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Village renewal as an instrument of rural development: evidence from Weyarn, Germany

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Rural migrants are usually accused of contributing to urban poverty. This is different in Germany, where urban migrants are often accused of contributing to difficulties in rural living. These difficulties range from distortions in cultural lifestyle to loss of rural identity to unrealistic economic lifestyles. In an effort to help rural people respond to these challenges, the German government initiated a village renewal policy that allows rural communities decide on their future to rurally improve their living conditions. The objective of this study is to present the role village renewal plays as an instrument of rural development in Germany. It provides overview on the meaning and aims of village renewal, as well as its history in Germany. Using data from the local level in Germany, the research investigates how rural development can take place through the application of this instrument. Focusing on Weyarn Municipality, a rural area of upper Bavaria in southern Germany, the research specifically reveals how the community stemmed its emerging urbanization through the implementation of village renewal and regained its rural identity. Since many of the literatures on the subject are in German, this study contributes to the list of works on the subject in English.

Keywords: Landentwicklung; Weyarn; dorferneuerung; village renewal; rural development

1. Introduction

In most countries, rural migrants are usually “accused of contributing to urban poverty” (Tacoli, 2011, p. 10). The reverse is the case in Germany, where urban migrants are usually accused of contributing to difficulties in rural living. These difficulties range from distortions in cultural lifestyle to loss of rural identity to unrealistic economic lifestyles. As a means of resolving these challenges, efforts at finding ways to “making agriculture attractive”, reviving rurality through emphasis on cultural living and creating a “more dynamic non-farming sector” are embarked upon by most municipal authorities in Germany (Brüntrup, 2010, p. 11). Particularly, aspects of reviving social and economic activities within the rural areas have become a major challenge that many of these communities and municipal authorities struggle with.

Magel (2000) in Klaus and Magel (2000, p. 98) assert that “the rural areas of this world whether in Western,

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Central or Eastern Europe, South America, Africa or Asia; require answers to urgent structural and economic questions; and problems of location. Hence, it is not possible to solve worldwide problems without strengthening the power of rural areas (Klaus & Magel, 2000). This is a challenge to all – whether in developed and developing countries or countries in transition. Handling such challenges demand for suitable rural development strategies or instruments. The integration of economic, environmental and social-cultural factors within the rural development process is very important and could serve as an effective strategy for achieving sustainable development at the central unit of the rural space. In the contexts of rural and community development, one such very effective strategy being used in Germany is the village renewal process.

A survey of literatures on rural development approaches show that only very few works have been done on the subject of village renewal in the English language. The many that exist on the subject are mainly found in German literature. This paper, in an effort to contribute to the subject in the English language, presents the case study of a rural development program (in Germany) done to re-establish the cultural/rural identity and improve general living conditions of a municipality located in a highly urbanized region. It focuses on the case of how Weyarn, a rural area of upper Bavaria in southern Germany, stemmed its emerging urbanization to regain its rural identity.

2. Understanding village renewal

In reality, “where we live is a central life factor that affects all the others – work, education and love. It can make or break work arrangements and personal relationships” (Florida, 2009, p. 6). To the rural person, the central place for all these activities is the village. In this study, we conceive the village only in its rural sense. We view it as the central unit of rural areas – an active center for economic and social/cultural activities and development. In most of the developed countries, aging and waning villages are gradually losing their vitality and attraction (Liu, 2002). The problems associated with these sort of villages are what village renewal is meant to address. Renewal, in the context of village renewal, does not imply making or to make the village become new or making it become a city or urban center. Rather, it implies making the village retain or gain back its original rural identity. It demands for social, physical and environmental improvements that do not negatively affect its identity as a rural place. According to Hody (2001), the spatial structure of a village is defined by the relation of public and private space, which is designed by various elements of different functions: buildings (for farms, dwellings, private and public purposes, village hall, school, church, local shop, pub, post office, bus-stop, etc.), private and public spaces (small gardens, forests, roads and paths, etc.), village green areas, memorials, and so forth.

