Paper presentation.
”The physical impoverishment and decay of Danish Villages. Causes and Consequences.”

*Any professional trade has its own special way of perceiving and understanding the world.
*I am a carpenter, an architect, an associte professor and a town planner with a special, longlastsing interest in Danish villages.

*I live, work and research out there where the houses are a little shabby, and where it smells of slurry & pigs as well as stoking the woodburner.

*So all in all I think I have a fairly wide background for working with my subject.
*Different researchers would find other matters more important than the physical environment:

DEFINITION:

The buildings:
- Production buildings
  . Farm buildings
  . Dairies
  . Etc.
- Workshops

- The houses

- The gardens

- The roads

- The squares

- The infrastructure in a broad sense
Over the last 30 years, the physical environment in quite a lot of Danish villages has, in my assessment, deteriorated drastically.

Until further:

FORMULATION OF THE PROBLEM WITHOUT STATISTIC DOCUMENTATION!!

I have seen…
Qualitative observations

Kilometres by the thousands have been run

Photos by the thousands have been taken

Searching.
Problem formulating.
Discussing (participating in conferences here and there)

Is not based on a finished project, but is an attempt to start a research and, if possible, form a network.
Discuss if there “is something” in the problem.

A neglected phenomenon among researchers, politicians, project makers and others.

You have to see many villages in order to understand the extent of the problem.
In many places in Denmark you can see the same development trends.

We still do not know much about these villages and the people living in them!

*HOWEVER, there is probably no doubt that:*
  * We are too old
  * We are too stupid
  * We are too fat
  * We probably also smoke too much
  * We are too unemployed
  * We have no esthetic sense and we love plastic windows
  *
  * "Sub Denmark"???

A couple of definitions that I am presently developing:
PHYSICAL DECAY AND IMPOVERISHMENT:

DECAY: When the buildings are more or less collapsing

PHYSICAL IMPOVERISHMENT

When the buildings:

*Are not maintained.

*Are maintained or rebuilt in a wrong way using bad materials and lousy workmanship. (Do it yourself and "Silvanisation” (the culture of the do-it-yourself centres”).

*New buildings and rebuildings/extensions are out of local context. (Architectonically, as regards materials and in terms of scale)

*When front gardens and entrance gates are filled with junk and old cars with and without number plates.

*When furnishings in the public space are of an unheard bad quality and standard of maintenance….

*When public roads, edges and kerbs as well as public spaces are not maintained.

The only buildings which are kept in good order everywhere are the parish church and the village hall.
The church is duly and beautifully maintained.

The village halls are maintained by local fiery souls with few means, without putting on airs and with an operational attitude to life > free of maintenance > plastic windows!!

WHY DO THESE THINGS HAPPEN MORE POWERFULLY JUST NOW?

Mega trends in the social structure create: ”FUNCTIONAL DEPLETION” in the building volume of the villages

* Farm buildings
* Convenience stores
* Municipal schools
* Nonconfirmist chapels
* Co-operative dairies
* Workshops for workmen

- These buildings are no longer needed in the village

  • When we talk about the houses and their physical decay there could be many explanations, however research gives no certain answers

  • There could be too many dwellings
Too few young people – too many old ones. The drive disappears.

-Social impoverishment < > Physical impoverishment are often connected

-Undertrained and with too little money

1. Do-it-yourself

2. Do nothing

Both can have fatal consequences for the physical expression.

-Lacking municipal finances, interest and professional insight. Politically and Professionally!!!

-Weak or no local political organization and impact. (The fiery souls have moved out).

-Local disagreement about the future perspective:

a)”Growth”, nicely, decently

b)”Fine the way it is now, thank you!” > freedom, anarchy, room for a bit of everything from the everyday life of the economy of survival

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The consequences?

THE SPIRAL OF DEATH!!
The so-called ”Spiral of Dead”

When the physical decay/poverty is no longer ”just” a consequence of the development in the society.

But also becomes itself part of the reason for the (physical) come-down of some villages!

Who wants to live in a “Dump Site”??
White Trash Areas

________________________________________

RESEARCH IS MISSING:

*The extent and nature of the problem:

How many  ???

________________________________________
Villages
People
Buildings

AAU-RESEARCH presently.
>about (extremely) low property valuation
>100 –metre map

*Where?
We already know that the phenomenon is found all over the country, also in the “Rurban” areas close to the larger cities, but especially in “Fringe Denmark / The Phasing out Banana”

Regionally and municipally the statistical coverage is OK (to expose the phenomenon)

Linking village, building and personal-sensitive information is a problem?

*The development:
The development of the building and dwelling volume:

In different kinds of villages.
The housing development:
Housing in farm buildings rendered superfluous
Houses which are decaying
Houses which are transferred to leisure-time purposes
Houses which are renovated
Houses which collapse
Houses which are removed/demolished
Houses which are newly built. Private – non-profit

*The consequences of more/many marginalized fellow citizens:

For rural districts and villages.
The Spiral of Death

For the municipalities.
Increasing social expenses.

For the people who live there.

"The good people in the villages"
Falling house price, fear and concern, irritation
The marginalized.  
Outside network due to lack of money, social conduct, drugs, drinking, ethnicity, age

So today ”all” efforts (and I am sorry to say so) aim at keeping the villages free from people with social housing and other problems. Except for the ”old people” who are to be treated kindly.

What can be done?

Research and evaluation in

”Best practise”

”Worst Practise”

for physical and social ”restoration”
The rural district policy in Denmark nowadays.

5 ministries.

Without co-ordination
Without common understanding of the problem
Without common analyses
Without common evaluations of ”Best Practice-Worst Practice”
Without co-ordination of action areas
Without… go on your self
The municipal level.
The reform of municipal structure with 98 new, larger municipalities. Will the villages and rural districts be better off??? Nobody knows, but…

The closure of small schools, sports facilities, nurseries etc. Will render the villages even less attractive.

More empty houses? Cheaper houses? More marginalized people with problems?
Conclusion:

In this paper I have tried to illustrate how the Mega Structure Development with unrelenting strength creates structural sacrifices in rural districts and villages.

However, in my mind the question of the future development of the rural districts and villages entail colossal future challenges for the business life, the rural district population and the public sector, if
it is to be hoped that they are able to resist the unrelenting pressure which the sociological tendency puts on the rural districts and the villages as such, and especially on rural districts and villages in the remotest areas of the country.

Before we in Denmark start the basic discussion of the question: "What is Denmark to use the villages for in future?, and reach a clarification, it can be difficult to work out such serious visions, strategies, plans and projects for Rural District and Village Denmark.
The following sub-questions can be asked in order to display the complex of the problems.

- Does the Danish society have any interest in or need for keeping all villages and smaller habitations alive, and if so, why?

- Do we need people to live in the villages for the sake of the agriculture?

- Does society have to keep the villages inhabited to secure the value of the loans granted by the Mortgage Credit Institutes

- Should we keep the villages inhabited out of regard for the cultural environments, which are deposited in incredibly many villages?
• Should society keep the fringe areas and villages alive, because it is a task for the welfare state? After all, more than 800,000 people live in such places?

• Should we keep the villages alive in order to service and facilitate tourism and leisure life, and possibly permit that a considerable part of the housing stock will be transformed into weekend cottages without obligation to reside?

• Should we keep villages alive because settling can be attractive, also in the poorest of villages, as prices for houses are so low that almost everybody can join in, knowing full well that it may lead to sanctuaries and village ghettos for people with even very alternative ways of living?