

# FORUM SYNERGIES

*Linking Sustainable Practices throughout Europe*



## Sustainable Europe in Practice

8 –11 October 2009, Göhrde Castle, Wendland, Germany



## Conference Report

Supported by



## Forum Synergies – the hosting organisation

... is a European non-profit organisation. Since 1994 our network of engaged citizens and associations has gathered rich and varied experience in sustainable practices, mainly in rural areas. Trying out the best ways to save resources and energy in our local communities, combining the intelligent use of modern technologies with traditional know how, and sharing our successes and weaknesses throughout Europe, have given us faith in getting involved in political decision-making on our future.

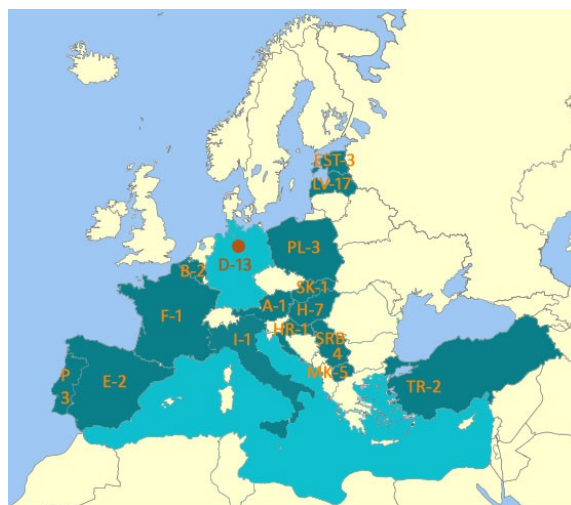


You can find more information about our ideas and projects on our website [www.forum-synergies.eu](http://www.forum-synergies.eu).

## European Rural Sustainability Gathering

From 8-11-October 2009 FORUM SYNERGIES held its „European Rural Sustainability Gathering“ in Göhrde hunting castle in Northern Germany. During 3 days about 70 participants from 16 European countries explored rural sustainability projects in the remarkable Wendland region, compared these experiences with their own regional issues in open space sessions and agreed on commitments and new projects. The event was made possible by the support of Fondation de France and Fondation pour le Progrès de l'Homme.

Participation was widely spread across the majority of EU member countries and some neighbouring countries as the map shows. It was quite obvious however that the meeting was especially attractive for Eastern countries. Latvia and Serbia contributed the largest national groups. Marta Marczis, Forum Synergies founding member, had organised an “East wind” group of 18 participants from Hungary, Serbia, Macedonia, Croatia and even Turkey that were related by previous project work in the context of the United Nations Environmental Programme. There was also a quite diverse group of German participants with connections to different national and international networks like the „community supported farming“ scene or the Global Ecovillage Network.



For the first time we had encouraged participants to bring children and partners to the gathering and so there was a multinational group of 7 children and youngsters to go to the forests with an experienced (male!) child care person.

The catering was organised with tasty local all organic food including some sponsoring of fruit juices from local processing company “Voelkel Säfte”.

## **The Gathering**

### **The opening evening**

After arrival and clearing of initial obstacles at the conference venue (like missing keys and heating problems in some rooms) there was a welcoming evening at the first night where deputy county governor Martin Donat and the mayor of Elbtalaue Municipality Jürgen Meyer welcomed the participants and explained the particular history and situation of Wendland region in terms of its long struggle for integrated and rural development, having been a former boarder region until the fall of the iron curtain in 1989 and not being convinced about the central government's plan to establish a centre for nuclear waste disposal there.

The region relied very early on an integrated development strategy to valorise its ecological, cultural and social resources by developing renewable energy projects and soft tourism. The numerous “alternative” settlers that moved into Wendland region from the mid-1970s on were, after some time of hesitation, rather supported by the local government and the municipalities. The “alternative” sector meanwhile contributes substantially to the local income and to the social and cultural richness of the region.

### **The field trip day**

The first real conference day was dedicated to four field trips, three of which by bus, one by bicycles.

The first field trip about “Natura 2000 and jobs” led participants to people and projects that care about the preservation of the ecological resources of the region (Elbe biosphere reserve and Drawehn Nature 2000 areas) and try to develop jobs and income from these assets.

The second field trip “renewable energy “ led participants to a wood chip heating system of a local school, a large biogas plant with methane purification technology and a connected biogas fuel station, a cooperatively owned windmill and another biogas plant with a connected neighbourhood heating system.

The third field trip “multifunctional agriculture” brought people by bicycle (this was by far the largest group, obviously an attractive mobility offer) to a bio-hotel that uses mainly locally grown food, and to two nearby ecological farms. The first of them, Tangsehl biodynamic cooperative farm, showed many diversified activities like crop, dairy and vegetable production and processing, farm kindergarten, secondary school classes visiting the farms for 3 weeks and a community supported distribution scheme of the products. The second farm, Darzau biodynamic farm, engages in solar electricity and uses the vast farm buildings for different independent economic activities like a carpentry, a black smith, a bakery and an ecological seed breeding and research business.

The fourth field trip about “rural quality of life” led the participants to the roots of the particular regional history, namely the place of the proposed nuclear waste disposal, and to lively exchanges with some of the most prominent proponents of the regions sustainable development philosophy.

After the four groups had returned from their field trips there was a plenary session with sharing of some of the main impressions. In the evening followed FORUM SYNERGIES traditional international buffet where participants displayed and explained local food that they had brought from their home regions. A tremendous variety of tasty local products was offered and consumed in an en-

thusiastic atmosphere. Local band “Two Troubadoura” accompanied the buffet with saxophone and accordion and in the end motivated the participants to dancing.

### **The open space day**

On the second conference day Rebecca Harms, co-president of the Green Group in the European Parliament, held a keynote speech, summarising the particular history and experiences of Wendland region (where she was born, grown up and still is living) and sketching out chances for further development strategies in remote European regions in the context of new EU policy trends after the last EU elections.

