded by electric fences. The process of losing accessible public areas is not sudden. It was affected by the shifts between the political regimes and changes in lifestyles.

One hundred years ago, people used to depend much more on others' help, on the community, especially during the summer - the season of haymaking and harvesting. Therefore, there were not many reasons to build fences around their properties. The wooden paling used to be only where it was necessary to keep animals in their place, and the rest of their garden and land was accessible for anyone. Furthermore, to build fences around their whole property wasn't worth the time, resources, and work, they would have to put into it, especially when they had to do all the work by hand. Additionally, the villagers spent most of their days outside, so the whole village was under constant patrol as everyone worked directly on their fields around the village. Nowadays, it is common to have a fence around the entire garden and land. Therefore, the open character of the village and the rural houses have become increasingly private. The more robust separation between residents' properties and public spaces has also

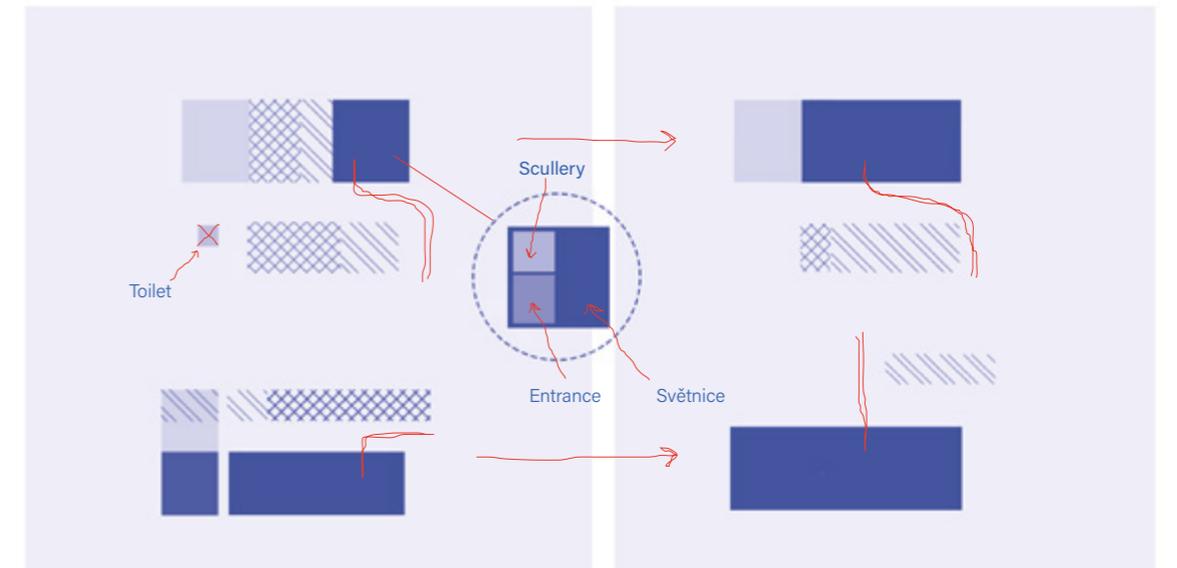
been noticed by the village people as they can't enter many of the old paths that used to lead through the landscape and connected their homes with the surrounding nature.

Today, people spend most of their time indoors, in the comfort of their houses or at work outside the village. In the past, there used to be a bench at every household's dooryard inviting the neighbours or travellers to sit down and talk with the house owner. It was traditionally a well-known public space in the private area of the property where anyone was welcome. Neighbours used to stop by for gossip or enjoy the last bits of the sunlight while leaning their backs towards the houses' walls. The house owners used to sit there and observe the street, and if someone walked by, they would share a couple of words with them. This character of outdoor meeting places is not very common anymore, *I could see only two benches like this during my field research, and I'm not sure if they are still used for their original purpose.*

The countryside's private image is underlined by seeing swimming pools, playgrounds, and little zoos behind the palings in people's gardens. It is less common to see children playing in the streets and adults meeting outside their homes. *And I don't wonder why. They have everything they need, all the comfort they seek in their homes and gardens.*



Time to experiment



Examples of spatial layouts of chalupas in Libějovické Svobodné Hory in the past and their transformation to the present state.

