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**Title: Villages in Landscapes - the importance of
appearance.****DRAFTVERSION. Februar 2007****ABSTRACT.**

A piece of the history of Denmark with its roots back to the Neolithic period 6,000 years ago is about to disappear, even if it is still possible for the trained observer to read the structures from the production landscapes of the past in the landscape of the present, and the localization of the villages in the landscape is the same, in principle, as when Denmark stepped out of the Middle Ages 800 years ago. After the major agricultural reforms around year 1800 where the separation of agriculture and village was orchestrated as a principle of development we have grown accustomed to a landscape image with many thousand large and small villages and a developed and live landscape with scattered large and small active farm units. The landscape image with which we are familiar was thus created over the last 200 years. (Mogensen and Møller 2006,b, p.8-9).

Primarily due to the structural rationalization processes of the agricultural establishment throughout the last generation the physical rural structures are squeezed. The changes in the country are highly visible and distinct, and the external physical appearance of many villages and detached farms can at best be characterized as shockingly inferior.

Over the last 30 years the physical environment (buildings, gardens, roads and spaces, etc.) in the Danish villages has undergone drastic changes. Many villages near the large towns are drowned in growth and modern, architectonically maladapted buildings, and other villages especially in the Danish outskirts are hit by decline and physical impoverishment and decay.

By way of introduction and polemically, it can be said that the Danish society has grossly omitted to take care of the largest and most important part of the cultural heritage in the Danish landscape, that is to say the 6-7,000 large and small villages dispersed in the Danish cultural landscape, even though quite a lot of villages are thriving. The local community centre, the school, the grocer and local societies are still alive. All the houses are occupied and all the buildings are presentable and well kept, and you will often find a certain amount of modest newly-built houses. Another type of village is the one with ailing local community centres and larger villages which today face a difficult situation where the development has come to a standstill, and where the physical decay and mental despondency sneaks up on every nook and cranny of the village. Finally, you will find an accumulation of small/smaller villages counted by the thousands with less than 200 inhabitants which are divided in at least two types: The ones that are attractively situated, and the ones that are not. In the latter case there seem to be no development possibilities, whether in the short or long run, which can save these small villages from a pitiful and protracted death struggle. (Møller 2007)

The conference paper is an updated and expanded version of the paper: The physical impoverishment and decay of Danish Villages. Causes and Consequences (Møller, 2005 b and Mogensen and Møller, 2007).

Preface.

During 2003 and 2004 it struck me that quite many villages in Denmark were in the process of physical decay and that as an architect and **urban planner (village planner)** one could not avoid noticing both the insidious and obvious decay in all parts of the country. To me it does, however, look as if “nobody” apparently does anything

about it¹. Maybe because the conduct of the discussion about the future of the villages, the research in their possibilities and weaknesses as well as the interest in doing something effectively about the physical state and development of the villages apparently falls down between more ministerial and research chairs. Neither can you assert that the local authorities as a whole, the architects or planners² or the people of the building trade have shown great interest in the case.

Therefore I think that it is at the last moment that “the alarm is given”. Otherwise the game is up and it will be too late to save many villages as potentially good, future settlement and production places.

During my initial work cultivating the research field “The physically decayed and impoverished villages in Denmark. Situation, causes and consequences” I made a number of survey-like dives into the fringe and rural district Denmark in the period from the autumn 2003 till the winter 2007, which implied that so far I have taken more than 2,500 digital photos of both the good and the bad physical conditions and driven thousands of kilometres on the small Danish local roads in most of Jutland, South and Western Funen, Northwest and South Zealand, Taasinge and Langeland and visited hundreds of villages to get an impression, where the physical decay and the impoverishment of the physical environment were prevailing to a greater or smaller extent.

My village definition is dynamic and fluent, and when I write villages I mean built-up areas from 2-3 farms and a few houses and up to areas with 999 inhabitants. You will find in “Ordbog over det danske sprog” (Dictionary of the Danish language) (Gyldendal, 1931, Mogensen and Møller 2006b, p. 32), a robust and useful definition, where a village is defined as “an accumulation of farms and (or) houses in the country”. Own, approximate calculations show that the total number of villages amount to at

¹ An exception, however, is the large equity fund Realdania which since 2002 has promoted and in part financed a series of important development projects both at property level and in large contexts in the Danish rural districts (www.Realdania.dk).

In later years, very few municipalities have initiated preparing the so-called Cultural Environment Atlases or Municipal Atlases, where conditions are recorded but where it is neither a question of protection nor of duty to act in relation to preserving or improving the physical conditions.

² For many years the professional interest among architects and planners has been mainly absent as opposed to the situation in the 1970s and the early 80s where Dansk Byplanlaboratorium published a series of books on village conditions. Damsgård, O. and Johansen, J. (1998, p. 34-39).

least 6,000. In the municipal and local physical planning the largest villages are often named as a local centre or small local centre and villages with 199 or less inhabitants appear in the official statistics as open country, however the development is dynamic and the number of official urban societies is constantly changing. The latest rankings from Denmark's Statistics Office published in *JyllandsPosten* on 06.02.2007 show that 30 country settlements are entered in the statistics as villages as the population is higher than 199. At the same time a number of villages loose inhabitants and thus they slip out of the statistics of "urban" settlements in the country.³

My observations point out that the decay and the physical poverty exist in all sizes of villages and all over the country, and perhaps also surprisingly at a fairly short distance (7-12 km) from larger provincial towns such as Randers, Horsens, Skanderborg, Tønder, Aalborg, Svendborg, Fåborg etc.

Earlier, it was not till the nakedness in the vegetation of the late autumn, the winter and the early spring together with the pitilessly revealing, clear and frosty sunshine or observations made on a day where the winter fog and the dreary dripping from the leafless trees determined the basic sentiment that the physical state of the villages was displayed mercilessly. Maybe the general impression of a certain grey poverty and the obvious character of destitution of the many neglected buildings was also noticed. Now it has unfortunately become an all-year phenomenon.

The underlying reasons for the physical decay of these villages affected by the development are to be found in a mixture of strong, international, national and regional development traits in the economic cycle, and the resulting town development process which in the later years has favoured the strong growth centres in and around the capital, the triangular area and the Jutland motorway town from Randers to Kolding. In this process Denmark has been distorted and a number of areas away from the major towns can be designated outskirts or hard-to-supply areas, about which can be read in the Government's last two Country Planning Statements from 2003 and 2006, respectively.

