



EXperiential **T**Ourism for sustainable **R**ural development

WP2: Success stories and needs mapping for VET renewal in rural tourism

A2.1: EU collection of success stories and analysis of national trends



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Analysis of the current national status of rural tourism and related VET offers

Desk Research National Report - die Berater

Country: Austria

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1. Does your country have a high level of rural tourism? Is there a variety of rural sectors in your country?

Rural areas hold considerable importance in Austria, with approximately 78 percent of the population residing in regions classified as rural. Nevertheless, Austria's rural landscapes are pivotal not only due to their expansive territory but also for their roles as residential, economic, and recreational hubs.

Rural sectors in Austria encompass a wide range of offerings, from traditional farm stays and agritourism to outdoor adventure activities like hiking, skiing, and mountain biking. Additionally, Austria's rural areas are known for their culinary delights, with many regions offering locally produced foods and wines, further enhancing the rural tourism experience. Austria offers a diverse array of rural sectors that cater to different interests and preferences of tourists. Agritourism is currently one of the most popular sectors in Austria's rural tourism industry. This sector capitalises on the country's rich agricultural heritage and scenic landscapes, offering visitors a blend of agriculture-based activities such as farm stays, wine tastings, and culinary tours. Many agritourism establishments are located in picturesque areas like East Tyrol and the Salzkammergut region, providing a sustainable and immersive experience in the local lifestyle and culture. These farm stays not only connect tourists with traditional Austrian farming practices but also emphasise ecological sustainability and the preservation of rural heritage (Farm Stay Planet, 2024). Each of Austria's regions offers a distinct blend of outdoor adventures, cultural heritage, and culinary delights, providing visitors with a diverse array of experiences to enjoy during their rural tourism adventures.

General Tourism in Austria

Over the past decades, Austria has emerged as one of the world's leading tourism destinations, despite its small size and population. Renowned for its Alps, picturesque rivers and lakes, charming cities, rich history, and vibrant culture, Austria offers a diverse range of attractions to visitors.

In terms of economic impact, tourism contributes significantly to Austria's GDP, with added value totalling 30.3 billion euros in 2019. However, the COVID-19 pandemic led to a decline in tourism-related employment rates in 2020 and 2021. Austria boasts an impressive natural landscape, with 695 mountain peaks higher than 3,000 meters, six national parks, and 48 nature parks. The extensive network of hiking and cycling trails spanning over 64,000 kilometers offers opportunities for both active and relaxing outdoor holidays. The country is also rich in cultural heritage, with 12 UNESCO World Heritage sites, including iconic landmarks such as the Spanish Riding School and the Viennese coffee house culture. With over 69,000 accommodation establishments and more than 1.3 million beds, Austria provides ample options for lodging. The country's ski resorts attract millions of visitors each year, with extensive ski slopes and state-of-the-art facilities. Moreover, Austria offers numerous convention hotels, exhibition halls, and special event locations, hosting thousands of congresses and seminars annually. Additionally, the country

is home to around 75 thermal baths and numerous wellness hotels and health resorts, and almost 900 organic farms to choose.

Notably, half of the total bed capacity (excluding camping facilities) was concentrated in Tyrol and Salzburg. In the tourism year 2021/22, commercial establishments provided three-quarters of the available beds, while private accommodations accounted for the remaining quarter. However, there were significantly fewer commercial establishments (around one-third) compared to private lodgings. (Statistik Austria, 2022). In Austria, each federal state has its own tourism strategies aimed at promoting sustainable development of the tourism sector. These strategies vary depending on the specific conditions, resources, and goals of each state, but they all share common priorities to ensure a long-term, environmentally friendly, and economically viable tourism industry.

Salzburg:

Tourism is a vital part of Salzburg's economy, especially in rural areas, where it generates jobs, income, and opportunities for leisure and recreation. Despite pandemic-related challenges, overnight stays in Salzburg have either matched or surpassed pre-pandemic levels, showcasing the resilience of the tourism sector in the region. It brings in about 30 million overnight stays and employs 30,000 people.

Rural Salzburg, Austria has long been a popular choice for farm stay holidays; its mix of dramatic scenery and quiet peaceful rural charm being surely best appreciated from some of the lovely classically Austrian farmhouses that dot its countryside.

