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## Village



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URN: 0156-55993944

*This is a translation of the following entry:*

Schröteler-von Brandt, Hildegard (2018): Dorf. In: ARL – Akademie für Raumforschung und Landesplanung (Hrsg.): Handwörterbuch der Stadt- und Raumentwicklung. Hannover, 439-445.

*The original version can be accessed here:*

urn:nbn:de:0156-5599394

Typesetting and layout: ProLinguo GmbH  
Translation and proofreading: ProLinguo GmbH

Recommended citation:

Schröteler-von Brandt, Hildegard (2018): Village.  
<https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0156-55993944>.

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**Villages are not homogenous settlement, economic and social areas. Their diversity reflects different spatial, social and economic realities which are influenced by demographic factors (growing and shrinking villages). The main structural features include the influence of agriculture, the unity of the civil and economic community, the direct connection with the natural environment and landscape as well as the limited number of inhabitants and population density.**

## 1 Historical development of the village

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Villages began to develop as far back as the Early Middle Ages with the spread of manorialism and the allocation of land to farmers on a lease and levy basis. These villages became more dense with population growth and the Carolingian expansion of settlements, and increasingly formed their demarcated village structure with the construction of churches and the delineation of farming communities by way of boundaries. In the High Middle Ages agricultural production increased thanks to improvements in agricultural technology. The economic and population growth in Germany led to the formation of many villages (Troßbach/Zimmermann 2006: 45), in parallel to the establishment of many towns. Wood clearing and the cultivation of moorlands created additional space for the establishment of villages. During this period, the legal form of the self-governed village community with its own village council also emerged (Troßbach/Zimmermann 2006: 45). Internal organisation within the village (stipulation of sowing dates, constructing the village fortification, setting out the boundaries, etc.) consolidated the community structures considered typical of villages. Plagues and famines decimated the population at the end of the High Middle Ages. In what was known as the desertion period, approximately a quarter of the settlements were abandoned. When the population began to increase again between the 16th and 18th century and feudalism was growing, land development resumed and *▷ Agriculture* intensified (improved cattle rearing, introduction of new crops, etc.). Very few villages have been founded since the desertion period in the Late Middle Ages, and the land development of the modern era and the landscape of rural settlements has changed very little to the present day.

With the development of commercial production methods and private availability of land as well as the abolition of serfdom during the Stein-Hardenberg Reform in 1801, agricultural production became subject to the new market laws. This resulted in the mechanisation and rationalisation of production together with the concentration of rural land ownership, which prompted large waves of migration to the new industrial towns. By 1800 the villages were by and large self-sufficient: from goods and services supplied by agriculture and village trades, the establishment of schools and village laws to the regulation of common duties and responsibilities (stipulation of rights of way and the use of common land, organisation of fire services and defences, etc.). There was a distinction in the social stratification of villages between large, land-owning farmers, medium-sized and smaller farmers, who often only farmed as a sideline, the village tradespeople and a lower class of landless farm labourers. ‘Social inequality has been one of the constitutive features of European villages from the outset’ (Troßbach/Zimmerman 2006: 11) with all their inner tensions and interdependent relations. Nevertheless, village life was characterised by the ‘simplicity and closeness of social relationships in the village, the significance of subsistence economy elements, the role of “family”, “relationship” and “neighbourliness”’ (Troßbach/Zimmermann 2006: 12).

