What is Cultural Village of Europe?

Porrúa (España) 2008

Wijk aan Zee (Holland) inhabitants, united with solidarity to defend their small village near the sea against the project of an airport that could have destroyed their landscape and environment. Encouraged by their own success, they proclaimed themselves cultural village of Europe in 1999, following the trail of another small village Tommerup (Denmark) that had done the same in 1996 showing the analogy to the well known “Cultural city of Europe”.

With the intention of sharing their worries and experiences, exchanging ideas and working together, they invited ten other villages from other countries that had similar characteristics to an exchange program called Cultural Village of Europe, where a twelfth village came later. In 1999, a manifesto called the Charter of Villages is signed, with the common ideas about rural development of small communities of Europe and the recognition and respect of their importance and identity in the economical and cultural level in Europe.

One of the basic ways of the program is to maintain the contact between the villages of the net, their inhabitants, that's why different level meetings are organised. Each village is declared Cultural village of Europe for one year in this order: Wijk aan Zee (Holanda) 1999; Mellionnec (Francia) 2000; Bystré (Chequia) 2001; Pergine Valdarno (Italia) 2002; Aldeburgh (Inglaterra) 2003; Paxos (Grecia) 2004; Killingi Nõmme (Estonia) 2005; Ströbeck (Alemania) 2006; Palkonya, (Hungría) 2007; Porrúa (España) 2008; Tommerup (Dinamarca) 2009; Kirchheim (Austria) 2010.

Village characteristics (different in their foundation, origin, habits, religions, languages…) way of life and economy (livestock, agricultural, wine growing, forest, touristy…), habitat and landscape (sea, valleys, mountains…) make the variety and richness of Europe mosaic and its originality and interest. Ten of the twelve villages are municipalities, only Wijk aan Zee and Porrúa are local forms of civil associations.

In Wijk aan Zee, they have created a foundation called Cultural Village of Europe to promote, program and coordinate the program bringing together the villages of the net and taking care of the Charter of Villages.

In our case, despite the fact that the municipality supports the program and the village of Porrúa is involved in the project, the actions are carried out by the cultural association LLacín, which has been a model for other villages.

Activities of the program
The locality that has the title of Cultural Village of Europe of the year becomes the hostess and has to organize the meeting activities for the other villages. Until this year 2007, we have celebrated these yearly meetings in eight villages. Palkonya (Hungary) is organising them this year. Each village organises these events its way, but basically there are three types of actions:
First, **the opening and closing conferences that last two days in spring and autumn respectively** and where the mayors and a small delegation participate. In these conferences each village presents its point of view about the theme chosen by the cultural village for debate. The themes treated until now by all the villages have been very different (Culture in small communities, Tourism impact, Organisation forms, Water, Resources exploitation…).

Second, during the Summer they organise a **youth camp**, where young people come from all the villages which is a great opportunity to meet and fraternize. There are cultural, sportive and festival activities.

The principal event of the program is the **welcome of groups of 40/50 persons of each village** of the net during three or four days. During this week end **cultural activities, visits, gastronomic tasting, are organised**. People live with the village inhabitants because they are hosted in their houses and usually have a dinner with the family.

The yearly hosting of **Cultural Village of Europe** can be village by village, or sometimes two by two, even all the villages together. In this case, the neighbour villages that are interested in the project are sometimes asked to help.

Besides these meetings and activities, the villages organise other actions in or out of their cultural year. Almost all the villages have organised **concerts, exhibitions** (painting, sculpture, photography…) and improvement **works of places, parks, sculptures…), trade fairs, markets**, etc. Moreover, other programs have been developed like magazines, webs, articles, books, and similar. The Dutch village has been pioneer in those actions.

