



THE DISTRICTS OF NORTH RHINE-WESTPHALIA

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THE DISTRICT – THE UNKNOWN QUANTITY

District identification has very little meaning for many people in North Rhine-Westphalia. "I register my car with the district, but what else does the district authority do?" is an often-heard question. The answer is that district authorities do quite a lot. They are major providers of services for citizens. Whether the district authority

- **pays the cost of accommodation for the long-term unemployed or instead of the Federal German Employment Agency is responsible for active employment market policy in the entire district area,**
- **finances local public passenger transport, creates and maintains nature and countryside areas, carries out refuse collection and disposal,**
- **oversees the planning and running of kindergartens, family centres or care homes,**
- **organises an exhibition in the district museum, or**
- **organises emergency rescue and disaster management services,**

it always does so on behalf of and in the service of its residents. Sometimes measures adopted by the district authority seem to those affected anything other than pleasant. But if a driving licence is taken away or food hygiene checks are undertaken at businesses locally in response to complaints, the district authority is ultimately acting in the citizens' interest - that is, in the interest of those it has to protect from damage or harm



> *Some figures*

About 59 per cent, that is, 10.7 out of the roughly 18 million citizens of North Rhine-Westphalia, live in one of the 31 districts of the most heavily populated Federal German state. Together these cover 89 per cent of the physical area. The rest is divided amongst 23 independent cities. The most heavily populated district, not only of North Rhine-Westphalia, but also of all 323 German districts is the District of Recklinghausen. The district in NRW with the fewest residents is the District of Olpe. On average in our Federal State each district has about 345,000 residents in an area of 1,000 square kilometres.

On average in each district of North Rhine-Westphalia there are twelve communities and/or towns and cities. There are 373 altogether. The districts with "their" communities and towns and cities enjoy a close, partnerly relationship. They share between them the work which is carried out by an independent city alone. Because communities and cities belonging to districts vary considerably in size (the smallest has just under 4,000, the largest over 150,000 residents), their service capacity naturally varies: independent cities therefore carry out additional work, which for the smaller communities is carried out by the district.

> *More than just a slogan:*

Local self-government

Local self-government is an important basis of our democracy. It means that many public services are provided by the districts and communities on their own responsibility. Thus, together with the federation and the states, they form the state's organisational framework. The state authority is thus spread. In this way decisions which, for example, have importance only for the residents of a district are reached in the specific interest of those residents.

by the way...

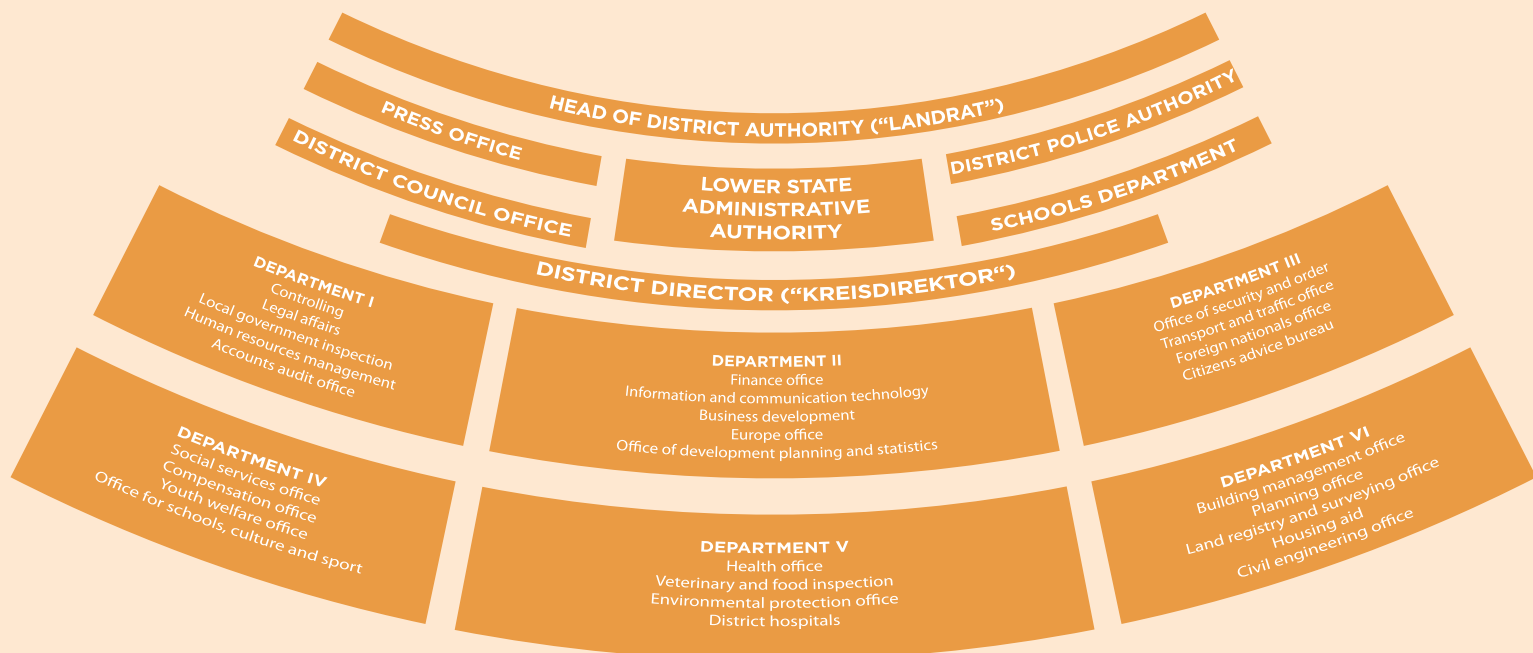
A SHORT DIGRESSION ON THE WORD "KREIS" (DISTRICT)

The word "Kreis" (presumably from the Bohemian "kraj"=state) as a designation for a political division with administrative duties goes back to the High Middle Ages.