³ The population in the open land and in the villages with up to 199 inhabitants are 800,000 persons, equivalent to 15% of the population of Denmark. If we include the number of inhabitants in villages of between 200 and 999 inhabitants, around 1.2 mill Danes, equivalent to 23% of the population of Denmark, live in such areas. (Mogensen and Møller, 2006b, p. 32).

These development trends have strong, local consequences for the cultural environment of buildings in rural districts and villages, and these years we are witnessing a true drama of impressive dimensions, where a proud, confident and in number important agricultural industry go through an intense process of structural adaptation, where the number of independent farms decreases drastically, where many million square metres of agriculture buildings, which have been made superfluous will slowly but surely fall into decay and where the several thousand year old necessary relationship between agriculture and village has broken down. (Møller, J. 2006 c).

Studies (Bille, T. et al. 2004) around the new possibilities given by the Danish planning act for other utilization of these many agricultural buildings depleted of functions do not seem to indicate that the problem can be solved in this way.

In the same process a multitude of service industries in the villages die out, all of them leaving empty and with time run-down workshop buildings and grain and food stuff companies. The closing of up to 1600 co-operative dairies was terminated many years ago, just as perhaps up to 8-9,000 village shops⁴ have been forced up the wall and now stand as silent witnesses of better times.

Systematized observations from field studies:

1. The front gardens

The first thing you inevitably notice in a village is the front gardens⁵ which often fall into disrepair and are used as a parking place and/or a rubbish dump, which is filled with garden furniture from last year together with the demolished bicycles, the children's plastic toys, the cars without number plates and on flat tyres as well as building materials that never came to use after all, and where the visions for the future, for which the materials should have been used, were never realized.

⁴ In the working paper "Dagligvareforsyningen i landsbyer" ("Supplies of convenience goods in villages") (1981) the number of convenience stores in villages in 1969 are 10,500, of which 6,000 are estimated to be grocers and co-operative stores.

⁵ In the 50s and 60s the front gardens were always well-kept, the hedges were trimmed before Midsummer Day, and everybody took pride in the front gardens being ok. The front garden thus served to contribute to the self-respect and reputation of the household and was a visiting card showing the family's consciousness about itself, its prosperity, energy, order and beauty (Bavnshøj, 2004). The spread of the passenger car in the country through the 60s was, as we remember it, the starting signal of the come-down of the front gardens, because the new vehicles demanded garages, carports and drives with or without surfaces. And they got it – without having a petty eye to the ornamental bushes, roses and perennials of the front garden.

2. The old houses

I also stated for myself that many old⁶ houses were in physical decay.

Some of them are no longer occupied by people, and some of them are offered for sale⁷, but seem to be difficult to sell, however, the majority of the houses is still occupied, but by whom the research does not know. It may be elderly people, who can no longer manage the maintenance, or it may be youngish people who do not seem to know how to do it. The occupiers may also be single parents with job or on the social, or it may be the elderly bachelor who never left home or the divorced, middle-aged man who has given up becoming one of the winners in the lottery of life as well as people with as weak an income that neither building societies nor banks will lend money to them for building maintenance.

The point is that the physical decay and impoverishment is rapidly advancing, but neither I nor anybody else knows something scientifically supported and covering about why. Or asked in another way:

- a) Who owns and lives in the physically decayed houses?
- b) Why do they let the decay take place?
- c) And what does it take to change the state of things and make it different and better?

3. Architectural style 2007

Another aspect of the physical decay – or maybe rather impoverishment – is in my opinion the fozzled and unsuccessful building projects which are prevalent in the villages, because it is a fact that there are activities in the villages. Some people are very active, while others do not lift a finger.

You may say that it is of course always better that people maintain and rebuild and extend their houses than the buildings fall into disrepair. And still.

Many houses are irreparably damaged by wrong material handling, and much money is spent on works which have to be redone after a few years and which raise the price

⁶ The concept "old houses" is not defined keenly, but covers in my consciousness houses built before 1975, for which reason also the problem about the detached houses from the 60s and ahead, which fills up quite a lot in the housing supply of the villages, can be treated in this note.

⁷ The most traumatic you can see I suppose is the many cases where the curtains in the empty windows quite clearly show that the last resident was an elderly person, who is now lying in the cemetery or has moved into an old people's home.

and depreciate the house so that it is more difficult to sell which is also confirmed through the recently published investigation of settlement in the fringe areas (Ærø et al., 2005/Stensgaard, 2005), where some newcomers shun the recently, tastelessly renovated village houses.

In the country the culture of the "do-it-yourself and the mutual friendly turns" flourish to an abundant extent, maybe of economic necessity⁸ or just of a wish to try⁹, and they dauntlessly start one rebuilding and extension project after the other without having the slightest idea of what they are up against, neither regarding the building technical¹⁰, the material handling, the plan and building act legal, the functional nor the architectonic/aesthetic aspects in a given building project. The single building project often fails, but what is much worse! – also out of step with the context and the surroundings of which the building is a part¹¹, and which, I suppose, signals some kind of indifference or ignorance to the surroundings of the house.

When as (newly hatched) house owner you are facing the task of maintaining or extending old property and have no knowledge and insight in construction, practical garden art and architecture, it is quite easy and also understandable that you familiarize yourself with it in the enormous supply of free building market catalogues which every week drops through the letter slit, and when the lifestyle mantra of the time is that "I will make a difference", then you do not necessarily fit your new or rebuilt house in a maybe more humble, contextual connection in relation to the surrounding buildings and street room.

⁸ Tanvig talks about a kind of survival economy in the fringe areas of the country. Lecture at DGI, Vingsted 25.04.2005.

⁹ The many unqualified housing programmes in the TV channels of the country and the so-called customer advising of the building markets may give people the impression that anybody can build.

¹⁰ The hurricane 08.01.2005 showed many examples of "homemade" rebuildings and extensions which could not resist the ravage of the hurricane. Most of the relatively new and the new buildings constructed by professional workmen after project material from skilled architects and engineers came out without damages.

