

5th Day of Villages in the German Federal State of Brandenburg

Since 2007 the Working Group Living Villages, part of the association ‘Brandenburg 21’ (registered association for sustainable local and regional development), has organised an annual “Day of Villages”. In 2011 about 100 participants met in the village of Golzow to discuss “Living and Working in a Cultural Landscape”. The region of Oderbruch in East Germany, around the river Oder, is a special man-made landscape, cultivated in the 18th century.

The Working Group Living Villages is the organiser of a Brandenburgian Network for Living Villages. This was the “germ cell” of a regional village movement, which is a member of ERCA. In informal talks at the Day of Villages, members of the German Initiative Group “Village Movement”, which had been created at the International Village Conference in May 2011 in Berlin, discussed the next steps for creating a village movement in Germany through the cooperation of initiatives of several German Federal States.



Photographer: Silke Last

Report of 5th Day of Villages

Living and Working in a Cultural Landscape

Bright lights of the 5th “Day of Villages” in Golzow, a Village in the Brandenburgian region “Oderbruch”, a special man-made cultural landscape around the river “Oder”,

by Gerold Fierment and Silke Last

The village Golzow became well known by a unique cinematic epic named “The children of Golzow”. A film team had accompanied a generation of children from 1961 to 2007 by a long term cinematic documentation. And 50 years later, in 2011, a new young generation of the children of Golzow had prepared an exhibition of artificial projects on the topic: “Our Oderbruch – our Village, our native home”. As the best project was awarded an imaginative

"tree of maps", on which could be seen the haunts of the children in the Oder-landscape which symbolized the roots of the children in their home landscape "Oderbruch".

The exhibition was part of the main theme of the Day of Villages "Living and Working in a cultural landscape". About 100 participants followed the invitation to the 5th "Day of Villages", organised by the Working Group for Living Villages / Brandenburg 21 in cooperation with the LEADER LAG "Oderland". Since 2007 "Village Days" of the German Federal State Brandenburg have taken place, following the experiences of "Rural Parliaments" of other village movements.

Proudly the mayor of Golzow reported how local identity and attachment to home have been formed by the steady fight with the water (danger of overflowing), but also by modern agriculture and the special landscape, a functioning infrastructure such as a basic school, a day-care centre, village shop, a network of bike paths for tourism, etc.

A representative of the county administration pronounced that they will promote the initiative of encouraging people in the villages by supporting the Federal-wide competition "Our village has a future". Other objectives will be to analyze the potential for added value (e.g. for tourism), to ensure the mobility of the region by developing the infrastructure and the "traffic arteries" and focusing on priority projects because of the decreasing of funding. It is especially important for the regions that they are given more rights by the State Government in the future to decide autonomously about the effective use of financial resources.

The politics of the State of Brandenburg since 1990 has been constantly faced with new challenges, explained Mr. *Torsten Maciuga* (State Chancellery). Since approximately 2003, the changes caused by emigration and low birth cohorts were so drastic that a main focus of the State became to react to the demographic change. Response to these developments was to strengthen the emphasis on family policy and to move away from the advertising of Brandenburg for investors as a low-cost site. Initiatives to return emigrated qualified employees have started. Ultimately, it will be necessary to react to the long term demographic changes by appropriate development concepts. The State Chancellery will help with good examples on the spot with the "Marketplace of Opportunities".

How a "cultural landscape can be experienced and shaped locally" was the topic of a presentation by *Dr. Kenneth Anders*, Academy of Landscape Communication. Alternatives to a widespread and often one-dimensional "site-thinking" was stressed and the necessity of a more analytic and integrated view, in order to make developments more sustainable and to prevent mistakes. In terms of prospects for young people, there was a warning against the danger of a vocabulary which "constrains" the perspective, often drawn from an "unpleasant prospect of descent" for rural areas. Looking through a funnel, it will be necessary to "upturn the funnel" in order to come from a narrowing view to an opening up of the perspective.

Concerning youth policy, the widespread terminology "to make *offers* for the youth" seems to be dangerous language, simply transferring terms of the market to youth policy. It is much more necessary to "*open opportunities*" for the young people. The estimation of the special culture of life – different to that of the city - is one of the conditions for the viability of rural areas. The traditional "love" of rural space and life should be much more sustained and promoted. Critically were mentioned deficits in the education system: compared to a well developed environmental education there is a lack of education in landscape culture and landscape policy, as was in former times delivered by the school subject 'local history and geography' (in German: "Heimatkunde"). The school could do much to raise the residents

awareness of the use of landscape. Such an education might contribute to break the discrepancy between the need for qualified trainees in the countryside and the career aspirations of young people.

Another point is the compatibility of cultural landscape and energy. A look at history may help here. The traditional village structure is connected with the energy available in the nearby environment. With the beginning of the fossil fuel era these limitations no longer existed. With the transition to the (locally producible) renewable energies in part a re-connection of the consumption takes place on the resources of space. The regions must be involved in the energy market. Otherwise there is the risk that rural areas fall under pressure of industrialization and the danger that diverse rural structures are transformed into pure service areas for energy production, so said *Kenneth Anders*.

Experiences of the Regional Park "Barnimer Feldmark" were presented by *Torsten Jeran* as a successful project with good examples of civic and corporate commitment. He explained how here the concept of Regional Parks as civil society action spaces between the settlement axis between Berlin and the surrounding countryside became a practical form; - e.g. with successful agri-tourism offerings, farm shops for local products or opportunities for self-picking fruit. This concept was a common planning idea of the Federal States of Berlin and Brandenburg in order to link city and countryside.

Marion Piek of Brandenburg 21, stressed the role of voluntary mayors and civic village leaders for strengthening the activities of self shaping the local living conditions. In order to strengthen the villages the support and qualification of these voluntary actors should be improved.

In four working groups the participants discussed different aspects of the general theme "Working and Living in a Cultural Landscape". Key messages of the 5th Day of Villages and main conclusions of the working groups were:

- For rural areas to develop a positive image is essential. The village people need a forum for face-to-face encounters with each other, with other initiatives, projects and NGOs as well as with politicians, such as the "Day of the Villages," or a "parliament of the villages" to discuss their problems, to learn from each other and to formulate proposals and demands to policy.
- To strengthen local initiative in the villages, the support and capacity building of voluntary actors, such as the honorary mayors, civic village leaders and village councils is essential for the development of the villages.
- The interests of young people shall be taken more into consideration and the participation of youth should be fixed in the communal constitution; by making learning more practical the conditions for vocational training should be improved.
- Using bio-energy demands to consider the reconcilability of economic and ecological requirements, so as to avoid monocultures, and to make better use of the potential for energy savings, such as heat insulation.
- To promote start-up initiatives, but also use funds for the perpetuation of successful processes.
- To involve the village people into the development of tourism, because upon their participation depends whether initial successes will become durable solutions.
- In order to secure beekeeping in Brandenburg, it is necessary to combine it with other agricultural occupations; beekeeping is a precondition for successful agriculture and horticulture.

- Internet connection (broadband) should be codified as an obligatory part of the services for the public.

In informal talks at the Day of Villages members of the German Initiative Group “Village Movement”, which had been created at the International Village Conference in May 2011 in Berlin, discussed the next steps for creating a village movement in Germany by cooperation of initiatives of several German Federal States.

Contact:

Dr. Gerold Fierment, Silke Last
Brandenburg 21 e.V./WG Living Villages

E-Mail:

Gerold.Fierment@gmx.net

Silke.Last@t-online.de