- Living
- Barn
- Workshop, Tools
- Animal shed - hens, rabbits, cows



*Time to experiment*

This diagram shows all the private fences in the village.



This diagram shows the private and public character of the village.

- Current social places
- Current public areas
- Roads and paths
- Past social places
- Forest
- Current private areas

## An atypical village?

The atypical layout of Libějovické Svobodné Hory made me wonder how much it affects the village's social and architectural trends and, therefore, if my research is relevant for other Czech villages as well.

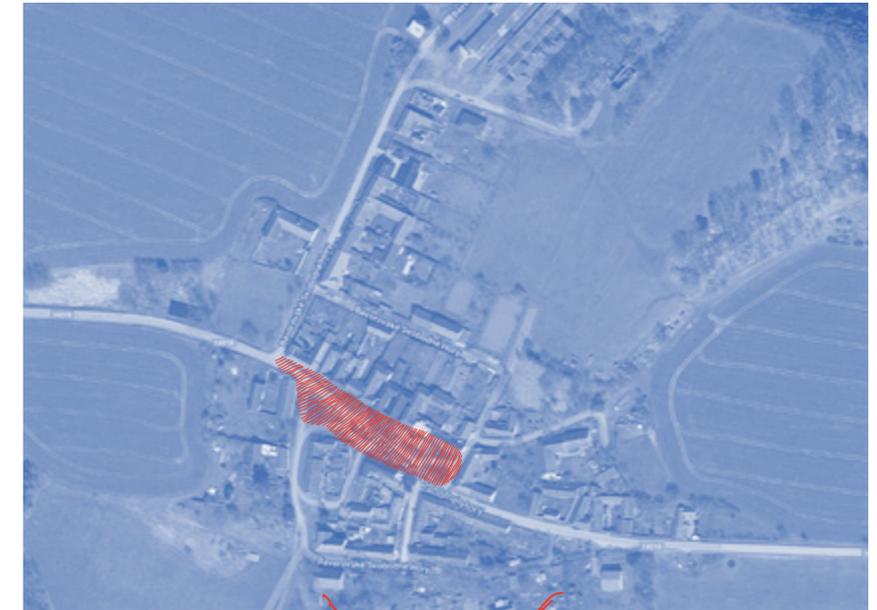
*Diving deeper into this topic, I turned my attention towards a neighbouring village called Bavorovské Svobodné Hory. Again, I went door to door, asking people four different questions, comparable to those I asked in Libějovické Svobodné Hory. In general, I was surprised by how similar the answers were.*

The village has the same origin as Libějovické Svobodné Hory, but it is organised around a square that is currently the village's only traditional gathering place. For the past ten years, the celebration of 1st May in the square is the only common occasion when the villagers meet. Even though, with

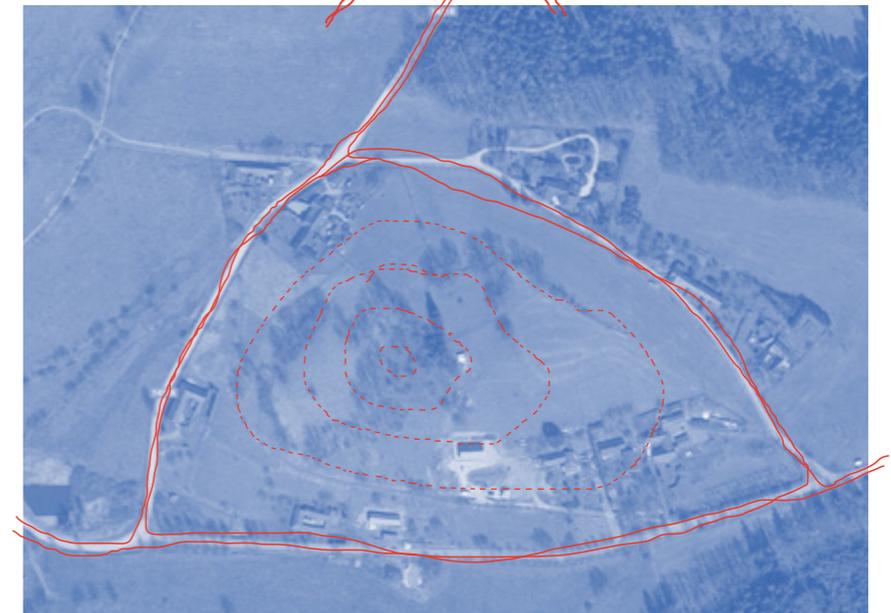
every new year, it has been gradually losing its popularity. Same as in the village Libějovické Svobodné Hory the generation who used to organise the events left to work in the cities, and the villagers' meetings became random and rare. The older people I spoke to felt lonely, especially two of the older ladies with only one friend each in the village who they would only see once a week. Otherwise, they live on their own without meeting anyone. As with Libějovické Svobodné Hory, the village used to have its 'linden tree' bench and a pub, but both places disappeared decades ago.

