



The Project „Wedding Forest Hamm“

– old custom in modern times



Why and how?



Landscape designing and the „Hochzeitswald“ are normally two different topics. But the activities and the huge success have shown the bond between the project and the topics “Landscape designing and protection of species”. So the “Hochzeitswald” has made an important contribution to the sustainable increasing of forest areas in Hamm. 2/3 of the ground in Hamm is agricultural area and only 8% is forest land. So with this project we have a good, working combination of natural habitat for flora and fauna and recreation area for the citizens.

The project is part of the climatic protection program for the following reasons:

- a networking of ecological (forest land, biotope networking, soil protection), financial (eco sponsoring), cultural (old custom, identification, wedding-ceremony) and global aspects (climatic protection and increase of forest areas)
- numerous groups work together (most of them voluntarily) (“Baumpaten”, local newspaper, choir, association community, City of Hamm)
- different kind of media (newspaper, television, broadcast, internet) are integrated
- the project has a large acceptance in the population (locally and also supraregional)
- nearly 1.000 trees have been planted

- different kind of artworks have been integrated
- the development has been associated and documented continuously

This project shows that a forest area can be planted alongside the “conventional way” and is considered favourable by all parties concerned. New ways of positive identification have been created and at the same time it shows the will of the citizens make a small contribution to the increase of the forestry in Hamm.



Who, how, what?



The project „Wedding forest Hamm“ exists since 1995 and is well known far beyond the borders of Hamm, as a symbol for the preservation of an old custom. It gives the citizens a chance to offer themselves or others, a very special gift and to make an active contribution to the environmental and climate protection which has an effect now and for future generations.

The numbers alone are impressive but they can't describe how well known, successful and deep-rooted the project is in Hamm, and far beyond its borders.

- 17 years
- 34 plantings
- nearly 900 planted trees
- “Baumpaten” (people who pay to take over a sponsorship for a tree) from Hamm, 40 other German cities (from the danish to the austrian border, from the belgian to the polish border
- “Baumpaten” from Germany, Switzerland, the Netherlands, France, the USA, China and Japan

Many cities, counties and communities from all over Germany became increasingly aware and contacted Mr. Garske in the environmental office. As a result, you'll find “Wedding forests” in Dortmund, Münster or Hanau, all based on the model of the project in Hamm.

Since the beginning of the project in 1995 the “face” of the area has been developed constantly. In

the beginning it was planned as a small, time limited project, but it was so successful that the first area, about one hectare in size, was planted within a short time. After that, a second acreage nearby was purchased, with 1,6 hectares; a little larger than the first one. Shortly after that in 2003 the third area was added. With 4,2 hectares it offers space for about 600 trees, so the projects progress is assured also for the coming years. Not only for weddings but also jubilees, childrens birthdays, newly-borns, high-school-graduates, “friendshiptrees” or foreign delegations - today there is hardly any occasion not suited to planting a tree.

It quickly became clear that the area should not “only” be used as the “wedding forest” but also be a combination of nature, art and recreation. And so wooden-sculptures of the well known local artists Manfred Dirkling and Gordon Brown were mounted within the area. Dirkling focused on the idea of wedding couples and families and created a couple and a family, each made from one tree trunk.

Gordon Brown took the well known german folksong “Vogelhochzeit” (“Bird's wedding”) as a motive and sculptured a circle containing seven giant birds heads as well as carving a seat to be used for picnics for example.

A so called “tree-of-the-year-forest” has been planted in the direct neighbourhood of the sculptures. Every year the officially voted tree-

of-the-year is planted, and people can find relevant information on information charts, so the idea of the tree-of-the-year is brought to publics attention.

As a fitting tribute to the 775th anniversary of Hamm in 2001, 775 young shrubs were planted on the area. Today the shrubs have developed to a huge and valuable retreat for a great number of rare animals.

You'll find detailed information about the sculptures and the „Anniversary shrubs” under the heading “Wedding forest – nature, art und recreation”



The history



A basis for the whole life – that's what many loving couples think about the most beautiful, most exciting and most important day – their wedding. Love grows with time, after the 10th and the 20th wedding anniversary, the silver wedding and as a "grand finale" the golden wedding anniversary. The trust and the love are getting stronger and deeper-rooted with growing age and so the image of the durable, strong and steady tree fits perfectly to the idea of the marriage bond.

