

TERRITORIAL JUSTICE FOR URBAN AND RURAL REGIONS? ABOUT THE RESPONSIBILITY AND ROLE OF THE BAVARIAN ACADEMY FOR RURAL AREAS

Holger Magel

Summary

The article describes the one-sided global discussion on urbanization, conducted without developing sufficient future-oriented comprehensive visions and strategies for rural areas. The concepts discussion concerns mostly agriculture; while there is nearly nothing being said about establishing central places, or nurturing small and medium-sized enterprises (SME) in rural areas. Europe and Germany still believe in the principle of cohesion and the goals of the Territorial Agenda 2020 in endogenously developed rural areas, despite some controversial discussions about the need and outcome of specific and even enhanced strategies and measures in shrinking peripheral regions. It is not primarily a question of economy to support rural areas, but it is first and foremost a question of human rights, dignity and territorial justice. The constitutional demand of equivalent living conditions in Germany is a visible expression and result of territorial justice. Fortunately, this issue of justice is now a hot matter of political discussion in the Bavarian Parliament.

In the second part of the article, the indispensable roles and contributions of civil society and NGOs as independent partners and co-producers of the State are described – such as the Bavarian Academy.

Keywords

Equivalent living conditions • territorial justice • Enquete Commission • urban-rural cooperation • integrated rural development • active civil society • home-country strategy • independent academy for rural areas

1. As a preliminary point – why was only an urban summit organized?

During Oct. 17–20, 2016 in Quito, a South American city, a big world Summit on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development took place, under the name Habitat III. Many problems were discussed there, but mostly the opportunities for cities in the era of urbanization, and the idea of ‘smart city’ as a vital space for living and economy, and as a machine of growth and prosperity. The concept of the ‘right to the city’ was also formulated.

Similarly, the world of real estate looks on larger and growing cities. In the ‘Daily News’ of the Munich ‘Expo Real’ dated 4 October 2016, the President of Polish Echo Investment Nicklas Lindberg spoke of the ‘growing urbanization in Poland’ and the appearance of a (new) creative class and creative enterprises associated with this. The term ‘city’ in his opinion is synonymous with ‘creativity’.

And the rural areas? Were they ever mentioned? What about the right to rural life?! At Expo Real, there was almost zero discussion about it. Habitat III talked about urban-rural relations, but unfortunately only from urban perspective.

One would like to ask and call: **Where is the UN World Summit on Rural Areas?** There is nothing like this; we only find individual views and reports by the World Bank, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) which are mainly about agricultural development, effects of climate change, buffer zones for flood protection etc. Globally, there is no common overall vision of **urban and rural** and of **cities and villages**. Unfortunately, neither do the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) offer such a vision; not in a specific or convincing manner.

We are fortunate, as the EU has at least a holistic view on space, city and countryside. It can be inferred from the Territorial Agenda 2020¹, or from the (not legally binding) Declaration of the Cork 2.0 Conference in September 2016². It is a matter of pride that long before the EU, Germany and Bavaria adopted such a comprehensive look as the basis for all spatial policies and strategies undertaken for rural areas. Therefore, they have a lot of experience, which is helpful for all European neighbour countries, and even for e.g. China or Cambodia.

It is all about the Four Goals of European Territorial Planning:

1. Embedding and co-ordination of national spatial planning (*Raumordnung*) and spatial development (*Raumentwicklung*) within the European framework (e.g. TEN³), based on the idea of a balanced and polycentric urban system.
2. Strong and vital cities.
3. Indigenous development, diverse and productive rural areas.
4. Rural-urban cooperation.

It is important to note that Europe, especially Bavaria, still believes in the ‘Central Place Theory’ by Walter Christaller, i.e. a functioning, hierarchically decentralized network of

¹ Territorial Agenda of the European Union 2020. Towards an Inclusive, Smart and Sustainable Europe of Diverse Regions – agreed at the Informal Ministerial Meeting of Ministers responsible for Spatial Planning and Territorial Development on 19th May 2011 in Gödöllő (Hungary) http://www.nweurope.eu/media/1216/territorial_agenda_2020.pdf (accessed: 19.11.2016).

² Cork 2.0: European Conference on Rural Development, 5–6 September 2016, Ireland. <http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/events/2016/rural-development/programme.pdf> (accessed: 19.11.2016).

³ The Trans-European Networks (TEN) were created by the European Union by Articles 154–156 of the Treaty of Rome (1957), with the stated goals of the creation of an internal market and the reinforcement of economic and social cohesion https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trans-European_Networks (accessed: 19.11.2016).

large, medium and small central cities in urban /agglomeration regions and rural areas. Talking about increasing urbanization all over the world, it refers to an increase in all categories of central localities, not only an increase of major or even mega cities, as it is suggested unfortunately many times at the global level, especially also in China.