In the 16th Century the "district councils" ("Kreistage") were set up as councils of the landed nobility. At the beginning of the 19th Century the Prussian statesman Freiherr vom Stein (1757-1831) attempted to introduce full local self-government also in the rural (that is, today's district) areas along the lines of the Municipal Corporations Act of 1808. The attempt failed initially and succeeded only when District Authority Acts were passed in 1872 for the eastern provinces of Prussia, in 1886 for the Province of Westphalia and in 1887 for the Rhine Province. These formed the basis of the district constitution until the end of the Second World War and may really be regarded as the predecessor of the present District Authorities Act of the State of North Rhine-Westphalia passed in 1953.

With the Local Authority Constitution Amendment of 1994 what is known as "unitary authority" was introduced. Whereas until then the District Chief Executive, as chief administrative officer, and the until then honorary head of district authority ("Landrat"), as political representative, divided the work between them, now the full-time head of district authority performs the duties of both administration and political representation.

A TYPICAL DISTRICT AUTHORITY



> The district council

The representative body of the people and the district's highest decision-making body is the district council. Its members are elected direct by the residents of the district (all EU citizens aged 16 year and over and entitled to vote). Each voter has one vote. With this vote he or she elects the representative in the electoral constituency and the party at the same time (reserve list).

> The committees

The committees of the district council have specific functions. Here a distinction must be made between compulsory committees and voluntary committees. Compulsory committees are, amongst others, the youth welfare and accounts audit committees. Voluntary committees cover special areas like social services, health, finances, planning, environmental protection, culture and schools. As well as members of the district council, informed private citizens can be members.

> The head of district authority ("Landrat")

The head of district authority is elected direct. He is chairman of the district council and director of district administration and also represents the district outside the district. The administration carries out statutory and voluntary duties and implements the decisions of the district council.

As well as self-government duties, the head of district authority also carries out duties for the state. The state borrows the head of district authority in order to engage him for national duties. Under this "executive loan" arrangement the head of district authority is responsible for local government supervision, directs the district police authority and, together with the school inspection officers, sets up the schools office.

by the way...

ORGANISATION PLAN OF A DISTRICT AUTHORITY

The district authority is directed by the head of district authority ("Landrat"). His managerial staff are the district director ("Kreisdirektor"), as so-called „general representative“, and the departmental heads. Each of these coordinates a number of offices or specialist divisions, which in turn are divided into different sections. The office of environmental protection (in Section V on our chart) may, for example, comprise sections which carry out the work of waterway protection, garbage collection and disposal and nature and scenic area conservancy. In detail the administrative organisation of the 31 districts in North Rhine-Westphalia varies and is designed to meet respective local needs.



WHAT DO THE DISTRICTS DO WITH THE MONEY?



The districts see themselves today as up-to-date service providers for their citizens: they regulate citizens' communal life, ensure public order, make service offers, provide health care for children and young people, inspect food, promote business and advise at times of crisis. They also organise, for example, youth welfare services for a number of communities.

A large number of tasks the districts are required to perform by law, others they perform voluntarily. They all cost money. Where the districts obtain their funds is regulated by law: major sources are what are known as the state's key allocations, as well as charges, fines and hunting tax. However, the biggest source of income is what is known as the "district levy": district cities and communities remit part of their budget to their district. In turn the district undertakes for their communities tasks which by concentrating them it can perform more effectively and more cost-effectively.

Most of their money the districts spend on social tasks, for example, the cost of accommodation for the long-term unemployed ("Hartz IV" reformed social security provisions). The second big item is what is known as the "countryside levy", which the districts for their part pass on to the respective regional authority.

Many people are unaware in how many areas of everyday life the districts perform essential tasks for residents and companies. Much of what is commonly believed to be the responsibility of communities or associations is in reality the responsibility of the district. The following pages are therefore intended to inform people about the most important tasks and services performed by the districts of North Rhine-Westphalia.



YOUTH WELFARE, SOCIAL WELFARE, HEALTH



Budgets show that the districts devote a large share of their financial means to services of general interest. Within the terms of both their statutory and voluntary duties people can rely on the supporting hand of the districts. With their services the districts assist people in nearly all phases of life. That is what the district youth welfare, health and social welfare offices are there for.

> *Youth work for all*

Before all else, of course, it is parents who are entitled and required to support children in their development and to educate them. It is the task of public youth welfare to contribute to reaching this educational aim of making children into responsible and socially acceptable persons by providing advice, aid and support. The districts' child and youth welfare facilities therefore see it as their task to assist and support all children and young persons as well as their families, not just difficult and violent children.

Youth welfare offers various kinds of assistance. These include in particular aid and education in the family, support and advice in questions of partnership, separation and divorce as well as with the exercise of personal care, support in emergencies, assisting children in day facilities and day care centres, assistance with education and integration and

assistance for young persons of legal age (in or outside institutions or both). Other youth welfare tasks include measures for the protection of children and young persons, assistance with family-court proceedings, advice and support in the ascertainment of paternity and the assertion of maintenance claims and youth court assistance.

> *General social welfare services*

Youth welfare offices arrange adoptions and provide financial assistance in accordance with the Advance Payment of Maintenance Act. These many and varied tasks are entrusted to specially trained persons. For this reason the youth welfare office makes use of the services of a general social welfare service staffed by social and social education workers.

Social security is an essential element of the welfare state. Security of livelihood was in times of what was known as "social assistance" an essential element of a district's work. According to the reform of social welfare legislation with the fusion of unemployment and social welfare benefit (under "Hartz IV" provisions) the districts meet the cost of accommodation, initial provision for housing and clothing and for class trips lasting several days as well as services which are necessary for integration of the needy into working life, such as child supervision, care of relatives at home, debt counselling, psycho-

YOUTH WELFARE, SOCIAL WELFARE, HEALTH

social support and addiction counselling.

In most districts of North Rhine-Westphalia statutory tasks are performed by working committees of the districts and the respective labour agency in accordance with the Social Welfare Act II. Some districts are given the option of assisting the long-term unemployed in their own way. There is also social assistance, if applicants are unable to do more than three hours of work daily. Permanently incapacitated and needy persons aged 65 and upward receive needs-related basic security equal to social assistance benefits. The districts continue to meet the cost of social assistance and basic security and remain the appeal authorities.