¹¹ The low interest during construction has implied that it is today cheaper to finance a newly bought owner-occupied residence than to lease a newly constructed residence (Beboerbladet, February 2005), and "a good deal" of people have chosen to move from the common housing sector to the country to sustain themselves as owners of real property, maybe without sufficient financial brawn and without knowledge about what it requires of money, time and work to maintain both house and (front) garden in a decent way.

So the extreme focus of the time on the residence as lifestyle project and the self-assertion of the house owners via the residence, the enormous supply of bad and cheap building materials related to too few or too much (borrowed money) further implies a layer of physical impoverishment in the Danish villages, where the chamber of horrors of the building market catalogues in wooden fences, plastic windows, “look-alike” roof covering products as well as the unskilled dealings of the owners and the “do-it-yourself makers” with facing paint, water scouring and thin plaster as well as front garden destroying crushed granite and stone surfaces are exhibited to the general public, and the number of sterling, physical quality environments in the villages is reduced very rapidly.

In connection with the maintenance of the existing house construction mass you may say that both too little and too much money gives problems – each in their own way.

The new residences

On the rebuilding side within the residential housing in the villages we have, for the last 10 years, seen a lot of Swedish wooden houses or American inspired log houses and log cabins which I suppose nobody will assert fit beautifully and are a natural prolongation of Danish building tradition in the villages. At the same time a lot of package-deal houses are constructed with integrated car shelter, kitchen bays and pagoda curves in the overhang as beloved, architectonical means. It is all indicative of a widespread lack among the builders of understanding of and insight into regional and local construction traditions.

It means that also the residential rebuilding often implies an impoverishment of the construction culture and the physical environment in villages and rural districts as such.

4. The superfluous farm buildings.

The superfluous farm buildings *in the villages*¹² is a complex problem, and the challenges certainly are not the same for the different categories of buildings and different categories of villages¹³.

¹² Minister for the Environment Conny Hedegaard (Hedegaard, 2005) said in her contribution to the nature conference at Christiansborg 03.03.2005 that the countryside – *the open country* – has to be cleared by inventing one or more kinds of demolition support. That is indeed ok, but our research

In spite of the agrarian reforms and the enclosure with scattering of a number of farms at the end of the 18th century and 50 years ahead there are still extremely many villages which today, 150-200 years after the reforms, in their physical structure and everyday life are characterized by active, professional farms with the environmental influences that active farms liberate to the surroundings with smell, heavy traffic, noise and ordinary dynamic disorder¹⁴ around by buildings¹⁵.

Besides the active farms we find the more hobby-marked agricultural activities which only to a small extent influence the village with the same factors as the professional farms.

Quite many farm buildings are no longer in active use¹⁶ after scattering of the farm or after structural rationalisations, and some of them have been taken out of active operation for several years, but stand like when they were left, and still others are being transformed from farm buildings to something else within or outside the § 35 universe of the Planning Act (the rules about rural zone permissions), and finally we then find the farm buildings which for a number of years have been used for other purposes.

shows that there are quite many *and maybe more superfluous farm buildings in the villages than outside*. The challenge and the possible future interventions must necessarily be widely different for superfluous farm buildings in the open country and in the villages, or you may say that in a planning and development context it is a question of two *fully* different challenges.

¹³ The Danish villages are very different in their structure and development plan. In order to mention some different types I can mention the fort village, the winding road village, the star enclosed village and the block enclosed village, and the point is that the planning task and the consequences of keeping or demolishing superfluous farm buildings are widely different from village type to village type.

¹⁴ In co-operation with the Swedish environmental organisation "Håll Sverige Rent" ("Keep Sweden clean") the Danish organisation "Dansk Landbrug" ("Danish Farming") will launch a campaign during spring of 2007, with the purpose to "tidy up the farmers ugly old scrapheaps to the delight of neighbours, as well as passers by and people walking about in the countryside" Randers Amtsavis 15.02.2007

¹⁵ These years we unfortunately witness that quite many farmers have totally lost the respect for the close surroundings around their property. I here think of the incomprehensive mess and the considerable untidiness because of the storing and ensilage of crops in pits near the farm, wrapped in plastic, which lie about, and with cut-up tractor tracks filled with ensilage sap and stinking surface water which puts one in mind of the Western Front in Flanders 1917. It is not unusual either that such provisional storages are in the field which does not make the sight of such areas better.

¹⁶ Birkkjær et al. (2006) estimate that there are about 100 – 120 million m² agricultural buildings. Of these about 40 mill. are used for the current production. This means that there are between 60 and 80 mill. m² which are unused in relation to the primary agricultural production. 40 to 50 mill. m² are worthy of preservation, which means that between 25 and 30 m² over a number of years should be cleared away at an estimated demolition and removal price of about 7.5 billion DKK

As to the condition description it is a fact that the superfluous farm buildings are each in different positions from active farming to quite other uses with a lot of intermediate forms or on the way to demolition.

For example:

Active farm which is on its last legs

Active hobby farm which uses the existing mass of buildings

Recently closed farms where the buildings are still standing empty and untouched from the farming

Farm buildings which have been transformed into partial other uses

Farm buildings which have been transformed into other uses

Farm buildings which are being further transformed to a "third" use

Etc. etc. etc.

All the above-mentioned positions may then be further assessed on the basis of a building condition assessment in relation to the culture-environmental importance of the buildings – for example in four categories as we know it from the SAVE method used in up to 80 "district atlases" and the newer culture-environment atlases, and finally the constructional condition of the buildings should also be included in the same way as we know it from the so-called condition reports which are drawn up in connection with the trade with private residential buildings.

In relation to a planning situation for the future of a village thorough and detailed examinations should as a starting point be made, and without a dialogue with the owner about his future visions you cannot make serious planning material, cf. moreover (Nellemann et al., 2004).

The challenges are different

It is interesting and obvious that the challenge of the superfluous farm buildings in the villages is strongly characterized by the local topography and the chosen way of parcelling out in the single village from around year 1800, which the below examples can show.

When the farmhouse of a farm built around a quadrangle is situated up to the street with a garden of 10- 25 metres between farmhouse and street like at Nørreskovvej in Støvring, and with the more or less superfluous farm buildings behind the farmhouse and facing the fields to the North, then the removal of the superfluous farm buildings will at the most imply less essential changes in the physical environment.

