

Europe and German Villages

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SUMMARY The author deals with the questions does future Europe need villages, and will the process of European unification do harm to the German villages. The general features of village round the globe, the process of peasant migration and contemporary movements of urban inhabitants in oposite direction, point out that the 3rd millennium will not to be the end of the debate on the decline of villages and rural exodus. The rural sociology can contribute in finding answers and solutions to the actual questions from the perspectives of dichotomies of past and future, and of village and city. The opposition of countryside and town has become dominant no matter, whether village and city are self-contained, independent and complementary to each other, or are dependent and have submitted rural to urban. The discourse centres on three main topical areas: material and social changes between village and town, changes in value orientation of peasantry to farmers and agriculturists concentrated on entrepreneurial industrialised agriculture, and changes in self-initiated development and governmental support programmes for »village renewal«. The consequences of these instruments at some invoke the impression of a »rural renaissance«, but others reveal noteworthy contradictions in the village renewal criticised as painting the facades, and cultural revival as profit-oriented folklorism. Many experts maintain that industrialisation and globalisation are unavoidable because mankind needs sufficient high quality food accessible in stable and diversified markets. Such a development probably would to damage to the village structure. Because our thinking is based on a monothetical way of economic reasoning – on industrial mode of production and consumption. The interventions against the global genechnological industrialisation of agriculture and food production (information and education campaigning, prohibiting misuse and negligence, and regulating markets) meet with manifold difficulties. The discourse on the future of the countryside is in full swing because it is not recognised the force of the spirit of capitalist industrialisation as the main source of contradictions, misjudgements, and »mistakes« that paralyse the public debate. Debates along with the conceptions of »risk society«, »communicative society«, »capital« and »globalisation«, are very far from the reality of village life. The way in which the problem of »hammonising« the results of regional differences will be solved, how the rising transportation will be prevented, as well as folklore tourism will be a respectable force to cultivate rural culture, and ecological claims of the consumers will be decisive for the future of the village in Europe.

Key words: future, Europe, village, monothetical approach, factual rural problems.

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The problem we face can be translated into two questions:

1. Does (future) Europe *need* villages?
2. Will the continuous process of European unification do *harm* to our villages?

1. Background: generalisations on village

Looking round the globe a number of recurring features of village are to be found:

- The variability of *materials and forms* of village structures is fascinating. That makes it difficult to address »the village« per se, but it has nourished a constant »romantic« view of village life since the advent of the »modern« industrialisation ideology.
- Despite the variety of material features, a great similarity is to be found in subsistence-based rural *mentality and value orientation*. This fact has always tempted observers to make dubious generalisations about »village life«.
- The material and *socio-cultural dependence* of the village (inhabitants) on the ruling polit-economical elites concentrated in urban areas is more or less pronounced.

Unlike nomadic and belligerent tribes and peoples, peasant populations have moved only reluctantly and slowly during centuries and millennia – but they really *moved*. Forced by epidemics, natural catastrophes or warfare, rural people migrated to cities or to more promising areas. As a result of their movements new villages have been founded and existent villages have been depopulated and fallen waste.

Insofar the societal *discourse on decline* of villages, of countryside and rural life at the dawn of the 3rd millennium is not something absolutely new. However, since the »industrial revolution« was set going, the debate on rural exodus and desertification will not end.

2. Village and city – past and present

What can *rural sociology* contribute to find answers and solutions to the actual questions?

It seems to be characteristic of villages that they are mostly thought of in terms of dichotomies:

- one of them is expressed in terms of *past and future*, which relates to the dichotomy of traditional and modern,
- a second and more widespread one is the opposition of *village and city*, between town and countryside, between rural and urban.

The twofold perspective: of past and of future is something that is common to both Europe and its villages

- *The past*: the term »**Europe**« is said to have been in the Middle Ages a kind of cultural, if not even political unifying idea;
the future: today Europe has the quality of a political vision, the reality of which still lies ahead and is to be reached by the present young generation,
- Same with **villages**: they are certainly the *oldest* and the most widespread form of human settlement between the North Cape and the Peloponnes, yet today their *future* social role, even their survival is put into question – and this is so expressly with regard to Europe.