Based on my findings, a spatial design based on the field research in Libějovické Svobodné Hory can be applicable in other villages as the village's layout doesn't need to necessarily determine the functionality of the community and their social places.

# relevant?



Bavorovské Svobodné Hory



Libějovické Svobodné Hory

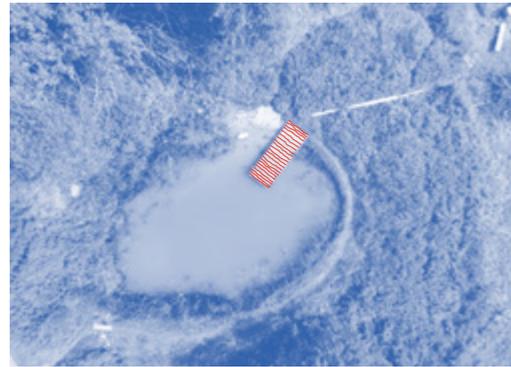
Time to experiment



Layers of me

60 - 61

*This is the Countryside*



Aerial images of our pond from the summer 2020. The pond was here only 5 months old.

A snapshot from one of the screening nights that we organised during the summer 2020.

## Layers of me

My countryside story began in summer 2018 when my partner and I bought an old 'chalupa' with a piece of land in the village Libějovické Svobodné Hory. For me, to decide to live and work in the countryside was a gradual process. After three years of living outside the Czech Republic in Scotland, my perspective of living in the country shifted from something impossible to do to an embracing vision of my future.

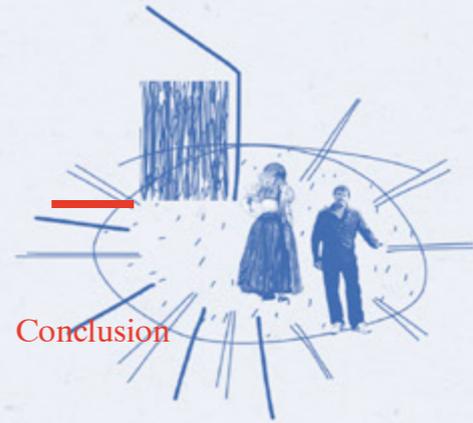
We chose this village for multiple reasons. My partner's great grandfather was born in the village, and his ancestors lived in this region for centuries, so he always had a close relationship to the place. Furthermore, we fell in love with the surrounding nature and never-the-same views of the Sumava scenery. We also admired the village's atypical layout that enables us to have our own space and freedom.

For me, an architect, and my partner, a musician, the countryside is an inspirational source for our work. As an architect, I would like to create new rural architecture that positively impacts the villages' social and cultural life. I'm interested in building long-lasting spatial programmes that connect creative minds but also the locals. Additionally, in the past years, I've become interested in permaculture. I see life in the countryside as an opportunity to combine all my passions. It's a chance for me to positively contribute to the environment through my work as an architect but also through the development of a sustainable programme for our land.

In the two years that we have owned the chalupa, we didn't only focus on the house's ongoing reconstruction. Last spring, we built a pond on our land that doesn't only retain the water in the landscape, but it's also open for everyone from the village to swim or spend free time there. During the summer, the pond became a new social gathering space where our neighbours and friends would meet to swim, relax, and talk. And this year's cold winter turned the pond's surface into an ice-skating rink for local kids. It's incredible to observe how social life is returning to this once neglected space.

