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*Biodiversity in traditional meadow
orchards and valorisation of their
produce*

Landcare Europe Spanien Workshop

BIRKENFELDER
originale
von heimischen Streuobstwiesen



Meadow orchards

- High-stemmed fruit trees scattered over meadow areas in contrast to intensive fruit plantations.
- Part of the German cultural landscape.
- Comparable to agroforestry systems in Southern Europe such as the Iberian *Dehesas*, olive or almond groves.
- Recognized as an intangible cultural heritage by the German UNESCO Commission in 2021.



Meadow orchards in Europe

- Over the centuries several agroforestry systems were developed in Europe:
 - Meadow orchards
 - Chestnut and olive groves
- Between 1930-1950 about 2 millions hectares were covered by traditional orchards in Europe, mainly:
 - France and Germany
 - Switzerland, Austria, Slovenia, Poland, England, Belgium, Spain
- Fruits (apple, pear, cherry) are processed into different products:
 - Cider, apple juice, poiré, and cherry juice
 - Vinegar, calvados



Ecological importance

- Formative element of cultural landscape
- Large variety of different apple and pear species, important gene pool
- Due to extensive underuse, meadows are very rich in species
- Long tree lifespan creates important structures for the animal world (insects, birds, small mammals, bats, etc.)
- One of the most biodiverse habitats in Europe



Meadow orchards in Germany

- **Classic agricultural dual use**
 - ❖ Meadow or pasture
 - ❖ Table fruit, juice and wine
 - ❖ (firewood and timber)
- **Steady decline of fruit trees over the years**
 - ❖ Abandonment of use due to big manual labor and high costs
 - ❖ Clearing for new development areas and commercial areas
 - ❖ Obsolescence of the trees
 - ❖ Lack of maintenance
 - ❖ Loss of traditions and knowledge



Hunsrück

- Low mountain range (400-800 m) in the southwest of Germany, near France and Luxembourg in the federal state of Rhineland-Palatinate



- Foundation: 1995
- 70 members, including 35 municipalities
- Cooperative approach between politics, nature conservation and agriculture
- No full-time employees, about 10 volunteers (board and members) in the field of orchards and environmental education

- Activities:**
- Environmental education
 - Marketing of orchard products
 - Conservation of species-rich grassland



Orchard initiative

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Objective / Rationale

Preservation of the orchards by increasing the added value

Elements

- Marketing
- Qualification
- Planting
- Environmental education
- Regional identity and traditions



Environmental education

- Orchard Experience Trail
- Excursions with school and Kindergarten classes
- Fruit press festivals
- Orchard box



Qualification, maintenance and new planting

- Orchard tree maintenance
- Tree cutting workshops
- Planting new trees
- Reproduction of old varieties (through grafting)
- Consulting owners





LPV Birkenfeld e.V. is the head of the initiative

Own initiative

- Marketing
- Organisation of apple harvest
- Product sale: direct marketing & regional super markets
- Logistics & transport

Production (to order)

- Juice press

Birkenfelder Originale



Principle: Exchange apples for juice

- Target group:
Private fruit tree owners
- Up to 800 participants
- Harvest quantity 20 – 200 t
- Advantages:
Identification of the owners with
the initiative
- Important multipliers



„Birkenfelder Rotäpfelchen“

Lead Product

- Forgotten regional variety
- Appeal on social media
- Typical use
 - ❖ Christmas tree ornaments
 - ❖ Jam
- Over 500 trees newly planted
- Slow Food Germany „Arche Passagier des guten Geschmacks“



No concepts on paper - Just people doing it

- Volunteer work at the beginning
- Broad social basis
 - ❖ Environmental work
 - ❖ Cultural heritage
 - ❖ Landscape conservation
- Multipliers:
 - ❖ Local media
 - ❖ Apple tree owners
 - ❖ Elementary school & kindergarten
- Good Business Plan
- All partners in the value chain benefit
- Open-minded partner (supermarket)
- Startup capital (local bank, EU?)





- Oldest and most successful orchard initiative in Rhineland-Palatinate
- Over 800 fruit trees are used again
- More than 500 participants
- Market share of 10% in the region (approx. 80.000 L annually)
- Economically viable

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Many thanks for your attention

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