



Grundtvig European Learning Partnership „Our Agro Bio Diversity“

**Report from the Grundtvig-Workshop IV in Austria
Thursday, 4th of October – Saturday, 6th of October 2012**

Conservation and Propagation of Seeds – Practical Work of a Gene bank

Including aspects of our educational program and up-to-date information about our efforts concerning the review of the EU legislation on Seed and Plant Propagating Material

Day 1 – Thursday, 4th october 2012

We were happy that such a big group of our partners was interested in our workshop topic. There were 4 people from Poland, 13 from Latvia, 12 from Romania and 6 from Switzerland. Together with the people from ARCHE NOAH we are a group of 38 people. We had to rent a bus, so that everyone could come with us. We were starting at Viennas' train station „Westbahnhof“. Our first stop was at Gärtnerhof Ochsenherz in Gänserndorf-Süd (www.ochsenherz.at), where Peter Lassnig and Jan Bönnhart were expecting us. Peter runs a biodynamic agriculture with about 5 ha with vegetable-, seed- and seedlings-production from open pollinating varieties. He does direct marketing with a CSA (Community supported agriculture) with about 200 members, mostly in Vienna.

Peter was showing us around on his fields. The participants were astonished by the cultivated biodiversity. Especially the blue tomatoes have been examined and documented very carefully. The tigernut was also something new for the most of the participants and Peter let us try some nuts fresh from the field. After that Peter and Jan showed us the equipment for the seed propagation and conservation and explained how all the facilities work. Peter has constructed an own device (Fig. 2) for seed-cleaning, which was inspected very thoroughly by the participants.



Fig. 1: Tasting of tigernuts fresh from the field



Fig. 2: Peter explains how the device for seed-cleaning works

Afterwards we all went for lunch in the recreation room at Ökosiedlung Gänserndorf, where Peters Parnter Lili Henzel already prepared a wonderful vegetarian meal with vegetables from the farm. The participants enjoyed this rest period in the cosy recreation room, since most of them have traveled to Austria overnight.

Our next stop was Gut Bergmühle in Kronberg (www.bergmuehle.at). It is an organic farm with emphasis on bean varieties, potatoes and goats (breed=Steirerschecken) for milk-production. They sell their products in their own farm shop, on the Karmelitermarket in Vienna and supply high end gastronomy. We were expected by boss Martin Rohla and Leo Leder. On the fields of Gut Bergmühle they were doing a field experiment comparing different runner-bean varieties. The seeds for this experiment came from the Seed-library of ARCHE NOAH. Leo was explaining the scope of the experiment and told us about the monitoring results so far and the differences between the varieties. After the field visit the team of Gut Bergmühle was showing us what device they use to thresh their beans.



Fig. 3: Leo Leder shows us the field experiment where they compared the different runner-beans



Fig. 4: threshing of beans

Our last visit lead us to Martin Allram in Dietmannsdorf (www.allramdaham.at). He runs a



Fig. 5: Martin Allram shows us his areas for seed production

biodynamic farm with emphasis on cereals and seed production. He sells his products in wholefood-stores and gastronomy. Martin is like the other two we saw on that day also one of ARCHE NOAHs' partner farms for seed production. After a common introduction of the farm we were visiting his areas for seed production. Martin was telling the participants about his approach to propagate seeds.

After that we drove to Langenlois where we spent the next two nights. We had dinner in a Heurigen, which is a traditional "Restaurant" in Austrian wine-regions.

Day 2 – Friday, 5th October 2012:



Fig 6: Mara Müller guides the Latvian group through the ARCHE NOAH show-garden

We were starting the day in the seminar room of the castle of Schiltern, which is situated opposite the ARCHE NOAH show-garden. All the participants were introducing themselves, so that the group could learn to know each other. Afterwards Mara Müller and Michael Suanjak from the ARCHE NOAH team made a guided tour through the show garden. They explained the setting of the garden, the links to the ARCHE NOAH network of seed-sustainers and the peculiarities of the (propagation)-cultures. The

show garden attracted lots of attention and the participants made notes and took pictures of the garden.

In the afternoon we built up 4 stations and divided the big group in 4 smaller groups. Each group should pass through every station. In every station the participants could learn something about the work of seed propagation and how it is done by ARCHE NOAH. The special activities were explained and demonstrated by one of ARCHE NOAHs' staff members. Then the participants were invited to practice themselves (Fig. on the following page). Following the slogan: You will remember the best what you have practiced on your own. These four stations are also part of our educational program, in specific we train this in our course "seed-gardener" which we hold every year.

Station 1 with Anja Meckstroth: Cleaning and dehydration of seeds: cleaning with sieves / cleaning with water

Station 2 with Michaela Arndorfer: Guided tour through our seed collection, explanations about the ARCHE NOAH database

Station 3 with Michael Suanjak und Mara Müller: Testing of seed-germination, the use of steam to eliminate seed-borne pathogenes

Station 4 with Beate Koller: Dissemination of seeds: seed-swap, selling, ARCHE NOAH network of seed sustainers

After a coffeebreak the participants started a seed swap. In preparation of the workshop we have asked all participants to bring some seeds from traditional varieties from their own country. With the seeds the participants also exchange some interesting information about the varieties, which might help in the following year to cultivate the varieties.

Since we were in time delay the primarily planned program-point "guided tour through the ARCHE NOAH propagation garden" has been officially cancelled. The participants could visit the garden on their own initiative.



Fig. 7: Station 1: Anta is practising the seed-cleaning with sieves



Fig. 8: Station 2: guided tour in the ARCHE NOAH seed library



Fig. 9: Station 3: Michael Suanjak shows the testing of seed-germination and seed-adherent pathogens



Fig. 10: Station 4: Beate Koller discusses with the Romanian participants about the dissemination of seeds

Day 3 – Saturday, 6th october 2012



Fig. 11: Johannes Maurer and Mara Müller with Auseklis Bielis, Janis Pakalns and Gutntra Aistara from Latvia handing over the latvian apple varieties

In the morning Beate Koller gave detailed up-to-date information about the revision of the EU legislation on Seed and Plant Propagating Material and ARCHE NOAH's efforts to make it more respectful towards the environment, consumers' expectations and the needs of small actors in the seed chain (see also www.seedforall.org). She explained how the revision will be executed on the EU-level and how every country of the European Union can involve itself in this process. In the beginning of November 2012 ARCHE NOAH organized an own workshop on this topic.

On this Saturday the ARCHE NOAH's fruit festivities were also happening in the show-garden. Janis Pakalns, a Latvian participant of the Grundtvig-Workshop, is a propagator and breeder of apple varieties and brought some rare apples from his home country. These varieties became part of our big apple and pear-variety exhibition in the baroque pavilion of our show-garden. For documentary reasons we took pictures of the apples and agreed with Janis that he will send us some propagation material so that we can graft some new trees with the Latvian varieties.

Conclusio:

We have learned a lot by preparing and carrying out this workshop. We were a bit short in time or let's say we had too much program for the three days. Still it was a very successful workshop where ARCHE NOAH could communicate and pass on a lot of their knowledge and best practices collected in 20 years of conservation and propagating seeds of about 6000 different plant varieties. It was a motivating experience to see the interest of the group for the topic of seed-propagation. But not only the participants learned from us, they also brought knowledge in that field of seed-propagation to Austria, so that a mutual learning was taking place. Also the informal parts in the evenings when we were all together singing and dancing were very heart-warming. Thanks to all the wonderful singers from Romania and Latvia and especially to Anita from Latvia who motivated the group do dance together.