

Rural rules! Trendy Concepts for Rural Living



Swapping City for Country Life

Like many people on the verge of starting a family, we swapped our cramped apartment in Dublin City for a more spacious and rural alternative in Co. Wicklow. Sometimes we still can't believe how lucky we were [finding our perfect family home](#) after just one viewing. The house itself and also its location in the gorgeous seaside [seaside town of Greystones](#) offers everything we had been looking for.

We didn't exactly acquire a farm, but my husband John likes growing vegetables in the sizable wrap around garden. I love my herbal and lavender bed as well as our little orchard which

bears gorgeous fruit every year and gives shade on sunny days. The kids have plenty of space for activities and their own little playground. Since we bought chickens just before Easter this year, I fondly call it our Payne FARMily.





Greystones – Not so rural anymore

Unfortunately the construction of housing estates in Greystones has grown exponentially in recent years. When we first viewed our house in summer 2016, there were only a few new developments around. All within reason for a popular and attractive area like Greystones. But ever since, developments have exploded, not taking the limited infrastructure into account at all. To my regret it doesn't feel as rural anymore as we had hoped for when we moved here.

However we still value all the amenities close by. Our house and garden is like a little green, self-contained island where we can enjoy privacy and tranquility without feeling claustrophobic. All the more during the times of a full Corona lockdown. We are thankful that we get to combine the best of both worlds – lively Greystones and the beautiful Irish countryside and sea at our doorstep.

And whilst Ireland is the destination embodying tranquility and re-connection with nature for many Germans, I turned to Germany for some pretty interesting trends emerging around rural living.

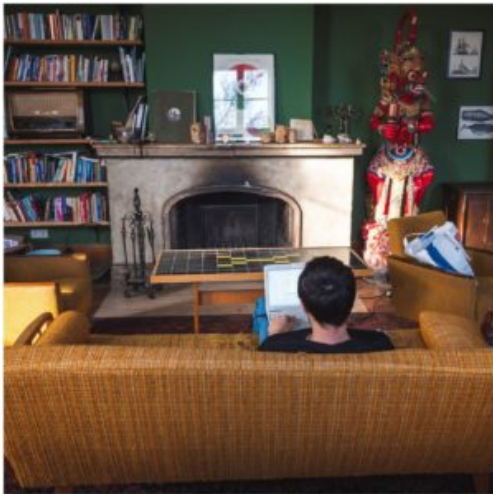
Longing for Land

According to a study, about 41% of the Germans could imagine switching their urban setting for a more rural one. Especially during the pandemic, as the proximity to the work place has become redundant, more people take advantage of their newly gained flexibility and flee the packed cities in favour of rural living.

Even before the pandemic the image of country life was already changing. It is no longer seen as outdated lifestyle between boring fields and smelly cow stables. Therefore house prices in rural areas in Germany have been increasing by 40 % in the past 4 years. It used to be the expensive and little supply of living space that forced young people out of the cities. Now more people *choose* rural living, hoping for a higher-quality family life. (Source: [German Documentary](#) "Out of the City – The Dream of Rural Living" [Titel translated])

Rural Living on Trial with "Coconat"

Committing to buying your own property far out in the countryside can still be a challenge despite working from home. Limited accessibility, none or little public transport and usually few facilities nearby – to name a few. [Coconat](#), about an hour South-West of Berlin, is a great project to live in the countryside 'on trial'. "It is perfect to get a feel for country life", Svenja Nette, a 35-years old blogger says to the ZDF (German TV station). „Am I made for country life and is the country life made for me“, she continues. That is what you can find out as a guest on the expansive former country estate in Klein Glien.



© 1:

[Coconat](#), 2 & 4: [Tilman Vogler](#), 3: [Andreas Plata](#)

Klein Glien is a tiny village with not more than 80 residents in the federal state of Brandenburg (surrounding Berlin). Here Coconat offers co-working and living space for young professionals, mostly coming from the nearby capital of Berlin at the moment. Instead of living or working by themselves in a single household, they can join a group of like-minded people from different backgrounds.

In the community area – a huge converted barn – the guests can socialise, share ideas or enjoy the peaceful surroundings on their own. Some only stay for 1 night to work on an assignment. Others book in for weeks or even months, working and contributing to the community in multiple ways. Apart from looking after their guests, the 3 founders Julianne Becker, Janosch Dietrich and Iris Wolf make sure that the locals are kept in the loop too. “It was important to us to respect the

views of the people in Klein Glien and that they accept us in return", says Julianne. The annual village festival, for example, is now hosted on the estate. A fantastic gain for everybody since the estate had been deserted and hence unused for many years beforehand.