Salzburg is similar to another of Austria's popular farm stay destinations; Carinthia, in that its lakes are a major attraction. Though the temperatures here may be a little lower, the lakes of the Salzkammergut region are renowned for the quality of their water with the likes of Lake Wolfgang, the region's largest, becoming hugely popular in the summer. Especially in the south of Salzburg, tourism creates jobs and helps people live better lives. The high internationality of visitors has led to a significant impact on Salzburg's tourism sector during the COVID-19 pandemic. While pre-crisis levels will be reached again, it will be under changed conditions, particularly regarding guest needs, as well as the expectations of the local population and employees. The focus on sports activities during winter, as well as themes such as hiking, biking, and health, makes sports a crucial strategic area for action for the state of Salzburg. (Tourismusstrategie Salzburg, 2030).

Tyrol: Tourism in Tyrol is supported by an impressive bed capacity, with around 328,000 beds in winter and currently approximately 325,000 beds in summer. In 2022, Tyrol recorded 44,800,225 overnight stays. This extensive accommodation infrastructure enables Tyrol to welcome a diverse range of visitors from various countries. Visitor numbers are represented by a variety of origin countries, with Germany comprising the largest share, followed by the Netherlands, Austria, Switzerland, and Belgium. Tourism in Tyrol is characterized by a remarkable diversity of offerings that attract guests from around the world, both in winter and summer. It is a paradise for skiers and mountaineers it is also a place where people can just stay and enjoy the scenery, amongst some of the most dramatic and magnificent scenery in the whole continent. And it is hugely popular for farm stays that combine both the peace and tranquility of the farm with the excitement of winter sports. Recent data indicate a certain normalization of the seasons compared to the previous year, with the summer season in the 2021/22 tourism year slightly stronger than usual. With a wide range of leisure activities such as skiing, hiking, cycling, and wellness activities, coupled with stunning landscapes.

Upper Austria: During the summer of 2022 and the winter of 2022/23, Upper Austria welcomed a total of 3,081,115 holiday guests. Approximately one-third of these visitors came from nearby European markets, including Germany, Hungary, Czech Republic, Poland, Netherlands, Slovakia, Italy. Upper Austria offers a diverse range of vacation options catering to various preferences, including adventure seekers, nature enthusiasts, cultural aficionados, and those seeking relaxation. The region features an extensive network of cycling paths and mountain bike trails, allowing for exploration amidst stunning mountain landscapes and lush valleys. Visitors have the opportunity to participate in various activities such as water sports, horseback riding, and golfing in the beautiful surroundings. Upper Austria also offers wellness experiences provided by trained professionals, allowing visitors to unwind and recharge away from their daily routines. Cultural enthusiasts can explore the lively arts scene and visit historic landmarks, gaining insights into the region's rich history and cultural heritage.

Lower Austria: In Lower Austria, there were a total of 6,598,348 overnight stays recorded in the summer of 2022. Despite its focus on quality, Lower Austria has managed to preserve its authenticity and regional identity. It is Austria's agricultural heart and is a big producer of white wine and cider amongst others, as well as that particular Austrian favourite; the dumpling. The local speciality being Marillenknodel made from apricots. The tourism sector in Lower Austria prioritizes sustainability and regional identity. Lower Austria is positioned as a destination that offers a unique blend of art and culture, regional cuisine and wine, nature experiences, and wellness opportunities. The region's tourism industry encompasses various sectors, including holiday tourism, day trips, health tourism, and business tourism, each contributing to its diverse and dynamic tourism landscape.

Vorarlberg: In 2022, Vorarlberg saw a remarkable surge in tourism numbers, with overnight stays reaching 8,537,369. Vorarlberg in the far west of Austria, lined up against Germany, Switzerland, and Liechtenstein, and is an unassuming, quite traditional place with a lot of agriculture, dairy farming in particular. Vorarlberg is renowned for its alpine landscapes and rich cultural heritage, making it a sought-after destination for tourists seeking both outdoor adventures and cultural experiences. Vorarlberg's well-maintained cycling routes and different hike paths attract cyclists of all levels. During the winter months, Vorarlberg transforms into a winter sports paradise, with world-class ski resorts such as Lech-Zürs, St. Anton, and Kleinwalsertal. In addition to its natural attractions, Vorarlberg boasts a vibrant cultural scene, with numerous museums, galleries, and cultural events showcasing the region's artistic heritage. The Bregenz Festival, held annually on the shores of Lake Constance, is a highlight of Vorarlberg's cultural calendar.

