

Farm Vacations as an integral part of the Mountaineering Village Concept

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Significance of agrotourism (farm-accommodation) in Austria

Categorie	Number of farms in Austria				
	1999	2010	2013	2016	2020
Farm holdings total	217.508	173.317	166.317	162.317	154.953
Holdings with agro-accomodation	13.236	10.293	10.473	9.103	8.397
In per cent %	6,1	5,9	6,3	5,6	5,4

Source: Agricultural Survey/Statistics Austria

60 % of holdings with farm-accomodation are full-time farmer, mostly situated in the mountain area (82%), more than 60% are in three provinces (Tyrol, Salzburg, Styria)



© Farm holiday

Significance of agrotourism (farm-accommodation) in Austria and the Mountaineering villages

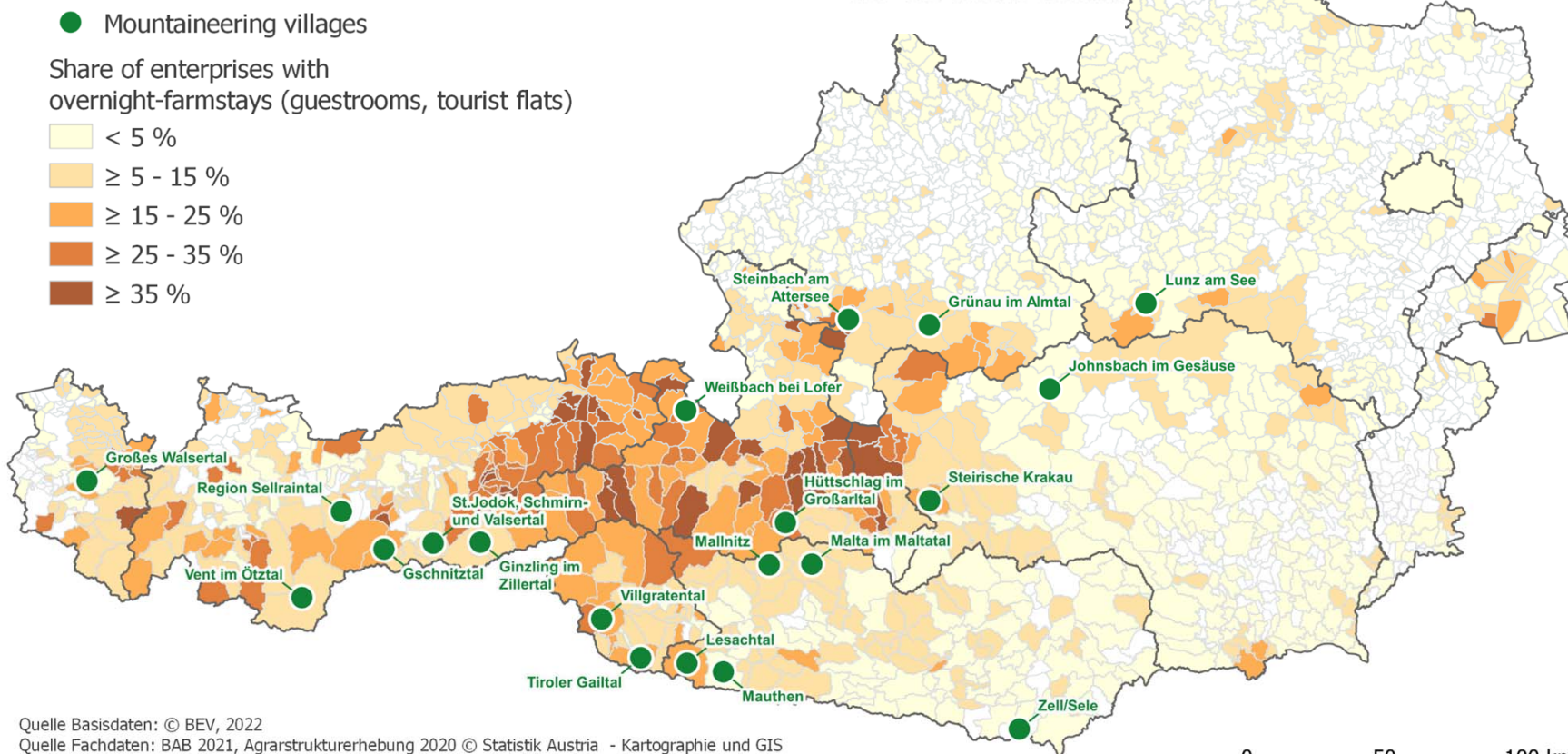
- Agrotourism is a relevant sub-sector of tourism in Austria – esp. in regions with low tourism intensity – stable long-term development
- Agrotourism enterprises benefit from the unspoiled, natural alpine environment, but also from the sectoral tourism infrastructure in the region (interaction, spillover)
- Guest accommodation is responsible for one third of income and secures the existence of one third of the holdings (Joanneum Research 2021)
- Farm-accommodation was more resilient during COVID-19 than other branches of tourism sector
- Agrotourism in mountaineering villages: 427 enterprises with 101.781 overnight stays (2018), corresponding to 15% of touristic enterprises and 5% of overnight stays