2. Territorial justice – a real and substantial task for policy

It is worth noting that the German Constitution (Art. 72 paragraph 2), and especially the Federal Spatial Planning Act (*Raumordnungsgesetz*⁴) entail the goal of equivalent living conditions in all regions throughout the country. Nevertheless, urban and rural areas, which have developed in Germany separately from each other, are producing a growing gap between prosperous and weak parts of the country. Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) provides regular statistical data in this respect. Also England and other European countries face the same problems. Rural areas with medium and small cities and municipalities, including the villages, especially in the case of mono or old industrialized structure and obsolete economy or unfavourable spatial location, continue to decline further. Demographic problems, such as aging population, declining birth rates and migration of young, well-educated people, and especially women, give the green light to a vicious circle (Figure 1).

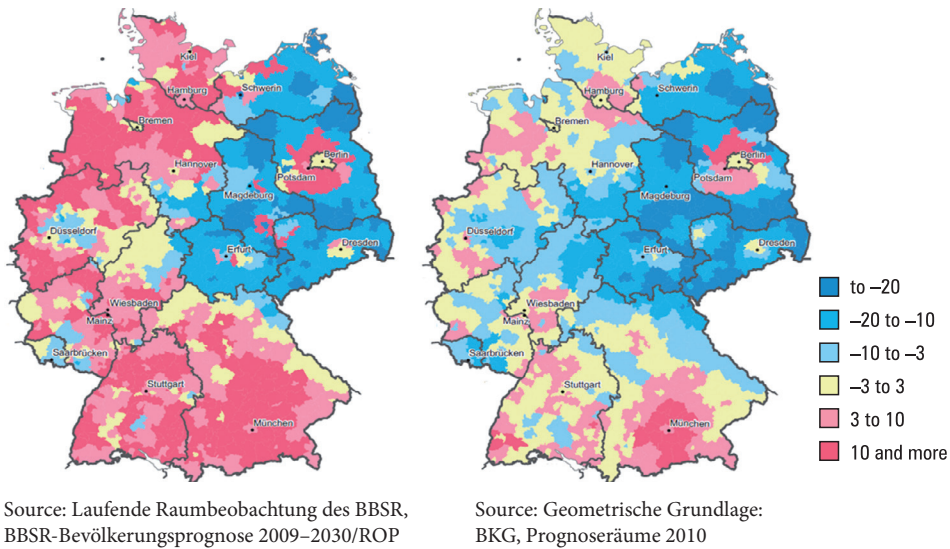
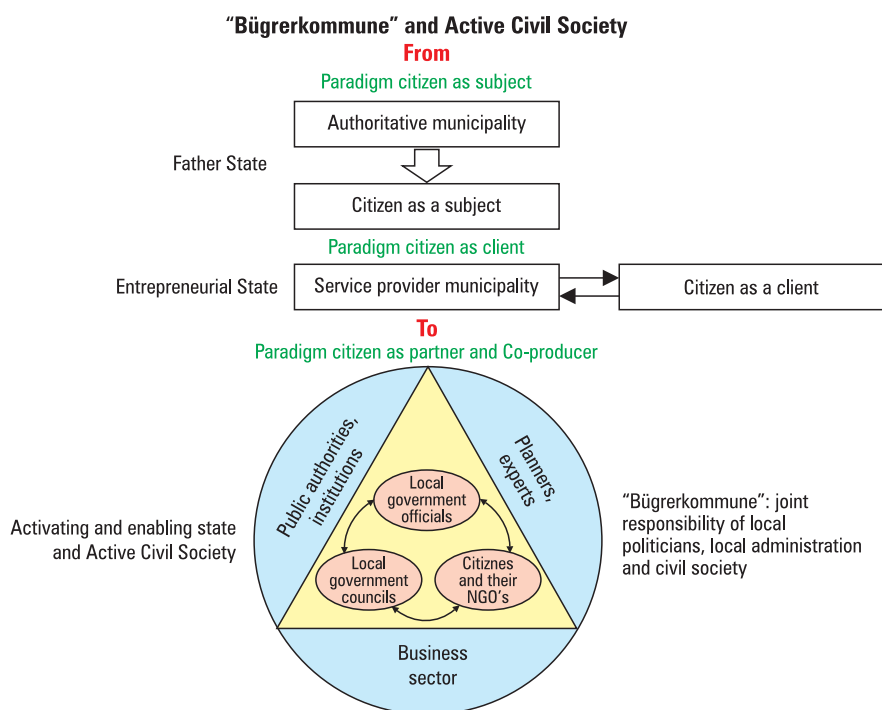


