

**TO DO!97**  
**Contest Socially Responsible Tourism**

***Award Winner***

***Regional Development Programme***  
***NATURE AND LIFE - BREGENZERWALD***

represented by

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**Rationale for the Award**

by

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Investigations into the candidacy of NATURE AND LIFE - BREGENZERWALD were conducted from 7th to 13th December 1997. At the request of the Study Group for Tourism and Development the data concerning the concept and purpose of the project as stated in the contest documents could be verified in situ without any problem - with the following result: The authorised appraiser suggests honouring the regional development programme NATURE AND LIFE - BREGENZERWALD with an award at the ITB 1998.

## 2. BACKGROUND

With an area of 550 sq. km Bregenzerwald is the largest region of Vorarlberg (area comparable to "Greater Berlin"); it comprises 22 communities with a total of 28,000 inhabitants. The towns in this area are between 600 and 1,500 metres above sea level. The majority of the population are of Alemannic origin with Walsers in villages in the upper mountain regions.

The valley borders on the Rhine Valley to the west, on the neighbouring Allgäu to the north and in this area can still be described as a highland region. This district is usually known as "der Vorderwald". The real centre of the Bregenzerwald, "der Mittelwald", lies to the south and gradually assumes alpine attributes. In the areas to the east and south-east, in the direction of the Arlberg, the landscape takes on full alpine character and is known as "der Hinterwald".

Incomes and livelihoods in Bregenzerwald depend on three pillars: tourism, agriculture and trade and industry. Apart from wood processing there is no traditional manufacturing industry. The business structure is geared to small enterprises. More than two thirds of all companies have between one and nine employees and a quarter of the enterprises are one-man businesses. The two largest employers are a brewery in Egg (100 employees) and a wood construction company in Reuthe (300 employees).

Because there is insufficient employment in Bregenzerwald, about 6,000 "Wälder"- as they call themselves - have to commute every day to the larger towns near the Rhine Valley and Lake Constance (Dornbirn, Hohenems, Lustenau, Bregenz). The result is considerable rush-hour traffic in the mornings and evenings that cannot be alleviated by the "Wälder" buses in spite of exemplary scheduling and their being used to capacity.

For centuries Bregenzerwald has been an isolated area and till after the end of the Second World War life was dominated by agriculture. Even today the agriquota of twelve percent is higher than the Austrian average. Bregenzerwald is designated as a "5b area" (EC term for mountainous and disadvantaged zones) and also as a Leader II target area (EC fund for underdeveloped regions).

The 1,390 farms - almost 50 percent of all the farms in Vorarlberg - still operate the alpine three-stage farming, with a complex net of more than 250 mountain pastures, 200 preliminary alpine pastures used in May/June and September, and 19 dairy pastures; they produce virtually all the traditional milk and cheese products locally and are therefore largely responsible for conserving the landscape (of inestimable value) and cultivating the arable land.

Tourism has played an increasing role in Bregenzerwald since the 1970s and 1980s and at present accounts for annual revenues of 3,000 million Austrian Shillings (approx. 430 mill. DM) in the valley region. Overall there is little seasonal difference in revenues so

that summer and winter are of equal importance. However, there are substantial differences in the geographical distribution of this income. The summer revenues are higher in "Vorderwald" and "Mittelwald", whereas "Hinterwald" earns its income with wintersports (ski resorts up to 2,100 m above sea level). Here - where the ski tourism is concentrated in a small number of villages - the villagescape has changed accordingly. In other communities tourism has had little or no effect on the landscape or local architecture. Some village centres, e.g. Schwarzenberg, have been put completely under preservation orders.

300,000 visitors account for 1.5 million overnight bookings in nearly 15,000 hotel beds (all in family businesses) - a modest 30 percent capacity (120 days). The goal must be to increase this poor capacity rating cautiously, in accordance with the rather reserved mentality of the local population. The first aim of the future development of tourism must be the firm intention (and chance) of promoting an autonomous eco-social network development for the region.

### **3. NATURE AND LIFE - BREGENZERWALD**

#### **3.1 Appraisal**

In contrast to all previous award winners, this is not only the first ever project in Europe proposed for an award, but it is above all a concept approved by regional and community politics. That is to say, NATURE AND LIFE - BREGENZERWALD was not developed by an oppositional or tourism-critical lobby, but evolved as a result of a broad political consensus; a consensus embracing all 22 Bregenzerwald communities and initiated, supported and enlivened by many inhabitants working in agriculture, gastronomy, butchers' shops, dairies, handicraft and trade businesses.