## 2 Forms of villages

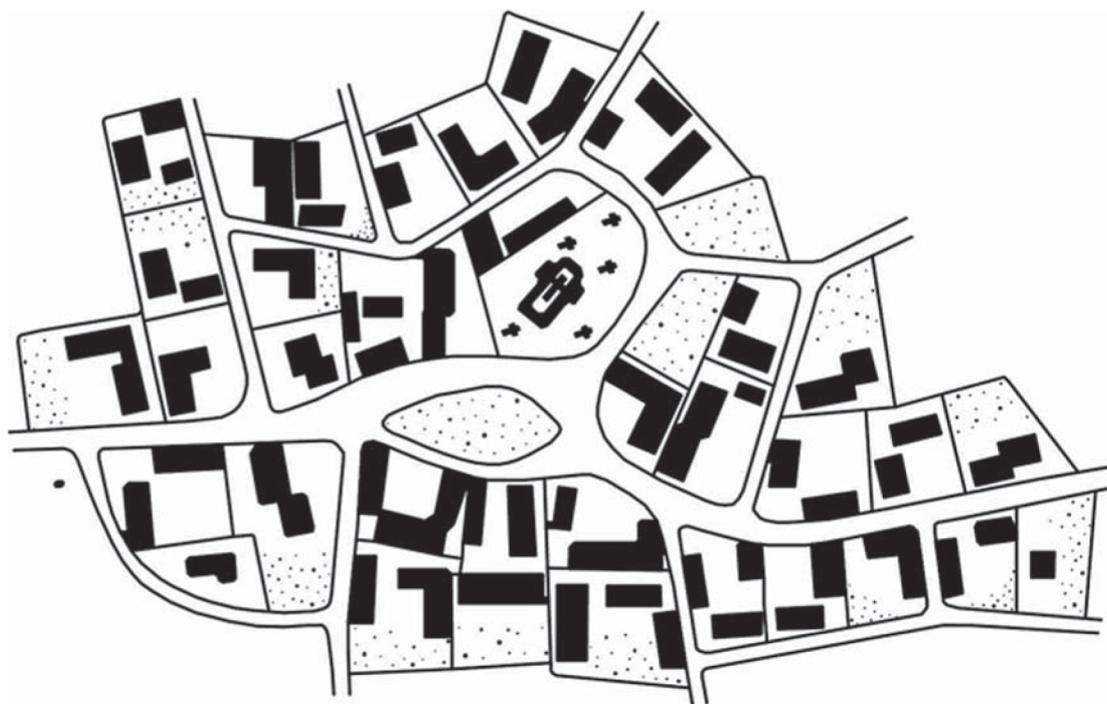
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Factors in the development of the many different forms of villages include natural spatial conditions (such as topography, position of buildings depending on weather and climate influences, soil conditions and agricultural yield affecting the size and layout of the buildings), the building materials available in the region (e.g. shingle roofing in southern Germany and reed

covering in northern Germany) and the structure of land ownership and tenure (such as estates or the inheritance system according to laws relating to the inheritance of farm land or gavelkind law). The most common type of traditional settlement is the enclosed, unplanned scattered village (see Fig. 1) with irregular plots. In street villages (see Fig. 2), the street running through the village with homesteads grouped on the left and right, forms the basis of the ground plan. In villages built around a village green, the buildings are grouped around an open area in the centre, which the village community used as common land, fire protection pond, communications area, etc. In the systematic creation of ribbon villages on woodland (see. Fig. 3) on the cleared forested areas, the farmsteads are built on either side of a long (often straight) street and are evenly distributed over plots of land (as with ribbon villages on moorland or marsh land). In a circular village (see Fig. 4), the farmsteads are positioned close together around an open space like a fortress with just one entrance.

Today, the original village structure is usually only extant in the village centre, as it has otherwise been reshaped by new build areas or in the course of the expansion of the main through roads.