Fig. 1. The growing gap between the north and the south of Germany. In Bavaria mainly peripheral rural areas (blue colour) are lagging behind. On the left, changes in German population in % in the years 1990–2010 – on the right, a forecast for the period 2010–2030

⁴ Raumordnungsgesetz vom 22. Dezember 2008 (BGBl. I S. 2986), das zuletzt durch Artikel 124 der Verordnung vom 31. August 2015 (BGBl. I S. 1474) geändert worden ist.

In the present situation, some economists and scientists advise the State against further investment and financial support for those areas, and in favour of the transition to the *stand-by* function, which is equivalent to a decrease in the minimum standards and expectations. They suggest to rely on strong regions and their large, medium and small cities, and to hope for the so-called *spill over-effect* on the surrounding rural communes and villages. However, recent studies – for example in Finland – shake the foundation of faith in this approach [Lehtonen et al. 2015].

Whether government supports only cities and / or rural areas: since long more and more opinions prevail, which indicate that the State cannot regulate everything any more (“father model of the State”); instead, local and regional activities and self-help principle must be assumed as the basis. This is expressed in a new spatial planning paradigm (*neues Raumordnungsparadigma*) marked by the growing “Active Civil Society”, which has become more self-confident, better informed, and better educated. The point is to agree on the appropriate infrastructure equipped with the negotiation processes between the State and the citizens. We call this a **new joint responsibility community** (“**Bürgerkommune**”), which sees the State as the “activator” and “enabler” through support (help) for self-help, and the citizens, NGOs and the business sector are considered as equal partners and co-producers, who take on more responsibility within their capabilities (Figure 2) [Glück and Magel 2000].



Source: author's study. Copyright: Magel 2017

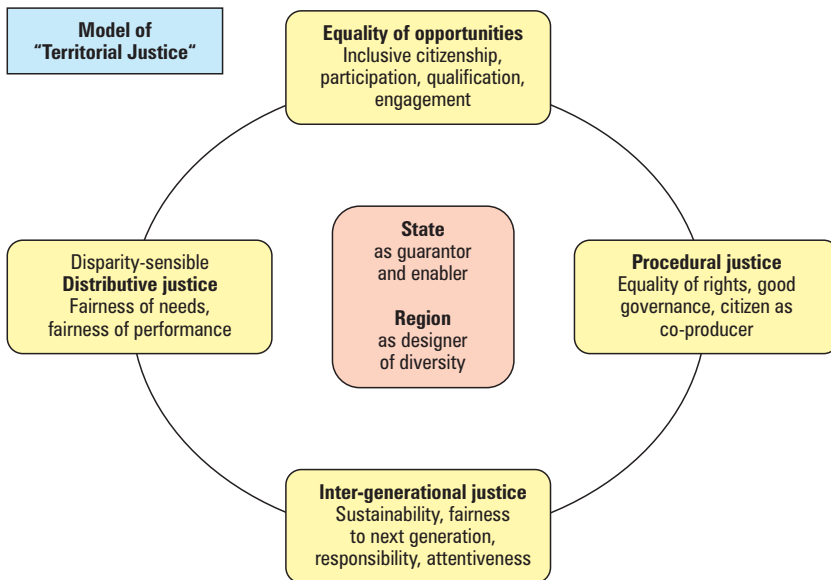
Fig. 2. The new paradigm of Active Civil Society

However, if the differences between the regions are too large, it is apparent that the poor regions will not cope. In that case, the State must take over the role of a guardian and a guarantor for social justice (the principle of the “Welfare State”) and try to rectify imbalances between the regions. This is not only for the sake of the economy and environmental protection, but it is an order of justice and the resulting injunction of general liability. Translating this into the development of cities and villages, in Germany we talk about the injunction of spatial or territorial justice (in Anglo-Saxon countries both terms “spatial” and “territorial” do exist). Although this concept was known already some 15-20 years ago, it has so far stayed in the shadow, and after the Johannesburg Summit in 2002, it was covered by the term “sustainable spatial development” (*nachhaltige Raumentwicklung*), at least in Germany.

