

**Zeitschrift:** The Swiss observer : the journal of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK  
**Herausgeber:** Federation of Swiss Societies in the United Kingdom  
**Band:** - (1974)  
**Heft:** 1698

**Artikel:** The Pestalozzi childrens Village  
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**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-689617>

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# THE PESTALOZZI CHILDRENS VILLAGE

When the Dalai Lama visited Britain in October, 1973, the Pestalozzi Village at Sedlescombe, near Hastings, was one of the first places that he visited. He came to greet the twenty-one young Tibetans among the 131 children from all over the world who are cared for in a unique institution inspired by the great Swiss educationalist Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi.

The Pestalozzi Village was created in 1959 and is the second of its kind. A similar village had been founded in Horgen, Switzerland, in 1946, to take care of war orphans or children of refugees. But the image of the Pestalozzi children's villages as being a haven for orphans — an image perhaps conjured up by the memory of Pestalozzi caring for the destitute children of Stans during one of the darkest periods of Swiss history — is no longer true. Since 1966 the Pestalozzi Village governed by the *Pestalozzi Children's Village Trust*, has been essentially concerned with the education and training of deprived children from the emergent nations.

Due to the poverty of these countries, where in some cases only about 12–16 per cent of children are able to receive secondary education, there are many youngsters who have proven ability at primary level but do not move on as every child in the west is able to do. The talents of these young people will be lost to their countries when they grow up. This is a sad situation since these are the very people that the developing nations need for their future prosperity.

## Helping to form an elite

The Trust thus aims at developing the potentialities of a number of children — not necessarily orphans or refugees — so that they can not only fulfil themselves, but later help to contribute to their countries' welfare.

It is not, however, just learning and skills — be they academic, technological, or artistic — which the Trust aims to provide. It is inherent in the scheme that the children or young people shall return to their countries of origin, be encouraged and enabled to retain their national and ethnic characteristics, cultures and outlooks. Hence they come in groups, live together as national families with house staff from their own lands. They follow their religious beliefs, as far as is possible, in the same way as they would do in their own families at home.

Yet a further fundamental of the



*Group of children, including Tibetan, Thai, Jordanian and Nigerian in the Village.*

Trust's policy is the very fact that these national groups of widely differing backgrounds and outlooks should live, work and play together. Thus is it hoped to instil comprehension of the "other point of view" at an early age while at the same time retaining their pride in what their own nations can offer the world.

The children at Sedlescombe come from Tibet, Thailand, India, the Middle East, Nigeria and South Vietnam. Some of these countries are represented at Pestalozzi because of world events. The Tibetan group, for example, came as a result of the flight from Tibet by the Dalai Lama in 1959 and the inclusion of a group of Arab children in 1966–68 was a conscious effort to aid the refugee relief programme. The choice of other countries, which were either beset by widespread poverty or war, is self-explanatory.

The children who come to Pestalozzi for periods ranging from five to eight years have to be carefully selected by criteria clearly laid down by the Trust. It is obvious that these children should be in a position to derive benefit from their life at Sedlescombe. This means that they must have proved their ability in primary school. They must also be able to live without their parents for many years and be happy. In practice, this requires them to come from a strong family background. They have to show personal characteristics demonstrating their individual ability to stand on their own and a desire to learn and succeed. The selection is carried out by action groups of committees representing the Trust in the countries concerned. That these committees are right in their selection is surely demonstrated by the pictures of merry children or adolescents at Sedlescombe. The children come in national groups of 12 (not less than three of either sex) together with a minimum of two staff of the same nation.

## Towards a high proportion of graduates

Once at least during their stay at the village (finances permitting) the children are given an opportunity to return to their homelands. This practice is not only to ensure that national and family ties are maintained, but as the trip is normally made after completion of "O" levels, it is at a moment when initial choice of future career is being made and the first stage in specialisation for "A" level will be embarked on after the visit home.

For those children with no knowledge of English (this is true of all of them except the Indians and Nigerians) an intensive course with language laboratory is provided. When they know basic English they pursue their formal education in local schools of the East Sussex C.C.E.C. They thus follow the normal English school system and are exposed to the English or "western" way of life. This brings a great many of them to higher education. In fact, the Chairman of the Trust reported in his 1972 Annual Report that ten out of the 37 children who came in 1966 were already in university, five in polytechnics taking degree courses, eight at technical colleges, and four at hospitals training as nurses. Of the total 131 initial entrants into the village up to 1971, just over 50 are now about to complete their training or higher education (not all of them in Britain) and are ready to start adult life in their own countries, thus achieving the aims of the Trust.

At the village, in the evening, at the weekends and in the holidays, the children receive training and instruction in all those particular disciplines which the village sets out to provide. The Trust believes that it is immaterial that they are possibly unlikely to become carpenters or builders. What matters is that they learn the necessary discipline of