This essay is part of an all-Dutch series on the topic of New Villages. Contact persons for this topic are ir. N.J. Beun and dr. J.H.A. Hillebrand. It was written on assignment of Innovation Network Rural Areas and Agricultural Systems by:

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New Times for the Villages

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Foreword

Can building new villages help to create a society that meets the public’s residential and working wishes in a sustainable manner? Will building new villages enable us to solve a number of problems that we are no longer able to tackle properly in other ways? These intriguing questions merit serious debate. InnovatieNetwerk Groene Ruimte en Agrocluster (Innovation Network Rural Areas and Agricultural Systems) wants to fuel and encourage such a debate. The debate will raise a broad array of questions about employment opportunities, rural quality, care, amenities, social cohesion, design, embedding, financing, management and the participation of present and future residents.

An integral and innovative approach is necessary in order to seize the opportunities and utilise the energy that exists for this subject. The Nieuwe Dorpen (New Villages) project started by Innovation Network consists of commissioning designs, finding out what is being done elsewhere in this field (including in other countries), identifying norms and values of the public and organisations in the community with regard to living, working and recreational activities, and organising debates. Ultimately, this could result in pilot projects (field experiments) that lead to the creation of new villages. Whether this happens will depend largely on the results of the debate and on the courage of politicians and civil servants to adopt a positive-yet-critical stance, as well as on the opinion formed on the concept’s added value to society with respect to decision-making.

One of the building blocks for stimulating the debate was an invitation to Bert Kisjes to write this essay together with Carin Giesen. In “New times for the villages”, they search for vitality in villages. The basis for this essay was experience gained in the movement called ‘Cultural Villages of Europe’. The authors provide an intriguing view on the specific characteristics and qualities that give villages their strength, and of the value that villages thus have in today’s society.

Besides casting light on the ‘vital village’ phenomenon, the authors mention numerous subjects in passing that require further examination. They include:

- Sharing experiences;
  The experience gained in Wijk aan Zee will also be useful for other villages and urban districts. The experience needs to be recorded in a way that allows it to be exchanged.
- Role of small independent businesses;
The essay raises the question of specific problems experienced by businesses and whether they are solvable by setting down requirements for businesses in a different way. A related question is whether it is true, as the authors suggest, that among people with occupational disability benefits there is a group that could flourish as self-employed persons.

- Rejection of newcomers;
  It would be an enlightening exercise to reconstruct the reasons why established residents reject newcomers.

- Role of the meeting place;
  The authors place a heavy emphasis on the role of the meeting place (in Wijk aan Zee this is Hotel Café Restaurant Sonnevanck). This prompts the question of whether sufficient attention is given to ensuring the availability (or training) of people who can act as hosts at such places so as to safeguard their quality. Existing training courses for the hospitality industry tend to lean too heavily towards only the sale of beverages, food and overnight accommodation.

I hope that the authors’ intriguing vision of the value that villages can have in our present-day society will challenge you, the reader, to join in deliberations on this subject. This will be a step towards a new way of thinking about the spatial arrangement of the Netherlands. Giving thought to the ‘New Village’ is not a goal in its own right, but a means for examining established thinking in the Netherlands about how we wish to live, work and spend our free time in rural areas, and for breaking away from lines of thinking that form barriers.

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1. Introduction

Inspired by the institute Cultural Capital of Europe, Wijk aan Zee proclaimed itself to be Cultural Village of Europe in 1999. The most important motive was to gain status and end once and for all the avalanche of plans from urban planners who thought the surroundings of the village perfect to build a storage facility for toxic sludge, an addition to Schiphol Airport, extra harbours in the sea, a windmill park, a power plant and an addition to the Hoogovens Steel Mill. The village had had a meeting place for years – café restaurant Sonnevanck – where active inhabitants met. As such, they were able to respond promptly. They soon agreed and responded with a ‘tour de force’. But what started with protests evolved into a movement of emancipation for the village.

Wijk aan Zee had sought the support of villages of other countries for the idea of ‘Cultural Village of Europe’, because it was convinced that they would be having similar problems. This resulted in 1999 in a network of eleven villages in various European countries. The movement was named Cultural Villages of Europe. One of the first acts of the movement was to compose a Charter. The Charter was signed by the mayors of all eleven participating villages: Aldeburgh (Great Britain), Bystré (Czech Republic), Kilingi Nõmme (Estonia), Mellione (France), Palkonya (Hungary), Paxos (Greece), Pergine Valdarno (Italy), Porrúa (Spain), Schachdorf Ströbeck (Germany), Tommerup (Denmark) and Wijk aan Zee (the Netherlands). The Charter is a statement of the villages about where they stand, how they see the world and how they want to be seen by the world; eleven European villages in eleven European countries that sailed their own course and took action. Together they developed powers of which they themselves hardly recognise the magnitude and that led to vitality emerging in those villages.

In the past two centuries there have been a number of developments that have led to major changes in society. Economic thinking, organisation and planning, specialisation, mobility, individualisation, science and its applications have changed society profoundly. These developments have had an effect on the village, but were not developed by it. The changes came from outside. Thus the village acquired a reputation for being backward.

People in this period could do nothing with the qualities of the village we will formulate in this essay. However, now that the great developments are not merely bringing prosperity but also problems, the villages offer possibilities once again. Large infrastructure projects are no longer paramount in politics. Life in the street and the
way in which citizens interact forms the main theme. The village can participate once more because its themes are again on the agenda.

Contemplating this essay prior to writing it, we had great difficulty with the word ‘village’. The word is laden with prejudice. Attributing qualities to villages is easily considered romanticising, and the lack of specialist knowledge considered a real deficiency. Moreover, what is the difference between a village and a city district? Can a district not also be a good place to live? Much of what is said about villages applies equally to city districts. However, it is necessary to realise that a district is part of a city and that the facilities of the city are the facilities of the district as well, while an important characteristic of a village is that it can cope with considerably fewer facilities in the vicinity.

For the description of a village we abide by the formulation put forward in the Charter of the Cultural Villages of Europe movement:

“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 also the people are familiar there.”

What the definition implies is that a village is not the same as a rural area, but that people live there, and that you need to get involved with them. The importance of this will be made clear in this essay.