After her speech moderators Mikk Sarv from Estonia and Christoph Hatlapa from Germany explained Open Space rules and philosophy to participants and proposed them to contribute their own topics for thematic workshops. The proposed 6 parallel group locations and 3 successive time slots were then quite rapidly filled by participants’ workshop proposals, ranging from some more general topics like “What are public goods” to a wide array of concrete themes like effective schools, sustainable fishery, the situation of Roma people, community supported agriculture and many more. Surprisingly the possible 18 workshop slots were exactly filled up by the number of proposals; just the 19th merged easily with another one so everybody had their place and time to talk about the desired issues.

Each workshop was moderated by the one who had proposed the topic and who was responsible for its organisation. A second group member was meant to take notes on large flip chart papers, and all the groups had to fix a list of participants and some sort of summary.

After supper there was a social evening with screening of some participants’ DVDs; some more proposed activities („bring your local music CDs...”) in fact were replaced by collective sitting and talking and early sleeping because the intense exchange obviously had been quite demanding.

### **The „fishbowl“ day**

On the third and final conference day people gathered in a plenary to draw personal conclusions and agree to commitments for follow up actions. An inner chair circle was formed and only those who were sitting in the inner circle were allowed to speak, using words like “as a conclusion from this meeting I will do the following: ...”. After presenting proposals for action the speakers then had to note their proposal on a flip chart paper and add a concrete action, like proposing a meeting, a tele-conference or the writing of a concept. There were 9 concrete proposals ranging from „sustainable education“ over a „multifunctional farm network“ to a „connecting east“ follow-up meeting in Sofia.

## **Results**

### **Enlarging the network**

To the surprise of the organisers one main outcome of the gathering was the fact that 83% of participants had not been in contact with FORUM SYNERGIES structures before and participated for the first time at one of the Forum’s large exchange meetings. Those participants had diverse chances during the gathering to meet activists from other countries in their respective fields of in-

terest, to get inspired by the Wendland experiences shown during the field trips and by the other participants' contributions.

The benefits from participating at the gathering for each participant are obviously very individual and hard to estimate. There were many statements about a feeling of great enrichment and of taking home a great treasure of new experiences.

On the other hand for the FORUM SYNERGIES network this means that a large number of new people from new countries has come into contact with our methodology and might contribute to the Forum's activities in the future.

There were a number of new membership applications at the end of the conference including countries not yet represented in FORUM SYNERGIES like Latvia, Macedonia and Serbia. So the "formal" representation of countries in Forum Synergies rose from 10 to 17

### **Thematic exchanges**

As a result from the Open Space day and the concluding fishbowl session commitments were made to engage in a number of new thematic exchange activities. Of course some of these proposals were more grounded than others in terms of engagement, of the responsible convenor and of number of participants that backed up the proposal with their signatures. The most promising seemed to be

- the rural health project
- sustainable fisheries
- multifunctional farms
- an international youth volunteer camp.

### **Methodology**

Another remarkable result of the gathering was the fruitful experience with the Open Space methodology on the second conference day. Although regarded previously sceptically by some board members everybody seemed very convinced at the end that Open Space has contributed a way to mobilise a large number of experiences and ideas among a quite diverse group of participants. The expectations into the Open Space method by the organisers – namely to bring up new and unexpected ideas and surprising initiatives that nobody could have thought of during the conferences preparation – was fully fulfilled. In a final feedback round several participants stressed that Open Space method was one of the things they will take away from the conference with the hope to implement it back home themselves.

The experience of the gathering in its basic structure of welcoming evening, field trip, open space day and fish bowl session contributed to the treasure of moderating experiences in the network that has been accumulated over the years

### **Consequences for FS' programme and strategy**

Rethinking Forum Synergies action programme 2008-2013 was expected to be an important follow up activity after the gathering. In fact as a result of the proposed new thematic exchange topics, of the enlarged network relations and membership coverage of additional countries there now is material for new and supplementary activities within the network for the coming years.



## Evaluation

Main tasks of the gathering as the central large event of Forum Synergies' first two years of the new action program were to renew the activity of FS membership, to enlarge the network and to mobilise new initiatives and ideas for thematic activities. Taking into account that the sustainable rural development scene had considerably changed since the beginning of the network in the early 1990s the idea was also to gather voices from many new practitioners concerning actual tendencies and priorities at the grassroots level on the background of recent developments in EU agricultural and rural policy.

### Weak mobilisation of old members...

The goal to mobilise FS existing membership was only partially fulfilled since from the 23 current members only 11 participated in the gathering. The attempt to mobilise some of the very early contacts that were initially active during the Sustainable Mystery Tour had only limited success (Mara Bergmane). On the other end there was a surprisingly high presence of completely new participants coming especially from the Eastern new member states and pre-accession countries.

This seems to show that Forum Synergies' structure and networking activities are particularly interesting for people with a need of orientation about what rural sustainable development basically is all about, like it is the case in the new member states and pre-accession countries. Once the political integration into EU has settled and structures and procedures for sustainability projects are more obvious the activists concentrate on their project work and become less interested in an international exchange of ideas and experiences. Feedbacks on the invitation to the gathering from many sustainability projects for example in Spain, France and England clearly indicated that the gathering was seen as an interesting opportunity but the daily business of running the projects was clearly more relevant to these activists. From these countries there were almost no participants.

The FORUM SYNERGIES network seems to carry its potential "eastward" moving from more established situations to the political newcomers like a travelling circus. This poses the question of adequate FORUM SYNERGIES activities for projects in the older EU member states.

### ... but many new contacts

On the other hand the goal of mobilising new members and bringing up new activities and action ideas was fully achieved. Some quite concrete and some less concrete project proposals came out of the Open Space workshops and deserve a serious follow up. This means a lot of coordination and moderation work in the near future; even if we are not forced to follow up every idea that was raised we should feel a high responsibility towards those who contributed ideas to give them the necessary networking support to become active and realize them.

