

**Cultural landscape, traditional food and tourism.
Rural development in the “Franconian Switzerland”
(Bavaria, Germany) and in the Wachau (Lower Austria)**

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Introduction

Changes in land use and land cover are some of the far-reaching effects of human activities on modern landscapes. As a result of the intensification of agricultural production, on the one hand, and the retreat of agriculture from unfavourable sites, on the other hand, many of the traditional land-use systems have begun to disappear. At the same time, the ecological, scenic and cultural-historical significance of traditionally used landscapes have become better recognized – and this has led to various efforts to protect them, recently focussed in the European Landscape Convention (Fairclough & Grau Møller 2008).

In general, we have learned that historic parts of the agrarian landscape cannot be conserved by law and by designating landscape protection areas alone. Rather, there is a need to maintain those traditional agricultural activities which shape the cultural landscape. Since the 1970s, the cultivation of disadvantaged agricultural areas has been supported by compensation payments and similar subsidies from agricultural and nature conservation authorities – which over time has become ever more expensive. A more effective cultural landscape protection would need an economically sustainable development of traditional land-use forms – most appropriately by establishing added-value chains in a systematic interaction of politics, producers and consumers, often tourists. Thus, cultural landscape development will increasingly depend on supply of and demand for characteristic regional – mostly agrarian – products (Ilbery & Kneafsey 1999).

As “the future of cultural landscapes will be decided in the heads of the consumers” (Favry et al. 2004: 19), the success of landscape development largely depends on an attractive regional image, on the quality and choice of regional products and on effective marketing strategies designed by the regional suppliers of goods and related services. Thus, the consumers as tourists or buyers of regional products are wooed by regional stakeholders and producers.

The authors of the “Fast Food – Slow Food” project in the “Austrian Landscape Research” are of the opinion (Favry et al. 2004: 18) that small and medium-sized rural enterprises in particular have an opportunity to create their own image and implement their marketing strategies if they manage to show the relationship between regional food and cultural landscape. This means a clearly defined product and process quality that corresponds at all levels of the processing chain to high ecological, social and landscape conservation standards. If they want to realize these quality chains, all stakeholders need to engage in networking and better cooperation.

This chapter describes the traditional forms of land use and the most characteristic regional agrarian products of two landscapes studied, the Fränkische Schweiz (“Franconian Switzerland”) in the North of Bavaria and the Wachau in Lower Austria. Both are situated in lower mountain ranges, were settled in the Carolingian era, have traditionally been used in agriculture and relevant for tourism since the early 19th century. Below, the networks and strategies to enhance the region’s image and to promote regional products and regional sustainable tourism are discussed in detail for both regions. In doing this, we can see how and why the success of a revaluation of endogenous rural resources is subject to great regional variations. The chapter concludes with an outlook on the possibly increasing competition among different cultural landscapes for the preference of consumers.

Franconian Switzerland

Franconian Switzerland in the northern part of Bavaria is part of the Franconian Alb, an Upper Jurassic limestone plateau with calcareous strata and massive rocks formed by dolomitic reefs. The karstified plateau is cleaved by a number of steep valleys of about 100 m depth. Traditionally, the plateau with its undulating relief is for agricultural use, the valley slopes for forest and rough pastures and the valley bottom for irrigated meadows.

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In the period of Romanticism, this cultural landscape was discovered as a tourist region. In 1812, J.C. Fick created the name “Franconian Switzerland”. Poets such as L. Tieck and W.H. Wackenroder and painters like L. Richter travelled extensively through the region over 200 years ago and portrayed the area in words and pictures. Up to now, the image of this tourist region has been strongly related to “romantic” landmarks such as castles, ruins and mills, but also to an “Arcadian” scenery made up of natural landscape elements like rocks, caves, creeks and pastures (Kulturamt 1994).

Due to the changes in the agronomic structure since the end of World War II, traditionally mixed agriculture has been given up in favour of specialized crops and livestock farming. The meadows are no longer needed as pastures and for hay making. The forest area is increasing, notably on the steep slopes and in the valley bottom (Weisel 1971; Fig. 1); the formerly impressive rocks are no longer visible. Since the 1990s, regional stakeholders have noticed that these landscape changes have led to a loss of landscape diversity and scenic beauty. A constantly decreasing demand in tourism – about 11% fewer overnight stays within the 12 years from 1993 to 2004 – might be a repercussion of these developments (Bender 2007).

