

Sustainability, Subsidiarity, Civic Responsibility - Guidelines for the Development of Vital Rural Areas

Nachhaltigkeit – Subsidiarität - Bürgerverantwortung Grundprinzipien für die Entwicklung vitaler ländlicher Räume

Maximilian GEIERHOS, Germany

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

The rural regions in Bavaria as well as in other parts of Germany are facing increasing challenges by trends such as globalisation, enlargement of the EU, demographic development etc. Considering the different background conditions, the impact is vastly different e.g. in the more peripheral rural areas and in those near large cities. It is, however, one of the main political goals to achieve or to secure conditions of living in rural and urban regions that are not the same, but on the same level. To reach this goal, an approach is needed which fits the various problems and needs of every single region or micro-region. It is therefore crucial to keep to the basic guidelines of sustainability, subsidiarity and civic responsibility. These guidelines are also part of integrated rural development, which is the strategic approach to flourishing rural areas. Within this approach, “integrated” refers to cooperation between communes as well as between authorities, and to the encouragement of a new common responsibility of state, administration, communities, economy and residents. Land management especially by land consolidation and village renewal is the basic instrument for carrying out ideas and plans that are worked out by self-responsible local groups and authorities. This bottom-up approach has been very successfully developed in the past two decades in Bavaria. It has to be continued and strengthened to achieve or to secure the vitality of rural regions and so to secure the stability of relationships between rural and urban areas.

There are in fact many positive things that could be reported about rural areas in Bavaria and in Germany. It would be possible to describe vital villages, attractive cultural landscapes, or the extremely colourful variety of cultural life in the country - as opposed to the highly subsidised city culture of yuppies.

However, according to the motto "Bad news is good news", people are not interested in the strengths of rural areas but rather in their weaknesses. The **Spiegel** magazine, for example, is currently publishing a whole series on "Provincial Germany". The articles in the series are being given doomsday titles like these:

- Abandoned land - lost land
- No future for the cow trade
- The Call of Emptiness

As I have said, there are actually many positive things to be reported. But this does not fit with the intended direction. So we are talking about such things as:

- Bonuses paid to residents for leaving dying villages,
- whole regions at the edge and in the interior of Germany which will lose up to two-thirds of their population within 15 years.
- Mention is made of farming villages that are running out of farmers, and of the
- "social and political erosion" that comes with this, when "...so-called low-loading farmers, who are strangers, take over the village zones."
- The statement is made that Germany is "emptying out in the middle and at the edges", and the "middle" is predicted as a kind of "rust belt" stretching from Görlitz to Gelsenkirchen.
- In this scenario, cities like Munich or Dresden are seen as "golden atolls in a sea of poverty and dementia".

And it's not as if these gloomy scenarios could not be confirmed through data, facts and prognoses. The Berlin Institute for Population and Development has published a short version of its report on the demographic state of the nation on the internet. Maybe you too have followed the media reports on this. I don't want to start talking about numbers now, but rather mention a few indicative subtitles from that short report:

- National Shortage of Children
- Germany on course to shrink
- Shortage of women in the east - by the way, the Spiegel also has a nifty title for this: "Regions with unbalanced sexual economy"!
- And the news magazine Newsweek even states that even in Germany, "whole swathes of land will fall back to a prehistoric state", where "the wolf will replace man."

What is this all about? What are these gloomy predictions supposed to do? This too has been made abundantly clear by an expert's public advice "not to add coal to an extinguished fire." That means that aid money and governmental support should be concentrated on centres of growth, lighthouse regions, or, to make it even clearer, on "centres of agglomeration".

So this is what it's all about. The war for distribution of dwindling state resources and administrations is in full swing. In Germany there are nearly a dozen "metropolitan regions", two of which are in Bavaria. It's worth aiming for a future there - or at least this is the currently accepted opinion of many media sources and no fewer experts. In the language of these experts, there are also "rural areas in need of stabilising". Unanswered remain the questions: On which level should this stabilising take place, and who should do the

stabilising? Here are the cities - there is the country. How can this polarity and competitiveness become a stable relationship between city and country?

CHALLENGES

Let us first try to analyse the challenges "the country" must face.

Decisions like the **extending of the European Union** and the **globalisation** of markets are having more and more effect on rural areas and villages.

- The **increase of competition** and
- the **strengthening of the flows of goods and trade,**
- with high **volumes of traffic** resulting and
- the **indication of housing and industrial areas.**

All of these developments are changing the structure of our villages to a more and more visible extent. These changes are accompanied by an unbalanced demographic development, also in villages: There are more rocking-chairs and less rocking-horses.