The representatives of several south eastern countries stressed however that they would need more time to stabilise their own networks, giving priority firstly to their internal working structures and then with more established relations coming back to FS and integrate into European exchanges with more professionalism and reliability.

### Back to the roots: FS methodology and topics

In two respects the gathering showed some "back to the roots" results for FS. Firstly, the methodology of having an intensive day of field trips and to use these impressions for a mutual exchange of

experiences on the following day was taken from the very beginnings of the network (e.g. the EN-ESD or the Swedish-Estonian workshop in 1999) proved to be a successful idea.

Secondly, the topics around multifunctional farming (largest field trip group, Open Space workshops “multifunctional farms” and „community supported agriculture”) proved to be interesting to a large number of participants, pointing back to the beginnings of the network where multifunctional and eco-farming projects were among active founding members (Pellworm, Wulksfelde, Mas de Noguera, CIVAM Mayenne, Lesachtal...). The initiatives that emerge from these workshops rely to the “access to land” thematic exchange project that has been developed together with Terre de Liens and Stroud Commonwealth in the recent months. This topic could be developed as a common link for activities in old and new EU members states.

### **Topics raised in the Open Space**

- Sustainability and Heritage
- Common goods
- Sustainable Farming
- Rural Life and Health
- Impact of organizational capacity of communities on sustainable development
- East Wind
- How to define public goods
- Use of renewable energies in rural areas/communities
- Meadows vs biofuels
- Non-violent conflict resolution in rural areas
- Participation
- Multifunctionality
- New win-win relations between cities and rural areas
- Water
- How to define common goods
- Is fish-farming or leisure fishery also a sustainable for diversification?
- How to safeguard immaterial rural heritage?
- What should be the future activities of Forum Synergies
- Good schools for our children
- How to make agriculture sustainable and fit for the future?
- Right to use our own resources
- Income diversification especially at small farms

### **Conference Reader**

The conference reader encompasses presentation sheets from participants where they briefly give an overview about their organizations and the fields of sustainability they are engaged in.

The conference reader is available on request by email or on CD (~ 7MB)

### **Participants**

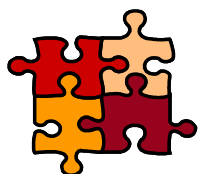
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*field trip 1*

## **NATURA 2000 and Economic Perspectives**

### **Background and stations**



Once a boarder region between former East and West Germany, large parts of the Elbtalaue / Wendland region are nowadays subject to EU environmental regulations (e.g. UNESCO Elbe Riverland Biosphere Reserve and Drawehn Natural Park). We visited people who strive to make a living from these natural assets



#### **▪ Hitzacker “Waldfrieden” and Hitzacker vineyard**

##### **1. Overview of the region**

*Klaus Lehmann, director of Hitzacker museum,  
Deputy Chairman of LEADER Local Action Group Wendland-Elbetal*  
[www.museum-hitzacker.de](http://www.museum-hitzacker.de), [www.luechow-dannenberg.de](http://www.luechow-dannenberg.de) -> LEADER

From Hitzacker vineyard with a good view along Elbe valley (99 vines, for some decades the northernmost vineyard in Germany, now topped by one in downtown Hamburg) Mr. Lehmann gave an overview about the region's history and particularities in a LEADER perspective.



Until the fall of the “iron curtain” along Elbe river (some army watchtowers are still to be seen) Wendland-Elbtalaue was a disadvantaged border region and as such profited from tax money support. After 1989 the support gradually ceased, and sustainable development had to build on the region's own strengths and potentials. The LEADER group (founded with LEADER+) as well as the Regional Partnership for the federal government's “model region” support programme ([www.wendland-elbetal.de](http://www.wendland-elbetal.de)) takes up this challenge with an integrated concept, building on the five pillars sustainable farming, renewable energy, ecology and culture.

##### **2. Elbe River Cycling Route – a sustainable tourism project**

*Oliver Hänsel, former Elbtalaue-Wendland-Touristik GmbH*  
[www.elberadweg.de](http://www.elberadweg.de)

Elbe River Cycling Route is a long-distance bike trail that has been worked out in the 1990s after the reunion of both parths of Germany. It runs from Dresden behind the Czech boarder down to Cuxhaven at Elbe estuary and in the last years has become the most popular thematic cycling route in Germany.

The stretch that runs along Wendland-Elbtalaue region is particularly interesting because along this segment the river had marked the border between both Germanies. Several army watchtowers as remnants of this time are yet to be seen, and on the eastern side the route runs partially along the former fence guarding road.

Oliver has worked out a coordinated internet presentation of all kinds of services and necessary logistical information to promote the route for sustainable tourism.



### 3. "Grenzenloser Elbgenuss" (Elbe River Enjoyment) cultural and gastronomic cooperation

*Susanne Hanspach, Agentur ElbGenuss*

[www.elbgenuss.de](http://www.elbgenuss.de)

38 farms houses and gardens, cultural and gastronomical projects along Elbe river had opened their doors in September 2009 for one week to combine regional catering with exposition and sale of handicraft and with cultural events. It was the first attempt of an annual autumn festival and after a good success will be continued in the coming years.

In fact it is a complementary festival to the amazing "Kulturelle Landpartie" festival in Wendland region that is held since 1989 in spring in the 10 days between Christ Ascension day and Pentecost. Kulturelle Landpartie in its 20th year 2009 had included about 600 artists in 100 places (mostly old farm houses) over the small Wendland villages and still seems to be growing. "Kultureller Elbgenuss" now was an attempt by some of these actors to enlarge the festival season towards the other end of the year, and locally is rather concentrated along the river and thematically oriented towards arts and regional food.