Upcycling Big Style – "Your Year in Loitz"

Annika and Rolando, a creative couple from Berlin, have recently moved into an abandoned house in Loitz in Mecklenburg Vorpommern in the North of Germany. With that they have taken on a hell of a project. Namely to convert a big, empty shell into a livable space and to add value for the local community. Annika and Venezuelan native Rolando are full of innovative ideas and have a vision to make it work. After all they have been chosen out of 93 applicants when Loitz got the funding for 'The City of Future 2030'. The town residents then elected the couple from the 17 finalists to join their community.

Beating Berlin and Freiburg which had also applied for 'The City of Future 2030', was a great win for the 4300-resident town of Loitz. From the funding Annika and Rolando receive a monthly base income of €1000 for a year and rent-free living in order to brush up the image of the infrastructurally weak region. The idea behind it is to make living in a remote area more attractive again for young people. Hence, rather than young people benefiting from the countryside, it is the other way around in this case.

Annika and Rolando have a year to put their concept which won over the jury into reality. Supported by ambitious neighbours and volunteers and with their creative ideas and skills they are to transform their temporary home into a vital communal space. With that they hopefully will create a win-win situation even beyond the scope of the project. A fantastic initiative that could also help to awaken some rural Irish towns from their slumber.



© [Dein](#)

[Jahr in Loitz](#); 1, 2 & 4: Matthias Marx

“It takes a Village to raise a Child”

Not only *where* people live, but also *how* they live seems to be undergoing a shift towards traditional ways of living. When I asked my friend Julia why she was giving up her convenient city centre apartment in Hamburg to move to a multiple generation living space about 160km further North, she says: “It takes a village to raise a child. And that is my hope for our new home in ‘Freiland Flensburg’.” Julia is a single mother with a 5-year old daughter. Living and working in Hamburg has suited her in the past years. “Now it is time to move on”, she tells me. “My grandad was originally from Flensburg. Maybe it is a sign that we found exactly there what we were looking for.”

[‘Freiland Flensburg’](#) is a campus close to the city centre of Flensburg containing different forms of residential spaces. It

includes apartments for single households, different size houses for couples and families, as well accessible units for senior citizens. The main building provides communal space such as guest rooms, a kitchen, a roof terrace and an atrium in the centre. The idea is to offer support for everybody who wants (or needs it) and to profit from the vast skills set of the variety of residents.

“I won’t need to worry anymore when my daughter is playing outside”, Julia says. “There are always going to be other kids around. Or I can drop her off with a neighbour when I have to run a quick errand or work.” Julia on the other hand could offer support in digital matters to elderly people, or teach students how to use a sewing machine. Her baking is fantastic too. I am sure her fellow residents are going to profit from that. A great traditional barter system in a modern environment.

Allotment Garden Irish Style

Rural living without a garden doesn’t really go together for me. What I observe in Greystones however is that most new builds go for an extended indoor space over a green outdoor area. If people have a garden, they often manicure it to perfection or pave it altogether. Not exactly my idea of a natural recreation space.

With joy I read about Tírmór Allotments in Newcastle, Co. Wicklow in the [Greystone Guide](#) recently. “The project is to lay a foundation for an agroforestry project”, says founder Huw. He also runs the Co-working space [Hub13](#) that is currently on hold due to Covid 19. “Tírmór allotments is all about increased biodiversity and soil quality”, Huw continues, “and how farming used to be done before we thought we could cheat nature. Construction impacts can lead to increased flooding and I am planning to counteract negative side effects like that by going back to the roots.”

Aimed to be completed within the next 5 years, Huw is converting parts of the 150 year old family farm just outside Newtownmountkennedy into allotments of various sizes. "In combination with the work hubs, people can spend their lunch break planting their own veg", Huw says with a smile. A fantastic solution for people who prefer a low maintenance garden attached to their house, but would like to give home growing a shot anyway. Cooking and eating it on spot won't be too far fetched either as Huw is planning an outdoor kitchen and campsite along with it. The perfect outdoor adventure for hobby gardeners big and small!

Less is More

Above living concepts show that the wheel doesn't have to be re-invented. We can absolutely learn from what generations before us did well or even take a peek at other countries. By just giving it a modern twist, it can turn into something innovative and sustainable.

When I was a teenager I didn't appreciate rural living nor did I see myself settling in the Irish countryside. The older I get, the more I learn to value traditional concepts of living. I enjoy home growing and cooking food from scratch. I think it is intrinsic wanting to provide for your family. It also is very satisfying creating something with your own hands. I enjoy showing our kids how things grow and what you can make out of them. Moreover I am amazed how little we actually need for a happy life. Here is to rural living!

