

BEST PRACTICE: NASSFELD-PRESSEGGER SEE, LESACHTAL, WEISSENSEE (NLW), AUSTRIA



Key Challenge

Appropriate local tourism strategies and policies to accelerate the transition to sustainable tourism.

Type of Solution

Stakeholder participation and management; Certification.

Case Classification

Type of Destination | Rural

Territorial Level | < NUTS 3

Size of the Tourist Area | 986 km²

Population | 20,000 in 2023

Type of Tourism | Ecotourism; Mountain; Rural; Sports; Cultural; Health and wellness.

DMO | Private limited company (shareholders are 51% communities, 49% tourism businesses).

Main Stakeholders Affected | Local authorities/ government; Local residents.

All tourism service providers; Local farmers and producers; Transport companies;

Additional Challenges Covered | Creating local added value through tourism; Insufficient or declining acceptance of tourism; Poor working conditions in the tourism industry; Sustainable and smart mobility solutions.

Context & Background

A decade ago, the rural region of Nassfeld-Pressegger See, Lesachtal and Weissensee in the south of Austria created a diverse year-round tourism offer (mountains and lakes), thereby achieving stable tourism growth. Tourism plays an important role in the economy, accounting for around 18% of GDP and 33% of employment. In 2023, around 2.2 million overnight stays were recorded, with a tourism intensity of 1 (1 tourist per inhabitant).

Key Challenge

The region has been affected by emigration due to the lack and precarity of job opportunities and, in part, the poor acceptance of tourism. This situation has led to a rethinking of tourism, with local people and the culture of hospitality being moved to the center of the tourism vision.



Implementation of Solutions: The comprehensive and future-oriented policies of an effective DMO aim to provide orientation and identity to residents, but also to stabilize the welcoming culture according to the principle: “Where locals are happy, tourists also come willingly.”

SOLUTIONS

- In 1998, a new *joint Destination Management Organisation* was founded for the three regions Nassfeld-Pressegger See, Lesachtal and Weissensee. The new, larger DMO (at least 1.5 million overnight stays) was prompted by the strong development of global tourism and the rapid increase in communication systems (online, social, etc.), the possibility of hiring specialized staff (e.g., for online advertising, data specialists), better support for employees and stakeholders, and the concentration of budgets. Since the leisure activities of guests and locals do not end in municipal boundaries, there was a need to develop infrastructure and experience offerings that go beyond regional boundaries.
- *Ecological infrastructure measures* have been implemented in the communities before the systematic transition to sustainability: the *conversion of the sewage system* to protect nature and revitalize lakes, measures to promote *soft and slow mobility*, such as nature park buses, train station shuttles or the *construction of a valley railway* in Nassfeld to reduce car traffic, accompanied by a [*comprehensive mobility system*](#) that makes cars unnecessary for local residents and tourists. The destination has also established itself as the world's first slow food tourist destination, supported by slow food international. Today a total of 124 Slow Food experiences are offered, which have also been adopted by educational institutions as best practices.
- Thanks to the ecological infrastructure measures undertaken and a clear vision for the future, after a *three-year certification process* to become the “Most Sustainable Region in Austria” according to GSTC criteria, the region was certified in 2021 and has since been recertified annually. The destination has also been awarded the Austrian Ecolabel. Current sustainability measures focus on green events, sustainable travel programs, development of new energy communities, an employer card with many employee benefits, and mobility.

Replicability potential: High (requires political will, significant financial resources (infrastructure), and strong cooperation).

Cost & funding source: 400,000 euros for “Slow Food Travel”, funded by the Austrian Ministry of Economic Affairs; Over 70 million euros for the valley railway developed by the local mountain railways and financed through a public-private partnership; 1 to 1.2 million euros annually (since 2010) for the tourism related mobility system, funded by lift companies, municipalities and tourism stakeholders; a total of 1 million euros for certification, funded by the Austrian Federal Ministry for the Environment and the Austrian Climate Fund as part of the “initiative of the most sustainable regions in Austria”.



Success Factors & Barriers Regarding the Implementation

Success factors: Involvement of as many stakeholders as possible in the concept development to prevent complaints; Close cooperation with stakeholders; Use of the Austrian Ecolabel as a basis for tourism strategy development; The existence of two main seasons that enable planning security and better working conditions; Sufficient funding; Good arguments (including economic ones) that could be used to convince tourism companies.

Barriers: Different priorities and mindsets (profitability versus altruism); In the absence of economic necessity, it was quite difficult to convince and involve people.

Results and Impacts

- In addition to the destination's certification according to GSTC and the Austrian Ecolabel, 32 companies were awarded the Austrian Ecolabel and were able to save costs by implementing sustainable measures in the areas of energy, cleaning and food waste.
- Farmers and small businesses in the Slow Food Travel project as well as employees involved in the "Most Sustainable Destination in Austria" initiative stated that environmental quality and sustainable measures were the deciding factors for them to return to the region or work there.
- Depending on the market of origin, between 29% and 62% of summer guests say that "sustainability is important to them when making travel decisions" (between 12% and 50% of winter guests).

Takeaways

- Networks and partnerships should be established before planning begins to agree on common goals.
- A key to sustainability awareness in the community is the involvement of children in education towards sustainability.
- - The basis for good coexistence in the region is a well-developed and functioning infrastructure. It is important to take economic aspects into account when developing sustainability measures to avoid criticism.
- - Consistent communication with the population about sustainability measures and their benefits is important.

Useful Links

- [Model region for the "Most Sustainable Region in Austria"](#) | NLW Tourismus Marketing

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