

European Rural Parliament 2015

Report from Brandenburg, Germany

prepared by

Brandenburgian Network of Living Villages

Results of collection and interpretation of ideas of rural people

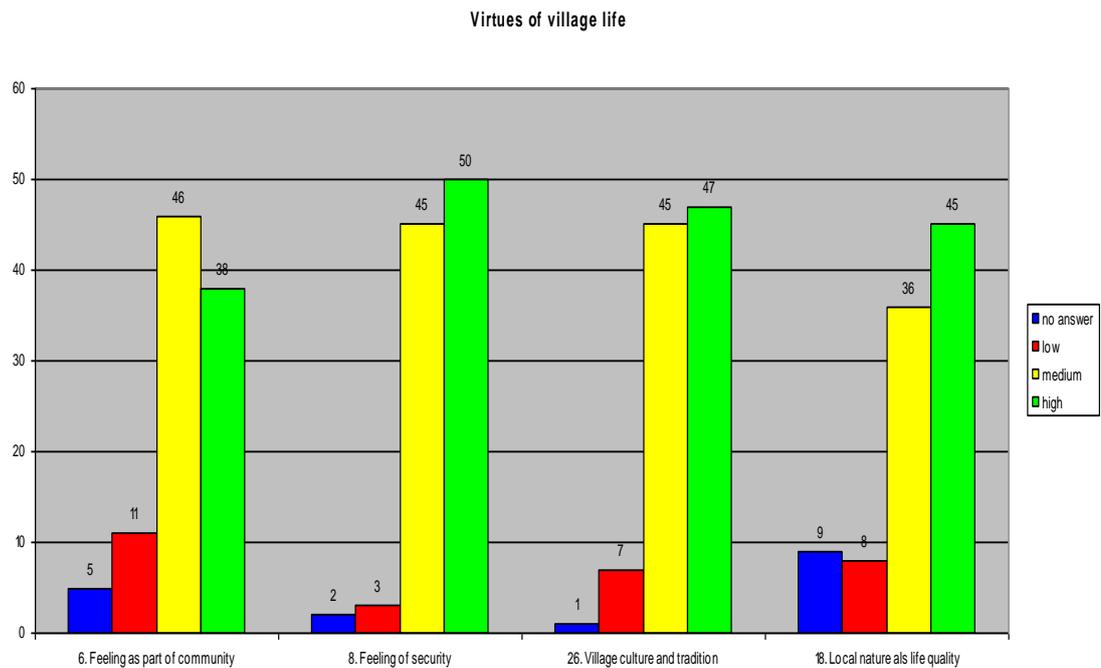
in selected villages of Brandenburg in the frame of the
European Rural Parliament 2015 campaign

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July 2015

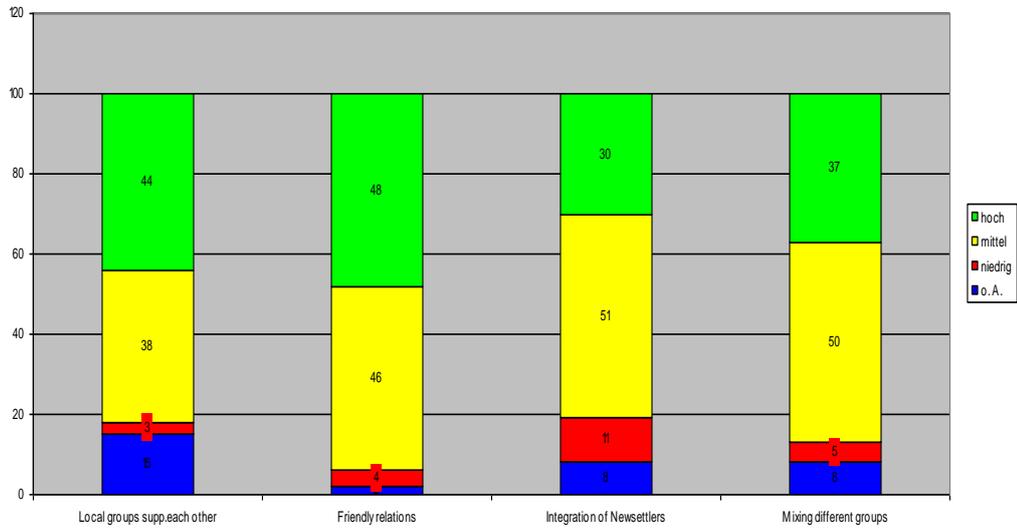
1. Main results of the campaign

In all visited villages the village inhabitants feel very attached to their villages. They mentioned many features of village life that characterises the connectivity, like natural environment as a factor of quality of life, care for cultural heritage and local traditions, feeling of security and communality in the community.

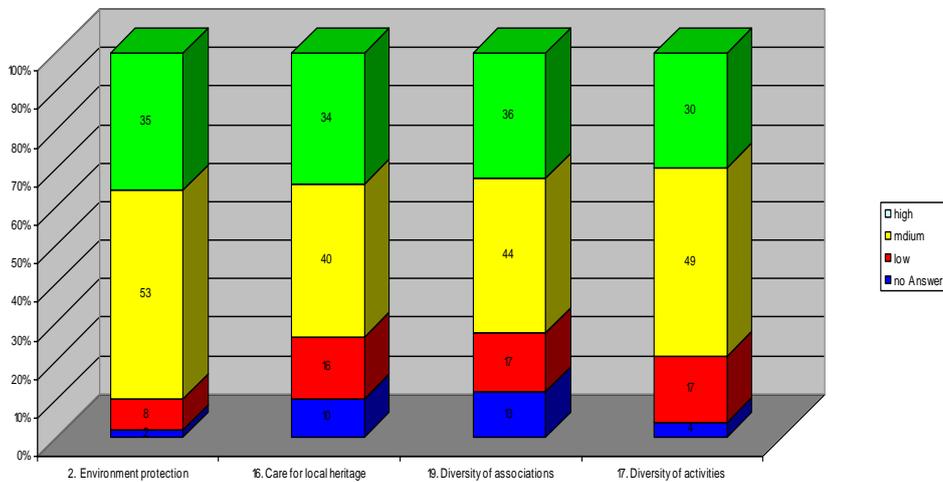


Communality was expressed by attributes such as friendly and open relationships, a good relationship between different sub-groups in the village, integration of newcomers, mutual support. Other attributes are related to community activities like environmental protection, diversity of activities, diversity of associations or groups and care for cultural traditions.

