

Sustainability in Austria

Best Practices in Tourism
With a Focus on Challenges and Successes



9 Federal States | 48 Best Practices

With a Focus on Challenges and Successes

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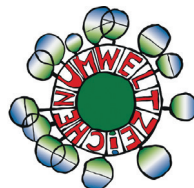
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Best Practices in Tourism

With a Focus on Challenges and Successes

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AUSTRIA TOURISM

As the national tourism organisation, Austria Tourism is fundamentally committed to working with all Austrian tourism stakeholders to maintain and enhance the competitiveness of Austria as a travel destination. Currently, around 220 employees of Austria Tourism are inspiring interest in 'Holidays in Austria' from 19 international offices across 30 markets. In cooperation with ADVANTAGE AUSTRIA, a further 7 potential markets are being developed. In doing so, Austria Tourism makes an essential contribution to increasing value creation within Austria's tourism and leisure industry.



LEARNING FROM EACH OTHER, ACTING SUSTAINABLY TOGETHER

Sustainable transformation is not a static state, but a dynamic process – driven by people who boldly forge new paths, take responsibility, and show every day that tourism in harmony with nature, society, and the economy is possible. In Austria, we embarked on this journey early on – with innovation, foresight, and a strong awareness of regional strengths.

Today, Austria is one of the most sustainable tourism destinations in the world. Our destinations and businesses embrace sustainability with conviction and in all its facets: ecological, economic, and social. They focus on regional value chains in culinary culture, renewable energy, resource-efficient mobility solutions, as well as fair working conditions, inclusion, and long-term economic resilience. Sustainability is no longer an add-on – it has become the strategic foundation of future-oriented tourism development and a central concern of our guests.

Precisely because sustainable tourism is so multifaceted, it needs one thing above all: visible role models. That's why we are publishing 'Sustainability in Austria' once again. Because good ideas must not remain hidden. Because they inspire, motivate, and provide orientation. And because others can learn from them – businesses, regions, and committed individuals across the country.

In this edition, we are showcasing 48 outstanding projects – from all federal states, throughout all seasons, and across diverse thematic areas: from barrier-free nature experiences and sustainable agriculture to mobility solutions, social responsibility in tourism, and innovative concepts in the circular economy. They all impressively demonstrate how sustainability can be lived holistically – creatively, effectively, and with passion.

I am convinced: These best practices are not only a strong sign of our industry's commitment – they are also a valuable source of inspiration for many other initiatives. Let us be inspired by them. And let us continue to work together to ensure that Austria remains one of the most sustainable tourism countries in the world – for the sake of a future worth living for generations to come.



Astrid Steharnig-Staudinger

CEO Austria Tourism



SUSTAINABILITY AS THE BASIS FOR A SUCCESSFUL TOURISM INDUSTRY IN AUSTRIA

For Austrian tourism to be successful in the future, it requires more than just an intact environment – one of the main travel motivations. Economically healthy businesses and a good balance between the expectations of guests and the needs of local communities are equally essential.

For many years, the Ministry responsible for tourism has implemented numerous priorities and measures to support the sector on its journey towards becoming one of the most sustainable tourism destinations in the world. Through a variety of formats, we provide information on different aspects of sustainability, highlight best-practice examples, and foster learning from each other: for instance, at the annual Tourism Mobility Day since 2014, in the dialogue series 'Sustainability in Tourism', or through the Austrian Tourism Innovation Award.

In commercial tourism funding, we prioritise support for ecologically sustainable investments and offer a sustainability bonus. Additionally, there are targeted funding calls, such as those promoting balanced tourism. Since 2024, the measurement of 'tourism acceptance' has been enshrined in law. This allows us, from this year on, to respond more swiftly to changes in local acceptance and to derive concrete actions based on annual results.

More and more businesses and destinations in Austria are consciously adopting sustainability measures and developing suitable offerings. The Austrian Ecolabel, available for both tourism enterprises and destinations, offers valuable orientation both internally and externally.

This publication provides further inspiration for successfully implementing measures in the areas of ecological, socio-cultural, and, by extension, economic sustainability. Let us take many small steps together and jointly move towards a successful and sustainable future for Austrian tourism!



Elisabeth Zehetner

State Secretary for Energy, Startups and Tourism
at the Federal Ministry for Economy, Energy and Tourism



SUSTAINABILITY – A NECESSITY AND OPPORTUNITY FOR THE FUTURE OF TOURISM

Sustainability is far more than a trend – it is both a necessity and an opportunity for the future of tourism. Numerous businesses have already implemented innovative and effective measures to operate sustainably in ecological, social, and economic terms. They demonstrate convincingly that responsible business practices not only benefit the environment and society but also enhance competitiveness, because they are economically viable and hold long-term promise.

Sustainability is not only about conserving resources – it also means supporting local structures, ensuring fair working conditions, and creating authentic experiences.

Many companies have already taken this path. They focus on regional value creation, promote fair employment practices, reduce their ecological footprint, and design guest experiences that make real sustainability tangible.

This publication aims to showcase exactly these pioneering businesses. It brings to the fore those who lead by example and actively shape the sustainable development of tourism – and thus a future worth living. Their initiatives are inspiring beacons for the entire industry and show that, through targeted actions and commitment, sustainable tourism is not only possible but also economically sound.

Every business, whether large or small, can make a valuable contribution – through conscious decisions and transparent communication.

Sustainability is not a goal that is reached and completed – it is a continuous process, driven by innovation, responsibility, and collaboration. Let us learn from the best, boldly explore new paths, and shape a tourism landscape that will inspire generations to come.



Martha Schultz

Vice President, Austrian Federal Economic Chamber

Sustainability in Austria

ABOUT THE PUBLICATION

Austria captivates not only with its breathtaking landscapes and rich cultural offerings. What is also remarkable is the innovative spirit of the domestic tourism sector when it comes to sustainability. To showcase outstanding projects, the first publication titled 'Sustainability in Austria' was launched in March 2024 in collaboration with Sustainia. It featured 50 projects across the categories of 'Sustainable Winter', 'Sustainable Summer', 'Resources & Circular Economy', 'Sustainable Mobility', and 'Social Sustainability'. It quickly became evident that there were many more project stories waiting to be told.

This comes as no surprise. What Austrian tourism is achieving in this regard stands up to international comparison. Austria ranks among the top in numerous global sustainability indices. It is the top performances of Austria's businesses and destinations that secure us these leading positions. They work day in and day out to make holidays in Austria an even more sustainable experience. The art lies in minimising environmental impact, respecting cultural and social aspects of the region, and at the same time, creating immersive and authentic experiences. This benefits both travellers and local communities alike.

In this publication too, we are highlighting pioneering projects. These initiatives are innovative examples of how tourism can work in harmony with ecological, socio-cultural, and economic sustainability. It should be noted that even this second publication cannot present all noteworthy projects in Austria's tourism sector – there simply isn't enough space. Nevertheless, the selection offers a valuable overview of innovation and pioneering initiatives and serves as a multiplier – offering

inspiration and motivation for industry stakeholders to implement further projects.

Given the heterogeneity of the projects presented, we deliberately chose not to categorise them in this publication. That is because social initiatives are often linked to ecological measures. Because sustainability efforts by Austria's destinations are not confined to one season. Because regional value creation and tourism acceptance almost always go hand in hand. Because in Austria, we find strong cooperation between regions and businesses. This, however, should in no way diminish the potential for inspiration. We are convinced that destinations and businesses can grow together, learn from each other, and that each project can serve as a role model for other tourism stakeholders.

METHODOLOGY

Unlike the first publication, for the second edition, tourism stakeholders were actively invited to submit their own projects. In total, over 100 projects from across all nine federal states provided information about their initiatives. The range spans habitat initiatives and measures for nature and biodiversity, as well as projects focused on culinary culture and regional identity, social sustainability, mobility concepts, and responsible hosting.

All projects were prepared in a comparable manner and submitted to a jury for evaluation. Evaluations were carried out by Miriam Berkmann (Vorarlberg Tourist Board), Christian Schilcher and Gabriela Schutti (Upper Austria Tourism), Thomas Wurzinger (Saalfelden Leogang Touristik GmbH), Marlies Ebner (Südburgenland Tourist Board) and Katrin Erben and

INTRODUCTION

Raphael Chrysochoidis (Austria Tourism). Each jury assessment was based on a points system in the category of innovation and the three dimensions of sustainability. Among other things, the evaluations examined whether the project employed new and creative technologies or methods in Austrian tourism, the extent to which it involved the local population and encouraged their active participation in tourism, whether the initiative contributed to the long-term strengthening of tourism regions in Austria, and whether the project promoted guest awareness of ecological sustainability and respectful interaction with nature. The total scores led to the selection of the 48 flagship projects outlined in this publication.

Interviews were then conducted with the individuals responsible for each initiative. These interviews provided detailed insights based on a specially developed set of questions.

- 01 Project Initiation**
How did the idea arise and why was the project launched?
- 02 Project Description and Goals**
What was the goal of your project and which challenge did you aim to solve?
- 03 Sustainability Aspects**
What measures did you implement to promote sustainability in your project?

- 04 Challenges and Elaboration**
What was the greatest challenge in the development phase?
- 05 Culture of Embracing Mistakes and Learning Process**
What were the major mistakes/setbacks, and what lessons did you learn from them?
- 06 Results and Achievements**
What are the key successes or measurable outcomes of your project?
- 07 Concrete Facts and Figures**
What figures and/or KPIs were collected in connection with this project?
- 09 Scalability and Transferability**
Can your project be implemented in other regions, and what would be needed for that?
- 09 Innovation and Future Development**
What innovations or developments are you planning for the future of your project?
- 10 Reflection and Advice for Others**
What was the most important lesson from your project and what advice would you give to others?

To the best of our knowledge, the information received forms the basis for the articles on the following pages. We have always endeavoured to highlight the diversity of the projects and to share personal insights and learnings.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We thank all project initiators for their time and the information they provided during the interviews. Your willingness to speak honestly and transparently about challenges faced during your projects is not taken for granted and is greatly appreciated. We also sincerely thank the jury members for the time they dedicated to evaluating the submitted projects and providing their assessments.

Learning from mistakes: Why embracing a positive failure culture shapes the tourism of tomorrow

Sustainable tourism is far more than environmentally friendly practices – it is a dynamic process shaped by innovation, responsibility, and a willingness to learn. In an industry under constant pressure to change, it is not just successes, but also challenges and setbacks that pave the way for a better future. This is precisely where the second edition of the publication 'Sustainability in Austria' takes its cue: it not only honours exemplary projects focused on sustainability but places special emphasis on a culture of embracing mistakes and the sharing of learning experiences.

MISTAKES AS CATALYSTS FOR PROGRESS

A positive culture of dealing with mistakes means talking openly about what went wrong – not to criticise, but to understand and improve. Especially in tourism, where projects are often interdisciplinary, regionally rooted, and supported by a variety of stakeholders, sharing learnings is essential. It allows knowledge to be multiplied, resources to be used more efficiently, and sustainable solutions to be scaled more broadly.

Mistakes are not a sign of weakness, but an indicator of courage – the courage to try new things, to question existing structures, and to pursue unconventional paths. A constructive culture of dealing with errors strengthens trust within teams and project partnerships, fosters a spirit of innovation, and ultimately makes the entire tourism sector more resilient in the face of future challenges.

INTRODUCTION

WHAT THESE PROJECTS HAVE IN COMMON

The projects presented in this publication share many similarities: they stem from genuine conviction, a desire for change, and a willingness to take responsibility. Whether it's about sustainable mobility, social inclusion, digital innovation, or regional circular economies – all initiatives demonstrate that sustainability is not an end goal, but a continuous learning process.

Another common thread is transparency in dealing with difficulties. The project leaders provide open insights into what didn't work – and what they learned from it. This willingness to disclose such details is by no means a given, but it is what makes this publication so special.

WHAT SETS THIS PUBLICATION APART

This collection deliberately distances itself from the conventional catalogue of success. It is not just about celebration, but also about reflection. Each project description includes information on how the project initiators embraced mistakes, highlighting specific setbacks and the lessons learned from them. The aim: to create an honest, practical, and inspiring resource for anyone looking to develop or advance sustainable projects in tourism.

This second edition stands as an example of a new openness in tourism – one that encourages, inspires, and invites imitation. It is both an invitation and a tool: for decision-makers, tourism professionals, developers, and interested individuals who understand that progress does not lie in avoiding mistakes, but in dealing with them productively.

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Barrier-Free Eulenweg – Making Nature Accessible to All

As Burgenland's youngest nature park, the [Rosalia-Kogelberg Nature Park](#) is setting a remarkable example for inclusion and sustainable tourism with its barrier-free Eulenweg and the cross-border Interreg project 'B.FREE Destination'. This project makes nature experiences accessible to diverse target groups and proves how innovative approaches can overcome both physical and societal barriers. The focus lies not only on barrier-free infrastructure but also on ensuring access to nature for all age groups and backgrounds.



© Naturpark Rosalia-Kogelberg | Hafenscher

Project Description and Sustainability

The Eulenweg was created as part of a project that originally started in 2013 with the installation of the first barrier-free seating areas and was expanded significantly in 2019. The goal was to connect a natural setting with modern accessibility. The 6–7 km Teichwiesen loop is specially designed for wheelchair users, families with prams, and people with visual impairments. Features such as a barrier-free telescope, Braille information boards, and shaded rest areas enhance accessibility.

Sustainability measures include:

- Use of environmentally friendly materials
- Promotion of climate-neutral mobility via near by railway connections
- Awareness-raising initiatives to dismantle social barriers and make nature experiences accessible

CULTURE OF EMBRACING MISTAKES – CHALLENGES & LEARNINGS

Challenges:

- Close coordination with the municipalities required great care and clear communication.
- Lengthy approval procedures for funding demanded flexible planning and patience.

Learnings:

- Early and transparent involvement of all stakeholders fosters collaboration and speeds up decision-making.
- Establishing effective project management with clear priorities and buffer times helps to better absorb delays. clear priorities and buffer times helps mitigate delays.

Challenges and Culture of Embracing Mistakes

The implementation of the accessible 'Eulenweg' (Owl Trail) required intensive coordination processes with the 13 participating municipalities. A two-and-a-half-year period of intensive exchange and close cooperation helped to align interests and reach a consensus.

Another challenge was securing funding, as public funds often involve lengthy approval processes. Despite these hurdles, it was possible to involve all municipalities and obtain sustainable financial support.

Success and Scalability

The project is marked by several successes: the Teichwiesen loop has been certified as a barrier-free circular trail and now attracts a wide range of visitors. Under the new 'B.FREE Destination' initiative, barrier-free mobility solutions such as specially adapted e-bikes for people with limited mobility are planned to further improve accessibility.

The project holds strong potential for broader application. With clearly defined standards and concepts, the barrier-free approach could be adopted in other regions. Key prerequisites include strong cooperation with local authorities, tourism organisations, and institutions involved in inclusion and accessibility. Additionally, there must be a deep awareness of the needs of people with impairments in order to promote sustainable accessibility.

Innovation and Future Outlook

Future plans include expanding digital tools such as a smart guide featuring audio and video sequences. This will make nature experiences more interactive and help overcome both linguistic and cultural barriers. As part of the interregional 'B.FREE Destination' project, a Hungarian translation is also planned to break down border-related obstacles and expand the offer to Hungarian tourists. The expansion of barrier-free mobility also remains a central element of the project and is a core component of future efforts in the Rosalia-Kogelberg Nature Park.

Conclusion

The Rosalia-Kogelberg Nature Park shows convincingly how nature experiences can be made accessible to all. As a model project, it unites inclusion, sustainability, and innovation. It stands as a source of inspiration for the tourism industry, especially for those aiming to focus more strongly on inclusion and environmental awareness.



Bio Discovery Tour – Experiencing and Exploring Sustainability

ORGANIC, MOVEMENT, AND MINDFULNESS

The ‘**Bio Discovery Tour**’ in the **Mühlviertel** is more than just a cycling route. It connects organic farming, conscious consumption, and gentle tourism. Situated in the heart of the Mühlviertel bioregion, the project opens new avenues for guests, producers, and businesses to meet and learn from one another – by bike, on foot, or with digital support.



Project Description and Sustainability

Launched in 2021, the tour emerged from a desire to strengthen collaboration between organic producers and hospitality businesses, while also giving guests an engaging experience of the Mühlviertel bioregion. At the heart of the initiative are currently twelve farms focused on being visitor-friendly and educational. Visitors learn how products are made, what philosophies drive the producers, and what 'organic' means in daily life. This is supported by info points, QR codes, audio guides, or digital content available directly on-site.

The tour follows existing cycling and hiking trails to conserve resources and make effective use of existing infrastructure. A tiered model has also been developed for gastronomy businesses to progressively increase the organic share in hotels and restaurants.

Challenges and Culture of Embracing Mistakes

Despite great enthusiasm at the outset, the project was slowed down by the pandemic, legal issues, and internal conflicts within the Mühlviertel Bioregion. The idea of comprehensively labelling and digitising businesses proved technically and organisationally demanding. At the same time, some farmers were uncertain whether public visibility would be manageable for them.

Success and Scalability

Despite the setbacks, the response has been very positive. Guests explore the tour independently, and many farms report excellent feedback. The 'Bio Discovery Tour' is designed to be open and flexible for expansion – with plans to include up to 25 participating farms. Close collaboration with the projects 'Mühlviertler Hoch.Genuss' and 'Bio.Genuss' further supports its integration into tourism.

Innovation and Future Outlook

In the long term, the tour aims to become an immersive organic experience – featuring digital tours, seasonal participation opportunities such as a potato subscription or hackathons focusing on regional cuisine. The goal is to make the cycles of production and consumption tangible – fostering eye-level engagement between agriculture, tourism, and society.

Conclusion

The Bio Discovery Tour stands as a model for sustainable tourism in rural areas: it connects people, builds knowledge, and strengthens regional value creation. With continuous development and a clear focus on quality and cooperation, it offers a forward-looking model for authentic and climate-conscious holiday experiences.

CULTURE OF EMBRACING MISTAKES – CHALLENGES & LEARNINGS

Challenge: High quality standards vs. limited resources

Solution: Restart with external support, focus on achievable goals

Challenge: Transparency creates vulnerability to criticism

Solution: Awareness-raising and support in managing public presentation



BioArt Campus – Where Sustainability and Innovation Merge

In the heart of the [Salzburg Lake District in Seeham](#), the [BioArt Campus](#) has, since 2022, combined pioneering spirit, ecological thinking, and regional value creation. This privately funded project has created a platform where organic agriculture, sustainable tourism, and innovative business models work hand in hand. Initiated by long-time organic pioneer Robert Rosenstatter, the Campus is a place that gives the organic philosophy both physical and conceptual space.



© Tourismusverband Seeham

Project Description and Sustainability

The BioArt Campus is more than a building – it is a multifunctional centre that combines organic production, knowledge transfer, and hands-on sustainability. Located in one of Europe's regions with the highest biodiversity, the campus is home to more than 28 companies employing around 100 people. Key features include a large organic shop, artisanal food producers, energy-efficient architecture, and culinary and educational offerings.

Since 2023, a new organic restaurant has enhanced the concept. Sustainable construction methods, use of regional materials, and consistent energy efficiency make the Campus a model project for ecological tourism and regional development.

CULTURE OF EMBRACING MISTAKES – CHALLENGES & LEARNINGS

Main Challenges:

- Project launch during the Covid-19-pandemic
- Scepticism and a wait-and-see attitude towards the new concept
- Economic challenges in a privately financed construction project

Learnings:

- Consistent communication and strong regional ties foster acceptance
- Visionary thinking requires patience – sustainable projects are a marathon, not a sprint
- Experience from previous projects helps to avoid mistakes

Challenges and Culture of Embracing Mistakes

Implementing such a visionary project naturally came with challenges – particularly during a period like the Covid-19-pandemic. The greatest hurdle was communicating a novel concept that could not be easily defined as a typical excursion destination nor as a conventional business park. The innovative nature of the idea also posed difficulties in attracting tenants. However, the openness of the region and targeted communication efforts, such as construction site tours, helped to build trust.

Success and Scalability

The BioArt Campus has quickly become a driving force in the region and beyond. All office spaces are fully occupied, and demand continues to grow. More than 4,000 guests have already toured the building. The idea of making sustainability tangible is drawing international visitors from countries like Korea, Denmark, and Norway. The next milestone is the BioAcademy – an education centre that will bring together formats on organic food, climate, and health.

The model is scalable, but highly dependent on regional authenticity and the presence of organic expertise.

Innovation and Future Outlook

Forward-looking developments such as the planned BioFestival and partnerships with organisations like Slow Food and Bio Austria are reinforcing the project's innovative strength. The BioAcademy aims to disseminate knowledge, break down prejudices, and create new networks – both B2C and B2B. Topics such as health, biodiversity, and energy efficiency will play a central role.

Conclusion

The BioArt Campus is an inspiring example of sustainable development that resonates far beyond the region. With a clear vision, consistent implementation, and a strong foundation of experience, the project shows how ecological transformation can be both tangible and economically viable. For the tourism industry, the Campus stands as a model of how sustainability can move beyond intention and become a lived reality.