The situation is quite different, when the production buildings of a farm built round a quadrangle are placed close to the village road like at Nedrevej in Albæk. Here the consequences of a removal of the superfluous farm buildings will be nearly disastrous and extremely perceptible to the physical cultural environment in the village.

The consequences of a not especially unrealistic future scenario in such a village will be that in the mentioned locality it will be necessary to remove up to one hundred metres of street room creating and culture-environmentally important buildings from the village.

I have briefly tried to render probable that the treatment of the superfluous agricultural buildings in the villages of agriculture is a most complex task which demands a whole-hearted district planning effort, supported by a good portion of economic support means. The situation today with buildings under rapid demolition and casual building removals¹⁷ are at any rate not satisfactory.

The smallholdings¹⁸

The superfluous farm buildings from the various epochs¹⁹ of the smallholdings rarely make out a problem of a noticeable extent in relation to the physical environment in the villages cf. the observations lying behind Table 1 above. They are as a main rule traded and maintained in a good way, probably because the size of land and building masses makes it manageable financially and physically to use and maintain them, and with that they become attractive to people who realize the dream of the life in the country with a small plot and a couple of horses, or where the outbuildings can be

¹⁷ The use of the development plan instrument in such connections in the villages may solve the questions of the future use of the sites from the demolished farms. The question is whether it is also usable around the farms in the open country.

¹⁸ Among the various forms of real estate in the rural districts the price for just that kind of small properties has increased by up to 50 % over the last 2-4 years.

¹⁹ Most of the smallholdings are located outside the villages in rather large or small parcelling outs, but for all that there is a good deal of buildings from earlier, active smallholdings in the villages.

used for workshop or garage. As a main rule, this demands people with a job and a reasonable private economy.

The middle-sized farms

Today we experience the greatest problems in a physical impoverishment connection in the villages with superfluous production buildings from the farms of what was earlier rather large farms of between 18 to 50 hectares. It is the use, the maintenance or the removal of these, as regards volume, considerable buildings which is today the greatest problem in relation to the superfluous production buildings of the agriculture.

Within the last couple of years it seems as if the number of superfluous farm buildings, which are demolished, is in rapid growth, and it is not strange that the owners see to it that they are removed, because in so doing they save their expenses for maintenance and insurance.

The problem is, however, that it looks as if this violent demolition need takes place without the least, preceding attitude to the culture-historical value²⁰ of the buildings or their function in the street and space structure in a village, and it does not look either as if anybody has thought of how, on a short or long view, to use or treat these newly created, large, open spaces, which appear as ugly scars in the morphology of the village²¹. To most of the owners of such an abolished, partly demolished farm it will nearly always be financially impossible to build something that can come up to the surviving, often large and powerful, but often badly kept farmhouses, which were built 80-100 years ago.

The use of the development plan instrument in the fight to get hold of the farm building problematic often turns out to be rather difficult, as the physical dimensions of the old farms and farm sites often exceed the needs of residences and industrial buildings, which the present and the future make topical, or which are made possible by § 35- 38 of the Planning Act and the Environmental Act, which all things considered implies

²⁰ The new Act on Strategic Environmental Assessment of plans and programmes (Act No. 316 of 05.05.2004), which contains explicit provisions about the urban and rural cultural heritage, will not come into play, when the farm demolition is not planned in a plan approved by the local authorities. The Museum Act and the Act on Preservation of Ancient Buildings and Preservation of Buildings and Urban Environments do not so much as approach the problem either.

²¹ The planning basis of the local authorities often does not contain provisions about such matters, and then we are in many cases in the ground of the rural zone administration, where it may be difficult to maintain architectonic and building conditions in connection with refusal or permission around future use.

that a reasonable hole filling strategy will not be realisable in very many villages (Møller, 2002).

The liberalisation of the rural zone rules in 2002 with easier access to establishing extra residences and workshops and farm shops does not in any noticeable way seem to be able to solve only a fraction of the megalomaniac problem, and it looks to me as if nobody knows what to do with these superfluous farm buildings.

There are at the moment no proper support possibilities for preservation nor for demolition²², and the physical planning and the building preservation legislation and effort do not reach this problem at all. It therefore still remains to be discussed what the society wishes to do with such buildings and then subsequently legislate so that the problem can be solved.

The problem is, as indicated earlier, extremely complex, because exactly this type of superfluous farm buildings are not old and valuable enough to be preserved, and they are not used for sensible purposes either through a new application. There are simply too many superfluous square metres in the country to find use for them. However, they still make out a considerable part of both the village structural and building cultural heritage in our villages and in the open country.

I wish that a revision of the Planning act in the spring of 2008 would contain clear regulations on the local authorities' obligation for registration and subsequent village and open country planning, which take a position as to which specific farms *have to be* preserved, which *can* be preserved and which, all things considered, *should be demolished* as quickly as possible, and that at the same time there was a possibility of granting preservation support and demolition support, respectively, for this purpose²³.

A tall order, yes, but surely not taller than it was, when the preparation of redevelopment and urban renewal plans was started and subsequently the housing mass in the

²² A so-called demolition deduction does, however, exist in the taxation rules, and the agricultural societies and more (Møller, 2002, Dansk Familielandbrug, 2002) have spoken out for a modification of the deposit duty on building refuse from such demolished buildings (Landbrugsavisen, 2005). The Rural District Policy 2006 of the government contains a field of effort with support means of totally 16 million DKK for changed use of superfluous farm buildings. At best this money will go to somewhere between 50 and 100 concrete projects, estimated on the basis of knowledge of the prices of the rebuilding of such farms. In relation to the extent of the problem it is almost like making fun of people in the rural districts.

²³ The structure and task reforms in 2005-07 with greater responsibility to the local authorities as regards the planning and development in the open country and the rural districts might definitely be the external cause to revitalize the efforts of the local authorities in the village field.

worn and obsolete areas in the capital and the large provincial towns was demolished, rebuilt and renewed.

It will cost money, estimated at about 7.7 b. DKK (Birkkjær et al. 2006) but over time the result will be more beautiful villages and a more well-trimmed, open country without the many, strongly disfiguring, superfluous and more or less strongly decayed, superfluous farms, which characterize the Danish rural areas, especially when we get a little away from the largish towns, where financially strong urban farmers still have not taken over and probably never will.