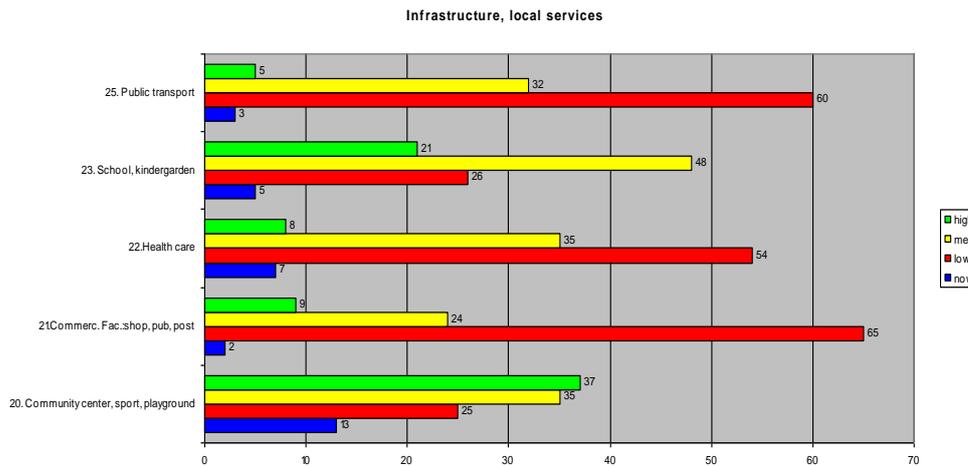
Quality of village community



Activities of Village Community (1)

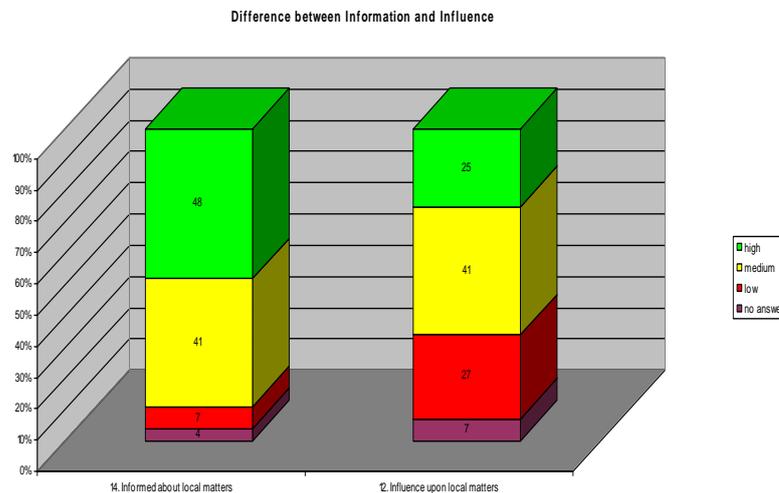


So, it doesn't come as a surprise that the importance of nature and environmental protection for villagers generates conflicts about these natural resources, and villagers perceive it sometimes as burden to place safeguards for the community as external actors enter the village environment and damage landscapes through, for example, the uncontrolled spreading of wind turbines and wind parks near to villages and protected areas. Other forms of "legal land grabbing" get increasing importance, in which multinational energy companies buy land from private owners and exploit entire regions by monoculture cropping of biomass for biofuel etc.



Despite of high levels of social relationships and connectedness, most villagers experience their living conditions as poor due to marginal facilities, as access to public transport, markets and social infrastructure are limited. For the main part they are missing local shops, pubs and public transport.

An overall and mostly unresolved problem is the loss of independence and self-determination that has been experienced throughout most of the villages. In the past, villages have been self-reliant municipalities, however through municipality reforms they merged to bigger municipalities. In Brandenburg, villages normally became part of cities.



Therefore, one of the most urgent demands of villagers is to retrieve local self-determination. It is an important element of local identity. It improves the possibilities to articulate, plan and organise local matters by themselves. Concerning the local identity of each village as part of a bigger municipality one village mayor said: "We should be a bunch of flowers in which each flower has its own florescence".

Villagers also strongly demand for improving the living conditions in response to the demographic change. It is crucial to maintain or further develop a family-, children-, youth- and newcomer - friendly village. What is done instead, is the policy of “shrinking the infrastructure” as a consequence of demographic change.

It is expected that policy makers recognize villages as a sustainable form of life in rural areas. Having the possibility to choose between village and city life, is one indicator for wealth in a developed country. The discrimination of villagers by cutting more and more support for living conditions must be ceased. This would include the recognition of sparsely populated regions as respected part of a society.

Most of the villagers who participated in the group discussions, agreed that the motto of the Swedish Village Movement (“ALL Sweden shall live”) would fit very well to Brandenburg and agreed to use the slogan “ALL Brandenburg shall live!”. Not only the cities, but also the villages, and not only the strong regions, but all regions including the weaker ones, should be in the focus of politics.

II. Description of the campaign – process, methods and people involved

The coordination group of the Brandenburgian Network of Living Villages consists of four volunteers. They agreed to be the regional champion of the preparation campaign for the second European Rural Parliament in the Federal German State Brandenburg. The campaign started in January 2015 during the “International Green Week” in Berlin, an international annual fair for agriculture and rural development. The network got support of another institution, the Rural Network Brandenburg, to present itself at the LEADER booth. Both organised a meeting to get village actors involved in the campaign.

Because of its limited capacity and lack of financial means the network decided to utilize the “Rural Vibes” programme¹ to study the ideas of village people. The questionnaire, which includes more than 50 indicators of village vibrancy, was reduced to four open questions:

- Why do you live in a village?
- Which problems and constraints exist in your village ?
- Which activities are pursued by the village community to improving the quality of life?
- What is proposed to or requested from rural policy makers ?

Three LEADER regions supported the survey. The LEADER managers selected the villages and organised focus group discussions and conducted interviews.