The second dichotomy mentioned is that of village and town or city:

- *Village* then is taken as a term for small settlements, nested amidst fields that can be reached for daily »agricultural« work from which the great majority of rural inhabitants earns their livelihood. The result of this patterning is a »patchwork« or puzzle of settlement and cultivation and handicraft sites.
- *Cities*, on the other hand, appear as large agglomerations, strategically distributed, connected by straight lines of communication (roads, railroads, canals). They do not form a puzzle, but rather a »network« like that of a spider, ready and apt to »catch« something valuable.

3. Recent changes: material, ethical, political

The opposition of village and city, of agriculture and industry (of »agrarkultur« and industrial way of life) has always given rise to the question

- whether village and city are *self-contained*, independent of and complementary to each other,
- or are *dependent* and submitted the one to the other – and that is mostly to say: the rural to the urban.

Both theses have found their defenders. A number of rural sociologists have maintained the conceptual autonomy of village and rurality, others at the same time have doubted the reality of these terms.

The ensuing discourse centres on three main topical areas:

- *factual material and social* changes: roads that formerly connected villages and towns, either cut the village in two halves because of heavy streamlined traffic or are replaced by bypasses that take commercial clientele away from the village shopkeepers; shops die out, railway lines are closed down, schooling is concentrated in central places, farmsteads are evacuated and their build-

ings are converted into living and sleeping quarters of pseudo-urban commuters and the whole countryside changes into a site for leisure activities and waste refills.

- Changes in *value orientation*: former values of village inhabitants were concentrated on sustaining partnership with nature and heaven, thus maintaining the resources for growing sufficient food. Now farmers are said that they adopted the urban-oriented ideas of entrepreneurship, improving their economic competitiveness by means of concentration, rationalisation, specialisation, in a word: by industrialisation. The ideas of the 1960/70s »rural industrialisation« have been set off by installation of »agricultural production plant« (*Agrarfabrik*). More conventional-oriented farmholders thus have difficulties to find successors for their farms and marital partners for their families. On the other hand: the countryside is qualified for ecological preferences, for aesthetic qualities of cultivated areas, for quietness and simple lifestyle, mostly garnished with glittering features in glossy periodicals.
- Changes in *self-initiated development* activities and governmental support programmes for »village renewal«, like sanitation of housing, beautification of the village infrastructure (pathways, squares, fountains), revival of folklore specifics in music and theatre with an eye on attracting paying tourists.

4. The force of monothetical economic reasoning

Spread out in a table of activities, all these items may invoke the impression of a »*rural renaissance*« (B. Kayser) but at second sight they reveal noteworthy contradictions in themselves: village renewal is criticised as mere painting the facades, cultural revival as profit-oriented folklorism.

Hence it seems difficult if not impossible to decide where we go – but this is a normal trait of the process of evolution. Evolution always means that the older, the precedent step or phase is both valued (positively) as »*root*« (tradition) and (negatively) as something »*bygone, outdated*«. To find then a satisfactory path between value orientations that seemingly exclude each other will be a constant task of the future for those presently living.

Why then do we so often arrive at *negative* or pessimistic conclusions – for example as specified with regard to the rural and the village:

If the process of technological rationalisation will continue, rural settlements will take the appearance of (pseudo)urban agglomerations, the landscape will be cut into rectangular pieces by canals and roads (see vineyards in Germany's Kaiserstuhl, new rice fields in Iran) the countryside converted into a leisure park and waste refill.

Many experts maintain that this kind of development is unavoidable because:

Mankind wants and needs sufficient high quality food accessible in stable and diversified markets, they say, hence we must accept specialisation, rationalisation, concentration, or in short: industrialisation and globalisation.

Would such a development do *damage* to the village structure?

The answer is: most probably **yes**. given the high population density and regional variance of living conditions in Europe. (Similar experiences can be drawn from US and SU landscapes. In USA, rural life went through a serious crisis at the beginning of the 20th century, today communitarianist thinking succeeds in keeping »rural communities« alive).