BIOhof Geinberg – Energy-Efficient Organic Vegetable Farming with Principles

RETHINKING ORGANIC VEGETABLES

Located in the **Innviertel** region, **BIOhof Geinberg** combines cutting-edge greenhouse technology with consistent ecological principles across approximately 12 hectares. Thanks to geothermal energy, water recycling, and socially sustainable structures, it operates one of the most energy-efficient organic greenhouses in Europe. This project serves as a flagship example not only in agriculture but also in tourism for a future fit for generations to come.



Project Description and Sustainability

At the core of the business is the use of geothermal energy to heat Austria's largest organic greenhouse, saving around 5.5 million cubic metres of gas annually. In addition, all rainwater from the roofs is collected and stored – replacing over 100 million litres of precious drinking water each year. The greenhouse grows tomatoes, peppers, and cucumbers exclusively for the Austrian market.

Production is seasonal, follows natural cycles, and promotes regional value creation: over 98 % of the harvest is marketable, made possible by innovative packaging, sorting, and delivery processes.

Challenges and Culture of Embracing Mistakes

Becoming a flagship enterprise requires pioneering efforts – technologically, structurally, and in terms of communication.

CULTURE OF EMBRACING MISTAKES – CHALLENGES AND LEARNINGS

Challenge: Investment volume for geothermal greenhouse

Solution: Joint venture with a regional partner and leveraging the political environment

Challenge: Prejudices against large-scale greenhouses

Solution: Transparency and education through guided tours and learning opportunities

Challenge: Bureaucracy in organic certification

Solution: Patience, expert advice, and collaboration with authorities

Success and Scalability

Around 3,000 to 4,000 visitors annually tour the site – including school groups and thermal spa guests. A dedicated visitor space, barrier-free access, and a farm shop featuring products from over 40 regional producers support strong tourism integration. Socially, the business provides year-round employment for 120 staff, including housing support, training programmes, and integration of individuals from Ukraine and other countries.

Innovation and Future Outlook

In addition to expanding educational offerings, the main focus is on raising awareness for regional and sustainable food supply. BIOhof Geinberg aims to demonstrate how agriculture can remain viable amid climate and social challenges.

Conclusion

BIOhof Geinberg impressively shows how innovative technologies, social responsibility, and regional integration can form a holistic sustainability concept – with impact reaching far beyond the region.

Facts & Figures

BIOhof Geinberg

Farm size: **11.8 hectares** of greenhouse area

Savings: approx. **5.5 million m³** of gas & **100 million litres** of drinking water annually

Harvest volume: up to **200,000 kg** of vegetables per week

Employees: approx. **120**, employed year-round

Visitors per year: approx. **3,000–4,000**

Sales channels: Austrian retail, farm shop, gastronomy, social markets





BIOhof Geinberg shows that innovative technologies, social responsibility, and strong regional roots simply taste better.



Sustainable Hiking Experiences in the Salzburger Saalachtal

In the heart of the **Salzburger Saalachtal**, a project demonstrates how sustainable agriculture can be made tangible through tourism. The local tourism association focuses on hikes that not only impress with stunning landscapes but also raise awareness of regional production and the reality of farming life. What began as a single guided tour has evolved into a model for authentic guest experiences and regional value creation.



Project Description and Sustainability

The initiative emerged from a desire to enrich traditional guided hikes with meaningful content. Rather than emphasising physical activity alone, the hikes focus on encounters, culture, and cuisine. Guests visit local producers, such as the Paulinger farm shop or a dedicated alpine farmer, and gain direct insights into cheese production and other food-making processes. Children churn their own butter, adults sample regional specialities. The guides share knowledge on tradition, craftsmanship, and sustainable agriculture – creating experiences that go beyond pure information and offer a look behind the scenes.

Sustainability is reflected not only in supporting regional value chains but also in sensitising guests. The hikes make it clear that high-quality food requires effort and justifies a corresponding price.

CULTURE OF EMBRACING MISTAKES – CHALLENGES & LEARNINGS

Initial difficulties with participant numbers: Many hikes had to be cancelled at the beginning as the minimum number of participants was not reached.

Communication issue: The initial focus on raising awareness put many guests off – at first glance, the offer seemed too educational.

Solution: The promotional approach was made more entertaining (e.g. 'Smugglers & Alpine Farmers'), without compromising the educational objective.

Key insight: Authenticity inspires enthusiasm, but guests need to be emotionally engaged through captivating communication. Hosts also play a key role as multipliers in promoting the offer.

Success and Scalability

One particularly positive development is the cooperation with a Dutch tour operator that has integrated the hike into its holiday packages. As a result, participant numbers have increased significantly without compromising the depth of the content. Language barriers were addressed through simple translations.

The project is highly transferable to other regions, provided there are committed partner farms that are passionate about sustainability and willing to offer insights. Personal connections are crucial – both from the producers and guest services.

Innovation and Future Outlook

The tourism association plans to expand the concept across the entire Salzburger Saalachtal. A new hike is currently being developed that includes a cooperative of twelve farms – a cheese cooperative. The aim is to showcase more producers and make the region's diversity more tangible for guests.

Conclusion

This project illustrates that tourism can go far beyond recreation. It builds bridges between guests and producers, enjoyment and responsibility. Its strength lies in the honest behind-the-scenes look at farming – without moralising, but with strong emotional value. It provides an inspiring and practical contribution to sustainable tourism – replicable and impactful.

Facts and Figures:

Heutal Adventure Hike – to Smugglers and Alpine Farmers:

since 2023, **255** participants
runs during the summer months

Wild Waters and Local Delicacies:

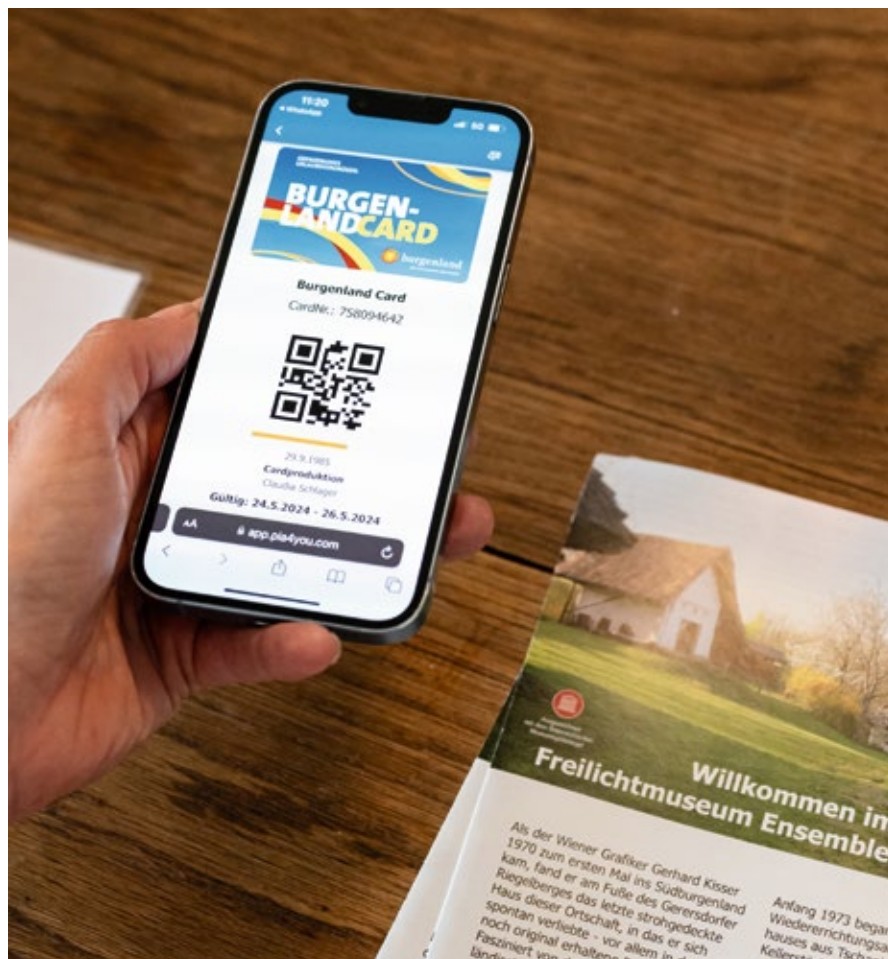
ongoing for four years, held during the
Bauernherbst season, over **130** total participants



© Christine Stainer

Burgenland Card – Sustainable Mobility and Regional Value through a Guest Card

The **Burgenland Card** is an innovative guest card project developed to promote sustainable tourism in Burgenland. By seamlessly integrating public transport with a wide range of cultural and leisure offerings, the card enables visitors to explore the region and its numerous inclusive services in an environmentally friendly way. The project marks a significant step toward sustainable mobility and added value in tourism for the region.



Project Description and Sustainability

The Burgenland Card builds on the success of the former Neusiedler See Card and has been expanded to cover the entire state. It allows guests to use public transport free of charge and grants access to more than 350 leisure activities.

Provided free of charge to participating accommodation providers, the card actively promotes the use of buses, trains, local municipal shuttles, and on-demand taxis to reduce car traffic. In Burgenland's small-scale tourism landscape, sustainability is also advanced through a digital version of the card, which will increasingly replace printed versions. Moreover, the physical card was changed from plastic to paper to further reduce environmental impact.

CULTURE OF EMBRACING MISTAKES – CHALLENGES & LEARNINGS

Challenge: Partner acquisition was difficult, as attractions and accommodation providers each waited for the other group to join first.

Lesson learned: Clear communication and early involvement of all stakeholders help to foster partnerships.

Additional issue: Bicycle transport could not be integrated due to limited capacity in public transport.

Lesson learned: Simple and seamless usage with minimal exceptions is essential. As a result, exceptions in service usage are being progressively simplified.

Challenges and Culture of Embracing Mistakes

One of the greatest challenges was the time-intensive process of acquiring partners. Since the system is based on partnerships between accommodation providers and attractions, it was necessary to convince both groups. Launching the project under a tight schedule required constant balancing and adjustments. With regard to public transport, it was essential to ensure area-wide access throughout Burgenland – something made possible by the recent expansion of the dial-a-ride taxi system.

Success and Scalability

One major achievement is the state-wide provision of free public transport, including on-demand taxis – a particularly valuable service in the less densely populated southern regions. Direct bus routes from Graz into Burgenland have further improved accessibility. The card is well received by guests and is regarded by accommodation providers as a valuable booking incentive.

The Burgenland Card serves as a scalable model that could be adapted to other regions under the right conditions. Success, however, depends on strong networks of partners and long-term strategic planning.

Innovation and Future Outlook

Future plans focus on promoting the use of the digital version to further reduce paper consumption. Expanding the number of participating hosts – especially in central and southern Burgenland – is also a key goal, to enhance public transport coverage and encourage more eco-friendly travel among visitors.

Conclusion

The Burgenland Card clearly demonstrates how tourism and sustainability can be combined. It benefits both guests and the region and serves as a model for other tourism initiatives. By integrating public transport, the card strengthens environmental awareness and helps reduce individual car travel. At a time when sustainable tourism solutions are increasingly essential, the Burgenland Card stands out as an exemplary model for a forward-thinking tourism industry.



Burgenwelt Ehrenberg – From Ruin to Inclusive Cultural Experience

HERITAGE CONSERVATION MEETS VISITOR ORIENTATION

Once a crumbling military complex, today the **Burgenwelt Ehrenberg in Reutte** is an internationally recognised cultural tourism project attracting over 400,000 visitors annually. It showcases how consistent restoration, economic thinking, and social sustainability can go hand in hand – supported by a non-profit organisation and a clear master plan.



© Burgenwelt Ehrenberg

Project Description and Sustainability

The project began with the aim of rescuing and revitalising the sprawling, heavily dilapidated fortress complex of Ehrenberg. Its foundation is a master plan developed in 2002 by managing director and architect Armin Walch, which still forms the content and economic basis for the non-profit association Burgenwelt Ehrenberg. The plan focuses on two pillars: cultural preservation and added tourist value. In addition to restoration work, modern attractions were introduced, such as the 'highline179' pedestrian suspension bridge, inclined lifts, museums/exhibitions, and gastronomy. All revenues from ticket sales commissions and lease income are 100 % reinvested into the project.

Particular emphasis is placed on social inclusion and ecological sustainability. With its own construction hut, a variety of educational and outreach formats, and a strong focus on accessibility, Ehrenberg sets standards for the Alpine region. Families with children are also a key audience, with dedicated children's learning spaces integrated into the design.

CULTURE OF EMBRACING MISTAKES – CHALLENGES AND LEARNINGS

Challenge: Balancing renovation and new use
Solution: A long-term master plan, close coordination with specialist bodies (e.g. Federal Monuments Authority, heritage conservation), and an intensive regional communication strategy to make the project's added value visible to the local population.

Challenge: Tourism and inclusion
Solution: Development of accessible entrances, audio/video guides, and wheelchair-accessible infrastructure

Challenges and Culture of Embracing Mistakes

The development of the project involved a range of uncertainties – from securing funding and obtaining official approvals to technical implementation and achieving societal acceptance.

Success and Scalability

Burgenwelt Ehrenberg is now a flagship cultural and tourism project: featuring a suspension bridge, inclined lifts, zipline, museums, exhibitions, knowledge-sharing formats for adults and children, a hotel, restaurants, playgrounds, accessible toilets, and landscaped parking. The barrier-free themed trail Schlosskopf includes a tactile model and info boards, audio/video guides (for people with mobility, hearing, and visual impairments), as well as lifts, accessible paths, and barrier-free sanitary facilities – demonstrating active implementation of inclusion.

With around 400,000 guests per year, a stable business operation, and ongoing reinvestments in product quality and the preservation of historic sites, the project's success is clearly visible.

Innovation and Future Outlook

Planned developments include more inclusive offerings and further development of the construction hut as a knowledge repository and training facility. Ecological measures – such as planting site-specific fruit trees, green facades, and habitat maintenance – are also being expanded.

Conclusion

Burgenwelt Ehrenberg combines history, innovation, and social responsibility. It proves that heritage conservation can become an inclusive vision for the future – economically viable, ecologically sound, and socially exemplary.

Naturpark Pöllauer Tal – Part of ‘BeeWild’

A PIONEER IN SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

The **Naturpark Pöllauer Tal in Styria** has launched an ambitious and forward-looking initiative with the creation of the first ‘Lebensmusterregion’ in Europe. This project combines sustainable regional development, biodiversity protection, and civic engagement. As part of the ‘BeeWild’ initiative, it sets new standards in nature conservation and sustainable tourism.

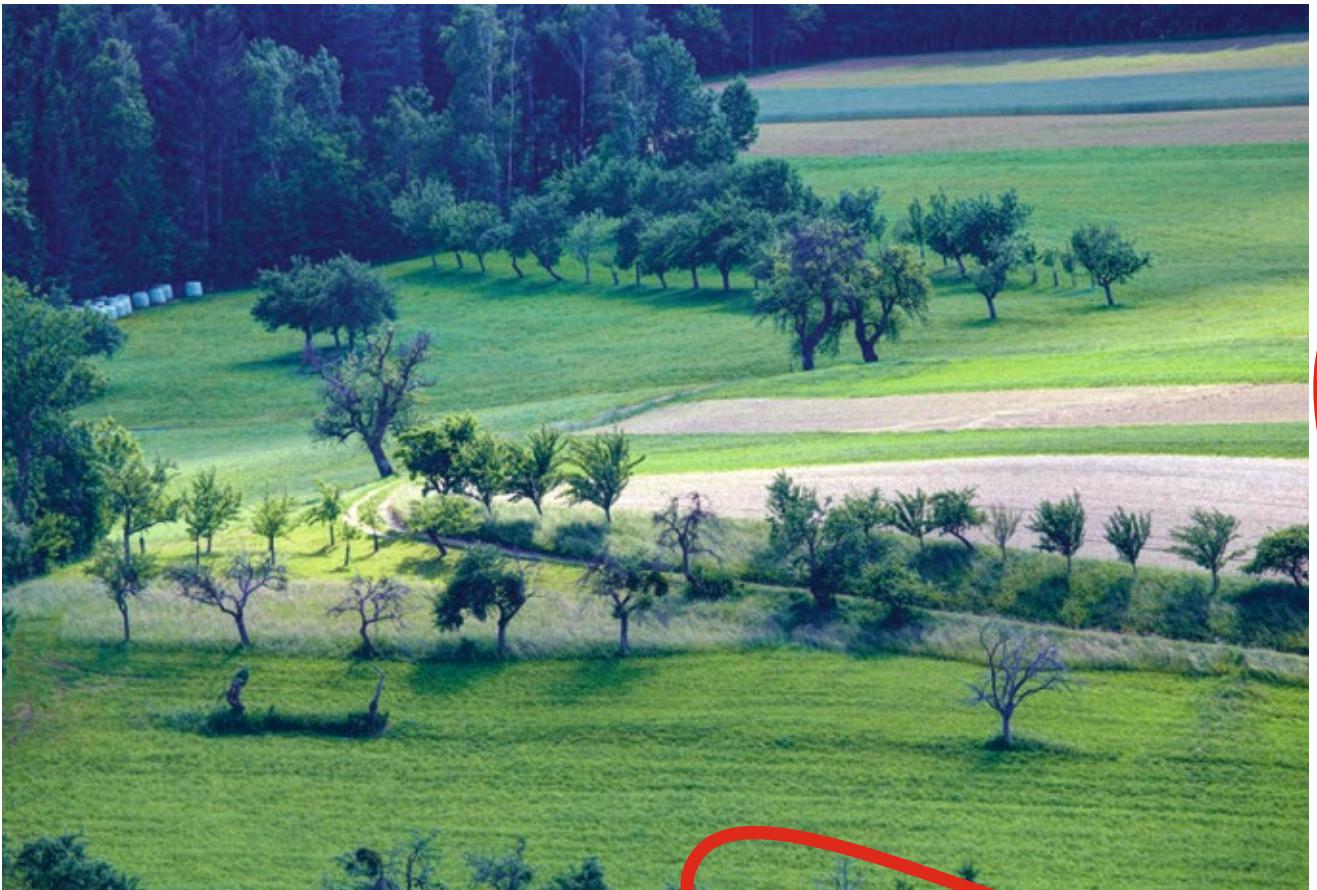


Project Description and Sustainability

The project emerged from the 'BeeWild' initiative, launched by local entrepreneur, nature enthusiast, and Frutura founder Manfred Hohensinner. Its goal was to implement a sustainable lifestyle in a region already characterised by a strong bond between people and nature. A particular focus is placed on preserving the cultural landscape, connecting habitats, and raising awareness.

Measures to promote sustainability include:

- Cultural landscape conservation: Preserving traditional orchards, extensively managed meadows, and near-natural forests as core habitats, connected via stepping stones and corridors such as flower strips and hedges.
- Scientific monitoring: Research on pollination and biodiversity is carried out on experimental plots.
- Soft tourism: Emphasis on regional products and sustainable accommodations supports a nature-based lifestyle.
- Education: Sustainability is actively taught, from nature park schools to adult education initiatives.



Challenges and Culture of Embracing Mistakes

The greatest challenge was involving the local population. Initially, the measures were met with scepticism – particularly from farmers, who saw them as just another marketing gimmick. However, through a strong stakeholder network and intensive awareness-raising efforts, trust was gradually built among the community.

CULTURE OF EMBRACING MISTAKES – CHALLENGES & LEARNINGS

Challenge: Scepticism towards sustainability measures

Solution: Dialogue with stakeholders, support for multipliers, and long-term scientific monitoring

Success and Scalability

The project has achieved remarkable results:

- 4,300 m² of bee meadows have been created.
- Monitoring and data analysis show measurable success in pollination and biodiversity.
- Two stepping-stone biotopes – wild bee gardens made of sandariums, deadwood, and dry stones – were established in both nature park communities.
- International recognition: The project was presented at the Austrian Embassy in Berlin, with high-profile ambassadors such as Sebastian Vettel, Elisabeth Görgl, and Othmar Karas.

The project's scalability is evident in the easy transferability of its measures. What's essential is a strong regional network and committed partners.

Innovation and Future Outlook

Future plans include expanding flowering areas and integrating science more deeply with practical applications. There are also plans to involve more companies in the initiative to strengthen sustainable economic cycles.

Conclusion

Naturpark Pöllauer Tal, located in the East Styria experience region, serves as a role model for sustainable development in tourism. The 'Lebensmusterregion' demonstrates how innovative approaches and the engagement of local communities can drive lasting transformation.

Alpine Cuisine Festival

The **'Alpine Cuisine Festival'** stands as a flagship initiative in the National Park Hohe Tauern holiday region. Its core ambition is to put alpine culinary heritage in the spotlight and introduce innovative dimensions to traditional regional cuisine. By establishing a strong link between gastronomy, agriculture, and tourism, the festival creates a sustainable model that supports both cultural identity and economic resilience.



