

Cultural Village of Europe

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Contribution from Wijk aan Zee



Lecture by Mr. C. Hazenberg

Ladies and gentlemen,

As Town Clerk of Beverwijk, I have been asked by the Wijk aan Zee delegation to talk about how Wijk aan Zee is regarded by the Town Hall.

First of all I would like to explain some basic principles regarding official business. As Chief Executive of the council, together with my deputy, we are responsible for the efficient running of the municipality.

One of our most important tasks is to ensure that staff members are aware that they are true servants of the government.

That means that they are not slaves, but are dedicated to working for the chosen representatives of the people, the council, and last but not least, the inhabitants of Beverwijk.

Therefore we need people who are not only experts in their own particular field, but who also have the right attitude. Beverwijk does not need technocrats, but democrats. Consequently, when new staff are employed I pay a great deal of attention to concepts such as democracy and the constitutional state. I explain the importance of the supremacy of the representatives of the people, and the open nature of the decision process and decision taking.

Every citizen can legally gain access to government documents. Furthermore, I also point out the value of a number of fundamental legal principles, such as the Trias Politica (division of the three powers), the basic laws and the principle of legality.

This last principle means that no single administrator and/or public servant can exercise power if not laid down by law. Furthermore, power can only be exercised for the purpose for which it was originally granted. In other words, there can be no question of abuse of power (Detournement de Pouvoir). This concept must be inherent in every civil servant of Beverwijk.

The realisation that the government cannot resolve everything from a central power base is deeply rooted in Dutch tradition. Councils have their own territory and can organise their own affairs. In short, it can be said that we have local autonomy.

Within the councils the same principles regarding decentralisation and delegation apply. The council and official organisation are not able to administer everything centrally. The idea of a central committee that regulates everything is not possible in a modern society. No- the citizens themselves must be prepared to manage their own environment as much as possible. This can be done using organisations such as Neighbourhood Watch. Residents make their own plans for the neighbourhood in consultation with the official neighbourhood coordinator. In this way the citizen becomes more involved with his local area, and living conditions are improved.

What do these principles have to do with the relationship between the people at the Town Hall, and Wijk aan Zee?

I am convinced that when public servants keep these principles in mind when dealing with the citizens of Wijk aan Zee, then the relationship will work well.

But is this the case in reality?

No, at the moment there is some tension between the village and the Town Hall.

The council sees the village as an appendage to Beverwijk, whereas the villagers wish to foster their own unique identity. Wijk aan Zee would like to have a member of the council working specially for their village. However, the council does not agree. It would like to see the village falling in to line, but local artists and adventurers disagree. So the nice, attractive Cultural Village signs will disappear as they contravene the rules.

Can this be solved?

Yes, of course, because these are not real problems. Rather a natural tension between creativity and a mania for bureaucracy. I also think that if it had always stuck to the rules, Wijk aan Zee would never have become Cultural Village of Europe.

Beverwijk and Wijk aan Zee; town and village, I hope that I can work there for many years to come.

Thank you