



Contribution from Ströbeck



A contribution to the discussion at the "Cultural Village of Europe" conference held at Bystre, Czech Republic from the 10th to the 12th of May 2001.

Cultural and Human Dimensions in the country.

In the 21st century, towns and villages will be facing vast changes. Life in small communities is directly influenced by the impacts of globalization and structural changes of economy. Conditions of life in villages, especially in the structurally weak new German Bundesländer, have changed in a considerable way.

The dramatic changes in agriculture, the unemployment in villages (it is estimated to reach almost 20%) and the insufficient technical infrastructure lead to malfunctions in the economy of villages. In addition to this, in Sachsen - Anhalt, the Bundesland I live in, the situation is aggravated by the legally imposed administration and school reform, and the independence of communities is expected to be further reduced. The future administrative units are planned for about 10 000 inhabitants. Schools should also be associated with larger units.

We make every effort to oppose these structural changes enforced by law by using all means presently available and by trying to create facts that cannot be overlooked. The vitality and attractiveness of villages depends a great deal on our ability to cultivate and improve them as places to live and work in.

The traditional generation pattern of villages has changed considerably. A new multi-tier generation structure is emerging, with children, teenagers, adults, prematurely retired people, seniors, locals, and newcomers.

In Germany, this process seems to have acquired some specific features: on the one hand, thanks to the waves of newcomer, the number of inhabitants in villages (1 200) has remained at a constant level, which, of course, is a gratifying fact. But, on the other hand, a large number of young, mostly educated people are leaving our region. This is mostly to be attributed to the low number of opportunities for apprenticeship and lack of employment. The substantially more lucrative jobs available in the old Bundesländer are also accelerating this process. This tendency should be halted if undesirable consequences are to be avoided. The vitality and attractiveness of villages depends a great deal on our ability to cultivate and develop them as places to live and work in. Heavy investment in the development of the existing substance of villages and the creation of further job opportunities (at present there are about 250) is necessary.

Given the strained local budgets, clear conceptions, elaborate planning, and schemes for budgetary subsidies are of primary importance. Targeted grant aids and EU support for the development of country areas should also be sought even if the red tape procedures are very difficult to handle in this case and take an enormous amount of time. Apart from the targeted local and state budget subsidies, in a number of cases, community involvement can be of great help. These unsalaried activities for a special purpose or for a limited time are becoming more and more important. Only under these conditions will we be able to maintain and further develop the specific chess culture of our village. The support of culture should be given the same priority as all other measures

concerning the infrastructure. This also involves cultural openness of people of all generations. In terms of the generation structure, this means that measures should be undertaken to conceive new initiatives and projects to fuel the co-operation between generations. Preventive aspects should be of key importance here to avoid social conflicts. We certainly are aware of the latent danger of crime and social conflicts but, as yet, have been able to prevent their development, thanks to the mutual consensus of generations.

For this reason, we would like to use culture, and this by no means applies to chess culture only, to create further common activity areas. We also see a chance therein to help women and young people find new jobs.

Last but not least, it is important to support the use of new media also in cultural areas. For all future-oriented villages, using the new media is unavoidable. The technical background for this is already available. The chief factor is to formulate clear objectives and to implement them so that the specific village conditions are met. Media do not lead to an impoverishment of communication in a village, on the contrary, they make it more viable. At the moment, we are preparing two projects which seem to be very promising in this sense and for which we may be able to receive some state funding. It is important that their application and content should respect the public needs.

Only those villages and regions that see their inhabitants as the central focus of all their efforts and who, together with them try to build their own unique profile, have a future ahead of them.

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