2.1. What is village renewal?

Nolten (2007) notes that village renewal involves reconstruction of destroyed settlements; renovation of structural fabric and streets; assignment of new functions; and making development that fulfill these functions. It is not only a process of construction of rural public roads, utilities, improvement of economy and satisfying the demands of villagers. Liu (2001) specifically refers to it as the various measures done to regulate and develop village land and
communities to improve production and living conditions. Lienau (1995) describes village renewal in the broadest sense to imply all measures to improve economic and cultural structure of rural communities. It is all of these, but most of all it is with emphasis on rural culture, traditions and features for maintaining a peaceful rural society and their unique styles.

2.2. The German concept of village renewal

Village renewal is popular in Germany and Austria, where it is normally used as a tool for strengthening the capacities of rural communities. The concept has been adopted generally by the European Union (EU) member countries. German literatures posit that the concept of village renewal has its origin in Germany, where it is referred to as *dorferneuerung* – a term meaning ‘village renewal’ (Liu, 2002; Magel, 2007; Wilson & Wilson, 2001). Magel (1996, p. 4) in Wilson (1999, p. 247) noted that “Dorferneuerung will become a transnational export to the west and east”. This is becoming a reality. Currently, advanced processes are ongoing on how this particular measure can be adopted by Egypt; while the process has already begun in countries like China and Cambodia (Magel, 2010). The USA and Canada have their own concept (referred to as *revitalization* or *regeneration*), which is applied up to their urban regions. However, village renewal in Germany is not the same as “urban renewal” or “urban village renewal”. Generally, village renewal in Europe is about the rural—not the urban.

2.2.1. History of village renewal in Germany

Village renewal started as a formal program in 1977 and has evolved to become a major rural development instrument. Prior to the 1970s, it was practiced in a different dimension. Fastnacht (1992) and Wilson and Wilson (2001) reveal that it was actually practiced in parts of southern Germany in the 1950s and 1960s as *dorfsanierung* (village redevelopment). *Dorfsanierung* was a concept in which a whole village center was demolished for redevelopment, especially crowded villages. However, *dorferneuerung* (village renewal) evolved mainly in response to problems arising from reduction in farm populations and changes in village form and function (Ensgraber, 2006; Liu, 2002). In contrast to the earlier *dorfsanierung* program, “the emphasis of dorferneuerung is on adapting village forms to serve modern functions rather than transforming them” (Wilson & Wilson, 2001, p. 242).

2.2.2. General aims of village renewal

Leser (1997) has shown that village renewal involves management measures in rural municipalities that are aimed at the living conditions of rural population to improve their future requirements. Its local aim varies from municipality to municipality or region to region – depending on what constitutes their greatest need or vision. Village citizens and *body of participants* (land owners, usually farmers) form the village community and are at the center of village renewal projects (see Land Consolidation Act of Federal Republic of Germany, 1994, Chapters 2–3). The people are united in the formation of a village vision, which they work for future actualization through emphasis on four aspects: jobs/agriculture, infrastructure, environment/ecology and social/culture (Magel, 2007). The expected outcome is to make the villages become livelier and the people enjoy a more sustainable
bonding to their history, traditions and the general rural character of their place.

The infrastructural (living) aim of village renewal is hinged on achieving adequate infrastructural provisions that uphold better living conditions of rural people. This is achievable through improvements in village streets and roads and the renovation of buildings for municipal or common purposes as well as historical monuments.

The jobs/agricultural aim is achievable through improvements in agricultural productivity, better measures of securing livelihoods through direct marketing of farm products and building of sustainable cottages for rural industry. When combined with Flurbereinigung (land consolidation), as is a usual practice based on the Land Consolidation Act of Federal Republic of Germany (1994), it can be used to improve agricultural holdings.

The environmental/ecological aim is achievable through redevelopment and re-naturalization of rural inland waters, developing more effective ecological systems for better waste management. The arrangement of green areas within villages and the use of environmental measures to integrate the village into the landscape are also important.

