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Shaping rural communities for the future

- village renewal as an important key

Long term protection for, and sustainable development of, rural communities as overseable living environments requires in the process of globalisation differentiated strategies, examples, negotiation concepts and instruments of planning.

The countryside needs multiple impulses for sustainable development especially in areas with weak infrastructure. The requirements, and ways of solving the inherent problems in the development of rural areas with function-capable villages are here related from experiences in the districts Bernburg, Köthen and Bitterfeld.

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The disintegration of the agricultural infrastructure in the new federal states of Germany, the unemployment in villages, the insufficient technical infrastructure has led to the loss of village functions. The requirements for the countryside have definitively changed in the last years, the population development is unfavourable. Solutions for rural problems have to be worked-out and applied on the spot.

The major challenges

in the countryside are:

- Infrastructural improvement (water, energy, transport, communication),
 - Clarification of still-open ownership questions, reorganisation of land areas,
 - Constructional-architectural conservation and utilisation of buildings,
 - Retention and organisation of village functions,
 - Gradual realisation of village development concepts or village renovation plans,
 - Ecologically-sound village organisation,
 - Creation of leisure and recreation facilities according to requirements,
 - Committed efforts to attract financial support and the co-ordination of such support.
- The viability (economic strength) and attractiveness of villages depend definitively upon the extent to which they have been able to survive as living and economic bases and to further develop as such. Increased investment in further development based on the existing village substance, and the creation of new main-

ly non-agricultural work places are urgently necessary.

A one-sided concentration in trade and service industries and also in public facilities in the ground and middle centres leads to rapid loss of facilities within the village and weakens self-sufficiency.

All these factors are interactive and require consideration together as suitable bases for current and future requirements. The tight financial budgets in communities demands that special attention must be given to forming clear conceptional plans, a rationally thought-out blueprint and to efforts in securing state financial support.

Local development concepts

Starting point is an analysis of the communal situation in the community. Onto this can be built the future development conceptions of the community in a constructive joint operation within the administrative offices and with the district administration, the unravelling of existing utilisation conflict and, not least, to involve the inhabitants in the further shaping of their village.

The village development concept is a flexible, dynamic negotiational concept with self-involvement character as far as the community is concerned. The clearer the con-



Fig. 1: Village appropriate redevelopment of a farmstead



Fig. 2: Maintaining typical village places and streets

cept, the more precisely and realistically the idea can be developed, the higher the utilisation value and the chances of realisation. It should comprise important questions regarding the future of the locality:

- How can the community's technical infrastructure be improved?
- Which urgent actions regarding the village conception must be carried out?
- How can the economic development of the community be accelerated?
- What happens to unused buildings?
- How can the living substance be retained and further developed?
- Which basic functions of the village are to be secured and further built-on?
- Which leisure and recreation facilities are required?
- How is the ecological integration of village and countryside realisable?

There's often more than a single answer to such questions, alternative possibilities each with individual cost-use relationships are there to be worked-out as further variants. At the beginning of planning village development it must be clarified where action by local or district government is required and where private initiative can flourish. Here, it is important that the concepts and strategies developed together should certainly take place in smaller steps in the direction which the village inhabitants have decided upon.

Comprehensive village development requires answers to the questions arising from functional and structural alteration plans. Starting off from a complex planning campaign comprising the subjects economy/agriculture, living, ecology and culture, a new quality of approach towards the communities and their administrative offices is required.

Securing all possible development potential and aid on offer for rural development means a constructive cooperation with the state government, its respective specialist offices, and all the bearers of important public offices. A future-oriented community policy for land development and ground policy, the retention of farms with development poten-

tial can support to a great extent regionally-oriented economy and development policies.

Cooperation and co-ordination

The challenges involved in securing a stable future and strengthening countryside structure must be faced by federal and state governments and local authorities together. Starting from the requirements of the village inhabitants, there unfolds multiple possibilities for a comprehensive renovation of village functions and the retention of traditional values of individual localities.

A sufficiently-supportive infrastructure can also be developed through intensified intercommunity cooperation. Many rural communities are too small for much of the challenges, but through cooperation the possible retention of sufficient multifunctionality, the reanimation of old village centres, can be achieved.

Above all, work places must be created within the mid-size economy: the village handworkers and trades, as well in through the accelerated extension of service industries. Private initiative cannot be done without here for the full exploitation of existing multiple inner-community potential. Starting-off from the swift creation and extension of modern communication systems, the public administration and businesses are challenged to make more on-the-spot decisions that favour the countryside. Performance-capable, efficiently-working communal administrations have an important role in the development of rural areas and future-oriented communities. The federal government's cost-cutting measures have an especially negative affect on the communities and the country districts.

In many cases the social task positions in the rural areas are less than in the cities. The rural communities too, must, especially in communal developments, look upon themselves increasingly as firms with the mayor as manager. The creation and securing of work places and an active economic policy are at the same time urgently required.

Securing the survival of a multi-structured agriculture and its involvement in possible development potentials are of fundamental importance for the identity of the countryside. It must remain an important part of the rural region's economic structure. An ecologically-intact village-countryside integration is not least an important requirement for a targeted regional economic encouragement, for attractive living areas, for local recreation and tourism and thus an increasing exploitation of the region's assets.

Village renewing as local Agenda 21

The community council's decision on the priorities for a future-oriented community development includes also the path to a sustainable future. An environmentally-correct development of the community in the sense of Agenda 21 – the UN conference of 1992 – requires the integration of ecological, economical and social requirements in planning and negotiations – and the achievement of cooperative inter-relationship between village inhabitants. It is decisive that the communities recognise a local agenda as their own task for the introduction of their own initiatives for future-oriented developments; developments which are socially acceptable, economically supportable and ecologically responsible. In the results of the village development planning and intensive discussions with the village inhabitants are realizable negotiation concepts for long-term economical, social, cultural, and ecological developments in the village: a locality's own route into the 21st century and, with that, a step towards a local Agenda 21. The Agenda is therefore a good instrument for the community future plans for activating the inhabitants and motivated common negotiations.

In this context, the village renewal movement has created important pre-conditions with its example and cooperation of inhabitants' influence in the developments. Concepts without realisation don't achieve anything. The main thing here is the value of a good example and how it is possible to bring together the different interest groups in the community.

Through shared responsibility within the village community, the village renewal planning as a local Agenda 21 will strive to strengthen self-reliant negotiation on communal level, to release impulses for economic, ecological and cultural self-initiatives within the community. Step by step, it must be possible to unite inhabitants' enthusiasm for new concepts and forms of cooperation and with those, communally-supported work for the future. Here lies the key for the future of rural communities.