

## Chess education threatened in chess-village Ströbeck

Bert Kisjes

The education in chess is in the chess-village of Ströbeck threatened. The law, ordaining that a secondary school (kids from 10 to 16) has to have 240 pupils, is going to be enforced. Momentarily the school has 180 pupils. With that number the obliged education in chess will disappear from the village. The local authority of Ströbeck regards the education in chess as the core of the living tradition of playing chess of the village and as the most vital part of the identity of the village. By the education in chess the village has gained its place in the world.



Living chessgroup

The tradition of playing chess of the chess-village of Ströbeck dates a 1000 years back. An important inhabitant of the prison, the story goes, taught his jailors the game in order to pass the time. Certainly chess had an important position in the Middle Ages. Already in 1688 there are records of living chessman. Those men were at the time part of the carnival. In all probability these chessmen have existed since that time without a break in tradition. At the moment the chessmen consist of the pupils, who learn chess at school. Those pupils perform in their village and outside of it. Also in foreign countries. The last three years the chessmen-pupils played their game in Holland, England and Italy. Next year they are going to Greece.

### Chess education

In the beginning of the 19th century, when schools were build everywhere in Europe, so also in Ströbeck, education in chess got its place in the school. Old documents state that the best of the pupils won a chessboard. It is stated, that in 1823 the school asked the local authority for money for chessboards and pieces for the best of the chess-players at school. Since every year there is a tournament at school and the best player wins a chessboard. That means that since 1823 approximately 180 chessboards

circulate. A filmcrew asked some years ago the people of Stroebeck to produce those chessboards that were won and to be photographed with them. From every nook and cranny more than a hundred boards appeared. The crew documented it.

The tradition of chess never broke down. Not even in the times of Nation Socialism and the period, that Ströbeck belonged to the DDR. During the



Demonstration for the school of Strobeck (14.12.2003)

DDR education chess did not fit in the educational system. Nonetheless the teaching went on. The living chessmen were popular. They played in 1960 in Leipzig during the Olympics of chess.

### Uncertainty of continuation.

The existing problem of the school is regarded by the district first and foremost as a financial problem. A school with 180 pupils is too expensive. For a middle school 240 pupils is the requirement.

Then you can form two double classes for six years. The school is a school for the environment. It could get more pupils from the region. They don't have to come from very far away, but from another district. That is quite a different problem. Parents from Derenburg, only at a distance of 4 km. from Ströbeck, are willing to send their children to Ströbeck, but that is forbidden, because the village is situated in another district. Those pupils go to a village much farther away, Werningrode. In 2008 maybe the situation will be changed, because there comes a reorganisation of the districts. But that does not count.

Counting the costs only the direct costs of the school are valid. Nothing else. The impact of the education in chess on the community, the impact on the identity of the village and the fame of the village don't count at all. Nor does the fact that by playing chess agressivity becomes harmless, as the village emphasizes. The argument that bigger schools are qualitative better is disputed, but sometimes used in this case.

The fact, that playing chess concerns not only the village but the whole of the community will probably be negated by the organisation of education.

### Protest.

The chess-village started a protest. Not only the school and the local authority, but also the parents cried out. And the club of chess and the German Organisation of Chess. Even chess players, who played at the Corus Tournament in Wijk aan Zee signed a petition. For instance international famous players like Vlastimil Hort and Shirov. It will be a near thing if the school will still exist next year.

# The war for water is not far

In a recently edited newsletter from Paxos we can read this warning from Spyros Bogdanos, the mayor of the island. This newsletter is the introduction to the Cultural Village of Europe Year of Paxos.

“Paxos emerged from the sea and lives in the arms of water obtaining livelihood benefits from it. Sea water: an element of affluence and wealth. Fresh water: an element that characterizes wealth for those who have it in abundance but poverty and ingenuity for those who lack it. The inhabitants of Paxos have experienced lack of water and they have known perfectly well how to manage it for centuries, so well that their cleanness as well as the 95% coverage of the island in greenery have become typical and proverbial, to the extent that they set the exam-

