

The Island

Pellworm is a north Frisian island. It is located in mudflats and protected by high dykes from the surrounding Wadden Sea National Park. Much of the surface area of 37 sq. km lies up to 1.0 m below sea level. Agriculture, tourism and service are the main economic sectors.

There has been great structural change within agriculture and so most of the little farms have had to give up. Along with this, the demographic structure has changed. The number of inhabitants is decreasing – nowadays about 1,100 people live on the island, but the percentage of people over 60 years old is increasing in inverse proportion.

Tourism has increased considerably in importance. Nearly every household has invested in tourist accommodation facilities. The main tourist season runs from June to the beginning of September with very little or no tourism for the rest of the year.

There are no sandy beaches on Pellworm, no discos, no shopping centres. You will only find small supermarkets, some shops and a few restaurants. Tourists visiting the island are attracted by the tranquillity, the pure climate, and the surrounding national park. The island is well established as a "green island" as it has been involved in renewable energy for a long time. In the early 80's the first testing area for windmills was established on Pellworm.

The Association

In 1990 OW was founded by a group of concerned farmers, business people, housewives, craftsmen, teachers, fishermen, and local doctors. "Ökologisch Wirtschaften!" means "run the economy in an ecologically friendly way", or to put it the other way round "let there be economic advantages from ecologically friendly working". A strategy for local development on the island was worked out founded on the basic concept that all economic (and social) sectors on the island are dependent on each other. This strategy aimed to demonstrate possibilities for halting the ongoing loss of population, and fighting the imminent death of the island by means of ecologically friendly development.

The topical aims of OW are:

- Promoting ecologically friendly agriculture, tourism and energy supply on Pellworm
- Processing and refining local products in the island
- Direct marketing of ecologically products
- Turning geographic and economic disadvantage into ecological and economic advantage

In the early years there were 4 committees within OW which did most of the work – tourism, energy supply, agriculture, and consumer affairs, each developing its own projects and ideas. A co-ordinating office was established, funded by the Ministry of the Environment.

Ecological farming and direct marketing

OW put the main emphasis on agricultural development, and looked for clues to halt the dangerous downward spiral forcing farmers to give up their farms. Ecologically friendly farming seemed to offer the possibility of more independence from the mainland. Six farmers converted to organic production, producing vegetables, milk, crops and meat. They co-operated in the production of fodder and the joint care of livestock, in processing their produce, sharing machinery, and exchanging land, and they also founded a marketing co-operative to sell their products locally.

The work of "Ökologisch Wirtschaften" concentrated on the commercialisation of these products. Looking back with hindsight it appears now that OW's expectations had been too high regarding comprehension and acceptance of their ideas. All that remains now are market stalls on the mainland and in Pellworm, and one farm shop. It's still unclear why the ideas didn't work as well as they could have – even cooperation with gastronomy didn't work, although for a longer period many guests asked for local produce. One partner in the Bio-farmers had to revert back to conventional farming. However those who were able to maintain ecological farming practices are convinced they are doing the right thing, and OW is continuing to support and work for that.

Ecological Bicycle-tour

Since tourism is greatly increasing in importance a working group is in charge of designing projects for sustainable tourism. In summer OW offers ecological bicycle tours to enable visitors to participate in the local development programme. The tour takes in organic farms and renewable energy plants (solar panels, photovoltaic plant, wind generators) Tourists get a practical insight into what OW means when it talks about an ecologically friendly economy. These tours are much appreciated by the guests. Another project within the tourist sector is an educational programme for ecological affairs which is offered within the German Education - Programme for Employees.