5. The superfluous farmhouses

The superfluous residences of the agriculture also make out a problem in the decay and impoverishment discussion. Kræn Ole Birkkjær (Ministry of the Environment, National Forest and Nature Agency, 2003) points out that there are 120,000 residences attached to the agriculture. Of these it is expected that only half will be necessary for agriculturally related settlement in 10 years. 30,000 houses will pass to other owners, and 30000 ought to be removed, but nobody today knows which. A special phenomenon or problem is that the houses belonging to the disused farms are often used as rented accommodation for employees, single young men working on the large farms. Caring for and maintenance of buildings and front gardens are not what these young, single men spend most of their time on, and in between you see that the tractor is parked in the front garden overnight. Anyone can imagine what this means for the appearance of a village.

A special chapter in the physical environment of the villages is the new production buildings of the agriculture, but as the building of new production buildings and organic fertilizer tanks gradually – luckily (Møller, 2002) – presumably as a main rule goes on in the open country, it will not be treated further here.

6. The physically run-down manors

A wide range of the 800 – 860 manors spread around the Danish cultural landscape are now more or less deserted. (Erichsen, J and Venborg Petersen, M. 2006 p. 276-277) describe the problem for many of the manors in the following way: “In the

country the large courtyards lie deserted, and in the main building which used to buzz with activity often only one small family lives. A dog or two are the only animals at the farm – unless the estate produces pigs. The situation has resulted in a very direct problem: How are the large and demanding building stock, the many small houses and the single elements to be maintained? This does not only go for the main building but to the same extent at least for the many and much larger home farms, often roofing several thousand m². Most of these old buildings, many of which are timber framed, and of dimensions which do not give access to today's large machines, are impractical and on the whole useless in modern farming”.

7. The Village Main Streets.

In the same way as the handling of the farm buildings rendered superfluous account for a considerable, but probably not very acknowledged *urban planning problem* in a number of villages, it is becoming increasingly urgent to analyse and discuss what is to be done with the often extremely run down village main streets which previously oozed of life

In shortness, the present situation is that the village main street no longer accommodates live and active common functions such as the co-op, grocer, baker, hosier, Tatol (drugstore of former days), community centre and/or the non-conformist chapel. Today, a typical main street in a village would therefore be characterized by shops etc. depleted of function and their fronts will be rebuilt with fairly little architectonic and aesthetical consideration²⁴, which is unfortunate when you consider that the main street is the “public image” of a village, and gives the first impression of the village you have arrived at, (Møller og Mogensen, 2007)and at the same time we find in a number of cases the oldest houses of the village in the same main street. These houses were from the start constructed with cheap materials, and are today of a size which is not up-to-date, and in many cases they therefore house the part of the inhabitants of a village with the smallest income which may result in a considerable physical decay and a bad maintenance standard in the main street.

²⁴ In a number of cases it will be a question of a building stock with a considerable potential in terms of cultural environment with a great narrative value and with the potential for fitting out exiting and contemporary houses.

8. Too often the local authorities fail to live up to their duties in the public space.

Unfortunately, it is also a fact that the local authorities have apparently given up in many places²⁵ and everywhere we witness badly maintained, local authority infrastructures with holes in the road surface, smashed and run-down pavements, razed bus stops and leaning road and town signs so that we may say that the last kick in the groin of the defenceless village comes from the authority which as one of its principal tasks has to see to it that the conditions in the public space is in an exemplary order.

The local authority lack of means, interest or professional insight may contribute to draw the village further down into the negative spiral of growth which quite many villages are already in today, and where they are no longer attractive as potential localities for settlement of good, well-established citizens with reasonable incomes and a reasonably secure place in the labour market, and still more villages will in future experience the same negative development, when a village is hit by the scourge of the negative spiral of growth.

All the above forms of appearance are in my opinion expressions of a violent impoverishment of the physical environment of the village.

9. Summing up

It is therefore clear that because of the comprehensive, broadly-based and many-faceted physical decay and the impoverishment ranging from the abandoned front garden, the unsuccessful building renovation and the unsuccessful choice of materials over the extension which is out of proportions, and development after the package-deal level concepts of Danish or foreign origin, together with the many distressed or demolished farm buildings that appear as open wounds in the village, the picture of the Danish village as such in the autumn and winter 2006/07 is greatly despondent.

Clarification of concept²⁶

When I talk about physical decay and impoverishment the definitions of the concepts are the following:

²⁵ Cf. *Ærø. Th.* (2005. p.16). Newcomers were often shocked at the negative atmosphere, which the local authorities/the state do very little to turn.

²⁶ Originally developed in connection with my presentation in Videncenter for det åbne lands planlægning, ("Knowledge center for the planning of the open land") Fuglsø. May 2005 titled "Forarmelsen af det fysiske miljø i landsbyerne". Møller 2005 ("The Impoverishment of the Physical Environment in the Villages") Møller 2005 (www. Countryside.dk) and Møller and Mogensen (2007)

It is *physical decay* when the buildings to some degree fall apart.

It could be proper ruins, and it could be buildings with large or small holes in the roof and bays, as well as lack of window panes in doors and windows, and overgrown gardens.

It is *physical impoverishment* when:

- * Buildings are not maintained in general.
- * Buildings are maintained or rebuilt in the wrong way using bad materials and lousy workmanship, including the most awkward results of "DIY" and the "Silvanisation".²⁷
- *New buildings, refittings and house extensions are out of the local context in terms of architecture, materials and scale.
- *When front gardens and driveways are filled with junk and old cars with or without number plates.
- *When the equipment of the public space is of an outrageously bad quality and maintenance standard.
- *When public roads, verges and kerbsides as well as squares are not maintained.

At some points it will always be a question of gradual transitions between decay and impoverishment, and you can only fully document the extent of the problems through a thorough, actual registration of the buildings.

Popularly speaking, it is a fact that the only buildings that are *always* well-maintained in the villages are the churches and the community centres, only in each their own characteristic way. The churches and the cemeteries, backed by money and expertise,

²⁷ A derogatory slang term among architects for the somewhat too "bad" and tasteless building materials, which people buy in the large "do-it-yourself" centres.

are always beautiful to look at, whereas the community centres “always” lack money and are managed and operated by people without fashionable notions about aesthetics and architecture, and lack of time for maintenance, which, from an aesthetic point of view, almost always result in degrading plastic windows with or without false or much too wide window bars which often influence the main street of the village.

