



# Orchard meadows – Cultivation and preservation of an endangered cultural landscape

Nature and Geopark Styrian Eisenwurzen (Austria)

## Contact info

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**Geographical/territorial context:** The characteristic and ecologically valuable cultural and natural landscapes of the Styrian Eisenwurzen are flowing waters and their alluvial forests, habitats in the mountains (alpine pastures, rock and scree meadows), meadows and pastures in the valleys, alpine mixed forest structures with a focus on beech and meadow orchards. Orchard meadows form one of the defining cultural landscapes in the region.

**Strengths/assets:** The Nature Park will play an active role in the entire life and production cycle: from renewal, maintenance, harvesting, processing and distribution to the marketing of the fruit and its by-products. This can create jobs, open up new opportunities for cooperation and support for the regional economy. A regional network and cooperation is also important to set future steps. The stakeholders in the wider area work closely together for nature and cultural landscape protection.

**Challenges:** The Styrian Eisenwurzen Nature Park is shaped by a diverse natural and cultural landscape but also by old industry – iron ore mining, near the Styrian Erzberg. After the decline of the industry in the 20th century and increasing tertiarization, the region was faced with depopulation. In recent years, the challenges of protecting and using meadow orchards have become increasingly difficult, since the management of this area involves a lot of work and effort. Therefore, this type of landscape has become an endangered element of the countryside.

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## Identified Stakeholders, Establishment of the Hub



- \* Markt 35, A-8933 St. Gallen, Austria
- \* Nature and Geopark office
- \* Local farmers, shop owners, provincial chamber of agriculture, big landowner, regional partner network

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## Co-development of the Action Plan



The co-development of the action plan happened through the following workshops:

- Participatory Workshop (19.11.2019): Meeting Project Team Gesäuse Partner (tourism board, nearby national park and Nature and Geopark management team)
- Roundtable with Stakeholders/Business Model Canvas / Serious Game (09.03.2020): *Subsequently, the project was presented to all representatives of the direct marketing sector. A so-called regulars' table was used for this purpose*

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## Established Action Plan

The overall objective is to support regional sustainable development within the four Nature and Geopark municipalities along the following pillars:

a) Education and Scientific Research b) Sustainable Tourism and Mobility c) Natural, cultural and geological protection d) Resilience against climate change e) General awareness rising and public relation  
 The approach regarding these objectives is already on a good level but we would like to involve more inhabitants, regional stakeholders and target groups in the future. Especially with the good interaction with our neighbouring national park, the tourism board and the regional "Gesäuse" partner network the Nature and Geopark has a good opportunity to increase in this matter. A strong network helps on several levels: protection of natural and cultural landscape, regional sustainable food production, sustainable tourism, added-value for the region, new innovative ideas and approaches and so on.

**Action 1: Stronger regional marketing of agricultural products**  
**Specific aim:** Stakeholder meetings with regional and external stakeholders to have an Action map for a proper future marketing.

**Achieved Activities:**

- Detailed conceptualisation with stakeholders from the region and external process support
- Marketing, development and awareness-raising planning for the next 5 years
- pre-organization of 3 workshops with minimum 20 people
- Holding the events on proper event locations – framework programme and snacks
- Public relations after the event

**Action 2: Protect meadows and alpine pastures from abandoned use**

**Specific aim:** Holding 2 events on the showcase alpine pastures to which managers of all participating alpine pastures are invited in order to support the exchange of experience with regard to appropriate measures for alpine pasture maintenance and restoration.

**Achieved Activities:**

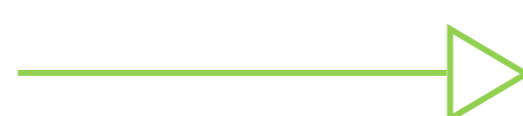
- Pre-organization of the two events: involving target groups, organizational tasks
- Holding the events on proper event locations – alps – framework programme and snacks
- Position paper regarding useful measures to protect alpine pastures including local food production in alpine areas

**Action 3: Continue the preservation and rejuvenation of the orchard stand**

**Specific aim:** at least 80 new plantings of apple and/or pear trees including protective measures were carried out, 50 trees were pruned, 6 biodiversity care days were held in the conservation gardens.

**Achieved Activities:**

- Establish criteria for orchard ambassadors
- coordination with orchard owners
- preparation of written agreements - so-called orchard commitments
- planting of trees with protective devices
- holding of orchard courses
- care pruning of old trees,
- biodiversity care of orchard conservation gardens



## Sustainability Beyond RURITAGE

We try...

...to involve local people to protect regional heritage, local food production, natural resources

...to strengthen orchard farmers on different levels - as we see the orchard as the main part of our cultivated landscape

We us...

... our partner network with local farmers to preserve the local heritage and therefore we can work together for the nature and cultivated landscape as well – as sustainable local food production