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Foreigners from here and elsewhere : The appeal of living together

Expert speaker :

Lisbeth LENNARTSSON, Mayor of Borgholm in Sweden.

Debate participants :

Maria CHICHARRO ORTEGA, General Secretary for the association UNCLEAR in Spain.

Eddie DAVIDSSON, Head of economic development in the township of Gnosjo in Sweden.

Anders NYHOLM, Head of economic development in the township of Borgholm in Sweden.

Frans VAN HOUTEN, Director of the Emigration Fair in Utrecht, Holland.

Chairman :

Régis DE CLOSETS, newsreader, journalist-reporter, and collaborator at Figaro and Paris Match.

As we have previously seen, Sweden has opened its borders to a large number of foreign inhabitants. However the success of this open border policy does not lie in the statistics. Lisbeth Lennartsson insisted upon the quality of the welcome. She described the measures taken in order to make integration easier and to improve living conditions for newcomers.

■ The Swedish reception policy is more than just a massive advertising campaign; the human aspect is essential. The fact that all the inhabitants get involved including those living in rural areas has meant that foreigners have been able to integrate in good circumstances. The newcomers can maintain their culture ; they have no obligation to give up their native community.

The government also set up other methods to improve foreigners' integration : Lisbeth Lennartsson explained "Children of foreign origin are very quickly taught Swedish in classes especially adapted for them". Wealthy newcomers who can afford to buy a house are given help with their house hunting, and at the other end of the scale, poorer newcomers are given help with their accommodation. Lastly the local economy has developed due to government grants which have encouraged the creation of businesses ; 8.8% of these are run by women.

■ As nothing is ever perfect, Lisbeth Lennartsson revealed what could be improved : "At this moment in time it is mainly the large cities that benefit from opening the borders. We have to expand the consequences to other areas. We should welcome all sorts of newcomers, Iraqis for example, but we should also aim to attract other nationalities".



At local level, representatives from the townships of Borgholm and Gnosjo explained their policies to attract, and the conditions for the integration of newcomers.

For Anders Nyholm, the promotion of Borgholm on the Island of Oland was a huge challenge, mainly due to its geographical setting, this little island on the east coast of Sweden seemed doomed to isolation. However the situation rapidly changed with the development of different infrastructures, in particular the bridge which was built in 1972 linked the island to the mainland. The region welcomes some 3 million tourists every year. The township does everything possible to encourage foreign visitors to live permanently on the island. It's a major challenge due to the loss of the younger population which has emigrated to English speaking countries, in particular the United States of America. "The communication measures are also aimed at people with young families, who live in countries on the frontier, such as Holland, Germany and Belgium. Meetings have been organised with those interested in order to develop a link with them".

Frans Van Houten, director of the Emigration Fair which takes place once a year at Utrecht in Holland, knows all about these migration problems. With the support of the 115 exhibitors who come mainly from countries whose population statistics are falling, he helps organise the departure of compatriots who are seeking to emigrate. In Holland, there are more than 120 000 people who leave the country to live elsewhere. The main causes for emigration are the climate, a decrease in mutual respect, lack of space, the cost of living, and of course the high population density, the highest in Europe.

In order to attract the younger population, the township of Borgholm did not hesitate in using huge marketing strategies to make them known. Anders Nyholm explained "Apart from the classic advertising campaign we organised meetings and created a fact sheet containing information about our hopes and expectations". Thanks to our "open day" policy and the instigation of dialogue revolving around questions and answers, a real contact was made with future residents. Lastly Anders Nyholm explained that sincerity was a key factor during the various measures taken : "We adopted a realistic approach based on honesty in order to avoid disappointing any future newcomers".

As for Gnosjo, a small Swedish township of 10 000 inhabitants, recruiting new inhabitants became essential because of a sudden increase in industrial activity. Eddy Davidsson explained "Our priority was to attract new inhabitants. The help desk which was consequently set up, proposed trips aimed at giving potential inhabitants an insight into the region and its community".

Slide show of the town

The Spanish example was also interesting and gave an insight into the measures that can be taken in order to promote a region with a decreasing population. Faced with an increasing number of uninhabited villages, the Spanish government realised they had to act in order to change the public's opinion of the country side. The region of Alabacete, situated in the independent community of Castille-la-Manche is particularly effected, it has a poor average population density of 4.2 inhabitants per km², and in some rural areas 2.2 inhabitants per km².

In 1997, the national cooperation programme proposed a project aimed at local authorities : Maria Chirrago Ortega explained "The aim of the project was to carry out a census of foreign people, in order to have a better understanding of the migration movements, and to introduce laws that would lead to more openings". Thanks to a communication strategy based on the strength of natural heritage, the link with most of Madrid and Saragosse's population, as well as the support from the Spanish media, 3 000 foreigners have since moved into the region.