The decisive point of the argument above is in the word »if« – »if we continue...« and if we accept the consequences as they were explained above. I am afraid that we do accept (is to say: we did accept already), or in other words: that those who oppose for ethical or ecological reasons will not subsist. Because our thinking is based on a monothetical if not dogmatic way of economic reasoning: economy must be based on efficiency, profitability and growth. This can only be achieved by what we call »industrial mode of production and consumption«.

The interventions that are currently discussed as remedies against the accomplishment of a global gene-technological industrialisation of agriculture and food production are three:

campaigning (information, education),
prohibiting misuse and negligence,
regulating (nominally »deregulated« markets).

And the difficulties with these interventions are manifold:

- the more regulation the more drive for misuse and exaggeration,
- prohibitive rules most often cannot be successfully controlled.
- Campaigning, yet, is also a dubious means, because in modern industrialised societies, nearly all members are convinced of the ideology of »modernity«.

So the discourse on the future of the countryside is in full swing, as it was inspired quite recently by the incidence of BSE and FMD. The structural course of the public discussion, however, presents a stunning monotony:

- the media announce fatalities
- politicians and officials appease
- civic initiatives press for action
- politicians acknowledge former »mistakes« and announce action programmes (a frequently used trick is to play »general« moments against »local« or individual ones. Either globalisation is denounced as being responsible or special traits of the regional or ethnic or economic structure are addressed as culprit).

- the debate cools down and much of its content falls into oblivion.
- As a result, progress against the process of decline is very slow.

It has not yet been sufficiently recognised that the overwhelming force of the spirit of capitalist industrialisation is the main source of contradictions, misjudgements, and so-called »mistakes« that paralyse the public debate on rural future.

The German sociologist *Ulrich Beck* coined a striking term »**risk society**« – *Jürgen Habermas* pleads the case of »**communicative society**«, *Pierre Bourdieu* has broadened and sharpened our sight of »**capital**«, and the mainstream today is to denounce »**globalisation**«.

Much of this kind of debate is very far from the pertaining reality of village life, however.

Time and again, promising examples can be read in the media: e.g. the metropolis of Hannover in Northern Germany is about to form a common body of city and adjoining »umland« municipalities with real power to decide and to execute a joint path of development.

The future of the village in Europe (EU) will be decided by:

- how we solve the problem of »harmonising« the results of regional differences
- how we prevent the rising transportation activity caused by regionally different regulations for treatment
- folklore tourism will be a respectable force to cultivate rural culture
- ecological claims will be forwarded by consumers.

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Europa i njemačko selo

Sažetak

Autor se bavi dvama pitanjima: treba li budućoj Europi selo, te hoće li proces europske unifikacije naštetiti njemačkom selu. Opće značajke sela u planetarnim razmjerima, migracija seljaka i novodobna kretanja gradskog življa u obrnutom smjeru, upućuju da treće tisućljeće ne znači i kraj debate o nestajanju sela i ruralnom egzodusu. U traženju odgovora i rješenja aktualnih pitanja sociologija sela može pridonijeti iz perspektive dihotomija prošlost-budućnost i selo-grad. Sve je izrazitija opozicija selo-grad, bez obzira motre li ih sociolozi sela samodostatnima, nezavisnima i komplementarnima ili pak zavisnima, a ruralno prepušteno urbanome. Glavna su tri područja: materijalne i društvene promjene između sela i grada; promjene vrijednosne orijentacije seljaka od održivog partnerstva s prirodom i nebesima ka poljoprivrednicima usmjerenima poduzetničkoj industrijskoj poljoprivredi; promjene u samopotaknutim razvojnim aktivnostima i vladinim programima potpore »obnovi sela«. Dok posljedice tih mjera u jednih stvaraju dojam o »ruralnoj renesansi«, drugi, zbog kontradikcija, kritiziraju obnovu sela kao »farbanje fasade«, a kulturni preporod kao profitno orijentiran folklorizam. Industrijalizacija i globalizacija poljoprivrede po mnogima su neizbježne, jer čovječanstvo treba dovoljne količine kvalitetne i raznovrsne hrane po stalnim i prihvatljivim cijenama. Takav će razvoj vjerojatno ugroziti strukturu sela, jer naš način mišljenja počiva na monotetičkom ekonomskom rezoniranju – na industrijskom načinu proizvodnje i potrošnje. Intervencije protiv globalne gensko-tehnološke industrijalizacije poljoprivrede i proizvodnje hrane (informacijska i obrazovna kampanja, zabrane zloporaba i nesavjesnog odnosa, te regulacija tržišta) nailaze na mnogostruke poteškoće. Diskurs o budućnosti zemaljskoga (ruralnog) prostora krenuo je posve drugim smjerom, jer još nije dovoljno prepoznata svemoć duha kapitalističke industrijalizacije. Taj je duh glavni izvor kontradikcija, pogrešnih sudova i tzv. »pogrešaka« koji paraliziraju javnu raspravu o budućnosti rurisa. Autor zaključuje da su rasprave tragom koncepcija »rizično društvo«, »komunikacijsko društvo«, »kulturni kapital« i »globalizacija« veoma daleko od stvarnoga seoskog života, te da će način rješavanja problema »harmonizacije« posljedica regionalnih razlika, način prevencije rizičnog prometa, prerastanje folklornog turizma u respektabilnu snagu za njegovanje seoske kulture te ekološki zahtjevi potrošača odrediti budućnost sela u Europi.