Landscape conservation measures in Franconian Switzerland

In 1972, the Fränkische Schweiz – Veldensteiner Forst Nature Park was founded (renewed edict from 1995). It has a total area of 2 310 km², of which 1 397 km² are classified as landscape protection area. The main aim of the nature park is the promotion of landscape related to tourism. Furthermore, several other institutions (e.g. the regional planning authorities and landscape conservation associations) take care of the preservation and reconstruction of historic landmarks. In their measures they are implementing the nature park programme (with EU subsidies for rural development), e.g. clearing of shrubby meadows, clearing of bushes around the rocks, restructuring of ponds; some measures draw on institutional subsidies for traditional agriculture (which are the Bavarian Contract Nature Protection Programme, since 1995 funded by the nature protection authority; or the Bavarian Cultural Landscape Programme, since 1988 funded by the agricultural administration). Outstanding examples are the maintenance of rough pastures and extensively used meadows.

In any case, the funds stem from the public budget. Thus, we have to ask whether society is willing to spend tax money in order to preserve landscapes. On the oc-



Fig. 1: Ailsbachtal, Franconian Switzerland, ca. 1930 (left) and 1994 (right), showing a notable increase in forest cover on the formerly mesoxerophytic sheep pastures. Photographs by H. Scherzer and H.J. Böhmer.

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casation of a survey done by the University of Bayreuth, we learned that one third of tourists would no longer visit Franconian Switzerland should landscape preservation measures such as the clearing of shrubs around the rocks be abandoned (Popp 2003). In other regions, researchers also tried to find out how much tourists or locals would pay for the conservation of a cultural landscape or certain landscape elements. The results are quite variable – in a study made in the Moselle valley (Job 1999), tourists were less willing to pay than local people; instead, the tourists referred to their consumption of regional products.

Therefore, we realize that there is a need for producing and marketing regional food. The most successful marketing in respect of cultural landscape is through direct selling at the farms, farmers' markets and by promoting culinary specialities, as this helps attracting tourists to the region. In Franconian Switzerland, initiatives of this kind are supported by the central tourist agencies and assisted by a LEADER+ project.

The sheep grazing programme

In this context, the most important project in the Franconian Switzerland is the restart of sheep grazing on the characteristic mesoxerophytic pastures (Fig. 2), which were reduced in the first half of the 20th century from 15% to 1% of the total area. Since 1993, based on a regional sheep grazing programme (Weid 1995) as major planning tool, new pastures have been cleared and combined with existing ones in order to create a grazing system. The idea is that grazing herds of sheep will hamper the succession of woodland and make the expensive manual clearing of bushes unnecessary. The production of wool, which was the former regional product of sheep farming, nowadays is too expensive compared with overseas production. Instead of wool, the shepherds get their income from the production of meat which is sold directly to regional butchers and restaurants. The Jura Lamb Programme represents the first trademark of Franconian Switzerland (Fig. 2).

However, the main problem with implementing the programme is to get a sufficient number of shepherds. In 2002, the first one became insolvent and parts of the rough pastures had to be mowed again by hand. Admittedly, lamb is not traditional in Franconian cuisine and this might be a reason that shepherds are selling less lamb than the landscape planners had expected (Bender 2007).

The Wachau

The Wachau represents a section of the Danube valley over 36 km in length, between Melk and Krems in Lower Austria. Here, the river Danube flows through the geologically old mountains of the Bohemian Mass, separating the Dunkelsteiner Forest in the South from the Waldviertel region in the North. Thus, the valley is engraved up to 700 m deep into the mountain range. All villages in the Wachau are accessible by the river or the riverside road. Since 1837, the Wachau is connected to Vienna by an excursion ship line. As a result, the



Fig. 2: Herd of sheep grazing on a rough pasture and brand logo of the Jura Lamb in Franconian Switzerland. Photograph by A. Niedling.

Wachau became a popular (nearby) tourist destination during the 19th century and also a subject of landscape painters (Suppan 2004; Fig. 3). Apart from its scenic beauty, historic villages and monuments such as castles and monasteries, the Wachau is known for its vineyards and apricot (locally known as *Marillen*) orchards, both of which originate in Roman times.

The vineyards, situated on narrow terraces rising up to the top of the steep slopes, and the orchards contribute notably to the scenic beauty. Thus, the Wachau is protected as landscape protection area under Austrian nature protection law. Furthermore, in 1994, the Wachau was awarded the European nature protection diploma and in 2000, the Wachau was added to the UNESCO World Heritage List on condition that former plans to dam up the river Danube were abandoned (Hajós 2000). As early as 1972, a Working Group for the Protection of the Wachau was founded whose tasks have changed over time. In the beginning, the working group was confronted with several threats to the landscape, later it became an active driving force for regional developments which are now supported by European and national funds, such as LEADER+ and LIFE Nature (Schimek 2005).



Fig. 3: The Wachau near Weissenkirchen, ca. 1940, painting by S. Stoitzner (1892–1976).

