

BEST PRACTICE: WAGRIN-KLEINARL, AUSTRIA

Key Challenge

Insufficient or declining acceptance of tourism.

Type of Solution

Adoption of a tourism strategy and monitoring framework; Stakeholder participation and management; Certification; Promotional campaigns.



Case Classification

Type of Destination | Mountain

Territorial Level | < NUTS 3

Size of the Tourist Area | 121 km²

Population | 3,993 in 2023

Type of Tourism | Ecotourism; Mountain; Rural; Cultural.

Tourism Organisation | Public Destination Management Organisation (DMO); In 2012 the Wagrain and Kleinarl tourism associations merged.

Main Stakeholders Affected / Local Residents; Tourists; All Tourism service providers; Local farmers and producers; Local businesses.

Additional Challenges Covered / Increase in the cost of living due to tourism; Deterioration and congestion of infrastructure; Poor working conditions in the tourism industry; Maintenance and conservation of cultural heritage sites; Measurement and monitoring sustainable tourism.

Context & Background

Tourism is an important pillar of Wagrain-Kleinarl's economy (more than 10% of GDP and employment). Most of the approximately 275,000 tourists (1.36 million overnight stays) come during the summer (June-September) and winter seasons (December-March), with Germany being the largest source market (43%). Wagrain-Kleinarl positions itself as a destination that focuses on a relaxing and healing holiday, which makes the relationship with the living space and the social environment very important.

Key Challenge

The population is confronted with rising housing costs and congestion of infrastructure, especially transport, in peak seasons. These negative impacts led to residents' increasingly critical attitude towards tourism.

Implementation of Solutions: In order to curb the increasing scepticism of local residents towards tourism, measures to improve the quality of life and strengthen residents' acceptance of tourism were carried out with their participation.

SOLUTIONS

- Regular measurement of tourism acceptance by surveying local people to identify weak points and improve them through strategic measures to ultimately promote the local residents' positive attitude towards tourism.
- Due to the great importance of cultural heritage for the local community, several initiatives have been launched to preserve and maintain culture and traditions through tourism, thus indirectly contributing to greater acceptance of tourism. These include the establishment of a cultural association, the networking of agricultural and tourist businesses through the "From the Valley for the Valley" regulars' table, and the establishment of a sustainability council in which all stakeholder groups of the destination (such as farmers, cultural associations, tourist businesses, residents, restaurants, outdoor providers, etc.) are represented.
- The *employee card "beActive" (app)*, introduced in 2023 together with regional partners, offers employees and their family members of all participating companies discounts in tourism businesses and on leisure activities. This contributes to the identification of employees with the region and consequently also to the acceptance of tourism.
- The behaviour of the guests is also influenced to minimise disturbances and irritations to the local residents. Since 2015, there have been initiatives to raise awareness among tourists about sustainable behaviour. Since 2022, guests can find *"10 tips for conscious travel"* on the destination website and can digitally sign a commitment *"Your future-oriented promise"*. The *AI concierge*, based on artificial intelligence, is also available to tourists around the clock with all the necessary information in all languages.
- The *Green Destinations Certificate* (2022) and the *Austrian Ecolabel for Destinations* (2023) were obtained, which improve the governance process in the destination. The associated exchange platforms for stakeholders and residents such as the sustainability committee, regular meetings, events (e.g. on the topic of zero waste) and workshops also promote tourism acceptance.

Replicability potential: High (requires political will, financial and human resources)

Cost & funding source: (1) Costs including both certifications, external support for 3 years, workshops, information events, meetings, implementation of initiatives, amounted to 170,000 euros in the period 2021-2024 funded by the LEADER programme. (2) One-time setup costs for the "beActive" app were 2000 euros and annual costs are 2800 euros. Also, there are personnel costs for maintaining the app, support for the companies etc.

Success Factors & Barriers

Success factors: Constant networking; A good and accessible database monitoring tourism development; Well-trained DMO employees; Viewing the transition to sustainability as an ongoing process; Partners who walk the path of transformation together.

Barriers: Scepticism among locals and companies.

Results and Impacts

- 168 employees use the “beActive” app, which corresponds to 8.5% of all employees in the destination. According to some individual feedback, the employees and companies are satisfied with the card.
- The results of the resident survey were incorporated into the development of the future destination strategy.
- There was a move away from a consumption-oriented destination characterised by mainly quantitative indicators, towards a sophisticated and high-quality regenerative destination.
- By involving the local population in activities and decision-making processes, the acceptance of tourism increased.

Recommendations by the Destinations

- It is particularly important to have a well-functioning network in which actions and measures are implemented.
- It is very useful to benchmark other destinations’ similar projects (peer learning).
- External support from a certification expert is essential in the certification process, to gain targeted expertise and higher credibility.

Useful Links

[Sustainability in Wagrain-Kleinarl](#) | [Regeneration holidays](#)

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