The mass of buildings in a typical (fringe area) village is today of course a product of a large number of so-called ”mega trends” in **the economic and** social development. The built-up environment therefore today consists of a mixture of widely differing types of buildings which have been systematized below:

Buildings which are typically both physically decayed an/or depleted of function in Danish villages in 2007.

- Production buildings of the agricultural industry and the agricultural houses.
- Other production buildings, such as grain and foodstuff companies, industrial buildings and craftsmen’s workshops.
- Houses

The houses of the community:

- Community centres
- Non-conformist chapels
- Cold stores²⁸
- Sports clubs and scouts houses (club houses)
- Other tenement houses
- (Churches)²⁹
- Post offices
- Town Halls³⁰

²⁸ In the years 1946 – 1953 a cold store was built in ”every single village” in Denmark on a joint basis. The epoch of the cold stores started to die out already in the 1970s, when all farm households had their own chest freezers, and today only the physical, ruined shell is left, scarring quite a lot of the Danish villages, and in some cases also the open land, where several villages joined up in building a common cold store midway between the small communities involved. Apparently, nobody has felt an obligation to remove the physical heirlooms from a dead community.

²⁹ At the moment there is a debate in Denmark about closing down churches and using the buildings for other common purposes. One of the reasons for this is that a large number of parishes no longer have enough inhabitants and church goes to necessarily sustain all the church buildings.

- Grocer's shops and co-ops (See also note4)
- Inns
- Grill bars
- Filling stations
- Transformer stations

The point is that the decay and the physical impoverishment exist among all categories of buildings, and there are cynical property gamblers who have literally made the physical decay of the houses a deciding condition for the collection of an unsavoury living as hirer out of cheap and many times strongly decayed village houses.

There have always been people in Village Denmark who have not been able to or who have not wished to maintain their residence or farm buildings because of age, poverty, illness, incompetence or other causes, but seen over a thirty-year period – the last generation³¹ - the number of decaying buildings has increased quite strongly, and when 20% of the buildings in a village are in decay, I suppose you can say that the village *as such* is in decay.

The prevailing miserable conditions of many buildings and plants in the country can, however, easily be further aggravated, and the quality-orientated development does not emerge automatically. It takes political commitment to tidy up in the country side³², and it takes political commitment to improve the traffic related and social infrastructure. Important and visible improvements of the local building culture may (perhaps) be used as a lever for a positive development of the village communities, however, this demands money, time, planning, prioritizing and co-operation on such projects, as it can be said that these years the building cultural environments of the Danish villages are exposed to a colossal pressure, and the challenges are found in the shadow of the structural reforms, the globalisation and the “Silvanisation”.

³⁰ As a result of the recently completed municipal reform in Denmark there is a considerable number of town halls which have been rendered superfluous, and which have not yet been sold or transformed to other purposes.

³¹ Maybe it is in reality the last ten years that the decay has accelerated.

³² The appreciation that the Danish society is to make decisions about shutting down a series of small and minor villages is steadily growing, after being introduced in the debate only at the start of 2006 by Møller. (Møller 2006a, Møller 2006b, etc.)

Thus we now witness that the building culture and the building cultural environments of the villages are being overrun or strongly challenged by the depletion of functions of the villages by the structural reforms, by poverty, cynical speculations, eager but ignorant DIY-builders, who apparently suffer from some kind of “fear” for employing competent, professional advisors in their building projects, a terrifyingly large offer of building materials, a variety of cheap television programs, nouveau riche equity riders and the absence of municipal interest, will and ability in and around the public space as well as the absence of a whole-hearted and resourceful planning effort.

In the same process the villagers have apparently “lost” their points of reference in relation to what is good “building custom” and tradition, a locally embedded common perception is eroded from under the feet of the country people, leaving deep marks in the physical expression of the villages. The villages as such are “defenceless” against these factors and the problem of the building culture in a long line of villages is in all its moving simplicity, the way I see it, that we are embarking on a restructuring process from the physical structures of the past to the creation of the physical structures of the future *without being prepared.*

In many ways the situation in the country side can be compared to the situation in the towns before the 1980s and 90s big urban renewal effort. At that time people from the old bridge quarters moved out into the suburbs. The buildings in the bridge quarters were run down and without adequate technical and hygienic facilities. The flats were small and badly organized. The yards and streets were badly kept, and large areas were more or less unsuited for human habitation. Through a massive effort during 15-20 years these conditions were radically changed, so that today the central quarters of the town are among the most sought after living areas at all. The very large number of more or less useless buildings is in the way and scar in exactly the same way as many production buildings, side and back buildings were in the way and ruined the living qualities in the bridge quarters of the towns before the big urban renewal effort.

Is the appearance of the villages an important element in the development of the rural districts?

The aesthetic impacts

One important aspect is the negative, aesthetic impacts of the physical decay. A country or a municipal government which does not treat all its villages with respect, and which also does not encourage its citizens to take an interest in the building culture in all its aspects has let an essential element of development slip from its grasp, as it may be a question of a long and perhaps impossible re-education process, where politicians, municipal employees, advisors of every sort, craftsmen as well as the people living in the villages are to be furnished with competence and insight in why and how building culture is handled. We cannot in decency have areas and villages which look like areas devastated by a civil war.

The villages and the social element

In the debate about the physically dilapidated villages a number of questions are raised. For one thing there is a political and moral aspect which is rarely debated. The signals which are sent out from the extinct main streets of the dilapidated villages are hopelessness and poverty, physically as well as socially. You could ask if this is good enough in the third richest country in the world, and in my mind the answer is no. You can also rightly ask if we through our lack of effort in 30 years are creating a "Sub-Denmark", which can be compared with the so-called "White Trash"³³ – and "Redneck areas" in USA or the crisis-stricken areas in the eastern provinces in the former East Germany (Bølsche. 2006, Byscher, W. 2006) or in Russia, where many villages are populated by old, single women and summer cottage visitors. The resident men have drunk themselves to death and the young people move to the towns. (Dalgård, P. 2006) or are we as Hansen (Hansen 2006) asks: "developing factory farming areas reeking of slurry, and where only large farmers and people from the social groups 4 and 5 live".