These developments have an enormous effect on rural areas:

- Especially in **peripheral rural** areas, they are connected to a **decline in the birth rate**, and cause **migration**, mostly for the part of the population that is young and well-educated.
- The resulting **over-age** of the population leads to **depletion of town centres** and **later also of initial (older) new housing developments**. This means that the
- technical and social **infrastructure is no longer used to full capacity**, causing increasing cost problems for the communes and remaining residents.
- However, according to current predictions, **in high-density urban areas** this development will lead to a **further increasing pressure on resources**, which causes the threat of
- **losing identities and**
- **using a large amount of land.**
- In turn, this means the **price of land for building will go up**, and the younger generation of locals will be driven away.

The transformation of agricultural structures has always brought changes. These are mainly caused by

The developments in the joint agricultural policy of the European Union
technical rationalisation and
an enormous **increase in productivity**.

The number of agricultural enterprises is going down. 50 years ago in Bavaria, there were three times as many farmers as there are now. This dynamic change is still going on and is especially obvious in the increasing pressure of competition and a continual movement of the productivity threshold in agricultural enterprises.

The effects cannot be overlooked. At present, the appearance of our villages is undergoing major changes in a way that has never been seen before, either in Bavaria or in Germany. Many of you are familiar with these changes and have seen them in your own home town: In many farms there are no cattle in the stalls, and the barns and machinery sheds are empty. More and more houses are only lived in by old people. We have to ask the question: What will happen to our village centres, when these people are no longer living?

From all of this has sprung a political discussion across our land, that is broadening and becoming more intensive. This is very positive. Although conferences and workshops might not be concrete promotion or support, they do provide a framework for the political and social task that an institution like the Ministry of Agriculture, with its responsibility for rural areas, must especially align itself with. But even beyond Bavaria, this social and political task is a shared guideline for cooperation in the consortium of federal and state governments for sustainable land development.

AREAS OF ACTIVITY FOR INTEGRATED RURAL DEVELOPMENT

We have re-oriented the tasks of Rural Development and its services according to this socio-political task. In particular, we are now concentrating on the following four areas of activity:

1. Future-oriented support for **farming and forestry**.
2. Strengthen the **communes** with a lasting effect and secure **flourishing rural areas**.
3. Carry out **public projects** in a way that is landowner-friendly.
4. Protect natural **basics of life** and shape the **cultural landscape**.

INTEGRATED RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Through **integrated rural development**, we offer new possibilities for communes to work together. We try to thus close the gap between planning and carrying out projects. We don't want long written concepts to file away. Rural communes should complement one another and so increase their location quality - and they can. It's not just about individual projects, but rather **inter-regional and inter-communal development concepts**. These concepts then form the basis for the support programmes necessary for implementation.

This means that several communes can network together and on the basis of such a concept, they can aim for, plan and carry out village renewal, land consolidation, or EU community initiatives, with a high rate of effectiveness.

Integration in this context means specifically:

- The combination of government processes with those of other institutions,
- close cooperation across commune borders,
- and combining resources, or to put it simply, saving money and reaching more results with the money used.

Another key is that projects run by various institutions are also harmonised with each other. This is why the Department for Rural Development stands as the institution that is able to use land management with the responsibility for coordination, so that a close cooperation between the various institutions is ensured.

The strategic accomplishment of integrated rural development is part of a precautionary policy and is carried by the idea of shared responsibility between the state, its authorities, the communes and the residents. Bavaria's foundational principle of land development still applies: Living conditions of equal value in the city and in the country. Integrated rural development must also play its part here: To create or preserve living conditions that are not the same, but on the same level, thus contributing to the stabilising of rural areas.

BASIC PRINCIPLES OF INTEGRATED RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Everything that is planned and carried out as part of integrated rural development must be based on three foundational principles:

- the general ethical principle of sustainability,
- the political and administrative principle of subsidiarity and, built on this,
- the closely related principle of shared responsibility of residents and government for the community.

At this point I would rather not go into giving yet another definition of **sustainability**. To me, sustainable activity is a foundational ethical principle that goes all the way back to the biblical task in the Old Testament: Creation is entrusted to mankind to be used, but also to be protected and preserved. Sustainable activity cannot be compartmentalised. In planning and carrying it out, it must always be comprehensive. Only then is it possible to weigh up and balance out the following:

- Economical bearing capacity,
- ecological compatibility,
- and orientation to the social and cultural needs of the people.