About 300 villagers and 25 organisers of 16 villages took part. As a second part of the campaign the results of the survey were discussed in three regions together with representatives of the participating villages and regional decision-makers in order to interpret and evaluate the results and to draw recommendations for the village communities and the policy. Three of the participating villages used their results of the survey to present the success of their villages to the evaluation committee of the State-organised federal-wide competition “Our Village has Future” (Unser Dorf hat Zukunft).

Two additional evaluation meetings took place, one in the frame of a three days meeting of Polish and German partner villages in Wulkow, a small village near the Polish border, another in a forum of regional villages. Altogether about 100 villagers and regional actors took part in the meetings. Follow up meetings are planned.

In September a German-wide conference, jointly organised by the German Rural Network and the German-wide association “Federal Alliance Living Villages“ with about 100 participants will give opportunity for further evaluation. In October 2015, the results will be presented and discussed with politicians during the annual Day of Villages in Brandenburg, where about 80-100 participants are expected.

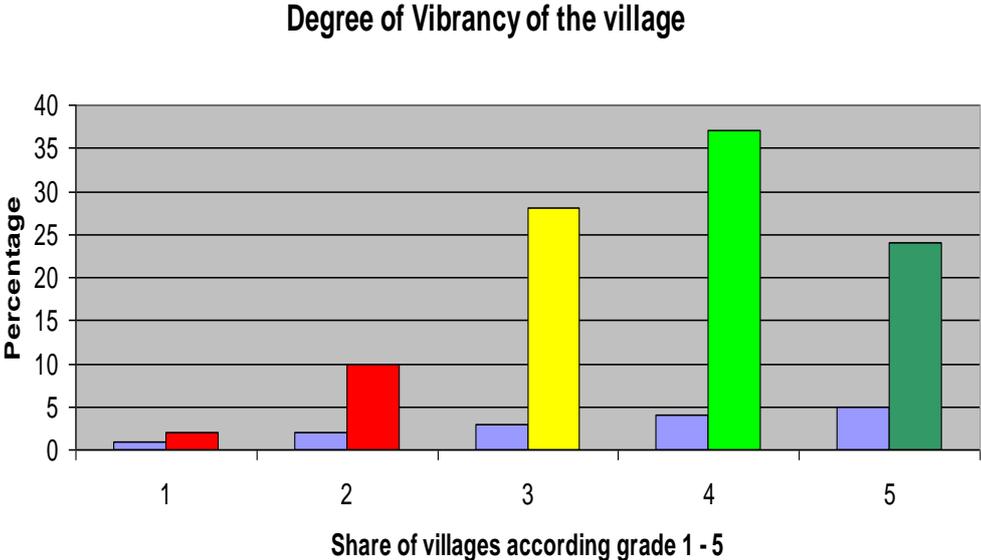
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Overall, about 320 villagers were involved in the survey. 252 questionnaires were completed. In addition, until now about 100 persons took part in evaluation meetings, and more than 150 will follow.

Three study locations were selected that have different distances to Berlin, the capital of Germany and the centre of the metropolitan region Berlin-Brandenburg. But there were no marked regional differences in the results of the survey. Among the selected villages, three of them with a relatively high level of vibrancy delivered more than half of the 252 completed questionnaires. There was some variation in the percentages of positive evaluations, but the negative evaluation of lack of self-determination or of missed infrastructural elements was more or less constant.

Concerning the general tendencies, compared with other experiences and sources, the results seem to reflect the real situation and the demands and expectations may be generalised.

The respondents evaluated the general vibrancy and agility of its own village on a scale from 1 to 5. 24% ranked the vibrancy very high (5), 37% high, 28% medium and 10% rather low. (2).

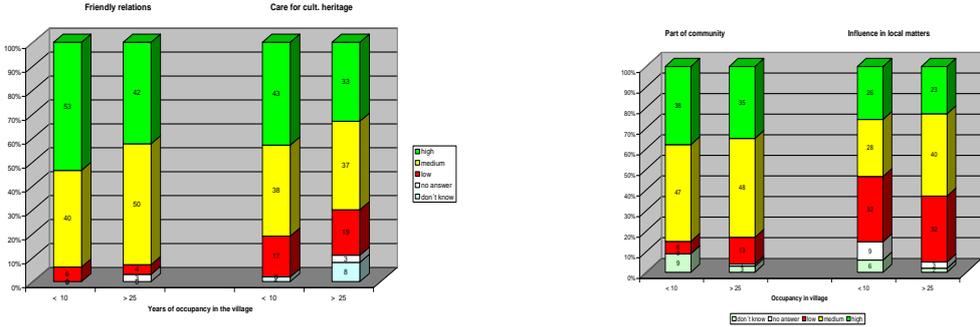


III. Achievements of local communities and good experiences

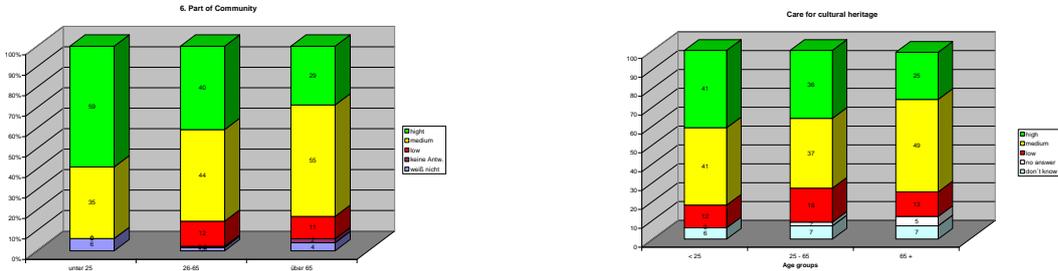
The study showed that villagers feel very attached to their villages. It is interesting that this attachment tends to be as high in all kind of villagers, regardless of size, distance to cities, or social group of respondent. The connectedness demonstrates not only that villages are for many people an alternative to city life. Even in villages, where living conditions in terms of lack of access to infrastructure are dominant, villagers still feel attached and happy with their quality of life. In this regard, connectedness remains an important potential for mobilizing citizen engagement.

Village attachment is made from a combination of factors, like impact of nature on quality of life, care of cultural peculiarities and traditions, feeling of safety and consciousness of being a mutual community (which here was measured by openness of relationships, the mixing up

of social sub-groups, mutual help and integrating of newcomers. These factors play a similar role for new settlers as well as for people who live in the village since a long time.