The social/cultural aims are achievable through the renovation or building of wayside shrines, historical monuments and chapels to enhance cultural preservation. Also, the preservation or reproduction of gardens and open spaces of importance with regard to conservation in a cultural or historical sense are necessary steps.

2.2.3. Planning framework for village renewal in Germany

According to Wilson (1999, p. 247), the 1993 Federal Planning Act of Germany states that:

Achieving this demands for a decentralized planning system. The planning structure of Germany is highly decentralized – starting from the EU level to the municipal, up to a client level. Spatial planning is in accordance with the German constitution (Article 75, No. 4), a policy area with only framework competencies for the Federation.

Village renewal, being part of spatial development (through integrated rural development) is implemented at the municipal level (see shaded portions in Figure 1). However, being within the operational aspect of the overall planning framework, it involves the EU, Federal, regional and municipal levels. It is a big policy issue at these levels, and this reflects in its funding structure. Its funding ratio entails the EU to provide 50%; the Federal level provides 25% through the states, while the municipalities provide the remaining 25%.

This does not mean that village renewal is as simple as presented above. Apart from being part of the general planning system of Germany, it has its own planning system; its own methods, instruments and planning processes (all packaged within a rural development concept). Figure 2 shows the various approaches to implementing the village renewal process. It involves formal (according to building regulations and the Land Consolidation Act) and informal planning processes.

The Flurbereinigungsgesetz (and the Baugesetzbuch are the Federal Land
Consolidation Act and the Federal Building Codes, respectively. These two federal laws regulate the two formal planning processes. State laws can come in within these procedures. For instance, in the context of Bavaria, the Bayerische Bauordnung and Bayerischen Landesplanungsgesetzes – which are the Bavarian Building Code and Bavarian State Planning Act, respectively – will apply. The informal aspect involves pre-phases (workshops, seminars and initial analyses) done to determine the needs and willingness of the rural people to embark on the formal process.

3. The Weyarn case study

Geographically, Weyarn is located within latitudes 47° 51' 30.7858" and longitude 11° 47' 54.9961" with a population of about 3200 people living in 20 villages in an area of about 47 square kilometers (Weyarn Municipality, 2010). It lies above the valley of the Mangfall almost within the northern Alpine edge. It is situated directly on one of the exit roads of the much-travelled Munich–Salzburg highway, with a traffic density of about 120,000 cars per day – not including the holiday traffic to the popular lake Schlier, which brings an extra 12,500 vehicles daily to the villages (Bundesrepublik Deutschland, 2008). Administratively, it is located in the district of Miesbach, in Bavaria, Germany. It lies within a high-traffic federal motorway, about 30 km southeast of the Bavarian capital, Munich. Its history dates back to a monastery that was founded by Siboto II, count of Falkenstein in 1133, and was formally declared a municipality in 1978.
The problem of Weyarn started in the early 1960s. Its close proximity of Weyarn to Munich city and its location in an idyllic countryside at the foot of the Alps makes its villages much sought after by holiday-makers, investors and private builders. This created urbanization pressure due to strong influx of outsiders and resulted in an astronomical rise in property prices. The communities were under threat of being overcome by urban encroachment and something needed to be done. They started to research on how to resolve these problems because they felt they were losing their homeland and culture to urbanization. The social implication was that upcoming adults were no longer getting married. The aged population was growing higher than the younger population, creating concerns on biological continuity. At last, they adopted village renewal as a response to tackling these problems and setting the community on the path of sustainable rural development. The Weyarn Village Renewal program was designed for a 20-year period, from 1991. For village renewal to be introduced within the context of the Bavarian State government’s mandate, the community of Weyarn had to develop a future vision based on their perceived rural development needs. They worked with the Bayerisches Staatsministerium für Ernährung, Landwirtschaft und Forsten (Bavarian State Minister for Agriculture and Forestry) throughout the course of the project. It was therefore not difficult to obtain necessary primary data for this study.