Around 300 years ago couples took that symbolic for their wedding as an occasion to plant one or more trees. In the following period this idea became a well known tradition and a matter of course.

The Herscheid community should be mentioned as an historical example. Every couple that was about to marry had to prove the planting of 6 oaks and 6 apple trees, before the authority accepted the application.

People have always had a deep bond with the forest. It was an almost inexhaustible source of food and raw material, but also a habitat and recreational area. Human life was and still is unthinkable without woodlands of some kind. So the planting of one or more trees was not only an expression for the love of the couple but also a symbol for the closeness to nature.

In the course of the industrialisation this tradition "got lost along

te way" and wood became timber, more an industrial product than a symbol for love and life.

In 1994 the local newspaper in Hamm, the "Westfälischer Anzeiger" had the idea to revive the old tradition for couples to plant a tree for their wedding. So in the spring of 1995 the first public planting was celebrated in the so called "Wedding forest". Initially the project was subsidised by eco-sponsors.

One objective of this project is to use the ecological and economic advantages, combine them and promote the interest in forests and its importance at the same time.

Many people use the chance to clink glasses of wine or champagne to celebrate their new tree.





How, why, what?

– The idea

The picture shows the first area of the „Hochzeitswald“/ „Weddingforest“ and the „Bird protection area“, that has been planted with 775 domestic bushes as a symbol for the 775th anniversary of the City of Hamm

In Hamm the old custom of the wedding forest has been picked up and has been purposefully implemented. Eco-sponsoring helped to keep the costs low and to make the price for a tree payable. At the same time there has been a constant reporting in the newspapers and a small but ceremonial supporting program was developed for the planting actions. So the awareness in the population could increase constantly.

The project considered the principle of sustainability. The common term “sustainability” or the “sustainable environmentally compatible development” is frequently used in the local Agenda 21. This term has already been used a hundred years ago in the forestry. It said that not more trees should be cut down than could grow again during the same period. So the stock of the forests should be secured permanently. The natural resources should only be used the way they regenerate

so the long-term conservation and usability is guaranteed for future generations. The project may only be a small element within the overall structure of a sustainable development but it improves the image of environmental and climatic protection because it gives the people the chance to get active and keep an old custom alive.

The paths to and through the forest area have deliberately not been paved, but are covered with bark mulch to keep the area as close to nature as possible. They won't last permanently and after the end of the project, nature will find its own way again.

Who, how much? – The participants



In November 1993 the local Newspaper (Westfälischer Anzeiger) introduced the environmental office to the idea of the “environmental cent”. The local department store “Real” started to charge 10 Cent more for a plastic bag and donated the proceedings to be used for local environmental projects, for example the “Wedding forest”. The Westfälischer Anzeiger established the contact between the office and the store and brought it to the public attention through articles in their newspaper.

The environmental office picked up the idea and provided an additional 10.000 DM as a solid base for that project. This money and the donations from the real-project were used to buy a suitable plot for the project. The wedding couples had to pay about 1/3 of the costs for their tree.

Step by step the project was realized in 1994. The newspaper printed official registration cards and posters and the local radio station brought the idea into the “hearts of the people in Hamm”.

The local bank „Sparkasse Hamm” was motivated by the idea and began to sponsor the project with 5.000,- DM/ 2.500,- Euro per year. So 1/3 of the cost (about 90,- Euro per tree) was paid by the couples, 1/3 by the Sparkasse and 1/3 by the city of Hamm and the “environmental cent”.

In 2009, the sponsoring of ‘Real’ and the Sparkasse ended, and today the people can get smaller trees for 45,- Euro or taller trees for 90,- Euro, so right now the project has become self-financing.



„The way there is the goal“



Your're never too young to start planting...

The people in Hamm were excited from the beginning and many couples signed up for the public planting. They could choose between 5 indigenous trees (Oak, Birch, Lime-tree, Ash-tree and Hornbeam)

There are no duties or taxes for the "Baumpaten" as the city gives them a growing guarantee for the young trees for the first two years. So if the trees suffer damage (drought, vandalism ...) the city will plant a new tree free of charge. With this pilot project all participants learned and collected solid experiences for following projects.



The picture shows a Japanese Delegation from Kyoto, planting a tree in the forest.

A newly wed couple plants their own tree, that has been a wedding gift of the groom to his bride.