Project Description and Sustainability

The event focuses on promoting high-quality regional produce and showcasing the diversity of alpine culinary traditions. It acts as a vibrant platform where chefs, hoteliers, and local producers collaborate, exchange ideas, and inspire one another. Young people from tourism schools are invited to participate, gaining valuable real-world experience and a deeper understanding of their professional opportunities.

The festival promotes sustainability on multiple fronts:

- Socio-cultural: It inspires the next generation to consider careers in the hospitality sector and connects them with experienced practitioners.
- Economic: By strengthening local supply chains and encouraging business succession, the event reinforces long-term economic viability.
- Ecological: Through the use of locally sourced ingredients, the festival emphasises seasonal, environmentally conscious culinary practices.

Challenges and Culture of Embracing Mistakes

One of the greatest challenges was bringing the concept of Alpine Cuisine to life. For a long time, it remained abstract and difficult to grasp. However, the festival series created a platform that gave the term a clear and lasting definition. Another key learning from the project was the importance of collaboration between agriculture and tourism. Mistakes were used as opportunities to refine processes and improve cooperation.

CULTURE OF EMBRACING MISTAKES – CHALLENGES & LEARNINGS

Challenges:

- The abstract nature of the term 'Alpine Cuisine'
- Coordination between different sectors (agriculture, gastronomy, tourism)

Solutions:

- Introduction of a clear event format
- Promotion of cooperation and mutual exchange

Success and Scalability

To date, the Alpine Cuisine Festival has drawn as many as 500 guests and has become a unique showcase event in Austria.

Its distinctive format makes it adaptable to other alpine regions, provided there is a commitment to involving local producers and institutions. The event has also attracted notable media attention, raising awareness of the importance and identity of alpine cuisine.

Innovation and Future Outlook

Looking ahead, the festival organisers plan to complement the current B2B focus with B2C formats to reach a wider audience. There are also ideas to

develop digital platforms for promoting local cuisine and facilitating knowledge exchange. Furthermore, integrating additional sectors, such as retail or cultural institutions, may open up exciting new avenues for growth and collaboration.

Conclusion

The Alpine Cuisine Festival shows how the creative blending of tradition, sustainability, and modern event culture can strengthen regional identity and deliver meaningful experiences. It sets an example for how tourism can become a driver of cooperation, economic development, and cultural pride in alpine areas.





The Alpine Cuisine Festival showcases
new facets of culinary offerings.



The Trail Stewards of Wilder Kaiser

Launched in 2023 by the Wilder Kaiser Tourism Association, the ‘**Trail Stewards of Wilder Kaiser**’ initiative aims to improve quality of life for locals and strengthen relationships with landowners and farmers. By addressing guest behaviours like illegal camping, off-leash dogs, and littering, the project relies on education and presence to resolve conflicts. The trail stewards act as role models, encouraging both visitors and locals to share and respect the Wilder Kaiser as a living and recreational space.



Project Description and Sustainability

The project promotes respectful behaviour in nature through direct communication and education. Social sustainability is at the heart of the initiative: stewards not only uphold rules but also lead by example, such as collecting litter themselves. This builds awareness and encourages a mindful approach to nature.

Acting as accessible contact persons, the stewards help address sensitive issues like leash requirements or wild camping. Thanks to close cooperation with municipalities, the project is supported as a community effort – strengthening overall acceptance and cohesion.

Challenges and Culture of Embracing Mistakes

The greatest challenge during implementation was finding the right balance between friendly education and consistent enforcement of rules. It also became apparent that mediating between the differing

interests of locals, guests, and municipalities was not always straightforward. One issue was that no clearly defined steering committee was established at the outset of the project. This occasionally led to uncertainty about how strictly certain rules should be enforced in practice.

Success and Scalability

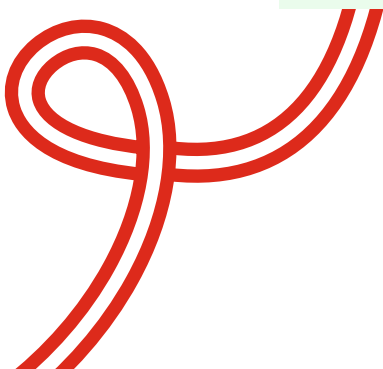
The project has already achieved visible results. There has been a significant reduction in off-leash violations and increased environmental awareness. Locals increasingly view the stewards not just as enforcers, but as helpful intermediaries and problem-solvers.

The model is scalable. Regions with similar tourism-related tensions can adopt the concept to improve social sustainability and conflict prevention. Notably, the project has also boosted public confidence in the tourism association as a capable, solution-oriented organisation.

CULTURE OF EMBRACING MISTAKES – CHALLENGES & LEARNINGS

Challenge: Divergent expectations and solution strategies among the tourism board, municipality, and landowners

Solution: A steering committee is introduced to ensure clear guidance and a consistent approach across the region



Innovation and Future Outlook

Future plans include expanding the stewards' responsibilities to include parking regulation and similar tasks. In the long run, the project aims to foster community-led self-regulation, gradually reducing reliance on supervisory roles.

Conclusion

The Trail Stewards of Wilder Kaiser represent an exemplary sustainable tourism initiative, addressing both ecological and social concerns. By combining innovative outreach with strong community integration, the project demonstrates how tourism stakeholders can meaningfully contribute to quality of life – for guests and residents alike.

Facts and Figures

In 2023, the following data were recorded to assess project impact: **9,884** dog owners were observed, including **800** with off-leash dogs; **2,042** visible dog waste bags left behind; **823** campers and **139** cases of incorrect parking were documented.



Free Tree Open Air Festival – Sustainability and Culture in Harmony

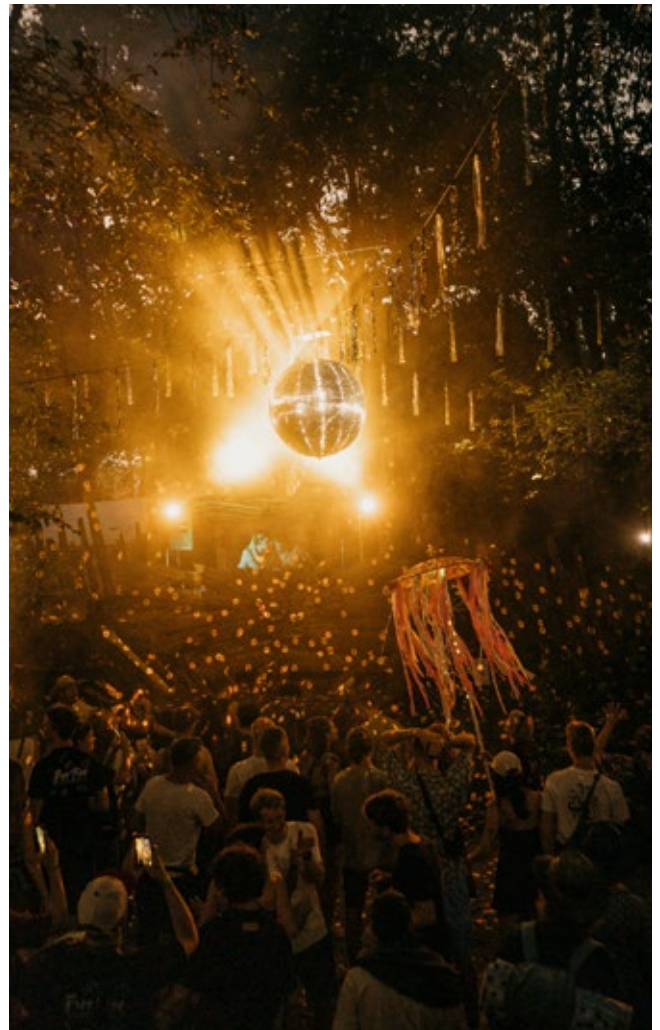
Since its founding in 2012 in the Innviertel region of Upper Austria, the **Free Tree Open Air Festival** has established itself as a sustainable cultural platform. With a strong emphasis on environmental awareness and diversity, the festival provides a stage for alternative culture in a region traditionally shaped by classical events. Its aim is to incorporate eco-friendly practices and appeal to a broad audience through a diverse musical line-up.

Project Description and Sustainability

The Free Tree Open Air Festival is committed to sustainability in various aspects:

- Waste avoidance and separation: An innovative system provides guests with colour-coded and scented bin bags to promote strict waste separation. Visitors receive a deposit refund for correctly disposing of their waste.
- Upcycled decorations: Festival decorations are made from repurposed materials such as offcuts and scrap wood from local businesses.
- Certified organic catering: All food vendors must be certified organic. The festival prioritises regional and organic food, working closely with local partners like Bio Austria and Biohof Achleitner.
- Encouraging public transport: To reduce CO₂ emissions, visitors are incentivised to use public transport. A shuttle bus connects the nearest railway station to the festival grounds. Those arriving by public transport receive a free drink or merchandise voucher.
- Social sustainability: Alongside ecological efforts, the festival also values diversity and local engagement. A balanced line-up regarding gender and origin and the inclusion of local artists contribute to social sustainability.

© Tim Koenig



Challenges and Culture of Embracing Mistakes

The greatest challenges of the project lay in financing and team development:

Funding issues: A significant setback was the late discovery of available funding opportunities. Until 2021, the festival was run without public funding, which greatly increased the burden on the volunteer team. Once public funding was secured, the team was relieved and able to bring in professional support. Without this financial support, the festival would no longer be viable today.

Restructuring and the pandemic: In 2018, the festival team decided to manage the entire organisation through their own association after their previous partner in gastronomy withdrew. This restructuring meant that no event was held in 2019. Following the cancellation in 2020 due to the pandemic, the festival returned in 2021 under strict covid regulations – an experience that ultimately brought the team closer together.

Success and Scalability

Despite setbacks, the festival attracts around 3,500 attendees daily, with a loyal visitor base. While the concept is transferable to other regions, successful implementation requires a committed volunteer team and robust local partnerships.

Innovation and Future Outlook

The focus going forward is on optimising workflows and responding to new trends in the festival sector. Rather than expanding attendance significantly, the team aims to continuously improve the quality and sustainability of the event. This includes implementing more eco-friendly initiatives and expanding regional collaborations.

Conclusion

The Free Tree Open Air Festival serves as a model for sustainable cultural events. Its combination of environmental measures, community involvement, and artistic diversity offers valuable inspiration for the tourism sector, proving that ecological awareness and cultural richness can thrive together.

CULTURE OF EMBRACING MISTAKES – CHALLENGES & LEARNINGS

These experiences highlight the importance of flexibility and perseverance. The lessons learned – especially regarding timely funding applications and internal organisation – will strengthen the team in the long term.

Climate Hikes in the Alpbachtal – A Project Report

Biodiversity and a connection to nature – these are the core values at the heart of the ‘**Climate Hikes in the Alpbachtal**’ project. As part of the KLAR! region (Climate Change Adaptation Model Region), the Alpbachtal focuses on raising awareness about the local impacts of climate change. This innovative initiative aims to sensitise both visitors and locals to ecological interrelations and sharpen their understanding of climate change.



Project Description and Sustainability

The initiative emerged with the goal of making climate change visible to both tourists and residents. In cooperation with local hiking guides and Hermann Sonntag, a biologist and climate educator, two existing hiking trails in the Alpbachtal were adapted. These tours focus on climate-resilient forests, moorlands, and the biodiversity of alpine meadows. By integrating scientific knowledge into guided hikes and offering a supporting booklet, information is conveyed in a subtle and experience-based manner.

Rather than relying on display signs, the project focuses on personal interaction and informal knowledge transfer through the hiking guides. This fosters a lasting connection between participants and their environment.

Challenges and Culture of Embracing Mistakes

Coordinating between the various stakeholders – particularly the mountain hiking guides, the KLAR! region, and the tourism board – was a key focus. Scheduling and agreeing on dates also required special attention. Additionally, it became clear that terms such as ‘climate change’ and ‘sustainability’ were initially interpreted differently, which led to engaging discussions and valuable exchanges. It also emerged that choosing appealing titles for the tours is a crucial success factor.

CULTURE OF EMBRACING MISTAKES – CHALLENGES & LEARNINGS

Challenges:

- Diverging definitions of key terms
- High need for coordination and scheduling among stakeholders

Solutions:

- Early involvement of all actors through workshops
- Clear communication of project goals and priorities areas.

Success and Scalability

The project received positive feedback from both participants and partners. Collaborating with an experienced biologist with didactic skills and training the hiking guides in practical approaches proved essential to the project's success. By embedding knowledge into existing tours and using established hiking paths, the regional context is emphasised and the concept's transferability highlighted. Other regions could benefit from similar approaches tailored to their specific local features.

Innovation and Future Outlook

In the upcoming season, an evaluation of the existing tours is planned. The insights gained will help expand the range of topics and adapt the tours more closely to participants' needs. One planned development is deeper involvement of the local community to strengthen awareness of their natural surroundings.

Conclusion

The 'Climate Hikes in the Alpbachtal' project is a striking example of how innovative methods can raise awareness of ecological topics. As a model for sustainable tourism, it combines regional expertise, hands-on implementation, and long-term vision. It serves as an inspiration for other regions to view their ecological assets as opportunities and communicate them effectively.



Genuss ab Hof – Regional Responsibility in Action

The ‘**Genuss ab Hof**’ initiative has been a pioneering model for direct marketing by small-scale farms and rural producers in Austria for over three decades. Founded in 1988 by market vendors in Graz, the initiative emerged from a desire to promote regional products and provide small enterprises with a sustainable income source. Today, the association supports over 500 active member businesses, operates a custom-developed franchise model, and offers an expanding tourism portfolio.



© Michaela Bergsteiger | GenussLaden im Gartenbau Schachert (Bruck a. d. Mur)

Project Description and Sustainability

At the core of the project lies the promotion of regional value chains. Sustainability is not treated as a buzzword, but as a foundational principle: producers set their own prices, there are fixed margins in the distribution chain, and partnerships with franchisees – such as garden centres, co-operatives, supermarkets, or self-service stores – create efficient sales channels. With 48 ‘GenussShops’ under the franchise model, the initiative offers an independent, transparent marketing structure – regional, fair, and efficient. New ventures like the ‘Genuss ab Hof Tours’ add a tourism dimension, allowing consumers to engage with producers directly – from cheese tastings to live pressing events.

Challenges and Culture of Embracing Mistakes

Arguably the greatest challenge lies in the tension between public funding and independent development. The association experienced several instances where well-functioning structures were halted or undermined by political decisions – setbacks that cost both time and money. The lesson learned: only an independent, self-managed network can endure in the long term. Internal insights also led to a clear strategic shift: certifications and quality labels are no longer mandated – instead, the focus is on direct farm visits, trust, and experience.

CULTURE OF EMBRACING MISTAKES – CHALLENGES & LEARNINGS

Core mistake: Excessive dependency on public institutions

Consequence: Painful project interruptions (e.g. Genussregion Österreich)

Learning process: Development of an autonomous, member-led network

Key insight: Self-responsibility and equal footing instead of external control

Success and Scalability

The success of ‘Genuss ab Hof’ is evident not only in its membership numbers but also in brand recognition and structural impact. Many have adopted the model – a testament to its innovative power. A particular highlight is the site on Graz’s Schlossberg, serving as a tourist hub and demonstrating how urban audiences can be engaged with regional themes. The concept is scalable and already operates in other federal states like Lower Austria, Burgenland, and Upper Austria. What does it require? Reliable partners, strong networks, and producers who aim to inspire – not just sell.

Innovation and Future Outlook

With initiatives such as the ‘Genuss ab Hof Tours’ and the ‘GenussSalon’, the project is exploring new directions in tourism marketing. Tastings, cultural activities, and direct interactions with producers make regionality a tangible experience. New formats like ‘GenussJuries’ – market trials with consumer evaluation – are also being developed. These are intended to be rolled out regularly and established beyond regional borders.

Conclusion

‘Genuss ab Hof’ is far more than a sales system. It is a movement that authentically links regionality, authenticity, and sustainability – driven by people who truly believe in their products. The project vividly illustrates how a local initiative can grow into a national model, and why setbacks, missteps, and the courage to act independently are key components of lasting innovation.

Sustainability with a System – A Hotel Operation Charts a New Course

In an industry under increasing pressure, an innovative hotel in Austria's Mühlviertel region is proving that sustainable management and economic success are not mutually exclusive. Since 2018, **Hotel AVIVA****s make friends** has been implementing a comprehensive sustainability concept that integrates ecological, social, and economic dimensions. Its initiatives – ranging from an in-house academy and rainwater use to a four-day workweek – have earned multiple awards, including the Austrian Ecolabel and the Energy Globe Award.



© Hotel AVIVA ****S MAKE FRIENDS

Project Description and Sustainability

AVIVA links sustainable thinking with a systematic implementation strategy. Around 70 % of its electricity needs are met by a 503 kWp photovoltaic system. A hotel-owned laundry, supplied by a 32,000-litre rainwater cistern, eliminates the need for outsourced linen services. The hotel also prioritises local suppliers and regional foods to reduce transport distances and support the local economy.

Social sustainability is equally embedded: staff benefit from electric cars for private use, over 120 hours of training per full-time employee annually, and access to an in-house academy.

The AVIVA benefits package includes further offerings such as health promotion, leisure activities, and flexible working models. The hotel has been repeatedly recognised as a top employer – a testament to its robust HR management and high employee satisfaction.

Challenges and Culture of Embracing Mistakes

A key challenge was objectively assessing the organisation's own innovation potential. Internally, it had long been assumed that the company was operating at an average industry level. Only through exchanges at professional events did it become clear that AVIVA was actually among the pioneers – a realisation that required courage and self-reflection.

Success and Scalability

The introduction of the four-day week and strong staff retention are among AVIVA's greatest achievements. Staff turnover has dropped by over 60 %, while the quality of applicants has improved. Since 2020, the number of unsolicited applications has doubled.

These measures are scalable but require strong leadership and cultural anchoring within the organisation.

CULTURE OF EMBRACING MISTAKES – CHALLENGES & LEARNINGS

Mistake: Underestimating the organisation's pioneering role for too long

Lesson: External comparisons and reflection are essential to identify development potential

Adjustment: Strengthening communication and strategic positioning as a model enterprise

Outcome: A conflict-free team culture that has endured for over 15 years

Innovation and Future Outlook

Future developments include more tailored working time models, ergonomically optimised workplaces, and greater investment in mental health. A second photovoltaic system is also planned to further increase energy self-sufficiency.

Conclusion

Hotel AVIVA*****s make friends is a leading example of how holistic and measurable sustainability can be implemented with benefits for the environment, staff, and regional economy. Its combination of innovative thinking, clear strategy, and lived corporate culture positions it as a model for sustainable tourism in Austria.



© Hotel AVIVA ***** MAKE FRIENDS

Green Mountains Initiative – Rethinking Sustainability in Alpine Regions

The **Green Mountains Initiative** demonstrates how alpine tourism regions can respond concretely to climate change. Launched in 2022 by the Silvretta Montafon Group, it serves as a strategic framework for transforming ski tourism. Its goal: to shape the skiing experience of the future with ecological, social, and economic responsibility – holistically, measurably, and rooted in the region. The initiative has full board support, is strategically integrated, and backed by a dedicated sustainability team.



Project Description and Sustainability

The Green Mountains Initiative is a comprehensive sustainability strategy that spans all areas of the business – from energy and mobility management to human resources. The current focus lies on three core fields of action: climate, natural habitat, and living space. Sustainability is not treated as an add-on but as a guiding principle embedded in the entire corporate culture. Work on a unified mission statement is currently underway.

Challenges and Culture of Embracing Mistakes

A key learning was the failure of the working groups originally established during the Covid-19-pandemic. Despite high levels of motivation, sustainability tasks often clashed with day-to-day operations, particularly during the intense winter seasons. Some groups were merged, others put on hold. Clear responsibilities were then established, most notably through the creation of a dedicated sustainability department. This now enables targeted internal support, ongoing monitoring and reporting, as well as continuous development.

Success and Scalability

Initial measurable successes are already evident: the share of regional food in catering outlets has increased, emissions are calculated annually and have been reduced by one-fifth compared to the 2018/19 reference year. A 'Green Ticket' combining public transport, ski pass, and equipment rental has been introduced. Social benefits such as bike-to-work schemes, childcare, and a sustainability newsletter enjoy high internal acceptance. In 2024, over 80 % of staff took part in at least one sustainability initiative. Project days in nature reserves or with forest owners were well received and enhanced environmental awareness among the Silvretta Montafon team. The model is transferable – provided companies are willing to critically reflect on their structures and understand sustainability as a long-term process.

CULTURE OF EMBRACING MISTAKES – CHALLENGES & LEARNINGS

Mistake: Strategic working groups were overburdened with additional operational tasks

Lesson: Sustainability requires clear responsibilities and structural anchoring

Adjustment: Introduction of a central sustainability team and ongoing evaluations

Outcome: Better integration of goals into daily operations and improved implementation fidelity

Innovation and Future

The initiative is currently being revised as Version 2.0. New KPIs for all action areas are under development, and internal communication is being expanded via a digital sustainability dashboard. A guest interface is also planned, allowing visitors to track the footprint of their stay. Mobility is being rethought through expanded EV charging infrastructure, rail incentives, and bus partnerships. Waste management, one of the most complex challenges due to the size and diversity of operations, is also a priority.

