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Lignite mining near cologne: the management of the populations
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The district government of cologne is the relevant authority for lignite planning and also for resettlements in the lignite areas of the Rhineland. That is the area between Aachen, Cologne and Mönchengladbach.

Exploitation of lignite in an opencast mining leads to extensive interventions in landscape and settlement areas in the mining region. In the run-up to mining transfers of infrastructure and resettlements of villages are necessary.

Resettlements need a public justification.

The yearly output in the lignite area of the Rhineland is about 100 million tonnes produced in three great opencast minings: Garzweiler with 114 km², Hambach with 85 km² and Inden with 45 km². These three opencast minings extract more than half of the german lignite which is used for production of 40 percent of the north-rhine-westphalian or 12 percent of the german energy. Lignite thus makes a great contribution to the german and north-rhine-westphalian electricity supply. In this respect, lignite will – in spite of the major expansion of renewable energies – undoubtedly be very important for the next fifteen or twenty years with a view to energy policy and economy.

From that point of view, the public justification for resettlements is to protect the supply of reliable and domestic energy.

Resettlements have great effects – both material and immaterial - for the village community and all the people concerned. Already when the mine plans are being announced, there will be burdens for the people concerned. These burdens cannot be prevented. But they can be compensated according to social acceptability.

At that point some figures to illustrate the dimensions of resettlements: Since the beginning of resettlements in the early sixties about 35.000 people have been relocated. Until the end of the extraction of lignite more than another 3.000 people will be relocated.

The concept of joint resettlement

The concept of joint resettlement is our basis for a social accepted relocation. The ultimate objective of this concept is the preservation of the village community according to which as many residents of the old village as possible move as rapidly as possible to a new location that is selected and planned jointly with them.

The concept of the common relocation of a village is an offer to all residents, but it is not obligatory. Therefore, one part of the people concerned take into account a different location. They do not participate in the common resettlement. In practice, participation is between 60 and 80 percent. But also with a participation rate of about 60 percent it could have already been achieved to largely maintain the old village community and social structure.

The procedure of a resettlement

The procedure of a resettlement starts about 15 years before the beginning of exploitation. One third of this time is necessary for the selection and planning of the new location, about two thirds – so about 10 years - are necessary for the realization of the new location and the removal of the old village. The time limitation to a relatively short period is expected to prevent the spatial separation of relatives, friends, club members and so on.

In order to increase attraction and acceptance of the new location and to consider the individual demands of the residents, it is very important to let the people participate in the development of their new village. So participation of residents is an integral part of the concept of common resettlement.

What does that mean in concrete terms?

In a first procedure step we - together with the municipal administration and the people concerned - find out so called "search spaces" which could be probable for settlement. The actual suitability of the site will be finally examined by an environmental assessment.

In a second step the final site will be chosen through paper and pencil interviews with the people concerned. This site will then be included in the following steps of procedure concerning planning and development of the location.

After the final site has been determined we find out the demand for residential plots in the new village. This is necessary to identify the exact dimension of the new village. For this purpose, we make a second paper and pencil interview with those people, who will definitely participate in the relocation.

On the basis of this, a proposal for the location and the dimensions of the new village is laid down in our relocation plan.

In the following formal procedure, when the draft is disclosed the municipal administration as well as the general public may suggest amendments and modifications concerning location and dimension. These suggestions will be examined and considered. The lignite mining plan shall be adopted by the lignite mining board. This democratically legitimized body is composed of local and regional politicians of the municipalities in the Rhenish mining area affected by open-cast lignite mining. After the lignite plan has been approved, the so found site for the relocation will be a mandatory target of regional and federal state planning. Especially the municipal administration has to respect this target in its urban land-use planning.

Adequate financial compensation

The adequate financial compensation is, of course, very important for the success of the resettlement. One main objective is to conserve the financial assets of the people

concerned. Regarding this, the mining company offers an “overall package” which includes apart from the financial compensation for the old house additionally other allowances and compensations. The objective is, that the resettler will be brought in a position to be able to build a new house comparable to the old one.

We have set up an agreement with the mining company about the principles for financial compensation. The lignite mining company in North-Rhine-Westphalia is the RWE Power AG. This agreement is valid in the whole mining district. Should there be any doubts concerning the correct application of these principles, the persons concerned may contact a conciliation board which we have established in our authority. The conciliation board consists of three members: one representative of my authority, one of the municipal administration and one of the mining company. In case the compensation principles had not been correctly applied, the conciliation board will recommend the financial compensation to be amended.