> *Care is an issue*

However, a district's social responsibility extends much further: care is an area of responsibility to which increasing attention is being given as a result of demographic changes. The districts are granting assistance for care and home care grants for all persons aged 65 and over who cannot pay the necessary home costs themselves or for whom long-term care insurance payments are insufficient. As well as the necessary home supervision and provider-independent advice, the care conference is an important instrument. The coordinating and supporting work of the districts is a cornerstone of the care sector.

Moreover, services like integration assistance, maintenance, benefits for the seriously handicapped

at work and education and training grants have become the responsibility of the districts' social welfare offices.

> *Comprehensive health protection*

The districts are there when it is a matter of health. Here the citizen profits considerably from the service capability of a district authority. Foremost among the tasks of a public health department is comprehensive health protection. A well-organised reporting system for infectious diseases guarantees rapid detection and immediate response in cases of tuberculosis and meningitis and in the case of influenza observation and other mass diseases. The oversight of drinking water hygiene, bath water and swimming baths falls as much under the category of "health protection" as the oversight of hospitals and operating practices, AIDS counselling and vaccination.

The public health departments devote particular attention to children and young people. Naturally, people know about school dentists, because dental health is an important issue. Great importance is also attached to screening tests (for example, before starting school), which have to be repeated in order to identify possible physical and/or mental impairment and individual need of assistance.

Assistance for the psychically handicapped is a further concern. The public health departments provide comprehensive counselling services:



The psychically impaired, mentally handicapped and also the addictive and drug-dependent can find advice and assistance here. Activities are supplemented by independent preventive work and the setting up of a network of services and providers.

> *Health conference*

The assessment service completes the range of tasks. Important for the coordination of health and social welfare concerns is what is known as the health conference, which brings together the communities, health sector institutions, including self-help, maintaining bodies and self-government. A prerequisite for successful work of the health conferences, amongst others, is comprehensive health reporting – a task which has grown in importance for public health departments in recent years.

> *Hospitals*

A number of districts in North Rhine-Westphalia are also hospital funding authorities. They thus ensure local inpatient and part-inpatient care where no other hospital funding authority or otherwise no adequate care is available. They contribute with a wide range of disciplines and specialist departments to a pluralistic offering in the clinic sector. District clinics frequently also provide medical care centres as well as ambulant services and facilities locally.



SECURITY AND ORDER

Public security and order are important factors for the quality of life in a democratic society. The districts perform essential services in the area of hazard prevention. They work closely with the hazard prevention authorities at state level, the federal and state police forces, the German army and the aid organisations.

> *District control centre*

If a citizen in the district area dials the number 112, it is mostly a district employee who takes action to help the citizen in his distress.

The district control centre manages the emergency service in the district area and alerts the voluntary fire services. Employees specially trained in emergency rescue and fire fighting are available for this task at the control centre round the clock. The expert transport of sick people is also organised by the district control centre.

> *Emergency rescue service*

To ensure rapid individual care in emergency, the districts, as maintaining bodies of the emergency rescue service, decide the number and siting of emergency rescue teams and rescue equipment and their availability. Emergency doctor, rescue vehicle, rescue helicopter and other special rescue equipment are kept ready and funded by the districts. Also the organisational preparation of rescue services and emergency precautions for larger events (for example, World Youth Day, the Football World Cup, accidents involving large numbers of casualties) are undertaken by the districts.



> **Fire Protection**

The districts organise and finance the regional training of the voluntary fire services; in the event of major catastrophes the districts can take over the control of fire service operations. They also make special operational control vehicles available to the voluntary fire services.

> **Disaster control**

As disaster management authorities, the districts perform numerous tasks. Thus, for example, by drawing up special control plans they ensure that catastrophic events can be adequately combated in particularly hazardous areas (chemical companies, floods). The districts also respond to unusual threats to the infrastructure, to attacks or epidemics of biological or chemical origin (for example, anthrax, bird flu, SARS). The districts are also active in the area of emergency food provision and civil-military cooperation. The districts' crisis managements are on constant standby to minimise the effects of accidents on the populace and the environment as far as possible.

> **District public order office**

All the districts also perform further work of general hazard prevention. The important area of the traditional public order office normally includes nationality and marital status, foreign residents' affairs, trade supervision, fishing and hunting, registry office supervision, combating illegal employment.

> **District police authority**

For over half a century a proven form of cooperation between the state and districts for the prevention and fighting of crime has existed in North Rhine-Westphalia. The state has made the head of district authority the chief of police in the district by way of "executive loan". Normally each district police authority of the state is responsible for the area of a district.

That makes sense: for one thing, local and citizen-related police work is thus guaranteed, and for another, synergetic and concentration effects are achieved hereby. In his double function as head of the district authority and district police authority the head of district authority also has direct responsibilities and intervention options in the areas of emergency rescue service, road traffic, public order office, disaster management, etc.

Cooperation between the public order authorities of the district authority and the police is thus guaranteed.

Even in the event of future reform measures the districts of North Rhine-Westphalia are therefore committed to a local and citizen-oriented district police in the interest of its citizens.



BUILDING AND TRANSPORT

The communal planning authority serves to assure and further develop the quality of local living conditions. From the setting up of a modern infrastructure (local passenger transport, building of schools and roads, public utilities, etc.) through to nature and countryside conservancy, public investment linked with these is undertaken in the service of the populace and the economy.

In the control and coordination of private and public building measures the districts with their planning offices perform an important role. They have a say in nearly all planning in the district area and ensure that public concerns (for example, nature and countryside conservancy, water management, immission control) are included and taken into account in planning processes. Also in the case of cross-community town and country planning and regional and state planning processes the district concentrates the interests of its towns, cities and communities and integrates them in the process.