Cultural anthropologist Eric Wolf, in his book ‘Peasant wars of the twentieth century’, wrote the following about the character of the people of village and countryside:

“Villagers are not good revolutionaries but rather anarchists. The universal peasant idea is a village free from officials, army recruiters, policemen, tax collectors and all other representatives of the city-based government”.

When asked, many villagers recognise themselves in this description.
In this essay we are looking for vitality in villages. We will use the experiences of the Cultural Villages of Europe movement as a base. We speak of vitality when a village is using its own powers. These are the powers of the natural environment, the capacities of the (individual) inhabitants and the specific qualities of a small community, as they will be described in this essay.
2. How the village was trivialised

In times past, comparatively many people lived in villages. The city was the place for facilities such as the market, government, a bishop, university and court of law. When in the 19th century industrialisation came into being, people started moving to where factories were built, wages were paid and new products were for sale. People started living together in larger communities. The development of mobility also made it possible to transport food over larger distances. Numerous families migrated from the countryside to the city as no wages were paid in the countryside. Creative people also moved to the cities. Here, new experiences were to be found; here was where the heart of a new and exciting time was beating. It was in the cities, in the concentrations of population centres, where developments occurred in all areas which together led to society as we know it today. In the following, we give a global sketch of the processes we believe are relevant to our argument concerning the position of villages.

Economics
The emergence of economics as a science and its application in the 19th century was a great success. It led to what is called prosperity, the pride of Western society. However, while in the Netherlands people thought to have eradicated the problem of poverty after the Second World War, the growth of the economy has not prevented the recurrence of homeless people and beggars in the streets. The abundance that was the consequence of prosperity and that has made such an impression on the world also resulted in the overuse of many products. This overuse led to certain intractable diseases of prosperity. Economic development also contributed considerably to the disappearance of beautiful landscapes, forests and biodiversity.

Economics has come to play an increasingly influential role in our thoughts and actions. More and more economic terms appear in our daily vocabulary. In shops the citizen is continuously comparing prices. He needs to keep calculating what he can and cannot afford. The most important difference between two jobs is no longer the nature of the work but the payment.

Culture of organising
Social sciences, originating as an analogy of the natural sciences, subjected society to a study and began manipulating it. Large-scale forms of organisation for production processes were invented. Large factories, banks with many branches and other so-called service industries emerged, where the division of labour became characteristic. People became used to executing instructions of which they could not see the implications. Personal initiative and personal responsibility fitted less and less well within that structure. Bureaucracy got the upper hand. Procedures became important
and formalism triumphed. The best compliment one could give after a party was “It was well organised”. Then the host would be satisfied.

**Specialisation**

Specialisation emerged with the development of organising culture. It became very important what you specialised in. The lawyer became an international affairs lawyer or criminal law specialist. Public places became clubhouses for certain target groups. The hotel, restaurant and pub industry, always considered to be a public place, was now being filed under ‘business’, and described by ‘economics’: economic laws were enforced, for instance that more (beer) needed to be sold to ensure a healthy enterprise. This industry ought to sell. And social activities were housed in other, often government subsidised, buildings: community centres, ‘socio-cultural centres’, or sports canteens. But as people also drank a beer in these places, the hotel, restaurant and pub industry proclaimed this to be unfair competition. A war erupted around what was to be called ‘commercial’ and ‘para-commercial’ businesses. And the pub that wanted to continue its former social function, and not be just a place that sells beer, would inevitably get into trouble with the inspecting organisations, which would conclude that the pub or café in question was unusual and not healthy or viable.

**Mobility**

As long as people have existed they have travelled. There have even been times that people did not settle at all. Travelling is not a new thing. But the inventions of the train, car, bus and airplane have greatly increased mobility. Citizens can now travel all over the world, and travelling is encouraged and facilitated in many ways. One who travels accumulates much knowledge of other cities. But this knowledge can be very superficial and unreliable. You do not get the impression that travelling across Africa brings you closer to understanding Africa. On most organised tours, people bring their own culture, and sleep in European beds in European hotels.

Mobility has also made the division of house and workplace possible. It is no longer necessary to live where you work, something that has had far-reaching consequences, among other things on the relationship between parents and children. Many children nowadays have little understanding of their parents’ occupation. In general we can say that through mobility people are less connected to their direct environments. Not only physically, but also socially: people live increasingly farther away from their contacts.

The possibilities offered by the Internet to ‘travel’ and to contact others through chat boxes have increased mobility in another way. The world is what is called a ‘global village’. We can contact people from around the globe without being able to touch, smell or see them. This has also reduced our connection to our own, immediate
environment. Someone in a room in the Netherlands who is connected to someone in Oslo may hardly notice what happens ten feet away from him.

**Individualisation**
Because of diverse influences society has become more and more individualised. Every person has the right to an own life, an own income, and an own existence without depending on anyone else. When he, by necessity, comes to depend on someone else, because certain physical or mental abilities are lacking, then in most instances he will come to depend not on an individual but on an organisation. In practice, such organisations often turn out to be insufficiently up to the task. An example is care for the elderly. The wish to grow old without depending on one’s own children, by relying on institutionalised health care for help has not led to the ideal situation people had hoped for.

The process of individualisation has resulted in people caring more and more about their own interests, without adjusting to other people. And this, in turn, has lead – and is indeed leading - to an explosive growth of interest groups. Even the elderly feel the need to get organised.
Individualisation separates people from each other. This separation is formulated in rights: rights about a place in the yard where a tree can or cannot grow and how much shade it can project, rights about how loud and until what time you may play your radio, rights to not have to perform certain tasks in a business and so on.

Despite the process of individualisation, the call to allow people to pursue their own path is waning, perhaps also because people are finding out that the personal freedom promised by individualisation, is not true freedom. You are only an individual when you are recognised by others or when you are able to recognise others as individuals.