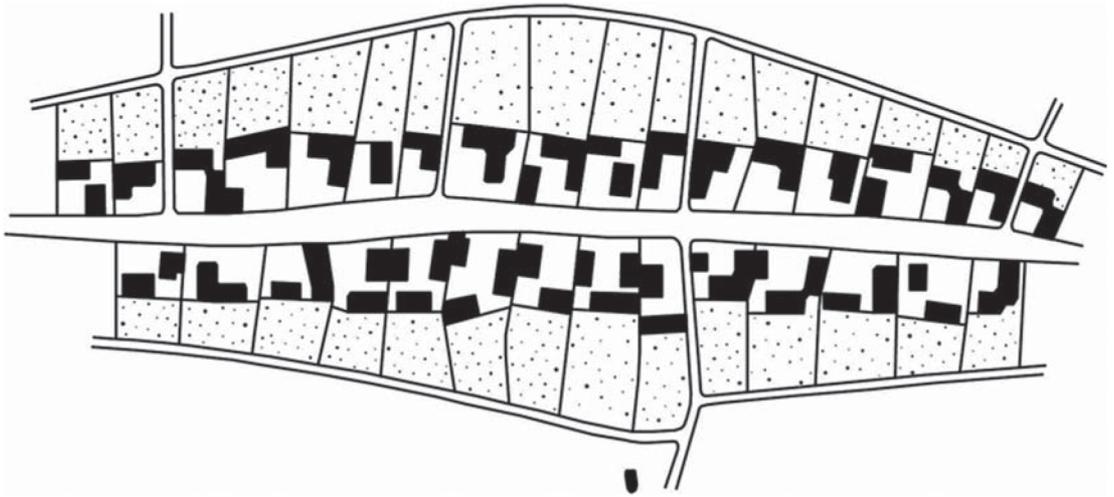
**Figure 1: Scattered village**



Source: The authors

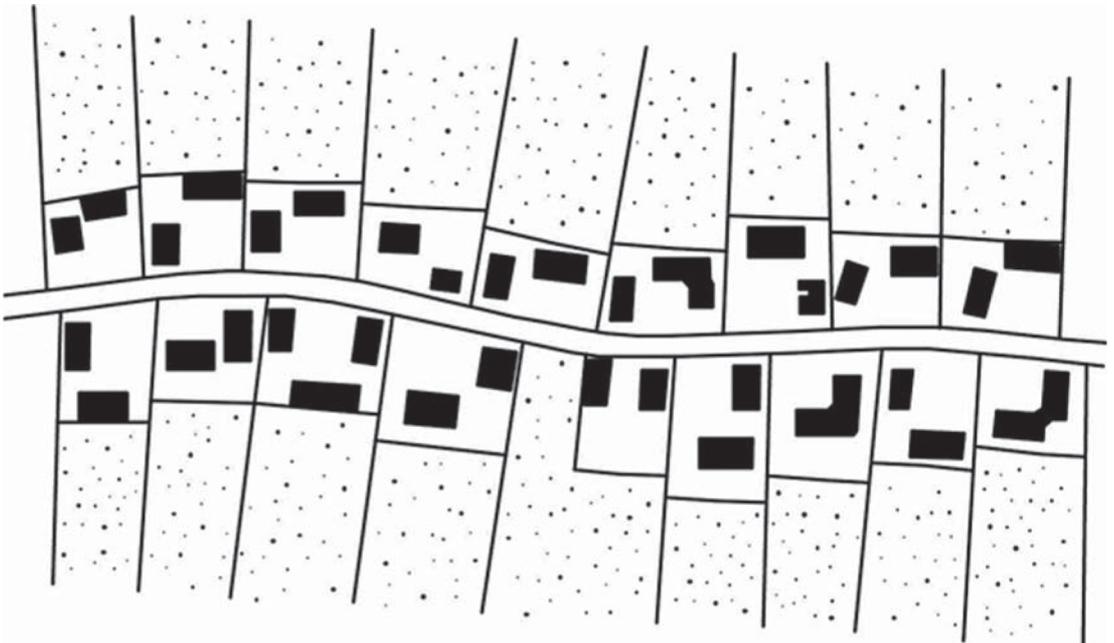
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Figure 2: Street village