Subsidiarity is a political and administrative foundational idea of land development in Bavaria: All planning and decision-making, even taking responsibility for carrying out projects, should happen at the lowest possible level. The legal basis for land development, the Federal Law on Land Consolidation, allows tasks and responsibilities to be shared out for the

most part at the lowest level, the community of landowners (community of participants). This scope is being used in Bavaria.

The prerequisite for this is that the people on this lowest level are trained to do justice to this responsibility. This is more than just the financial means. Support from a motivating authority without red tape, and with the goal of bringing services, belongs in the picture too.

At the same time, this is the foundation for the third basic principle of land development: the **shared responsibility** of residents and government (including the communal level) for the community. This community responsibility is a very timely answer to the challenge of finding a balance between two extremes:

- On the one side, the boundlessly liberalistic state burdening its citizens with all the responsibility without supporting them in this task;
- on the other hand "Father State" that handles its citizens like incapable children and tries to steer and regulate their entire community life.

The idea of shared responsibility between citizens, communes and the state has as its goal the unification of state and communal structuring with the individual initiative of the residents. Neither the liberalistic nor the omnipotent state is asked for here. Politics and authorities must submit themselves the basic principle of the motivating state. The practical success of land development proves this basic idea: More and more people are prepared to commit themselves and give input from their creativity and knowledge of their village, region and community. The EU has been supporting these ideas for many years, e.g. with the community project "Leader", based on the "bottom-up approach". And all important support programmes of integrated rural development have always been based on this approach too.

INSTRUMENTS OF INTEGRATED RURAL DEVELOPMENT

The central instruments of integrated rural development are land reorganisation and village renewal. In Bavaria there are currently about 1,900 such projects. Around one point two million residents in roughly 1,000 communes are involved. Since the year 2000 public and private investments of over one point two five billion Euros have been facilitated by rural development.

As part of the procedures of rural development, a large number of projects are planned, financed, carried out and legally safeguarded:

- The endogenous strengths of rural areas are used,
- the self-respect of the people living there is strengthened,
- cohesiveness and cooperation are encouraged in the villages, and
- through the use of modern information technology, new and highly qualified jobs are created in rural areas.

Many of the projects that could improve future chances are too much for just one commune. On the other hand, partnerships and shared activities in a network open up chances. Integrated rural development supports such alliances, foremostly between neighbouring communes and networks of communes.

Carrying out land reorganisation and village renewal, integrated rural development is better able to network between economy, ecology, and social requirements than ever before. I have already mentioned this principle of sustainability. Integrated rural development opens up a large number of perspectives:

- Integrated rural development gives motivation for developments for individual communes and for networks of communes.
- Farming concerns are supported sustainably. Primarily it is the competitive ability that is being strengthened: through road-building, consolidation of land, and opening up new sources of income.
- Land division makes it easier to solve conflicts over the use of land.
- Village renewal is the answer to questions of demographic development and changing structures. A new approach for this is the new main task of the social and architectural inner development of the villages.
- Infrastructures can be improved across commune borders - for example through optimising roadways or flood prevention systems.
- The experiential value of the area increases. New leisure facilities like inter-regional cycling and hiking tracks, environment protection projects and care of the countryside (e.g. inter-communal habitat network) accomplish this. Extra value is added through an upturn in tourism. But life for the residents themselves is also improved.

Together, the communes work out a concept for their integrated rural development. In this concept, a wide range of communal surface-oriented areas of activity are analysed and presented. Here, one special area of activity must be land use and land cultivation, closely referring to agriculture. From this arises a whole list of areas of activity that should all be combined in the concept:

- Development of the cultural landscape, environmental protection, landscape conservation.
- Protection of waterways and drinking water, flood prevention, development of waterways according to the EU guideline.
- Development of settlements, particularly external and internal development, taking into account changes in demographics and the structure of the agricultural economy.
- Economy, industry, infrastructure; above all, harmonising the efforts of the communes to create jobs.
- Basic and local supplies; Preserving and optimising communal service and supply facilities, and community facilities.
- Leisure, recreation, tourism, culture.

Not all these areas of activity can - or should - be addressed by instruments of Rural Development. However, the Department for Rural Development does carry a special responsibility because of its authority in land management. However, it is more than sensible for integrated development to combine programmes and instruments of other specialised areas too - purpose, content, and region. Thus, supported projects and development activities should be coordinated, although they were separate up to now. This development process can also be supported and optimised by regional management, under certain conditions.