**Science**
The developments described above are largely the result – directly or indirectly – of the development and application of science. The growth and prosperity of science has given European culture many impulses. It kept its promise to expose superstitions (such as belief in witches). The Middle Ages were called ‘dark’ and the era that conquered this darkness called itself ‘the Enlightenment’.
But has science kept its promise? Do citizens have more security and more to hold on to in life? Of course, in many areas they do. But in general? Science often led not to one truth but to many different truths or theories. And sometimes the battle between theories was not fought out in studies but as an old-fashioned religious war. An infamous example is the battle between different economic theories that originated in
the 19th century and was later called the ‘Cold War’. The Cold War was, after all, a war between two conflicting economic opinions.

Until the emergence and development of science, people gained knowledge from experience. That knowledge was passed on from generation to generation and therefore we now call it ‘traditional’. In the countryside and in the villages the replacement of traditional knowledge by theoretical knowledge occurred very slowly, and the change was not welcomed. The first Dutch Minister of Agriculture, Mr. Jacobs, told farmers in the early 19th century to listen to agricultural scientists and public relations people. But the agriculturalists in particular found it difficult to comply with scientific advice, because what should you do when that advice opposed traditional insights? In the end theoretical knowledge triumphed over traditional knowledge. But its application led to a number of new problems, such as in the areas of animal well-being and quality of nature and the environment. In the village, with much general and little specialised knowledge, people had to deal on a daily basis with outsiders who had a lot of theoretical knowledge and always knew ‘better’. Even when a villager suspected that the experts were wrong, it was not possible to refute their claims. This has caused many a countryside inhabitant to feel as if he was considered stupid, or even to feel stupid.

The development of science, too, turns out to have its problematic sides.

The place of the village in these developments
The developments considered above have changed all of society, including the village. The initiative for development lay in the city. The small-scale world and the small community characteristic to a village became trivialised. Village inhabitants followed the process slowly and passively, critical of many things contradicting traditional knowledge, somewhat annoyed because of the pace, and often asking themselves: ‘Is all this necessary? Is it not going too far? Should it all be this way?’ But they could not stop the developments. The village slowly lost its identity and was unable to grasp the new world being born. The book of Geert Mak about the Frisian village of Jorwerd that appeared a few years ago (1996) was an instant success, and confirms that life in a village is not what it once was.

Not only did the cities initiate developments, but we can even see that the norms of the city have come to dominate the countryside and that there no longer seems to be a place for the village. We would like to give some examples of this.

The first example concerns town and country planning.
In the 5th Note of Town and Country Planning of 2001 the government stated its intention of improving the physical environment of people, in cities as well as in the countryside. In the countryside the aim is to counter ‘thrashing’ and the erosion of the
open landscape. The Note addresses the issue of high-rise and low-rise buildings, as well as that of green and red contours. Green contours should give nature a chance while red contours should clarify where you can and cannot build. The problems that come with the application of the red contour idea are clear, for example, in Wijk aan Zee, where villagers are arguing with a construction company. Like many villages in central areas, the village needs cheap houses so that young people can stay there. The construction companies, however, want to build according to market demands. The consequence is that young people would need to pay so much for the new houses, due to their premium location close to the sea, that they will not be able to afford them. The result is that they will inevitably have to move. The consequences this may have are clear in Aldeburgh, a small town on the eastern English coast, across the North Sea from Wijk aan Zee. Many affluent Londoners qualifying for pensions buy houses there and the village has an average age of 65. Young people wish to stay but cannot afford to do so. Another problem in Wijk aan Zee is that construction firms have developed all sorts of ideas for ‘inbreiding’ (concentration of constructions) of cities that are now being applied to Wijk aan Zee. The result is that they always come with plans for high-rise (four story) buildings in an environment of low-rise buildings. It is interesting to note that applying city norms to the countryside was also the policy in the former Soviet Union and Rumania. The political leadership there decided to build flats for the farmers and workers in the countryside. The government thought that the countryside had a right to this, just like the city. Rumania took the most extreme action: it levelled villages and built a few flats instead. These are the kind of developments that we, in the West, always despised. Yet we are doing the same thing now in the Netherlands!

The extent to which city norms concerning town and country planning have influenced thought in the countryside can be seen from what some town and country planning experts wrote not so long ago in de Volkskrant (newspaper). For Auke van der Woud, student of the history of architecture and city planning, talking about villages is mere nostalgia. He envisages Dutch agriculture merging into a so-called ‘Park City’. Architects know what to do: integrate the village into the city and it becomes something useful. This is the basic idea behind Holland Park City, within which conceptualisation Holland becomes a large city without agriculture and without countryside, but with parks and recreational areas. Gert de Roo, urban planner from Groningen puts it another way. “In our heads, also in the countryside, we are all city folk. The people from the countryside show city-like behaviour as well. So what is stopping us from citifying the countryside? Nothing.” Architects speak openly about city designing even when talking about a village: “When we allow forms of urbanisation in the countryside, we will create greater dynamics there.”
The second example is at the level of government. In our country, just like in other EU countries, there is continuous talk of municipal reforms, of assimilating small communities into larger ones. In this way they want to improve the quality of government. The European policy aims to have all new member states adjust their quality of government and implement large-scale projects to join small communities together. For candidate members of the European Union, which have just recently started to look for democratic forms, this means new adjustments in the small village communities. After the changes of 1989 this again was a major municipal reform. Municipal reforms are not automatically improvements. Wijk aan Zee, for example, was joined with the town of Beverwijk in the thirties of the last century. This left Beverwijk in charge of the governmental decisions about Wijk aan Zee. Wijk aan Zee, however, never became a part of the town. In the inhabitants’ experience it has always remained a separate village, which made them feel that decisions were being made for them. People learned to whine and sulk, which always happens when dependence occurs without personal responsibility.

Conclusion
In this chapter we have shown how villages became trivialised because of developments in economics, the culture of organisation, specialisation, mobility, individualisation and science, and how the city perspective came to dominate the way in which people look at villages.
3. Quality of vital villages

In this chapter we will consider the specific characteristics and qualities that empower villages and show the value of this empowerment to present-day society.

Knowledge of the surroundings and the people
Whoever lives in a village for any period of time will have to expend little effort to obtain considerable knowledge of his surroundings; not only of the physical surroundings, such as buildings and infrastructure, but also of the changes that have taken place. Knowledge of how it looked twenty years ago. In every village there are people who have lived there for generations. Their knowledge goes much further back. There is not only knowledge of the physical surroundings, but also of other village inhabitants. Not only do people know what their names are and how they look, but also what their profession is and how that profession is practiced. People know part of the past of the other villagers, their respective educations, and their loves. People also know the misery others carry around with them and the failures of years before. The knowledge of people in a village is very detailed and comprehensive.