> *Planning and building for the future*

The districts draw up for the constructional outer area in the district area the countryside plans, which bindingly lay down the necessary conservancy and development measures for nature and countryside. In collaboration with the district towns, cities and communities the districts also work on projects for strengthening the business location and quality of life. To be able to plan, analyse and evaluate developments farsightedly, the districts have set up statistical offices. These compile statistics on, for example, population development, traffic volume,

building operations or economic developments, which are used as a basis for future planning development measures.

The housing support experts in the district authorities are ready with advice and practical support with regard to questions of state assistance for favourably priced living space for households on a low income or seriously handicapped relatives.

> *Well surveyed*

The district surveying and land registry offices have important tasks in the area of land reallocation where new plots of land have to be created and surveyed. This task is often especially important in the case of measures for reconstruction and urban renewal. However, anyone wanting to build a house also needs the assistance of the district land registry office. Here the future owner of the building is given a site plan of the plot showing its boundaries. When the house is finished, it is measured in to ensure that the land survey register, in which all the plots of land in the district are entered, is up to date. Surveys are not only carried out when changes are made to boundaries or buildings. In many areas of the State of North Rhine-Westphalia land register documents are based on data from the 19th Century and are imprecise. For this reason resurveys are constantly being carried out. This information is also needed by the assessment committees set up by the districts and district towns and cities. They determine the guide values for land prices.



Without good survey bases no local land-use plan can be drawn up. The work of the district land registry offices is an indispensable requirement for new building and industrial areas in the communities. The latest technologies, such as satellite surveying, are employed.

> **Transport – best links**

In a globalised world with ever expanding exchange relations a well functioning transport infrastructure is an import advantage for a location. Easy accessibility and excellent links and transport infrastructures which are amongst the best in Germany mark North Rhine-Westphalia out.

Millions of people drive to work, school or the shops in other towns or cities daily. Because trains and buses do not stop at community boundaries, the regulation of public local transport is the responsibility of the districts. Many districts also have rail and bus companies or have participating interests in them. Cooperation areas into which the districts and independent cities have been integrated have been created for local passenger rail transport. The districts invest in district roadbuilding and maintenance with million-euro transport infrastructure programmes. In the districts of North Rhine-Westphalia alone there are more than 9,000 kilometres of roads, which thus represent an important component of the regional transport network. The districts also ensure that, as well as motorised individual transport, public passenger transport as well as bicycle and pedestrian traffic are taken into appropriate consideration in transport development planning. They also support public passenger local transport and champion social and family-friendly fares in the transport federations and transport working committees.



CONSUMER PROTECTION



Through their responsibilities the district authorities are partners and representatives of citizens, particularly where healthy, problem free food is concerned.

This begins with water. The public health department's hygiene inspectors test the quality and content of the drinking water. The taking of samples and regular environmental medical assessment of water supply systems (springs, waterworks, etc.) are one of the inspectors' core tasks. Every citizen can turn on his tap, knowing that not only the respective waterworks' quality commitment but also official monitoring guarantees clean, healthy drinking water.

Highly sensitive foodstuffs are meat and other animal products. These are subject to continuous, regular monitoring by district vets and food inspectors. Animals and poultry for slaughter are subjected to an official examination before and after slaughter, domestic and wild pigs are also examined for the presence of trichinas. Milk hygiene is likewise officially monitored.

> *Inspections are necessary*

However, the veterinary offices monitoring activity actually starts with checks on animal feed even before food production begins. In this way it is ensured that in the production facilities being monitored animals are being given only satisfactory feeds and impairment of the meat is thus prevented.



Furthermore, food companies of all kinds (industry, trade and eating places) are regularly subjected to comprehensive checks by specially trained food inspectors. The protective hand of the food monitoring system extends to barbecue parties and fairs and festivals where food is sold. Additionally, food samples are regularly taken at retail and trade establishments. The inspection offices concentrate mainly on hygiene, content and marking of food.

> **Consumers can be involved**

The citizen can also be involved in the area of food inspection. If he suspects that a foodstuff which he has acquired is not faultfree, he can send it to the food monitoring department for checking as „consumer input“. This applies to both foodstuffs from retail and trade as well as from eating places.

Official combating measures in the case of identified animal epidemics serve both the protection of animal stocks as well of consumers. Here the veterinary departments follow EU requirements and national regulations. These comprise checking for adherence to hygiene regulations, vaccinations, setting up of no-go areas and – the most drastic measure – the slaughter of affected animal stocks. Authority vets also have the task of preventing and combating animal diseases which are transferable to humans, such as rabies, tuberculosis or psittacosis.

by the way...

As at companies, district authorities take care to reach decisions not only in the interest of the majority but also after taking particular aspects into consideration. For this purpose the districts appoint special officers:

The data protection officer ensures that partly very sensitive information about residents and local companies is treated considerately and completely in the interest of data protection. The corruption prevention officer is committed to projects to prevent bribery and corruption. And the equal-opportunities officer concerns herself with, amongst other things, women's matters and provides assistance with issues like violence, career or the family.

Finally, a district authority's other areas of responsibility serve to protect the consumer in the broadest sense. For example, the provision of a debt counselling service as a statutory communal task for which the social welfare offices are responsible. Responsibility for the supervision of chimney sweeps has passed to the public order offices so that citizens have a contact point at the district authority.



BUSINESS AND EDUCATION

North Rhine-Westphalia is a strong part of Germany with excellent future prospects. Its strength as the most populous, an economically strong and a highly productive state of the Federal Republic of Germany develops through its central position in Europe. In an international comparison NRW is amongst the world's 15 leading national economies. Within a radius of 500 kilometres (that is, the distance a lorry can drive in a day) around the state capital Düsseldorf live more than 40 per cent of the consumers in the European Union, about 150 million people.