Figure 2. Planning system in village renewal as part of rural development: methods, instruments and planning process.
Note: BayBO, Bayerische Bauordnung; BauGB, Baugesetzbuch; BayLpLG, Bayerischen Landesplanungsgesetzes; FlurbG, Flurbereinigungsgesetz.
Source: Adapted from Magel (2002).
3.1. Methods

Following three direct inspection visits to the municipality, a desk-based review was completed. Key informant interviewees were purposively selected from external persons involved in the project and from different sections of the population of Weyarn. Twenty-two interviews were conducted, 14 in the Weyarn community and eight to external persons involved in the project. The 14 persons interviewed from the community were: two political decision-makers (Mayor and political opposition leader), four non-political decision-makers (rural development coordinator and members of working groups) and eight others (farmers, crafts-persons and youths of the municipality). The eight external persons (experts) were two independent consultants, two project supervisors from the government ministry and four academic advisors involved in the project. Interviews were taped, transcribed and data were analyzed using the constant comparison method, whereby each transcript was compared with the rest of the data for validity and reality reasons.

3.1.1. The protocol (questions)

The interviews were based on standardized open-ended questions. This was necessary to avail informants the freedom to answer questions within the limits of their knowledge or experience in the project. Twenty-one of the 22 interviews were conducted in the English language. One was conducted in the German language, and its English transcription obtained via translation. For recording purposes, an MP3 recorder was used while note-taking was also done during interviews. The questions were created to identify a range of issues as they pertained to the different opinions of informants on the village renewal program in Weyarn. The major issues were to identify: major features of the program; its core focus; measures taken; approaches adopted; mode of execution; and general evaluation of the program. The following questions are some samples of questions asked: Explain your understanding of village renewal in Weyarn and why you approve or disapprove of it? What were the rural challenges facing Weyarn and in what ways did the village renewal program address them? What roles did the citizens and the local government play in the village renewal of Weyarn? Explain what may be the main benefits and challenges of the program? In the course of granting the interviews, the terms of these questions were altered slightly depending on whether the interviewee is an academic, local citizens (youth, farmer or rural business person), a politician or village working-group members (policy-makers), civil servant, and so forth.

4. Findings

Data deduced from the interviews were based on participants’ responses and evidence observed by the researcher. General findings show that the village renewal project was conceived in Weyarn through collective analysis of the rural challenges of the municipality and its people. Loss of rural identity due to urbanization was the major challenge identified. To tackle this problem, the Weyarn people set the target of achieving rural living to be of highest priority. They created and worked towards achieving a common, planned and documented rural vision. According to the Mayor of Weyarn and other local people interviewed, the common vision of the community (the people) and the municipality (the government) is that Weyarn should remain
rural. On the issue of approach, all interviewees agreed citizenship participation by the Weyarn people was core to the implementation of the program. Mr Kurtz, the consultant (planner) in the program, confirmed this and stated that “the high level of participation of the Weyarn people in their rural development affairs is due to the interest of the people in making important decisions that affect the way they live” – mainly to “create living space that encourages rural life”. In his role as a planner, he emphasized that his job was merely “advisory and that it is the Weyarn people that actually make the core decisions”. Table 1 presents a summary of important findings.

The table provides a general summary of the features, focus, measures, approaches, key implementation steps and general evaluation of the program based on key-informant data analyzed. Core benefits of the program were most visible in environmental protection, infrastructural development, better and more affordable housing, improved rural participation and governance, renovation of cultural buildings for the preservation cultural history and heritages. Land consolidation measures were carried out in the northern part of Weyarn for agricultural reasons only. Weyarn is a rich municipality. Its alpine location makes it an important place to the government and also an attractive place for tourists. So, unlike some other municipalities in Germany, economic benefit was not central to its village renewal program.