Having detailed knowledge of a small piece of the world gives people something to hold on to. They know their way in that small world, they can find their way well and they do not have to feel like strangers. Others have called this ‘a connection to their roots’; a kind of knowledge more difficult to lose than money and more difficult to acquire than an ideology, two other things you can hold on to.

Interpersonal knowledge, amassed over the years, is an important part of this knowledge. In modern society such knowledge is disappearing. The fact that a detailed knowledge of their own, tangible world by which they are surrounded gives people in villages something to hold on to, can possibly help psychologists in finding solutions to difficult modern problems such as stress, uprooting, and the lack of any points of reference. Detailed knowledge of their own world provides a clear framework for villagers to distinguish between real and surreal, between reality and fiction. In modern society, where the ‘virtual’ world is so dominant, this is no unnecessary luxury.

The detailed knowledge of village inhabitants also has a considerable breadth. It rises above the usual sectors of society. In a village different people live together, so the idea of separate population groups, each with their own specific needs, does not exist there. This tends to produce people who are more used to holistic-oriented reflection. In modern society all problems are approached per sector and formulated by interest groups. Governors and politicians are expected to consider decisions on a higher level. That often makes decision-making a complicated and theoretical process.
sectors are forgotten and the sheer amount of sectored approaches makes overview
difficult. The village on the other hand, because of its size and clear layout, is capable
of an integral approach to those problems.

Social control
The village has always known social control as an important instrument for cohesion.
A villager would therefore be wise to solve a difference of opinion with his neighbours
himself instead of calling in the police. When the police need to come it tends to mean
that there is a serious problem that may never be solved.
Resistance to social control rose in the 19th and 20th century. The norms for social
control adjusted only slowly to the developments discussed in chapter 2, as these
developments were not developments of the village. They came from outside.
Especially the villagers who liked the new developments were confronted by social
control: they adhered to different values and ways of life.

In the village social control exists for two reasons. The first reason is that people are
interested in each other. People always want to know what is happening in their
environment. The second reason is security. If there was no social control, the
countryside would potentially be a very dangerous place. The low population density
would too easily offer a place for all sorts of unwanted activities, like breaking and
entering, the storage of weapons and drugs, and murder. When social control
functions well it means that there are eyes everywhere. The combination of these two
reasons – interest and security – provides for a well-functioning social control. Thanks
to social control people who cannot live by themselves can still live in society;
someone is keeping an eye on them, once in a while someone helps them a little, and
they no longer need to go to an institution of care. Social control can make life more
bearable.

In the French village of Mellionec two elderly people from Paris bought a house. The
houses there are inexpensive and the couple was looking for peace and quiet. They did
not talk to the people in their new neighbourhood. Everyone left them alone as well.
Mellionec is a village without a bus stop. There is a baker and a grocery store but there
are no other shops. The two people began to have difficulty walking. Their children
discovered this and decided to take their parents back to Paris. There they both died
within months. The comment of the villagers was: ‘Why did they not talk to us? It is so
simple to help them do groceries. But you do have to bring it up.’

The number of control-institutes in our society has grown significantly in the last fifty
years. Some inspectors have been replaced by machines. Machines were made to
inspect tickets and register people to counter theft and vandalism. Every time
something goes wrong, people call for more police officers to be deployed in the
streets. But it seems that people are starting to realise that expanding police forces, cameras, specialised inspection teams and neighbourhood watch groups will not solve any problems. Expanding this type of control will lead to a police state – something Eastern Europe has had very bad experiences with in the 20th century. Lately, there has been renewed attention to social control. People advocate it especially when talking about ‘senseless violence’ and small-time criminals. People are increasingly calling for more civic responsibility, beyond calling the police.

Practicing human interaction
‘Each man for himself’ characterises city culture. It is ridiculous to greet everyone you meet in a crowded shopping street. Those who want to move freely in a street avoid contact: city folk know how to avoid others. They know how to be anonymous in the streets. That does not mean that a city person is doomed to live in isolation. They will generally interact through work, church, hobbies, cafés or clubs. They can easily avoid people they do not like to meet. As a result, circles of like-minded people easily emerge; small ghettos of people who share a particular political colour, age, preference or dislike, or who have similar incomes. This process leads to people getting used to dealing only with those similar to themselves. At school, these are people of the same age. At work they are colleagues and at the club they are those who share your opinion, sport or hobby. You can avoid someone you do not like. When you leave your house you do not need to meet anyone, even when the streets are crowded. Cafés, too, are generally aiming for specific sorts of customers. The consequence is that the public places where everybody comes are now experienced as uncomfortable, with which we mean trains and stations for example. Another thing is that there are few public places left. Most are claimed by traffic and shopping centres with merchandise. In a few places space has been created for specific population groups. On terraces people tend to concern themselves purely with their own table. Shops are public places, but they have intensive camera control. True public places could be squares or parks. For the Vondelpark in Amsterdam this is its claim to fame. It is an example of how special public life is when it functions correctly.

Only in villages does the necessity to talk to everyone more or less exist. It is strange when you do not greet someone you regularly meet in the streets. Whether you like it or not, you learn to talk to people, not just the ones you like, but also the ones that you do not. Where people in a village community systematically avoid each other there is a serious problem. Feuds can emerge as a result and poison the whole village. A village inhabitant can also isolate himself. He can build a wall around his property. People who lived in a castle tended to do this long ago. They preferred isolated existences within castle walls. Among the people moving into villages from cities now, there are some who do not seek contact of any kind. But the children of someone who
isolates himself will feel that wall in the village school. Such children are likely to become isolated.

Interaction with fellow inhabitants is so important in a village that, for those considering buying a house there, it would be wise not only to review the quality of the house and the décor before the sale, but also to realise that they have to be able to get along with their new neighbours. Those living there already will play important roles in how much you will enjoy living there.