Nature, quietness and community life are typical pull factors for people tired of city life moving to villages, and these pull factors are mentioned regardless of age of the respondents.



Although village connectedness tends to be relatively strong, the level of collective action is rather determined by the level of self-organization of the village community, which is organised primarily by village associations and local councils, especially initiated by the village mayor.

The role of associations for the vitality of the village was always mentioned in the first place. Often there are several active associations operating in a village. In almost every village the volunteer fire brigade exists. Those associations which do not represent special group interests, but are concerned with the interests and needs of the entire village play a dominant role in collective action, which is similar to the experiences of the Swedish Village Action Movement. They call themselves village associations, folk culture or cultural association. An outstanding example is the village Reichenow, about 30 km East of Berlin, where the cultural association contributes in many ways to the vitality of the village: they run a small public library, a communication center for previously integrated citizens, pottery, sculpture workshop, children's workshop, market for gifts (without payment), village festivals, training courses, Project Mobile - Alternative Mobility by organized riding for passengers. In other villages different associations and initiatives work together to increase the attractiveness of villages for tourists.

The local councils and the mayor, who are elected by the villagers, are the centre of the active village stakeholders. Where they are able, with new ideas and organizational force to mobilize the local community, they will play their role. But this also depends on qualifications and practical experience, the newly elected must have to learn and to acquire. Some give up even in the face of their small possibilities to change things. Once again it was confirmed that interaction of local councils and associations increases the power. Associations per se have a greater mobilization power with regard to their members; in several villages it has been (registered) associations who have better opportunities because of their legal status as local

councils, to acquire funding, in this way to bring together civic engagement and financial support for community projects.

In the evaluation meetings it became obvious that village mayors have a strong interest to share experiences about how many ways to the bundling and the interaction of the village actors can promote the self-organization of the village community. So, the “regulars’ table” (in German: “Stammtisch”²) for Local Economy of the Spreewald village Pretschen and similar forms as “regulars’ tables of associations”, “regulars’ table of citizens”, “round table” belong to such proven experience, how - following on regulars’ table traditions - all local forces may jointly develop strategies and self-design possibilities to develop their village. In a small village with 120 inhabitants. We found the example that parallel two regulars’ tables were created - a citizens regulars’ table and an entrepreneurs regulars’ table, the latter with more willingness to take risks for future projects, the citizens regulars’ table more of the actually and realistically feasible - and the mayor strives to get both and merge.

With regard to the practical self-*shaping* of village development (by special projects etc.), by the self-organized civic engagement and the use of own potential to be a lively village, there were to be found both traditional as well as new trends. The traditions include - mentioned most frequently - village festivals and celebrations. There is hardly a village where nothing happens in this regard, and even small villages usually have their annual Village Festival or Harvest Festival, often a carnival association. In many cases old traditions are being revitalised, such as Zampern (constructing straw dolls as a pioneer for children who go begging for sweets etc.).

A strong tradition found in almost all the villages - often stronger than the youth work – is the solidary concern for the elderly and other neighbourhood help, the care or assistance in purchasing, for doctor visits, etc. This partly compensates the shortage of medical care systems. An increasing number of "young old", sprightly and qualified seniors play an active role in village life, in particular in those villages, where their potential willingness and experiences is managed and organized. Brigades of retired people sometimes provide indispensable support in community projects.

In a number of villages regular community actions for the care and beautification of the village design etc. Some old traditions have become new traditions, e.g. those voluntarily organised “Saturday” cleaning actions have the name from GDR time and are called with the Russian term “Subbotnik”.

A recent field of identity-creating community activities became such projects as village shops, community centers and children's facilities.

Many villages complain about their lack of local shopping facilities which existed previously. Some communities have taken the initiative to set up a village shop for everyday consumption. This growing need can be explained on the one hand from the growing proportion of elderly villagers; on the other hand to use such stores as everyday communication points, and last but not least from the increasing interest in fresh, local and regional products and a willingness for it and for the preservation of the store a bit larger cache than prices for the discount prices of the supermarkets.

The State authorities so far mainly mediate experiences of village shops that may exist in a market economy. However, above all are those experiences of interest for smaller villages, as such stores operated cooperatively (food coops) or / and can remain viable by a high degree of voluntary, unpaid work of village people. An example for a lot of such of private initiative to improve the shopping we found in village a country butchers’ shop which enables sale of other goods of daily use in another village it was a combination of pub and village shop.

² Stammtisch = term for “regular guests” of a restaurant or a special group of people who meet there regularly (means, there exists a “reserved table for regular guests”)

Other new trends are different initiatives for preservation or establishing of Daycare centers and other local child care forms. People understand that these establishments are essential to the vitality and viability of a village, for maintaining or arriving of young families. This explains that many village communities have been fighting for the preservation of such facility in their own village and turned against bureaucratic fixed utilization standards. In some villages (of the 16 studied in 2 villages) parents have taken the daycare in own direction (so-called free sponsorship), others have found alternative solutions such as care mothers or -grandmothers.

Of great importance projects have proved in some villages that have been a focal point for community work and where communality has continued to grow. A typical example in two of the villages studied was a project "community centre", by which an architectural centre of the village and a socio-cultural community centre the village community has been created, each with a high level of civic engagement and other own contributions.

In other villages people lamented the lack of such centres. It seems to be a growing need again in the last years not only because restaurants often did not survive, but also because of growing need to meet each other as alternative to TV and PC as well as for new experiments of mixed meetings and events for different generations.

In the village of Wulkow, near the border with Poland, there was an old granary of the former estate. It was developed into a social, cultural and environmental centre. It was interesting that in addition to regular work assignments of the village community, a brigade of three retired construction specialists for several years daily unpaid participated and - since the beginning of financial support had been rejected at the beginning - members of this "Eco-granaystore-association" (Oekospeicherverein) and other villagers privately provided loans totalling €100,000 to finance the project and largely renounced any interest on these loans.