**Mayor conferences**
During May the 9th, 10th and 11th, we will have in Porrúa the opening meeting, the conferences of **Cultural village of Europe Porrúa 2008**, for the mayors and represent- atives of the villages of the net. These will happen in two parts, first, following the idea of the program “**Work in the village**” we will present the contents of the work directed by Professor Felipe Fernandez Garcia, from the geography department of Oviedo University titled **“Diagnostic and eco development: Porrúa 2008”** in which participate Jose Antonio Gonzalez Diaz and Jaime Izquierdo Vallina. In the second part, we will have the practical content. We will ask every delegation to bring a practical experience from their community and to show it in workshops in which people from **Porrúa** will participate.

**Villages visit**
September from 12th to 15th

Visit of the delegations from **Killingi Nomme** (Estonia), **Kircheim** (Austria), **Palkonya** (Hungary), **Pergine Valdarno** (Italy) and **Wijk aan Zee** (Holland)
People from the eleven villages are going to visit us in September, the second and third week-end, in two groups of five and six villages respectively. There are going to be forty persons from each village that are going to be hosted in Porrúa.

September 19th to 22nd

Visit of the delegations from Aldeburgh (United Kingdom), Bystré (Czech Republic), Paxos (Greece), Mellionnec (France), Ströbeck (Germany), and Tommerup (Denmark)

The program for the week-end will be:

Friday:

Arrival, accommodation
Welcome dinner

Saturday

Breakfast with the families
10.30 European festival, villages’ performances
14.00 Lunch
16.00 Dancing workshop, visit of the ethnographic museum and of the village…
19.00 Free time
21.00 Night feast in the park: barbecue and dancing

Sunday

Breakfast with the families
10.30 Reception in LLanes town hall
11.00 Guided visit of Llanes
14.00 Lunch in Porrúa
16.00 Cultural visits or free time
21.00 Dinner all together with the families, music performance

Monday

Breakfast with the families
Departure

Charter of the Villages

Preamble

We believe that village life is very important for the future and prosperity of Europe and that everything possible should be done to promote that objective. Incorporated into the Charter is the importance of rural development, culture and cultural heritage, agriculture, tourism, transport, education and the economy.
We ask all Local Councils to adopt this Charter on a non party-political basis as a positive way forward.
The signatories of this Charter feel responsible for carrying out the ideas and taking action to achieve the objectives.
Wijk aan Zee, december 10th 1999

Signed by:
Maggy Steen, Aldeburgh (England); Kalle Kipus, Killingi Nömme (Estonia); Michel Balbot, Mellionne (France); Spyros Bogdanos, Paxos (Greece); Massimo Palazzeschi, Pergine Valdarne (Italy); Luis Antonio Noriega, Porrúa (Spain); Rudi Krosch, Ströbeck (Germany); Lone Akselen, Tommerup (Denmark); Magda Berndsen-Jansen, Wijk aan Zee (Netherlands); Hana Sejkorová, Bystré (Czech Republic); Leonora Becker, Palkonya (Hungary)

Actual list of the villages that signed the charter of the villages since the 10th of December 1999

Introduction.

In 1996, when Kopenhagen was the Cultural Capital of Europe, the Danish village of Tommerup proclaimed itself to be the Cultural Village of Europe. In 1999 Wijk aan Zee did the same thing, after years of being walked over. Wijk aan Zee connected internationally with villages in 11 European countries. All these think it to be important to continue this initiative and have asked the French village of Mellionec to be the Cultural Village of Europe in the year 2000. Together they want to show Europe does not consist of cities only: there are villages as well.

Every human being has a world of his own. He is an individual.
Every human being has a father and a mother, his family.
Even when he does not know these people.
Every human being has an environment in which he grows up and which he gets to know well. This is his territory.
And all these worlds are set into a large world we call a community, or province, a region or a state or Europe or 'the' world.
The village is an old and tried form of a human's territory. It is the known world. Not only the things, but the people as well are familiar there. No matter how much the world changes, what technologies are developed, there will always be a difference between the familiar world and the less-known world. In this way cities and villages will not grow together.
When all that is known becomes unknown we speak of getting loose of ones roots. Our time knows many examples. Politics have worked hard at this 'fourth', this unknown world. But that resulted in a loss of attention for the 'territory', where a certain informal structure cannot be done without. There is not enough room for this. This led to indifference in villages which no longer see themselves as responsible and direct the responsibility to the higher government if anything is wrong.
Many villages have adapted to the urban developments and have taken to the urban lifestyle to survive and given up their own identity. They became quiet and settled residential areas of the city.
The world as seen from the village

The city culture is a culture of services. In the village the people are the important thing. And when it comes down to people they are not as unreliable as they are depicted. The village has room for meetings.