Burgenland: In 2022, Burgenland recorded a total of 2,933,997 overnight stays. Situated in the heart of Austria, Burgenland attracts visitors with its serene natural landscapes, rich culinary traditions, and renowned wines. The region offers diverse attractions, including scenic cycling routes, water sports activities, and cultural experiences such as wine tours and visits to fruit plantations. Adventurous individuals can enjoy activities like the Speed Arena in Rechnitz or explore the high ropes course, while families can visit the Family Park for a fun-filled day out.

Styria: The green heart of Austria; Styria, with Graz as its capital has huge swathes of beautiful, dense forest, low valleys and deep blue lakes. It also is a fertile farming heartland and is home to Austria's relatively unknown wine industry. The tourism sector in Styria has seen remarkable growth in employment. In terms of visitor numbers, Styria recorded 13,014,627 overnight stays in 2022. From majestic mountains to rejuvenating thermal and spring waters, and vineyards Styria boasts a wealth of natural attractions.

Carinthia: In Carinthia, tourism provides a varied and enriching experience within its natural surroundings and hospitable environment. As the sunny southern region of Austria, Carinthia harmoniously combines Alpine and Mediterranean influences. Carinthia is, like most of Austria, great winter skiing region but it's main claim to fame is its lakes, it has over 200, more than any other province in the country and once the snow season is over the lakes become the focus of tourism, with good opportunities for boating, fishing and watersports, and in some sections nude bathing points, all over the province. Alongside its lakes, Carinthia offers a range of outdoor activities, including hiking and cycling trails that wind through forests and ascend peaks, catering to nature enthusiasts and adventurers alike.

2. *What national and international legislation exists in your country regarding rural tourism?*

Austria has various laws and regulations at the national level that govern tourism activities, including those related to rural tourism. These may include laws related to land use planning, building regulations, environmental protection, and tourism promotion. For example, the Austrian Federal Forest Act (Bundesforstgesetz) and the Federal Nature Conservation Act (Bundesnaturschutzgesetz) regulate activities in rural areas to ensure environmental sustainability and conservation of natural resources. Rural tourism activities may also be subject to regulations at the regional (state) and local levels. Each of Austria's nine federal states has its own laws and policies related to tourism, land use, and rural development. Local municipalities may also have regulations governing aspects such as zoning, permits for accommodation establishments, and tourism promotion initiatives.

Some states may have similar systems.

For instance, Tyrol imposes mandatory contributions and tourist taxes, whereas other regions may utilize different funding mechanisms for tourism initiatives. For instance, Salzburg also implements a tourist tax system, but different than those in Tyrol. Similarly, Styria, Carinthia, and Vorarlberg, among others, have their own approaches to funding tourism and may have different regulations in place. In lower Austria for example from 2024 onwards, all municipalities will implement a standard overnight tax rate of 2.50 euros per guest per night. However, spa municipalities will charge 2.90 euros per guest per night due to higher infrastructure costs.

Internationally, Austria is also bound by various agreements and conventions that affect rural tourism. Furthermore, Austria's membership in the European Union means that EU directives and regulations related to rural development, environmental protection, and tourism also have an impact on rural tourism practices and policies within the country. Overall, the legal framework for rural tourism in Austria is multifaceted, encompassing both national and international legislation aimed at promoting sustainable and responsible tourism practices in rural areas.

3. *Are there any vocational training programs for rural tourism in your country?*

In Austria, there are training courses that focus on different aspects of the tourism and hospitality industry. Various educational institutions, including the WIFI (Wirtschaftsförderungsinstitut) and the BFI (Berufsförderungsinstitut) Vienna offer these training programmes.

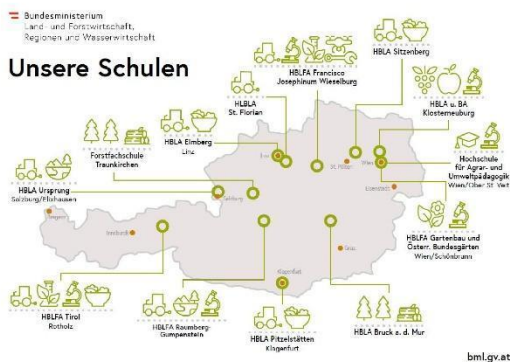
- The WIFI offers comprehensive training programmes in the catering and hotel industry that have been specially developed for entrepreneurs and employees in this sector. These courses are of

the highest standard and conclude with certificates or diplomas. The training programmes cover subjects such as event and leisure management, hospitality, hotel management, tourism and travel management (WIFI).

