

GERMANY

Local development

Location

Eifel region

Programming period

2014 – 2020

Priority

P6 – Social inclusion and local development

Measure

M19 – LEADER/CLLD

Funding (EUR)

Total budget 343 674

EAFRD 223 388

National/Regional 120 286

Project duration

2017 – 2019

Project promoter

Biologische Station der

StädteRegion Aachen e.V.

Biologische Station im Kreis

Düren e.V.

Biologische Station im Kreis

Euskirchen e.V.

Contact

henrike.koerber@bs-aachen.de

Website

www.leader-eifel.de/de/aktuelle_projekte/Dorf.Bio.Top.html

A LEADER project that aims to educate and support the local population, especially young people, to improve the biodiversity in the villages of the area.

Summary

The villages in the LEADER region Eifel have changed fundamentally since the 1970s, and today fewer species and biotopes can be found in and around the villages. The aim of the DorfBioTop! project is to preserve and promote the biodiversity in the villages and its surroundings. To achieve this goal, the initiative of the inhabitants is particularly important.



They are motivated to implement their own sustainable measures to protect the typical biodiversity in their villages. They are supported technically and financially by the three project sponsors and numerous cooperation partners.

Results

Village associations and municipal employees were trained and cost-optimised care concepts were developed to optimise public green space maintenance.

Information events on biodiversity in gardens were held and the protection of wild bees in the settlement area was ensured; fruit tree cutting courses and village walks were organised.

Advice and support (e.g. on species protection on buildings, indigenous woody plants, organisation of plant exchange markets, valorisation of village ponds, meadow orchards, public beds and other village habitats) was provided.

The project was received an innovative and sustainable project award at the UN Decade on Biological Diversity on May 29, 2018.

Lessons & Recommendations

- Continuous communication with all actors and at levels as well as networking are key to the success of this project.
- A lack of financial resources is not always responsible for bottlenecks in the project implementation: it is necessary to take preparatory steps for information transfer and awareness raising, and to focus on the mobilisation and networking of the actors and the support and monitoring of project planning and implementation.
- Another positive aspect of the project is that the different technical skills of the three project partners is combined and their close cooperation is increasing the impact on the villages.

Context

From the 1970s onwards, the villages in the low mountain range region of Eifel have undergone fundamental structural and settlement change. The redesign of housing and single-family house construction, together with the change in farming practices, have led to a dwindling structural wealth in the home gardens and a considerable restructuring of rural areas. The tranquillity of the village neighbourhood and the unmistakable character of the village community is slowly fading and with it the diversity of species and biotopes in and around the villages.

Another reason for the impairment of species and biotope diversity is the loss of knowledge of traditional practices. A large proportion of local people have little connection to environmental issues and the possible biodiversity of their villages owing to their adapted living conditions. Less and less time is available to look after the village interests and to support natural living environments.

To counteract these changes and thus protect endangered flora and fauna, the project DorfBioTop! was developed. The Eifel region has a great potential for the creation and preservation of habitats for numerous, partly endangered species thanks to its typical regional structural design, the structure of green areas and gardens as well as the surrounding cultural landscape. This potential is to be exploited within the framework of the project.

Objectives

At the heart of DorfBioTop! is the education of the population, especially the next generation, about the value of village biotopes. This should help to safeguard typical biodiversity for the landscape and to improve the regional identity, the experience of nature and recreation in the region. The project specifically aims to:

- Optimise green space maintenance in terms of ecology, effort and costs;
- Promote diversity of species as a pool for regional quality foodstuffs;
- Enable children, young people and adults to become experts in ecology in the village;
- Create attractive opportunities for voluntary commitment;
- Advise and offer assistance on the 'modern garden' in the village, on the care of animals and on the protection of trees and shrubs; and
- Improve the existing habitats in the area.

Activities

The most important principle in this LEADER project is the involvement of the village population in the planning and implementation of measures to ensure that the high quality of life in the villages is maintained in the long term. Activities should be initiated by the population to ensure the greatest possible sustainability.

DorfBioTop! is being implemented by three project agencies covering the entire area of the LEADER Region Eifel: the Biological Station Kreis Düren e.V., the Biological Station Kreis Euskirchen e.V. and the Biological Station StädteRegion Aachen e.V. This division means that the local population in each district has a direct contact person who knows the local village structures and needs.



The activities carried out within the framework of the project are diverse and can be grouped into the following three closely interlinked areas of action: i) information and knowledge transfer; ii) networking; and iii) implementation support.

Villagers get to know and appreciate their local flora and fauna through information events and various activities such as plant exchange fairs, village walks and theme-specific information events. Knowledge transfer and exemplary measures, such as the installation of nesting aids for swallows and the creation of a wildflower meadow, help to stimulate the development of ideas and engage people, so that every villager can make a contribution to the active protection of species and biological diversity. These could be, for example, near-natural gardens or the planting of flowering strips on roadsides. The project sponsors also advise the population on issues such as species protection on buildings, the care and valorisation of village ponds and orchard meadows as well as biodiversity-friendly green space maintenance.