Location of Mountaineering villages (A) and share of A&F Enterprises with agri-accommodation (2020)



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Quelle Fachdaten: BAB 2021, Agrarstrukturerhebung 2020 © Statistik Austria - Kartographie und GIS

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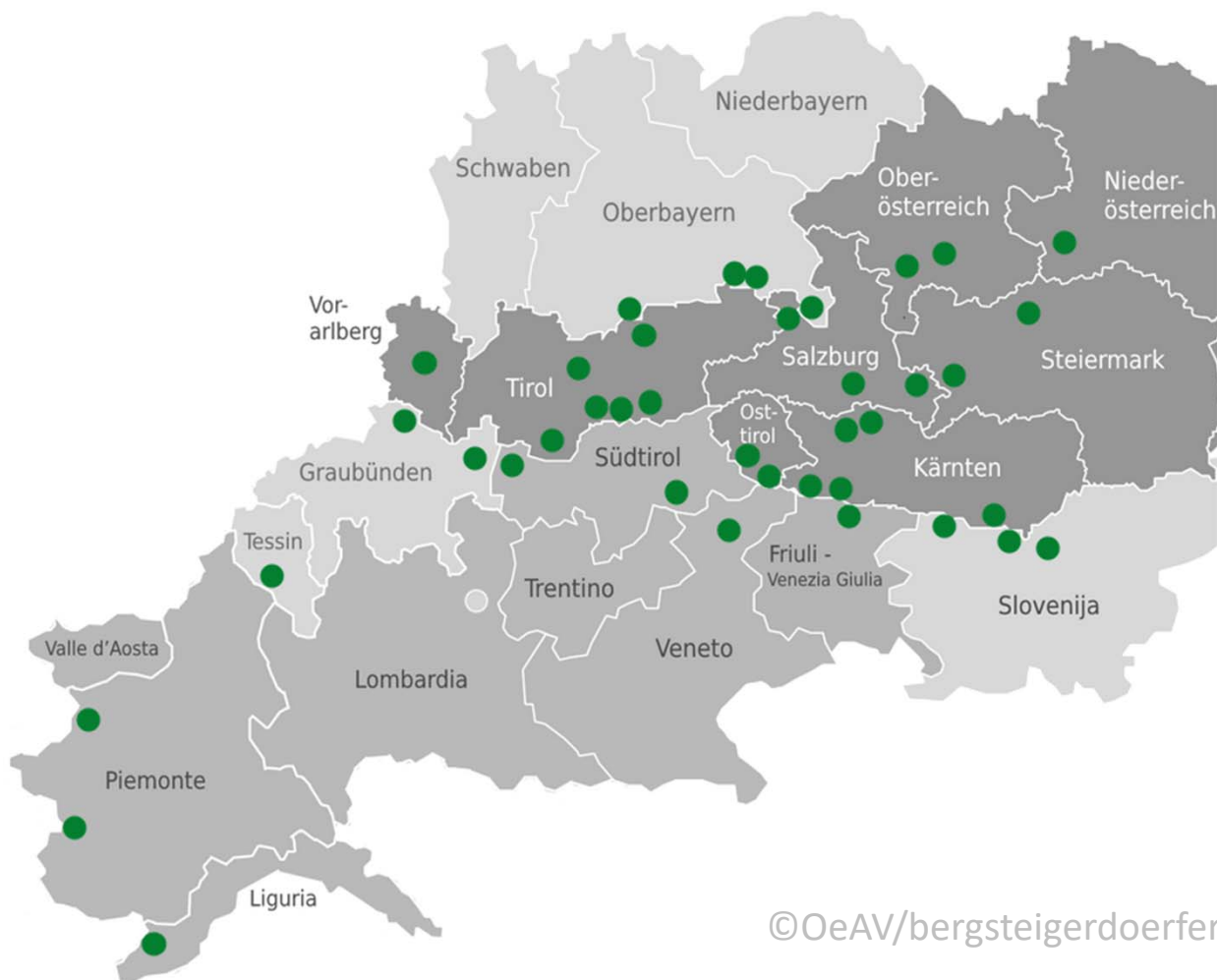
Datenauswertung & Design der Fachdaten: BAB, 2022