- BFI Vienna, on the other hand, also offers courses and seminars in similar areas, with a strong focus on individual training and career development. The courses on offer cover a wide range of topics, including sustainability management and online marketing, which can also be relevant for professionals in rural tourism (BFI Wien).

Both institutions offer practice-orientated training courses led by experienced trainers and geared towards the current requirements of the tourism industry. They thus support professionals in preparing for the challenges and opportunities in rural tourism areas.

In Austria, we also have Secondary Agriculture and Forestry Colleges. The secondary agriculture and forestry schools offer diverse, future-oriented training opportunities throughout Austria. The offer ranges from the different areas of agriculture and forestry to food, biotechnology and digitization as well as environmental and resource management. The Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Regions and Water Management acts as school operator and thus has the key responsibility for the educational offer at the Secondary Agriculture and Forestry Colleges; the pedagogic sector cooperates closely with the Ministry of Education. Currently about 3700 girls and boys attend the schools of the Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Regions and Tourism. Every year around 700 young people complete their school education at a Federal Agriculture and Forestry College. The completion rate is 96 percent. The agricultural schools are regularly top performers in terms of the central school-leaving examination results.



Additionally Austria offers Agricultural and Forestry Vocational and Educational Training (VET) Schools offer comprehensive training programs at approximately 80 locations across the country. These schools are secondary technical and vocational institutions under the jurisdiction of the Federal Provinces in collaboration with the Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Regions, and Water Management. Moreover, the VET schools also offer their graduates and people in rural areas further education and advice on current topics like EDP, management, processing of farm products and the like. They increasingly become education and training centres in rural areas (Austrian Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Regions and Water Management, 2024).

4. What is the responsible governing body/institution for supporting rural tourism entrepreneurs/professionals in your country?

The Ministry of Labor and Economy is responsible for overseeing the tourism sector, which falls under the broader category of Tourism and Leisure Economy, a matter characterized by a highly fragmented

competence structure. The Federal Ministry of Labour and Economy has tourism in its portfolio (State Secretary for Tourism) to define a coordinating national tourism strategy, to run national funding programmes and oversee national tourism marketing as well as to work on strategic issues for tourism at national and international level. Synergies between the national and regional levels are strengthened via a Steering Group for Tourism. Cooperation with other ministries, departments, institutions and the tourism industry is organised on specific topics via either permanent groups or round tables.

While tourism is within the jurisdiction of the individual states, the federal government establishes significant framework conditions for tourism and the leisure economy, including:

- Trade law,
- Transport law,
- Labor law,
- Internal security,
- Taxation and revenue system,

On one hand, the federal government is a member of the Austrian National Tourist Office (Österreich Werbung), and on the other hand, it assists tourism businesses with financing through the Austrian Hotel and Tourism Bank.

The Austrian federal states are responsible for issuing "tourism laws" and regulating the "event industry." They also partly handle regulations related to environmental protection, spatial planning, building regulations, and infrastructure matters (e.g., state roads).

They are responsible for adopting legislation on tourism. Austria has nine separated tourism laws of the federal provinces with each federal province implementing an individual tourism strategy including marketing and funding.

Tourism laws may include:

- Territorial structuring (destination classification of municipalities; tourism regions)
- Organisation and administration (tourism associations)
- Financing (fees and taxes)
- Statistics

Moreover, the federal provinces are the competent regulatory authorities for other issues relevant for tourism such as nature protection, regional planning, building codes and infrastructure (such as regional roads) and more.