This association and its village both became known in 1994, inter alia through the decoration as the first and only village with the German Environmental Award - are repeatedly made its appearance through innovations, including advertising of experience of European village movement. In May 2015 took place here a 3-day meeting with guests from Polish partner villages, which focuses on elements of solidarity, ecologically oriented economy stood, including locally practiced a "Give market" on which give you products in good condition for free and to take another product allowed. Many participants have exploited the "Repair Café", in which an expert on "Obsoleszenz" cleared (by large manufacturers in the products built vulnerabilities that provide post-warranty for failures) . After that repaired several professionals and visitors together in common those brought, no longer functioning products.

The best practice examples and experiences of such "advanced" villages are of great importance, for three reasons.

- First, they demonstrate what is possible *in principle* for a village community to develop - what we like to call "self-organisation of the village community" – i. e. to *plan* its village development by itself, be it by one central project or by a more holistic planning of different fields of village life and so to regain some local self-determination; to *shape* practically and by using above all its own resources and human capital the quality of living in the village and last not least – to *bundle* and *organize* all local actors and potentials for commonly planning and creating the living village and its future.
- Second, these experiences are of great importance for all villages and for learn of each other what can be done by the own power and how it can be done (exchange of experiences of know how). The events for evaluating the results of the questionnaire in the villages and regions themselves became partly such spontaneous exchange of experiences and three of the e involved villages, which had reached a certain step of success in participating at the German-wide competition "Our village has a future", asked for using the results of the cascade campaign and its graphical demonstration in diagrams, concerning their village, for the presentation of their villages for the next step of the competition.

- Third, the results demonstrate that planning, shaping and organising the improvement of quality of village life by its own potential is not only – as sometimes is said – necessary by the financial lack of state and municipalities. Moreover, this kind of self-organisation of the village community is in the first line part and indicator of a living and future-oriented village itself.

When on the one hand the involved villages were able to “deliver” such a lot of good experiences and results, so on the other hand, it seems normal, that the same villages are not free from defects and had to mention a lot of critical points, deficits and lacks. So – besides the critical evaluation of living condition, which will be described in the next chapter – village people mentioned those faults in the field of behaviour as the different phenomena and reasons of inactivity, disinterested parts of villagers and of young people, the commuters lack of time for local activities, the ongoing migration of young people despite of their social links to and within the village community because of the lack of local job initiatives etc.

So, these investigations demonstrated the need for exchange of experiences and mutual aid between all types of villages, independent of their level of activity, social and cultural development, and in some cases the evaluation meetings of the campaign became a starting point for such kind of exchange.

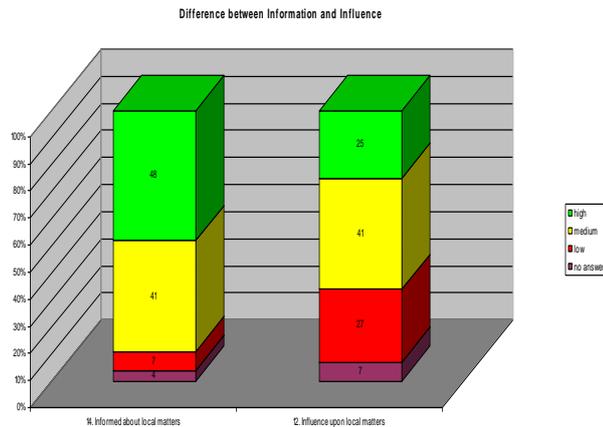
IV. Concerns, problems and aspirations of rural people for the future of their village communities

Concerns and problems, discovered by the campaign, which cannot or only partly be settled by the village communities themselves may be structured into four fields:

- (1) Deficits and disadvantages for village communities due to the loss of local self-determination
- (2) Conflicts as consequences of contradictions between ecological, social and economic demands and needs
- (3) Consequences of unsettled or partly reproduced phenomena of social inequality between city and countryside for the infrastructure.
- (4) Lack of workplaces and other deficits in village economy.

1. Deficits and disadvantages for village communities due to the loss of local self-determination

95 percent of respondents indicated positively, including 2/5 with "high", to be well informed about the rural issues. But one-third at the same time assessed the possibilities low to be able to exert influence on the village needs.



Behind these data, as the evaluation discussions showed, is concealed the well-known phenomenon that with the formation of large communities by merging small rural communities (municipalities) or their connection to cities most villages of Brandenburg lost their communal autonomy and thus lost their right to local self-determination. It was the most discussed problem in all evaluation meetings.

Historically the problem roots in the consequences of two so-called municipal reforms in a short time span of about 10 years after the political transformation of 1989 in East Germany. In the Federal State Brandenburg as a first “reform” the administration of rural municipalities were concentrated to central offices. A consequence was that the most rural municipalities lost their paid mayor who before has been the reference person for everything and everybody in the villages. As a second reform, the state organized the fusion of small municipalities to bigger ones or the integration of small municipalities into city municipalities. So the most villages lost their municipal self-dependence and the right to decide about all local matters in the village. For three years, the small municipalities were allowed to decide with which other they would like to unite or to join. After this time they were forced by administrative decisions of the state to do that step. About 500 small municipalities (one Third of all municipalities of Brandenburg) took that state constraints to court, but without any avail.

The loss of local self-determination of the most villages has three dimensions

- Loss of decision-making powers of elected representatives from the village. The village council, democratically elected by the village people, can not decide on local matters.
- The village population is thus largely excluded from participation in local decision-making. Many see this as a loss of local identity. Participation in local self-determination is an element of village solidarity and a driving force for civil engagement in village community projects and actions.
- Members of local councils per se have no right, to take part in decisions of the municipality parliament, even not, if it concerns matters of their own village. Only elected member of the municipality parliament have the right to decide, but not each village has an elected deputy in that parliament.

The description of the problem refers to some possibilities of its solution. In general, the opinion is expressed that the local villagers for self-determination over their village is a part of their local identity and attachment to one's own village. A centralization of administrative structures would not necessarily require to limit the local self-determination.

Most violent can be seen these contradictions there, where villages have become “local parts” (“Ortsteile”) of major cities: discrimination in investment (priority of the city); villagers

have higher personal costs for wastewater, construction of sidewalks, etc .. Some towns and their villages have come to terms, especially where villages are represented by deputies in the municipal council or city council and where the municipality assumes that each village belonging to their territory were supported to keep their own local identity. As a good experience were called that village mayors of villages which belong to a given town municipality, founded their own parliamentary group, were elected and became one of the fractions of the town parliament.

