

Šárka Klímová
Palacký University Olomouc

Camphill of the 21st century as seen by co-workers¹

Introduction

Co-workers, whether the original colleagues and refugees grouped around Dr. Karl König or current volunteers and Camphill staff, have been the driving force of this very first anthroposophical community since its establishment in 1940. The constant development and the changes in Camphill communities in various geographical locations brings a gradual transformation of co-workers' motivation to act in the Camphill movement. The objective of this paper is to identify the specifics of European and North American Camphills from the perspective of co-workers by means of an analysis of empirical data from a quality-based research study. The paper is one of the outcomes of a wider research project, which is currently being implemented as part of the author's dissertation and whose core focus is an empirical survey aimed at how co-workers perceive selected educational aspects of European and North American Camphills.

The essence of Camphill or what makes a successful Camphill

What makes a successful Camphill is a question asked by everybody who has an opportunity to experience the atmosphere of this specific anthroposophical community, in which life, work and entertainment is shared by volunteers from all over the world including persons with intellectual disability. It is therefore not surprising that the answer to this question had been searched for by the founder of the Camphill movement and the creator of the concept of the Camphill community, the Austrian physician Karl König. In 1965, the journal of the Camphill movement *The Cresset* published an article called *The Three Essentials of Camphill*, in which König described the three key aspects of Camphill. König states that in its early days, Camphill differed from other residential institutions in that the effort of Camphill was not just to maintain the lives of individuals with special needs but to develop

¹ Co-worker = common term for volunteers and other staffworking in the Camphill community

and educate them. At the same time, König rightly points out in the article that in 1965 the situation was completely different and the whole world was aware that the condition of children with intellectual disability could be improved by adequate educational practices (1965, p. 146).

As already mentioned, in 1965 König defined three specific aspects that make a successful Camphill. The first is the way of *perceiving a person with disability*. König relied on Steiner's threefold concept of man and claimed that any child, irrespective of the severity of their disability, was more than the child's body, more than the child's emotions, more than the child's spoken or unspoken words. The appearance of any child or any other human beings is just a shell of the person's infinite spiritual being. Even a child with special needs, just as we or anybody else, must learn to live with their indispositions and learn to control them. The role of parents, teachers and educators should be to destroy the shield of disability that covers the child and reach the core of the child's spiritual being and try to affect the core. In line with Steiner's anthroposophy, König claims that even a child with special needs is equal to others and absolutely equal to us.

The second essence of Camphill according to König is *individual teacher education*. He believes that teachers need to educate themselves to become confident in their approaches to children with special needs. According to König, this should be facilitated primarily by meditation and prayer.

The third essence of Camphill as defined by König is a new social order, which he also described in 1960 in his essay *The three pillars of Camphill*. König considered important that the social order in Camphill should be based on Steiner's *The Fundamental Social Law* (described at the beginning of the 20th century). In the three spheres of life in the community, three basic principles should be applied that correspond with the mottos of the French Revolution. The policy of the community should be based on equality of all members in terms of their rights and responsibilities. The cultural sphere should be based on liberty and in the realm of economics, the community should follow the rules of fraternity (König, 1981).

Almost fifty years later, Robin Jackson (2014) defined the essence of Camphill by means of six key components that are interconnected; effectiveness is only ensured if all of them are implemented. The key essences of Camphill as considered by Jackson are as follows: mutuality, spirituality, tranquillity, ecological sensitivity, economic sustainability and socio-educational impulse. *Mutuality* is a characteristic feature of Camphill pointing to the relationship between the caretaker and the child or adult with special needs, and according to Jackson is also linked with sharing life, work and entertainment in the community. *Rhythmicity* of life in Camphill is according to Jackson based on natural rhythms of the human body such as type, heartbeat, and breathing. It is manifested in the community as a fundamental element of human communication; and the relationship between the caretaker and individual with special needs is a search for an optimum rhythm of mutual communication and cooperation. *Spirituality* in Camphill has according to Jackson nothing in common with religion. It is

