



Landcare Associations – an alliance for Nature

DVL

German Association for
Landcare



**Information on the founding and activities of Landcare
associations**

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The dynamic development of a good idea

The idea of Landcare associations first came into existence in Central Franconia in 1986. From there it spread into further parts of Bavaria, into Hesse and Thuringia and then into the other federal states. Especially in the new eastern federal states numerous Landcare associations have been founded since 1990. There, people involved in conservation, agriculture and local politics realized that they were equally seriously concerned with the rapid loss of jobs in the agricultural sector and the ensuing lack of care for habitats in landscapes shaped by human cultivation and development.

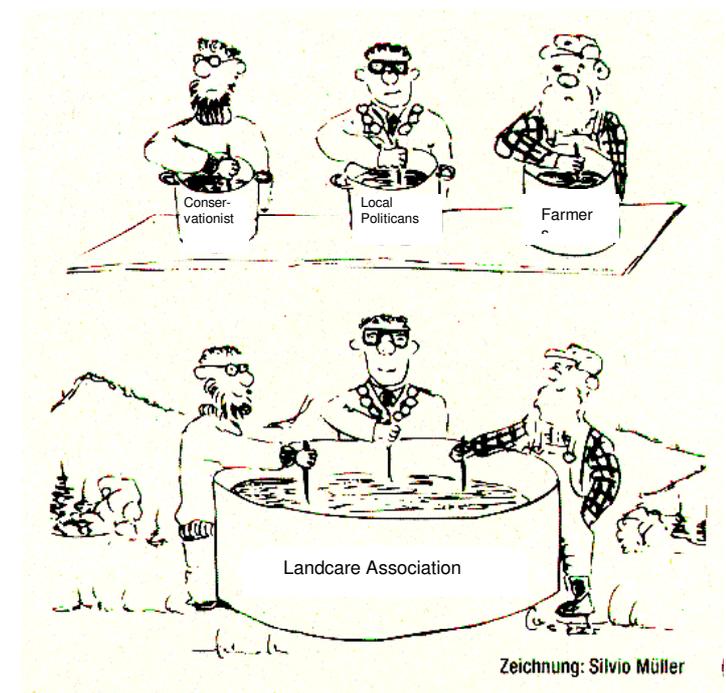
In early 2005 140 Landcare Associations were active in twelve federal states, and a number of others are being set up at the moment.

In the opinion of Landcare associations landscape conservations today means a lot more than cutting the grass in some meadows and planting rows of hedges:

- **landscape conservation** serves to preserve and create habitats for domestic species - both flora and fauna - and to safeguard soil, water and air, the natural basis for all life.
- **landscape conservation** also includes non-interference in natural processes
- **landscape conservation** furthermore provides a decisive contribution to the conservation of large areas of land cultivated and developed by man by using this land in a way that is as close to nature as possible. Thus important impulses are given for a sustained regional development.

The core element of parity

Designed as voluntary associations of conservation groups, farmers and local politicians Landcare associations embody a new approach to conservation. Their core element is the cooperation of those members of society; they are therefore represented by the same number of members on the board of each Landcare association and have an equal say in decision-making. This fair and balanced structure creates trust and very much enhances the success of Landcare association work. To guarantee that talks take place on a highly qualified level, the board of each local Landcare association is supported by an advisory panel of experts.



The principle of voluntary participation

As registered non-profit organisations serving the public interest Landcare associations have no authority to act on their own, but they can take action only at the request of land owners such as local communities, private citizens or organisations. The decision to request a Landcare association to perform some

activity rests solely in the hands of the land owner. This principle of voluntary participation has been proved to substantially increase people's willingness to take part in conservation measures and often leads to a veritable competition towards an environmentally friendly attitude.

Regional connection

There are no two identical landscapes, and each habitat requires a specific approach. As a rule, Landcare associations are therefore limited to only one country or natural region. This decentralized form of organisation gives full consideration to regional differences and contributes to the preservation of individual types of landscape. Due to this, the tendency towards the development of increasingly uniform spatial structures has to make way for regional diversity, which in turn forms the basis for long-term attractiveness for tourists.