One could ask a rhetorical question: "Who wishes to live in a dump site" (Møller 2005a) or as Abild. (C.Abild.2007) expressed it on Danish Radio Program 1 on 14.02.2007. "Who wants to live in the middle of a heap of ruins?" implying that physically dilapidated villages will put off most people, and will only attract people who consciously look for villages and houses in disrepair, of who can afford nothing else. A village can in a very short time get into the unfortunate development process

³³ See References at the end of the paper concerning a clarification of these two concepts

which I have previously called the spiral of death (Møller. 2005a, 2005b). By this I mean a process, where the physical decay and the spiritual poverty are no longer “just” a consequence of the development in the society, but also itself becomes part of the reason for some villages’ (physical) down-fall, which means that a village receives a negative reputation, which causes house prices to fall, which again over time results in even more inhabitants with low incomes and/or deviant social behaviour.

In summary

You could say that a dilapidated physical environment in a village seems deterring, or at best only slightly attractive on potential newcomers. This is presumably valid both in relation to year-round inhabitants and to people looking for a “second home” in the Danish rural districts.

There is, however, hope yet!

Among the many badly kept buildings in the countryside many possess great architectural qualities which deserve to be preserved. Also, many buildings and villages possess so much cultural historical and architectural value that with a changed approach and a renewed professional basis they could again provide the framework for a concerned social and common life. (Mogensen and Møller. 2007)

You could use as a starting point the cultural historical quality of the place. Hence, if you live in a gamekeeper’s lodge, belonging to the environment of a manor such as Nedergård in Nordlangeland, or in a house of an unskilled labourer at a former entrepot, such as Doverodde in Thy, not to mention if the village you live in is part of an intact architectural environment with well-proportioned and unspoilt houses grouped beautifully around “landsbyforten” (*The Village green, The Enclosure, There is no good designation for it in English*) along the village street as in Reersø in western Zealand the distance to the market town or a larger town with a centre is then probably of less importance, and many people would presumably be ready to accept a series of disadvantages, as the benefits obtained are of such a high quality that they would be worth the price. (See also Ærø et al. 2005).

As places with cultural historical qualities, furthermore, often possess amenity values relating to the landscape which not only bring the nature closer to the everyday life

but also allow physical expression, which the town cannot to the same extent offer, such as hunting, fishing, sailing and horseback riding, not to mention mental and sensuous stimulation such as tranquillity, pure and fresh air, bird singing and the changes of the seasons, it may even become attractive to live in the country. When to this can be added that the house prices in these areas are much more amenable than at Østerbro in Copenhagen or Frederiksberg in Århus – then it may even be attractive to live in the country.

What can we do – and what is being done?

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* 6000 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?

- Should we keep all the villages alive because we have the possibility of a good life with children, animals and natural splendour?

It could also be beneficial to start the specific planning and development discussions in the Danish regions and regional municipalities with a discussion of the points above.

The Danish planning system which is to handle the villages

Briefly, the Danish planning system around rural districts and villages is structured as follows:

- A) The Region is to work out a Regional Development Plan which is to contain strategies for the development of rural districts (Region Central Jutland 2007). This could be supported by the Regional Growth Forum prioritizing of financial means for this purpose
- B) The planning duty in the open land, which also includes the villages, lies with the municipal governments
- C) Adjacent to and interacting with regions and municipal governments there are substantial, however far from adequate means in The Danish Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries (2006), which result in a rural districts policy 2007 – 2013 in which about 110 mill. DKK/year in 2007 and 2008 have been set aside for Local Action Groups, which are to work out strategies for the rural districts in at least two adjoining regional municipalities, which we will be witnessing now with the co-operation between the North and South Djurs municipalities. The strategies are to be approved in The Danish Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries, after which the specific project funding is given by the board of the Local Action Group (LAG). The problem is that the means for the embellishment of the villages seem rather insignificant in relation to the task which is to be undertaken.³⁴ As a supplement to the rural district funds there is a minor pool in the Ministry of the Interior for small projects in the ru-

³⁴ Proposal for the Rural District Act (2006) §2. 6.b. Renewal and development of villages

ral districts, and in the Ministry of Social Affairs there is a modest town renewal pool, also to be applied by municipalities for village projects.

The point is that there is no co-ordination of the resources from the various ministries, and that the structure of the very complex new co-operative and planning system with Regions, Growth Fora, Leader+ and action groups, as well as the ordinary current municipal planning with strategies and revision of town plans every four years will not necessarily run smoothly. At the same time the municipal governments are to lift the planning tasks in the open land, and thus I may fear that the minor villages once again will be “forgotten”.

Planning of village futures at municipal and local level

If a municipal government is interested in (re-)creating more beautiful villages by working with the building culture, planning at different levels is necessary, and there is no doubt that all good village planning starts with a screening of all the villages in the municipal district in order to get a survey of the actual state. Then it is up to the politicians at the strategic level in the municipal planning process to announce clearly which specific villages can expect to receive municipal support for the rebuilding of the physical environment, and when. (Hansen. et al. 2007)

The next step in the process is then a detailed planning for each single village in a binding, mutual co-operation with the citizens, based on dialogue.

Firstly, the battle is against the "indifference" and the wide-spread “doing-nothing attitude” at the personal as well as municipal levels. Over time, the process is to (re)build and maintain the residents’ and the municipality’s pride and involvement in the continuous development of the village. Experience³⁵ shows that a combination of “soft” and “hard” cultural heritage elements are pedagogically convincing, and if you, as a starting point, use “the importance of the place” the good story and the exciting experiences, it is possible to involve the villagers.

³⁵ See Hedegård and Møller 2006

At the physical level the planning effort in the broad spectrum is about building credibility and mutual respect between the local authorities and the citizen, through the planning process and small, perhaps symbolic acts.³⁶ One could even say that a social capital is accumulated (Putnam, R. 2000, Svendsen, G.H. 2001) as a precondition for working with the more solid physical matters such as houses, streets places and equipment in the public space, which certainly need a “firm, loving and knowing hand”.

Over time the purpose is to recreate the beautiful, authentic and well-kept villages, cleaned of plastic window frames and other aesthetically unsatisfactory elements and with a good mixture of old and new.

