



Mensch-Biene-Bildung (People-Bees-Education)

Supporting beekeeping while creating opportunities for social inclusion.

EAFRD-funded projects

Location: Bad Kissingen, Germany

Programming period: 2014-2020

Priority: P6 - Social inclusion and local development

Focus Area: Local development

Measures: M19 - LEADER CLLD

Funding:	Total budget	73 163.70 (EUR)
	EAFRD	42 000 (EUR)
	National/Regional	0 (EUR)
	Private/Own funds	26 223.70 (EUR)
	Other (Aktion Mensch)	4 940 (EUR)

Timeframe: 2016 to 2017

Project promoter: LAG Bad Kissingen

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Project results

- 12 people with intellectual disabilities were trained as 'bee shepherds' and visitor guides.
- 600 yearly visitors.
- 450 additional yearly visitors during organised activities.
- Ten bee swarms are maintained.
- Annually, approximately 80-100 kg honey is sold, primarily through direct marketing via the abbey shop.
- The innovative approach of the project created opportunities for people with disabilities and non-disabled people to work jointly in a natural environment, generating substantial learning, building confidence and creating new perspectives.
- Environmentally, the project contributed directly to the regeneration and maintenance of a historic landscape and the cultivation and protection of bees. The project received recognition as a teaching apiary by the Bavarian Beekeepers' Association.
- New synergies and added value were created, combining social inclusion, environmental education, cultural heritage and community.
- The project raised awareness about disability.
- New and lasting networking connections were created.
- The holistic and integrated approach, particularly the role reversal, is transferable to other vulnerable groups.

Summary

Promoted by the Local Action Group (LAG) Bad Kissingen, Germany, the People - Bees - Education project regenerated a historic orchard. The project had a strong emphasis on beekeeping and social inclusion of people with disabilities and vulnerable people.

The project featured a specific integrative and innovative approach to training and allocated relevant roles and responsibilities to vulnerable people (as guides and 'bee shepherds'). Thus, it created an educational and interactive space for people with and without disability, many of them young. Project activities centred on regenerating an orchard meadow in harmony with its historical landscape development, connecting to cultural values, traditional food production, education and social inclusion.

The project developed an extensive programme of events, opening the regenerated space and its new educational features to the public as a tourism and leisure destination.

Honey is now produced and marketed in the garden, which welcomes a stream of visitors and is accessible for people with disabilities.



Key lessons and recommendations

- Every person is valuable.
- All current and future participants should be involved in the activities as equals from the outset.
- Projects such as this one cannot evolve from a top-down approach. Instead, they must grow out of the local potential, which is identified, understood and used.
- Have the courage to walk new paths.
- Networks and the development of regional supply chains are the key to sustainability.
- Talk 'with' one another instead of 'about' each other. Don't give up, even if things get difficult. Identify and leverage potential within the region and design your own path on this basis.



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Context

The historic orchard of the former Cistercian abbey Maria Bildhausen in Münnerstadt, a small town in northern Bavaria (Germany), lay derelict for some time. Years ago, the abbey had included many agricultural enterprises and gathered a considerable knowledge base in gardening and beekeeping. However, now this beautiful space was not used any more and lay fallow. An idea to create something new, which would benefit the whole community as well as the environment, gradually took shape.

The People - Bees - Education project idea was born with the ambition of developing and organising events designed for people with disabilities and non-disabled people, tailored to different age and social groups.

After years of abandonment, the historic orchard was inaccessible. A new way of fully including people with disabilities into all aspects of project implementation therefore needed to be found. In addition, the project was to be opened to the public for the benefit of existing and new visitors and tourists.

In 2016, a project group was established to further develop the initial ideas and to develop a more detailed project plan. Some months later, an application form was submitted to the LEADER (Liaison Entre Actions de Développement de l'Économie Rurale) Local Action Group (LAG) Bad Kissingen. In May 2017, a favourable funding decision was taken and the project could be launched in August of the same year.

Objectives

The project had two primary aims: to improve opportunities for people with special needs to participate on an equal footing in community life; and to restore, maintain and provide access to traditional agricultural sites.

A holistic approach to accessibility ensured that the project would go beyond simply overcoming mobility restrictions and this was promoted through an innovative methodology in the implementation of the project. The objective was to create opportunities that would facilitate contact between people with and without special needs and thereby foster respect, solidarity and an increased engagement in the work with people with disabilities. This was to be achieved through the restoration of the beekeeping activity in the orchard, sharing information on beekeeping and improving the public educational and recreational options available.

An additional objective was to position the region as a quality destination in Germany.