Susanne organized the festival in her free lance home office and compiled a comprehensive "Lockbuch" as festival guide.

#### Main conclusions



**"To loose a disadvantage may cause another disadvantage"**: When financial support for the former disadvantaged border region was stopped after the re-unification of Germany, an economic break-down was the consequence. This gap had to be filled with new activities

**"Top down meets bottom up"**. Top down initiatives like the installation of the biosphere reserve provoke also bottom up initiatives like the cycling route. In the beginning the cycling route met more the needs of tourists than the needs of inhabitants. E.g. hotel owners were not so happy to rent a room only for one night and had to adopt themselves to the new situation.

### ▪ Hitzacker: Lower Saxony Elbe Valley Biosphere Reserve

#### 1. Natural environment, acceptance, employment, tourism

*Anne Spiegel, Biosphere Reserve Administration, Hitzacker*

[www.elbtalaue.niedersachsen.de](http://www.elbtalaue.niedersachsen.de)

The administration governs the Lower Saxony part of a large biosphere reserve that combines former eastern and western Elbe riverbanks. A first attempt to designate this area a national park has been successfully challenged by local farmers at court because the area is not in natural conditions but predominantly influenced by farming. The acceptance of Natura 2000 regulations is now better but still an issue. The administration tries to support efforts for integrated economical development but has very limited means for it.

(Presentation available on FS website at <http://www.forum-synergies.eu/index.php?pid=11>)



#### Main conclusions



**"To keep the balance"** between rigid nature conservation tasks and development demands: that's a difficult task

**“A lot of voluntary work”**. Although sustainable development and education are among the most important tasks of a biosphere reserve most of the work can only be done on a voluntarily basis as the government does not provide enough money

## ▪ Wussegel/ Seerau: Walk to a herbal hay meadow

### 1. Tasks and projects of the Landschaftspflegeverband (Landcare association) Wendland-Elbetal:

Heinke Kelm, Landschaftspflegeverband Wendland-Elbetal e.V.  
[www.lpv-wendland-elbetal.de](http://www.lpv-wendland-elbetal.de)

The local Landcare association is governed by a board where farmers, environmentalists and municipalities are equally represented. It manages nature conservation projects in a sense that is beneficial to all sides.



#### 1. Route of old fruit varieties

[www.route-der-alten-obstsorten-im-wendland.de](http://www.route-der-alten-obstsorten-im-wendland.de)

Relicts of regional apple, pear and plum tree varieties planted along rural roads have been identified and inventorised. Young trees of these varieties have been replanted. Leaflets and maps have been worked out for publicity. The project links to similar projects in Prignitz and Altmark regions to the north resp. south of Wendland and has been designed in a joint effort across the former border. It is supported by ERDF money.



#### 2. Achievements and failure of the Herbal Hay Project [www.kraeuterheu.de](http://www.kraeuterheu.de)

In the 1990s the association's project to market hay from meadows with high plant biodiversity to horse owners all over northern Germany was a pilot project of nation-wide significance. Supporting agencies welcomed the attempt to “sell biodiversity” on the market and thereby reduce the dependency on tax money. After introduction of the EU per-hectare grassland payments the market broke down because late-mown hay from non-fertilized meadows became readily available. The ecological value of rare plant species had not been the unique selling point.

### Main conclusions



**“EU funds compete with each other on the same plot of land”**. How can it be that EU money seeks for different goals on the same piece of land? Nature conservation money seems to be less attractive to farmers than subsidies for the production of renewable energy crops. However these crops are not grown sustainably.

#### 3. Result-oriented reward of conservation grassland

The association has collaborated with authorities to develop an easy to handle subsidy scheme for grassland extensification, paying farmers not for management restrictions but rather for the number of rare plant species in their meadows that they identify out of a list of 20 key species. Thus farmers are completely free in their grassland management and in the same time develop an active interest in plant biodiversity. The scheme now is financed through the European

Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and is offered all over Lower Saxony in certain target areas. The association trains farmers to recognize the relevant key species.

### Main conclusions



**“How to motivate farmers?”** To tell farmers how they have to cultivate their land easily causes problems of acceptance. Now they are paid for the product: e.g. if they achieve to have a certain number of indicator species on their land. By that way they are motivated to take their own responsibility in order to achieve the goal. – However many still prefer traditional management agreements which are simpler to implement, less risky to fail and don't require additional cognitive efforts...

### ▪ Govelin: Large scale contractual conservation management

#### 1. Extensive farming for the conservation of the rare Field Lily (*Lilium bulbiferum* L.) and the bird Ortolan Bunting

*Christel and Harry Bergmann, farmers*

[www.lilienpfad.de](http://www.lilienpfad.de)

In the 1990s the Bergmann family switched their farm from producing crop to producing nature conservation and “developed” the largest population of the autochthonous field lily in northern Europe. 73 ha are under a particular contract scheme. They completely depend on subsidies (as “normal farmers” might do also). In 2005 a 3,5 km explanatory foodpath was created, and some regional activities were launched based on their initiative, e.g. a yearly festival or guided excursions. In 2009 they won a price for their activities and by that rose the public awareness. However the follow up of the project after the retirement of the farmers in some years remains unclear.