However, we are experiencing a “resurrection” of a kind, especially in Bavaria, through changing the constitution, and through the creation of a parliamentary Committee of Inquiry into ‘Equivalent living conditions throughout Bavaria’ (*Enquete-Kommission Gleichwertige Lebensbedingungen in ganz Bayern*). As a member of this committee, I was asked to submit a paper on ethical and normative background for the work on equivalent living conditions in Bavaria [Magel 2015]. It cannot be the responsibility or an arbitrary decision by the government or certain economic lobbies, whether there exist equivalent living conditions or not. Justice and its impact on the spatial development is a universal and perpetual mandate, which is ultimately based on the universally applicable human rights and human dignity. It is enough to refer to the famous ‘Theory of Justice’ by John Rawls [1971] or to lectures about justice available on YouTube: by Professor Michael Sandel [2013] from Harvard and Professor Amartya Sen, a Nobel Prize laureate in economics [2013]. Based on these theories, together with another member of the committee Manfred Miosga, professor for regional development, we created a new model of spatial justice with **four dimensions of justice** (Figure 3). Firstly, **equal opportunities**, which are based on the fact that every newly born child will have a chance to have school education and much more. Secondly, the **justice of distribution**, which is about local infrastructure and equipment necessary to live and work (e.g. Internet access). Thirdly, **procedural justice**, i.e. mainly: equal rights for all, participation, and management issues. Last, but not the least, **justice for generations or grandchildren**. Here it is primarily an injunction of sustainable actions, e.g. in financial and environmental terms [Magel 2016].

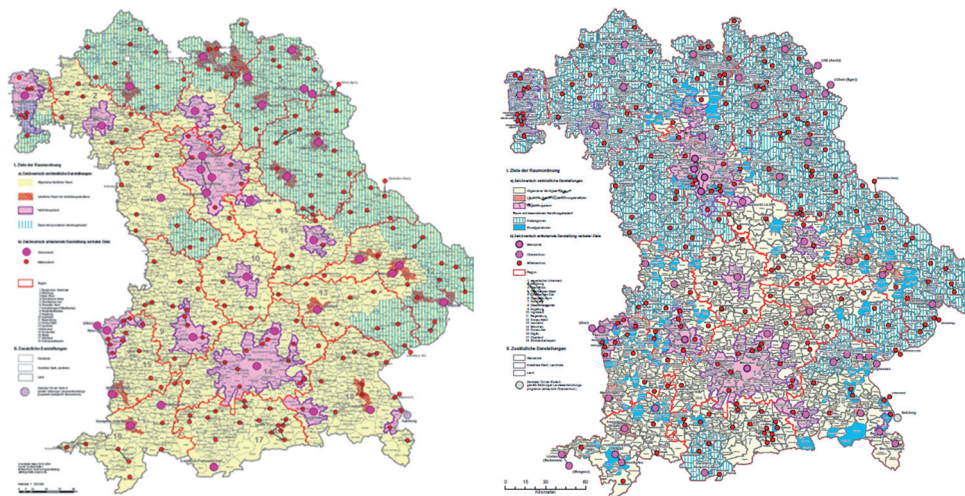
This new model of territorial justice was accepted by all parliamentary factions in the Commission, as a basis for further discussion. It will now be used to determine specific criteria for each of the four areas of justice, by which the spatial justice for all regions will be determined, monitored and evaluated; or in other words, to ensure the equivalent conditions of living and working. These criteria must be developed taking into account the specificity of the region, together with the citizens and the civil society, which must most certainly include the NGOs. We call this disparity sensibility.

Why is this territorial justice so important to Bavaria? Looking at the map (Figure 4) it is evident that we have serious problems, especially at the borders of our region. Here we are talking about peripheral rural areas, which suffer from depopulation



Source: developed by H. Magel and M. Miosga at 2015. Copyright: Magel/Miosga 2015

Fig. 3. Model of four dimensions of territorial justice. Based on theories of justice and empowerment (Rawls, Sen and Sandel)



Source: Draft of Bavarian Development Plan – Entwurf Landesentwicklungsprogramm of 2016

Fig. 4. Peripheral or weaker rural areas (marked in green) within Bavaria. Left: the current system; right: the planned increase of the number of regions, which merit specific assistance of the State

and the lack of jobs, and thus face the shrinking carrying capacity of the infrastructure for local supply, health and education, due to the decreasing population and the weakening local financial and causative strength, including the collapse of real estate prices. These areas need special care and attention of the State. It is against justice when some people suggest that they should be deliberately depopulated or emptied. Resilient strategies and adaptation projects, aimed at preventing the decline are necessary, but in my opinion, at the minimum, they must also include a “strategy of return” (“Rückfallstrategie”). We have to allow the eventual return to the “previous” situation, when the trend again reverses. But if we now let regions decline too much, that return will be difficult.