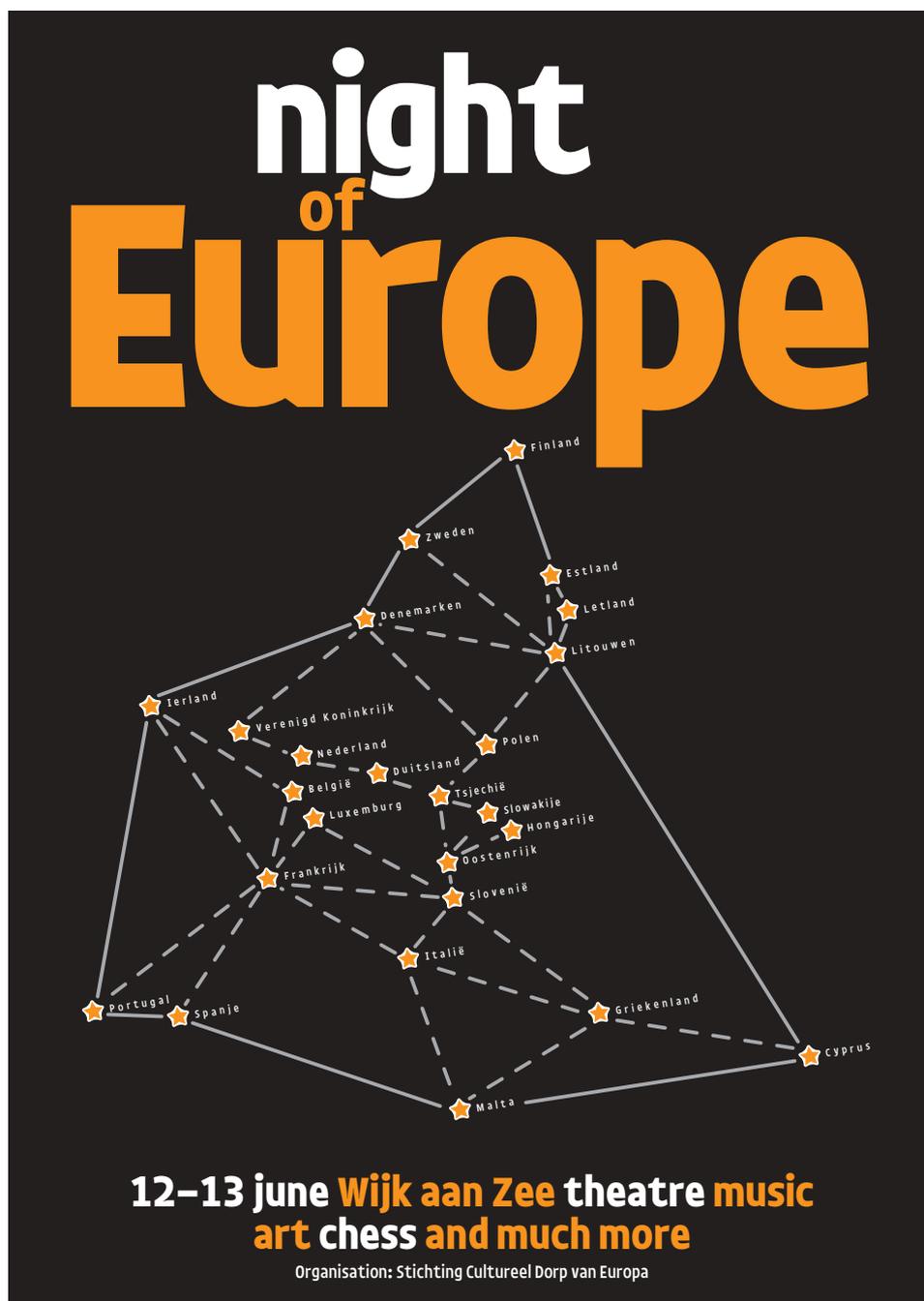
ple for everyone on our planet to follow as the war for water is now not far.

The element of water is life itself for Paxos. This element raised generations, the one after the other, it opened up the roads of communication, making the locals risky, it became a cultural bridge, it brought money in difficult years and several times it costs human lives.”

It is a very clear motivation why Paxos dedicates its year to one of the four elements: water. The Mayor conference from the 16th - 19th of April, the visits of the villages and the summer camp for the youth all will be dedicated to this subject.



Lack of water on Paxos



**night of Europe**

Finland  
Zweden  
Denemarken  
Estland  
Lettland  
Litouwen  
Ierland  
Verenigd Koninkrijk  
Nederland  
Polen  
België  
Duitsland  
Tsjechië  
Slowakije  
Luxemburg  
Hongarije  
Frankrijk  
Oostenrijk  
Slovenië  
Italië  
Portugal  
Spanje  
Griekenland  
Cyprus  
Malta

**12-13 june Wijk aan Zee theatre music art chess and much more**

Organisation: Stichting Cultureel Dorp van Europa

## Night of Europe

The admission of ten new countries into the European Union will be celebrated on the 12th and 13th of June in Wijk aan Zee. The idea behind this celebration is that a big decision like this should not pass completely indifferent.

Wijk aan Zee got the cooperation of Beverwijk, Heemskerk, Velsen and Steelfactory Corus and invited 500 people from the ten new countries. Together with their guests they will eat and make music together. An orchestra made for this opportunity from different countries and choirs will perform the 4th part of Van Beethoven's Ninth Symphony.

Wijk aan Zee found its way in Europe. It likes to show that Europe – in any case the Europe of the villages – is a very attractive and inspiring project.