> *Attractive locations*

The strength of the state is also due to the strength of its 31 districts, which make up nearly 90 per cent of the geographical area of North Rhine-Westphalia. The districts of North Rhine-Westphalia are attractive business and industrial locations. The transformations from an industrial to a service and information society as well as the rapidly growing internationalisation of competition are central future challenges for further economic development. Accordingly, location policy in the interest of the promotion of trade and industry and employment has the highest priority. The active promotion of trade and industry and employment undertaken today by its trade and industry promotion companies or offices is much more than just goodwill and a nice service. The earliest possible



support of investment projects, advice on business start-ups and funding, local authority guidance and concentration function, export business assistance and location marketing are just some of their main tasks which have one central aim: the creation of new and preservation of existing jobs.



> **Qualification is a decisive location factor**

Competitiveness does not begin in the factory workshop or the research laboratory. It begins in the classroom. As bodies maintaining vocational schools the districts have many and varied opportunities for qualifying potential employees in close partnership with businesses, chambers, the skilled trades and industry according to the requirements of the labour market and developing new future-focused kinds of jobs. Districts are often also maintaining bodies for further-training establishments, further-education colleges and technology centres. With all these efforts the disadvantaged members of our society are never lost sight of. The districts are also the maintaining bodies for many special schools for handicapped children. Thanks to these schools' large catchment area special assistance is possible for each disability.

Qualification and further training remain the best prerequisites for a secure job – also tomorrow and the day after tomorrow. The districts use all the means available to them to enable young people in particular to obtain a professional qualifications and future prospects.



NATURE CONSERVANCY



One of the state's most urgent tasks is conservation of the natural bases of life. This means that earth, water, air, animals and plants and their living spaces are given especial consideration in all planning projects. This is guaranteed by the Nature and Countryside Conservancy Acts of the federation and the states. The districts, as lower countryside authorities and lower water authorities, then also ensure that the conservancy laws are abided by.

The aim of the legal requirements is to achieve a balance between measures requiring free space and protection of the natural living spaces of animals and plants.

> *Districts, naturally*

In the nature conservancy legislation not only the aims, tasks and content of nature conservancy and care of the countryside are described but means are also prescribed for implementing these. Here, too, the districts are active in the fulfilment of their statutory tasks.

Countryside planning serves to protect, develop and care for our countryside. It represents an essential means of environmental provision. The countryside plan provides on the basis of the North Rhine-Westphalian Nature Conservancy Act and Countryside Act the planning and legal possibilities for measures of nature conservancy and countryside care and development.

> *Countryside plan*

How and where can planning be undertaken for our and with our environment and the various agents? One of the districts' special tasks is to draw up the so-called countryside plans, something which is understandably done in coordination with many interest groups. These plans set out in a combination of picture, map, text and reasons the space to be planned for.



AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

The planning is in many cases supported in the preparation phase with the help of concept developments and increased participation processes.

Countryside plans are finally resolved on in the form of a charter by the district council after a comprehensive participation procedure involving citizens and supporters of public concerns. On approval by the regional government the plan is legally finalised. It applies in all cases only to the free countryside.

This task is also in good hands with the districts with regard to the function of nature and countryside as a recreation and adventure area for people.

The aims of this countryside planning are:

- to plan the existing and also expected state of nature and countryside,
- to uphold the specific communal aims and principles of nature conservancy and countryside care,
- to implement the requirements and measures
 - for prevention or reduction of damage to nature and countryside
 - for protection, care and development of specific parts of nature and countryside and their life communities,
 - for the protection, improvement and regeneration of earth, waterways, air and climate,
 - to conserve and develop the variety, character and beauty of nature and countryside.

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THE COUNTRYSIDE ASSOCIATIONS AND THE RUHR REGIONAL ASSOCIATION – PARTNERS OF THE COMMUNITIES

The Rhineland Countryside Association ("Landschaftsverband Rheinland, LVR") is the association of the Rhine districts and independent cities, the Westfalen-Lippe Countryside Association ("Landschaftsverband Westfalen-Lippe, LWL") that of the area corporations in Westfalen-Lippe. The constitution of the State of North Rhine-Westphalia guarantees that the communities are to administer communal affairs themselves. However, communal affairs often extend beyond the boundaries of the communities, towns, cities and districts, for example, in the preservation of culture as well as in parts of the health, school, youth and social welfare sectors. For this reason there are two regional communal associations in North Rhine-Westphalia, the Rhineland Countryside Association based in Cologne and the Westfalen-Lippe Countryside Association based in Münster which carry out tasks of this kind for the districts and independent cities. The principle of communal self-administration – the participation of citizens in the fulfilment of the tasks – thus also applies to the region. The countryside associations maintain, for example, museums, psychiatric hospitals as well as schools for the deaf and blind. Or they support the communities in the preservation of monuments; the concept of "countryside association" is thus a little misleading at first glance.

The districts and independent cities also form the Ruhr Regional Association ("Regionalverband Ruhr, RVR"). The Ruhr Regional Association operates, for example, leisure centres and secures and maintains numerous nature conservancy areas in the association's area. It also operates waste disposal systems via a subsidiary company. All three associations are also members of the Association of Districts ("Landkreistag").



FULL OF LIFE AND CULTURE

You can feel it, a vitality and unbelievable energy. In the districts of North Rhine-Westphalia art and culture are not foreign words. NRW is a state which also lives for or precisely because of its culture. And how. Because the range of cultural activities offered is as large as the state is big! 31 districts are the best guarantee for an interesting cultural offering. The many activities, such as art & culture days, the award of prizes for art, exhibitions, concert series or theatre performances and lots more form a broad range for every age group and the most varied interest groups. These attractions are initiated and supported in a successful mix by private artists, the communities of the districts and the districts themselves. It normally amounts to an aggregate of offerings that an individual would not create but which, as a common endeavour, serve to enrich everyone.

Moreover, in the districts' cultural departments information on cultural and tourist events, projects, artists and cultural initiatives is recorded and collected and processed for the information of citizens. Alongside these activities, the districts' cultural work also includes "traditional" tasks, for example, the preservation of monuments.