Conclusion

The Green Mountains Initiative by the Silvretta Montafon Group is a prime example of how sustainability can be strategically and practically anchored in alpine regions. Its strength lies in its structured approach, dynamic learning culture, and openness to continuous reassessment. It represents not only ecological responsibility but also social innovation and future-oriented corporate culture – a model with impact well beyond Montafon.





The Green Mountain Initiative proves that climate change can be tackled through strategic measures across all dimensions of sustainability.



Green Traces – Making Energy Visible in Farm Holidays

FROM VALUES TO MEASURABLE SUSTAINABILITY

For many farm businesses, sustainability is a lived reality. But how can this mindset be made visible and comparable – for guests, hosts, and the tourism sector? The ‘**Green Traces**’ project shows how energy consumption and CO₂ footprints can be transparently recorded, even for small-scale farm holiday providers – laying the groundwork for credible sustainability communication.



Project Description and Sustainability

The project began with a board retreat in January 2023, where 'Farm Holidays in Vorarlberg' decided to strengthen sustainability as a strategic focus – based on real data instead of assumptions. Together with the Energy Institute Vorarlberg, a digital tool (ekat.at) was adapted for farm tourism businesses to systematically track energy usage at farm level: electricity, heating, mobility – tailored to farm size and facilities.

The tool is free, user-friendly, and scalable across Austria. It enables individual CO₂ balances for each business, offers a sector benchmark, and for the first time allows meaningful comparisons within a diverse operating landscape.

Challenges and Culture of Embracing Mistakes

Despite high levels of enthusiasm at the start of the project, participation from many businesses fell short of expectations. The initial data collection process is time-consuming, particularly during the first round – and time is a scarce resource in agriculture. In addition, some participants were concerned about potentially receiving poor results.

CULTURE OF EMBRACING MISTAKES – CHALLENGES AND LEARNINGS

Challenge: High effort for initial data entry

Solution: Awareness-raising and support through webinars, training sessions, and energy advisors

Challenge: Lack of visible benefit

Solution: Comparable evaluations, guest-facing communication, and integration into the website relaunch

Challenge: Uncertainty in dealing with 'poor' results

Solution: Emphasising the learning curve and the monitoring function – focusing on improvement rather than judgement

Success and Scalability

The tool is now available to around 2,300 farms. Initial benchmarks are in place, and feedback from pilot farms has been positive: the data helps understand energy flows and supports targeted improvements. The vision: energy accounting becomes as routine as financial accounting.

The communication side is also shifting: sustainability is increasingly seen as a decision-making factor by guests – and will be clearly visible on the redesigned website in 2025.

Innovation and Future Outlook

The project will expand to include further indicators, such as social sustainability. Since the relaunch of the 'Farm Holidays' website in February 2025, a dedicated section informs guests about what's actually implemented on the farms – using concrete actions, not just buzzwords. Early adopters are prominently highlighted. Members are also continuously trained, e.g. via webinars, to improve sustainable guest communication and make thoughtful language choices.

Conclusion

'Green Traces' demonstrates how transparency and a solid data foundation are essential for credible sustainability. It makes commitment visible, strengthens awareness, and provides orientation – for businesses as well as for guests. A bold move toward honest sustainability communication in rural tourism.

Guest Mobility Ticket SalzburgerLand – Mobility as a Game- changer in Tourism

A LEGALLY ANCHORED SUCCESS MODEL

With the new **Guest Mobility Ticket**, the federal state of Salzburg is sending a strong message: sustainable tourism mobility is being rolled out across the region – legally anchored, socially fair, and ecologically sound. Since May 2025, guests have been able to use all public transport in the region with a small surcharge on the overnight stay tax – simply, digitally, and conveniently.



Project Description and Sustainability

The Guest Mobility Ticket was introduced as a legally mandatory model – a first in Europe. Funded through a staggered mobility contribution (€ 0.50 initially, € 1.10 later), all overnight guests automatically receive a digital ticket granting access to the entire public transport network – including long-distance trains.

Technically, the ticket is linked to the existing guest registration system. Issuance is handled directly by the accommodation providers. Pilot regions like Wagrain-Kleinarl and Fuschlsee show the system works – even for small-scale hosts.

Challenges and Culture of Embracing Mistakes

The greatest hurdle was winning people over – politically, economically, and in the tourism sector. Despite initial scepticism, broad communication and consistent implementation succeeded in securing majority support.

Success and Scalability

Salzburg is the first federal state to implement guest mobility by law. The project replaces previous voluntary schemes and brings structural clarity. Even during the test phase, positive effects on CO₂ emissions, nitrogen oxides, and fine particulate matter were observed. An impact analysis is currently being carried out by the company vionmo.

Transport planning now benefits from real-time data on guest mobility behaviour – a first in the tourism sector.

CULTURE OF EMBRACING MISTAKES – CHALLENGES AND LEARNINGS

Challenge: Vocal criticism from the hotel industry

Solution: Dialogue formats, an FAQ portal, and training provided by accommodation coaches

Challenge: Technical obstacles in ticket issuance

Solution: Integration with existing systems, a hot-line, and tutorial resources

Challenge: Acceptance among transport providers

Solution: Negotiations with ÖBB and integration of all modes of transport

Innovation and Future Outlook

With projected revenues from the mobility contribution expected to reach around € 16 million annually by 2027, regional public transport will be expanded in a targeted way. Tourism professionals will be included in the public transport planning committees. The goal: less congestion, more tourism acceptance, and better quality of life for all.

Conclusion

The Guest Mobility Ticket SalzburgerLand represents a bold step toward climate-friendly mobility. It brings together tourism, politics, and transport in a forward-thinking model – fair, efficient, and pioneering for all of Europe.

Facts & Figures

Salzburg Transport Association (as of 2023)

Number of employees: **65**

Number of transport companies: **21**

Founded: **1995**

Total volume: approx. **27 million** ordered kilometres (bus and rail)

Population in service area: **568,346**

Number of districts: **6**

Number of municipalities: **119**



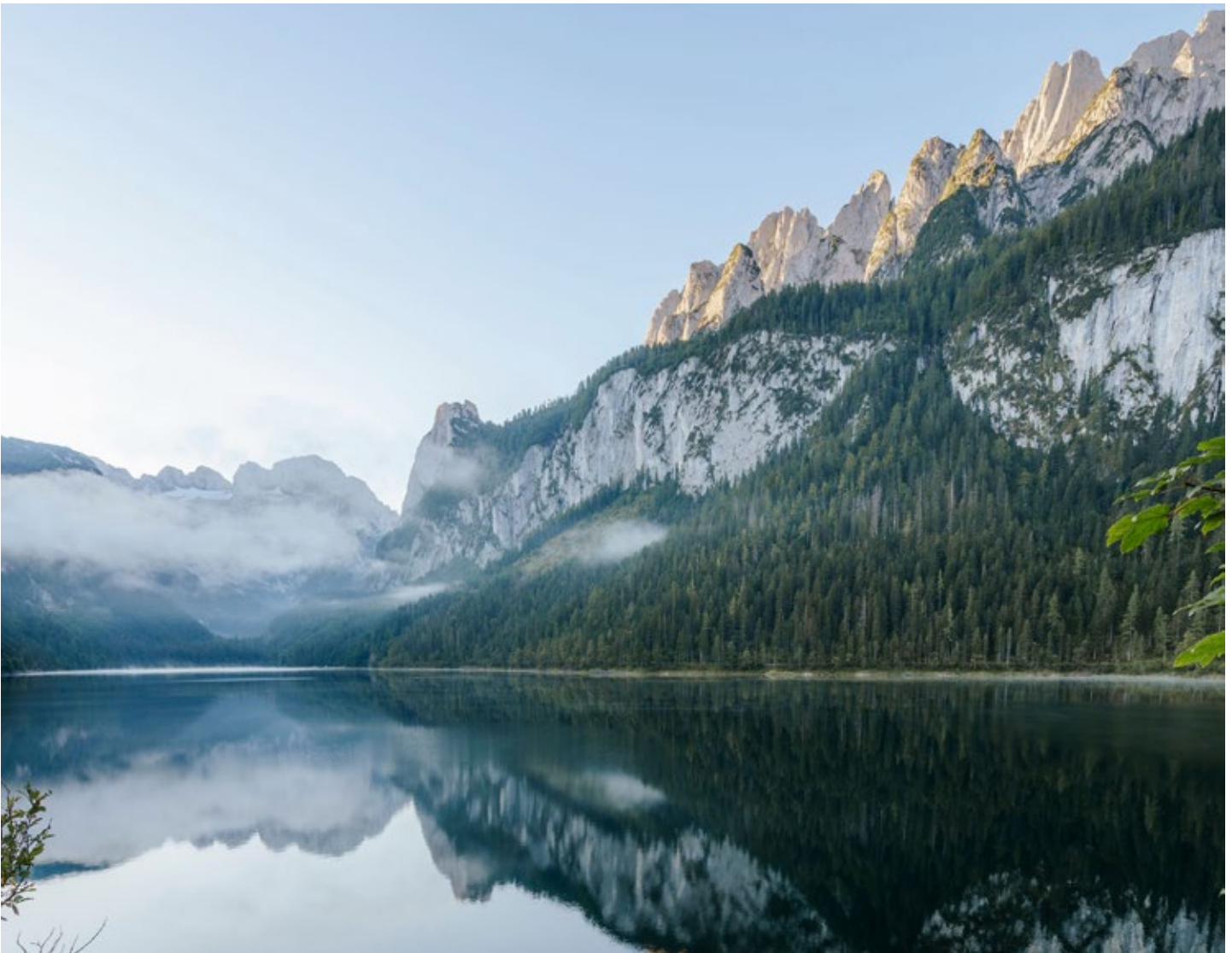
Discover SalzburgerLand in an environmentally friendly way using public transportation.



IN OUR NATURE!

Upper Austria

The 'IN OUR NATURE! Upper Austria' project was launched by the State of Upper Austria and is being implemented under the responsibility of Upper Austria Tourism. It was initiated in response to increasing pressure on natural areas from a wide range of recreational activities, a trend that intensified during the Covid-19-pandemic. The project brings together diverse stakeholder and user groups to develop conflict-free and sustainable solutions for nature use. It exemplifies an innovative and cooperative approach in Austrian tourism.



Project Description and Sustainability

The project, currently being implemented in pilot regions, focuses on three main areas: holistic natural area development concepts aimed at balancing different user interests on shared land; innovative methods for dispersing visitor flows in sensitive environments using mobile phone data to derive targeted actions; and an awareness campaign promoting respectful behaviour in nature.

Challenges and Culture of Embracing Mistakes

The greatest challenge during project implementation was the large number and diversity of stakeholders, some of whom had conflicting interests. Establishing a foundation of trust between the various actors was particularly time-consuming – but ultimately rewarding.

Success and Scalability

One major success has been the establishment of model regions where natural area development and digital visitor guidance are being tested and refined. Insights gained are being compiled into guides for other regions, enabling scalability both within and beyond Upper Austria. A key measurable result is the collection of mobility and visitor data, which allows for targeted intervention and improvement of strategies.

CULTURE OF EMBRACING MISTAKES – CHALLENGES AND LEARNINGS

Problem: Delays caused by a lack of visible benefits from collaboration between different interest groups

Solution: Early development of an internal communication strategy with regional adaptations to strengthen the initiative in the long term

Innovation and Future Outlook

The project team plans to continue refining data-driven visitor management and intensifying regional cooperation. The focus will remain on developing more sustainable tourism products and enhancing climate-friendly mobility options.

Conclusion

'IN OUR NATURE! Upper Austria' stands as an outstanding example of sustainable tourism development that merges nature conservation with innovative technology and a cooperative spirit. It sets a benchmark for similar initiatives in other regions, demonstrating how sustainability and tourism can be harmoniously aligned.

© Oberösterreich Tourismus Böhmerwald | Robert Maybach



Inclusive World Day – Special Art Experiences in Vienna

An extension of an existing project has led to an innovative initiative that places inclusion and participation at its core. With the goal of making museum and cultural tours accessible for people with different disabilities, the project has become a **flagship model for inclusion in tourism**. Originally designed for blind and visually impaired individuals, the initiative was expanded to include offerings for deaf people and those living with dementia.

Project Description and Sustainability

The Association of Certified Viennese Tourist Guides offers special art mediation programmes for people with disabilities as part of 'Inclusive World Day'. On 21 February 2024, guided tours took place at the Mozarthaus Vienna for people with dementia, the blind and visually impaired, as well as deaf individuals. This commitment reflects the association's efforts to promote cultural participation for all and remove barriers.

By collaborating with various advocacy groups, the initiative ensures its offerings meet the specific needs of participants. Positive feedback and growing participation demonstrate its success. With voluntary commitment and gradual programme expansion, the project contributes to long-term inclusion in the cultural sector.



© Verein der geprüften Wiener Fremdenführer

The aim is to offer professional guided tours to people with various disabilities free of charge. Central to this is enabling social participation and access to cultural spaces. Strong partnerships with disability organisations helped raise awareness of the initiative and laid the foundation for its sustainable development.

Sustainability is demonstrated through the long-term building of networks and the promotion of inclusive tourism. The project exemplifies how targeted efforts can create an inclusive cultural environment.

Challenges and Culture of Embracing Mistakes

Setting up the project was not without its hurdles. One of the greatest challenges was identifying the right organisations and interest groups, and securing their cooperation. Raising awareness and gaining recognition within these groups required time and patience.

Success and Scalability

The project's greatest reward is the joy expressed by participants and the continuously growing number of attendees. This response proves a genuine need exists and that the initiative fills an important gap.

Its scalability is promising. With similar efforts by individuals in other regions, the concept could easily be adapted. The key prerequisites – commitment and cooperation with local advocacy groups – make the model transferable.

Innovation and Future Outlook

The project shows that simplicity is often the key to success. Rather than focusing on high-tech solutions, it relies on human initiative. Going forward, the project will maintain and expand current efforts, growing organically through voluntary contributions.

CULTURE OF EMBRACING MISTAKES – CHALLENGES AND LEARNINGS

Challenge: Complexity in building a network involving diverse organisations

Approach: Deliberately slow growth to avoid major setbacks

Insight: Patience and a step-by-step approach can create long-term stability

Conclusion

This project is an outstanding example of inclusion and sustainability initiatives in tourism. It illustrates the importance of volunteer commitment and partnership to ensure cultural access for all. With its focus on social sustainability and inclusion, it serves as a model for similar efforts in other regions. The 'Inclusive World Day' held on 21 February 2025, with accessible art mediation programmes at the Mozarthaus Vienna, demonstrates the initiative's potential for large-scale inclusive events.

Collaborations with advocacy groups ensure the needs of participants are met. Increasing participation and consistent positive feedback confirm the success of this format. The key lesson? Slow growth, voluntary engagement, and the joy of participants are the foundations of a sustainable and impactful initiative.

Klimaberg Katschberg – Living with Nature, Not from It

Klimaberg Katschberg is an ambitious initiative from the border region between Carinthia and Lungau in SalzburgerLand. The project aims to create a carbon-neutral tourism destination – not as a distant vision, but as a concrete goal to be achieved by 2030. Backed by a coalition of 21 businesses and the local community, the initiative seeks to foster sustainable tourism – to live with nature, not off it. Ten of the participating businesses are already certified with the Austrian Ecolabel, and one has received the Green Key award.



Project Description and Sustainability

The concept of Klimaberg was born out of a deep, long-standing sense of responsibility for nature and future generations. One key element is the use of 'climate soil', which stores carbon and is introduced into the ground to directly offset emissions. The project also promotes local value chains, such as partnerships with regional food producers and the use of bioenergy via woodchip heating. Its most impactful implementation is the Hotel 'Das Katschberg', a sustainable timber hotel built in 2020.

Other key measures include:

- Avoiding plastic in food services and using rainwater in sanitary facilities (Hotel Das Katschberg)
- A centralised waste management system with a compacting facility, reducing waste transport frequency
- Expansion of photovoltaic systems
- Use of regional construction materials
- Establishment of wildflower meadows and beehives at 1,650 metres elevation
- Planting pine trees for each sustainable holiday booking
- Distribution of around 70 'climate garden beds' with local herbs and vegetables

CULTURE OF EMBRACING MISTAKES – CHALLENGES AND LEARNINGS

Learning from Setbacks

Topic: Photovoltaics: Despite the early idea of shared use, implementation was delayed for a long time – too much discussion and too little clarity in the initial phase. Today, the project is being relaunched as an energy community.

Hesitant funding structures: Promised subsidies have yet to materialise – apart from one grant from the ÖHT, the project has been almost entirely privately financed.

Regional scepticism: At the outset, project ideas were dismissed as mere 'gimmicks'. Only through persistent communication and the emergence of visible successes did perceptions begin to shift.

These experiences led to a key takeaway: don't over-discuss – take action, even if the solution isn't yet perfect.

Success and Scalability

The project has received multiple awards, including 3rd place in the sustainability prize from the Carinthian Chamber of Commerce. Media attention has encouraged more regional business involvement. According to CO₂ calculators, current emissions per overnight stay at Katschberg are around 2.6 kg – including travel. While no historic baseline is available, this reduction is supported by the use of photovoltaic energy, bioheating, and local supply chains.

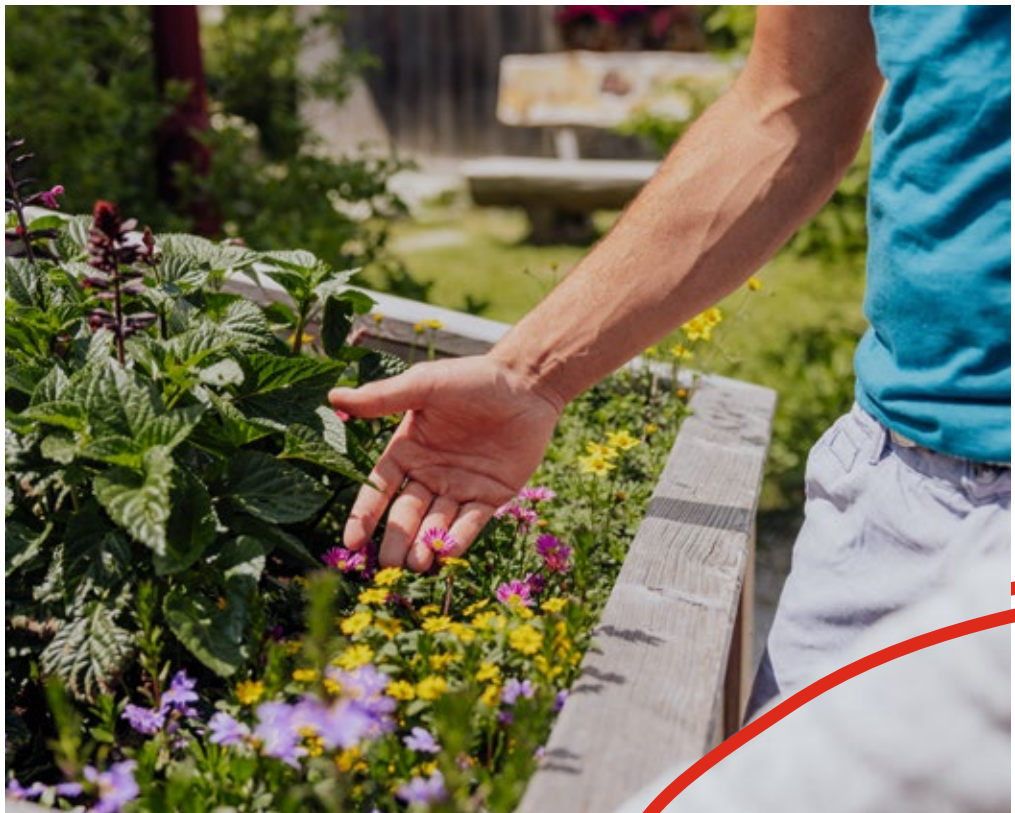
Transferability: Interest is growing in other regions. Partnerships are being developed with Green Areal Lausitz and a project in Hamburg. Nearby tourism operators are also increasingly interested in the model region.

Innovation and Future Outlook

In addition to expanding the energy community and storing CO₂ through e4F carbon soil, the concept is being explored for urban and industrial settings. Klimaberg Katschberg aims to become a cross-regional hub for sustainable tourism expertise.

Conclusion

Klimaberg Katschberg is a powerful example of a region taking responsibility – not only for its guests but for future generations. The project demonstrates that sustainable tourism is not a trend, but a necessity. For those looking for answers to tomorrow's challenges, Katschberg is a shining example.



Luftburg – Kolarik im Prater

ORGANIC GASTRONOMY FROM THE HEART

Located in the heart of Vienna's Prater, **Luftburg – Kolarik im Prater** has established itself as a pioneering business in sustainable gastronomy. Under the leadership of Paul Kolarik, this family-run enterprise has evolved into a fully organic-certified restaurant – a transformation that redefines both culinary excellence and ecological responsibility.