5. Performance of the program

The gemeinde (local councils or municipalities) play key roles in planning and economic development, unlike in many other countries where local councils play little or no role. Village renewal, amongst other instruments, is one of the major strategies towards the achievement of equivalent living conditions in the country. As part of the village renewal program in Bavaria, Weyarn invested a lot of time and resources to informal planning (see Figure 2). Beginning from 1993, active plans covering the complete municipal area were made based on reliable planning documents, general review of the areas’ strong points and weak points, setting up landscape planning and introducing a new structure for decision-making – whereby planning was actively done by citizens. According to the local people, they adopted the path of citizenship participation in order to make the concept flexible, sustainable and less bureaucratic. Public workshops and work-groups were used for discussing critical local issues such as concrete plans for agriculture, traffic, the image of the villages, economy, environment and culture. In the process, external planners and professional advisors provided assistances to the people. The people developed working groups on different themes in order to facilitate brainstorm on devising a vision for the community. A 200-year-old map of the municipality was used as a baseline for identifying the spatial location of important cultural heritages, some of which were rehabilitated. In general, the findings generally indicate that three key factors were responsible in the implementation of Weyarn’s village renewal program. These were the community’s vision, its innovative use of rural land policy management and its cooperation with professionals and other municipalities (where village renewal has been carried out before).

Figure 3 illustrates the key drivers of village renewal in Weyarn. The vision of the community was the basis for the program. Through cooperation,
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Features</th>
<th>Main focus</th>
<th>Measures</th>
<th>Approach</th>
<th>Execution</th>
<th>Evaluation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General rural plan</td>
<td>Long term</td>
<td>Anti-urbanization</td>
<td>Vision: rural character</td>
<td>Expert assistance</td>
<td>Realized vision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific rural plan: village</td>
<td>Avoid urban and suburban</td>
<td>Preserving rurality</td>
<td>Citizen participation (bottom-up)</td>
<td>Improving without distorting rurality</td>
<td>Based on German Building Code and meets Agenda 21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>renewal</td>
<td>characters</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>principles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land consolidation</td>
<td>Re-arrangement of parcels</td>
<td>Agricultural reasons only</td>
<td>Top-down</td>
<td>Partial involvement of locals</td>
<td>Limited to the northern part of Weyarn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land use and settlement</td>
<td>Converting farm land to</td>
<td>Land-use restrictions. Housing is</td>
<td>Rurally controlled land market</td>
<td>Restricted settlement pattern</td>
<td>Participatory and binding land-use planning: making</td>
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<tr>
<td>policy</td>
<td>residential to provide</td>
<td>based on heritable building right</td>
<td>(top-down)</td>
<td></td>
<td>land available for residents and nature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citizenship participation</td>
<td>“Planning for the people, by</td>
<td>Based on principle of “division of labor”</td>
<td>Use of Working groups or committees</td>
<td>Weekly meetings</td>
<td>People-centered planning</td>
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<td>Economic development</td>
<td>the people, and with the people”</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Funding</td>
<td>Decentralize commercial areas</td>
<td>Establishing multiple business</td>
<td>Citizenship participation</td>
<td>Adopting a “work and live” rural life</td>
<td>Improved agricultural and jobs in the villages</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
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<td>centers</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Evidence of accountability, equity and transparency</td>
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<td>Rural governance</td>
<td>Rural civil society</td>
<td>Rural news media and regulations</td>
<td>Based basic system of governance</td>
<td>Creation of rural laws, rules and</td>
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Source: Based on fieldwork.
they relied on professional services and networking in order to gain expert results and avoid mistakes that have been made elsewhere. Through innovation, they came up with land-based policies that encouraged local people to stay while discouraging the influx of urban migrants. In general, the performance of the Weyarn program can be explained within the scope of achievements and constraints.

5.1. General achievements

Considering the proximity of Weyarn to Munich, there was strong demand for land. They identified through preliminary analyses of their situation that rural economic development requires sustainable application of land policies and management, so making participation and land management a major aspect of the village renewal implementation.