> *Maintaining objects of historic importance*

As the higher authority responsible for monuments, districts also have responsibilities in matters of monument and historic building preservation. They are, for example, responsible for decisions on appeals against

decisions of the communities, the conferral of certain excavation authorisations and the designation of excavation conservancy areas. A district represents with these responsibilities an important contact and advisory point for citizens, as well as for communities. Furthermore, the maintenance of historic buildings is a task of monument maintenance, as well as the maintenance of cultural-heritage-related clubs and societies, professional associations, local cultural heritage archives and museums. District halls are there for citizens. For this reason the available exhibition rooms are well frequented, and in the district archives it is possible to see historic and modern objects and material.

> *Culture and tourism*

In many respects culture and tourism belong together. Because the culturally-interested person is often also somebody in search of recreation, he combines the two aspects. For the districts this means increasingly concerning themselves with the link between culture and leisure management.

In view of the fact that the districts of NRW are outstanding for their unusually varied cultural and natural landscape with a rich flora and fauna, in NRW there is a lot to choose from. These excellent basic conditions represent, amongst other things, the capital of tourism and culture, and it is important to quite specially maintain, care for and protect them. There is something for every age group, particularly in the areas of sport, excitement and relaxation. There are areas of the country which offer a leisure activity for every taste.



The range is as wide as the state is big. The districts have recognised this branch of industry and offer their commitment where it seems reasonable and possible. Normally they function as a coordination point and are supporting more and more initiatives for the setting up of tourist institutions or even initiate them themselves. Mostly the districts work in cooperation with the communities in these efforts. The aim here is always to offer citizens a wide and interesting range of activities which serve to increase the quality of life. Also in many cases the districts are maintaining bodies for the wildlife parks. Tourism also has a great importance for wildlife parks. Because when preparing ranges of activities for tourists, not only can beautiful countryside be offered but it can also be shown to those in search of recreation while still conserving the natural environment. It can be



stated for NRW that the state, for all its short history, already has a good reputation as a location offering a great diversity of natural space in a charming cultural landscape and also – not least because of its soft location factors – is regarded equally as an attractive business location.



DRIVING FORCE OF THE REGIONS



Physical and population size give the districts regional importance. An importance which they know how to use in many respects. The word "together" is an important aspect of the districts' fulfilment of their tasks, based on their balancing function as "concentrating authorities". The districts see themselves in many areas as promoters of intercommunal cooperation. Business, transport and tourism are examples of areas in which districts not only represent the interest of their communities but also cooperate in regional consensus with neighbouring districts.

Regional structure promotion and regional transport planning have long been tasks performed by the districts. Business promotion has, with increased structural change in the State of North Rhine-Westphalia, been introduced as what has become an indispensable element of intercommunal activity.

> *Regional concerted action*

Meanwhile the concept of "regional" is coming more and more into prominence in that people are acting beyond the boundaries of their districts. Particularly in matters of regional business promotion, tourism promotion, the environment or transport planning and in the case of questions of environmental policy the districts of a region are increasingly acting jointly and concertedly. Problems increasingly call for regional joint endeavor rather than limited local solutions. Here, too, the districts cannot be surpassed in their effectiveness as concentrating authorities.

Regional conferences, continuous intensive dialogue and cross-boundary contacts are just a few of the means used by the districts to actively further the strengthening of the region to which they belong



North Rhine-Westphalia borders on the Netherlands in the west and Belgium in the south-west. The districts close to the border have used what was in the past a geographic disadvantage and since the opening of the EU borders have attempted to turn their situation into a locational advantage. Consequently in all border districts a constant dialogue with the European neighbours is to be observed. The districts of North Rhine-Westphalia are important partners of the Euregio and also act pragmatically across boundaries by cooperating and organising across boundaries in different ways. The focus is mainly on overcoming the differences created by the border, not least in the case of legislation and responsibility. Pragmatic solutions of this kind are found, for example, ...



by the way...

The districts are modern service providers and move with the times. All 31 districts in North Rhine-Westphalia have their own Internet Website. There users can find important information, they can find the right contact and they can find the latest news. Visits to authorities can in many cases actually be made completely online – the word here is "e-government". Desired car registration numbers can be reserved, planning permission applied for, maps viewed or even live discussions conducted with the head of district authority ("Landrat").

- **when the police, fire brigades and rescue services need no longer stop at borders,**
- **when, for example, an accident victim can be taken by the German rescue service to the Dutch hospital two kilometres away and does not have to be driven to the nearest German hospital twelve kilometres away,**
- **when educational opportunities are increased because there are binational facilities initiated by districts which make training, a course of study or work in a neighbouring country easier, or**
- **when jobs can be created in industrial and business areas which are close to or even cross boundaries.**

There are enough examples to show that districts are the driving force of the regions. It would be impossible to list such examples or state examples in detail here because of their number and variety. One thing is certain: nobody knows how to establish the link between the communal and the regional better than the districts.



THE ASSOCIATION

The Association of Districts ("Landkreistag") of NRW is the union of the 31 districts of North Rhine-Westphalia. The members are the 31 districts of North Rhine-Westphalia, the Rhineland and Westfalen-Lippe countryside associations ("Landschaftsverband Rheinland, LVR", and "Landschaftsverband Westfalen-Lippe, LWL") and the Ruhr regional association ("Regionalverband Ruhr, RVR"). The Association of Districts is in turn a member of the German Association of Districts in Berlin. The Association of Districts is not an authority but a registered association of which all the districts of NRW and the mentioned afore-associations are members. The Association of Districts enjoys a special status, namely, the right to have its opinions on legislation or ordinances heard by the legislator and to express opinions for the totality of the districts. This right is conferred by the state constitution.

> Tasks

The Association of Districts handles the entire affairs of the 31 districts of North Rhine-Westphalia. It speaks and acts in support of self-administration in the districts, guarantees an intensive exchange of information and experience and promotes the strengthening of the districts' administrative power. As a central communal association, it represents the concerns of the districts of North Rhine-Westphalia vis-a-vis the state parliament and state government. It is committed to the public good, not individual interests.

> District assembly ("Landkreisversammlung")

The main body of the Association of Districts is the district assembly. It is made up of two representatives

from each district who are entitled to vote and meets at least once a year. The representatives elect a president and two vice-presidents from amongst their number. The district assembly lays down the principles of the associations' work.