The loss of self-determination as it relates to villages as "districts" of towns is underpinned by missing disposal of budget funds. For example, villages can not take public funds, if they - due to lack of its own budgetary means – will not be able to cover the demanded co-payment. Therefore, it is demanded that to the villages (Ortteilen) more room for maneuver is granted by available financial resources.

2. Conflicts as consequences of contradictions between ecological, social and economic demands and needs

New phenomena of social conflicts arose by the misuse of the "energy reform" for private or capitalist purposes. One example for that is a kind of "land grabbing", being formally legal, that more and more big surfaces of former arable land are bought from (mostly small) land owners by big capitalist concerns in order to exploit it for production of biomass for biodiesel etc.. Rural people are afraid of the negative consequences of monoculture, use of genetic engineering, destroying of landscape etc.

Other examples are kinds of industrial agriculture, biogas plants in their negative effects on quality of life and tourism.

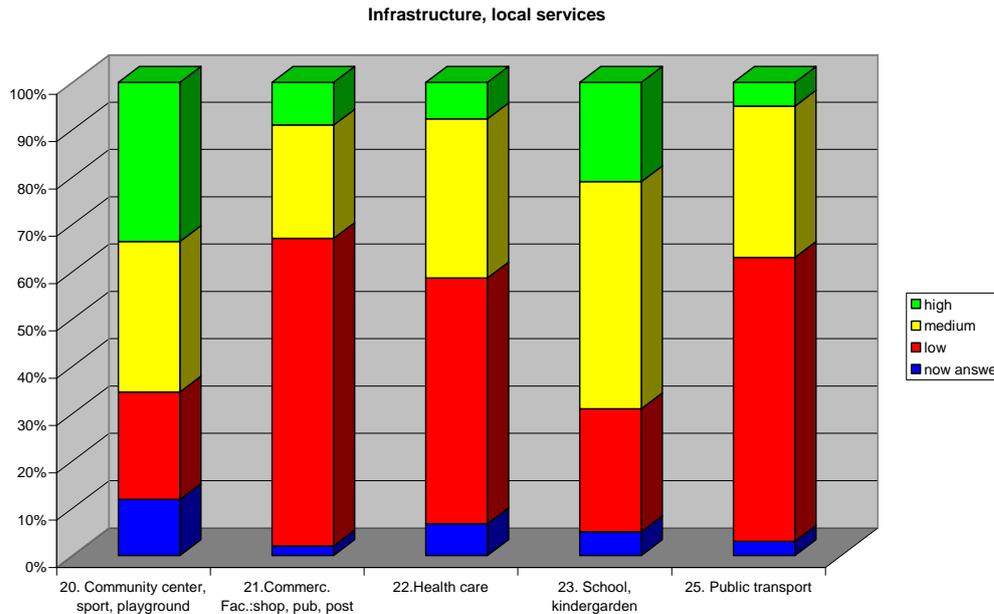
Nearly in all involved villages and mostly called in answering the open question, which are the most negative problems for the vitality of villages, village people expressed their dissatisfaction with the unsettled problem of decisions about the places of position for *wind turbines, wind farms or wind parks*.

The general problem is that a good and necessary ecological matter becomes discriminated by domination of private interests and the incompetence of landscape planning. The real danger for the villagers and the society as a whole is the damaging of landscape. The spreading of such installations seems to be an extremely spontaneous process. No village has any impact if private owners install them near to the village, but all of them are disturbed by noise etc. and are afraid of the negative consequences for tourism and newsettling. The society as a whole and the people living in towns have the general benefit, but no burden; villages do not have any benefit, but the burden.

Especially the land owners, vendors of land and the operators and owners of the installations have all the economic benefit. Villagers would see it as a matter of justness if there might be inserted a tax for operating of such installations which benefits directly to given village. But general solutions concerning decisions about places of position, use of private land for public purpose, exchange of private land, protection of landscape etc. have to be found by the state.

3. Consequences of unsettled or partly reproduced phenomena of social inequality between city and countryside for the village infrastructure.

The survey reflects - in contrast to the generally positive assessment of the social relations and activities in the given village communities - a total of largely negative assessment of local infrastructure and utilities.



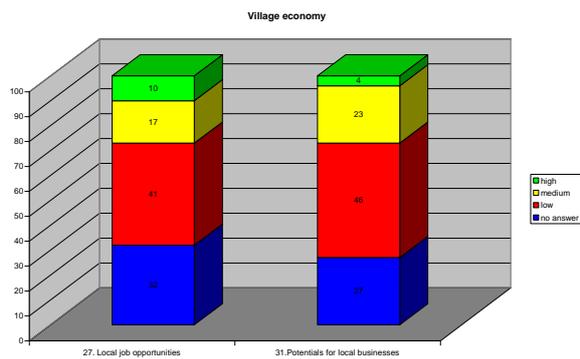
The strongest negative vote (nearly two-thirds) was the lack of a village shop, restaurants and a post office. Often these commercial facilities did exist in former times and had to be closed because of impossibility to survive in a small village under conditions of market economy and by the concurrence of supermarkets. But – as has been described in chapter 2 – needs are changing: growing number of elderly and growing needs for fresh local products are awaking the interest in a village shop. Similar it is the matter concerning the need for pub or small restaurant. All rooms much more easier may be substituted by kinds of combination with other facilities.

The second place in negative evaluation of infrastructure belongs to the traffic conditions (60 %). It is a general structural problem because the smaller a village the less the opportunities to localise all conditions for satisfaction of everyday needs. But often the access of those conditions supra-locally have been extremely reduced and so have been reproduced phenomena of social equality between city and countryside. For example, village people did not only criticise the long time distances between the traffic opportunities, but also for example the bad condition for elderly to enter or leave a bus; the same problem being for parents with buggies or prams and also opportunities for young people, for example, to be able to visit disco or other leisure time activities in the next town on weekends.

Closely connected with the traffic problems is the health care situation. This is a field where local initiatives only to a small extent will be able to improve the situation. The low supply with medical care and especially with doctors is one of the most serious shifts between town and countryside. In some cases the situation of health care has worsened and this is sometimes one of the reasons for old people, who have their roots in the village, to migrate from the village.