The project agencies are supported by a large number of regional cooperation partners, such as the LVR open-air museum Kommern, which offers a forum for the exchange of old crop varieties and expertise on traditional forms of cultivation. Nature conservation associations and village communities as well as the home association (Heimatverein) from Aachen and the beekeepers' associations in the districts of Euskirchen and Rurtal also support the objectives of the project through their work.

The following example illustrates the central importance of networking to the project: due to the decline in small farms and reduced food supply (insect deaths), populations of swallows and bats in the Eifel region are threatened. The inhabitants of the small village of Sistig wanted to tackle this problem and the LEADER project brought together and advised local initiators and representatives of nature conservation associations and authorities in order to agree on a common approach for the conservation and promotion of swallow and bat populations in the area. As a result, swallow nests and bat boxes were attached to the houses in the village of Sistig in the spring of 2018. The additional nesting offer is intended to support the local swallows, which find less and less building material from clay puddles due to the sealing of areas and the loss of smallholder livestock farming and therefore have difficulties in building stable nests. The campaign inspired ideas for the 'Schwalbenfest' in summer and the application for recognition as a 'Schwalbenvillage'.

Through the cooperation of the three project sponsors and the other cooperation partners, the project covers a wide range of topics, including the following areas:

- Meadow orchards (local varieties, conservation, plantation and fruit processing)
- Hedges (regional seedlings, plant and care)
- Old crop plants (start, exchange and collect Ark projects)
- Natural gardens (perennials, herbs, alternative forms of cultivation, advice)
- Wild corners (ruins, overgrown corners, edge stripes)
- Nesting aids (insects, birds and bats)
- Bee-friendly planting (flowering strips, village planting, garden design)

- Dry-stone walls and piles of stones (creating, planting, maintenance)
- Aquatic habitats (remediation, new construction, planting)
- Pedagogical support (materials and methodology)

The project is also in a position to carry out knowledge transfer, training and consulting for the project ideas from the region and to accompany the planning and implementation of the projects.

The target groups of the activities are also broad and range from private individuals, village and horticultural associations and companies to local authorities.

Main results

Village associations and municipal employees were trained and cost-optimised care concepts were developed to optimise public green space maintenance. As a result, the areas around the Kleinhau town hall (2 000 m²) and the 2 500 m² on Stockberg in Vossenack have only been cut twice a year since the beginning of 2017. The measure is intended to double the number of plant species.

- Information events on biodiversity in gardens and protection of wild bees in the settlement area, fruit tree cutting courses and village walks;
- Advice and support (e.g. on species protection on buildings, indigenous woody plants, organisation of plant exchange markets, valorisation of village ponds, meadow orchards, public beds and other village habitats);
- Exemplary implementation of measures (e.g. creation of ecological village concepts for selected example villages, development of concepts for green space maintenance, collection and propagation of old crop species in cooperation with the LVR open-air museum Kommern)

However, the results and effects are difficult to quantify, not least because of the intensive press and public relations work and the positive reporting in newspapers, radio and television. However, it can be assumed that the project has made a significant contribution to informing the population in the region about the value of village biotopes and the possibilities for action to protect and improve biodiversity in and around the villages.

The project received an award as an innovative and sustainable project of the UN Decade on Biological Diversity on May 29, 2018. From the viewpoint of the UN Decade expert jury, DorfBioTop! mobilises the population in an exemplary manner to engage them in habitat and biodiversity protection, with special emphasis on the following aspects:

- Villagers get to know and appreciate their local village flora and fauna (experience nature with all their senses, site visits, lectures);
- All participants in the LEADER region can develop and implement their own (small) projects with technical and financial support from the DorfBioTop! Project;
- All activities come from the population and thus guarantee greater sustainability and a high level of self-motivation;
- The networking of different actors strengthens cooperation, increases motivation and strengthens the social sector; and
- Nature conservation issues are specifically addressed to companies, municipalities, private individuals and institutions.

Key lessons and recommendations

The continuous communication with all actors and levels as well as networking are in the view of the project agencies the key to the success of “DorfBioTop!”. The associated need for resources for the consulting effort should not be underestimated.

According to the assessment of the project promoters, it is not the lack of financial resources that is often delaying project implementation, but the preparatory steps of information transfer and awareness raising, as well as the mobilisation and networking of the actors and the support and monitoring of project planning and implementation. If these points are given sufficient attention, experience has shown that there are often (financial) ways and means of implementation.

Another positive aspect of the project is that the different technical skills of the three project partners and their close cooperation and complementarity increase the impact on the villages.

A central challenge of the project is to explain and communicate the importance of biodiversity in villages. In a comparatively near-natural rural low mountain range region such as the Eifel, which is also partly located in a national park, this represents a particular challenge. The fallacy is that biodiversity essentially refers to the green surroundings of the villages and is already protected.



Additional sources of information

www.biostation-dueren.de/139-0-LEADER-DorfBioTop.html

www.biostationeuskirchen.de/content.php/38?selected=1080

www.bs-aachen.de/de/dorf-bio-top/

www.undekade-biologischevielfalt.de/aktuelle-themen/article///dorfbiotop-wird-projekt-der-un-dekade-biologische-vielfalt-mit-buergerbeteiligung-zur-erhaltung/