### Main conclusions

**“conservation agriculture as a viable alternative to production for the market”:**

## Participants

1.	Inita Ate, LV	Association “Liepaja District Partnership”
2.	Murat Bayramoğlu, TR	Hüsnü Özyeğin Foundation
3.	Arend Boekhoff, DE	Kein-Ems-Kanal
4.	Doris Boekhoff, DE	Kein-Ems-Kanal
5.	Inês Carneiro, PT	CETRAD/UTAD (Centre For Transdisciplinary Development Studies/Univ. Tras-os-Montes)
6.	Balázs Dernei, HU	UNDP
7.	Justyana Duriasz-Buľhak, PL	rural DEVELOPMENT foundation
8.	Oliver Emmes, BE	Forum Synergies
9.	Nikola Jovanovski, MK	Center for Sustainable Development ALKA
10.	Ligita Laipeniece, LV	Association “Liepaja District Partnership”
11.	Janis Lapins, LV	Askeres group connected with Local action group (LAG) “Aizkraukles district partnership”
12.	Simone Matouch, AT	Forum Synergies
13.	Nenad Nikolic, SRB	Council of the local community Tomaševac

14.	Stefanie Plöger, DE	
15.	Christian Pommerehne, DE	water <a href="http://www.wasserbote.de">www. wasserbote.de</a>
16.	Aleksandar Ristin, SRB	Leader+ Banatski Karlovac
17.	Ivana Stefanovic, SRB	Leader+ Banatski Karlovac



# FORUM SYNERGIES

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*field trip 2*

## *Renewable Energy*

### Background and stations



The administrative district of Luechow-Dannenberg strives to achieve self-sufficiency in renewable energy. We visited particularly interesting examples of use of regenerative energies in rural areas.

#### ▪ Elbe river route, lookout from bus

##### 1. Overview of the region

*Titus Bahner, Kateminer Mühlenbachtal e.V. / Forum Synergies coordinator*

After designation of Wendland village Gorleben to become the national nuclear waste dump in 1979 many “protesters” came and settled in the region. Besides fighting against nuclear energy, they started to develop positive futures and developed practical alternatives to the large scale and centralized energy production system. So the quest for renewable energy has led to a considerable competence especially in biomass use for heating and electricity.

#### ▪ Dannenberg, primary school

##### 1. Woodchip heating system, photovoltaic system

*Mr. Schulz, Elbtalaue municipality*

The primary school is entirely heated by renewable energy, namely by a woodchip heating system for basic load and an additional rape oil boiler for cold days. The woodchips are furnished by farms from regional production. They may contain up to 20% humidity and can be harvested in the forests with simple technology. The rape oil also is produced regionally and has to meet a recently established DIN standard.

The regional government has put the school's large roof (as well as many other roofs of public buildings) to the disposal of a group of people to install solar heating modules and recently also photovoltaic modules there for free. A display inside the school building shows the energy harvested and the CO<sub>2</sub> replaced by both the solar modules and the renewable heating.

#### ▪ Jameln



##### 1. Germany's first Biogas Fuel Station:

*Hans-Volker Marklewitz, Raiffeisen Agricultural Cooperative, Jameln*



The agricultural cooperative in Jameln, a central village in Wendland, built a 600 kW biogas plant run mainly on corn (maize) with addition of cow slurry from four large nearby milk producers. 90% of the biogas is conventionally turned into electricity, whereas 10% is purified to 98% methane content and transported via a 1 km pipeline to a nearby transit road where it is compressed to 250 bar and offered as car fuel. All CNG cars that run on compressed natural gas can be served without any technical problems. Since the station's opening in 2007 many regional residents replaced their cars with CNG-converted cars. The demand is so high that the promised gas pressure at the station mostly cannot be reached. An additional compressor will soon be installed to sell a greater proportion of the produced biogas as car fuel.



## ▪ Jeetzeler Berg windturbines

### **citizen-financed windturbines**

*Daniela Weinand, ReEnergie Wendland, target GmbH*

Local residents financed and built three 600 kW windturbines and recently an additional 1.500 kW turbine in a cooperative effort

## ▪ Volkfien: Biogas neighbourhood heating facilities

### **Volkfien local heating network ,**

*Burkhard Blank, biogas producer*

Two farmers built a large (600 kW) biogas plant – same technology as in Jameln – and besides producing electricity use the produced heat to furnish hot water to the village's 24 homes via a circular pipeline. Due to clever financing the residents didn't have to pay anything for the connection technology to their existing heating and now receive the warmth to a considerably lower price than before. Their old heating system remained in place to be secure in case of technical problems.

#### Background and project objectives

- To establish biogas plant and to increase the renewable energy usage in the Wendland area.
- To provide local heating by usage of local resources for local population.

#### Initiators and organisational form

The initial idea was to establish plant owned by more farmers. However due to regulations and circumstances the biogas plant started as the initiative of the two organic farmers who had idea to establish the biogas plant and to provide heating. They farm in total 300 ha of land but the idea was to include additional production of other farmers.

They produce the biogas and distribute the heat. The network belongs to the local association who deals with the regulation of fees and payments of the services they get. Actually the association administers the heating system.

#### Main activities

Production of biogas from corn predominantly from organic production. Prior to 2005 they could use more corn produced from conventional farms.

They supply the local neighbourhood with heat from the farm. The local pipeline was made with the project supported by the government of the state and it belongs to the village association. Association manage the distribution and payments for the services – heat received.

#### Results and lessons learned

The biogas plant from local initiative grew up in the production plant that nowadays sells the electricity and heating as well to the national distribution system. It is subsidised by cheap public credits because it's used for community welfare.

#### Future challenges and perspectives

Subsidies for land usage for production of corn used for biogas vs. subsidies for protection of the biodiversity protection on the same land. Environmental protection subsidies are sometimes contrary to its aims and purposes.

#### Contribution to sustainability

Usage of renewable energies for community welfare. Usage of local production for local benefits.

