



## Contribution from Porrúa



### **THE DEVELOPMENT OF NEW INITIATIVES TO EFFECT THE "CHARTER OF THE VILLAGES". A PORRUAN PROSPECTIVE**

First, I think it is necessary to remark how important it is for us to participate in this Conference in its third edition, within the program "Cultural Village of Europe". Likewise, I would like to dedicate special thanks to the villages that have hosted this initiative until now, because of the important effort they made in this task, and also thank warmly the representatives of Bystré for their hospitality here and now and their willingness to maintain the project in the present edition.

As representative of the small northern Spanish village of Porrúa, with around only 400 inhabitants, I can assure you that the opportunity of our participation in this European initiative has allowed us, not only to share really interesting experiences, but also and specially to understand that our local problems as a village are also common. And I think that the global valuation normally given to the culture we as villages represent, is a seminal problem.

One of the main grievances we have is that living in a small village is still equated, in our country, to being a third class citizen. Moreover, it is still believed that village culture does not evolve and keeps limited to the already known local traditions. And, believe me, with this idea it is really hard to explain even to our own local politicians the interest and relevance of participating in this project. Porrúa, along with other fifty villages, conforms politically and administratively the municipality of Llanes, and for this reason the modest cultural initiatives we bring about have not enough support and can only be developed if there is a real political interest or a previous social demand capable to put pressure on the politicians. It is for this reason that our work from the Porrúa Neighbour Local Assembly, which has not an official political structure, is to maintain, improve and impulse a centenary tradition as regards the system of collective representation of the village. Decisions on problems that affect us are taken democratically through a system of a local assembly, with ordinary and extraordinary reunions in what is called Concejo Público, meaning Public Council. When the problems debated go beyond the strict local sphere or when their solution depends on higher political stances, they are passed on to the municipal politicians although too frequently they have a late solution, as you can imagine or experienced in your own villages.

This traditional system of neighbour organisation, where every person in the village has an actual possibility to participate and make decisions, is what allows us to keep our cultural identity and be conscious of the fact that we can not be passive before the global culture that is actually being imposed basically from the cities, that is, from the big centres of decision making. It is time for the villages to be listened to. Since we live in a small village, we know we cannot wait the solutions of the politicians to our social and cultural necessities forever. This is specially the case nowadays, when many decisions are taken at an international level and transcend our local area.

So I believe that the villages must try hard to become the main characters of their own future, and that the European construction cannot forget the importance of individual and social relations of its citizens at a local level. Our work towards a common view and the writing down of the Charter of the Villages are, in my opinion, the starting point of a long distance task we must keep pushing at an international level from all possible organisms and institutions. The first thing to do here is to convince ourselves of the importance of this work, and of our capacity to bring it about. This will not be a simple task, since many of our propositions are contrary to the projects of a global economy and to the global means of communication. But it is, however, a necessary and unavoidable task in order for the European union to have a real and believable human dimension of our problems, because otherwise we will be constructing an already failed project.

Porrúa is a good example of the changes undergone since the Spanish entry in the European Union, specially as regards agriculture and cattle in the local economy. These changes have been positive in what refers to the welfare of the population, but endanger both our popular culture and our environment.

From a cultural point of view our main concern is the loss of the tradition of participation that has always marked our everyday activities, as in the communal work to fix agricultural ways. For this reason it is fundamental to collaborate on new projects as the maintenance of an ethnographic museum in the village or the organisation of a traditional festival and market in which all the neighbours can take part, and many of them actually do.

From an environmental perspective, our duty is to avoid that the rural tourism, that help our local economies, imply a sharp change as regards the construction of new houses or the degradation of our natural landscape as a consequence of a massive use.

Finally we would like that the construction of our future as a village counts with the involvement of all the neighbours without exclusions, and that our development be not only dependent on administrative decisions at a national and international level. The city point of view is not the only one to be defended, but also the singular elements of the villages must be respected as an starting point for a global understanding.

We believe firmly that the charter of the Villages must constitute a starting point for a significant change from the point of view of the European institutions and the development of their corresponding policies. We all should keep working on this path with our own available resources.