associated with the belief in the spiritual potential of every human being and a sense and feeling for the good which is inside all of us. Spiritual care and support do not result from the application of memorized techniques or approaches, but from common sharing and learning. They help solve issues relating to the value and meaning of life. *Tranquillity* or peacefulness in Camphill does not mean the absence of noise or silence as such. It represents a developed quality that can be defined as a state of interior emotional and intellectual peace. Tranquillity in the community should help individuals overcome and cope with feelings of aggression, nervousness, and fear, so that everybody feels stable in terms of their mental state. Eventually, this peace has a healing effect. *Economic sustainability* is a key component, which had been supported already by König when in 1938 he sent to the Government of the Irish Republic his vision of a community completely independent of the surrounding environment and economically independent and sustainable thanks to their own farm and craft workshops (Potter, 1938, p. 8). In Jackson's concept, economic sustainability is based on Steiner's The Fundamental Social Law mentioned above.

Ecological sensitivity, which according to Jackson is another essence of the Camphill community, had been proclaimed by König much earlier before it became a global issue. König believed that Camphill communities should be absolutely responsible for taking care of the places where they are based in a way that is not harmful.

The last partial component as defined by Jackson is *socio-educational impulse*. The author again refers to König who saw the critical importance of the fact that Camphill co-workers need to be equipped with social and educational skills. König based this concept on the thoughts of Comenius, Pestalozzi and Froebel. This aspect should not only relate to school-based education but comprehensive development of the child – body, mind, feelings, spirit, creativity, and definitely the individual's attitudes to others.

From my perspective of a short-term volunteer (co-worker) who spent five active months in a Camphill community (2014) and two months in a different community (2015, 2016) as an observer and researcher, I asked myself a question why Camphill is a place where I feel well irrespective of whether the community is located near the Czech Terezín, in Scotland or Ireland. Independently of the above mentioned authors I used my own experience to define some of the specific features that make a successful Camphill. These specifics are as follows: transcending and ubiquitous *spiritual ideals*, whose realization provides inspiration as part of lifelong learning and searching for unprejudiced, equal and respectful approach to all people without distinction; *voluntariness*, which is present in all work in Camphill and clearly makes it a life mission rather than employment; *familiness*, which is caused by openness, warmth and mutual help of all community members; *care* for oneself, other community members, community home, and the environment that surrounds the community, and *rhythmicity*, which

manifests in changing common community-wide activities such as festivals celebrating the annual cycle of nature, and individual activities that provide everybody with privacy.

Research methodology

The objective of the study is to describe and understand how Camphill co-workers perceive the current position of Camphill of the 21st century. The research question was defined as follows: '*What is the co-workers' perspective of the current European and North American Camphills?*' This basic research question was divided into two specific questions: (1) '*What do the co-workers consider the specific features of the current Camphill?*'; (2) '*What does Camphill mean to the co-workers?*'

The research study is based on two types of data collected by different methods – semi-structured interview and qualitative questionnaire.

The interviews were held with 5 co-workers who have been active in Camphill for over twenty years. The questions focused primarily on the above mentioned selected educational spheres of Camphill. At the same time, they provided enough space for a spontaneous dialogue on the issue of life and work in Camphill. All interviews took place in the co-workers' home environment during the author's two-month visit to a Scottish Camphill. The interviews were recorded using a voice recorder and transcribed.

The interviews were followed by qualitative questionnaires, which were – due to geographical fragmentation of the Camphill movement – replaced by interviews with other co-workers. The respondents were recruited by means of the *snowball method* (Švaříček, 2014) – at first the author addressed those co-workers that she personally knew, who were then asked to address other co-workers, and finally the questionnaire was distributed in the international Camphill movement network. The inclusion criterion was at least 1 year of active work in Camphill and willingness to participate in the research study. The period of one year spent in the movement is considered sufficient for an adequate insight and understanding of the main principles of Camphill. The willingness of the respondents is a prerequisite in quality-based research; otherwise it would be impossible to obtain authentic information.