Project Description and Sustainability

The decision to transition fully to organic arose from a personal shift in values within the Kolarik family. What began as mindful grocery shopping grew into a comprehensive business philosophy. Supported by the City of Vienna's 'Natürlich gut essen' initiative, Luftburg converted its entire kitchen to 100% organic in 2019. By 2021, all beverages followed – with a clear mission: every product served must be certified organic. A strong emphasis is also placed on regionality – around 80% of all produce comes from within Austria. Sustainability is also embedded in staff training: employees undergo annual sessions to raise

awareness about the importance of organic food and sustainability.

Success and Scalability

The effort paid off: Since reopening in 2021, Luftburg has experienced increased demand – especially among corporate clients. For many, the organic offering is a key factor when choosing a venue.

According to Kolarik, the Luftburg model is scalable – regardless of business size. What matters is not capacity, but commitment.

CULTURE OF EMBRACING MISTAKES – CHALLENGES AND LEARNINGS

Supplier Dropouts: Not all partners were willing to follow the organic path. Consistent decision-making led to parting ways – even with long-standing suppliers.

Misjudgement of Volume Requirements by Suppliers: There was a misunderstanding with a supplier regarding the quantity of pork knuckle meat – the supplier believed that 7.5 tonnes were needed, whereas the actual requirement was 75 tonnes. Fortunately, the misunderstanding was clarified in time, and the necessary quantity can now also be provided in organic quality.

Image Shift: The transition to a high-quality organic restaurant concept resulted in a partial change and shift in target audiences.

A new challenge: high internal training requirements: Raising awareness within the team was essential to credibly convey the values of organic and sustainable practices to the outside world.

Despite these challenges, the team led by Paul Kolarik demonstrated perseverance – with a clear stance: uncompromising commitment to their own values.

Innovation and Future Outlook

In 2025, a comprehensive renovation project was implemented, focusing on back-office areas and staff facilities. Priorities included modernisation, employee well-being, and resource efficiency – featuring a deep borehole for a groundwater heat pump and a tripling of the photovoltaic area. The gas connection was decommissioned – a clear commitment to 100 % renewable energy.

Conclusion

Luftburg proves that sustainable gastronomy can be far more than a marketing buzzword. With visionary thinking, firm decisions, and high authenticity, it serves as a blueprint for the industry. Perhaps the most meaningful evidence of its success comes from guests who call it the ‘place to be’ for organic dining – a form of recognition that transcends numbers.

Facts and Figures:

75 tonnes of organic pork knuckles annually –
20 % of Austria’s total organic pork knuckle supply
Around 80 % of ingredients sourced from Austria
Food waste below 10 % (industry average: 17–20 %)
Fully organic certified since May 2021



Circular Economy Meets Regional E-Commerce 2.0

The project ‘[Circular Economy Meets Regional E-Commerce 2.0](#)’ demonstrates how traditional structures can be sustainably transformed through innovative approaches. Its aim is to promote a circular economy that combines social, ecological, and economic aspects.



Project Description and Sustainability

This initiative merges regional value creation with sustainable online commerce. By using reused packaging materials and supporting local producers, the project created an online shop that offers both environmental and economic benefits. A particularly noteworthy aspect is the inclusion of economically disadvantaged groups through affordable product offerings.

Challenges and Culture of Embracing Mistakes

A key challenge was convincing customers to accept the use of recycled packaging. Initial scepticism was successfully overcome through transparent communication. Mistakes were actively integrated into the development process in order to continuously improve the system.

Success and Scalability

The project has received multiple awards and reached a broad audience – from top executives to low-income individuals. Thanks to its straightforward scalability, the concept is appealing to other regions and industries aiming to promote sustainability and regionality.

Innovation and Future Outlook

Future developments include the introduction of even more efficient recycling processes and the expansion of the product range. In the long term, additional partnerships with regional producers are planned to further strengthen the model.

Conclusion

The project 'Circular Economy Meets Regional E-Commerce 2.0' serves as an inspiring example of how innovative ideas can transform traditional systems in a sustainable way. It offers a blueprint for circular value creation and sustainable business practices.

Earth Markets in Burgenland

A FLAGSHIP PROJECT FOR SUSTAINABILITY AND REGIONAL VALUE

The 'Earth Market' in Parndorf, located in the Austrian region of Burgenland, is an outstanding flagship project in the field of sustainable tourism. The initiative arose from the desire to create a platform where local producers and consumers could come together. Inspired by their commitment to the Slow Food movement and their close collaboration with producers, founder Monika Liehl, together with Kerstin Rohrer from Slow Food Burgenland, developed the vision of establishing a market in Burgenland that would be more than just a place for high-quality, sustainable products. It was also intended to foster a direct connection between producers and consumers. With short transport routes and fair prices, the market has become a vibrant example of sustainability in action, while simultaneously strengthening the regional economy.



Project Description and Sustainability

The Parndorf market offers only good, clean, and fair products sourced within a 40-kilometre radius, minimising transport distances and CO₂ emissions. The focus is on seasonal and organic produce, cultivated without pesticides or synthetic fertilisers. The personal interaction between producers and consumers builds transparency and trust, encouraging more conscious consumption. This direct marketing guarantees fair prices and secures long-term livelihoods for the producers. The market therefore contributes not only to reducing environmental impact but also to preserving biodiversity and strengthening the local economy.

Challenges and Culture of Embracing Mistakes

The development of the market was shaped by numerous challenges. At the outset, the project was not taken seriously and received neither financial nor other support at the local level. Setbacks such as the Covid-19-pandemic and organisational obstacles demanded perseverance and creative solutions. One defining moment was the spontaneous decision to deliver market products during the pandemic. This flexibility not only strengthened the cohesion among producers but also demonstrated how vital community is to the success of the project.

CULTURE OF EMBRACING MISTAKES – CHALLENGES AND LEARNINGS

A major setback was dealing with the tax and administrative requirements that followed the spontaneously launched delivery service – a situation that could hardly have been anticipated in advance. This experience underscores the importance of acting swiftly, flexibly, and with a customer-oriented mindset in unforeseen crises, even if mistakes are made that are difficult to rectify later and may result in financial losses.

Success and Scalability

The market has grown impressively: from ten producers in 2010 to nearly 40 today. Demand from new producers is so high that applications must regularly be declined. The market has become a gathering place for consumers and a model for replication. Inspired by this example, more Slow Food markets are being developed locally, supported by Slow Food Austria's expertise. New Earth Markets are emerging in Linz and Vienna, but the Parndorf market remains unique due to its size, its location in a well-preserved 19th-century barn on a goat farm, and the special sense of community it fosters in the German-speaking region.

Innovation and Future Outlook

Planned developments include quality assurance measures and new features in the show kitchen, involving regional chefs. There will also be children's programmes and workshops designed to enhance knowledge about nutrition and sustainability. These activities aim to raise awareness and engage visitors in the long term.

Conclusion

The 'Earth Market' is a powerful example of sustainable tourism and regional empowerment. Its combination of direct marketing, high-quality local goods, integration with regional gastronomy, and a vibrant community spirit makes it a model project for the tourism sector – and a personal passion for its founder. It impressively demonstrates how strong, local initiatives can enhance the resilience and sustainability of tourism.

Digital Guest Card for Sustainable Mobility in the Alpenregion Bludenz

The **Alpenregion Bludenz** is considered a pioneer when it comes to sustainable mobility solutions in tourism. In May 2019, a pilot project was launched to significantly simplify guests' use of public transport – through a (digital) guest card that enables free travel throughout Vorarlberg. Developed in close cooperation with the state of Vorarlberg, the regional transport association, and participating municipalities, the model has the potential to serve as a blueprint for other destinations.





A sustainable holiday in the Alpenregion
Bludenz promises impressive experiences
amidst the natural surroundings of the
majestic Alps.



Project Description and Sustainability

The project's goal was to rethink both arrival and local mobility: guests should be able to travel effortlessly using public transport, without worrying about fare zones or tickets. The guest card acts as a key to accessing regional bus and rail services within Vorarlberg and to its border stations. The aim is to make eco-friendly travel a convenient and attractive option. The offer is financed via the local tourism tax. According to a survey of 2,800 people, 80 % of guests are aware of the card – and over 50 % use public transport during their stay.

Success and Scalability

The uptake of the guest card and the growing use of public transport show that sustainable mobility works in alpine tourism. Usage increases significantly with longer stays. The project thus has a dual effect – reducing traffic and environmental strain while strengthening the role of public transport in tourism. Replication in other regions is possible, provided political and infrastructural conditions are met. A structured top-down implementation process is recommended.

Innovation and Future Outlook

Future communication efforts will increasingly focus on promoting public transport as the preferred arrival option. The region's website is now fully geared towards public travel options. Staff are being trained, messaging is being revised, and regular meetings with accommodation providers are ensuring consistent communication. The aim is a seamless information chain that makes it easy for guests to access the mobility benefits of the guest card.

Conclusion

The project in the Alpenregion Bludenz proves that forward-looking tourism is achievable through digital innovation, collaborative effort, and a clear vision. Despite initial challenges, the project yielded valuable lessons. It demonstrates how tourism can contribute meaningfully to the mobility transition – setting a strong example for the entire industry.

CULTURE OF EMBRACING MISTAKES – CHALLENGES AND LEARNINGS

Communication: Information about the option to use public transport with the guest card did not always reach guests in the beginning.

Solution: Training sessions and information events for accommodation providers, as well as standardised text modules for guest communication.

Scalability: Expanding the project to other regions has proven challenging.

On 1st May 2025, the Bodensee Vorarlberg Tourism destination launched the initiative with 13 municipalities. More are expected to join throughout the summer season.

Solution: Recommendation for a centrally coordinated, top-down approach at the federal state level, as practised in Salzburg.

Contractual arrangements: The revision of municipal agreements was not always straightforward.

Solution: Coordination and adaptation to current framework conditions

Concert Bus to Schubertiade – Sustainable Mobility Meets Cultural Enjoyment

COMFORTABLE, CLIMATE-FRIENDLY AND WELL-COORDINATED

The **Schubertiade in Schwarzenberg** ranks among Europe's leading classical music festivals. While the musical excellence is undisputed, the 'Concert Bus' project impressively demonstrates how getting to the venue can become part of the overall high-quality experience – ecological, organised and comfortable.



Project Description and Sustainability

The concert bus emerged from a practical need: Schwarzenberg has limited accommodation capacity, prompting many visitors to stay in neighbouring towns with more upscale lodging options. The solution was a dedicated bus network consisting of three routes that transport concertgoers directly from their hotels to the venue and back – scheduled precisely to match concert times and with convenient boarding right outside the hotel.

The project is jointly funded by Regio Bregenzerwald, Bregenzerwald Tourism, and nine municipalities situated along the bus routes. In 2024, over 2,100 tickets were sold, signalling strong acceptance of this gentle mobility initiative. Coordination is managed by Bregenzerwald Tourism.

CULTURE OF EMBRACING MISTAKES – CHALLENGES AND LEARNINGS

Challenge: Precise coordination with individual concert times; construction works, road closures, etc., must be closely monitored

Solution: Built-in buffer times and direct coordination with drivers on site, with possible relocation of stops in advance

Challenge: Funding model involving multiple partners

Solution: Tripartite cost-sharing – regional authority, tourism board, and participating municipalities

Challenges and Culture of Embracing Mistakes

Implementation required broad coordination with municipalities, hotels, and event organisers. From a technical and logistical standpoint, the tight scheduling posed a particular challenge: buses needed to arrive punctually but also had to wait when concerts overran – for example, due to multiple encores.

Success and Scalability

Around 40 % of the bus operating costs are covered by ticket sales. The remaining expenses are shared among stakeholders, supported by high guest satisfaction. While currently limited to the Schubertiade, the model is transferable to other major events with similar concentration and visitor dynamics.

Innovation and Future Outlook

Targeted expansions and additions are planned for the future – for instance, small-scale shuttle bus solutions already exist within Schwarzenberg and from neighbouring towns such as Andelsbuch. In addition, the Regio Bregenzerwald coordinates the entire Bregenzerwald regional bus system. Alternative mobility solutions continue to be developed – from local village buses to the ride-sharing app 'vlow'. Transport services to and from events beyond local boundaries in the Bregenzerwald are also supported by clubs and youth organisations. These events must be of predominant public interest.

Conclusion

The concert bus is more than a shuttle service – it reflects a regional mindset where culture, tourism and sustainability are thoughtfully intertwined. It enables climate-conscious travel without compromising on comfort and shows how mobility can become an integral part of an outstanding cultural experience.

Apricot Blossom in the Wachau – A Sustainable Springtime Experience

BLOSSOM TOURISM WITH VISION

When the **apricot trees begin to bloom in the Wachau**, thousands of visitors flock to the region each year. To respond to the growing influx in an environmentally friendly way, a coordinated, free mobility offering was introduced in 2023 – with resounding success.



Project Description and Sustainability

On two weekends in March and April, the municipalities of the Wachau, in cooperation with the Eastern Region Transport Association (VOR) and Donau Niederösterreich Tourismus GmbH, provided a free bus service. The aim was to offer guests a relaxed, climate-friendly experience while also easing pressure on the sensitive cultural landscape.

The result: around 5,000 passengers used the free bus service – a new record. Additionally, the Wachaubahn train carried approximately 2,000 passengers, and the DDSG Danube shipping service opened its season with strong visitor numbers.

Challenges and Culture of Embracing Mistakes

Despite the short lead time, the offering had to be communicated reliably, with precise timing, and sufficiently. The early onset of blooming, caused by weather conditions, presented a challenge – it required flexibility and swift coordination among all parties involved.

Success and Scalability

The high demand confirms that environmentally friendly transport solutions are well received – as long as they are simple, comfortable, and accessible. The implementation highlights the potential of seasonal, integrated mobility concepts that could be replicated in other regions and for other events.

An additional boost comes from the new 'Wachau Spring Ticket', which allows guests to use buses, trains, and ferries at a flat rate. It enables visitors to experience the region holistically – without a car, with maximum flexibility.

Innovation and Future Outlook

The successful launch of the free service has encouraged further development. Future possibilities include more weekends with free shuttles, stronger involvement of leisure partners, and expanding the spring ticket with digital features. Visitor flow management via apps and webcams is also set to be further developed.

Conclusion

The apricot blossom in the Wachau is not only a visual highlight – thanks to thoughtful mobility planning, it also serves as a model for sustainable excursion traffic. The collaboration between tourism stakeholders, local authorities and transport planners shows how visitor numbers can be managed in an environmentally and logistically sound way.

CULTURE OF EMBRACING MISTAKES – CHALLENGES AND LEARNINGS

Challenge: Early blossom and potential frost risk

Solution: Flexible planning of bus and rail services, ongoing communication via the apricot blossom webcam and online platforms

Challenge: Managing visitor flows without causing congestion

Solution: Use of existing infrastructure (bus, rail, boat) and targeted distribution of information

Sustainable Tourism Project – Naturforum 4.0

NASSFELD – PRESSEGGER SEE – LESACHTAL – WEISSENSEE

The **Naturforum** is an outstanding example of sustainable innovation in tourism. Launched to improve how natural spaces are managed in **Carinthia**, the project aims to minimise conflicts between leisure industries, agriculture, and nature conservation. The need for the initiative became even more apparent during the pandemic, when increased use of natural areas led to noticeable problems.



Project Description and Sustainability

The Naturforum seeks to manage natural areas sustainably by considering the needs of all stakeholders. Through workshops and detailed analysis, experience zones were defined that balance recreational use with conservation. A new guidance system now directs visitors to specific 'highlight routes', relieving pressure on sensitive zones. Innovative tools such as heatmaps and GPS data support this structured approach to land use.

Challenges and Culture of Embracing Mistakes

The greatest challenge was bringing all stakeholders to the table. Involving voluntary citizens proved particularly difficult, as their perspectives and needs often varied. Another obstacle was the initial complexity of the invitations and communication of project goals, which was not easy for everyone to understand. A key takeaway from the project is the importance of simplifying and localising communication to ensure it remains accessible to all participants. The analysis of the living environment should also be kept deliberately straightforward to facilitate understanding and collaboration.

CULTURE OF EMBRACING MISTAKES – CHALLENGES AND LEARNINGS

- Difficulty in involving the local population
- Overly complex invitation processes
- Need for better coordination with stakeholders

Lesson learned: Clear communication and tangible objectives enhance acceptance and participation.

Success and Scalability

The Naturforum has already led to the creation of five new mountain biking routes and an extensive guidance system for hikers and cyclists. The model is transferable to other regions, provided external moderators are involved and detailed natural area analyses are conducted.

Innovation and Future Outlook

Looking ahead, the Naturforum plans to place greater emphasis on sustainable mobility. An upcoming symposium will explore innovative ways to integrate public transport into the leisure and tourism sectors. Additionally, the existing guidance systems will be refined and expanded to improve visitor flow and environmental protection.

Conclusion

The Naturforum illustrates how innovative and sustainable concepts can be successfully implemented in tourism. It serves as a model for resolving user conflicts and protecting natural areas through collaboration and clear communication. This project highlights the importance of inclusive learning cultures and forward-thinking planning across the tourism industry.



Kaunergrat Nature Park Centre

A MODEL PROJECT FOR SUSTAINABILITY

The **Kaunergrat Nature Park Centre** is a flagship initiative for sustainable regional development and environmental education. It was established to provide visitors with clear access to the natural themes of the park while serving as a hub for education, research and local development. The project brings together protected areas, local communities and tourism associations to support a sustainable future.



Project Description and Sustainability

The Nature Park Centre serves as the central hub for the Kaunergrat Nature Park, which spans over 600 square kilometres. A key aim of the project is to bring the region's natural environment closer to people, whether through exhibitions, educational programmes or guided tours. Each year, more than 1,600 children take part in environmental education initiatives.

In addition, accessible infrastructure such as boardwalks through the Piller High Moor has been created, enabling people to experience nature without causing harm. The Nature Park combines regional development and nature conservation in a unique way.

Sustainability Measures:

- Creation of barrier-free access, allowing people with disabilities to experience nature
- Promotion of environmental education for both children and adults
- Preservation of nature through guided visitor flows and sustainable construction methods

Challenges and Culture of Embracing Mistakes

One of the greatest challenges in developing the nature park centre was the initial resistance from the local population. The construction of the centre did not receive unanimous support.

Critics feared that increased visitor numbers would put pressure on valuable natural sites. Additionally, the selected location at Gacher Blick was a subject of controversy. Through persistent dialogue and close cooperation with the host municipality, viable solutions were found – making the nature park centre a popular and regionally significant excursion destination today.

CULTURE OF EMBRACING MISTAKES – CHALLENGES AND LEARNINGS

Challenge: Resistance to the chosen location and the construction project

Lessons learned: Staying committed to the vision and engaging in dialogue with the local community paid off.

By integrating points of criticism into the planning process, broad acceptance of the project was achieved in the long term.

Success and Scalability

The Kaunergrat Nature Park Centre has become a pioneering project in Tyrol, demonstrating how regional development and nature conservation can be effectively combined. Over time, the centre has evolved into an educational hub and a platform for local economic development. It coordinates inter-municipal projects and markets regional products. Visitor numbers and regional impact confirm the project's success.

The concept is scalable, but successful transfer to other regions requires close cooperation with municipalities and local stakeholders.

Innovation and Future Outlook

Future plans include expanding regional value creation through the establishment of a Nature Park

cooperative. This would further integrate tourism, education and regional products. Partnerships with local hotels and universities will also be deepened to promote sustainable tourism. The long-term goal is to strengthen the park's role in regional development while maintaining its commitment to nature and environmental protection.

Conclusion

Kaunergrat Nature Park stands as a beacon of innovative regional development and sustainable tourism. It illustrates how dedicated engagement and community involvement can lead to long-term success. As a hub for education, conservation and regional collaboration, the Nature Park Centre is a leading example of sustainability in Austrian tourism.



Environmentally Compatible Mountain Sports in Montafon

A MODEL PROJECT FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM IN ALPINE REGIONS

In **Montafon**, a traditional tourism region in **Vorarlberg**, a forward-looking project was launched: the development of a concept for environmentally compatible mountain sports. The initiative was born from the need to harmonise nature-based recreation with the protection of sensitive alpine habitats. It was initiated by the Vorarlberg Mountain Guides Association, Montafon Tourist Board, the 'Gemeindeverband Stand Montafon' and the Verwall-Klostertal Mountain Forest Nature Conservation Association.



Project Description and Sustainability

The goal was to establish a shared understanding of sustainable alpine nature use – not only among tourism providers but also with visitors and local residents. Particularly innovative was the close cooperation with diverse stakeholders, including forestry, agriculture, hunting, nature conservation, mountain guides and ski schools.

Sustainability was approached holistically: in addition to protecting natural resources, the focus was on awareness-raising, communication and visitor management. The strategy was scientifically grounded and supported by external experts. A comprehensive catalogue of measures was

developed, ranging from information campaigns to infrastructure solutions compliant with conservation standards.

Challenges and Culture of Embracing Mistakes

The greatest challenge was managing conflicting interests. Diverse perspectives – from farmers and hunters to tourism businesses – made it essential to establish transparent dialogue formats from the outset. Developing a mission statement was a complex negotiation process, requiring a deliberate effort to address, rather than avoid, conflict in a constructive way.