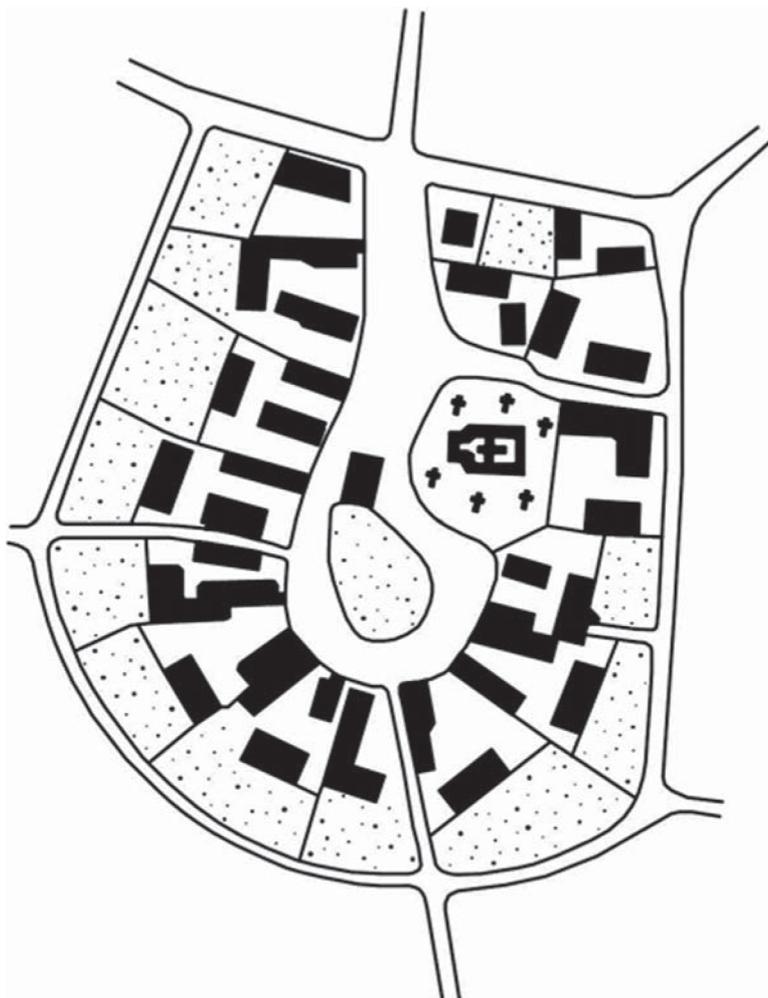
Source: The authors

Figure 3: Ribbon village



Source: The authors

Figure 4: Circular village



Source: The authors

### 3 Structural change

Widespread industrialisation in the 19th century led to a general decline in the economic significance of agriculture and resulted in a process of 'deagriculturalisation' in the 20th century, especially after 1950. Villages increasingly became part of the social modernisation process and underwent radical change in their structural and spatial as well as economic structures. The loss of political and administrative autonomy through the local government reorganisation of the Federal Republic of Germany in the first half of the 1970s and the increasing centralisation of public infrastructure has led to far-reaching restructuring processes in the past 50 years. However the distinctive social forms of the village with their 'characteristic polarities of control and obligation, conflict and solidarity, internal inclusion and exclusion' (Troßbach/Zimmermann 2006: 286)

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remained in spite of the change. In the German Democratic Republic (GDR) the nationalisation of agriculture after 1945 and its organisation into agricultural production cooperatives ultimately led to the industrialisation of agriculture. The agricultural production cooperatives were also responsible for the rural ▷ *Infrastructure* and new prefabricated settlement buildings were erected for the workers in and around the village (Henkel 2012: 275).

## 4 Essential characteristics of the village

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The concept of the village evokes a small, spatially manageable unit and a particularly distinctive form of communal life and social networks. While villages are associated with a positive life situation – linked with the idea of home – on the one hand, on the other hand they are also associated with backwardness: backward compared to the attainments of the urban way of life or the limited access to service provision, culture and infrastructure as well as train or bus services (▷ *Transport in rural areas*). The closeness to nature and landscape are particularly appreciated by all age groups, who are drawn to outdoor leisure pursuits and the many activities that can be enjoyed in nature and the countryside. Another key feature is the simplicity and compact nature of the villages. Above all, the quirks and distinctiveness of the villages and how they have been shaped by their specific history foster a sense of identification among inhabitants. The village identity is expressed in the centre of the village in particular (▷ *Identity, spatial*). The high number of associations in the villages and the neighbourly and in particular networks based on relationships form the backbone for shaping the living environment in the village. The social closeness of the past ‘symbiotic community’ in the village is seen as an opportunity to coexist in a village community and the possibility of actively helping to shape this community.

## 5 Spatial category

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Villages are closely linked to the spatial planning category of ▷ *Rural areas*, which have become increasingly distinctive according to their structural development and can be distinguished in grades from very centrally to very peripherally located rural areas (Federal Institute for Research on Building, Urban Affairs and Spatial Development [*Bundesinstitut für Bau-, Stadt- und Raumforschung, BBSR*] 2010). The criteria for demarcation include the number of inhabitants, settlement area and location. According to geographical research, villages are described as rural group settlements of approx. 100 inhabitants, which further differ from smaller hamlets in terms of their facilities with public and private services (Lienau 1972). Villages with 400 to 2000 inhabitants are small to medium-sized; those with larger populations are considered large villages (Henkel 2004: 228).

## 6 Current problems and outlook

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Given the demographic trends, there are increasing differences in rural areas in terms of growing and shrinking regions (> *Demographic change*). Shrinking villages, some of which are experiencing dramatic depopulation and an increasingly ageing population, are facing major challenges when it comes to managing this structural change. Local discussions focus on maintaining the public infrastructure from educational institutions to transport services, as well as how to handle the declining range of private services (shops, doctors' surgeries, food outlets, etc.). Various adaptive strategies need to be developed for these new situations (> *Village development*; > *Integrated rural development*). Cooperation with neighbouring villages can achieve synergy effects and avert infrastructure closures (decentralised concentration). Increasingly creative new solutions are being sought with regard to funding bodies for the infrastructure, such as citizens' cooperatives and associations. Given these challenges, active village communities can be considered key to the development and sustainability of the village. Villages traditionally have strong civic engagement and a high willingness to take responsibility for managing these challenges.

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Heutzutage ist die ursprüngliche Dorfstruktur durch die Anlage von Neubaugebieten oder im Zuge des Ausbaus der Ortsdurchfahrten überformt und zumeist nur noch im Ortskern vorhanden.

Last update of the references: February 2017