During the 10-month period of this research stage, the survey included 21 respondents especially from European and North American Camphills. The length of their experience in the Camphill movement was from 1 year to over 30 years. It is also important to note that more than 50 % of the respondents have worked in Camphill for over 30 years. The age of the respondents ranged from 21 to 78 years, with more than 50 % of the respondents older than sixty years. Besides identification items, the questionnaire included questions regarding the already mentioned four educational spheres. As far as the qualitative nature of the questionnaire is concerned, all items were open-ended.

The data obtained by means of transcribed interviews and qualitative questionnaires were subjected to open coding by means of the *paper and pencil method* (Švaříček, 2014). According to similarities in meaning, the codes were grouped into categories and then analysed by means of the

'*laying the cards*' method. A subsequent analysis focused on those categories that showed mutual correlations and related to the research question. The categories were divided into two areas – a category relating to the specifics of Camphills as seen by the co-workers, and a category relating to the personal attitude of the co-workers to Camphill, i.e. what Camphill means to them.

Results

The specifics of Camphill or what makes a successful Camphill

The co-workers' statements about what makes a successful Camphill and about specific features of Camphill were classified into five categories by their similarities. These partially correspond with the three key components of Camphill as defined by König (1965) and with the six key components of Camphill as defined by Jackson (2014).

Spirituality

The interviews and questionnaires frequently suggested the thoughts of Steiner's anthroposophy, which brings spiritual ideals to Camphill. *Anthroposophy*, which brings *high ideals*, and *belief in these ideals*, were the most frequent answers of the co-workers to the question what makes a successful Camphill. This can be demonstrated by the reply of one of the co-workers who describes Camphill as: '*a place governed by high spiritual ideals.*' The answers also included the *idea of social three folding*, which is Steiner's concept of social arrangement (defined in the previous section of the paper), which includes three different spheres governed by three principles corresponding with the mottos of the French Revolution. The *anthroposophical concept of man*, which was defined as an essence of Camphill already by König, also brings *belief in the spiritual potential of each individual*. According to the co-workers, the spiritual background of the Camphill community is also manifested by *moral values, which are recognized in Camphill and on which life in Camphill is based*. This is related to *not focusing on material gains and absence of remuneration*, which was also identified as a specific feature by the co-workers.

Sharing

Life in the community, whether Camphill or any other community, naturally brings sharing – at least sharing of the common community space. In their responses, the co-workers frequently mentioned *sharing and joint life, work and entertainment*. They also suggested *cultural exchange*, which is much more diverse in the 21st century compared with the pioneer or post-war period of the Camphill movement. Today, Camphills are entered by people from all over the world and you can often meet a

co-worker from Korea, who prefers travelling and life in the community to the permanent threat of war in their country, or nurses from the Philippines whose life in the community gives them an opportunity to learn a foreign language in a welcoming environment open to foreigners, which helps them find a job in a Western country in the future. Cultural exchange is also related to another aspect mentioned by the co-workers – *meeting people* at different levels – meeting other co-workers, managers of the community, persons with special needs, teachers and educators, social and health professionals, physicians and therapists, but also the parents of community members with special needs. Moreover, there are also extra-community meetings, because the communities in a region or country often collaborate and meet at joint events. According to the co-workers, a typical feature of Camphill is also *teamwork and cooperation*, which can be considered a natural consequence of sharing life and work in Camphill.

Mutuality

Mutuality in Camphill is one of the major characteristics of the relationship between co-workers and community members with special needs. This is aptly described by one of the co-workers who states the following: *‘Be there for the others just as they there for me.’*

Just as everyday sharing of worries and joys need not be easy for every member of the community, mutual interactions might sometimes become complicated. This is described by one of the co-workers as follows: *‘It is a way of life in which people develop – often through pain – in close interaction with people who would otherwise remain strangers because of personal, social or cultural differences.’* Mutual interaction in Camphill is based for example on *mutual support, responsibility for each other, or mutual tolerance*. According to the co-workers, the objective of mutual support and interaction should be *joint learning; respect for oneself and the others, which allows us to be true to ourselves and let the others be true to themselves*. It is mutual learning that makes Camphill a *place where everybody can grow*.