Generally, village people are worried that their striving to active meet the problems of demographic change will be avoided by continuation of a policy of “shrinking back” of infrastructure as a pretended consequence of diminishing number of population. Villagers expect that the particularities of small settlements in broad diversified and sparsely populated regions are taken into account and the appropriate standards for the utilization of infrastructure are used. They expect a policy which supports that each village will be or become children- and family-friendly, youth- and elderly- friendly and new-settler-friendly village. Therefore they understand the role of a Kita as lifeblood of village and therefore can be explained the growing role of meeting places, houses for meeting of several different generations, community houses, etc..

4. Lack of workplaces and other deficits in village economy.



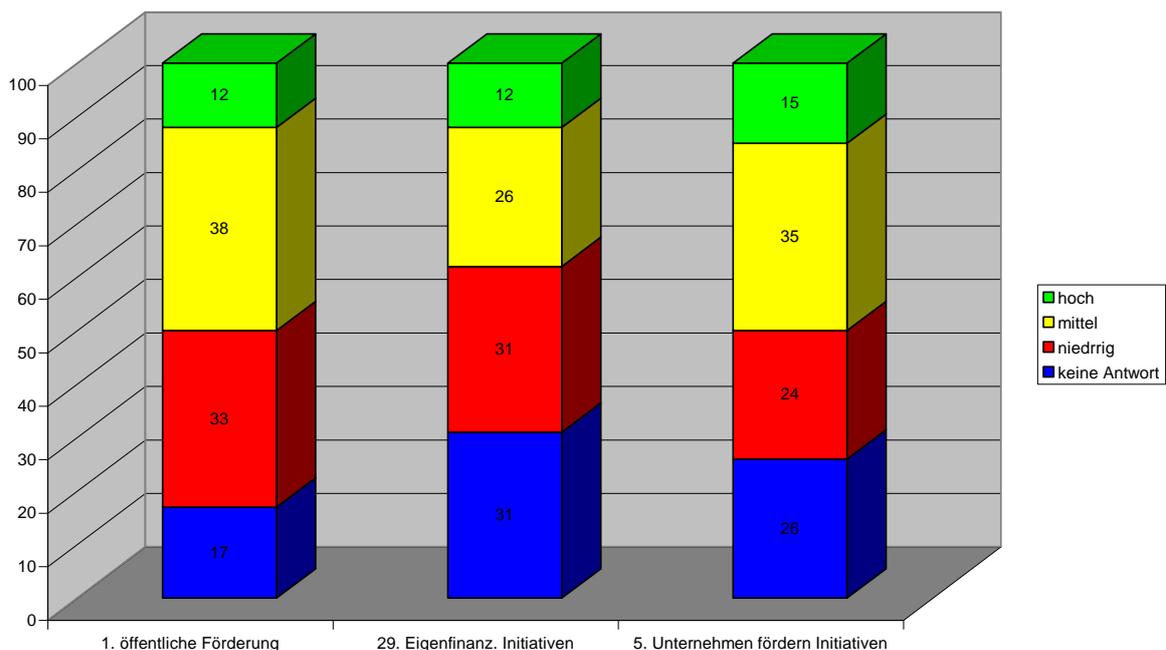
The absence of work places and local opportunities of vocational training is not a new problem, but it is mentioned by the village people again and again because the solution of that problem can only to a very small extend happen by village people; but it remains the main condition for a sustainable anchoring of young people in the village. In Brandenburg it is a special problem because of the former predominantly agricultural structured economy; it means there are not enough non-agricultural alternatives in a normal accessibility – a problem which can only be settled by a long- term policy of creation non-agricultural jobs and training places.

As one of the obstacles for creation of small businesses was called the lack or bad quality of broadband.

But, on the other hand, it depends to a certain extent on the local atmosphere, support and solidarity, as it was to be seen in a small village of 120 inhabitants, but 16 small businesses, which act together in supporting the village development and on the other hand become included in all spheres of village life.

Another difference was that between a higher level of evaluation of public support than self-financed initiatives.

Öffentliche und Eigenfinanzierung



The support for local initiatives through funding and by local businesses is assessed positively by half of the respondents; self-financed initiatives play a lower role, were evaluated by two-thirds as low or not at all

V. Demands and Conclusions

A. Conclusions for strengthening vibrancy and activity of village communities

(1) The high degree of village solidarity and identification with one's own village is a significant potential for further strengthening the communities. It would be necessary to consider whether these resources are sufficient to enhance activity and degree of participation in village matters and even to more trying to mobilize passive villagers. This affects more or less all village communities ; generally the conclusion may be drawn that there does not exist any community which could not learn of experiences of others.

Exchange of experiences and spreading the know how of best practices maintain important instruments of increasing the vibrancy and self-organisation of village communities. The survey demonstrated that sometimes dominating problems and contradictions can be found which concern more or less all village communities, so for example the problem of local self-determination. But similarly it is necessary to discover the special local or regional problems as subject of exchange of experiences, in order to make networking a necessary, living, needed and asked instrument.

(2) The wide loss of self-determination over the affairs of the village as a negative consequence of former municipal reforms continues to be regarded as deterioration of living conditions and obstruction of joint responsibility of village communities for the future of their village. On one hand, the first can be countered by the utilizing of all possibilities that are given by the communal constitution to increase the decision power of the local councils and of participation in decision-making of municipal or city parliaments. Some village mayors seem to have too much respect for regulations, even if they have a negative effect on the village development. Exchange of experience and joint action by local councils, for example in form of establishing own fractions of village mayors in the municipal parliament can be useful here. Last but not least the use of education opportunities may be helpful.

On the other hand, self-determination (participation, direct democracy, co-determination) is a trait of civil society and has to be a right of every community. Self-determination can be re-italized for example through participatory village planning. It may start from old, former village development plans, may include single projects and future-workshops in some cases as well as holistic planning of different fields of village life in other cases, but generally it seems to be useful to design common activities and projects that challenge and encourage civic engagement and will promote the attachment to the own village. The given funding opportunities for village planning by LEADER should be designed so that they are directly accessible to villages and democratic planning from below

(3) The contradiction between high activity of associations and hardly self-financed projects raises the question whether the role of self-"shaping" for the improvement of local living conditions, as the essence of self-organization" of civic is underestimated? One conclusion might be necessary to consider whether all possibilities of self-organization to improve their own quality of life by its own power and resources, have been exhausted already in every village? And whether the diverse experiences of self-shaping, which were named in the survey, are known, exchanged and used everywhere? Examples of this are projects that are directed to closing their own gaps in public services and local infrastructure: maintaining a kindergarten independently operated by parents' association; village shop with honorary staff; Community hall as a project of all associations, and so on?

