



Friedrich Wilhelm Raiffeisen and His Work: The Cooperatives

Friedrich Wilhelm Raiffeisen was born in 1818 in Hamm (Sieg) and died in 1888 in Heddesdorf, now part of modern-day Neuwied. Following his military service, Raiffeisen served as mayor of Weyersbusch (1845–1848), then of Flammersfeld (1848–1852), and finally of Heddesdorf (1852–1865). In 1865, he was forced to step down from his position as mayor for health reasons. Even as early as his time in Weyersbusch, Raiffeisen began to show his persistent passion for finding new ways to ease people’s hardship through self-help and personal responsibility. He continued this work in Flammersfeld and Heddesdorf, developing his own credit institution to relieve the suffering experienced by the rural population. With the support of the Agricultural Association for Rheinpreussen and the Count of Wied, this work grew into the development of the cooperatives, which Raiffeisen tirelessly devoted himself to, despite losing his eyesight, until his death in 1888. These establishments would come to serve as the seed for today’s global cooperative system.

The Cooperative: An Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity

A big day for the cooperatives – on November 30, 2016, UNESCO added “The Idea and Practice of Organizing Shared Interests in Cooperatives,” Germany’s first nomination, to its Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. With this nomination, UNESCO has underscored the significance of cooperatives to the shared life of a community. In Germany, the idea and practice of cooperatives is a widespread and socially formative cultural form. One out of every four Germans is a cooperative member. And today over 800 million people around the world belong to cooperatives – these establishments served, and continue to serve, as a response to the current challenges of society. They contribute to sustained development, for example, through poverty reduction by means of local employment and social integration; cooperative members see each other as co-proprietors of a shared project. The family of cooperatives has always understood itself as a movement focused on social values and founded on the principles of solidarity, honesty, responsibility, and democracy. This has enormous cultural significance today – significance which has now been recognized internationally.

The submission for the UNESCO nomination was initiated in 2013 by the Deutsche Friedrich-Wilhelm-Raiffeisen-Gesellschaft (German Friedrich Wilhelm Raiffeisen Society) and the Deutsche Hermann-Schulze-Delitzsch-Gesellschaft (German Hermann Schulze Delitzsch Society), and was successfully submitted to UNESCO by the Federal Republic of Germany.

The Life of Friedrich Wilhelm Raiffeisen

March 30, 1818	Born in Hamm (Sieg)
Until 1835	Religious upbringing and schooling by Pastor Seippel in Hamm
1835–1843	Military service in Cologne, Koblenz and Sayn
1843–1845	Administrative work at the Mayen District Administration
January 15, 1845	Appointed mayor of Weyersbusch
September 23, 1845	Marriage to Emilie Storck in Remagen
March 22, 1848	Appointed mayor of Flammersfeld
August 24, 1852	Appointed mayor of Heddesdorf
1862	Request to retire for health reasons
1862 onward	Advisory role in the founding of numerous savings and loans associations
1863	Death of Emilie Raiffeisen in Heddesdorf
1865	Retirement; marriage to Maria Pensenroth
1866	Publication of “Die Darlehnskassen-Vereine als Mittel zur Abhilfe der Noth der ländlichen Bevölkerung” (Loan Associations as a Means of Relieving the Hardship of the Rural Population)
March 11, 1888	Death in Heddesdorf; burial in Heddesdorf cemetery on March 14, 1888