Quality of interpersonal relationships

Satisfaction or dissatisfaction of any kind in the community always depends on the quality of the community’s interpersonal relationships. If all individuals are satisfied in the community and mutual interaction between the members is based on respect, tolerance, individual responsibility for oneself and mutual support, life in the community might seem an ideal place. Coexistence of many people on a relatively small area of the community and coexistence in community houses with often as many as ten co-workers and five children or adults with special needs need not always be perfect. The co-workers mentioned aspects pointing to the quality of interpersonal relationships so frequently that it became desirable to create an independent category based on these specifics. The following statement made by one of the co-workers might be considered a summarizing opinion: *‘Camphill is built on a loving relationship between human beings.’*

The co-workers also emphasised the *feeling of belonging caused by their life in Camphill. The feeling of being needed* in the community was aptly described by one of the co-workers as follows: *'The most attractive for me was that I was accepted by the people in Camphill irrespective of what my CV or my degree said.'*

Sensitivity to nature

König advocated ecological sensitivity and the potential of Camphill already in 1965. Nowadays, this issue is much more acute than it was at that time. As evidenced by the co-workers' statements, even today Camphill is not indifferent to the planet Earth. In this context, the co-workers mentioned *taking care of the land without artificial fertilisers and taking care of the community and its surroundings*. The general attitude in this area is summarized by the following statement of one of the co-workers: *'...in Camphill every individual takes care of their fellows, the environment, the surroundings of the community.'* The sensitive approach to nature and the whole planet is also associated with an *effort to maintain sustainability of the community*, which was also required by König already in the process of shaping the Camphill concept at the end of 1930s. Camphill should be able to produce own farm and garden products and should not depend on import. Nature and its seasonal variations are celebrated in Camphill by means of festivals, which open and round off the seasons.

What Camphill means to me

The interviews with the co-workers suggested what had been anticipated regarding the diversity of Camphill. This was aptly described by one of the co-workers: *'It is difficult to describe Camphill because it means many different things to many different people.'*

However, based on similarities in meaning, it is possible at least partially classify the co-workers' responses relating to their personal attitude to Camphill and the importance Camphill has to them and society.

Camphill as a family/home

The first Camphill was established in 1940 as a home for Austrian refugees grouped around Dr. Karl König and children with special needs whose life was endangered in countries controlled by Hitler and who were in Great Britain considered inferior and ineducable. The perception of Camphill as a *home* or as a *second home* and *its members as a family* is therefore clear. The co-workers' statements confirmed that even today, when they usually stay at Camphills for a shorter period of time compared with the pioneer period of the movement, the atmosphere of Camphill and the attitudes of its members provide a feeling of *familiness and home*. One of the co-workers defined Camphill as *'a large family with people*

from all over the world where everyone contributes according to their possibilities and takes according to their needs.'

Camphill as a community living a genuine inclusion

The community nature of Camphill can be considered the general feature of Camphill. Therefore, it is not surprising that this characteristic was often mentioned by the co-workers. They emphasised the *intentionality* of the community in a sense that it is created with a clear intention it should follow. Camphill was defined by one co-worker as follows: *'a place where the so-called co-workers live with people with special needs, learn together and work in order to achieve mutual interaction and personal growth.'* This definition suggests the previously mentioned potential, according to which the community provides space for and supports personal growth of each member and at the same time supports natural integration of all members as a result of sharing life, learning and work. Other responses were similar; the co-workers described Camphill as *living with people with special needs; shared life and work with other community members – whether healthy or those with special needs; community living based on moral values*. There was also an opinion that Camphill is a *place of genuine inclusion*.