## **Participants**

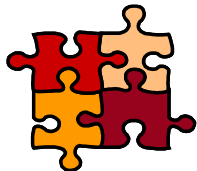
Titus Bahner, DE	Katemerer Mühlenbachtal e.V
Benedek Jávör, HU	Rural Workshop Foundation (RWF)
Tünde Koleszár, HU	Edelény Small Region
Márta Marczis, HU	UNDP Regional Center for Europe and the CIS
Maris Miklas, LV	Aizkraukle partnership
Janis Miklas, LV	Bebri hunters association / GB wood Ltd
Britta Rolle, DE	CASA VERDE EU-Beratung und Projektentwicklung
Tibor Ruszó, HU	Association for the Roma and disadvantaged people in the Bódva valley
Eckhart Schwake, DE	NABU (Naturschutzbund Deutschland) Ortsgruppe Lüneburg
Liljana Tanevska, MK	CeProSARD Center For Promotion of sustainable agricultural practices and rural development
Márius Weszelovsky, HU	Micro-regional association of Abaúj-Hegyköz



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## *field trip 3*

### *Multifunctional Farming and Regional Marketing of Organic Products*

## Background and stations



The Kateminer Mühlenbachtal (Katemin Mill Stream Valley) represents interesting examples of economic activities that have been developed on the basis of an organic farm: processing, direct marketing, nature conservation, education, seed breeding etc. Further issues are types of business entity and adequate forms of ownership. On this bike tour we visited several sites and had discussions with (small) entrepreneurs and farmers.

### ▪ „Kenners Landlust“ Eco Boarding House

1. **Slow food, rural tourism and new consumers**  
Barbara Kenner, “Kenners Landlust” Eco Boarding House  
[www.kenners-landlust.de](http://www.kenners-landlust.de) (also in EN)

## Main conclusions



Eco Boarding House successfully links up boarding business and environment protection activities like eco- building, nature close environment and the offer of organic health food. Simple self service practices and informal atmosphere of natural living forms a right place for families with children where they learn and enjoy sustainable living.

Successful and sustainable use of local resources – organic food, natural meadows and forest trails, cooperation with neighbours, sustainable and healthy living practices create a good and independent income for owners, workers and local food producers (at least 60% of the food served here is local or regional) cooperating with Eco Boarding House.

Still, environmental problems, like drying up of surface streams due to the shortness of ground water caused by conventional irrigation farming and monocultural forestry is taking place and creates problems of housing and living at Eco Boarding House.



## ▪ Nieperfitz

### Nature conservation and extensive farming in the Katemin Mill Stream Valley; Experiential education offers

Andrea Funcke, Mobiles Mitmachmuseum (Mobile Hands-on Museum)

[www.momimu.de](http://www.momimu.de)

#### Main conclusions



In former times the region was heathland (covered with small scrubby vegetation) and managed by sheep- and beekeepers. After having been afforested 100 years ago it is now in large parts woodland which invites tourists from all over Germany to spend their holidays in a calm and peaceful place.

## ▪ Tangsehl Farm

### 1. Guided tour of the farm, voluntary association as ownership structure, Community Supported Agriculture

Jutta Ebel, Hof Tangsehl e.V.

[www.tangsehl.de](http://www.tangsehl.de)

### 2. Farm and Forest kindergarden

Karen Brüchert, nursery teacher

[www.hofkinder.com](http://www.hofkinder.com)

### 3. LandArt and psychotherapeutic work

Lisbeth Wulff, Akron e.V.

[www.unserhaus-ce.de](http://www.unserhaus-ce.de)



Tangsehl Farm is a 90 hectare biodynamic farm with meat and milk production and processing, vegetable gardening, a farm shop, a guest house for school classes and a kindergarden. 15 people work permanently on the farm under fairly basic circumstances. Further activities include nature conservation, land art projects, and psychotherapeutic work.

#### Main conclusions

Biodynamic farm Tangsehl found existence possibilities according to basic rule of anthroposophy – integration of pedagogy (forest kindergarden), biodynamic farming with wholesome, biodynamically produced food and anthroposophic medicine (psychotherapeutic work) uniting land art, biodynamic farming methods, use of horses, farm animals. Tangsehl acts as an environment educational centre and provider of biodynamic food for both visitors and local inhabitants in such a way rising their life quality and own income level. It is a good example of sustainable development and conservation of natural resources – soil, water, woodland and wild plants.

The farm, owned by an association, is highly indebted. The farmers have to pay a high rent, which was scarcely earned by traditional marketing like the farm shop and market stalls. Therefore a system of prepayment realized by a group of interested consumers and supporters is taking place as a Community Supported Agriculture scheme which started in spring 2009.

My own point of view and second thought – even with some time higher subsidies, purchasing capacity and as I observe – some time lower hygiene demands as in Latvia, for example, the farm

meets existence problems. What is the reason? Could a real competition exist between EU countries regarding organic agriculture products and farming in such a different situation, regulation and payment situation as we have? (*Mara Bergmane*)

[This is the eternal question of agricultural policy: Should we compete against each other all over Europe or is our task to supply the local and regional population with fresh and healthy food? *Wolfgang Stränz*]

## ▪ **Regional Marketing of Organic Products in Wendland during the last 20 years**

**Annette Quis, Bio im Wendland GbR**

[www.bio-im-wendland.de](http://www.bio-im-wendland.de), E-Mail: [info@bio-im-wendland.de](mailto:info@bio-im-wendland.de)

Storchenmilch (Stork Milk, [www.milchkooperative-wendland.de](http://www.milchkooperative-wendland.de)), Wendland-Bräu (beer, [www.storchenbier.de](http://www.storchenbier.de)), and Voelkel juices ([www.voelkeljuice.de](http://www.voelkeljuice.de) also in EN and FR) are well established regional food labels. We talked about changing markets and appropriate marketing strategies in the face of an apparent trend away from independent grower-consumer alliances, farm shops and food coops to marketing food through wholesale channels.

Wendland Kooperative started in the 1980s with 10 organic producers associated as a cooperative of producers/ consumers. The idea was to offer quality and regional food and build up a link between farmers and consumers: a different strategy from the supermarkets, which are selling organic food (but not linked to the territory). The cooperative has changed its business over time and now consists mainly of consumers in Hannover town that run two shops with Wendland products there (120 km away, [www.wendlandkoop.de](http://www.wendlandkoop.de)).