For the first time this summer, we organised two nights of outdoor movie screenings where we invited our neighbours, and it became an enjoyable social gathering. When I returned to the village for the field research the following December, my neighbours were already discussing what movies we should screen during the upcoming summer. Thanks to the experiment, I got to know everyone in the village, so I intend to invite more people for the next screenings. Hence, it becomes a new opportunity for the village's community to meet again. All that made me realise that even two students new to the social situation with few resources can trigger actions in a village where is not much happening. Just by creating spatial interventions on their land and making it open to the public.

Layers of me



# Conclusion

*To conclude, I believe the countryside still has a lot to offer, and it's worth saving for future generations.*

Its freedom, close connection of nature, non-material values, open space to experiment, and rich history and culture are only the tip of the iceberg of things we can admire about the countryside. Due to the historical happenings, the Czech countryside is currently in hibernation mode, waiting for something or someone's actions to wake it up. It will take time for the Czech countryside to fully recover from the struggles brought by the last century's happenings. *Still, thanks to my exploration journey, I'm more confident that the country's social and cultural life can be revived. During the social experiment in Libějovické Svobodné Hory, I was positively surprised at how welcoming and open the people in the village are and that the will to change the village's current state is present, only the trigger is missing. Based on my experiences with the pond and the evening cinema, the trigger can be even a small-scale spatial intervention for social purpose with a straightforward programme on private land.*

The landscape of the Libějovické Svobodné Hory is gradually

transforming into a private space that takes over all the public social spots and many public connections. Therefore, it's essential to consider the formation of transitional points between the private and public areas. The experience with the swimming pond and film screenings show how private land can open up the village.

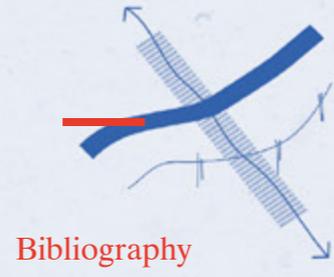
It doesn't make sense to try to revive the past and save or rebuild the village's old social gathering places. They wouldn't be relevant anymore. The bench under the linden tree together with the older ladies are long gone, and there is no point in trying to build the same bench again as it wouldn't bring back the ladies who would use it. But what can be done is to investigate and learn about the past social spaces. Keep their stories in mind while designing modern adaptations of public space elements - both for current inhabitants of the village and those who are not there yet.

*Based on my research, I would like to design a set of small-scale spatial interventions that would support the village's social coherence and social activities. As I already witnessed, even one workshop, one pond, and two cinema nights can have a massive*

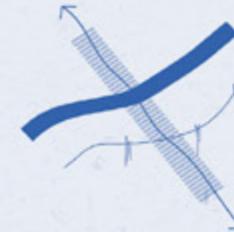
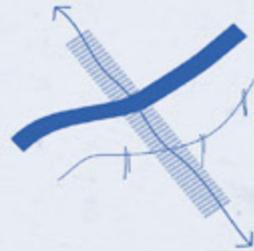
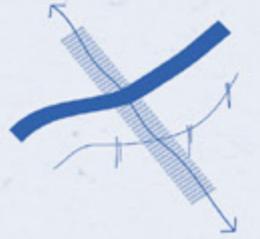
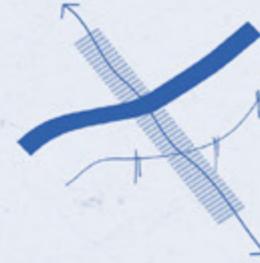
*impact on social and cultural life in the village and people's perception of the space.*

A spatial intervention needs a clear, long-lasting programme to succeed in the village's environment. By creating set-off interventions that explore the relationship between private and public while engaging the locals and attracting the 'outsiders' and creatives, new social, economic and cultural opportunities will prevail for the people in the village. *Nevertheless, I'm convinced that the communication and engagement with the locals and the visible effort to become part of the community is vital for any project in the countryside to succeed. Without that, the intervention would become another private spot in the village's landscape.*

Furthermore, even a small-scale local intervention can respond to global issues and can be a source of inspiration for others. In the end, it's not only the Czech countryside that is facing many social and cultural threats. The spatial solutions made in one village in the middle of the Czech countryside can be relevant to other villages, to other countrysides in other countries.



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let's create a  
future together  
where the  
countryside  
does not die

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The  
time  
has  
come.