Promotion of wine

The Wachau viticulture originated in the late Roman times as it is documented in the *Vita Sancti Severini* and was extended during the Middle Ages at the instigation of Bavarian monasteries. Due to modern changes in the general agronomic structure, farmers in the Wachau specializing in vine and fruit crops. Of course, the boost to the Wachau's popularity from romantic painting and tourism was very helpful in this.

Very early, the winegrowers began implementing a very strict quality management. In the Wachau, there are three categories/qualities of natural wine, *Steinfeder*, *Federspiel* and *Smaragd*, which are protected by copyright (Fig. 4). The foundation of the *Vinea Wachau Nobilis Districtus* organization of wine producers in 1983 formed the basis of modern wine marketing. As a result, the ca. 200 members have achieved an appellation of Wachau which makes their wine unique. Especially *Grüner Veltliner* and *Riesling* from this region have achieved world fame.

In comparison with several other wine-growing areas, the steep vineyards, manageable only by hand and held steady by dry walls constructed across the steep slopes, are much appreciated although they are very difficult to work (Fig. 5). Due to their specific local climatic conditions they enable the production of wines of excellence. Therefore, the preservation of these historical landscape elements is an undisputed fact. The production area has been extended from less than 800 ha during the 1950s and 1960s to over 1500 ha today. Marketing of the wine takes place locally in the farms, some of it in a special kind of tavern on the farms (the *Heuriger*) or via a cooperative (*Domäne Wachau* with more than 700 members).



Fig. 4: Classification of quality wines used by *Vinea Wachau* members © *Vinea Wachau Nobilis Districtus*.

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Fig. 5: Vineyards in Weissenkirchen in 2005, Photograph: © Brains & Pictures.

Marillen

The professional production of apricots (*Marillen*) in the Wachau started around the 1900s. The production area of approx. 50 000 trees was planted in the crisis years of the wine production around 1925. The territory proved to be very well suited to the cultivation of high quality apricots. Recently, the EU has placed the Wachauer Marille under the protection of a special appellation (Fig. 6). The valorization in the region is promoted by the group Original *Wachauer Marille* founded in 2003 and its ca. 220 members. The fresh apricots are turned into jam, nectar, distillate/schnapps and apricot dumplings made using traditional recipes passed on through generations.



Fig. 6: Cachet of © Original Wachauer Marille.

The apricot blossom in the Wachau, which takes place on average on the 10th of April, is a special tourist attraction. The apricot harvest around the 15th of July is another occasion that attracts a lot of tourists who come to buy the fruit directly from the orchard. Guided tours

through apricot orchards are currently being planned. On such short holidays, several tourists also purchase wine, visit the *Heurigen* and admire the scenic spots of the region.

Conclusion

Both studied landscapes are famous tourist regions where the experience of scenic beauty and traditional landscape elements still play an important role nowadays. In Franconian Switzerland, we noticed some efforts to make the development of the cultural landscape economically sustainable but these are as yet not sufficient. The preservation of historic landscape elements in this region still depends on sizeable public subsidies. In the Wachau, landscape-oriented tourist marketing is pursued on a very large scale (as cultural heritage) and there is also a strong network of regional stakeholders (*Arbeitskreis Wachau*). Apart from this, there is a larger sum of potential day trippers and short holiday guests from Vienna with better financial means than those expected in Franconian Switzerland. An indicator for this might be the recent development of tourism. Overnight stays during the 1990s in the nine main tourist municipalities of Franconian Switzerland have decreased by 11% (1993–2004), while in the Wachau they have increased by 11% (1990–2000)¹.

With regard to the demand for regional products, we must generally be aware of polarizing consumption habits between cheap (industrial) and premium (traditional) food. Between these two categories lies an indefinable grey zone for simple but ecologically high-value products, e.g. fruit, beer, schnapps, etc. which can be produced in every region. Thus, the determining factors for the different trends in both studied landscapes could look like this: Franconian Switzerland has a long history of tourism, however, agrarian products are not really exceptional. Moreover, the production of lamb is not inte-

¹ The data have been calculated by the author on the basis of official municipal data provided by the Bayerisches Landesamt für Statistik und Datenverarbeitung and Statistik Austria.

grated in the regional culinary tradition. In comparison, the Wachau produces regional food and wine of absolutely top quality which other regions are not able to replicate in quality and characteristics. This region has achieved a status of unique selling proposition. Here, food tourism (Everett 2008: 337) is a main motivation for tourists to visit the region and to get in direct contact with producers, refiners and restaurateurs.

In the future, rivalry and competition between cultural landscapes in growing regional agrarian niche products should increase markedly (Nótari et al. 2009). Thus, some of them will be able to improve their position also as tourist destinations while others will decline over time.

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