- Austrian National Tourist Office (ANTO) is the national tourism-marketing organisation. The Ministry (more than 3/4) and the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber fund it. ANTO cooperates closely with the Austrian tourism industry, including the tourist boards of the Federal Provinces and tourism businesses. ANTO's responsibilities are market research, brand management, marketing, networking and information provision. It serves as a knowledge hub for the Austrian tourism ecosystem. Its mission is further to inspire worldwide enthusiasm for vacations in Austria, to provide benefits for the tourism industry in the country and run customised image campaigns.
- The Austrian Federal Economic Chamber (WKO) serves as a pivotal resource for businesses across various sectors, including tourism. One of its key functions is providing funding opportunities to support the growth and development of businesses within the tourism industry. Through various funding programs and initiatives, WKO aims to bolster the tourism sector by offering financial assistance, grants, and incentives to businesses looking to expand, innovate, or enhance their

operations. These funding opportunities cover a wide range of areas within tourism, including infrastructure development, marketing and promotion, product diversification, sustainability initiatives, and workforce training. WKO's funding programs are designed to cater to the diverse needs of tourism businesses, from small-scale enterprises to larger establishments. Whether it's supporting the establishment of new tourism ventures, upgrading existing facilities, or implementing sustainability measures, WKO provides valuable financial support to help businesses thrive in the competitive tourism market. Additionally, WKO offers guidance and support to businesses throughout the funding application process, helping them navigate requirements, deadlines, and eligibility criteria. By facilitating access to funding opportunities, WKO plays a crucial role in driving innovation, competitiveness, and sustainability within the Austrian tourism industry (WKO, 2024)

5. *What efforts have been made by different authorities in your country to promote rural tourism?*

Rural Development being a supporting instrument for agriculture and rural areas is implemented via the so-called Rural Development Programmes. They aim at shaping the rural area as living environment and economic and recreational area in an ecologically, economically and socially active way. Therefore, six priorities of EU policy have been defined at European level, which are pursued and implemented by the Member States accordingly within the framework of their national development programmes. To this purpose, Austria has worked out a comprehensive set of support options in the form of numerous different subsidisation measures:

- Austria's priorities focus on resource, environmental and climate protection issues, which are first addressed in the Agri-environmental Programme ÖPUL, Austria's programme for an agriculture, which is appropriate to the environment, extensive and protective of natural habitats. Central goals are to ensure the management of less-favoured areas, as well as to preserve and further develop the Austrian cultivated landscape - this applies not only, but essentially to the Alpine area.
- For agriculture investments in holdings, in processing and marketing as well as in opportunities for training and further training of farmers constitute important measures of rural development.
- Moreover, also non-agricultural areas are continuously being extended. This is demonstrated by current options of subsidisation for example in connection with the further development of broadband coverage or of the development of offers in the field of tourism.
- With the LEADER priority, the programme includes in addition to that an important regional development instrument with participatory character. The people in the LEADER regions can decide independently which projects shall be supported. LEADER is not only a funding program of the European Union for innovative projects aimed at strengthening rural areas and promoting regional economies while enhancing the quality of life in the regions, but also a methodological approach to participatory regional development. (Federal Ministry Republic of Austria, 2024)

In 2019, the Ministry overseeing tourism introduced a fresh national tourism strategy known as the "Plan T – Master Plan for Tourism." This strategy sets out principles for the sustainable advancement of tourism and acts as a framework for governmental decisions across all levels.

The "Plan T - Master Plan for Tourism" places strong emphasis on sustainability in all its facets and fosters a culture of collaboration to achieve a heightened standard of tourism policy. It is designed to significantly contribute to the implementation of the United Nations' Agenda 2030 and the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). To put the strategy into action, it is complemented by action plans

featuring specific measures and initiatives. It serves as the cornerstone of tourism policy and concentrates on fostering sustainable tourism development in Austria. This approach addresses not only the requirements of visitors but also considers the needs of the industry, the environment, and local communities.

The key aspects of Plan T Master Plan for Tourism are:

- Improving the dialogue and initiating stronger cooperation with Federal Provinces, destinations, businesses, interest groups and stakeholders from other sectors.
- Supporting digital transformation, such as supporting tourism businesses to adapt, creating data alliances and expanding e-government services.
- Creating appropriate framework conditions for the tourism sector, including in the fields of taxation, business succession and new business models (such as setting framework conditions for the sharing economy).
- Optimising the quality of training and better exploiting the potential for inter-business measures to improve the attractiveness of working in tourism.
- Working towards greater levels of sustainability, including by improving climate-friendly mobility and promoting further use of renewable energy.
- Intensifying cooperation between tourism and agriculture, including in the culinary sector.
- Further developing tourism marketing, such as rethinking destination management and optimising the use of new technologies.
- Strengthening family-run and owner-managed enterprises by tailor-made financing and subsidy mechanisms as well as developing new financing mechanisms with a focus on equity.
- Creating a future-oriented system of statistical indicators covering all three dimensions of sustainability.
- One pivotal focus of "Plan T" is digitalization, presenting a significant challenge and opportunity for the tourism industry. The strategy emphasizes leveraging digitalization for innovation, productivity enhancements, and customized solutions for both tourists and service providers (Federal Ministry of Labour and Economic Affairs, 2024)