The fact that human interaction is important in a village and that it is practiced, does not mean that there are invariably harmonious relations. A combination of social cohesion, social control, interaction and helping neighbours does not automatically lead to harmony and solidarity. This is a romantic idea. In a village things can get rough; people can fight. This points to the fact that people do not feel indifferent towards one another: there are mutually operative human relations. The art of human interaction is practiced in a village, and only when it is practiced can it prosper.

What we are talking about here was referred to in the Middle Ages and the early Renaissance as the ‘art of living’. The first sentence of the first Ethics written in Dutch by Coornhert in 1586 is: ‘My intention is to describe the art of living’. Our society, being focused on prerequisites to life, has somewhat lost that idea, although terms like ‘life artist’ are still used sometimes in biographies and funeral speeches. When thinking of a work of art, the tendency now is to think of a sellable object and not of life. In our opinion this attitude is incorrect.

Hospitality

Hospitality is one of the forms of the art of living. Rediscovering hospitality is an important issue in a time when people talk negatively about foreigners. The foreigner who is not a tourist is soon seen to be a problem. This will continue to be the case as long as hospitality remains exclusively professionalised as a branch of industry rather than part of the art of living.

A village like Aalten in the Achterhoek, near the German border, sheltered a lot of people in hiding during the Second World War. At one point, 20% of the local population were refugees. Those in hiding were not tax deductible; they were illegal and put their hosts at great risk. Evidently, the people of Aalten had their own ideas about what should happen in the world.

When the Iron Curtain was torn in 1989 people of the Danish village Tommerup came together. They wanted to respond to this internationally momentous event. One of the village residents, Poul Peterson, proposed to invite 1,000 inhabitants of different Eastern European countries. For practical reasons the number was reduced to 400. With this kind of hospitality, Tommerup lay an important foundation for the current
Cultural Villages of Europe movement. The most important activity of this movement is practicing hospitality. Each year, hundreds of villagers travel to the Cultural Village of the year where host families provide for them. At first this idea caused many to react sceptically: how could Estonian people, who speak only Estonian and Russian, stay with a French family? By now, practice has gained the upper hand over fear. It has turned out not to be a problem and it did not detract anything from the experience at the time either. The Cultural Villages of Europe movement demonstrates that hospitality can still be practiced nowadays.

**Ability to do something as a community**
There are villages that, when they pull together, are capable of something extraordinary. We would like to give an example.

In the past year governments and small communities have often collided over the issue of space for highways, toxic sludge depots, harbours, railroad tracks, house-building projects, airports, industry and nature reserves, and recreational areas. The problem of small communities is always that urban planners have thought up a plan at the drawing board, without sufficient knowledge of the local situation. In 1994 an ‘Eleven Foolish Plans Tour’, true to its name, designated eleven such plans as ‘foolish’. One was the construction of a large toxic sludge depot on the beach near Wijk aan Zee. What was going on? In the IJmond the company Hoogovens has been expanding northward ever since WWII ended and has closed Wijk aan Zee off from its eastern neighbours. Initially, the local inhabitants considered this growth a necessity: Holland wanted its own steel mill and economic development was considered important in general. When in the 1970s the company claimed even more space, however, people began to ask whether this was truly necessary. And when in 1989 other companies started to claim space as well, the inhabitants decided that things were going too far: the plan for a toxic sludge depot on the beach was inappropriate. They showed their unanimous disapproval by taking a group photo of all inhabitants to accompany the argument: “That is not what the beach is for.” Meanwhile, the village carried on looking for alternative methods. After thirteen years, they proved that you do not need to store sludge: it can be used to make bricks out of. In our society, where many people have become self-centred, communal actions that increase community cohesion, as in the previous example, are of great importance.

**Art and culture**
We have described an activity as a unified expression of a community. Usually, however, the things that people do together are related to art and culture. Art and culture have slightly different meanings in a village than has become the trend in society as a whole. Professional art, where individuals or small groups make a work of art and put it up for sale to hang on a wall or to enjoy for an evening, is scarce in
villages. This is mainly because a village cannot provide enough audience, and therefore not enough money. For those things you go to a city.

Participating in a choir, an orchestra, or a play is something very different from buying a ticket for an event. Singing together, playing, rehearsing and organising is a very intensive way of interacting with each other.

Another important characteristic of practicing village culture is freedom; freedom that is unfortunately unavailable to professional artists. The professionals have considerable obligations. They have to be able to meet living expenses and generally have to play to whatever the audience or the reviewer likes. They need to repeat something that ‘works’ over and over again. In visual arts the artist can hardly avoid considering the taste of museum boards and gallery owners. Depending on the type of art, especially for people involved in theatre and playing in orchestras, single performances are very costly. In a village, by contrast, single performances are the rule. This is necessary in order to get players to participate, since they will not play something they do not like. When you realise this particular dynamic and can work with it, you may be able to make a living in a village as a professional artist as well, because a stimulator or supervisor is usually welcome. This is potentially a good investment for subsidies.

The communal practice of different forms of culture turns out to be crucial for a village. A village with a firm identity usually derives it from practicing culture. Some examples are provided in the following.

The village Halsbach (800 inhabitants) in Bavaria performs a number of plays each year. This has brought fame to the village. The ingredients of success? (1) A farmer who is a talented writer and director (2) an old farm functioning as an indoor theatre (3) a forest that is used as an open-air theatre (4) enough inhabitants who are prepared to study for a part and (5) a number of people who are prepared to build the decors and other necessary things.

Organising a Cultural Village, in 1996 in Tommerup, in 1999 in Wijk aan Zee, in 2000 in French Mellionec, in 2001 in Czech Bystré and in 2002 in Tuscan Pergine Valdarno, has had enormous consequences for all participating villages. In all instances it was a joint action involving many local inhabitants. At first, people thought that they were in over their heads and had many doubts; doubts as to whether they could manage the year well, and doubts as to whether they could have so many people over and feed and lodge them on a limited budget. But they all found a way and made something beautiful of which everybody was proud of afterwards.