> Executive committee

The executive committee is made up of 16 members (heads of district authority). It also includes the office director, the chief executive officer. The executive committee can also co-opt up to four members of the North Rhine-Westphalia state parliament, that is, include them as consultative members. These should be members of district councils. The executive committee represents the association outside the area. It prepares the district assembly and implements its resolutions.

> The technical committees

The technical committees prepare the resolutions reached by the bodies of the Association of Districts in their respective specialist areas and serve to exchange experience between the districts. The technical committees are currently those shown in the diagram. There is also a large number of issue-related working committees and working groups.

> The executive office

The executive office is managed by the chief executive officer, who is elected by the district assembly for eight years and who transacts the business of the current administration under the supervision of the executive committee. The executive office has the task of preparing the work of the committees of the association and implementing its resolutions outside. For this purpose

DISTRICT ASSEMBLY

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

EXECUTIVE OFFICE



THE MAIN BODIES OF THE ASSOCIATION OF DISTRICTS ("LANDKREISTAG") OF NORTH RHINE-WESTPHALIA

OF DISTRICTS ("LANDKREISTAG")

it maintains constant contact with the state parliament and the state government and other associations and interest groups.

> *The Freiherr vom Stein Institute*

The Association of Districts of North Rhine-Westphalia is the maintaining body of the "Freiherr vom Stein Institute (FSI)", the association's scientific research institution at the University of Münster. The FSI has the task of carrying out fundamental community and basic politic-scientific work and maintain the relationship between communal practice and community studies.

> *The Association of Districts of North Rhine-Westphalia ("Landkreistag Nordrhein-Westfalen, LKT NRW")*

- puts suggestions to the state parliament and state government when preparing and implementing legislation, ordinances and decrees, in so far as they affect the concerns of the districts,
- deals with questions of organisation, efficiency and the administrative power of the districts,
- advises the districts and provides them with information,
- maintains the exchange of experience among the districts, and
- informs the public about district work, facilities and problems.

> *Further information*

A comprehensive range of public and internal information is available on the Internet at www.lkt-nrw.de.

COMMITTEE FOR CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS, ADMINISTRATION AND HUMAN RESOURCES

COMMITTEE FOR SCHOOLS, CULTURE AND SPORT

SOCIAL AND YOUTH WELFARE COMMITTEE

FINANCE COMMITTEE

HEALTH COMMITTEE

ENVIRONMENT AND BUILDING COMMITTEE

ECONOMICS AND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE

SURVEYING COMMITTEE

VETERINARY COMMITTEE

DISTRICT POLICY AND CIVIC PARTICIPATION

A modern district authority has a great interest in active civic participation. It informs its citizens regularly, comprehensively and early about planned projects and enables them to materially influence community development. In many districts this offering meets with a great willingness among people to participate. Many commit themselves in order to fulfil their responsibility to the community. Particularly in cases of direct concern great potential for participation can be mobilised.

However, immediate concern at district level is mostly less pronounced than amongst the towns, cities and communities. Unlike there, the districts undertake tasks which on average generate less individual concern than do, for example, the closure of a kindergarten or the allocation of a business and industrial area. Many district tasks, such as the maintenance of the land register, food inspection or the health services are in the eyes of citizens less „spectacular“. Concepts like "citizen community" and "civil society" are accordingly applicable to the district level only if modified, because numerous communal supervision, security and order or school inspection activities transferred from the state and the federation have to be fulfilled.

> **Statutory and voluntary duties**

By contrast there are the duties of statutory or voluntary self-administration. Here the district or district policy decides – within the legal framework – whether and in what way certain tasks are performed. The statutory tasks include, for example, garbage collection, countryside planning, building inspection or motor vehicle registration, while voluntary tasks are mostly to be found in the social welfare or cultural sector.

It is precisely the districts' supralocal tasks that are of greater interest to citizens. The building of district roads or even waste management are the issues which traditionally arouse intensive civic participation.



In these and many other processes (for example, planning approval, countryside planning, and environmental compatibility inspections) civic participation is laid down by law and already fixed in its minimum requirements. Moreover, a district authority which sees itself as a modern and service-oriented service provider always has an interest in well informed concerned persons to enable it to prepare for potential conflict situations. Accordingly considerably more comprehensive information is provided and earlier than would be required by the law. Early offers of participation and coordinating discussions produce better results and shorter processes on both sides.

> Voting options

As well as the case-related areas of participation, perhaps the most important form of civic participation is the exercise of the active voting right. Since 1999 full-time heads of district authority ("Landrat"), like the members of the district council, have been elected by the citizens of the district. The head of district authority is the chairman of the district council and the district committee and at the same time the head of the district authority.

The citizens of the cities and communities can thus exercise a direct influence over the political orientation of their district – or take on a political mandate themselves.

by the way...

Have you already sought a meeting with your district councillor? District councillors are open to suggestions and criticism from their constituents. After all, they are the representatives of the voters of their district, their constituency. Their opinions can find their way into the bodies which make district policy via district councillors.

If you do not know who your district councillor is, the district authority would be pleased to provide you with information.

There are also further forms of civic participation. These range from visits to public meetings of the district council and its committees through residents' question times, applications and submissions to petitions for referendums. Sometimes a simple discussion helps: many district councillors are always open to suggestions and criticism.

District policy and civic participation – here, despite partly restricted freedom of decision, there are many opportunities for discussing projects, planning and processes with citizens and realising them in accordance with citizens' needs and wishes. This is also a worthwhile opportunity for greater citizens' interest and identification with the district.