CULTURE OF EMBRACING MISTAKES – CHALLENGES AND LEARNINGS

Challenge: Many interests, no shared vision

Solution: Multi-phase dialogue formats supported by moderated facilitation

Mistake: Initial communication was overly technical

Lesson learned: Simplified language and target group-oriented content are essential. Consciously addressing setbacks strengthened the project. It became clear that openness to criticism and iterative adjustments were key success factors.

Success and Scalability

A key achievement is the jointly developed 'Guiding Vision for Environmentally Compatible Mountain Sports', which now serves as a strategic reference document for the region.

By involving all municipalities, regional organisations and specialised departments, a broad consensus was achieved. The measures are transferable to other comparable alpine regions – provided that similar participatory structures exist and local stakeholders are actively involved.

Innovation and Future Outlook

The project is designed as a continuous learning process. In the future, digital visitor management will

be further developed, along with the integration of the concept into tourism products and services.

A monitoring system is also planned to measure the success of the measures.

Another area of innovation is stronger collaboration with educational institutions to encourage sustainable behaviour starting with schoolchildren.

Conclusion

'Environmentally Compatible Mountain Sports in Montafon' exemplifies a new approach to tourism in sensitive regions: cooperative, science-based, and long-term in its outlook. The project shows how dialogue, a willingness to learn, and strategic communication can bring about sustainable transformation – offering a valuable model for other alpine regions.



Pinzgauer Wohnstube – Affordable Housing for Local Residents

The '**Pinzgauer Wohnstube**' project was launched in the municipality of Leogang to address the urgent issue of unaffordable housing for locals. In a region heavily shaped by tourism, where second homes increasingly consume available land, the project aimed to create an affordable and sustainable housing solution tailored specifically to the local population and those seeking to settle in the area.



Project Description and Sustainability

The primary goal was to develop housing for locals in a tourism-driven area, where property prices and the proliferation of second homes pose significant challenges. Initiated by the municipality, the project led to the formation of an infrastructure company, which made it possible to bring local businesses and institutions on board as partners. These included the cable car operator, the local tourism board, and the Raiffeisen bank, all of whom contributed financially and with their expertise to the project's successful implementation.

Sustainability was also central to the project. The building was initially planned to meet climate-active standards to ensure long-term environmental compatibility. While some elements – such as heat pumps and photovoltaic systems – were ultimately not fully implemented due to budget constraints, the project offers valuable starting points for future sustainable construction approaches in the region.

CULTURE OF EMBRACING MISTAKES – CHALLENGES AND LEARNINGS

Challenge: Uniting partners with different goals and roles

Solution: Prioritise clear communication strategies and shared values

Setback: Local tensions surrounding land sales

Lesson learned: Greater transparency and open dialogue with all parties involved are essential

Challenges and Culture of Embracing Mistakes

The greatest challenge was coordinating between the various – and in some cases, unusual – partners who typically have no involvement in housing development. The partners had to learn how to collaborate on a project that was important to all of them, outside the usual mechanisms of the tourism sector.

A key misstep concerned the project's social sensitivity. Land sales in small communities are often contentious, and there was significant societal pressure on sellers to favour local investors over foreign buyers. This experience highlighted the need for future projects to place even greater emphasis on fostering open, values-based dialogue among all stakeholders.

Success and Scalability

The project successfully created housing for 8 to 15 local residents. The units are now fully occupied, and the model provides a blueprint for similar projects in other alpine regions. The infrastructure company formed through the initiative proved to be a flexible organisational model, allowing municipalities and partners to jointly realise projects of public interest.

Scalability is a key advantage. The framework used here can be adapted by other communities – whether for housing, childcare facilities, or mobility projects. The collaborative financing and governance structure involving regional partners could serve as a replicable model for other locations.

Innovation and Future Outlook

Looking ahead, the project team plans to place a stronger emphasis on sustainable building and energy systems, such as integrating heat pumps and solar panels. In addition, citizen-financed investment models are being explored to increase community engagement and support.

The 'Pinzgauer Wohnstube' remains a flexible tool for future infrastructure initiatives aligned with regional needs.

Conclusion

The 'Pinzgauer Wohnstube' illustrates how innovative thinking and collaborative strategies can successfully deliver sustainable housing in tourism-focused regions. By bringing together partners that would not typically work in the housing sector, a model has been created that responds directly to local needs.

The project's willingness to embrace challenges and learn from setbacks underlines its role as a benchmark for both the tourism and real estate sectors.



PIZ VHOTEL – A Digital Platform for Responsible Hospitality

In Montafon, the **PIZ VHOTEL** project marked an innovative step towards promoting the sustainable development of tourism businesses in a practical and hands-on way. The platform, developed through the PIZ Montafon innovation lab, is aimed at accommodation providers and offers a comprehensive, digital knowledge and advisory system for responsible operations. Originating from the innovation lab of Montafon Tourismus GmbH, PIZ Montafon today stands as a strong example of how creative spaces for innovation can be purposefully established and sustained over time.



Project Description and Sustainability

The origins of PIZ Montafon date back to a think tank held in 2021, initiated by local stakeholders such as Illwerke VKW and the Bank for Tyrol and Vorarlberg. The aim was to develop sustainable solutions for challenges including mobility, staff shortages, and environmental protection. From this, the 'Future Lab' emerged – a protected space for new approaches to thinking, embedded within the organisational structure of Montafon Tourismus GmbH.

At the heart of the initiative today is the PIZ VHOTEL – a free online platform offering over 60 topic areas relating to sustainable hospitality, structured into ten virtual rooms. The platform is based on the criteria of the Austrian Ecolabel and is technically designed to allow individual profiles, progress tracking, and content

to be managed intelligently – including AI-supported guidance through the digital assistant 'PIVO'.

The platform is further enhanced by the Sustainability Check and the 'Host Role Model' programme, which enables Montafon accommodation providers to achieve certification with the Austrian Ecolabel in collaboration with experts.

Challenges and Culture of Embracing Mistakes

The greatest learning moment within the context of the Future Lab was recognising that the protected space for innovation inevitably clashes with the realities of implementation. Once projects are operationalised, autonomy and agility tend to diminish. While proximity to stakeholders is necessary, it also brings increased dependencies and bureaucratic obstacles.

CULTURE OF EMBRACING MISTAKES – CHALLENGES AND LEARNINGS

Challenges:

- **Lack of internal networking:** The existing host support team was involved too late in the development process
- Communication style too abstract: Initial texts and content were too complex or "too technical", especially due to English jargon

Learnings:

- Strengthen target group orientation: Messaging was simplified, and texts were revised to better match users' actual needs
- Make better use of existing structures: Existing resources and departments will be involved earlier in future to avoid duplication of work

Concrete responses:

- The platform was revised multiple times – including the integration of a local AI assistant ('PIVO') to support implementation
- User feedback was systematically collected and incorporated into iterative improvements
- New content and formats were developed to suit specific user groups (e.g. more self-learning formats and low-threshold entry points)

Success and Scalability

Despite some initial hurdles, PIZ VHOTEL has been a success. Already, 150 hosts have registered – 50 more than initially expected. Even in the absence of legal requirements, the platform is proving to be a valuable orientation tool for businesses looking to explore sustainability. The system is technically ready for expansion into other regions, and there is already interest from destinations across Vorarlberg.

Innovation and Future Outlook

The platform is designed as a modular system. In future, content packages, newsletters and gamification elements are set to be added. In the long

term, PIZ VHOTEL could serve as an intranet for destination management organisations, offering tools that extend beyond sustainability – including internal communication functions, training modules and automated analytics.

Conclusion

PIZ VHOTEL demonstrates how a blend of digital tools, a culture of innovation and strategic sustainability can help reimagine tourism.

The platform is more than a tool – it symbolises a shift from passive certification to active, ongoing development. For other regions, it offers a tried-and-tested blueprint for systematically fostering a culture of sustainable hospitality.



© PIZ Montafon

RegioMarktplatz – Sustainability and Innovation in Tourism

RegioMarktplatz is a flagship project offering innovative and sustainable solutions for tourism. The core idea is to connect regional producers with guests and provide them with a simple, direct way to discover and enjoy local products. At the heart of this concept is the host, who collaborates with RegioMarktplatz to deliver this unique service to guests.

The initiative was born out of a desire to strengthen local value creation and offer guests a relaxed and convenient start to their holidays. The project was founded by Konstantin Kühn, a tourism expert with over 20 years of experience in hospitality and a clear vision for sustainable tourism development.



© RegioMarktplatz GmbH

Project Description and Sustainability

The goal of RegioMarktplatz is to make regional products more accessible to guests while simultaneously supporting the local economy. Guests can order products from the region online either before their arrival or during their stay, and have them delivered directly to their accommodation. Sustainability is a core principle: by supporting local supply chains and small-scale producers, the project not only reduces environmental impact but also promotes social cohesion in the region.

Challenges and Culture of Embracing Mistakes

The greatest challenge was the technical development of the platform, which was significantly delayed due to the insolvency of a development partner. Onboarding regional producers also proved difficult, as many lacked the resources for marketing and logistics. The project team learned from this experience and began providing more support to producers – taking over tasks such as product management and logistics.

CULTURE OF EMBRACING MISTAKES – CHALLENGES AND LEARNINGS

Main Challenges:

- Technical issues caused by unexpected partner failures
- Time-intensive onboarding of regional producers
- Logistics solutions had to be developed entirely from scratch

Success and Scalability

Although still in the pilot phase, RegioMarktplatz has already reached important milestones. The platform is on the verge of launching, and initial partnerships have been established with regional tourism organisations. The concept is transferable to other regions, though it requires close collaboration with local stakeholders and sufficient resources for logistics and marketing.

Innovation and Future Outlook

The project team plans to expand the product range and launch a central dashboard for producers and hosts. In the long term, RegioMarktplatz aims to scale the model to additional regions and secure new cooperation partners. The focus remains firmly on strengthening sustainable value creation at the regional level.

Conclusion

RegioMarktplatz demonstrates how innovation and sustainability can go hand in hand. Guided by Konstantin Kühn's vision of making tourism more regional and environmentally conscious, the project sets new standards and serves as a source of inspiration for others in the tourism sector.

Henriette Stadthotel – How Purpose, Structure and Courage Transformed a Hotel

RETHINKING FROM WITHIN

Henriette Stadthotel in Vienna stands for uncompromising sustainability – socially, environmentally and economically. What began as a modest family-run hotel has evolved under the leadership of the second generation into a flagship example of forward-thinking urban hospitality. This transformation didn't happen with a big bang, but through steady commitment, courage to change, and a deeply rooted value system.



Project Description and Sustainability

The journey began when Georg and Verena Pastuszyn, together with their team, took over the hotel and made a conscious decision to pursue structured development. The turning point came with the Common Good Economy framework – a tool that revealed both the progress already made and the untapped potential. Since then, Henriette has followed a clear path: honest, bold, and transparent.

Their measures range from green electricity and heat pumps to natural bedding and regionally sourced organic breakfast products. But sustainability here is not only about environmental impact – it's also social, with a strong emphasis on valuing employees and cultivating a resilient team culture.

Challenges and Culture of Embracing Mistakes

Change brought friction – both internally and externally. In particular, the introduction of chemical-free cleaning systems, the switch to natural textiles, and the establishment of new communication structures within the team required considerable persuasion and perseverance.

Success and Scalability

Today, Henriette succeeds not only through what it does but how it does it. Guests come specifically because of its values-driven approach, and the team remains strong and motivated. The hotel was awarded the 2024 Trigos Award for its 'Mission Micro-plastics & Water Protection' – recognition for a holistic commitment to sustainability, seamlessly integrated into every part of the business. The model is scalable – but not by imitation. It must be evolved through conviction, not copied.

CULTURE OF EMBRACING MISTAKES – CHALLENGES AND LEARNINGS

Challenge: Driving change with the existing team

Solution: Clear definition of roles, consistent communication, and long-term cultural development

Challenge: Transition to alternative cleaning methods

Solution: Patience, staff training, and targeted recruitment for sensitive positions

Innovation and Future Outlook

The next bold move: a renovation inspired by circular design – ‘Inspired by Cradle to Cradle’. In early 2025, Henriette unveiled new rooms built with materials from closed-loop systems. On the ground floor, the addition of ‘Der schöne Ernst’, a new restaurant, reinforces its connection to the neighbourhood – creating encounters instead of boundaries.

Conclusion

Henriette Stadthotel proves that sustainability is more than a checklist – it is a mindset. One that involves depth, contradictions, and ongoing work. But also pride, impact and vision. It is a lighthouse project that shines thanks to its people, not just its technology.

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Regional Food – by and for the Schladming-Dachstein Region

The project ‘Regional Food – by and for the Schladming-Dachstein Region’ was launched in 2020, a time when the Covid-19-pandemic was reshaping daily life. The idea emerged from the observation that many farms were increasingly marketing their products directly. This opened up the opportunity to better connect regional agriculture with the hospitality sector. The goal was to increase the use of regional food in hotels and restaurants, while simultaneously strengthening local value creation.



**CULTURE OF EMBRACING MISTAKES –
CHALLENGES AND LEARNINGS**

Mistake: Difficulties in gaining acceptance for certification and scepticism toward control systems

Solution: Intensive awareness-raising and involvement of local points of contact

Project Description and Sustainability

The primary aim of the project was to create stronger links between local direct marketers and hospitality businesses, in order to boost the regional economy. As part of this, 'Genuss establishments' were certified, committing to the use of regional products.

A key challenge was to build a platform that enabled easy collaboration between producers and restaurants.

The project implemented several important sustainability measures:

- Certification of participating businesses via the 'Netzwerk Kulinarik', ensuring quality and origin standards.
- Promotion of regional products to shorten transport distances and reduce environmental impact.
- Encouraging hospitality businesses to use seasonal and local ingredients – for instance, fresh eggs instead of packaged liquid eggs.

Challenges and Culture of Embracing Mistakes

One of the greatest challenges was communication with the businesses, particularly with direct marketers. The bureaucratic effort initially met with scepticism from some businesses. In addition, there were reservations about the AMA control system, which is used to ensure quality and carried a negative connotation for some farmers.

A key learning was the importance of open communication with businesses and clearly conveying the benefits of participation. It became evident that companies were more willing to take part when they were approached directly by trusted actors from the region.

Success and Scalability

The project has delivered tangible results. To date, 20 direct marketers, 43 hospitality and accommodation businesses, and 4 artisanal producers have been certified. Collaboration with the 'Netzwerk Kulinarik' has reinforced product quality and provenance, leading to broader acceptance in the region.

The model has proven scalable and can be replicated in other regions. Key to this is close collaboration between tourism associations, farms, and regional partners, to build trust and manage coordination effectively.

Innovation and Future Outlook

Looking ahead, the project plans to expand its network of participating businesses. Although the

current LEADER funding period ends in 2023, the initiative is set to continue and grow. Particular attention will be given to integrating new producers and deepening the relationship between agriculture and gastronomy. The use of digital platforms to facilitate networking and coordination will also be enhanced.

Conclusion

The project 'Regional Food – by and for the Schladming-Dachstein Region' has demonstrated how a locally grounded initiative can be successfully implemented. Through close collaboration between producers, the hospitality industry, and the tourism sector, the region has strengthened its local economy and contributed meaningfully to environmental sustainability. It offers a strong model for other regions with similar goals.



© Netzwerk Kulinarik wildbild.at

RETTER Bio-Natur Resort

SUSTAINABILITY IN ITS DNA

The **RETTER BIO-Natur Resort** is located in the heart of the Styrian Pöllauer Valley Nature Park – surrounded by organic farmland and evolved from a small country inn into one of Austria's most innovative organic hotels over the past 40 years. Hermann Retter took over the family business under challenging circumstances and, together with his wife Ulli Retter, transformed it into a multi-award-winning seminar and wellness resort offering 100 % organic catering. Today, the hotel is a pioneer in sustainability, certified organic quality, and regional circular economy – setting benchmarks for the hospitality sector both in Austria and beyond.



Project Description and Sustainability

Since 2004, the entire hotel operation has been run on a fully organic basis – a consistent and forward-looking decision that followed the conversion of the surrounding farmland to organic agriculture back in 1992. The resort relies on natural building materials such as wood, clay and stone, operates its own biomass heating plant, and collects rainwater in underground cisterns for reuse. To ensure a secure supply of certified organic products, it established its own organic estate, the 'BioGut', which includes an on-site bakery. Particularly noteworthy is the comprehensive level of certification achieved: the RETTER BIO-Natur Resort holds the Austrian Ecolabel and the Green Globe Standard – awarded threefold, covering the hotel, its agricultural operations and its in-house production facilities.

Challenges and Culture of Embracing Mistakes

The greatest challenges arose from the complete transition to organic in 2004 – a decision that entailed significant investment costs and deeply transformed operations in the kitchen, procurement, and guest communication. "Back then, my tax advisor said: It would be cheaper to buy a Ferrari every year", recalls Hermann Retter. Despite the lack of supply chains and high material costs, the transition was carried through – driven by personal conviction and a long-term strategy.

CULTURE OF EMBRACING MISTAKES – CHALLENGES AND LEARNINGS

Challenge: High costs and lack of organic supply chains during the 2004 transition

Mistake: Insufficient focus on systematic in-house production at the outset

Lesson: Build your own value chains and involve partners on a long-term basis

Solution: Establishment of an in-house organic farm, including a bakery and cultivation areas

Success and Scalability

Today, the resort employs around 130 people, including 20 apprentices. It offers 116 rooms, 20 seminar rooms, and an award-winning 1,500 m² wellness area. The combination of seminar hotel and wellness destination has proven forward-thinking: guest numbers have grown steadily even through crisis periods. By operating its own fleet of electric vehicles, providing a pick-up service from the nearest railway station, and investing in sustainable mobility infrastructure – including 40 EV charging points – the resort serves as a beacon in the region, generating a positive pull effect on other stakeholders.

Innovation and Future Outlook

With the foundation of its in-house BioGut, the expansion of the 'Bio-Organic-SPA', and the integration of digital tools for staff, the resort continues to break new ground. Its long-term vision includes full organic certification for the entire nature park. A generational handover is also in progress – with fresh ideas building on deeply rooted values.

Conclusion

The RETTER BIO-Natur Resort is a powerful example of how deeply embedded sustainability, a spirit of innovation, and strong family leadership can merge into a future-ready tourism model. As a pioneer with regional roots, forward-thinking vision and a reflective learning culture, it offers an inspiring blueprint for the wider hospitality industry.



© RETTER Bio-Natur Resort

Rote Wand Friends and Fools – How a Gourmet Hotel Became a Think Tank for Sustainable Culinary Culture

Born out of crisis, matured into a vision: the ‘Friends and Fools’ project by the **Rote Wand in Lech-Zug** stands as a prime example of a new generation of tourism initiatives. What initially emerged as a response to pandemic-related uncertainty has since evolved into a flagship project for sustainable culinary arts, regional value creation, and experimental gastronomy.



Project Description and Sustainability

The origins of Friends and Fools date back to 2020. In the midst of the Covid-19-crisis, the Walch family, who run the hotel, developed a vision together with their children that transcended the boundaries of conventional hotel operations. What emerged was a platform that reimagines the connections between agriculture, gastronomy, research, and community.

Specifically, Friends and Fools comprises a wide range of regular events: masterclasses featuring experts in areas such as culinary arts, scent composition, fermentation, and wild food processing convey knowledge at the highest level. The in-house lounge functions as a space for encounter – a long communal table for 24 people brings together individuals from a diverse range of backgrounds to enjoy excellent food, stimulating conversations, and the building of new networks. Beyond that, the platform acts as a forum

for discourse that extends beyond culinary themes – from culture to craftsmanship to science.

Sustainability is deeply embedded in every structure: the hotel relies on its own hunting grounds, grows vegetables at an altitude of 1,500 metres, operates its own culinary lab for flavour research, and has converted paved surfaces into edible gardens. Even the architecture has undergone radical transformation: 98 underground parking spaces were created, freeing up the surface for green spaces.

Challenges and Culture of Embracing Mistakes

The strategic transformation posed significant challenges for the team. The loss of some long-standing guests was noticeable – not everyone was able to relate to the new concept. Formats such as the Chef's Table and the Friends and Fools Lounge required intensive communication efforts to be properly understood.

CULTURE OF EMBRACING MISTAKES – CHALLENGES AND LEARNINGS

Challenge: Loss of familiar guest structures due to clear repositioning

Lesson: Staying true to your own vision ultimately strengthens authenticity and helps build connections with new target groups

Challenge: In some cases, there was limited understanding among the local population.

Lesson: Patience and consistent communication help to break down barriers.

Success and Scalability

Today, Friends and Fools is a platform that excites international chefs, regional producers, and guests alike. Formats such as fermentation workshops, field kitchen events, or culinary masterclasses create opportunities for participation, exchange, and direct engagement with sustainable food cycles.

Scalability is indeed possible, but it requires structural resources, the courage to innovate, and a robust regional network. Particularly noteworthy: the platform serves as a hybrid stage – not only for culinary excellence but also for cultural reflection.

