

SDG 4: ENSURE INCLUSIVE AND EQUITABLE QUALITY EDUCATION AND PROMOTE LIFELONG LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL



Education is a human right. It is crucial in determining how people are able to develop their capabilities and what goals they achieve in life. The 2030 Agenda aims to achieve inclusive and quality education for all plus lifelong learning, which also affects other SDGs such as reducing inequality (SDG 10). In Germany education is the responsibility of the federal states, although municipalities do play a central role in key areas such as education for sustainable development.

LIVING SUSTAINABLY: FROM GRANDCHILDREN TO GRANDPARENTS

➔ WHAT ARE THE ACTIVITIES ALL ABOUT?

Alheim in the federal state of Hesse has committed to sustainable education for young and old. And the results are there for all to see – It has already been nominated a model municipality for the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development four times. In 2016 UNESCO awarded it the title ‘Excellent Municipality – in the World Action Programme of Education for Sustainable Development’. Alheim also became Germany’s most sustainable municipality in 2016.

➔ WHAT HAS BEEN DONE SO FAR?

Alheim is almost self-sufficient in renewable energy. Here, though, sustainability is also about lifelong learning for sustainability. For instance, the municipality has an environmental education centre that trains senior environmental instructors. Knowledge on sustainability and climate change mitigation is imparted to children in kindergartens, schools and numerous out-of-school learning environments.

➔ HOW WAS THIS IMPLEMENTED?

In 2000 Alheim presented two projects at Expo in Hanover: the Alheim – Licherode environmental education centre with the slogan ‘A region becomes a natural learning environment’, and Oberellenbach district as a contribution to ‘Village 2000 – Examples of sustainable rural development’. This prompted the switch to renewable energy. Soon education programmes were to be developed in order to get everyone on board for more sustainability.

➔ WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS?

Alheim has networked with other municipalities. It is part of the support programme ‘ZuBRA – A Future for Bebra, Rotenburg and Alheim’, and as part of this association is taking part in the competition ‘Municipality of the Future’ held by Germany’s Federal Education Ministry. The competition focuses on sustainability.



Alheim ➔ Hesse



Population:
5,300



Mayor:
Georg Lüdtkke





A LIFETIME OF LEARNING

Spending a lifetime learning and discovering new things – this is what the citizens of Alheim in the federal state of Hesse do. The municipality has committed to sustainability, and education is the key to it. Alheim has already been voted a model municipality for the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development four times. It is thus making a key contribution towards achieving SDG 4, because training learners in sustainable development is a key component of achieving the goal by 2030.

In Alheim the path to sustainable education began in 1994 with a new nature-centred strategy for tourism. The second step was Expo in Hanover in the year 2000. There, Alheim was able to present two projects: Licherode environmental education centre, and Oberellenbach district as a contribution to ‘Village 2000 – Examples of sustainable rural development’. 40,000 international visitors came to see Alheim at the world exhibition. This encouraged the municipality to continue along the path to sustainability.

As Mayor Georg Lütke puts it: ‘At that time a vision emerged. By 2015, we envisaged that 80 per cent of the energy we use will be sourced from renewables’. A target so ambitious that barely anyone believed it. This is why it was necessary to arouse people’s interest. Why should we be a part of the energy transformation? ‘Education is the key’, says Mr Lütke: ‘Education for sustainable development’. In Alheim this starts during childhood. At the child day-care centres children are shown how a solar power system works. The sun shines on a small solar panel, and the wheel connected to it starts turning almost right away. Children tell their families about this when they get home, and by doing so become ambassadors of the energy transformation.

Solar power in Alheim soon began to boom. Today the municipality obtains 100% of the electricity it needs from renewables. A little hydropower, a biogas plant, but above all solar power. As Mr Lütke puts it, ‘These are not huge solar power plants owned by an investor. They are citizens’ own solar power systems’. It is also the citizens themselves who earn money when electricity from their systems is sold, he explains.

Yet sustainability is more than just green energy. How does organic farming work? How is bread baked? In out-of-school



Cooking with solar power – in Alheim, the youngest learn a great deal about sustainability. (Photo: Gemeinde Alheim)

learning environments, children learn how organic farmers or bakers work. Acting as energy detectives, they study energy consumption, or they take water samples from streams. This enables them to learn that we are responsible for our environment. But it is not only children who are trained in sustainability. Their parents are also involved. At the environmental education centre in Licherode many senior citizens train children and adults on a voluntary basis. One thing is clear to the citizens of Alheim: they share responsibility – for their environment and for the quality of life they share in the community.

This municipality in Hesse is now spreading its vision around Germany. Every year some 3,000 children from all over Germany come to the environmental education centre in Licherode. Adults also come for training. And Alheim is advising similar institutions in other federal states. Mr Lütke is strongly committed to networking. ‘I’m no longer a localist, I’m a regionalist’, he says. Alheim has been part of the ZuBRA region for several years, for instance. Together, the towns involved are taking part in the ‘City of the Future’ competition run by the Federal Education Ministry. Together, municipalities develop ideas for liveable and sustainable regions. And they devise a framework plan for education, because environmental awareness and sustainability need to be communicated.

INTERNET ADDRESSES

www.alheim.de

www.umweltbildungszentrum-licherode.de

www.bne-portal.de/en/education-sustainable-development-germany