Even in the stronger regions, we also have structurally weaker districts and municipalities, which should get help.

3. Home-country strategy (*Heimatstrategie*) for Bavaria

Undoubtedly, the Bavarian Government is aware of this, but it communicates very little about how to react to the decline of such weak regions. In fact, ethical and normative dimensions of territorial justice are not discussed. Instead of theories and philosophies, more pragmatic ways are preferred, where the goal is equivalent living conditions – as it is written in the constitution. Naturally there are also criteria to measure living conditions, but these are not discussed along with the ideas and systemic approach of the Enquete Commission, rural municipality associations, or NGOs.

Government’s favourite solution is to give financial support. A lot of experts are surprised that the government wants to enlarge the weak rural areas in regions (see: Figure 4) by including those, which had never been seen as weak before. But this is the way of territorial politics and of “policy by money”, which is applauded by local politicians and mayors. This works as long as the State or the region is rich – like Bavaria is nowadays. It will be an exciting question whether the Bavarian Government will seriously study and implement the proposals of the parliamentary Commission of Inquiry on “Equivalent living conditions” in terms of measuring the situation everywhere after the end of the commission’s work.

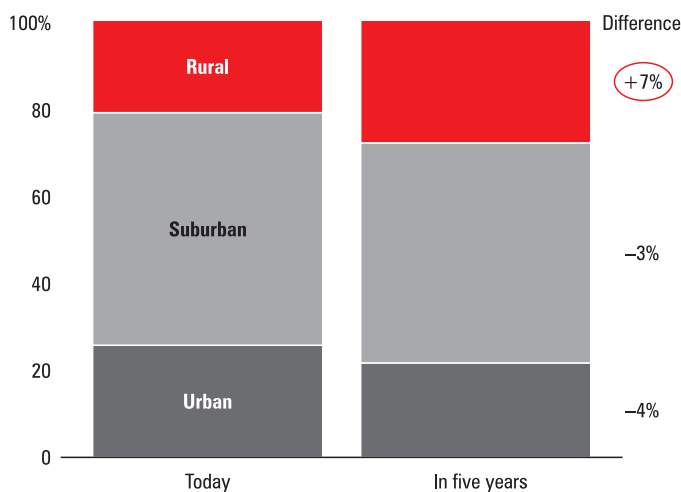
It is worth mentioning that apart from these methodological and theoretical questions and differences, the Bavarian Government has started positive strategies and supportive programmes to avoid excessive weakening of the regions and municipalities. In its central policy approach, the so-called Home-country strategy (*Heimatstrategie*), which is complemented by many other specialized programmes of all line ministries, the government equips the rural regions, particularly those peripheral ones, with a catalogue of special projects. They include decentralization of government offices, even ministries, and set up branches away from large urban centres (like Munich), in district towns and rural communes; similarly so with university departments (institutes, research units). These decisions are guided by concepts and spatial programmes such as the integrated rural development (*integrierte ländliche Entwicklung*), followed by programmes like: village renewal or urban renovation; integrated town development

concepts (*integrierte Stadtentwicklungskonzepte*)' LEADER; Regional management; and all other inter municipal and cross-cutting programmes. The goal is to reach a higher attractiveness of rural towns and villages in order to keep or attract people (especially young people) to the region. Naturally the business sector and enterprises must offer high qualification jobs in rural centres.

4. Long live the countryside – wishful thinking or the first turn of the trend?

The first successes are visible. A media report under the slogan “Long live the countryside” narrates that in some parts of rural Bavaria there is again a growing trend of living countryside, which it is often also psychologically conditioned, and corresponds to the new lifestyle. Federal Ministry of Agriculture speaks cautiously about the change in the trend. Der SPIEGEL already specifically mentioned the phenomenon of escaping the city. Also in Waldviertel in Lower Austria, or in western Poland positive, migration balance to rural areas has been observed again.

Why is this the case? Businesses consultants explain it in the following way: there is a tendency to shift from living in cities to living and working in rural areas. Global consulting firm Bain & Company have already spoken about the **post urbanization** era, when due to technological progress, the problem of the distance loses its importance (*declining cost of distance*), and thus the rural areas may be more attractive as a place of living and working (Figure 5) [Allen et al. 2016].