VILLAGE RENEWAL

A central element of integrated rural development in Bavaria is village renewal. This programme has been extremely successful in Bavaria and in all of Germany for the last 25 years. It's all about long-term improvement of living and working conditions in the country. Hard economical factors play a role here just as much as community feeling and connection to home.

This is why we aim for comprehensive solutions. Through village renewal, communes can expect help with planning, financing and organising a wide range of tasks - for example in the area of building, design, ecology, economy, or culture. We also offer land reorganisation as part of village renewal. Many projects could not be carried out without this, and many other projects can be speeded up.

Due to changed conditions and new challenges, village renewal requires new priorities: The social and architectural internal development of villages is becoming more and more of a main task. Changes in structure lead to a gradual loss of typical village multifunctionality. To work actively against these negative developments, we offer the campaign programme "Dorf vital" (vital village) to the communes. Here, communes and residents are motivated to recognise the inner development potential of their villages and develop "vitality strategies". Central points here are:

- Architectural and social development in villages
- Re-using or re-assigning existing buildings in village centres
- A healthy multifunctionality
- Reducing land use for settlements and traffic
- Land management in the village and in farmland
- Corporate efforts by communes and residents to strengthen the vital force of the village.

LAND REORGANISATION

Another central component of integrated rural development is land reorganisation. In this way we can offer rural areas comprehensive possibilities of land organisation and improvement of infrastructures. These are more important than ever before for improving agriculture's competitive ability and future sustainability. In Bavaria there are about 124,000 agricultural businesses. They cultivate around two million fields. Business growth takes place mainly by leasing extra fields. Almost 1.5 million hectares are leased, that makes 45 % of all agricultural land. This increases further the number of fields for each individual farmer. Often, these fields are scattered over a wide area. On average, the cultivated land of a Bavarian farm is divided into 15 fields with a size of 1.7 hectares each. In some areas there are even farms that cultivate more than 100 individual fields. This means uneconomical set-up and driving time, more work and thus more running costs for the businesses. Small fields with awkward shapes also prevent the use of modern farming technology and the sharing of machines among farmers.

Compared with structures in other regions of Germany or in other countries, this is a significant cost factor and thus a huge disadvantage in competition.

Therefore, we have the following goals:

- Reduce running costs and therefore
- increase the competitive ability of farming businesses
- Ensure complete land use and create differentiated land use concepts if necessary
- Preserve the valuable cultural landscape which has grown out of centuries of agricultural land use.

However, the service offer of land reorganisation is especially aimed at the communes. Nearly all future-oriented communal development procedures have the same basic requirement: The land needed to carry out projects must be made available! In all areas of activity to do with integrated rural development, the commune is only then truly able to act if the necessary land is available. Therefore, land reorganisation with comprehensive land management is a particularly important tool.

Land reorganisation makes it possible:

- to take into account the interests of farmers, landowners and communes or other local planning authorities,
- to solve conflicts over use, and
- to minimise land use for traffic, settlements and industry.

CONCLUSION

Integrated rural development is a sustainable, subsidiary and cooperative way to shape the future of rural regions - with shared responsibility of residents, communes and the state.

At a global event like this congress, I think it is appropriate to quote another "world president": the past president of the "Habitat International Coalition", the Indian architect and town-planner Kirtee Shah. At the "URBAN 21" congress in Berlin in the year 2000, he said:

"If we want to solve the problems of the cities, we need... among other things, stable and economically sound rural settlements. It is therefore imperative that plans for the viable city of the future must include realistic strategies for sustainable rural and agricultural development. Rural areas and village communities... have an important contribution to bring and must be supported as they do this."

The problems in our cities might sometimes seem larger or more urgent. Perhaps they only get more attention in the media because the media themselves are concentrated on the metropolises. I am convinced that Kirtee Shah is right: If we want to solve problems in the city, we need stable and economically sound rural areas - and I add, they must also be worth living in. And these are requirements, not secondary results. In my opinion this is just as true in Bavaria and Germany as it is in all the nations of the world. Concentrating on rural development does not mean the problems of high-density urban areas are ignored or suppressed. Rural development also helps to avoid or solve problems in metropolitan regions, and is thus an important contribution to stabilising the relationship between city and country areas. This kind of stable relationship is a condition for any positive development, whether in the cities or in the country.

CONTACT

Dipl.-Ing **Maximilian Geierhos**

Head of the Bavarian Administration for Rural Development:

Sustainability, Subsidiarity,

Civic Responsibility

Ludwigstr. 2

D-80539 Munich

Germany

Tel.: + 49 89 2182 2492

Email: Maximilian.Geierhos@stmlf.bayern.de