Coordinated local marketing activities of eco-farmers have been taken up by farmers Annette Quis and Henriette Kulow again in 2000 under the label Bio im Wendland ([www.bio-im-wendland.de](http://www.bio-im-wendland.de)). They take up the cooperative's initial marketing strategy, now running it as a private business, and sell produce at four weekly market stalls. Additionally they deliver to large consumers like restaurants, retailers and organic shops and via a box scheme.

### **Main conclusions**

All the initiatives started in the 80's together with the fight of the anti-nuclear movement, when the government planned to build the national nuclear waste dump in Gorleben/ Wendland and built a test mine in the salt dome situated there.

The anti-nuclear movement united the population, created new initiatives of economy and commerce in a former forgotten part of the German Federal Republic.

## ▪ **Hof Darzau: Bio-dynamic farm**

**Ernst-Heinrich Schmidt, farmer**

In 2000, after having worked over years in industry, he came back to this rural area, took over his 80 ha parental farm, converted it to biodynamics and decided to rent out the empty buildings of his big farm, which were not in use.





It was also a way to have more people sharing the place during the day. The roof is being used for the installation of photovoltaics. Five activities are run on the farm site: joinery workshop ([www.signum-tischlerei.de](http://www.signum-tischlerei.de)), bio-dynamic seed breeding ([www.darzau.de](http://www.darzau.de)), bakery, wrought-iron craft workshop, and a “workshop café” which currently is out of service.

## Main conclusions

Hof Darzau shows new aspects of biodynamic farming and untraditional development possibilities, according to owner speciality and wish.

Reorganization of a former biodynamical farm to a kind of “business nursery” offers support and possibilities (I would rather say “offers a place” as he is not giving any specific support) for rural small business entrepreneurs, creating new production units at Hof Darzau.

Even if it is an individual initiative (each business is independent and they are not sharing common activities), it might evolve in the future. At the same time retaining the bio-dynamic farm environment – buildings, soil – and offering new income possibilities for owners and other local residents. A good example how to use resources, how to keep people and activities in a rural area!

A general comment: Most of these initiatives have been risen in a context of opposition (anti-nuclear movement): which does imply questions about the future (continuation of the initiatives) and about how to raise similar activities in a different cultural, social and political context (in another country...).

## Participants

1. Mohamed Al Younis, HR	Croatia
2. Peter Balasov, SK	AGROKRUH s.r.o.
3. Mara Bergmane, LV	Eco health farms
4. Riza Çağatay, HU	Hüsnü Özyeğin Foundation
5. Zane Eglite, LV	Association “Lets do it ourselves!”
6. Elizabeta Gjorgjievska, MK	Center for Sustainable Development ALKA
7. Alberto Grosoli, IT	private - organic farmer
8. Marina Guedon, ES	Forum Synergies
9. Faton Jaja, MK	Macedonian Agricultural Advisory Support Programme - MAASP
10. Santa Kreicmane, LV	Association “Lets do it ourselves!”
11. Hannes Lorenzen, DE	Forum Synergies
12. Livia Madureira, PT	CETRAD/ UTAD (Centre For Transdisciplinary Development Studies /Univ. Tras-os-Montes)
13. Ana Marta-Costa, PT	CETRAD /UTAD (Centre For Transdisciplinary Development Studies /Univ. Tras-os-Montes)
14. Liene Medne, LV	Medari AH
15. Xavier Pérez-Albert, ES	Mas de Noguera

<i>16. Ulrike Schimmel, DE</i>	<i>Global Ecovillage Network of Europe</i>
<i>17. Jeanine Sochas, FR</i>	<i>Association d'animation du Beaufortain (Savoie)</i>
<i>18. Wolfgang Stränz, DE</i>	<i>Buschberghof Fuhlenhagen</i>
<i>19. Klavs Svilpe, LV</i>	<i>Association "Lets do it ourselves!"</i>
<i>20. Evalds Urtans, LV</i>	<i>Association "Liepaja District Partnership"</i>
<i>21. Sirje Vinni, EE</i>	<i>Estonian Village Movement KODUKANT</i>
<i>22. Marek Zabek, PL</i>	<i>Dolina Strugu development initiative</i>

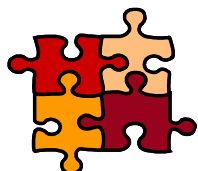


# FORUM SYNERGIES

*Linking Sustainable Practices throughout Europe*

8-11 Oct, 2009, Göhrde Castle, Wendland, Germany

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*field trip 4*

## *Rural Quality of Life, Alternative Schools and Anti-Nuclear Movement*

### Background and stations



Over the last 25 years the anti-nuclear movement in Wendland has generated a unique socio-cultural “climate” that includes traditional farmers and newcomers alike, creates a huge annual trade and crafts fair in spring, leads to all sorts of eco-projects and continues to attract young families to the region. We visited some key points that show this history and social quality and talked with insiders.

#### ▪ Elbe riverside road

##### **View of the former border, overview of the region**

*Luise Meinecke*

Wendland, the county of Luechow-Dannenberg in Lower Saxony with 52.000 inhabitants, was the least densely populated area in former Western Germany. Located along Elbe stream at the former iron curtain border, it was designated in 1977 to be the site for the national nuclear waste dump. As a consequence it became a melting pot for all sorts of German anti-nuclear movement groups who settled there, solidarized with local farmers, set up rural livelihoods and businesses and created a unique social mixture of stubbornness and creativity much similar to the well-known little Gaelic village. The waste dump hasn't been built until today, 30 years later.

“Wendland-Elbtalaue” is a LEADER region since 2001 and, together with 17 other regions, participated in Federal Ministry of Agriculture's model region project, as well as in different European projects. The main development topics are eco-farming and animal-friendly husbandry, alternative energy (esp. biogas), sustainable tourism, and cultural activities.