Porrúa foto: Gijs Molenaar

# 'Dear people from all the villages'

Het was een geweldige om jullie dorp te bezoeken. Soms was het helemaal niet wat ik had verwacht, maar nog veel beter. Soms was het ook wel moeilijk. Ik was alleen en moest alles alleen doen, maar had veel steun van de mensen die voor me zorgden. Elk land was uniek en had zijn eigen schoonheid. Het belangrijkste voor mij was het ontmoeten van mensen, m'n kennis vergroten en plezier hebben. Op deze manier heb ik veel geleerd en daar ben ik blij mee. Ik hoop iedereen weer te zien. In Holland of in welk land dan ook!

Gijs Molenaar

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## CULTURAL VILLAGE of EUROPE

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### Colophon:

This newsletter is published by  
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## Short news

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### Nieuwsbrief van Kreiz Breizh

In december Cultural Village in Kreiz Breizh has edited a next edition of a newsletter. The Cultural-Village group from Bretagne has made a passport for people who visit the Cultural Villages of Europe.

### Cultural Village Tommerup changes its organisation

Cultural Village in Tommerup has decided to make a non governmental organisation. From 1996 till now Cultural Village in Tommerup has been an activity of the town-hall. For this occasion a meeting has been scheduled on the 28th of February. For this event Tommerup invited Bert Kisjes from Wijk aan Zee.

### Easels and Brushes.

For the third time in Wijk aan Zee will be organised the symposium for painters 'Easels and Brushes'. From 6th - 16th of May some fifty painters will come to the sea. The theme will be 'treasures of the sea'. Painters who want to participate should turn themselves to the organisation that can be reached by the address of this newsletter. For a certain amount of painters there will be a free place to stay and food.

### Corus Chess tournament

The (since 1999) yearly chessmeeting at the Corus Chess Tournament between Schachdorf Strobeck and Wijk aan Zee has been won by Strobeck with 4,5 - 3,5 points.

### Palkonya

Since 5 years Palkonya wanted to have a dirty-water system. But they never found the sponsors for it and it is very expensive. But now they start to do it together with 6 other villages. Palkonya has a website now: [www.palkonya.hu](http://www.palkonya.hu)

### Project for schools

Ferdinand Reindl from Aurolmunster (Austria) has developed a plan for contacts between 3-5 schools of the Cultural Villages. This project will be for pupils between 12 and 16 years old. For this project money will be requested from the Comenius programm of the European Union.

### Quality of small schools

Mayor De Jonge of Heerenveen (Netherlands) said, that schools from small communities have a worse quality than bigger schools. Therefore he propagates that children from the country are sent to bigger schools for the region. The mayor bases himself upon a study of B. van Ruijven for the Fryske Akademy and the State University of Groningen on schools in Friesland and Limburg. The small schools have less opportunity to help retarded children, he states. The investigator Van Ruijven himself has declared that it makes no difference for the quality of education, that the Frisian schools are relatively small. The conclusion of mayor De Jonge is denied by the investigator himself.

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CULTURAL VILLAGE of EUROPE

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Dr. Wolfgang Böhmer  
Ministerpräsident  
Domplatz 4  
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Germany

Wijk aan Zee, 16th of January 2004-02-08

Highly esteemed Mr. Boehmer,

Since 1999 we are related to the chess-village of Ströbeck in the context of Cultural Village of Europe. The eleven villages envy the chess-village of Stroebek because of their living tradition of playing chess. Such an evident and living identity can be only a wish for a small community. For Ströbeck education in chess is more important than the Eiffel Tower for Paris.

We have noticed that by a reform of the educational system the obligatory education in chess will vanish. So the living tradition of chess in the village will end as a relic from the past. The Museum of chess will just remind people of history.

Just because of the living tradition of chess youth from the chess-village of Ströbeck has great possibilities to orientate itself in the whole of Europe. Which village can offer its youth something like that? Since 1999 mwe have seen the living chessmen play in Holland, Bretagne, Eastern Bohemia, Toscane and Suffolk. A village, that has inherited such a treasure and understands its worth, has big possibilities.

That such a wealth, which cannot be bought by money, must vanish because of a reorganization, we don't understand. Who is trying to create a big, functioning community with a good education, should not only look at the consistency of the whole system, but also at the quality of the individual parts. The community is an organic system. When the little pieces do not live, but are dead, the whole system collapses. Then the misery in the form of too much criminality, indifference, self-enrichment at the cost of others, and asocial behaviour cannot be estimated. Then no rules can be established which are respected.

We would expressly plead for education in chess. We can, when it is necessary, make our argumentation more clear in a seminar. We care much for the theme.

We wish you all the necessary wisdom for a wise decision.

Yours truly,

Drs. Bert Kisjes  
President of the Cultural Villages of Europe