“Wedding forest – Nature, Art and Recreation”

Wooden sculptures of the
local artist
Manfred Dirkling

The wedding forest was always supposed to be more than “just” an area with planted trees. Some kind of “branding” was imagined which would invite people to come for a walk, have a picnic and get information about the idea of the project or about the “tree-of-the-year-area.”

The wedding forest was always supposed to be more than „just an area with planted trees“. Some kind of “branding” was supposed to be developed and it should invite people to come for a walk, have a picnic and also get information about the idea of the project or about the “tree-of-the-year-area”.

Right from the beginning the local artist Manfred Dirkling was asked to create two sculptures for the wedding forest. It was clear, that it had to be wooden sculptures and Dirkling orientated on the idea of family and wedding and created two stylized wooden sculptures, one in a form of an embracing couple and one as a family with a child. For 9 years these sculptures were an integral part of the wedding forest, but were continually exposed to the seasons and the outdoor conditions. It was the express wish of the artist to keep the wood untreated and the sculptures unprocessed. Wood is a natural material and therefore doesn't last forever!. As time went by the sculptures got “back to nature” – what was entirely the artist's intention. But it was already clear that a suitable replacement should follow.

In 2007, the 25th public planting took place – the “silver wedding in the wedding forest”!!! Silver wedding couples who married in Hamm 25 years ago and still lived in Hamm had the chance to order/ plant a tree for half the normal price at this special public planting. So in spring 2007 nearly 60 couples could be welcomed – a new record. Reason enough to celebrate this success with a big summer party! The world-famous artist Otmar Alt who lives in works in Hamm put one of his wedding motives to the disposal of the organizers for a beautiful poster that was created just for this event with the names of all the “Baumpaten” since 1995. This poster could be bought for 5,- Euro.

With this summer party the “Baumpaten” had the chance to see their trees with green leaves as well as enjoy an interesting program. Amongst other things there was a big drawing with great prizes, sponsored by local companies (3-day-trip to the Christmas market in Dresden, digital camera etc.). All the revenue from the party and the drawing were used for another “upgrade” of the area.

In the front part of the forest right beneath the “tree-of-the-year-area” was unplanted space. With the proceedings, this part was planned to be embellished with the wooden sculptures of the local artists Gordon Brown and right after the party he was engaged to start with the realization of the idea.





Poster with a design of the world famous artist Otmar Alt from Hamm

For Gordon Brown the most remarkable thing about this project is the variety of "Baupaten", couples, friends, pupils, sons & daughters etc. People in Hamm love the idea and maintain this old tradition.

So Gordon Brown orientated his ideas and designs around this variety and looked for a joining element. He remembered the old traditional German children song "Vogelhochzeit" ("Bird's wedding"). This song served as the motive for the 7 huge wooden sculptures. These sculptures are "throne-like", crowned by over dimensional bird's heads. They are placed in a circle and visitors can take a seat and having a picnic for example. Owl, Woodpecker, Eagle owl – each of the different forms characterizes one bird from the song. The forms are orientated on nature but stylize it at the same time.

Brown used big tree trunks from

native forest. "What was more obvious than using wood for this idea, Brown explains, "even for aesthetic reasons".

The sculptures were erected and inaugurated in the forest in three phases, and in 2010 the collection was completed. Beside it people find a commemorative plate with the complete text of the song so everybody can sing this song on their visit to the wedding forest.

Hamm has won a new leisure activity – groups or families making a cycle tour to the wedding forest, having a picnic, sitting on one of the bird's throne-seats, enjoying the occasion and maybe singing the "Bird's wedding" song.

Right beside the entrance to the forest area is the "Tree-of-the-year-area" originated with financial support of the SDW (Association for the Protection of the forest)

and organizational support of the environmental office. Every year a Board of trustees destines a "Tree of the year".

Every year the area grows with the planting of the current tree-of-the-year. At the same time detailed information about the respective tree and the idea of this project are placed on display.



Ceremonial inauguration of the wooden bird sculptures of the local artist Gordon Brown



The picture shows Eckhard Uhlenberg, the former minister of the environment of Nordrhein-Westfalen and the Lord Major of Hamm, Thomas Hunsteger-Petermann planting a tree.



Also, the “millennium-tree”, the Ginkgo, has found its place there and so the visitors can get an overall view about the different tree species and the constant development of this area.