#### ▪ Hitzacker, Freie Schule

**Hein Benkelmann, Member of Directorate and teacher**

[www.freieschulehitzacker.de](http://www.freieschulehitzacker.de)

The “Freie Schule Hitzacker”, a comprehensive primary and secondary Waldorf School of 250 pupils, plays an important role in the region's attraction for young families. The high involvement of parents in their development makes it a focussing point for “alternative” social life.



The school aims to qualify children to freedom and social responsibility and to bring about their individual talents, seeing itself in difference to the regular state primary and secondary schools with their attempt to mainly filter knowledge into children's heads. This Waldorf education is based on the work of Austrian philosopher Rudolf Steiner (1860-1925) and its Anthroposophy. There is also a Kindergarten in Hitzacker with a similar philosophy.

The school is financed at approx. 2/3 by state subsidies and additionally by monthly school fees that are adapted to income (sometimes down to zero for parents that live on social security).

Parents are also encouraged to contribute voluntary working hours to renovating activities or organization of school events, taking large responsibility in everyday school life. This makes the school a place of living social exchange between families. A large part of the region's "alternative" families send their children to Hitzacker.

## ▪ **Gorleben: exploration mine for nuclear waste and Gedelitz**

### **Visit and talk session on the spot**

*Monika Tietke, farmer, Bäuerliche Notgemeinschaft (Farmers' Emergency Association)*

[www.baeuerliche-notgemeinschaft.de](http://www.baeuerliche-notgemeinschaft.de)

### **Talk session: How 25 years of anti-nuclear resistance have shaped the region**

*Monika Tietke, Horst Wiese*

Gorleben salt mine was chosen 32 years ago for permanent disposal of nuclear waste. The choice was obviously motivated by political reasons rather than by geological facts, Gorleben being situated close to the inner-German border with prevailing west winds shifting any accidental fall-out towards the East, and with Wendland at this time being a remote and poor border region with a very conservative and willing population.



The farmers started an "emergency Association". A large part of the regional conventional and eco-farmers participated and still participate in large demonstrations with their tractors that they organize in an alliance with the other regional resistance groups. Their main demands concern the stop of any additional production of nuclear waste and the shut-down of the exploration activities in Gorleben salt mine which obviously is not suited as a nuclear storage because it cannot be reliably screened off from groundwater access.

Nowadays nuclear waste is temporarily stored in a large surface hall next to the mine. The exploration mine itself has illegally been extended to the capacity of a final storage but still is not legally designed as such, so the battle still is open. The local political scene however has completely turned around in the last 30 years, now showing a consensus among all local parties against the nuclear storage plans in Gorleben.

### **Main conclusions**

Nuclear waste and its dealing is a global problem and a local decision brings it to an issue for the live of the whole planet.

It is a need to be part of the political life and to take over responsibility. The engagement in politics is a contribution to sustainable development

### **Future challenges and perspectives**

To contribute to the closing of the salt mine Gorleben as a storage for nuclear waste.

## ▪ **Volkfien**

### **Local heating network: renewed village life through renewable energy projects**

*Andreas Krüger, Project founder*

After the construction of a large (600 kW) biogas plant in the small village of Volkfien by two farmers, village inhabitants organized a neighbourhood heating infrastructure (“Nahwärmenetz”) to make use of the heat which so far was a wasted by-product of the biogas generator motors. They organized planning and construction of a circular pipeline that furnishes hot water to 23 of the village’s 24 homes and founded a village association to own the infrastructure and to administer payments.

Due to clever financing and governmental support the residents didn’t have to pay anything for the connection technology to their existing boilers and now receive the warmth to a considerably lower price than before. Their old heating system remained in place to be secure in case of technical problems.

At the occasion of many talks and negotiations about the planned neighbourhood infrastructure the contacts between the village’s inhabitants lived up, in some cases even started from zero, and in social terms brought back a real village community where old inhabitants and newcomers feel united by a common enthusiasm that turned into a project for the public good. So a pragmatic sustainable energy project led to the social renewal of the rural community.

## ▪ **Werkhof Kukate**

### **Attractiveness of the district, new residents and regional development**

*Michael Seelig, Region aktiv Wendland-Elbetal e.V.*

[www.werkhof-kukate.de](http://www.werkhof-kukate.de)

### **Background and project objectives**

Michael Seelig explained that under the threat of declaring the Wendland region to a permanent disposal site for nuclear waste, the region developed creative resistance in manifold ways, the activists being scattered all over small villages and old farm houses. To make this diversity visible and show it to visitors and friends, a crafts and arts festival called Wonderpoints / cultural Land excursion started in 1990 ([www.kulturelle-landpartie.de](http://www.kulturelle-landpartie.de)).

Annually between ascension Thursday and Pentecost, private persons open their houses for presentations of





theatre, cabaret, singing, dancing, arts and the sale of handicrafts. In its 20th year 2009 the festival included about 600 artists in 100 places over 40 villages and still seems to be growing. This attraction brings more than 60.000 visitors into the region during these 10 days.

Werkhof Kukate, one of the initial places of the festival, is the last place in Germany where the knowledge of hand weaving is lived as a profession and where apprenticeship diploma and masters certificates can be obtained under the leadership of Mrs. Seelig.

## Participants

Aris Adlers, LV	Latvian rural forum
Ruta Andejeva, LV	Elejas rural municipality
Nadia Assebbab, DE	Land in Sicht – Allmende nördliche Altmark
Lolita Duge, LV	Vilce`s local government
Baiba Lapina, LV	Askeres group connected with Local action group (LAG) "Aizkraukles district partnership"
Evija Medne, LV	Jelgava Rural partnership LAG "Lielupe"
Jane Paunkovic, SRB	Faculty of Management
Elza Pukite, LV	Jelgava rural partnership "Lielupe"
Mikk Sarv, EE	Avatud Ruum OÜ (Open Space Ltd)
Marta Szymczyk, PL	Rural Development Foundation
Kristel Vilbaste, EE	Tallinn University