The first action of the municipal and village council was fighting unstructured development, and, secondly, excluding all undesired development through active planning. Main achievements include reverting to rural identity and making affordable living space for its citizens through land management, the main gains being as follows.

5.1.1. Preservation of rural culture

Developing a vision was made a priority above any other issue – because the people felt that any future plans must be based on an agreed vision that is supported by all. So, prior to the initiation of physical developments, Weyarn came up with a vision in 1991: “we want to be rural”. The implication of this vision meant that they had to start working towards making their place rural and halting its fast trend of urbanization. What is most striking is that the municipal authority and rural working groups showed the researcher a painted image of the vision of Weyarn, painted by the Weyarns. They also have documented rules and regulations prepared in

Figure 3. Three-way description of Weyarn’s success: learning point for others. Source: Adapted from Chigbu (2009).
support of this common vision. According to Mayor of Weyarn, Mr Pelzer, this is a unique vision, considering that many rural municipalities located close to big cities would normally want to take advantage of urbanization. In line with this vision, historical ruins in the village were reconstructed and the unhistorical ruins cleared away. The village centers, churches and the rathaus (town hall) were rehabilitated back to their original cultural facades.

It is important to state at this point that the case of Weyarn is not a case of commodization of rural development. Commodization is easily perceptible when even locals involved in rural efforts feel that these have lost their original meanings and have become inauthentic, too promotional and commercialized (Martin, 2010). Every activity undertaken was done with full participation of the locals and in all cases they felt it meaningful and authentic to their rural future (Weyarn Municipality, 2010). In straight-forward terms, what Weyarn has done is to delineate settlement, social, cultural and working spaces within its municipality. They did this by carrying out reconstruction and rehabilitation of their physical village and increased the social and cultural awareness of the villagers to maintain a mind towards keeping their place rural.

5.1.2. Improvement of rural living conditions

In line with their vision, land policies were introduced to facilitate economic and social developments. Through their village working-groups, seminars and workshops, a rural land management policy was developed to create possibility for affordable housing and control of migration to urban areas. This land management policy specifically dealt on land use, settlement and regulatory policies to be put in place to sustain rural values. Priority was given to reducing the escalating property prices to a level that young families can afford. Its implementation demands that agricultural lands are converted to residential parcels by the municipality to make housing affordable to the citizens. The implication was that where agricultural landowners have the need to sell land, they must consider the municipality as first buyer. In such cases, landowners are to sell two-thirds of their land to the municipality for future residential purposes at double the price of agricultural land and are entitled to sell one-third privately at the market price (where demand exists). Through this approach the municipality was able to control land sales and growth, as well as regulate its rural land market. This is backed up by a land settlement policy, which stipulates that ownership of residential land is given on the basis of heritable building right (either as an indigene or one who have lived for at least 15–20 years in Weyarn).

This approach is making building land available to the natives. To this end, the municipality acquired various properties as a reserve that they lease out at very cheap fixed interest rates for 149 years. The stock of properties has grown so large that the municipality guarantees a property to each young family for the next 25 years (Weyarn Municipality, 2010). The result is that young people are eager to marry, form families and live in the villages. This has brought about low building costs and discourages them from emigrating to nearby cities. Although these efforts have increased the attractiveness of the place for the Munich suburbanites (looking for houses), this sort of indigenization policy on land has discouraged the influx of migrants seeking
permanent residencies. Rather, what it has done is to make the place a haven for recreation and tourism – meaning temporary stay of urbanites while creating economic development for the residents.