Initiative Mountaineering Villages: Origin and objectives

- Elaborated on initiative of Austrian Alpine Club (OeAV/Abt. Raumplanung), 16 founding villages/small regions (2008)
- Main targets: Realization and support of sustainable, ecological tourism offer – oriented at specificity of mountaineering community
- Contribute to development of economically weak mountain municipalities in remote location
- Implementing project of Alpine Convention (according protocols of tourism spatial planning, transport etc.)
- Extension of the initiative to other Alpine countries beyond Austria (D,CH,I SLO) 39 villages (2024) there of 22 (A)

„To provide an alternative to technologically advanced tourism, ..., avoids the threatening growth constraint of touristic infrastructure, ... an example to agree on limits for development, ... instrument to preserve at a large-scale, close-to-nature spaces as a supplement to intensively used economic and tourism regions“

(Haßblacher 2013; translated by author)



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Basic criteria and implementation of the initiative

- Joining and maintaining membership of the Initiative is subject to certain criteria:
- **Exclusion criteria:** e.g. lack of tourism infrastructure, little mountain specificities, lack of village character, high impact from winter sports facilities
- **Mandatory criteria:** e.g. tourism quality, alpine competence, quality of appearance of locality, landscape quality, mobility quality, cooperation quality
- **Target criteria:** e.g. tourist quality, cultural and regional specific features, alpine competence
- Supported by OeAV marketing platform – website, printed products
- Cooperation with (touristic) partner companies – 123/31 holidays on the farm

„Fit for municipalities which were not included in intensive winter sports, and which are not eager to be included. An antithesis to gigantism and anonymity in mainstream tourism“ (Haßlacher 2008, translated by author)

Challenges and expectations of the Initiative

- Establishing the label “mountaineering villages” to raise awareness, unique selling proposition and destination marketing
- Stabilization and increase of overnight stays and visits to villages, reduce seasonality dependency
- Improvement of partner enterprises in quality of offer
- Achieve enhanced value-added
- Utilizing existing infrastructure to secure “living villages” and achieve sustainable local development
- Realize alternative transport organization and routing (enhance accessibility)
- Common promotion of partner units (e.g. coordinate offer and provision of packages)

Performance and assessment of the initiative

- Heterogeneity of villages, and diverse awareness level of the label
- Some contribution to local and regional development
- Tourism trend between 2008 and 2019: 2/3 of villages slightly positive or stable (Σ 1.6 Mio overnight stays per year in 20 villages)
- Exclusionary strategy for niche tourism development of high-quality, preserving characteristics of “pristine” nature and mountaineering appeal
- Agrotourism activities are an important element in the initiative: mountain farming as precondition of landscape development, land use etc.
- Agrotourism enterprises absorbed into commercial accommodation sector



Blick auf Vent im Sommer © Bernd Ritschel

Findings in three case studies

- Three Villages: Johnsbach (Styria), St.Jodok/Schmirn/Vals (Tyrol), Mauthen (Carinthia)
- Qualitative interviews with stakeholder and local experts ($\Sigma 23$ interviews): main local promoters, tourism board, local administration, partner enterprises, local sections of OeAV, managers of protection areas, top-down guidance by OeAV
- Performance of implementation depends on commitment of these actors, institutions and networking
- Niche product characteristic confirmed by interviewees
target group – nature enthusiasts, mountaineers-climbers, families with kids, trend hybrid guest structure
- No danger of mass tourism because of the initiative



Climbing (Mountaineering Village Weißbach) ©
Christina Schwann

Conclusions

- Effects of agrotourism: stabilizing farm holdings, preservation of cultivated landscape, increased local added value
- Initiative itself dominated by tourism strategies (despite reference to local development objectives)
- Involvement of local population varies: often employment outside tourism and agriculture!
- Professional marketing of the Mountaineering Villages tourism label could be improved



Mountain tours, view on the Saldurseen lakes
(Mountaineering Village Matsch South-Tirol) © Edwin
Heinisch



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