Eco-Islands

Pellworm was one of the 6 participating islands in the Eco-Islands-Project, a European initiative towards sustainable development. The aim of the project was to form a network of islands for the exchange of experiences on the possibilities for sustainable development. Pellworm and OW directed their main focus on workshops on renewable energy, soft tourism, and direct marketing. The "Wool-Connection" cooperative was established between an organic farm and an old spinning mill on the island of Hiiumaa, Estonia. Ecologically produced wool from Pellworm was processed on Hiiumaa; the finished pullovers came back to Germany and were sold with the help of OW. The project surplus was transferred back to Hiiumaa to set up soft tourism on the Estonian island.

Sustainable Mystery Tour

OW is a member of the European Network for Experiences in Sustainable Development (ENESD), and the first pilgrimage of the ENESD touring exhibition stopped off in Pellworm in October 1998. The work and ideas of OW were reviewed by a number of visitors from several European countries, and members of OW did the same for other partners within the ENESD. Along with the international contacts within the Eco-Islands Project, this was the starting point of international relationships continuing within Forum Synergies.

Pellworm Energy Program

Discussion about the wind-park on Pellworm almost split people in the island into two mutually hostile groups, but OW as an association committed to the concept for renewables as the whole energy supply on Pellworm. An analysis of demand and a first broad outline of the concept was made in 1993 – 1994. A second study was set up with several partners from universities and the north Germany energy supply company to work out a plan for local development. The results were presented to the public entitled "Energy Supply on the basis of renewable energy sources using the example of the North Sea island Pellworm."

Bureau of Energy Supply

In preparation for EXPO 2000, the local government body and OW founded the Bureau of Energy Supply as a joint venture. The main task was to provide the impetus for converting the renewable energy concept into practical reality. The Bureau was the consultant for private households and local authorities in any question of sustainable energy supply. When the financial support from the local energy-supply company "Schleswig AG" was restricted in 2001, the office had to be closed. One of the main issues was to solve the question how the Pellworm energy supply could become totally independent from the mainland, so a study was undertaken on setting up a biomass plant with a geothermal reservoir. This unique and innovative biomass plant would fill the gap existing within the energy supply from renewable resources. To end up with, the local government body decided it preferred a biomass plant with the sole aim of producing electricity (and money).

A newly-formed profit-orientated association is now proceeding to plan a smaller version of the biomass plant without the participation of OW.

Expo 2000

Pellworm was a partner project with the county of Schleswig-Holstein at EXPO 2000 within the project "Dorf 2000". (Village 2000) This was an experimental representation of the future of the countryside, with the emphasis on coastal protection, Nature protection, and sustainable energy supply in accordance with the renewable energy concept.

Regionen Aktiv

When the German Ministry for Customer Protection and Agriculture set up a programme called "Regionen Aktiv", the objective being integrated policies for local development in the countryside, it seemed that at last here was a programme which fitted all the ideas OW had developed for many years. With agreement from the local government body, OW members wrote the application papers, and the north Frisian region Uthlande (Pellworm and the islands of Fohr, Amrum, Sylt, and Nordstrand) was accepted as one of the 16 model regions within the federal republic.

OW tried to involve more NGO's in this process as one of the programme's objectives was to build joint schemes between government and NGO's for planning the future of rural areas. But when the money came in and the management was filled, none of the OW members was included, and the district council started a campaign against OW. After a long and sometimes painful struggle which included some serious personal attacks, the Board and members of OW decided to concentrate on smaller and more concrete projects of its own.

As OW itself is a non-profit organisation, the Pellworm Country Trade Company was founded by members of OW some years ago to run profit-orientated projects. So now this company is undertaking studies on vegetable processing, wool processing, a slaughterhouse, and energy consultancy. The profits will be used for investment in vegetable processing, the slaughterhouse, and so on.

Maybe this time, in another way, OW will be able to turn disadvantage into advantage. Back to our roots perhaps - we're sure this is the way to regain the energy we felt we lost in struggling with local authorities. For now we'll concentrate on strengthening what OW has already achieved and not try to convince the whole island of the possibilities of running the entire economy in an ecologically friendly way. Maybe OW is still young and a little bit foolish, but we continue to be optimistic.