Source: [Allen et al. 2016]

Fig. 5. Rural areas are becoming more attractive – where people live now, and where they will live in five years' time

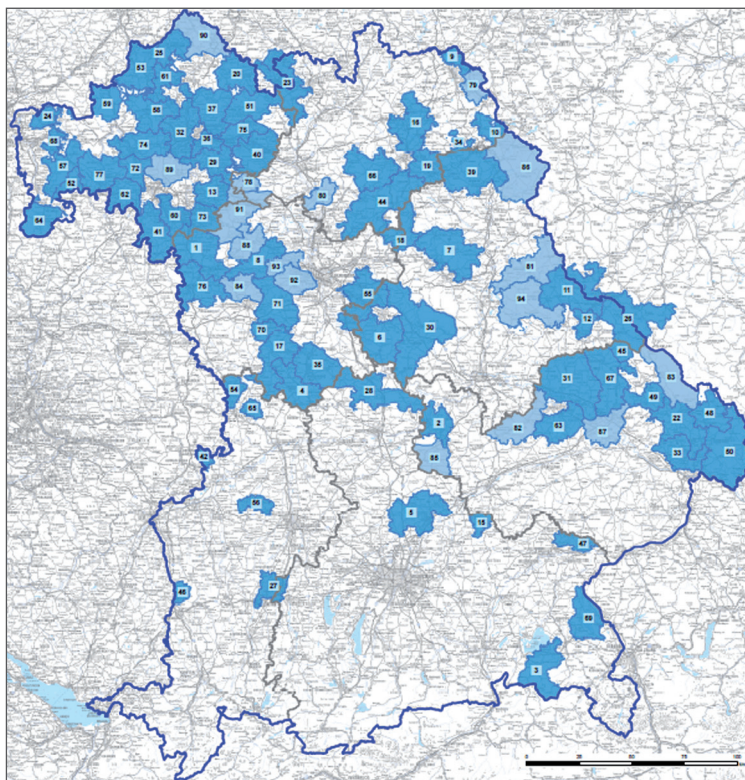
So, again there is hope – and that reminds me of a book I wrote 25 years ago, together with the then President of the Bavarian Parliament Alois Glück. The book carried an intentionally motivational title ‘The countryside has a future: New perspectives for rural areas’ [Glück and Magel 1990]. The message is that we have to withstand the voices heard at meetings of UN or the World Bank, where some say with satisfaction, or try to convince us that the whole world will inevitably be urbanized, and thus creative and living in prosperity. This idea saddens me personally, when the concept of urbanization is understood only as a tendency to create mega-cities and agglomerations.

Here I recall the warning voiced by the former French Prime Minister Edgar Faure: “If rural areas stop breathing, cities will suffocate”. There is no need to look only at Beijing, Manila, Mexico City, Lagos or Cairo, in order to verify the truthfulness of these words; instead, it is enough to look at Munich, my city of residence, which for a long time now has been choking with problems related to transportation and housing, and it is on track to lose its attractiveness as an outstanding European city, and as a compact and green living space. More and more green areas of the city and its surroundings are being disappeared as a result of intensive “inner development” (*Innenentwicklung*).

‘The countryside has a future’ or ‘Long live the countryside’ – one way or another, once again, we need new, courageous and creative perspectives, which can be read partly in the new EU Regulation EAFRD [Regulation 2013], for example, the provisions aimed at supporting small and medium-sized enterprises (SME). Having said that, these measures are not yet bold enough, and they are too much focused on agriculture only.

If we want to keep people in the villages and the rural towns, we need – as I already mentioned – additional high-quality jobs; while agriculture can give work opportunities only to a part of rural population. On-going Digitization and Work 4.0 trends can enhance rural accessibility and mobility, and thus support job creation in the countryside.

Therefore for me, rural and urban renewal and development make sense only when they are accompanied by the support of regional economic development and workplace creation. At the same time, the integrated rural development and its counterpart support for urban development (integrated town development concept) must pass their biggest test. It would be best if they could merge in the form of a large or medium-scale urban-rural partnership, including e.g. new partnerships and collaborations between SME in urban and rural areas, with consequences for improving housing, infrastructure, mobility and harmony of work and family life for young parents. In this way, the Integrated Rural Development (Figure 6) and also the urban development concepts and projects in rural areas are best contributing to equivalent living and working conditions.



Source: Bavarian State Ministry for Food, Agriculture and Forestry

Fig. 6. Projects for integrated rural development in Bavaria managed by Land Managers from 7 regional offices for rural development. Look at their dominance in northern Bavaria

5. Who represents the interests of the countryside, outside the world of everyday politics?

Larger cities like Munich, and the region of Bavaria view the strong support for rural areas with some apprehension and envy. They complain about the too big (in their opinion) concern with rural areas, indicate their main problems, and stress the indispensable central function of the master supply centre for smaller cities and rural areas. This involves also political influence, rank and the game of power with the financial equalization for poorer municipalities.