6. *In your country are there any funding opportunities for entrepreneurs who wish to start a rural tourism business?*

Between 2014 and 2020, approximately 7.7 billion euros from EU, federal, and provincial sources were allocated for the Rural Development Programme in Austria. Roughly, half of this funding originated from the EU budget, specifically from the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD).

Projects proposed under the program, whether by individuals, associations, or municipalities; undergo a selection process on specific deadlines. If they meet certain criteria, they are chosen to receive subsidies.

The implementation of the program involves collaboration between federal and provincial authorities, as well as the payment agency AMA. Due to the delayed initiation of the subsequent subsidy period, the current Rural Development Programme's duration has been extended by two years until 2022. During this extension, additional funds are earmarked for rural development initiatives.

The CAP Strategy Plan Austria replaces the existing rural development programs as a funding instrument for agriculture and rural areas starting from 2023.

An important step in the EU-wide reform is the integration of both pillars of the CAP – direct payments including sectoral measures and rural development – into an integrated, performance-based

implementation model. This is accompanied by increased environmental, animal welfare, and climate ambitions, which are intended to be implemented through appropriate support measures within the framework of the national strategy plan, particularly in connection with the European Green Deal.

For the years 2023 to 2027, a total of 9.16 billion euros in European and national funds are available for agriculture and rural areas, including the impulse program for agriculture. The national financing is shared between the federal government and the states.

Over 98 different measures aim to strategically allocate the funds for the following priorities:

- Enhancing the sustainable competitiveness and resilience of agricultural enterprises, including through direct income support, redistribution to smaller farms, or investments.
- Securing food supply for the population. Expanding high levels of resource and climate protection.
- Strengthening biodiversity-promoting agriculture. Advancing organic farming and promoting sustainable forestry.
- Management of mountainous and disadvantaged areas. Promotion of knowledge transfer, innovation, and diversification.
- Improving vitality and quality of life in rural areas. Expansion of infrastructure and services.
- Further strengthening the LEADER approach.

LEADER enables people in rural areas to further develop their region through collaborative projects. For this purpose, rural communities that wish to network and collaborate join forces with regional stakeholders from various sectors to form a Local Action Group (LAG). Following the bottom-up approach, this group, with active involvement of the population, develops a Local Development Strategy (LES) for their region at the beginning of an EU funding period.

LEADER plays a special and central role in regional development in rural areas. Therefore, it has been budgeted with 210 million euros, nearly 6 million euros more annually than in the previous period. LEADER is not only an EU funding program for innovative projects aimed at strengthening rural areas, promoting regional economies, and improving the quality of life in the regions, but also a methodological approach to participatory regional development.

With its seven principles, LEADER thrives on innovation and the commitment of people in the regions:

- Local partnership
- Territorial approach
- Bottom-up approach
- Networking
- Cooperation
- Cross-sectoral approach
- Innovation

Austria's regions are diverse, each with its own strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and risks. The key to successful LEADER implementation is therefore to involve the population and local stakeholders.

To address current challenges, there are some innovations and new opportunities in this funding period. The entire funding process is now digitalized through the Digital Funding Platform of the Agricultural

Market Austria. This facilitates the use of the new impact monitoring system, allowing for a clearer demonstration of LEADER's added value.

Digitalization is also applied in the new possibility of promoting Smart Village projects through LEADER. In the Smart Village concept, small-scale communities use a participatory approach to develop innovative digital solutions to local challenges.

In addition to digitalization, another major challenge is climate change. Therefore, a new, fourth field of action, "Climate protection and adaptation to climate change," has been created, used by 81 of the 83 regions.

Opportunities for cooperation between urban and rural areas to provide urban and rural qualities to many people at their place of residence have been further expanded. Within a functional partnership, medium-sized cities of up to 110,000 inhabitants can now collaborate with a LAG, benefiting both partners. LEADER regions that utilize this cooperation opportunity receive an additional 100,000 euros in LEADER funding. Six cities are already pioneering this step with LEADER regions (Austrian Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Regions and Water Management, 2024).