Sexism works both Ways

On the back of some quite negative publicity I have read about men and childminding during the Corona Crisis, I realised that

sexism works both ways. And I felt the need to show a different side of the story. It is obviously going to be a very personal point of view from within our family. Nevertheless I don't think that my husband John is an edge case. If we still *do* live in a world where men are misogynistic and can't or don't want to look after their children, I am even more lucky to have found the one and only super husband & daddy.

„Feminists shouting sexism all over“

I don't mind "Men-are-from-Mars-and-Women-from-Venus Jokes". Men and women *are* different by nature. They have different strengths and skill sets, often complementing each other. Generalising and joking about their flaws can be humorous. Especially when both sides are aware that it involves stereotyping and exaggerations.

A friend of mine sent me a video the other day about what would happen if women went on strike. It was hilarious! Men were holding crying babies, unable to work out what to do with them. Business men in suits panicking over having to pick up their little ones from kindergarten for the first time. Men at home clueless how to look after domestic stuff. It clearly was exaggerated and sarcastic which I don't have a problem with as such.

But jokes like that don't seem to work the other way around. Feminists would be shouting „sexism“ from all over. Why is it that we find it very funny when men are put down or made fun of when it comes to child rearing? But jokingly criticizing women's driving or mechanical skills – which is obviously as clichéd – is sexism?

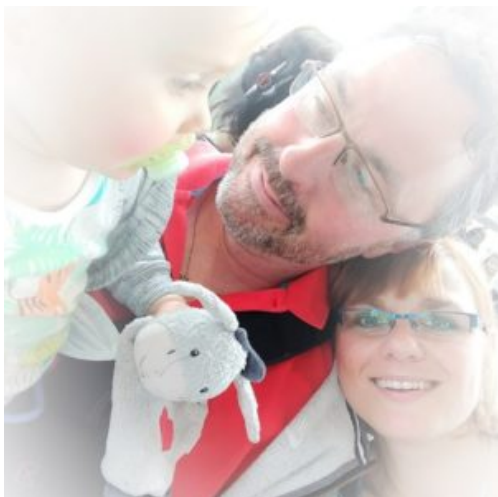
Men against Women

What I have noticed – even more during the Corona Crisis – is that often it is men against women. As if it was a competition that has to be won by either side. What happened to being

partners? Making use of what we both bring to the table and work as a team? Rather than just finger pointing and jumping all over each other's flaws.

I am not saying that we never have these – let's call them gender-based – arguments at home. Who is more tired? How many hours did I look after the kids on the weekend and how many hours did he etc.? Who deserves a break more? We *do* argue about these things, because it can be tough at times. [Looking after two small children 24/7 in your own four walls](#) while working from home is a challenge that grew exorbitantly during the pandemic.

However once our tempers have cooled down after above mentioned confrontations, we remind ourselves that we don't gain anything from *winning* in a marriage. (Well, except for half an hour extra sleep maybe at the cost of not talking to each other for a while.) We made agreements that we tend to stick to. And if we can't for one reason or another we try to compromise and re-adjust. Above all, we know that we are on each other's side and not in some strange pseudo-battle between male and female.





Lazy Housewife vs. Career-oriented Husband

One of our biggest standing agreements is how we split the roles at home. My main task is to look after the children and the domestic chores in the house. John is the sole bread winner. We both have a big responsibility. But for some reason I find neither is perceived as such.

An example for the negative media coverage during the Corona Crisis that I mentioned at the start stated that women are the losers of the pandemic. They have to stay at home and look after the children whilst the men can continue their jobs as before. No one even considers the increased financial pressure now resting on the husband's shoulders whilst the mother gets to spend more time with the children. It might not have been the mother's choice, but not necessarily the father's either.

It doesn't help that the image of a house wife and stay-at-home mom is still not the best in modern society. People argue that women make themselves dependent on their husbands and are denied self-fulfilment. They talk about "giving up" something, but never about gaining at the same time. Everybody knows – at least in theory – that it definitely *is* a full-time job to look after young children. And an important one on top of that. So why is it that women still feel the need to justify themselves for being home carers?

The Grass is always greener on the other Side

It looks like neither men nor women get what they are looking for. Of course I enjoy withdrawing to our home office to work on the computer while John is minding the kids. John on the contrary can't wait to get out at night time and roll around on the floor with the kids.

Does that mean we envy the other person all the time? Is that why there is a constant, merciless battle between men and women? Neither a full-time job in the office nor minding the kids at home is always a pleasure. But John and I chose our roles for a reason. The more we enjoy switching occasionally for a break. However we are far from questioning our whole system.