The land management policy makes no allocation for central industrial areas. However, on account of the land available, the municipality is able to offer private sites for exchange and is thus able to integrate individual trades (from cobbler’s shops to high-tech businesses) in suitable premises within the locality. This has brought a good level of deconcentration and decentralization commercial and cottage-industrial activities within the municipality. This is further unifying living and working conditions within the villages. Formerly abandoned old farm buildings have been renovated back to their traditional forms in order to maintain their rural character and functions. Through this means, by the first five years of the project, the municipality created 616 jobs in 174 enterprises. As of 2009, it was believed that more than 200 additional jobs have been created (Mr Pelzer, personal communication, 2010). This may seem a small achievement, but for a population of 3200 it is a big economic feat. Also buildings for private purposes (e.g. schools, bus-stops, local shops dwellings, farmsteads, walkways, driveways, pavements, historical buildings, open spaces) were reassessed and amended or provided. Ecological farming is practiced within the municipality, the forests are protected and some brooks were re-naturalized in order to enhance the ecosystem. Considering that the main objective of the village renewal in Weyarn was to avoid an uncontrolled growth that is externally influenced or a growth that might lead to urban or suburban characters, the municipality embarked only on infrastructural improvements that allowed for conservation of their rural quality of life.

The policy of citizenship participation was adopted to encourage wide views and full involvement of the locals in the program. The model of participation adopted by the municipality is one in which the coordination of information and decision-making serves as a pivot for good participation. A lot of people were involved in both internal and external decision-making, and the coordination unit is at the center of the Weyarn information network while the citizens constitute the base of decision-making. This is evidenced in the word of their Mayor, who said that “politics for the people needs politics with the people” and this applies to development. Figure 4 shows the structure of participation in Weyarn.

The impact of citizenship participation was that issues such as infrastructural provisions were tailored only to the needs of the people. As can be seen from above, the people remain at the base of decision-making (as citizens), are represented at the centre through a specific committee (coordination unit) and at the top through working-groups (joint working-groups). So they are represented at every level of decision-making and all categories of village groups (youths, women, men, aged, etc.) are represented in these working groups.

5.1.3. Improvement in rural human resources and capacities

The municipality tasked experts to advice the people (through local committees) on best practices for smooth running of the rural development affairs. The general responsibilities involved in the development of their locality were based on expert assistance in areas such as community assessment, project
facilitation, organizational development/partnership, capacity-building and strategic planning. They also gained through professional assistance in administrative matters, monitoring and certification, financial procedures, records and reports, information management, marketing/public relations and leadership development. In general, Weyarn philosophy was based on the ideology that the best way towards rural development is the activation of rural identity and utilization of collective intelligence guided by experts.

Undoubtedly, the high involvement of the citizens of Weyarn in the planning and execution of the village renewal project led to improved capacities in the community. The various workshops, seminars and trainings that took place during the 20-year period of the program equipped the community with better rurally enlightened, trained and aware populace. Many of the different members of the working groups in the community now have formal knowledge and understanding of project planning for community and rural development, due to their cooperation with experts in the execution of the project. In addition, the handicrafts, small-scale and medium-scale industries were enhanced through a decentralization of commercial districts. The promotion of these industries not only led to an improvement in social and economic conditions, but it equipped those in the industries with new ways and skills of rurally sustaining their trades.

With regards to the youths, they have become even more aware of the
history, heritage and future needs of their community due to their involvement in the program. For instance, the youths of Weyarn were involved in the planning and execution of a school block in the community. One of the key informants for this study, a 15-year-old youth named Benedict, proved to have a highly advanced knowledge of the rural path in which the community has taken and could confidently discuss the needs of Weyarn in relation to their future. This is not only a sign that the vision of the community is well understood by the youths, but it serves as evidence that there is a sort of informal educational culture that is being built for the preservation of the rural heritage of the Weyarn.

5.1.4. Gain of national, international and global recognitions

The execution of village renewal in Weyarn has been recognized within and outside Germany (in Europe) as a result-oriented rural development strategy. At the national level, Weyarn received a national award in the “Unser Dorf hat Zukunft” award. The competition themed “Unser Dorf hat Zukunft” [“Our village has a future”] has been on since the early 1960s at the federal level in Germany. It is organized by Das Bundesministerium für Ernährung, Landwirtschaft und Verbraucherschutz (Federal Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Consumer Protection). Its objective is to create healthy competition between municipalities in terms of rural development competitiveness. In the 2007 competition, 34 municipalities were scrutinized. Weyarn was declared winners of the 22nd edition of the competition due to their creative display of self-governance at improving general quality of life in their communities (Bundesrepublik Deutschland, 2008).