Activities

The project pioneered a new approach and its activities provided a blueprint for others to follow. All activities had a special emphasis on inclusion and on highlighting the value of people with disabilities and other vulnerable groups equal to any other member of the community. This went beyond simple participation and implied active involvement, taking on roles and responsibilities in project planning, goal setting, as well as in project implementation across all areas of activities. This 'role reversal' was considered important and very effective in terms of increasing respect for people with disabilities and their social acceptance.



One of the first activities concerned the redesigning of the grounds of the existing historic orchard to make it barrier-free, fully accessible and freely available for all people. This included building an educational path through the orchard.

A further key activity was the set-up of the beekeeping facilities, with a special feature: the beehives are hosted in a sphere, called a 'Hobosphere', instead of a rectangular crate. Information boards were also placed on the site.

Training was provided for people with disabilities and other vulnerable groups so that they could become 'bee shepherds' and guides for visitors. Most of the trainees were young people. Working groups were created and met every two weeks during the warm season.

Between May and December 2017, an extensive programme of around 65 events, seminars and public tours was planned and implemented, with topics including beekeeping, gardening, horticulture, nature appreciation, culture, traditions, harvesting and cooking. This included unique programmes for school classes, kindergartens and families, introducing young people to social inclusion, environmental education, their cultural heritage and the values of their region, helping them to develop their own identities. Some events were specifically designed to target a female audience.

The project activities were implemented following an integrated approach via close collaboration among stakeholders in the fields of education for sustainable development, landscape conservation and regional supply chains. The project collaborated with the LAG, a university (beekeeping, horticulture), a social welfare foundation, a vocational training centre, a religious organisation, local authorities and a funding organisation – stakeholders from areas usually considered as separated.

Main results

Quantitative benefits include:

- 12 people with disabilities trained as 'bee shepherds' and visitor guides.
- 600 yearly visitors.
- 450 additional yearly visitors during organised programmes.
- Ten bee swarms are maintained.
- Annually, approximately 80-100 kg of honey is sold, primarily through direct marketing via the abbey shop.

Qualitative benefits included:

- The innovative approach of the project created opportunities for people with disabilities and non-disabled people to work jointly in a natural environment, generating substantial learning, confidence building and new perspectives on sustainability, awareness and community building.
- The project contributed directly to the regeneration and maintenance of a historic landscape and the cultivation and protection of bees. The project received recognition as a teaching apiary by the Bavarian Beekeepers' Association.
- Project participants and visitors learned about the interactions between historic landscapes, land usage and food production through special learning programmes.
- New synergies and added value were created by bridging inclusion, environmental education, cultural heritage and the community.
- The project raised awareness about disability, regional landscapes and regional products.
- A female beekeeper served as a role model for other women, beyond traditional gender roles.
- New and lasting networking connections were created regarding beekeeping and orchard maintenance, involving training and research organisations.
- The holistic and integrated approach, particularly the 'role reversal', is transferable to other vulnerable groups. Four projects have already been identified as potential transfer partners.



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Key lessons and recommendations

Every person is valuable.

All current and future participants should be involved in the activities as equals from the outset.

Projects such as this one cannot evolve from a top-down approach. Instead, they must grow out of the local potential, which is identified, understood and used. A bottom-up approach and networking ensures that activities can be co-designed and that everyone has a voice.

It is important to have the courage to walk new paths to create new opportunities for people to interact with one another as equals.

Networks and the development of regional supply chains are the key to sustainability due to an improved awareness and understanding of and between the stakeholders regarding the project's operations and needs.

Talk 'with' one another, instead of 'about' each other. Don't give up, even if things get difficult. Identify and leverage potential within the region and design your own path on this basis.

"The fact that we could do something like this is a success. Sometimes I find it really irritating that we are treated differently. We're people, just like everyone else."

J. Makowski, 'bee shepherd'

"My favourite thing is watching the apiary and seeing the bees build a honeycomb. We're also always looking for the queen bee. There are also little bees you can hold in your hand - those are the drones."

M. Hermann, 'bee shepherd'

"In many ways, the project is also a model for other regional development projects. It has led to a lot of other great things."

C. Kuhlmann, Regional Developer and LAG Manager

"The project focuses on sustainability: socially, ecologically, and economically. It is a model that shows how inclusion among equals can be put into practice and how bringing different areas together can create added value and useful new ideas."

C. Kuhlmann, Regional Developer and LAG Manager

"With the project, we are creating a space for interaction among equals, and programming that fosters interaction between people with special needs and the others. By producing honey, we are also continuing what the Cistercians started here in the orchard many years ago."

R. Waldvogel, Head of the Dominikus-Ringeisen-Werk in Maria Bildhausen

Additional information:

Kloster Maria Bildhausen website:

<https://www.bildhausen.de/klosterakademie/mensch-biene-bildung/mensch-biene-bildung-14.html>

LAG Bad Kissingen website:

<http://www.lag-badkissingen.de/Projekte-2015-2022?page=16197&detailID=37163>