Jobs with a Meaning

After a hard day – rather than arguing who got the better end of the stick – we try to show each other appreciation for what we have achieved. John in his job and I in mine. I also disagree with the assumption that having a paid job is generally more fulfilling. Whilst our children show me appreciation almost every day, John might be looking for it in vain in the office, despite his hard work.

When it comes to the questions whose job as such is more important, I am also the clear winner. The purpose of my work, i.e. our children, add by far more meaning to my life than John's tasks at the office to his. At the same time we are well aware that we couldn't afford our life style without John's long hours and his good salary.

A Healthy Co-Dependency

There is no doubt about it that it needs us as a team to make it all function. Rather than striving for personal happiness and self-fulfillment, we believe that owning up to our responsibilities and contributing our part is the key to a

content (family) life on the long run. With this comes happiness and fulfillment.

Apart from that, there is no reward system or competition going on for the harder worker. If one slacks off, the other one has to bear the additional load, or things will start slipping. We are not ashamed of admitting that we are depending on each other. Our marriage and family would not work if we were two separate individuals fighting to realise our own personal goals.

Trouble Shooting in the Crisis

The Corona crisis has required a lot of re-adjustment. Even though our traditional roles made it easier for us to adapt quicker to childminding and [working from home](#), we weren't prepared to master it all by ourselves, entirely without the support of family and friends.

Hence we do have our moments when when we are sick and tired of it all and annoyed by each other's company. We had an argument recently which we didn't sort out before we went to bed. However we both agreed the next day that we didn't like that and won't be doing it again going forward. (Well, we will argue for sure, but won't drag it out until the next day.)

There really is no point. We know that we are generally on the same page and agree on the 'big stuff'. Otherwise we wouldn't have got married in the first place. When we argue it is about day-to-day things in combination with being tired or overwhelmed. At the end of the day we know that our marriage is the base camp where we both re-charge our batteries.

How to become the Employee of the Month as a Stay-at-Home-Mom

Numerous times I have been awarded Employee of the Month. It usually is a small ceremony. Few words, big emotions. Sometimes even tears. The last time I dressed up for the occasion but unfortunately someone spilled on my top. No big deal, it happens.

For the last two and a half years a young man has been managing the procedure. In September a sweet little lady joined the committee. Together they monitor me all day long and you never know what's going on in their heads. Sometimes I expect adoration and get shouted at. Other times for no reason at all I receive supportive smiles. They are harsh critics and they don't make a secret out of it. Their expectations are high and occasionally I struggle to meet them. I often have doubts that I am doing my job properly. The more surprised I am when I receive approval for my efforts.

The Challenge

The job itself is popular. Many people want to do it sooner or later. On the other hand you hear a lot of negative things about it. The job description sounds pretty straight forward at first. You'll find out soon enough though that you have to be flexible, able to improvise and multitask. Funny enough these are all skills that I didn't think I had. What I like about it is that I can work from home most of the time. That also means unfortunately that it is not 9 am to 5 pm.

When I took up the challenge in May 2017, I didn't have a clue what to expect. I thought I was well prepared, but in hindsight there was still a lot to worry about. I left my secure office job to jump into something completely new, which I

didn't know if I wanted for the long term. Now I am glad that I had the courage to do it. I couldn't think of anything else that I would rather do. Of course there are days when I am fed up with it all, but I had these in my old job too. So I definitely made the right decision.

More than a Job

By now I am quite passionate about my work and that really helps. Once you got into it, it is hard to go back to a job behind a desk. A very important part of my day-to-day tasks are the people I am dealing with. Different characters and sometimes even multiple personalities in one. This makes it prone to conflicts and it is on me to keep it all under control. This is something I really had to learn. I have always liked a structured and tidy working environment. And this isn't one. You are basically trying to keep the chaos to a minimum most of the time.

My shiny Award

Looks like I am one of those people myself who has a lot of negative things to say about this mysterious job. So I should mention at that stage that the reward I am getting makes all the stress and overtime worthwhile. And I presume it is also time to tell you what this 'Employee-of-the-Month thing' is all about if you haven't already guessed.

Instead of a gold-plated plaque to hang on the wall I receive colourful scribbles on paper. I get handcrafted cards with Thank-you-stamps and random animal stickers on it. Muddy little fingers bring me in daisys from the garden. I get cuddles and hugs, accompanied by heartwarming smiles and loud laughter. After a long day I am served 'homemade', imaginary meals. When I lie exhausted on the couch someone leans his tiny head against my shoulder without saying a word. With sparkling innocent eyes looking at me I get told "Mammy I love you". Then I know that I have the best job in the world and that for two little people I will always be the Employee of

the Months. No shiny award needed.