The German chess village Ströbeck, at the foot of the Harz Mountains, has a long chess tradition. Long ago, a captured nobleman is said to have taught chess to his guard. This had far-reaching consequences for the village. Ever since schools have existed in
Ströbeck there has also been chess education. The village has not yet reared world-
famous chess players, but it does have an identity all its own. This remains the case,
even though chess education has almost succumbed to the uniformity higher levels of
government strive for. That a village can teach a subject of its own choice in school
clashes with the scaling up and streamlining objective of central management to such
an extent that the village needed to expend considerable energy simply to keep its
education – an education that had survived both Hitler and communism.

In his book *Homo Ludens* (1938), the famous historian Johan Huizinga describes our
19th century ancestors as having become overly serious; as having ‘put on their work
suits’. He goes on to develop the argument that playfulness largely disappeared from
public life during the process of industrialisation. Perhaps he meant the joint practice
of village culture in the sense being discussed here.

In any case, we can say that practicing village culture – also because of its communal
character – increases cohesion between citizens. As such it is an important force in the
village.

**Nature**

In a very essential sector of the countryside, namely in agri- and horticulture, people
are dealing with living instead of with inorganic dead things. Those who refuse to
acknowledge this, risk getting into trouble. The rapid shift in Eastern European
countries after WWII from farms to industrial-like enterprises, modelled on factories
working with inanimate materials, was therefore a great fiasco. It is still an open
question whether you can treat nature in this way, and there is still an active
discussion about how you can treat animals.

In the countryside there is generally much respect for nature. The concept of nature
itself is large as well, because it includes not only plants, birds and fish, but also people
and the weather. People and nature are not opposites in a village. Recognising that
people are also part of nature is an important basis for acknowledging each individual.
The long-lasting interaction between people so characteristic to a village is an
excellent ground for such recognition; for the realisation that you have to accept
people for who they are. Realising this makes the uniqueness of people stand out. It is
an attitude that allows people to have defects without having to hide them.

**Informal democracy**

Wijk aan Zee has not been an independent community since the 1930s. There is a
village council, but this has only advisory powers. When something needs to be done
that involves a risk, private initiative is necessary. Just such an initiative occurred when
Wijk aan Zee became Cultural Village in 1999, and it manifested itself without any kind
of formal decision. Support was sought through informal circles and in the end the
project was supported throughout the community. An ad hoc board was formed consisting of the different population groups. It was so widely supported that the Mayor and Aldermen had no trouble getting money from the city council.

A village lends itself perfectly to come up with democratic solutions to problems. People can oversee the things being discussed. There is no need for complicated analyses or theories as people are aware of the problems from their own experience, from seeing and hearing about them. Although perhaps they cannot see the national and international dimension of the problem, locally they know which problems require a solution right away and which can wait a while.

The quality of village democracy determines the extent to which the various population groups in a village are able to sit together and talk. That does not happen automatically. It requires people who are able to reason from common interests, and who can consider these as being their own interests. In a world where competition is protected by law as a good and functional principle, people looking for cooperation can be discredited. Just as competition laws can correct one company cooperating with another.

One of the concerns the government has about village democracy is that it doubts whether enough specialised knowledge exists in villages. This perceived deficiency has caused government to join small communities together. However, expertise does not imply a better view of a problem. It more often than not takes the problem out of context. Moreover, when discussing a problem many experts usually claim to be right. Because of their thorough knowledge of their surroundings, however, villagers are often the ideal people to choose specific solutions to specific problems. Other kinds of specialised knowledge, such as that required for building a bridge, building a house, reinforcing a dike or constructing a road, can always be brought in from outside.

Conclusion
Knowledge of the environment and of the people, social control, practicing human interaction, hospitality, the ability to do something as a community, the joint practice of art and culture, being closest to nature, seeing people as part of nature, informal democracy; all of these are characteristics that can give a village identity and power. They are also the traits that society as a whole can use to solve current problems in prospering(!) societies.
4. Vitality in practice

Villages can grow into vital villages and contribute to society as a whole. The time is ripe. In a number of villages people have realised this. In this chapter we give examples of how vitality is realised or how such realisation is impeded. We will do this using the experiences of Wijk aan Zee and other European villages.

First: no
To become vital a village needs to start moving. This in itself requires something. In the case of Wijk aan Zee the requirement was fulfilled by anger about sloppy town and country planners who wanted to use the village as a dumping ground: anger about an over-arching policy that sought not to spread the burden but to concentrate it. The villagers, however, were thinking in terms of spreading the burden, and they thought that the village had already sacrificed enough for the economic development they considered necessary.
Wijk aan Zee understood in time that protesting only erodes your own strength and causes you to lose the high spirits needed to get something done. The village became unified which, as we shall see, made a lot of things possible.

Unity and a place to meet
Unity could exist because Wijk aan Zee residents had a meeting place. Lacking a town hall, the village used hotel café restaurant Sonnevanck as a public place that was prepared to house and service the people of the village. The café attained an important function in the social life of Wijk aan Zee, and because it was also a hotel, could connect this to the world outside the village. Not only the villagers could find each other there, people from elsewhere were also involved. An example of the latter is the following. When, because of the problems of toxic sludge, the village needed to deal with the issue of water quality, a hydrologist was needed at a certain point – even though nobody knew what that was. In Sonnevanck they wrote on a blackboard: “Wanted: hydrologist”. Within a month two hydrologists appeared who gave very sound advice. Café Sonnevanck could be more than a community or village social centre because it did not depend on any form of government. Administrators of community or village social centres tend to draw initiatives into a drab average. Characteristic for Sonnevanck was that its operator dared to take risks on private initiative, something that makes entrepreneurship so interesting. The most important thing was to reformulate the goals of the café. An emphasis was placed upon the function of a public place in society and hence on its quality as a central meeting place.
Importance of the small independent entrepreneur
Also in a wider sense than we described above, the small-scale independent enterprise is economically and socially very important to a community such as a village. Its interests usually coincide with the interests of the village, because for a café owner, a carpenter, a baker and a greengrocer, the inhabitants of a village are both neighbours and customers. The same goes for modern service providers. For instance, a bookkeeper who can draw up a budget is indispensable to some. The small independent entrepreneur is often a person who has trouble working for bosses or who is not satisfied in paid employment. He or she is someone who needs independence above all and who wants to do things his or her own way. Within the current economic climate there is little space for such people. Economic organisations such as the Chamber of Commerce, trade organisations and other commercial organisations provide the small entrepreneur with little support. A small entrepreneur, to them, is merely a starting entrepreneur who wants to rapidly increase his turnover and expand his enterprise. Also, the requirements placed on such an entrepreneur regarding reports and quality often makes it very difficult, or even impossible, for him to work competitively while adhering to a 40-hour working week. Forms and all sorts of demands and regulations cost a lot of time and paralyse the enterprise. Moreover, these things force a small entrepreneur to work in a way suitable for large corporations but not for small ones. In Wijk aan Zee, and probably in any other village, there are many people whose capacities are underused because of these impediments. Among those with disability benefits there could be many who could prosper as independent entrepreneurs.