7. *Do you have any best practices/successful examples regarding rural tourism in your country?*

In Austria, some remarkable initiatives in the field of rural tourism emphasise the country's cultural and natural resources and promote sustainable practices.

Firstly, Zell am See was recognised by the UNWTO as one of the "Best Tourism Villages" for its outstanding implementation in rural tourism. This programme highlights places that exemplify rural tourism by preserving and promoting cultural and natural resources while driving innovation and sustainability in economic, social and environmental terms ([UNWTO](#)).

Alpbachtal: A notable example of sustainable practices in rural tourism is Alpbachtal, where since 1953 building legislation has stipulated the traditional timber construction style for all new buildings. This measure has not only helped to preserve the cultural heritage and Alpine appearance, but has also made Alpbachtal the "most beautiful village in Austria". There are over 105 active farms here that offer visitors authentic agricultural experiences ([B2B Austria](#)).

Gmünd: In the medieval town of Gmünd in Carinthia, a transformation has taken place in which empty historic buildings have been turned into art galleries and studios. This initiative has not only given the town a new cultural image, but also promotes tourism in a sustainable way ([B2B Austria](#)).

Stanz: As one of Austria's "Smart Villages", Stanz has implemented innovative projects such as the "Token System & Blockchain Pilot Project" to promote a local energy community. This project is an example of how digital technologies can be used to promote sustainability in rural areas ([Smart Rural 21](#)).

In 2023, Austria's "Innovative Concepts for Climate Adaptation and Resilience in Tourism" funding initiative aimed to sensitize the domestic tourism industry to climate change adaptation and resilience. By late October, a panel of experts selected eight winning projects that best described the conceptual valorization and climate-resilient orientation of regional tourism offerings. These projects, collectively

funded by approximately 0.87 million euros from federal tourism funds and the Rural Development Program 2014-2020, include:

Culture & Cycling along the Iron Road (OÖ, Stmk, NÖ): This project by the Tourism Association Steyr and the National Park Region plans to adapt and reposition the cross-provincial region's tourist offerings to climate change through a connected, year-round "Culture & Cycling" concept.

Climate Adaptation Strategy Wipptal: The Tourism Association's project focuses on developing a concept for implementing four specific climate adaptation measures, critically evaluating the region's existing tourist offerings and deriving possibilities for self-transformation.

KURT: Climate-fit and Resilient in the Spa & Volcanic Land: This initiative leverages a multidisciplinary competence center to initiate a comprehensive discussion, knowledge transfer, and development process for creating climate-resilient tourism offerings in the Spa and Volcanic Land.

Julius Kugy Alpine Trail 2.0 - Resilient Hiking Tourism: Managed by the Carinthian Alpine Club, this project aims to further develop the Julius Kugy Alpine Trail, opened in 2019, into a beacon for resilient, climate-neutral, and sustainable hiking tourism.

How Much is Enough? Model Development of Heutal Tourism Region: This project by Ionica Mobility aims to create a comprehensive data model for regional value creation and tourism in the Heutal region, to calculate maximum capacity and establish Heutal as a model year-round tourism region.

OFFLINE VILLAGE 2.0: Gargellen Tourism is developing a health tourism concept that provides scientifically backed digital balance vacation experiences, in cooperation with research institutes, innovators, tourism, and other sectors, including local residents.

Sustainable Use: Neusiedlersee (NNN): This project plans for the ecological management of the lake to ensure a unique symbiosis between natural space and local economy, securing the long-term attractiveness of the lake region.

Design of a Regional MTB Experience Network in the Schladming-Dachstein Region: This aims to develop a low-threshold, community-wide MTB concept for locals and guests, similar to cross-country ski tracks or premium hiking trails, but specifically designed for a high-quality, year-round cycling experience.

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[Farmstay Holidays in Austria ➤ Book a Trip to the Austrian Countryside](#)

[Förderinfo & Sonderrichtlinien \(bml.gv.at\)](#)

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[Austrian National Tourist Office \(ANTO\) \(bmaw.gv.at\)](#)

[Plan T – Master Plan for Tourism \(bmaw.gv.at\)](#)