The statements of the co-workers also suggested that at the time of its establishment Camphill was: *'a successful community, which might have achieved its objective when it was needed (in Great Britain, children with special needs were considered ineducable until 1970s, author's note), but has nothing to offer today.'*

Camphill as a social experiment and a model of society

Almost one-fifth of the co-workers jointly identified Camphill in a way that is not usually found in literature on Camphill; yet this description is very apt. This is *social experiment*. The way that the co-workers described Camphill is as follows: *'Camphill is a social experiment of people who live and work together based on individual responsibility for each other.'* Another co-worker claims the following: *'Camphill is a social experiment in order to try out a new type of living and working together with people of different age, nationality and ability.'* The description of Camphill as a social experiment brings us back to the past into the period when Camphill was established. Conversely, another description, which was agreed by a large number of co-workers, moves us to the present and the future.

A number of co-workers perceive Camphill as an *ideal model of society based on interpersonal relationships*. They claim that in its essence, *the way of life* in Camphill means *an equal community* and in the future will provide *a way for the mankind based on the same spiritual ideals, ecological sensitivity, mutual tolerance, and shared life*.

Conclusion

In the Czech lands, the tradition of anthroposophy and curative education dates back to the beginning of the 20th century. At that time, an environment friendly to anthroposophical thoughts attracted R. Steiner and later also K. König. As a consequence of World War II and the start of the socialist regime, all anthroposophical efforts until the 1990s were condemned to extinction or illegality. The promising effort by K. König concerning the establishment of a curative educational institute in late 1920s and another effort – this time to establish a Camphill community –in mid-1960s did not unfortunately have a chance of success. Therefore, the traditional care for people with special needs developed in institutions, whose alienated formal approach to people with special needs was miles apart from the family environment and holistic approach offered by Camphill. This is probably the reason why the system of care for people with special needs is being transformed very slowly in the Czech Republic and Camphill communities do not have an established tradition. An exception is a publicly unknown community called *Camphill on the Confluence* (ČeskéKopisty near Litoměřice), which has for 15 years provided sheltered housing and day care centre and is a home and workplace for adults with mild intellectual disability. The absence of tradition goes hand in hand with an alarming absence of Czech literature, which is limited to outdated fragments in the form of several texts from 1990s and the beginning of the millennium. As someone who had an opportunity to experience the atmosphere of Camphill from the position of a short-term co-worker, I consider the absence of awareness and literature on the issue of Camphill a dismal fact, because throughout the many years of their existence in many countries, Camphills have clearly shown their legitimacy, are inspiring and deserve our attention.

The objective of this paper was to identify the opinions of the current co-workers about European and North American Camphills by means of an analysis of empirical data based on a quality-based research study. The core of the paper, using a data analysis, was to point out the specifics of Camphill as seen by the co-workers, what in their opinions makes a successful Camphill and what Camphill means to them. The research study suggested that the specifics of Camphill as seen by the co-workers could be categorized as follows: spirituality, sharing, mutuality, quality of interpersonal relationships, and sensitivity to nature. These categories partially correspond with the essences of Camphill as classified by the spiritual creator K.König under the category of spirituality, which from an anthroposophical perspective naturally involves the essence defined by König – the threefold concept of man. At the same time, some categories correspond with the basic components of Camphill according to Jackson – spirituality, mutuality and ecological sensitivity. It can therefore be stated that some of the aspects of Camphill that represent its specific atmosphere have survived since the establishment of Camphill until today and are acknowledged by the co-workers in a similar way. The fundamental specific is spirituality, which was identified as the essence of Camphill by K. König, R. Jackson as well as the co-workers involved in the present research. Beliefs in higher spiritual ideals that are of lasting value survive in

Camphills irrespective of the fluctuation of community members and changes in the principles of functioning of the communities. The specifics of Camphill were confirmed by the statements of the co-workers concerning their own views of Camphill and its significance for individuals and society. The present research study suggests that despite the transformations of the communities in the past and present, there have been strong essences of Camphill that have the potential to survive into the future.

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