Ključne riječi: budućnost, Europa, selo, monotetički pristup, stvarni problemi.

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Europa und das deutsche Dorf

Zusammenfassung

Der Autor befasst sich mit den Fragen, ob Dörfer im zukünftigen Europa gebraucht werden, und ob der Prozess der europäischen Unifikation sich auf das deutsche Dorf schädlich auswirken wird. Die allgemeinen Charakteristika des Dorfes weltweit, die Bauernmigrationen und die neuzeitlichen Bewegungen der städtischen Bevölkerung in entgegengesetzter Richtung weisen darauf hin, dass das dritte Jahrtausend nicht das Ende der Debatte über das Verschwinden des Dorfes und den ländlichen Exodus bedeutet. Bei der Suche nach Antworten und Lösung von aktuellen Fragen kann die Landsoziologie aus der Perspektive der Dichotomien von Vergangenheit und Zukunft sowie Land und Stadt einen Beitrag leisten. Der Gegensatz zwischen Land und Stadt ist immer ausgeprägter, ganz abgesehen davon ob diese von den Landsoziologen als selbstgenügsam, unabhängig und komplementär oder als abhängig, und das Ländliche als dem Städtischen überlassen betrachtet werden. Drei Hauptgebiete stehen im Fokus: materielle und gesellschaftliche Veränderungen zwischen Land und Stadt, Veränderungen in der Wertorientierung der Bauern, die sich von der nachhaltigen Partnerschaft mit der Natur zu den auf die unternehmerische industrielle Landwirtschaft ausgerichteten Landwirten wenden, sowie Veränderungen in den selbstinitiierten Entwicklungsaktivitäten und den Regierungsprogrammen zur Unterstützung der »Dorferneuerung«. Während die Folgen dieser Maßnahmen bei den einen den Eindruck einer »ländlichen Renaissance« erwecken, kritisieren die anderen wegen der Kontradiktionen die Dorferneuerung als Anstreichen von Fassaden, und die kulturelle Erneuerung als einen profitorientierten Folklorismus. Die Industrialisierung und Globalisierung der Landwirtschaft werden von vielen als unvermeidlich angesehen, da die Menschheit ausreichende Mengen hochwertiger und verschiedenartiger Nahrung zu beständigen und akzeptablen Preisen benötigt. Eine solche Entwicklung wird wahrscheinlich der Landstruktur Schaden zufügen, da sich unsere Denkweise auf dem monothetischen ökonomischen Denken, auf der industriellen Produktions- und Verbrauchsweise gründet. Interventionen gegen die globale gentechnologische Industrialisierung der Landwirtschaft und Nahrungsproduktion (Informations- und Bildungskampagnen, Verbote von Missbrauch und Nachlässigkeit sowie Marktregelung) stoßen auf vielfache Schwierigkeiten. Der Diskurs über die Zukunft des ländlichen Raumes hat eine ganz andere Richtung eingeschlagen, da die Omnipotenz des Geistes der kapitalistischen Industrialisierung noch nicht in ausreichendem Maße erkannt worden ist. Dieser Geist ist die Hauptquelle von Kontradiktionen, falschen Meinungen und sgn. »Fehlern«, die die öffentliche Debatte über die Zukunft des Ruris lahm legen. Der Autor schließt, dass die Verhandlungen auf der Spur der Konzepte »Risikogesellschaft«, »Kommunikationsgesellschaft«, »kultureller Kapital« und »Globalisierung« dem wahren Landleben sehr fern liegen. Die Zukunft des Dorfes in Europa wird davon bestimmt, wie die Probleme bezüglich der »Harmonisierung« der aus Regionalunterschieden hervorgehenden Folgen gelöst werden, wie dem risikoträchtigen Verkehr vorbeugend entgegengewirkt wird, sowie vom Auswachsen des Folkloretourismus in eine respektable Kraft zur Pflege der ländlichen Kultur und von den ökologischen Verbraucherforderungen.