Of course, rural areas have strong interest groups in the form of powerful municipal associations; but in their daily policy, many topics are treated superficially, even though they reflect accurately the nature and diversity of life in the countryside and its economic activity in antithesis to the city – namely, rurality, (agri)culture, regional architecture, land use, landscape, rhythm of life, proximity of nature, lifestyle, the slowness, slowing the pace of life etc.

In order to be able to identify, preserve and promote these aspects in the era of modernization, globalization and cultural egalitarianism, nearly 30 years ago in Bavaria we created our independent non-profit organization: Bavarian Academy for Rural Areas. It is a self-financing association, not a State institution like some German Academies for Rural Areas (Thuringia, Baden-Württemberg, North Rhine-Westphalia, Rhineland-Palatinate).

In Bavaria, Lower Saxony (Niedersachsen), Hessen and Schleswig Holstein academies see themselves as think tanks for politics and society. On the one hand, they support the inhabitants of rural areas and communes; on the other hand, through constructive criticism and suggestions, they help governments and parliaments. It is significant to mention that from the eight external experts of 21 members of the aforementioned Enquete Commission, five members come from our Bavarian Academy: professors, Directors-General of chambers of commerce and industry, heads of offices of Rural Development. Their contribution involves not only their personal competence and experience, but it also consists in expanding the potential of the academy as a whole, which had been developed over the last 3 decades on the basis of nearly 300 members, representing almost all professions and all social groups within Bavaria, whether they are independent freelance engineers and planners, government officials, business people, industry representatives, business leaders, bankers, mayors, governors, parliamentarians, or even the Secretaries of State and Ministers, university professors, theologians, or journalists etc.

It was, for example, our academy which warned the Bavarian government very early not to rely on the free market interests and forces to provide broadband network in rural areas; but instead to treat this new technology as an essential element of public services, on an equal footing with roads and water supply infrastructure. After several years, the situation has been managed by the new government exactly in the way that our academies had suggested.

It was the Bavarian Academy, which in 1994 organized the first conference in the country on inter-municipal cooperation (today we are talking about the aforementioned integrated rural development), and it was at a time when a stubbornly parochial thinking was still prevalent among the municipalities.

It is the Bavarian Academy, which warns all politicians in the government and parliament against destroying the open cultural landscapes for one-sided, short-term economic gains, by allowing the municipalities to create industrial areas on the “green meadow” much more than ever in order to generate tax revenue from businesses. Cultural landscapes, as mentioned by the European Convention on Landscapes, belong to the identity of the country, and give stability and orientation to people in times of globalization and high-speed modernization. We cannot allow them to be destroyed irreversibly, as it has already been happening, much too often.

Against its own background and constitution of a truly interdisciplinary body, our academy can more reliably than other institutions call upon the ministries and administrations of the State, in order to better and more closely cooperate for the good of urban and rural areas; because the future can be secured only by comprehensive, integrated solutions and more urban rural cooperation within or outside metropolitan regions.

Due to its high competence in the rural management and the municipal development, the academy can also convincingly argue that the current German support programme for rural development is still insufficiently focused despite official praises. Support for the SME sector in the new Federal Joint Task Law on Agriculture and Coastal Protection has been only possible thanks to the enormous pressure that our academies and sister academies put on the members of the German Parliament!

And yet let me stress: It is simply easier for an Academy to organize visionary conferences, and look not only at the practical issues or at the future of the agricultural sector, as it will be done e.g. by the Ministry of Agriculture.

Our Bavarian Academy, of course, with the cooperation of official institutions and ministries, created a lot of courageous views on the urban-rural partnerships, made comments to drafts of legal acts, and at hearings in Parliament on Bavarian State Development Program (*Landesentwicklungsprogramm*⁵). It submitted considerable solutions to educational policy and the location of schools in rural areas; health care; the situation of churches in rural areas; new jobs (including telework); renewable energy; agricultural development and regional marketing; biodiversity and cultural landscape; mobility in rural areas; the so-called inner development; new constructions; land protection; civic engagement; financial situation of the communes; reconciliation of work and family; and strategies for preventing the collapse of many villages. We especially focused on the fundamental issues, such as “changes in the heads” and we called for attention, long before the change of the Bavarian Constitution; we called for justice for all regions. The Rural Areas Working Group (*Arbeitsgemeinschaft Ländlicher Raum*), association of all German academies, raised the problem of aging in the rural community with enormous consequences, which is a tremendous challenge for new forms and standards of housing design, mobility and adaptation of rural infrastructure. Insufficient recognition and consideration of different phases of people’s lives – and thus of changing people’s needs and possibilities – is also a problem.