Practicing culture
There are villages where there is a higher level of creativity, villages that use much art and culture to form their identity. Examples in the Netherlands are Wieringen, where singing as a cultural manifestation is highly developed, and Diever in Drenthe, which has a well-developed theatre culture. Outside of the Netherlands an example is Halsbach in Bavaria, which performs a new play written by its inhabitants as often as five times a year. In Wijk aan Zee, the cultural manifestation of music has developed to an above average level. In 1985, mechanical music was turned off forever in Sonnevannck. This created space for people to play live music again and they brought their instruments with them when they came to Sonnevannck. Eating was also rediscovered and cherished as a new form of art. Since 1999, a large communal dinner is organized for hundreds of people every first Saturday of the year. Just as serious communities have organisations called ‘municipal works’, the village has a ‘cooking team’. In the summer, on a day when the weather is good, a ‘dinner at the seaside’ is prepared for villagers and guests. Thousands of guests participate. For 2003 a ‘dinner with the...
neighbours’ is in preparation: a number of employees and the directors of the Corus steel mill have been invited to dinner. As such the village hopes to create a better climate to talk about the problems that exist between the factory and its small neighbour.

There are many villages that express themselves in their own way. In the Spanish Porrúa everyone loves bagpipes and drums and wants to play in a band. The local music school has 80 students, while the village has only 500 inhabitants. Cultural expressions in the form of a band, a theatre company, a choir or through the visual arts are important to a community’s well-being.

**Using the means available**

It would be possible to compile a long list of villages where beautiful things have happened by using the qualities of the people in the village and the natural environment; remarkable achievements of which the respective village is proud, and in which outsiders love to participate. We would like to give some examples.

The opening meeting of Cultural Village of 1999 in Wijk aan Zee was held in the local gym. The gym is neither beautiful nor pleasant. A few villagers, however, were able to turn it into something gorgeous with very little money. The village had never seen the gym look like it did that day and loved it. The whole Cultural Village year was only possible because of the attitude that you have to use the means available. The means in question were individuals with certain abilities, a steel mill, dunes, a beach, the sea, two churches, a number of cafés and restaurants, many musicians, a recording studio and a few sculptors and painters.

The village Zdenkov in the southern Czech Republic has 75 inhabitants, too low a number to realise many community facilities. There is no village assembly hall or café where people can meet. The farmer who was chosen to be mayor therefore created a public fireplace, in a corner of his fields where there are a few trees. Villagers meet there on nice evenings to barbecue together.

The village Diever in Drenthe, the Netherlands, performs a Shakespeare play every year. The village uses the abilities of its inhabitants, the environment, and the fact that many tourists visit the village in the summer.

The village Bystré in the Czech Republic has called on woodworkers to come to the village for a week in 2003, where those who come will live in the middle of the forest. The letter of invitation reads: ‘One part of the wood is used for industrial products, another for heating. But wood is a material that needs more time to grow than a human being has to live, and you can create beautiful things out of it that give new forms and new life to the wood.’
Processing the past
Reflecting on its own past is a healthy and indispensable activity to the vitality of a village.
In many places people pay attention to their own history. The community Heemskerk in the Netherlands has a historic club with over a thousand members. In Wijk aan Zee stories of old inhabitants are published monthly in the village paper. But in many villages large parts of their individual histories remain unattended to. People who have lived their whole lives in a village have often had trouble accepting developments in modern society but have had nowhere to go with their criticisms. In many places this turned into a fruitless conflict between the natives and so-called ‘imported ones’. The Belgian publicist Jan Hertoghs wrote in the magazine *Humo* a few years ago about how complicated the process of integration into villages was for city people.