Specific focus areas for the rehabilitation of the physical environment in the villages

The local plan

The rehabilitation of the physical expression of a village is a lengthy process over time and the point is that house owners work on their houses continuously. Small and large remedial actions are carried out on the building stock regardless of whether you can apply for subsidies from pools and funds, and the overall impression is formed by the sum of hundreds of large, small and perhaps even insignificant remedial actions on the building stock.

The most potent tool in the battle for a more beautiful village environment is the local plan, which sets the legally binding rules for the outer appearance of buildings, the application of buildings, protection of free areas, hedges, etc.³⁷.

When, at the same time, you know that a couple of incorrectly rehabilitated houses will blemish a village for more than a generation, it must be logical that the rehabilitation process has to be conducted according to clear guidelines, ensuring a continuity in the basis of planning and a uniform construction project processing over time, and already Groth and Mølgård (1989. p. 316 - 318) wrote that the daily, current con-

³⁶ An example is that the technical administration in the municipality removes graffiti from road signs or realign slanting road signs.

³⁷ Act on planning §15. stk 2. nr. 7,9,10 and 14

struction project processing is a cornerstone in the creation of the physical environment at the local level

In order to ensure that this ongoing change of the building stock of a village supports the aim of creating a beautiful and authentic village in time, it is also extremely important that the plan is carried out in co-operation with the citizens who from the outset should preferably be positive, as the investments of the citizens form the all-important basis for the rehabilitation of the physical environment.

Guidelines on paper

Beside the district plan and as a supplement to this it would be obvious to work with guidelines *on good building code in the local area*, which means that guidelines should be devised which are pedagogically structured, easy to use and with a lot of photos to substantiate the text.

Such guidelines should be part of every real estate deal, and should therefore be handed out to all potential and new owners of real estate in the villages. It would be obvious if the estate agents selling real estate in these places were to hand over such guidelines³⁸. You would thus hope that house owners who undertake remedial measures which do not demand planning permission, will not already from the outset commit an offence on their estate.

The local authorities should finance³⁹ the preparation and distribution of such guidelines, which should also be distributed to the professional advisors in the building sector, and last but not least such guidelines should of course be handed over to all master craftsmen.⁴⁰

Guidelines on the internet

³⁸ It could then be hoped that real estate agents will also read the guidelines on construction work on old houses themselves, so that they know what they are dealing with.

³⁹ I would imagine that mortgage credit institutions, banks and funds would be prime candidates for fundraising in connection with initiatives like these.

⁴⁰ See The References. Odense Tekniske skole.

Obviously, such local guidelines should be available on the internet for all to download. This is furthermore becoming increasingly important since the building sector in Denmark is becoming more and more electronic, and all mobile workmen's huts are hooked on to internet 24 hours a day.

Awards and campaigns

For some years many municipalities have awarded prizes for worthy projects, where beautiful building works in the villages and the open land are rewarded. This could be new buildings, as well as reconstruction or regeneration projects on older estates.

Branding of villages in a creative industries economy context

An upgraded or regenerated village where the citizens and municipalities jointly and over some years have gained control of the physical environment will be in a favourable position in the fight for attracting new inhabitants, be it as residents throughout the year or as owners of second homes, and it should be remembered that today marketing is not the same as it was some years ago.

The way of communicating with the consumers and house buyers has changed through a number of years. Today, it is about story telling and branding. Giving factual information about a product/house and expecting the customer to have (and see) the need no longer suffices. Stories about the product have to be created, which the consumers can relate to and want to be part of. Everybody creates an image of himself in the eyes of the outside world through the products he consumes, the work he has, the holidays he goes on, the house he lives in, and where he lives and what he does in this spare time. Altogether a story is created which is passed on to others.

This means that the staging of the story becomes increasingly important. If you want to sell a good product it no longer suffices that the product is quality certified and produced according to relevant specifications. It should also influence our emotions, as any good story does it. (www.Fornydinhal.dk, 2007).

Inspired by Jensen (Jensen, H.B. 2007) it is patently obvious that a village is not to sell itself on cheap houses and bad building quality, but on the opposite, as the story

about the specific village is to ensure that it stands out from the many other villages. It is about having a special profile, a certain “image” of the village, with which the newcomers you want to attract can identify themselves.

If a village wishes to brand itself, the internal pride and awareness of the village you live in must be in place. The physical circumstances, the cultural environmental heritage and the story of the place can be used as a lever in the subsequent branding of the village.

These things being in place, it will be possible to deploy external profiling and marketing, and of course communication of all the beautiful and good aspects is to be given on the internet.

Conclusion

Both in the old and the new municipalities, the new regions and in many villages an understanding of the importance of the physical environment as a (perhaps) decisive provision for future survival and development of the villages has been developed during the last couple of years. Now you would think that everything was fine, Unfortunately, that is not the case, and it is particularly disgraceful that *none* of the public authorities are facing the extent of the task, and allocate funds which only approximately match the scale of the challenge in the 6-7,000 large and small villages spread all over Denmark.

I note that the national rural districts policy only allocates very little money for upgrading the physical environment of the villages and that many single projects will never be assessed, the collection of past experience on a local, regional and national level is absent, and it is striking that no public authorities are working on a scenario of village Denmark with fewer villages than today. At the same time a discussion is lacking of prioritizing and its methods to be used for the requisite prioritizing which has to be done, once the authorities realize that not all villages can be salvaged.

Concurrently, I note that present research is unable to give an adequate answer to the following issues, which I find quite decisive for a future well-structured effort built on analyses, plans – physical as well as financial – and current appraisals.

- ❖ How many villages without any attractions and futureless, perhaps are there in Denmark, and what is their role in today's society and their future role?
- ❖ Where are they located?
- ❖ What are the characteristics attached to them as regards history and present situation concerning planning status, housing schemes, business development, public and private service and association activities?
- ❖ Which socio- economic characteristics can be attached to the people living there?
- ❖ What opportunities for successful measures and actions can we point to?
- ❖ Or what do we need to know from an extensive research in "Best Practice/Worst Practice"? (Møller and Mogensen, 2007)

One thing is for sure: A long haul is ahead of us before our villages and rural districts will be beautiful to live in again.

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