Innovation and Future Outlook

The next steps have already been outlined: an in-house agricultural operation with goats, sheep, and dairy processing is planned to close the sustainability loop.

At the same time, the concept will be expanded to include craftsmanship and the arts – creating a holiday experience that is as sensuous as it is intellectually stimulating.

New forms of involvement are also being considered: Rote Wand is looking for individuals who wish to engage not only on an idealistic level but also financially. Corresponding participation models have been in place since the beginning – a crucial step towards a genuine community-based project.

Conclusion

Friends and Fools represents a new mindset in tourism: moving away from standardised offerings towards depth, authenticity, and transformation. It demonstrates that hospitality and innovation are not contradictory – rather, they form the foundation for sustainable future models in alpine regions.



© Rote Wand Gourmet Hotel | Ingo Petramer



Travel is all about human encounters – beautifully exemplified at the Rote Wand, where guests gather around a shared table for 24.



‘Be Tactful’ – Conscious Tourism at Lake Achensee

The ‘Be Tactful’ project by **Achensee Tourism** was launched with the aim of promoting sustainable and respectful interaction with nature. The initiative was born from the observation that traditional tourism communication often fails to adequately reflect the challenges of interacting with natural environments and the resulting conflicts. The goal is to raise awareness among tourists in a playful way – without wagging a disapproving finger.



© Achensee Tourismus

Project Description and Sustainability

The primary objective of ‘Be Tactful’ is to encourage visitors to treat nature with respect. The project relies on digital communication measures across social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram. Rather than implementing a singular innovation, the initiative consistently built up a campaign to raise awareness. A comprehensive set of graphic content was developed to inform tourists about topics such as avoiding litter, respectful behaviour on hiking trails, and the protection of local flora and fauna. The project is supported by humorous cartoons and short videos, shared in various campaign cycles across social networks.

One of the most sustainable measures is the complete renunciation of printed materials. All content is distributed digitally and integrated into existing channels such as hiking guides or the Achensee Tourism website. This not only saves paper but also reaches a broader, digitally savvy audience.

Challenges and Culture of Embracing Mistakes

A central theme of the project was dealing with technical difficulties. For example, it became apparent that some of the originally planned social media formats, such as the 'Insta Guide', were suddenly no longer supported by the platforms. These unforeseen developments forced the project team to rethink and adapt their strategies multiple times. Despite these setbacks, the team remained committed – highlighting the importance of flexibility in digital communication.

Another example was the initially disappointing reach of some content. It became clear that certain topics, such as the management of mountain bike trails, received unexpectedly high engagement, while others attracted little interest. From this, the team learned to place greater focus on controversial or particularly relevant issues and to actively discuss them with the community.

Success and Scalability

Despite early challenges, 'Be Tactful' achieved significant success in several areas. One video, addressing the leash requirement and how to deal with dog waste, garnered over 400,000 impressions. This illustrates that even in niche areas of tourism, large target groups can be effectively engaged if the message is clearly and appealingly packaged.

The project holds strong potential for transferability to other regions facing similar challenges. However, it requires the inclusion of local stakeholders – from municipalities and tourism providers to conservation organisations. At Lake Achensee, for example, new paragliding launch and landing sites were established and rules for behaviour in the nature park were developed in collaboration with the local community.

Innovation and Future Outlook

The project team plans to expand the successful video strategy and develop new content for both winter and summer seasons. Additionally, 'Be Tactful' is set to be rolled out more intensively on other social media platforms such as TikTok in order to reach younger audiences.

The long-term goal is to establish 'Be Tactful' as a permanent fixture in Achensee Tourism's communications, continuing to rely on collaboration with influencers and digital media.

Conclusion

'Be Tactful' is an outstanding example of how tourism and nature conservation can go hand in hand. By using digital media, tourists are sensitised to important environmental issues in a playful and humorous manner. The combination of flexibility, a spirit of innovation, and a strong focus on sustainability makes the project a role model for tourism in other regions.



Inclusion with Impact – How a Hotel Embeds Social Sustainability in Tourism

In the **Upper Austrian village of Wesenufer**, a unique hotel demonstrates how inclusion and sustainability can go hand in hand in the tourism sector. People with psychological and psychosocial impairments not only find career prospects here but also a respectful working environment. The establishment sees itself as a socio-economic enterprise that combines social participation, economic stability, and ecological responsibility – and in doing so, has gained recognition beyond the region.



Project Description and Sustainability

The hotel pursues a holistic sustainability approach based on the three well-known pillars: social, ecological, and economic. At its core is the integration – or rather, the inclusion – of people with psychological and psychosocial impairments into the regular hotel operations. Around 45 to 50 such individuals currently work in the kitchen, service, reception, facility management, housekeeping, and convenience shop – the project began in 2008 with 15 people. The business is certified with the Austrian Ecolabel and the EU Ecolabel and takes part in initiatives like 'United Against Waste'. Local supply chains and a clear positioning as a socially sustainable host shape the hotel's identity, just as much as the consistent commitment to quality standards in tourism.

Challenges and Culture of Embracing Mistakes

At the beginning of the project, the greatest hurdle was gaining acceptance among the local community, commissioning parties, and guests. Prejudices surrounding mental health made intensive awareness-raising efforts necessary. Through numerous conversations with local residents and guests, the team clarified what the project was truly about: not special treatment, but equal participation. This dialogue proved essential, as many commissioning clients now consciously choose the establishment – precisely because of its social commitment.

Internally, it soon became apparent that both managers and staff required a dual set of skills: in addition to professional qualifications in hotel operations, social competence – including knowledge and attitude toward mental health – is indispensable.

This led to the key realisation that regular training for all employees is essential for long-term success.

Success and Scalability

The hotel's development is a measurable success: since the project began, the number of inclusive jobs, training and employment opportunities has more than tripled. The targeted placement rate into the mainstream labour market has been exceeded several times in recent years. The hotel has received multiple awards and is regarded as a flagship model in the industry. At the same time, it is evident that this model could be transferred to other regions – provided there is a similarly consistent investment in relationship-building and public communication as in the Upper Austrian example. Acceptance does not arise overnight, but through continuous, transparent dialogue.

Innovation and Future Outlook

The aim is to further expand training opportunities. Young people with impairments will have the chance to complete full vocational training – with ongoing support. Alongside this, the hotel continuously enhances its quality management to meet future challenges in the tourism sector. The overarching goal remains: to provide a working environment that is both socially impactful and economically viable.

Conclusion

The inclusion hotel in Wesenufer is more than just a hotel – it is a place of opportunity. The combination of social responsibility, economic success and ecological awareness makes the project a true beacon within Austria's tourism landscape. It impressively demonstrates that inclusion not only works, but also has the potential to enrich entire regions.

Slow Food Carinthia – Sustainable Indulgence as a Tourism Model

CULINARY HERITAGE AS CULTURAL IDENTITY IN THE ALPINE-ADRIATIC REGION

What began as a regional initiative has developed into an international best-practice model: **Slow Food Carinthia** combines small-scale agriculture, regional food culture, and sustainable tourism. Launched in 2015, the project powerfully demonstrates how food, tourism, and education can be interconnected and implemented – with global appeal.



© Slow Food Kärnten | Michael Stabentheiner

Project Description and Sustainability

The project stemmed from the observation that Carinthia does not produce large volumes, but is home to many small, quality-conscious producers as well as a fragmented gastronomy and tourism infrastructure. From this, the idea emerged to translate the philosophy of Slow Food – good, clean, fair food – into a tourism concept.

The result is a comprehensive ecosystem of over 100 partner businesses and around 300 bookable experiences, where producers, hosts, educators, and communities work closely together. Slow Food Carinthia sees itself not merely as a travel product but as a movement for preserving and evolving food culture – from schools to fine dining.

Key sustainability measures include:

- Promotion of traditional production methods (e.g. Jauntaler Hadn buckwheat, dried pears, Krainer Steinschaf sheep)
- Integration of educational institutions from kindergarten to vocational school
- Development of regional value chains in culinary arts and food culture
- Awareness-raising through hands-on experiences such as bread baking or cheese making

Challenges and Culture of Embracing Mistakes

The greatest challenge was bringing all relevant stakeholders – from farmers and restaurateurs to public authorities – to the table and securing their long-term commitment. Quality assurance also proved to be a sensitive issue, requiring a great deal of tact and care.

Success and Scalability

Slow Food Carinthia has become an export success: international study tours, for example from Saudi Arabia and Southeast Europe, travel to Carinthia to learn from the region. The World Tourism Organization even invited the team to Andorra to present the model.

Tangible achievements include:

- 3 Slow Food Travel regions
- 12 Slow Food Villages
- over 3,000 active network members
- numerous study visits and international requests

While the model is transferable, it depends on strong local structures, well-connected stakeholders, and a tourism strategy that places culinary culture at the heart of travel experiences.

CULTURE OF EMBRACING MISTAKES – CHALLENGES AND LEARNINGS

Hurdle: Diverging understandings of quality among producers

Solution: Reliance on existing quality assurance systems such as Genussland Kärnten or Slow Food criteria, combined with investment in training formats

Mistake: Expanding too quickly would have made communication more difficult

Solution: Focused expansion within three clearly defined Slow Food regions
Learning: Enthusiasm alone is not enough – financing, structure, and perseverance are essential

Innovation and Future Outlook

The project is set to expand internationally. Plans include offering experiences in English and combining culinary trips with hiking and cycling. Work is also underway on 'edible villages' – a concept that brings together local supply, home-growing, and quality of life. A core element remains the Slow Food Guide, which highlights exemplary businesses in Carinthia and serves as a seal of quality.

Conclusion

Slow Food Carinthia exemplifies how sustainability in gastronomy can have ecological, cultural, and economic impact. As a bridge between agriculture, tourism, and education, the project sets new standards – rooted in the region, and internationally recognised.



Culinary Models for the Future in the Ötztal

HOW TWO PROJECTS PROMOTE REGIONALITY, SUSTAINABILITY, AND YOUNG TALENT

In the Ötztal valley, two remarkable initiatives have emerged that combine culinary enjoyment with sustainable development and support for young talent: the ‘**Genussplatzln**’ and the competition ‘**Sölden Seeks the Gastro Super Talent**’. While the Genussplatzln provides a platform for regional businesses, the Supertalent format specifically promotes young professionals in the fields of gastronomy and tourism.



Project Description and Sustainability

The Genussplatzln project focuses on close collaboration with local producers. Dishes are based on seasonal and regional products, prepared with attention to resource conservation and authenticity.

The Gastro Super Talent, on the other hand, interprets sustainability in terms of long-term talent development and regional grounding: young talents present their skills in the kitchen, service, and marketing - embedded in a professional, hands-on event.

Challenges and Culture of Embracing Mistakes

Both the introduction of the Genussplatzln and the organisation of the Supertalent competition required flexibility and a willingness to learn. While the focus for the Genussplatzln was on developing a criteria catalogue that respected the diversity of participating businesses, the Sölden team had to deal with unpredictable weather and tight schedules – for example, during a challenge at 3,000 metres altitude that was nearly cancelled due to a storm.

CULTURE OF EMBRACING MISTAKES – CHALLENGES AND LEARNINGS

Genussplatzln

Challenge: Varying business sizes and differing expectations

Solution: A credible set of criteria developed through group dynamics and regular evaluation

CULTURE OF EMBRACING MISTAKES – CHALLENGES AND LEARNINGS

Gastro-Supertalent

Challenge: Time pressure and logistical constraints in an extreme location

Solution: Tight feedback loops with participants and ongoing optimisation

Both projects demonstrate that failure is part of the learning process – and that the willingness to improve is crucial to success.

Success and Scalability

The Genussplatzln have become well-established in the Ötztal and enjoy widespread popularity among both guests and locals. The Gastro Super Talent has impressed with its international participation: eight schools from five nations joined the inaugural event. Media attention, professional exchange, and the integration of regional businesses make both formats transferable best practices – provided that regional conditions and partners are carefully considered.

Innovation and Future Outlook

The Genussplatzln project aims to expand cautiously with a focus on quality - potentially into other valleys. For the Gastro Super Talent, greater internationalisation is being considered. New challenges and additional partners are expected to enhance the programme's appeal.

Conclusion

With these two projects, the Ötztal demonstrates how sustainability, quality, and talent development can be effectively integrated into tourism. The Genussplatzln emphasise regional authenticity, while the Gastro Super Talent promotes creative support for emerging professionals. Both projects act as trailblazers for the industry – rooted in the local context yet radiating beyond regional borders.



Pfesch Private Brewery – Beer Culture as Experience and Message

REGIONAL FLAGSHIP ACHIEVED THROUGH PASSION

What began as a stress-relieving hobby evolved into a lived vision: **Pfesch Private Brewery**, located in Upper Austria's Innviertel region, stands for artisanal brewing, regional cycles, and a strong tourism experience. With a spirit of innovation, handshake integrity, and family dedication, the business has developed into a showcase for enjoyment and sustainability.



Project Description and Sustainability

Brewing began at Pfsch in 2011 – first in a small kettle, today with a capacity of up to 250 hectolitres per year. The philosophy: small-scale, honest, regional. Around 80 % of the beers are sold directly on-site - mostly to visitors who book seminars, tours, or brewing workshops. A special highlight: custom-designed beers and labels for weddings or corporate events.

Sustainability is also evident in sourcing: hops are grown in the brewery's own garden, malt comes from Grieskirchen, and cheese and meat are sourced from nearby farms. The focus is not on organic certification but on regional value creation and transparency.

Challenges and Culture of Embracing Mistakes

The greatest challenge was the gradual development from a hobby brewery into an experience-driven brand. Financial hurdles, investment decisions, and uncertainties around the visitor experience accompanied the process – along with the ambition to maintain a family-run structure throughout.

CULTURE OF EMBRACING MISTAKES – CHALLENGES AND LEARNINGS

Challenge: Ensuring economic viability in a rural setting

Solution: Development of additional offerings such as seminars, guided tours, picnics, and corporate events

Challenge: Making investments without clear future forecasts

Solution: Gradual expansion focused on in-house contributions and adapting to demand

Success and Scalability

The brewery became part of the 'Innviertel Beer Region' (Bierregion Innviertel) and is now a popular destination: brewing seminars, guided tours, and picnic experiences for groups of up to 16 people are in high demand – attracting guests from across Austria and beyond.

The business offers customisation over mass production, striking a chord with a more conscious target group.

An expansion towards 'farm holidays' with an on-site pub is in planning – another step toward greater visibility in tourism.

Innovation and Future Outlook

The aim is to expand tourism offerings and deepen regional integration. Potential collaborations include culinary initiatives like 'Wie's Innviertel schmeckt' or the 'Innviertler Genussbox' project. Shipping logistics – including to Vienna and Germany – are also being further developed.

Conclusion

Pfsch Private Brewery stands for courage, regional identity, and lived values. It powerfully illustrates how a family business with creativity, a sense of community, and a sustainable approach can become a role model for tourism and the regional economy.

Hi5-Hotel Seiersberg – A Vision for Sustainability

The ‘Zero Emissions Hotel’ project by Gerald and Ulrike Essl-Silberschneider is a powerful demonstration of how innovative energy concepts can sustainably revolutionise the hospitality and gastronomy sectors. In collaboration with local specialist companies, they developed a unique system that operates almost entirely emission-free and is a trailblazer for the industry.



© Hi5-Hotel Seiersberg

Project Description and Sustainability

The project originated with the expansion of a commercial kitchen, which quickly evolved into a comprehensive energy concept. At its core lies the 'Hi5 Energy/Climate Control System,' which integrates heat exchangers, hot and cold water storage, photovoltaics, and two combined heat and power units. This system uses heat efficiently to also produce cooling - an innovation that significantly reduces energy consumption.

A particularly noteworthy achievement is the saving of 130 tonnes of CO₂ annually by utilising waste heat for air conditioning. This sets a new benchmark in sustainable building technology.

Challenges and Culture of Embracing Mistakes

During implementation, the project encountered unexpected obstacles. Public authorities, in particular, were not prepared for such an innovative and large-scale undertaking. These challenges required perseverance and a clear vision.

Success and Scalability

The greatest success is the creation of an almost emission-free operation. This flagship project not only minimised energy consumption but also contributed significantly to climate protection. The integration of modern technology makes the concept scalable and adaptable for other regions with suitable infrastructure.

Innovation and Future Outlook

The 'Hi5 Energy/Climate Control System' will continue to be refined, particularly through new technologies and ongoing research. The aim is to further improve energy efficiency and extend the system's application to different types of buildings.

Conclusion

The 'Zero Emissions Hotel' is a prime example of sustainable innovation in the tourism industry. It illustrates how bold visions and technological expertise can shape the future. This project is not just a role model but also an inspiration for sustainable business practices in hospitality.

CULTURE OF EMBRACING MISTAKES – CHALLENGES AND LEARNINGS

Challenge: Gaining acceptance and support from public authorities

Solution: Intensive coordination and transparency to move the project forward

Lesson learned: Innovative projects often face resistance that can only be overcome with patience and persuasive commitment

Tempel 74 – Sustainability and Innovation in Building Culture

The ‘Tempel 74’ project in Mellau, Vorarlberg, is a prime example of sustainable building culture and gentle tourism. Evi and Jürgen Haller, together with friends and neighbours, realised their vision of high-end residential culture in a cooperative tradition. It combines the traditional values of the Bregenzerwald with modern design and sustainable concepts. Through the use of local resources and innovative energy solutions, Tempel 74 sets new standards in architecture and tourism.



Project Description and Sustainability

Tempel 74 originated from a vision to unite the cultural heritage and building traditions of the Bregenzerwald with modern, sustainable construction principles. At the same time, it aimed to contribute to regional value creation and promote gentle tourism. An old farmhouse that could no longer be renovated was replaced by two interconnected buildings: House A, a faithful reconstruction, and House B, a modern structure that interprets tradition freely. The use of local materials such as wood and sand from the Bregenzerach, along with renewable energies like solar thermal systems and biomass heating, lies at the heart of the project.

Sustainability is embedded in all aspects:

- Ecological: Efficient insulation, thermally optimised structures, and pollutant-free materials reduce the ecological footprint.
- Economic: Collaboration with local craftspeople strengthens regional value creation.
- Social: Architectural tours raise guest awareness for sustainable building practices and promote cultural exchange.

Challenges and Culture of Embracing Mistakes

The greatest challenge was aligning cultural identity with sustainable innovation to create a forward-looking construction project that remained deeply rooted in the traditions of the Bregenzerwald.

CULTURE OF EMBRACING MISTAKES – CHALLENGES AND LEARNINGS

The project did not experience any major setbacks. A key reason for this was that Jürgen Haller – as owner, architect, and construction manager – was able to apply his extensive expertise and experience throughout all phases of the project. This triple role allowed for seamless management from concept to completion, ensuring clear communication and efficient decision-making. The collaborative partnership with regional craftspeople also played a crucial role in the project's success.

The reconstruction of House A required meticulous work to preserve historical building methods and traditional aesthetics, while House B had to strike a balance between innovation and heritage. Another major challenge was completing the entire project within just nine months.

Success and Scalability

Tempel 74 received numerous awards, including the Austrian State Prize for Architecture 2021 and the Vorarlberg Timber Construction Prize 2021. These honours underscore the project's cultural, ecological, and economic significance.

The scalability of the concept depends on its adaptation to local contexts. In other regions, the local building culture would need to be thoroughly analysed and respected to ensure an authentic outcome.

Innovation and Future Outlook

Future developments focus on strengthening brand identity and integrating digital services to enhance the guest experience. The emphasis remains on connecting building culture, sustainability, tradition, modern design, and hospitality.

Conclusion

Tempel 74 is a flagship project for sustainable tourism and regional building culture. It demonstrates how tradition and innovation can be harmoniously combined to promote cultural preservation and ecological progress. The project serves as a model for sustainable initiatives in the tourism sector.

Urban Blooms – Greening and Revitalising the Heart of Innsbruck

Urban spaces thrive on change – and on the courage to try new things. With the **Urban Blooms** project, Innsbruck Tourism, in collaboration with architecture firm Snøhetta Studio Innsbruck, has been launching temporary interventions since 2024 to show how design, quality of stay, and social participation can be brought together.

What began as a pop-up design of a construction site in the Kiebachgasse in the Old Town has developed into an experimental urban laboratory: non-commercial zones, greenery, colourful pavement markings, and modular urban furniture invite people to linger, play, and interact - revealing the potential of public space in the heart of Innsbruck.



Project Description and Sustainability

Inspired by Dutch pop-up parks, mobile, green urban furniture was developed together with Snøhetta to make sustainability visible and tangible in urban spaces. Manufactured in Tyrol from locally sourced wood, the Urban Blooms embody a clear commitment to responsible design, regional value creation, and resource-efficient production. Their implementation follows a modular, adaptive principle that is continuously refined – in close cooperation with regional businesses such as the Auer wood manufactory in Innsbruck.

Through this initiative, Innsbruck Tourism underlines its commitment to socially responsible and design-conscious tourism development in public spaces. The urban furniture invites locals and guests alike to pause and enjoy, making clear how tourism innovation can enhance urban living environments - in line with the guiding principle: More quality of life through tourism.