A new and significant problem, which we remember from last year’s European debate, is currently the integration of many immigrants and refugees in rural Bavaria. We could put an important emphasis on this issue, with the participation of the government, the parliament and federal institutions [Franke and Magel 2016].

Fortunately, we can enjoy the fact that, simply because of our independence, we can expect special attention from the media, i.e. radio or newspapers. There is hardly a month in which we would not be asked to give an opinion or take a stand on issues related to urban and rural areas.

6. The academies are the place of constructive confrontations and discussions

Why is this possible? By their very nature, our Academies for Rural Areas’ Development have such a broad composition, that they cannot be limited to, for instance, an indus-

⁵ Verordnung über das Landesentwicklungsprogramm Bayern (LEP) of 22 August 2013.

try or farmers lobbying. All members feel committed to strengthening the rural areas. Neither do we want to do business, nor do we strive for some private gain – and this, in all probability, makes us more credible.

It is important that our actions are not merely based on the fact that we are “basically against something” or that we “basically always demand something”; instead, our contribution is critical, but constructive, and thus we are a reliable and predictable partner. This also applies to the other academies, which act primarily from an urban point of view. We remain open, and we do not treat the larger cities and metropolitan areas as opponents, but as a necessary support for our country and our society. For reaffirming the role of cities, we also want to contribute to their more open attitude and partnership with rural areas. *I see it as the key to the future of cities and rural areas, because only in the spirit of friendly cooperation, the city can be relieved and rural areas can be strengthened.*

Our academy cannot argue “with the belly”. We need serious opinions, which are evidence-based (following the findings from scientific research). For this purpose, we have created our own Boards of Scientific Trustees, involving university professors, young scientists, lawyers, politicians, local planners and officials. The Board of Trustees often use the foundation of their own research or the practical results and experiences of planners or communes. If there is a difference of opinion within the academies, efforts are made to find common ground. After all, in our academy, you will find representation of the Presidents of the Bavarian Association of Rural Municipalities (*Bayerischer Gemeindetag*) and Association of Counties (*Bayerischer Landkreistag*), as well as the current Minister of Agriculture or the Secretary of State in the Ministry of Finance, Spatial Development and Home-country and a number of committee chairmen of the Bavarian Parliament. For all of these high officials, it is clear that the academy does not want to embody and represent the perspective of the official policy by the Ministry or communes only, but seeks to represent a more diversified and broader perspective of society. The Ministry and its representatives may only represent the official line of the government or the opinion of the coalition parties; therefore, they are often glad, if in some inconvenient circumstances, those more independent institutions such as academies express their opinion. **That is the exact task for our academies.** In addition, we also have an educational mission, which is realized in the form of a large number of conferences and hundreds of attractive publications, which are read by students and teachers at universities and by officials in the Ministries and municipalities.

7. Get on the nerves of time, people and things!

In the end, let me quote a basic definition – and at the same time, a confession of a kind – in relation to the responsibility and the role of the academy since its establishment, as well as from the beginning of my leadership.

“The reputation of the academy depends to a decisive extent on how it sees itself and how it checks up a place of disputes, where there is a chance of opposite and contradictory opinions, and not only dealing with those which are compatible with the

specific agenda. In the various activities of the academy, conferences, scientific discussions, research projects, opinions, and support, it must always be important not to give up anything and always “get on the nerves”. Get on the nerves of time, the nerves of people and their home regions, the nerves of things and professional requirements! This is not in order to divide, but in order to unite’ [Magel 1998].

Keeping that in mind, we try to search, in the competent and pragmatic way, for solutions to the problems of rural areas in the context of overall development of towns and villages; we take impulses and inspire action for the future, far beyond the events of everyday life. We feel strengthened in our work by the global and European call for good governance and stronger civic involvement. We want to continue to act as a responsible and serious partner of the State, of the communities and municipalities, the economy and the society.

I wish the new Institute of Rural Development in Southern Poland complete success in their commitment to equivalent urban and rural development. You can count on trusting cooperation with our German Academies for Rural Areas.

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Univ. Prof. EoE Dr.-Ing. Holger Magel
President of Bavarian Academy for Rural Areas
Spokesman of Working Group of Academies for Rural Areas in German Länder
Technische Universität München
Institute of Geodesy, GIS and Land Management
80333 München, Arcistrasse 21
e-mail: magel@landentwicklung-muenchen.de
www.landentwicklung-muenchen.de
www.akademie-bayern.de