Adjacent to the Tree-of-the-year”area is a section suitable for the protection of the birds. On the one hand it helps as a spacer to the neighbouring land but also fulfills an important ecological purpose. The woods are used as sanctuary, a nesting place and a food source for domestic birds.

As a symbol for the 775th anniversary of the city of Hamm in 2001 and as a further piece in the mosaic of the anniversary events, exactly 775 small bushes were planted. Particular attention was placed on using domestic bushes appropriate to the habitat.

Over the past few years this section has developed into a densely overgrown area that has an immense value for the surrounding area as a home and a food source for many partly endangered animals.

A further piece in the mosaic of the overall concept is the so called “Dummy-Tree”. A life without a dummy? Unthinkable for many toddlers – unthankful for many parents. Hard times are coming when it’s time to say goodbye to the dummy. Say goodbye to the trees – also unthinkable for the young and elderly.

With the dummy-tree the City of Hamm has given the children and the parents a way to ease the wrench from their little “comforter” and start the lifetime relationship to nature. Since 2007 toddlers can hang their dummy onto the huge chestnut tree. Many children have used this chance and so a lot of “dummy-fruits” are hanging from the tree. A positive side-effect is the chance to lead the children to nature and their role as a comforter and a friend for life.

Meanwhile, the public plantings are more than just a meeting of the godparents for trees. There is a framework program with the hunting-horn blowers and a local choir who composed a song especially for the wedding forest and who perform it at the public plantings.

With the godparents for trees, their friends and relatives, about 200 – 300 people, meet to turn the idea of planting trees into reality.

Drinks, waffles and a hearty soup complete the framework program of the planting taking place bi-annually in spring and autumn.



The picture shows the local choirs, presenting the „Hochzeitswaldlied“/ “Wedding forest song”



Current status



People enjoying a picnic in the summerly „Hochzeitswald“/ “Wedding forest”

What’s the score with the wedding forest currently?

In the meantime 34 public “patches” with more than 900 trees are impressive numbers in the history of this project and hopefully numerous trees will be planted and many people will visit the area in the future. The area (20 acres) has been “filled with life” by bridal couples, birthday children, couples celebrating their anniversary, high-school-graduates, exchange students, friends or nature lovers.

Domestic trees like the common oak, swamp oak, sycamore, horn-beams, winter linden, copper beech, ash trees and birch are returned to nature.

This wedding forest is not only a model for a local climate protec-

tion project but has also a positive cultural and social effect. Couples have the chance to take a walk through their forest and later in the future they can show their tree to their children and grandchildren. So it is an enduring heritage for the next generations. This forest with its many many trees is a beautiful memory for a special event or for an unforgettable day – the day of the wedding.

In the meantime there are several wooden tables and benches placed all over the area. They invite people to pass by and have a picnic there or just take a rest. As the wedding forest encourages identification with the home country in an ecological, cultural and social way, it is to be expected that the idea will be transformed into other districts of Hamm.

More than ever, the quality of life is influenced by the destruction of the environment and even more the importance of the forest for the natural balance increases. So the public plantings are about to re-mind us all to show solidarity for nature and to teach us how to live in harmony with nature.

The three areas in an overview

	Location	Size	Number of trees
1st area	nördlich des Weges „Zum Wiescherbach“ (Gemarkung Wiescherhöfen, Flur 8, Flurstück 68)	11.133 m ²	completely planted with 148 trees (1. - 4. planting)
2nd area	südlich des Weges „Zum Wiescherbach“ (Gemarkung Wiescherhöfen, Flur 8, Flurstück 487)	16.810 m ²	completely planted with 252 trees (5. - 18. planting)
3rd area	Nördlich des Weges „Zum Wiescherbach“ (Gemarkung Wiescherhöfen, Flurstück 567 & 569)	41.688 m ²	until now 525 planted trees (since 18. planting)

The wedding forest is enjoying increasing popularity. More and more couples take the chance to dig the first sod for their own tree. A tree is not only a symbol for being, growing and the everlasting love but also to show the deep bond to the hometown of Hamm and to get active in its ecological designing.

Also, outsiders who do not take part actively are pleased with the "Baumpaten" when they get presented their certificate and their layout plan during the solemn ceremony. With the layout plan they have the chance to identify their tree after many years.



For further information or if you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact us.

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