Improving cooperation between local government and village
More and more villages are losing their independence and are becoming part of larger communities. For those communities a village belongs under the heading ‘district affairs’. Wijk aan Zee, for example, has been part of Beverwijk since the 1930s and relations between the two have always been difficult. The formal democracy of the town does not connect well with the informal structures of the village. In Wijk aan Zee people took the initiative of analysing the relationship between the town and the village in order to try to find and formulate a good method of cooperation. During a lunch to which the municipal government was invited, they proposed their idea. The municipal government liked it, and seems prepared to cooperate. The project will not only concern the relations between the village and municipal government, but relations with higher levels of government as well. The project should start in 2003.
Throughout Europe there is a process of joining small communities, either together or to larger ones, led by national governments and the European Union. For small communities such as Mellionec in France and Bystré in the Czech Republic, organising a year of Cultural Village of Europe meant that they had to call in help from neighbouring villages. Ties of cooperation emerged out of this inner need to cooperate; a cooperation that has continued beyond its initial cause. This is something very different from cooperation imposed from above.
In Pergine, Italy, that has consisted of a number of villages for a while now, the Cultural Village initiative has finally consolidated the relations between the former villages; they used to have only limited ties with one another.
Drastically limiting formalisms
Activities in villages are usually small-scale and clearly structured. A formal approach, therefore, has a paralysing effect and is soon considered annoying. As examples, we address the way in which volunteers are dealt with, the system of permits, and the difference between commercial and para-commercial enterprises.
Firstly, local government professionals ought to deal with volunteers much more carefully. They often do not realise the quality of the volunteer. The volunteer works in the evenings and in the weekends, the professional during working hours. The work a volunteer does is something he fully supports, something that is not always the case with respect to what he does for a living. Moreover, a volunteer works for free: in most instances, what he does will actually cost him money. Those who pick up, place and return crush barriers themselves, for instance, should not have to pay for them.
Secondly, the system of permits is not always very subtle. The system makes it impossible to think of something on a Friday evening and to execute it the next Saturday or Sunday. The system of permits discourages organisers from acting spontaneously. Sometimes this problem can be solved to the satisfaction of all parties concerned, as was the case, for example, in the Drommedaris in Enkhuizen, the Netherlands. Musicians often played there, but this was, in principle, something impossible for the proprietor to allow because he needed a permit for every performance. Finally, he reached an agreement with the mayor according to which he would have a permanent permit for live music, while the mayor retained the right to revoke it if and when problems arose. Another example: whoever wants to organise something on the beach, or elsewhere in the open air, needs to act according to the weather. Because of the necessity to have a permit it is now very difficult to react to changing weather conditions. However, experiences in Wijk aan Zee demonstrate that when you point out to the civil servant responsible that in our own time we can fly to the moon but cannot get a permit for an event during a weekend of good weather, this will often make him think. Just such a line of reasoning made it possible for Wijk aan Zee residents and their visitors to have dinner together at the beach.
Thirdly, and finally, we turn to the difference between commercial and para-commercial enterprises. For the café, the separation of functions has effectively eradicated, in most places, the old formula of hotel-café-restaurant-with-a-few-rooms where everything happened. We have discussed this in chapter 2. In any case it is clear that this separation of functions has not worked properly in the villages for the simple reason that there are not enough people for such specialisation. Café Sonnevanck in Wijk aan Zee has never concerned itself with this separation of functions and this has undoubtedly been one of the reasons for its success.
Ownership and maintenance of land in the same hands
Large organisations such as the provincial waterworks and Natuurmonumenten (Dutch Society for Nature Conservation) tend to act as landlords who do not care where their lands lie. They formulate a national policy and find it annoying to follow the specific demands of local people.

Most of the dunes around Wijk aan Zee are owned by the Provincial waterworks. As we said before, in 1999 Wijk aan Zee wanted to use a plot of land between the village and the Corus steel mill as a sculpture park. Eleven renowned sculptors from eleven European countries were invited to make sculptures. It became a beautiful park and the Dutch queen came for the opening. For those who love art it was clear that you could not simply remove such a collection after four months. It was easy to convince the various governments of that too. It took, however, two years to convince the waterworks that in such a case you should not hold so strictly to your policy; a policy which of course does not mention anything remotely like a sculpture park. Those two years took a lot of energy and have enormously delayed making the park a permanent feature.

Another example is local agriculture. When this disappears, the acres of land it leaves behind need to be maintained. We should prevent this maintenance from being carried out from a distance by organisations that have no connection with the locality or its residents. Ownership and maintenance by local people will also increase the number of jobs.

Space for doing and thinking at the same time
A place where you think of things and make them, where thinking and doing is united, is hard to imagine in these times when functions are separated. For a village it can contribute significantly to vitality.

In Wijk aan Zee a space was recently designated as ‘public workspace’. The space is a small old church that was used as storage space for beach cabins in winter. The idea behind this project was that, besides a meeting hall, sports area, church and café, you also need a place where you can make things. How did the idea originate? We will have to go back to 1999, when Wijk aan Zee became Cultural Village of Europe. Because of the large number of activities in that year a construction team was brought together. All the constructions necessary for the year were made by this particular team of people. They invented constructions, erected painted signs along the access road to Wijk aan Zee, and turned the gym into a festivity hall. After 1999 the building team remained intact. People had come to enjoy doing things instead of talking in meetings. Following the methods of this team the idea for the workplace emerged. The old church was found to be the best place. The intention is that painters, welders, woodworkers, instrument builders and perhaps designers as well will meet each other there, that there will be exhibits, and that the top floor will house a well-equipped
music studio. The important thing is that you can support many activities in the village from such a workplace.

**Conclusion**

However limited the practical experiences may be, they show how vitality can be attained. It is important that a creative process is started that is supported by the village community. The most important building blocks for this creative process are the different abilities of the various residents, the fact that these citizens are prepared to deal with one another, private initiative, using the local artistic qualities and means, exploiting the existing situation, keeping history in mind and having a central meeting place. It is also important to be critical about methods that may work elsewhere in society but tend to impede positive and desirable developments in villages.
5. In conclusion

In the 19th and 20th century, many developments occurred in which villages did not play a part. In a rapid development of economics, organisation, individualisation, mobility, specialisation and science there was no place for the typical qualities of a village community. But when it turned out that these developments also caused problems, the situation changed. People started to ask again for the kind of things that can be developed in villages; for what is called ‘social cohesion’.

On the basis of the ideas and experiences of Cultural Villages of Europe we have shown in this essay what the qualities of the villages are. We have made clear that these qualities only become visible when they are called upon. This is not only important to villages, but also to society as a whole, because the quality of society depends on all of its building blocks.

In the 1990s the world became acquainted with the term ‘social capital’. Well known social scientists such as Bourdieu and Putnam, as well as the philosopher Fukuyama, used the term. Capital, labour and technique were no longer considered sufficient for economic and social developments. When corporate life and networks fail, when citizens are insufficiently involved, we will not advance. The characteristics that we called qualities of the village in chapter 3 may fit the heading ‘social capital’. The village no longer needs to feel backward: the criteria have changed.

At the closing conference this year in Cultural Village Pergine Valdarno, one of the speakers was Enrico Cheli, a sociologist from Sienna. He said that he had just returned from a conference in Frankfurt where he spoke with colleagues about the future of European culture. That culture does not yet exist, he argued, it still needs to be born. Moreover, that culture cannot be imposed from above, it can only grow from the base, from the people themselves. He emphasized the timeliness of the Cultural Villages of Europe movement, comparing it to a four-year old that made a step in the direction of European culture. The important thing is to create a society that unites the best of cities and villages.

Looking at a village is seen by many people as looking at the past - as nostalgia. In the past, studying the past has led to great innovations. In a changing time, where some developments grind to a halt, looking back at history may be the most important thing you can do. Looking at ancient Greece in the late medieval period has brought us the Renaissance and the New Time. History can indeed inspire people for the future, also in the case of villages.
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