



Contribution from Pergine Valdarno



STATEMENT OF MASSIMO PALAZZESCHI - Mayor of Pergine Valdarno - ITALY

The development of the project "Cultural Village of Europe" induces all of us to think about the present (Bystré), and about the future, about 2002 when Pergine Valdarno will be the Cultural Village of the year.

As you know there are problems our Municipality shares with other small Italian villages. I have already told you about them in the past, but I just want to call them back today, to give you an idea of what is the situation of small villages in Italy. We are a small Municipality of 3200 inhabitants in the province of Arezzo in southern Tuscany. It is one of the 7460 Italian municipalities in Italy are the 92% of the total amount. They occupy the 80% of the national land with 240.600 km and they administrate with 23 millions of inhabitants the 42% of the national people.

Nevertheless, in spite of these dates, the national policy of local administrations is managed by the 8% of the biggest metropolitan municipalities (Rome, Milan, Naples, Palermo) rather than the requests of small villages, when we want to use our European term, come later.

From here the importance of these meetings, where it is possible to sign agreements, programmes, on an European scale, which bring to the attention of National Governments, as well as of the European community the question of small villages and the need of policies and interventions different from those of big realities.

We need to sustain the needs of local, National European policies which aim to the demographic balance, to bring people back to small villages, where they live according to a more human dimension. I mean the policies which aim to the sustainable building development which is compatible with the quantity and quality of environment and cultural sources, typical of a certain territory, by supporting recovering interventions of the existent buildings and their conversion into tourist buildings.

Small villages in Italy work together on big choices, on primary services (water, waste material, energetic sources) in order to deal with choices which will be otherwise managed by big towns where these problems are bigger.

New laws allow villages to deal together with services for people. Small villages are aware of the fact that their development is not in contrast with the development of towns. When we point the attention to the problem of impoverishment of country areas, of the diminishing attractions and opportunities for the new generations there, means giving attention to also to the problems of towns, according to the logic of integration. Big cities can take advantages from a better redistribution of sources and of people, since their living areas, their expenses and their socio-cultural identification are in crisis because of the loss of balance between the main components which give structure to settlement.

We must give a value to local sources and to new entrepreneurs who want to bring small villages to life again, through non invasive instrument such as handcraft, tourism, local product, commerce. For these reasons we proposed the candidature of Pergine Valdarno to be Cultural Village of Europe in 2002. We think we will work on the following themes:

- **1 THE VALUE OF THE LOCAL PRODUCTS**

We want to give value to the local products, such as wine and oil, which are treated in our area with natural handcraft methods which give them a high grade of genuinity, big industrial production cannot grant. Typical local products, which have behind them an enormous cultural background given them by popular traditions and by history, must be given value and must be let known by the big public.

We can do it by making their production be convenient for local farmers. The economy of our territory is based also on gold production which has got Etruscan origins. But we think we have the duty to give value to agriculture in particular to quality agriculture.

Among the initiatives we are going to plan for the year 2002 we think we will organise, during the first Mayor conference, an exhibition of wines from the Arno Valley, with cheese, sausages and other products we grow up in our area. During the Last Mayor conference we would like to organise a meeting on Extra-Virgin oil, a quality product from our territory.

We would like to speak about themes connected with the development of agriculture with the Mayors of other European villages, who have in their national area typical productions, by pointing out the characteristics as well as the different elements peculiar to each of them.

- **2 RURAL TRADITIONS**

With this we mean the traditions of everyday life, which have characterised in the history of the small rural villages and which risk to get lost because of the conformity with life in towns, emphasised by mass communication means.

We must re-discover these traditions and protect them. We think the role of the Local administration is fundamental for this.

They must affirm the concept of healthy life in a small community, far from chaos and the pollution of the big metropolis, where we still live according to a human dimension, where everybody knows each other. We will work together with schools, associations, old and young people in on the project of "HOSPITALITY", in order to let them know better the ideas of "Cultural Village of Europe", as well as on the visits of the other European delegations.

We will be pleased to host exhibitions of photos and products each country can show in order to let its cultural traditions be known.

- **3 RURAL TOURISM**

It's the new economic reality which can make life in the country advantageous by contrasting the phenomena of moving towards towns. Rural tourism in fact, apart from being an important source of salary for the local farmers, is a vehicle for the maintenance of commerce and for economic activities to come to life again in small villages.

Rural tourism means also the recovering of old farm-houses as well as of the territory with its woods. In this way we can prevent it from hydro-geological disseset.

From the visual point of view we want to advance a proposal to this conference: We would like to install symbols of Cultural Village of Europe at the entrance of our villages, along the main roads of our area. We think also we will organise a brochure of the project we can give tourists, restaurants, as well as to each family in our Municipality.

- **4 HOW TO UNIFY THE VILLAGES THROUGH THE PROJECT**

In the year the Common money comes to life (euro) we think it's important to re-affirm the themes of meeting between different communities of our small villages, under the symbol of peace and of a life style which represents an inheritance we must not lose. The Cultural Village should put to the attention of national institutions the problems connected with small communities, always left behind by the emergences of big towns.

As regards the most important moment in the year, connected with the visits of the 10 delegations (40 people for each country), we want to host them during the weekends going from May the 12th, to the 29th of September 2002.

We would like to organise TWO MAYOR CONFERENCES

1) during the first weekend of April 2002

2) A concluding conference perhaps on the 23th, 24th of November. Important political people will take part to them.

A YOUNG MEETING from the 29th of July to the 5th of August, with young people of 15-20 years of age (about 30 persons) who will take part to the project "Do you know the countryside around Pergine Valdarno?", with lessons and guided visits in our farm-houses, meetings with our young Italian people, so that they will be able to know how life is going on in our village.

I am already working on the project with my colleagues and we are honoured to have the opportunity to introduce our plans to you today in Bystré. I thank you -the organisation of Bystré- for the hospitality, the other Mayors and all the people who are here today for their attention.

The Mayor Massimo Palazzeschi