Schlüsselworte: Zukunft, Europa, Dorf, monothetischer Ansatz, wahre Probleme.

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L'Europe et les villages en Allemagne

Résumé

L'auteur se penche sur deux questions: L'Europe future a-t-elle besoin des villages et le processus de l'unification de l'Europe portera-t-il préjudice aux villages d'Allemagne. Les caractéristiques générales du village à l'échelle planétaire, le processus de migration des paysans et les mouvements contemporains de la population urbaine dans une direction opposée indiquent que le III^e millénaire ne signifie pas la fin des débats sur le déclin des villages et l'exode rural. La sociologie rurale peut contribuer à la recherche de réponses et de solutions aux questions d'actualité sous les perspectives de la dichotomie du passé et du futur et du village et de la ville. L'opposition milieu rural – ville est de plus en plus dominante, que le village et la ville se suffisent à eux-mêmes, qu'ils soient indépendants et complémentaires l'un de l'autre ou encore dépendants et que le rural ait été soumis à l'urbain. Il y a trois domaines principaux: les changements matériels et sociaux entre la village et la ville; les changements de valeur de l'orientation des paysans de leur partenariat durable avec la nature et avec le ciel en agriculteurs orientés vers l'agriculture industrialisée et d'entreprise; les changements dans les activités de développement autoinitiés et les programmes du gouvernement pour l'aide à la «rénovation des villages». Alors que chez les uns les conséquences de ces mesures donnent l'impression d'une «renaissance rurale», d'autres, en raison des contradictions, critiquent la rénovation des villages en tant que peinture de façade et la renaissance de la culture comme un folklorisme orienté vers le profit. Beaucoup d'experts maintiennent que cette industrialisation et la globalisation de l'agriculture sont inévitables, car l'humanité a besoin de quantités suffisantes de produits alimentaires de qualité et diversifiés à des prix stables et acceptables. Un tel développement portera probablement préjudice à la structure du milieu rural, car notre façon de penser est basée sur un raisonnement économique monothétique – sur le mode industriel de production et de consommation. Les interventions contre l'industrialisation globale de la technologie des OGM (organismes génétiquement modifiés) dans l'agriculture et de la production de produits alimentaires (campagne d'information et d'éducation, interdiction des usages abusifs et des négligences, puis régulation du marché) se heurtent à de multiples difficultés. Le discours sur l'avenir du milieu rural a pris une tout autre orientation, car la toute puissance de l'esprit de l'industrialisation capitaliste n'est pas encore suffisamment reconnue comme étant la principale source de contradictions, de jugements erronés et des soi-disant «erreurs» qui paralysent les débats publics sur l'avenir des campagnes. L'auteur conclut que les débats sur la recherche des conceptions «société à risques», «société de communication», «capital de la culture» et «globalisation» sont très loin de la réalité de la vie en milieu rural, et qu'en Europe l'avenir du milieu rural sera déterminé par la manière de résoudre le problème d'«harmonisation» des résultats des différences régionales, la prévention dans le domaine des transports à risques en augmentation, puis le folklore dans le tourisme qui représentera une force respectable pour maintenir la culture du milieu rural; mentionnons encore la demande écologique des consommateurs.

Mots-clés: avenir, Europe, village, approche monothétique, problèmes réels.

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