For this reason, representatives of the tourist trade participate in some Landcare associations, thus emphasizing the responsibility of this sector of the economy for the preservation of intact landscapes.

The Landcare associations have three **major goals**: They want to

1. provide impulses for an economic development oriented along ecological principles and an environmentally friendly land use, a development that helps emphasize the unique characteristics of each region and activates its specific strengths.
2. set up an extensive network of natural habitats in order to keep the basic necessities of life intact in all of Germany's cultivated landscapes
3. provide farmers engaged in conservation work with a reliable source of additional income and to help them market products that are typical for their respective regions so as to keep wide stretches of land in areas less favored by nature from being allowed to lie fallow.

A partner of the local communities

Landcare association offices work primarily as a kind of service facility for communities, private land owners and local conservation groups. They help do more for conservation than it was formerly possible to do, and they are a suitable partner for the realization of the local communities' planning concerns.

Method of working

On the basis of existing concepts developed by conservation experts, a detailed study of selected areas of land is made, the actual measures to be taken are developed and costs are calculated. As a matter of course this involves close coordination with the local communities, with conservation, agriculture, forestry and water management authorities and with conservation groups and farmers.

Farmers as conservationists

The actual labour is primarily provided by local farmers. They are familiar with the landscape and feel responsible for "their" immediate area. The creation of larger new biotopes is frequently carried out by firms specialising in gardening and landscape architecture. All the technical and organisational work - such as applying and accounting for state, federal and European Union grants, supervising the implementation of measures and checking on ecological results - is taken care of by Landcare association offices.

In some cases, conservation organisations perform landscape conservation activities themselves; the Landcare association support them in this on request.

New strategies

This classic work of the Landcare associations is effectively complemented by a second, more recent strategy: Landcare associations support extensive land use systems such as sheep grazing and traditional mixed orchards by assisting with the marketing of the produce resulting from these systems.

Many of today's endangered habitats originally came into existence only through cultivation of the land. Unless put to some use by farmers, areas like the mountain meadows of the Thuringer Wald or the poor-soil pastures of the Schwabische Alb - two of Germany's typical low mountain ranges - would in the long run turn into forests. As lots of endangered animals and plants would thus lose their habitats, those cultivated landscapes must be maintained in the interest of conservation as well as that of the local population and the tourist trade.

The marketing of "natural products"

However, in the long term this aim can only be achieved if extensive forms of land use can be made profitable again. One way to do so is the regional marketing of quality produce grown on extensively used land. Landcare association initiatives promoting the marketing of lamb in local restaurants have shown that sheep grazing on poor-soil pastures can thus be encouraged anew. Spreading to further products, the implementation of ideas like this can provide important impulses for the establishment of regional economies.

Funding

In Germany conservation is an obligation of the federal states, so that the Departments of the Environment and of Agriculture in the individual states have to bear most of the financial burden. Programs designed to develop tourism, which lie within the sphere of responsibility of the Department of Trade and Commerce, can also provide funds. Within the federal government, the Department of the Environment supports model projects in conservation that cover larger areas extending over several states.

Some of the personnel costs for the administration of the Landcare associations are directly assumed by the federal states, another part is supplied for the conception and implementation of individual projects. Some counties in the 'old' federal states provide a large part of funding for both personnel and overhead of the Landcare association offices by themselves, and many of them have even allocated

additional funds for wildlife and habitat protection programs in their budgets. Moreover, Landcare associations receive money in the form of membership dues, donations, fines levied by courts and so-called "eco-sponsoring".

Summary

Landcare associations are a way of implementing conservation. They bring a region's various interest groups together and provide impulses for an environmentally friendly regional development. With the help of Landcare associations scarce public funds can be used for the preservation of diverse cultivated landscapes in an effective and expert way; this also supports the work of state authorities.

The umbrella organization

The German Association for Landscape Conservation is the umbrella organisation of all the Landcare associations in Germany and further, similar organisations. The association, which was formed in 1993 and is acknowledged as a non-profit organisation serving the public interest, represents the Landcare associations, holds conferences and supports initiatives leading to the founding of new Landcare associations. In cooperation with local Landcare associations the German Association for Landscape Conservation carries out model projects such as the establishment of regional economies.

German Association for Landcare

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