In a world "without borders" and with large scale urbanization, a human being needs his own place. Where all is big and more similar in form alienation and displacement arise. If village communities are dealt with respectfully the displacement needs not have as severe consequences as it does now and the prosperity that is there could be felt as prosperity much stronger.

In a village much knowledge about the local environment exists. Inhabitants feel involved in its development and support, conservation of the quality of the living-environment is a collective responsibility.

The special thing about village culture is that it isn't aimed towards the product but towards the creation process.

Culture in cities is a product people primarily experience individually. In a village culture is connected with social elements. People do it together.

Attention is asked for the small independent entrepreneur, who does not make huge turnovers, but who is often a very important support of the village culture and social cohesion.

Attention to the cultural heritage of the village which reflects the history of the village and defines its identity. People should be proud of their cultural roots which are a treasure for the next generations. The international exchange of ideas should be encouraged.

Villagers are sensible to solve problems among themselves and use the judicial system only as a last resort. Who, within a village community, hopes to find justice in a court should take into account an unwanted rupture in the social structure of the village.

Informal structures are of great importance to the village. Informal agreements where result counts more than form, improvisation and commitment that goes without saying are most obvious. A village can easily get into conflict with higher levels of government which can not deal with this.

Hospitality is a true characteristic of village life. In a village the stranger has an identity and interpersonal contact is possible.

How the world should view villages

1 Village economy. The small independent entrepreneur needs a boost. He is not only important for employment, but also for the social structure of the village.

Villages need an adequate level of services to conform the vision and needs of the inhabitants.

2 Food production. The farmer and horticulturalist have been important people in the village and the country since ancient times. They are people who grow food at the top of the food chain. Now many of them leave the country or just quit. Recognition is needed of the fact that good farmers and horticulturalists are needed to have good food and not just 'economic structures'.
3 **Village culture.** Village culture is usually not too expensive. Often availability and exploitation of accommodation are what's important. If there is no accommodation, help as a government. Judge locally how, make solutions to fit and no blueprints.

4 **Village planning.** There are problems with builders who want to put buildings in villages of which the villagers do not think that they’ll fit in. The scale of the existing buildings together with the surrounding environment determines the planology of the village. Building and environmental policy are still treated too much as separate subjects.

5 **Village democracy.** National political parties usually are not involved in village democracy. The boundaries they set can also obstruct solutions in the village. Community and provincial, national and supranational governments should spend time developing policy to deal with this phenomenon adequately. Political choices in a village are very tightly connected to personal responsibility and involvement of the inhabitants.

6 **Village society.** In a village people are not divided into categories like consumers, participants in traffic, single people, the needy etc. In a village there are no abstract problems and ideas, but problems and ideas of and about people. Problems and solutions have faces. Social cohesion - elsewhere supported by policy - occurs naturally in a village. Policy and government support have to take these natural occurrences into account as well.

7 **Village and nature.** Nature develops slowly, much slower than human activities. It's urgently necessary to take measurements to protect and preserve nature and to uphold biological diversity.

8 **Village and world.** Large scale developments will not pass by the villages. They will be affected by the consequences of the large scale infrastructural regulations for traffic, industry etc. Village interests are not subject but equal to other interests of society and deserve careful consideration. Using the NIMBY-argument is a denial of this respect-worthy interest.

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**Cultural Villages of Europe**
http://www.cultural-village.com/index.html

**Innovation Network**
http://www.innovatienetwerk.org/en/

**The Rake**
www.therake.nl

**Porrúa (España) 2008**
http://www.desdeasturias.com/porrua/paginas/queesi.htm