THE DIRECT LINE TO YOUR DISTRICT AUTHORITY

Kreis Aachen/StädteRegion Aachen

Zollernstraße 10
52070 Aachen
Tel. +49 (0) 241 51980
www.kreis-aachen.de

Kreis Borken

Burloer Straße 93
46325 Borken
Tel. +49 (0) 2861 820
www.kreis-borken.de

Kreis Coesfeld

Friedrich-Ebert-Str. 7
48653 Coesfeld
Tel. +49 (0) 2541 180
www.kreis-coesfeld.de

Kreis Düren

Bismarckstr. 16
52351 Düren
Tel. +49 (0) 2421 /220
www.kreis-dueren.de

Ennepe-Ruhr-Kreis

Hauptstr. 92
58332 Schwelm
Tel. +49 (0) 2336 930
www.en-kreis.de

Kreis Euskirchen

Jülicher Ring 32
53879 Euskirchen
Tel. +49 (0) 2251 150
www.kreis-euskirchen.de

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Kreis Lippe

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Kreis Minden-Lübbecke

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Tel. +49 (0) 571 8070
www.minden-luebbecke.de

Rhein-Kreis Neuss

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Oberbergischer Kreis

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Kreis Olpe

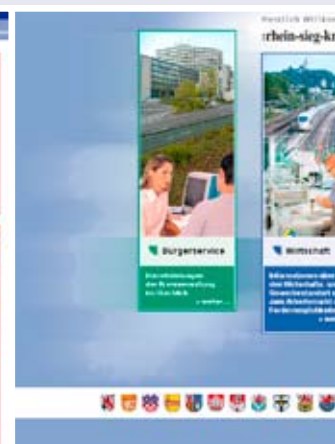
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50126 Bergheim
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www.rhein-erft-kreis.de

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www.rheinisch-bergischer-kreis.de

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www.rhein-sieg-kreis.de

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Kreis Viersen

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www.kreis-viersen.de

Kreis Warendorf

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48231 Warendorf
Tel. +49 (0) 2581 530
www.kreis-warendorf.de

Kreis Wesel

Reeser Landstraße 31
46483 Wesel
Tel. +49 (0) 281 2070
www.kreis-wesel.de



Neue Konzepte für kommunale Finanzen

Bei ihrem Finanz- und Zinsmanagement können die Kommunen in Nordrhein-Westfalen jetzt auf ein umfassendes Beratungsangebot der NRW.BANK zurückgreifen: Die Bank unterstützt die Kommunen beim Erkennen und Steuern von Chancen und Risiken im Finanzmanagement – und bei der Nutzung sinnvoller Lösungen. Das Ziel: die Zinsbelastung der Kommunen zu optimieren.

Die Schuldenlast der Kommunen in Deutschland steigt seit Jahren. Viele Kommunen suchen nach haushaltsentlastenden Maßnahmen. Daher hat in den vergangenen Jahren der Einsatz von Finanzinstrumenten, mit denen die Zinsbelastung gesenkt werden soll, an Bedeutung gewonnen. Verstärkt nutzen die Kommunen sogenannte Derivate. Mittels Zinsderivaten lässt sich beispielsweise die Zinsbindungsstruktur eines Schuldenbestands verändern und steuern. Je nach Produkt können zudem Chancen genutzt werden, mit denen die Zinslast optimiert wird.

Chancen und Risiken erkennen und steuern

Das Problem: Die Zinsbelastung kann bei einer unerwarteten Marktentwicklung deutlich ansteigen. Kommen in der Zinssteuerung also Derivate zum Einsatz, müssen immer auch die Risiken daraus fachmännisch analysiert und gesteuert werden. Und hierzu fehlen den Kommunen in der Regel die Infrastruktur und die Ressourcen.

Ein in Deutschland einmaliges Angebot

Hier setzt die NRW.BANK an. Mit ihrem Finanzwissen unterstützt sie die Kommunen dabei, die Finanzinstrumente sachgerecht einzusetzen sowie negative Entwicklungen zu erkennen und zu begrenzen. Finanzmanagement definiert sie dabei als Erkennen, Bewerten, Steuern und Kontrollieren von Risiken und Chancen der Finanzinstrumente – unter Wahrung der kommunalen Ziele. Gemeinsam sollen die Chancen und Risiken der Finanzinstrumente adäquat beurteilt und verschiedene Produktangebote durch klare Vorgaben vergleichbar gemacht werden – ein in Deutschland einmaliges Beratungsangebot, da die NRW.BANK die Funktion einer externen Stabsstelle der Kämmerei übernehmen kann.

Qualitätskontrolle des Finanzbereichs

Zum Beratungsangebot gehört auch eine Qualitäts- und Risikokontrolle des gesamten Finanzbereichs sowie der Aufbau eines übersichtlichen Reportings für die verschiedenen Gremien einer Kommune. Der Produkteinsatz erfolgt durch Ausschreibungen. Auf Basis einer differenzierten Limitsteuerung und der Anforderungen an neue Produkte wird sichergestellt, dass Chancen für die Zinseinsparung genutzt werden, aber keine Klumpenrisiken entstehen.

Pilotprojekt mit der Stadt Gelsenkirchen

In der Praxis wurde das Finanzmanagement in einem Pilotprojekt mit der Stadt Gelsenkirchen bereits erfolgreich erprobt – seit dem Frühjahr 2006. Gelsenkirchens Kämmerer Lars Martin Klieve erwartet deutliche Vorteile für die Stadt: „Der Finanzbereich der Stadt hat in den vergangenen Jahren bereits erste Erfolge beim Schuldenmanagement erzielt. Durch dieses Projekt qualifizieren wir uns weiter im professionellen Umgang mit unserem Schuldenbestand.“

2038: Verkehrsdezernent.



Die NRW.BANK hat die Ideen der Kommunen im Blick. Als kompetenter Partner wissen wir um die Herausforderungen in den Kommunen. Und haben die passende Antwort – ob mit intelligenten Förderprogrammen oder strukturierten Finanzierungslösungen. Wir reagieren schnell auf Ihren Bedarf. Mit Kapital. Mit Engagement. Und einer starken Mannschaft. Damit Ideen spielend Wirklichkeit werden.

Haben Sie auch Ideen? Dann fragen Sie nach uns – bei Ihrer Bank, Sparkasse oder in unseren Beratungszentren Rheinland 0211 91741-4600 und Westfalen 0251 91741-4600.

www.nrwbank.de



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