Challenges and Culture of Embracing Mistakes

The greatest challenge lay in the tight timeline: only a few months were available from concept to implementation. Intensive dialogue with municipal institutions and local residents was crucial to secure permits and generate acceptance. Originally planned

partnerships with sheltered workshops had to be replaced by specialised craft businesses to enable faster execution. At the same time, the involvement of volunteers – for instance, in painting the alley – added valuable social benefit.

Another major challenge was demonstrating that the modular urban furniture could function effectively in high-traffic event environments, such as Innsbruck's marketplace. This proof of concept was successfully achieved in 2024: the Urban Blooms adapted flexibly to changing usage scenarios and, through their integrative design, delivered genuine added value for events.

Success and Scalability

Urban Blooms evolved from a temporary intervention into a model project with wide-reaching impact. The flexible modules can be transferred to other urban spaces and open up new opportunities for designing non-commercial, publicly accessible areas. Particularly positive feedback highlighted the involvement of residents and the activating effect of seating and play elements, which have visibly improved the quality of stay in the city.

At the same time, Urban Blooms sees itself as an adaptive, context-sensitive process. As temporary architecture with lasting impact, the project invites participation in shaping living spaces, enhances urban quality of life, and offers new perspectives on tourism in public space. The project demonstrates that sustainable urban design happens where space is created for participation, change, and shared experimentation.

CULTURE OF EMBRACING MISTAKES – CHALLENGES AND LEARNINGS

Time pressure led to creative, though not always perfect, decisions

Process documentation was recognised as important but remained incomplete in parts

Innovation and Future Outlook

Urban Blooms continues to evolve – from a temporary intervention into a co-creative laboratory for sustainable urban design. The focus is not on expanding with new modules but on intensively activating the existing 17 urban furniture elements. These transform public spaces into open zones of encounter, where everyday life, creative experimentation, and communal experiences blend together.

The key lies in the combination of curated content, participatory engagement, and spontaneous use. This creates vibrant urban areas that don't dominate but invite – free from consumption requirements, with open access for all. Urban Blooms sees itself as a 'third space' – a platform for new forms of collaboration across sectors and institutions.

One example is the integrated rental station by ZUKO: using an app, 12 mobile chairs can be borrowed free of charge and used flexibly throughout the public space.

This way, public space becomes a shared testing ground – and tourism becomes a connector: linking business and culture, guests and locals, design and use. A collaboration that endures.

Conclusion

Urban Blooms stands as a prime example of a forward-thinking form of tourism that is more than guest services: it contributes to urban development, social participation, and the responsible use of public spaces. The initiative shows how innovation, sustainability, and collaboration can intertwine – and how tourism becomes a unifying element that enhances quality of life for everyone. A project that grows – with the city and the people shaping it.

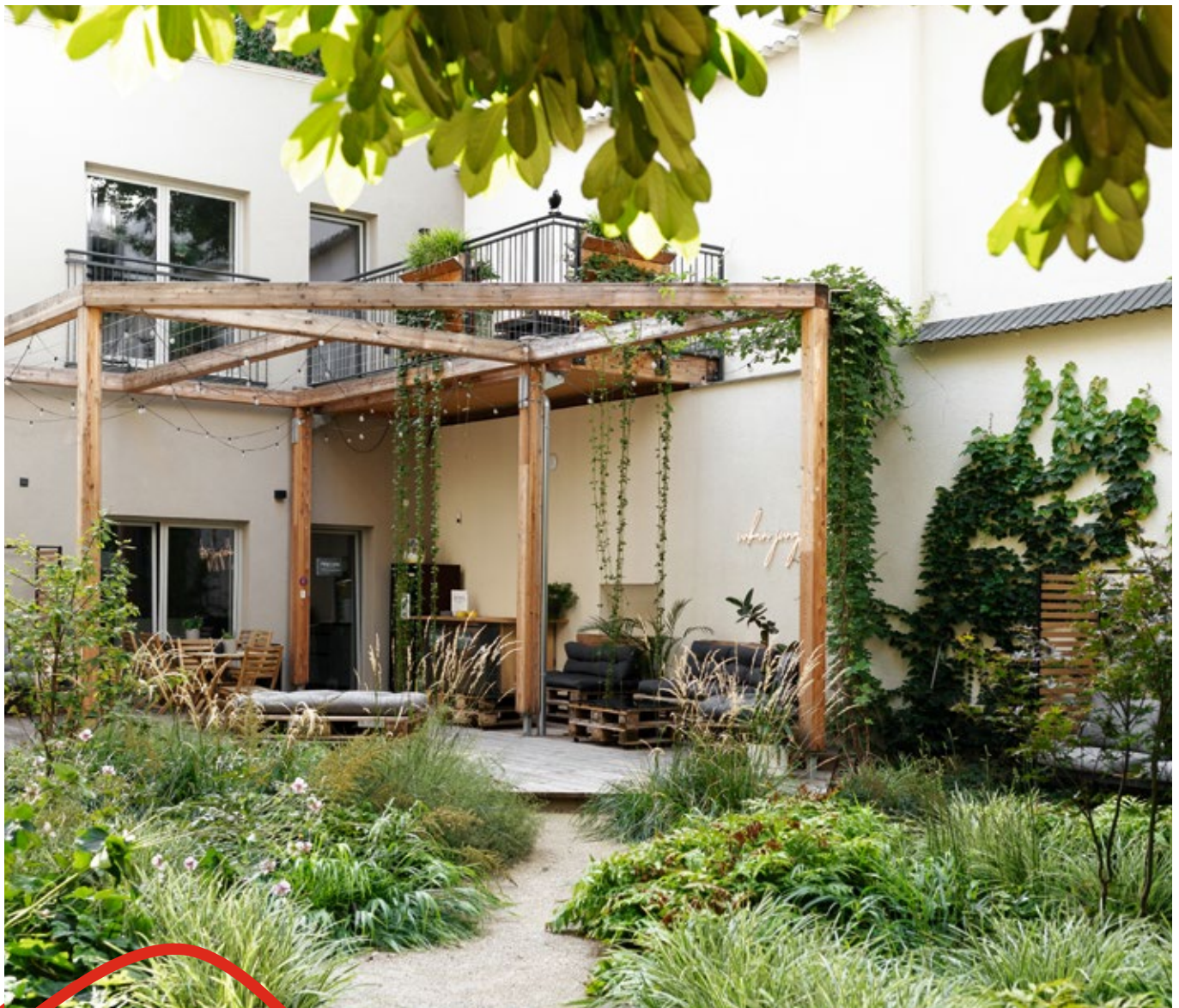


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Urban Jungle Apartments

A SUSTAINABLE TRANSFORMATION OF A TRADITIONAL BUSINESS

The **Urban Jungle Apartments in Vienna** demonstrate how a long-established business can be made future-ready through digitalisation and ecological measures. What was once a hotel with 92 beds has been transformed into a sustainable apartment building with twelve units – contactless, personal, and environmentally friendly.



Project Description and Sustainability

The primary aim was to future-proof this third-generation family business. The complete renovation left only the load-bearing walls intact. A host of sustainable measures were implemented, including a geothermal heating system and the incorporation of native plants throughout both the indoor and outdoor spaces. These plants not only enhance the indoor climate but also create nesting opportunities that support local biodiversity.

This blend of comfort and environmental awareness characterises the property. Guests are immersed in greenery throughout their stay, creating a calming, health-promoting environment that reflects the building's underlying ethos: modern hospitality aligned with ecological responsibility.

Challenges and Culture of Embracing Mistakes

The most significant technical challenge was selecting an environmentally friendly heating system. In Vienna, many options were excluded due to noise restrictions or the absence of a district heating connection. The chosen solution – a geothermal system – required extensive planning and a complex approval process. Collaboration with the older generation also posed challenges, particularly in restoring historic elements such as staircases and parquet floors. These points of friction, however, led to a more thoughtful and intentional integration of tradition and innovation.

CULTURE OF EMBRACING MISTAKES – CHALLENGES AND LEARNINGS

Challenge: Choosing a suitable heating system

Solution: Implementation of a geothermal system following lengthy negotiations and planning approval

Challenge: Handling historical building features

Solution: Balancing preservation and functionality resulted in creative reuse

Success and Scalability

The result is a distinctive urban living experience that is sustainable and digital without sacrificing warmth or personality. From the moment guests enter, they are accompanied by greenery, and the digital amenities – such as contactless check-in – are intentionally complemented by human interactions, ensuring a balance of convenience and hospitality. The concept has great potential for replication in other urban environments, provided there is a commitment to sustainable practice and a willingness to embrace contemporary technological solutions. Its scalability lies in the modularity of its approach and the adaptability of its core principles.

Innovation and Future Outlook

Plans for the future include additional ecological upgrades such as the installation of solar panels, building on the extensive sustainability measures already in place. However, innovation here extends beyond infrastructure. A major focus is on raising awareness among guests – for example, encouraging mindful water usage and participation in eco-friendly routines during their stay.

The philosophy underpinning the Urban Jungle Apartments is that sustainability does not stop at the front door. Instead, it is a living practice, co-created with those who stay there. Guests are not merely observers of a green lifestyle but become active participants in it.

Conclusion

Urban Jungle Apartments stand as a prime example of how economic viability and ecological responsibility can coexist in an urban hospitality setting. The project demonstrates that even with limited space and budget, ambitious outcomes can be achieved – provided there is a clear vision, the courage to embrace change, and a deep-seated commitment to environmental consciousness.

Alpe-Adria-Trail – Hiking Without a Carbon Footprint

MAKING SUSTAINABILITY MEASURABLE

The **Alpe-Adria-Trail** is one of Europe's best-known long-distance hiking routes. In 2023, the pilot project 'Hiking Without a Carbon Footprint' was launched by Kärnten Werbung and Trail Angels to demonstrate how sustainable tourism can not only be communicated but also tangibly implemented and measured.



Project Description and Sustainability

The trail covers 43 stages across Austria, Slovenia, and Italy – and selected segments are now actively marketed as a low-carbon travel experience. The aim is to offer a fully sustainable hiking package through train travel, e-mobility, certified accommodations, and regional cuisine. The key innovation: the carbon footprint is calculated and displayed – and can even be fully offset upon request.

Technically, this is made possible by an interface between the trail booking system and the carbon calculator 'Carmacal'. The result: bookable packages with a personal CO₂ value of just 100–120 kg per week – significantly below the EU target for 2040.

Challenges and Culture of Embracing Mistakes

The project demonstrates that sustainability only works when all factors interact – and when guests are inspired rather than morally lectured.

Success and Scalability

In its first year, 80 guests booked the new offer – a strong start, especially in the German market. Nearly 90 % of travellers also chose to voluntarily offset their carbon emissions. The international appeal of the Alpe-Adria-Trail remains strong, with partners such as National Geographic, DAV Summit Club (German Alpine Association), and ASI relying on the trail booking system.

Plans are underway to expand the offer across Carinthia and to other trails like the Carnic High Route. Interest in Slovenia is also growing.

CULTURE OF EMBRACING MISTAKES – CHALLENGES AND LEARNINGS

Challenge: Behaviour gap between intention and actual booking decisions

Solution: Focus on emotional added value (e.g. certificate for climate-neutral travel) rather than moral appeals

Challenge: Infrastructure for low-emission mobility

Solution: Cooperation with Kärnten Werbung and local providers – e.g. branded e-shuttles

Challenge: Comparability in terms of price-performance

Solution: Offering additional services to differentiate without putting price pressure on sustainability auf Nachhaltigkeit

Innovation and Future Outlook

The goal is to establish the carbon footprint as a standard booking criterion – alongside price and performance. At the same time, projects like 'Rail & Trail', which enables direct hiking access from Carinthian train stations, are being developed. A regional carbon offset initiative with the Alpine Association (mountain forest in the Karawanks) is also in preparation.

Conclusion

The Alpe-Adria-Trail vividly demonstrates how sustainability, digitalisation, and tourism can be combined. 'Hiking Without a Footprint' is more than a slogan – it is a concrete, inspiring offer that sets a benchmark for destinations across Europe.





'Hiking Without a Footprint'
is more than just a slogan on
the Alpe-Adria-Trail.



‘How the Innviertel Tastes’ – Making Regional Identity Visible

A NETWORK FOR GOOD TASTE

What began as a small network in the Schärding district has developed into the largest direct marketing project in Upper Austria’s Innviertel region. Under the name ‘**How the Innviertel Tastes**’, regional producers from small-scale agriculture and artisanal food production have been networking since 2019. In close cooperation with tourism stakeholders and educational institutions, regionality is being made tangible and usable – for both locals and visitors alike.



© Franz Muraier

Project Description and Sustainability

The idea emerged from a gap: while there were hundreds of direct marketers, few people knew where to find their products. The project responded by building a comprehensive network and implementing visibility measures, including the creation of a producer handbook.

The result: 182 direct marketers, more than 3,500 regional products, and a handbook that sold out its 5,000-copy print run in just six weeks. This established a new approach to regionality – low-threshold, accessible, and credible. The project was funded through LEADER resources and supported by educational programmes in schools and partnerships with the tourism sector.

Challenges and Culture of Embracing Mistakes

One of the greatest challenges was the immense effort required for coordination and research. Over 120 in-person business visits and countless revision rounds were needed to create a valid, up-to-date handbook. Added to this were technical and editorial hurdles, such as ongoing data maintenance and communication with producers.

Success and Scalability

In addition to the successful distribution of the print version, the project has gained recognition beyond the region as a best-practice example. Chambers of commerce now use the handbook for advisory purposes. The association is increasingly emerging as a regional brand – with strong recognition and a foundation of trust. A digital booking platform for culinary travel in the Innviertel is under development and aims to further enhance its tourism appeal.

Innovation and Future Outlook

The next major step is to make Innviertel's culinary offerings even more accessible through digital connectivity: an online platform is planned to connect producers with visitors. The focus will be on bookability, customisation, and authenticity – from smart farming to pasta workshops. The platform will support regional value creation and culinary travel experiences.

Conclusion

'How the Innviertel Tastes' vividly demonstrates how regional identity, sustainability, and cooperation can form a strong foundation for the future of rural tourism and food production – from the region, for the region, with an impact that reaches far beyond.

CULTURE OF EMBRACING MISTAKES – CHALLENGES AND LEARNINGS

Challenge: Keeping data current across 182 entries

Solution: Adopt a more pragmatic approach to revision cycles in future – not everything has to be perfect

Challenge: Coordinating a large number of stakeholders

Solution: Short decision-making paths (e.g. through appropriate communication tools and a clear decision-making structure) as a key success factor

Dürrenstein-Lassingtal Wilderness Area – A Model for Sustainable Tourism

The **Dürrenstein-Lassingtal Wilderness Area** stands for the preservation of the last primeval forests in the Alpine region and illustrates how nature conservation and sustainable tourism can be successfully combined. Covering an area of 7,000 hectares, it protects untouched natural landscapes and represents a flagship project for biodiversity and climate protection in Austria. The innovative approach links strict conservation with educational initiatives to raise awareness of the value of wilderness.



Project Description and Sustainability

The wilderness area offers space for natural processes, research, and education. Measures include strict regulations for the protection of the area, guided excursions, and the establishment of the 'House of Wilderness' – a state-of-the-art visitor centre featuring virtual and augmented reality technologies that allow people to experience wilderness digitally. These strategies promote sustainability by reducing direct human impact while engaging a broad audience.

Challenges and Culture of Embracing Mistakes

One of the greatest challenges was gaining acceptance for the strict conservation concept. The accusation that nature was being closed off to people was countered through transparent communication and educational initiatives. Another key focus lies in balancing nature conservation with tourism interests. The lessons learned show that awareness-raising and technical innovations such as augmented reality can help foster understanding and acceptance.

CULTURE OF EMBRACING MISTAKES – CHALLENGES AND LEARNINGS

Challenge: Gaining public acceptance for the strict protection status

Solution: Educational measures and transparent communication

Challenge: Biodiversity crisis and climate change becoming increasingly urgent

Solution: Establishment of Klimapartnerschaft.at, an initiative to implement concrete actions for biodiversity protection, climate mitigation, and ultimately, the safeguarding of human wellbeing

Success and Scalability

Successes include recognition as a UNESCO World Natural Heritage site and the innovative use of digital technology in the House of Wilderness. The project serves as a model for other regions, particularly because of its adaptable conservation and education strategies. It shows how top-tier conservation can be integrated with modern approaches.

Innovation and Future Outlook

Looking forward, the wilderness area plans to expand its protected area and further embed the concept of 'wilderness' in public consciousness. Through the Klimapartnerschaft initiative, companies and individuals are given the opportunity to actively contribute to nature conservation. This vision reinforces the idea of wilderness as a vital resource for both biodiversity and climate protection.

Conclusion

The Dürrenstein-Lassingtal Wilderness Area exemplifies how sustainable conservation and innovative educational methods can work in tandem. It provides a benchmark for managing sensitive natural areas and ensures that wilderness will be preserved for future generations. By combining tradition and innovation, the project sets a course for the sustainable future of tourism.

Facts and Figures

Size of the wilderness area: **7,000 ha**

Establishment: LIFE Project 1997–2002

IUCN Recognition Categories 1a and 1b: since 2003

UNESCO World Natural Heritage designation: 2017

Opening of the House of Wilderness: 2021

Annual visitors to the House of Wilderness: **30,000**

Klimapartnerschaft.at: **150 ha** of forest land already taken out of use

Key Terms on the Topic of Sustainability

Sustainability

Sustainability, or sustainable development, means meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It involves the careful use of resources and environmental protection to ensure that future generations can also enjoy a good quality of life.

Education for Sustainable Development

Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) aims to contribute to a peaceful, inclusive society with freedom, prosperity, and a livable environment for both current and future generations, particularly in light of global resource scarcity and related distribution issues. It encourages critical reflection on one's personal circumstances, social conditions, prevailing ways of thinking, and value judgements, with the aim of fostering individual responsibility and maturity.

Austrian Ecolabel

The Austrian Ecolabel is the country's most important externally audited sustainability certificate. It is awarded to products, services, and destinations that meet strict environmental criteria, including energy efficiency, resource conservation, waste management, and emissions control.

Bio Austria

Bio Austria is a key organisation representing the organic farming sector in Austria. As the leading association for organic agriculture in the country, it unites farmers, producers, and other stakeholders committed to promoting and advancing organic practices. Bio Austria focuses on supporting sustainable farming, preserving biodiversity, and producing high-quality organic products. The organisation plays a crucial role in shaping organic agricultural policy, providing certification standards, and fostering collaboration within the organic community.

Circular Economy

The circular economy is a model of production and consumption that involves sharing, leasing, reusing, repairing, refurbishing, and recycling existing materials and products for as long as possible. This approach extends the life cycle of products.

Interreg Project

An Interreg project is a European funding initiative designed to support cross-border cooperation between regions and countries. The goal is to tackle shared challenges in areas such as the economy, education, research, and the environment while developing innovative solutions.

LEADER

LEADER Austria is part of the European Union's rural development programme, aiming to promote sustainable, community-led initiatives in rural areas. In Austria, LEADER is implemented by Local Action Groups (LAGs) composed of representatives from the public and private sectors as well as civil society. These groups collaborate to identify local development needs, formulate strategies, and implement projects that improve the economic, social, and environmental conditions of rural communities.

CO₂-Äquivalent (CO₂-eq)

The term 'carbon dioxide equivalent' or CO₂ equivalent, often abbreviated as CO₂-eq, is a metric used to evaluate and compare the emissions of different greenhouse gases. This comparison is based on their global warming potential, converting the quantities of various gases into an equivalent amount of carbon dioxide with the same global warming impact.

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Sustainability in Austria

A LOOK AHEAD

In this second publication as well, we embarked on a journey of discovery through Austria's diverse, sustainable tourism landscape. Across 160 pages, we have highlighted the initiatives of various stakeholders who are pioneering sustainability efforts. Our intention was not only to showcase perfection but also to shed light on the challenges encountered along the way. What do the project initiators wish they had known earlier? What solutions were developed in cooperation with a variety of stakeholders? Successful sustainability work in tourism always strives to consider environmental protection, socio-cultural wellbeing, and economic viability equally – and to bring them into harmony.

Thanks to the 48 projects featured on the preceding pages, we have seen how innovation and dedication can pave the way toward responsible tourism. These examples are not only intended to reflect the sustainable side of tourism in Austria, but also to serve as a beacon for the domestic industry. The journey toward sustainability is an ongoing process that demands courage to rethink and act. Every one of us is called upon to be part of this change – through conscious decisions that take into account not only our immediate surroundings but also the global community. Austria's commitment to sustainable tourism is an encouraging example that change is indeed possible.

May this publication serve as a source of inspiration – to see the path toward sustainable tourism as an opportunity, and to motivate continued positive contributions to shaping the future. And, of course, there are many more pioneers of sustainable tourism than we were able to present in the two publications to date. We extend our heartfelt thanks to all of you for your commitment to the future of tourism in Austria.



Sustainability in Austria
Best Practices in Tourism



 Federal Ministry
Economy, Energy
and Tourism
Republic of Austria