At the international level, Weyarn received an international award in the European Village Renewal Award. They were selected as one award winners at the European Village Renewal award of 2004 – for holistic and sustainable village development of outstanding quality (European Association for Rural Development and Village Renewal, 2006).

On the global front, Weyarn has represented the State of Bavaria in the “Global Project – Village 2000” at the World Exhibition Expo in 2000.

5.2. General constraints and weaknesses

Unlike in the most rural development projects, budget did not pose much of a constraint in Weyarn. This is mainly because the municipality is wealthy – its strategic position within the alpine region makes it a municipality of key importance to the Bavarian government. It is also a major tourist location and this provides it with economic advantages. However, there were weaknesses and constraints observed.

The major constraint in the project, as reported by key informants, was the prolonged period of the project and the mode of participation in the project. Although highly admirable, the Weyarn approach to participation led to prolonged decision-making procedures that, in some cases, could have ordinarily been quicker within a purely bureaucratic setting. For instance, due to its participation structure, which involved everyone in the community, it took more than three years for the community to conclude preliminary analyses for the initiation of physical projects. In fact, some other municipalities in Germany have carried out the same program within a 10–15-year period.

Also, although it adopted citizenship participation as a strategy, rather
than just a process in the project, some decisions were still based on top-down approaches rather than the perceived bottom-up approach that citizenship participation is supposed to follow. For instance, the land management policies were centered on the municipal authorities, leaving them with higher control over the land market, rather than leaving it to the play of economic forces. Considering that the Weyarn citizens are not professionals, they had to participate with more focus on certain issues than others. Obviously, there appeared to be more focus on cultural development than on political development – this is evidenced in the fact that there was no strong opposition against the ruling political party in the municipality.

The Weyarn project may not be easily transferable to other municipalities around the world, but this may very well depend on the legal and institutional frameworks available in those countries. We view this as a major weakness of the program. For instance, the political atmosphere of Germany in general, and Weyarn in particular, covered up what could have been viewed as limitations in other countries. The entire process was aimed at countering the influx of settlers from their urban neighborhoods through anti-settler land policies – making land more accessible to natives only. This can be deemed to a running of a quasi-controlled rural economy and may not be practicable in some countries where the local councils have no strong positions within the framework of development projects. This will make the Weyarn experience difficult to be adapted to other regions.

Another major weakness of the program could be the governance structure within which the project was implemented. The Mayor of the municipality has been in office for a period of 20 years. This may be viewed as weak or bad governance in some parts of the world. Such a long-time project may not be adequately managed or sustained within political systems where only short or fixed tenures are allowed. In such political settings, breaks in tenure and changes in leadership may not encourage stability and sustainability in the project execution. Depending on whichever lens it is viewed, this calls into question the context of good governance in Weyarn.

6. Conclusion

Weyarn is today known and recognized as a rural area. This study has shown, through the case of Weyarn, how villages and the rural areas could maintain and strengthen their cultural distinctiveness from urban areas. The experience reflects the importance of vision in rural development projects, whether in developed or developing countries. Cooperation and innovation are two other aspects important for successful rural development. The protection and management of villages against urbanization is of value (with positive social and economic consequences) but this is only sustainable if rural people are proud of their rurality and have a collective vision that is rural based. In the case of Weyarn, village renewal helped to reinforce the economic and social independence of its people through the development and promotion of citizenship participation, common responsibility and self-aid among the population. Although it is obvious that village renewal has several other positive effects on the development of rural areas and communities, its major task in the case of Weyarn was its role as an instrument of rural development. Such efforts in other municipalities could contribute to sustainable preservation of rural heritages around the world.
References