(4) Because in the survey the role of local businesses was rated weak, but also information about the village economy is partly weak, it seems to give apparently in some villages a juxtaposition, but no cooperation of the village economy and community development. If true, that would in some cases an insufficiently used potential for village development.

Exchange of experience how to use it as well as on alternative economic initiatives (Repair Café, Give-market, exchange trading, etc.) that are possible with little effort, the village economy in some villages and the vibrancy of the village could be enriched.

(5) In general, the positive role of associations for the vibrancy of the village is highlighted. In some villages namely a "village association" or "homeland association" does exist. This kind of associations plays an important and integrating role in the community development because they have interests of the whole village to its object. In other villages has been lamented the absence of such a village association. Several participants stressed that local councils and village mayors can move and mobilize anything in the village only with the help of associations. Therefore, the conclusion arises whether it might be useful for all villages, to find below the municipal level forms of bundling the village actors, similar to those so-called "village action groups", the creation of which for example in Finland and Sweden were the beginning of their national village movements. In that direction also the model of "public-private partnerships" could play a role in forming regular cooperation of Village mayor, association representatives and local entrepreneurs as core of a self-organized village community. Similar models are the above mentioned "regulars' tables like the "Regulars' Table for Local Economy" of the Spreewald village Pretschen and other kinds of Regulars' tables.

B. Conclusions for policy-makers on the local, regional and national level

A basic problem seems to be the proper design of the relationship between a municipality and the villages belonging to it; villages, which sociologically are being own entities as small local communities in small rural settlements. But concerning its place in the municipal system they are dependent parts of a big municipality. Especially strong are contradictions where the municipality is a major city. Which opportunities are given by the municipal constitution to deepen the self-determination and participation of local communities with regard to the affairs of their village ? How can the City Council promote the civic possibilities of villages to largely determine and to shape practically the fate of their village itself ? (Promotion of own village planning; connection of civic engagement and providing funding for gaps in the local living conditions (eg village shop).

Politicians of the Bundesland Brandenburg should have the courage to concede that it was a political mistake and a violation of democracy to draw the right of self-determination off from the majority of villages which before had been its own municipality. Every local community should have the right to decide of all matters in its own territory. The German constitution grants that right to the "municipalities as local communities", but most municipalities nowadays are a group of local communities, and each of these local communities lost its right of self-determination. A future municipality constitution should – independently of the future structures of administration – give back the right of self-determination to all villages as local communities.

Dissatisfaction and sense of powerlessness against the municipality (town) result on the one hand from the fact that decisions are made on which the village has no effect, but it must bear the consequences: For example no impact on decision of wind turbines, their location at or near the village, but have to wear the noise and other effects. It has been suggested to experience a tax on the operation of such plants, which will benefit the village, being the site of a plant. On the other hand, there is dissatisfaction with the fact that often more investments will be spent to the benefit of the city at the expense of the villages, whose village is municipal part of the city municipality. Another critics is the fact, that villagers are higher than urban residents charged with costs for sewage water disposal, pavements, winter services etc. Villagers would prefer decentralized supply and disposal because of overcharges.

C. Conclusions for the national and European policy level

The pronounced village attachment of the villagers with its own village as a small rural settlement with limited infrastructure and as a small local community can be seen as an

expression of the fact that villages as well as cities each have permanent particularities and advantages and therefore also the village retains a lasting, permanent role as a socio-spatial form of existence. This requires a corresponding equal treatment of towns and villages in accordance with its permanent features.

The Swedish village movement bears the programmatic name "All Sweden shall live" (*Hela Sverige ska leva!*). This signifies that not only the cities but also the villages, not only the densely but also the sparsely populated regions, are to have a future. The 1st European Rural Parliament, which took place in 2013 in Brussels and wanted to give the villages of Europe a common "voice of villages", has taken up this slogan and turned into: "ALL Europe shall live!" Should not the same principle apply throughout Germany ?

The highly critical evaluation of the infrastructure in the villages studied in Brandenburg indicates that there exist ongoing and partly reproduced significant social inequalities between urban and rural areas. A particular problem is that such disparities are partly deepened by :

- Trends in the unilateral preferential treatment of cities and metropolitan regions at the expense of the villages to be sometimes seem to be fed by outdated concepts of an overall urbanisation
- Different village policies and funding practices between federal states (e.g. the own-share funding in promoted projects is higher in Brandenburg than in Bavaria, with the result that many villages were discouraged from using the available public funding opportunities.

D. Acceptance of decentralization

A basic problem which requires political rethinking still seems to be a lack of acceptance of sustainable decentralized structures with accordingly relatively small forms of existence as they are typical of rural regions. Of such a lack of acceptance for example resulted such political guidelines of regional planning as "shrinking back of local infrastructure" due to lower utilization, caused by decline in population numbers. On the contrary, it would be necessary to create a policy and practical measures to actively meet the challenges of demographic change on all levels of society. At the local level a strategy, policy and practical measures will be necessary to systematically designing and shaping living conditions in the villages which make each village to a baby- and family-friendly, children- und youth-friendly, newsettler- and communter-friendly village. That means among others also a strategy and policy which promote and support staying in the villages and encourage the influx of population from city districts to the villages.

Any hierarchical planning from above, as it is funded by the German central places system³, and any general centralization tendencies should be replaced by "thinking from below", i. e. from the village level. For example, the application of the approved bottom-up-principles in any village and regional planning might proote such an effegt. To start from the real needs of the rural population would mean as much as possible to keep living conditions locally respective in favorable accessibility and to centralize as little as necessary. Villagers interviewed have well recognized that local child care and small village shop are arteries for lively and sustainable villages.

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³ „Zentralorte-System“ with regional metropolies, medium and lower urban centers, which dictats for each category the norms of infrastructure facilities etc.