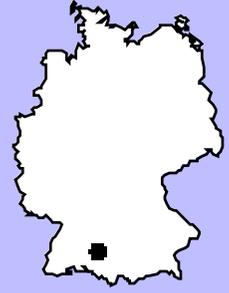


OBERSCHWABEN (Baden-Württemberg, Germany)

Tourism, culture and training in a rural environment



The action

A significant number of cultural activities making local rural traditions accessible to holiday-makers and the local people have been developed in Oberschwaben, with the support of a research institute established in the area. 31 districts and a large number of associations took part in these programmes. The various activities involve more than 1 500 people and have been a major source of attraction for tourists. The activities range from the presentation of ancient crafts on the brink of extinction to guided tours with an historical and cultural component, and do-it-yourself afternoon activities.

The key elements

- > Recognition of the cultural dimension in rural development, reinforcement of rural culture in the minds of the local people.
- > Discovery of the potential of rural culture, creation of opportunities for the exchange of information and ideas and meetings.
- > Thanks to the various activities, promotion of rural culture, ignored for a long time, via tourism.
- > Utilisation of the potential of local experts.
- > Co-operation between different districts and institutions.
- > Exploitation of the resources and methods of an institute rooted in the area. Promotion of the institute's experience and co-operation networks.
- > Constructive dialogue between decision-makers and researchers; mutual learning.

The Baden-Württemberg Pädagogische Arbeitsstelle Erwachsenenbildung - PAE (Council for Adult Education) was set up in the early 1950s. It has a scientific unit in Stuttgart and a practical work office in Inzighofen in the district of Sigmaringen. The structure's main objective was to contribute, after the Second World War, to the promotion of rural areas and the protection of democracy. At the end of the 1980s, Baden-Württemberg rural areas experienced a political awakening. At the time, the PAE brought new elements to the political sphere through the project "New forms of training work in rural areas", successfully carried out between 1989 and 1991 in the district of Sigmaringen. Through this project, a competition and hundreds of visits to local people's homes made it possible to identify "experts and specialists with skills in diverse domains". As a result, "professional clubs" (of local writers and historians, herbalists, mineralogists, stamp collectors, amateur painters, decorators, wood sculptors, crèche builders, wool and linen weavers, etc.) were formed and an initial contact with tourism established.

ready participated in the LEADER I programme and, on the basis of its earlier work, submitted its application regarding the project "Experience and training – Holidays in a rural environment". Whereas most of the mayors in the region showed interest in infrastructural investment during the preparatory phase of the LEADER I programme, the PAE, from the start, underlined the need for regional co-operation.

Starting point

Part of the Oberschwaben area was covered by LEADER I. Founded in 1996, the LEADER II group is a partnership bringing together various local and regional authorities, Obere Donau Natural Park (Upper Danube) and 18 structures working in the sectors of agriculture, tourism, industry, arts and crafts, culture and education (the PAE).

Implementation

Between 1993 and 1995, the PAE implemented the project "Experience and training – Holidays in a rural environment", within the framework of the LEADER I programme. The project involved five districts which played an active role in this project.

The project's first objective was to evaluate the potential of the districts involved in the project, acquire knowledge and design its first products. Secondly, this exercise was systematically evaluated and the supply of products enlarged. In the third phase, the programme was pursued, the findings of the enquiry implemented and detailed documentation gathered.

LEADER's chief objective in Oberschwaben from the start was concerned with the development of tourism and construction of a "Cultural centre in a rural environment". The PAE had al-

The attractions selected included: a cooper's and wheelwright's workshop, a blacksmith's forge, a basket-making unit, a tuff quarry, a windmill, a book-binding workshop, a maker of musical instruments, an ecological brewery and several organic farms. The following sectors of activity were concerned by the attractions: beekeeping, farmhouse cheese-making, baking, pottery workshops, paper-making, blacksmithing and embroidery. In addition to these attractions,

guided visits on the history of art and natural history were organised. The discovery of local potential - barely taken into consideration in the past - and inter-district collaboration were important for the districts involved in the project.

Within the framework of the LEADER II programme, these activities were considerably extended. To a large extent, the programme involved a different domain from the one covered by LEADER I, and required a higher level of joint work. A simple holiday programme generated a wide range of products. In order to improve services, continuing education measures for tourist guides were implemented and continuing education projects for collaborators working on a voluntary basis and a gastronomy unit were set up.

Whereas the LEADER I programme was more of a grouping together of isolated projects, the LEADER II approach was designed and carried out in a more collective manner. In addition to the development of the cultural programme, the PAE was charged with drawing up a plan aimed at creating and fine-tuning a network of important items from the tourist point of view, during the creation of the "Cultural centre in a rural environment". The plan was completed in 1997, providing key guidelines for development based on the LEADER approach.

Co-operation between the LEADER group and research institutes was conducted in close collaboration and in a spirit of mutual trust generally. A learning process within both the LAG and the PAE was developed: in the region, it became clearly apparent that rural culture could be important for local development and inter-district collaboration. People working within the PAE learnt to think more consistently in terms of revitalisation and to take into account basic economic conditions and tourism-related demands.

Elements of innovation for the area

Mobilisation of the population and social cohesion

- > New relations were established between the local culture and the general public and between tourists and the local inhabitants. The new tourist products won the trust of many visitors.
- > The districts came into contact with new experiences relating to inter-district co-operation and assimilated methods for the development of joint strategies.
- > Many players learnt to transform initially simple traditions into attractive products.
- > Local decision-makers are now much more aware of the cultural and tourist potential of Oberschwaben. Many local inhabitants have got to know their own area better and are showing a growing interest in what is happening there. Observation of the area's particularities and of the potentiality of the latter at the economic level has been sharpened as a result of the project.

Image of the area

- > The quality of tourist services has improved.
- > The image of the area has clearly improved and a local identity is starting to develop.
- > Culture is now locally recognised as a factor of development.

OBERSCHWABEN

The Oberschwaben LEADER area is hilly and comprises large parts of the district of Sigmaringen. It has a relatively strong agricultural tradition, with 15% of the active population working in agriculture and forestry. In spite of a significant potential, tourism has played, until now, a relatively limited role in the local economy. The area has a population of 85 000 inhabitants, a surface area of 733 km² and a relatively low population density for Germany (118 inhabitants/km²). Young and skilled people are leaving the area in large numbers.

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