NATURE AND LIFE - BREGENZERWALD is a subsidiary company of "Regionalentwicklung Bregenzerwald GmbH" (Regional Development of Bregenzerwald), the aforementioned 22 communities, in which - because of the active involvement of many community members in the numerous societies, associations, cooperatives, committees etc. - almost everyone is continuously communicating with everyone else about current projects and ideas. This gradually leads to the emergence of a broad majority or in some cases a broad opposition.

The fact that many "Wälder" are so engaged in regional politics has cultural-historical reasons: until 1805 Bregenzerwald had a centuries-old federally structured "farmers' democracy" (with its own parliament, constitution and jurisdiction), which, from a socio-political point of view, has influenced the awareness of the local population until today. For this reason the contents and goals of the regional development programme of NATURE AND LIFE - BREGENZERWALD are broken down into what must seem from the outside to be almost overwhelming numbers, which are basically grouped around the previously mentioned three economic pillars and interlinked.

#### **3.2. Objectives and concept**

The following is a summary of the goals of NATURE AND LIFE - BREGENZERWALD:

- the preservation and - at the same time - marketing of its own *Lebensraum*
- the promotion of partnerships across all branches of business with the aim of creating an eco-social interlinked regional philosophy and therefore

- the promotion of sustainable and environment-friendly tourism in Bregenzerwald which incorporates the business cycles between

land

host

guest

including the resulting consequences for all other areas.

### 3.3 Appraisal of the Project

#### Contest criterion:

#### **Involvement of the different interests and requirements of the local people through participation.**

The starting point was an initiative in 1991 taken by the “Young Gastronomy Vorarlberg“ (JGV) with the (working) title “Joining hands“. In cooperation with the young farmers this initiative aims at fighting against the decrease in the number of farmers (“farmers’ death“). The following insights were gained through their initiative:

- a) gastronomists and hotels have to buy more local farm products and
- b) farmers gradually have to guarantee a defined quality production.

After various workshops for agriculturalists and gastronomists a joint action plan was started (“meat from the calf raised on whole-milk“, “milk and cheese festival weeks“, “Wälder hospitality weeks“). At the same time the dairies developed and produced more than 30 different cheese specialities - from five traditional ones to begin with - both for the local people and for the visitors.

This first initiative took place when an agricultural prize for innovations was organised by the Young Gastronomy Vorarlberg, the Vorarlberg Tourism and the Chamber of Agriculture. The so-called “Ländle Oscar“ (in Austria “Ländle“ is the synonym for Vorarlberg) was meant to open up new market chances for the farmers. It is quite significant that the first two award winners came from Bregenzerwald. They are young farmers who were able to set up successful businesses with a line of herbal and natural products as well as the production of cosmetics on the basis of whey. They have of course been able to enjoy the support of a broad coalition of organisations and businesses, such as the nature product association, gastronomy, Regional Planning Community, Bregenzerwald Tourism, agriculturalists, butchers, traders, dairies, communal administration and the Vorarlberg Chamber of Agriculture. With their support the first farmer’s markets and other events as well as public relations work were organised.

From this first step and within a few years, a series of high standard gastronomy enterprises have developed in a second stage (remember: land - host - guest) which are focusing on the quality of the “Wälder“ products - even though they do not always demonstrate it on their menu cards, i.e. they don’t mention the local or regional producers. At any rate there are now more than seven restaurants in Bregenzerwald which gained a distinction for first class gastronomy, and this is a sign that the gastronomy overall has reached quite a high standard. This in turn led to the fact that, instead of cheap seasonal workers, exclusively local and qualified personnel is

employed, at least in all the restaurants visited by the author. Quite a number of them were trained in the well renowned College for Tourism in Bregenzerwald in Bezau.

**Contest criterion:**

**Strengthening the awareness among the local people with regard to the chances and risks of tourism development in their daileconomic, social and cultural life.**

In Austria these aspects have been discussed for some time and have been the focus of various domestic marketing activities. The same is of course true for Vorarlberg, or Bregenzerwald respectively.

The tourist ideal which Vorarlberg cherishes lays claim to “develop tourism in harmony and in agreement with the local population“. Eight years ago the regional tourism association “Vorarlberg Tourism“ published a brochure with the title “What have visitors got to do with me?“ which reflects on insights and opinions with regard to tourism. One must keep in mind that a number of local people in Bregenzerwald are either directly or indirectly concerned with tourism - even carpenters, shingle-makers or electricians.

The College for Tourism in Bezau has dealt with this issue in a number of projects (opinion poll among guests, study on commuters, excursion traffic) and presented the results of these studies to the local people. Ten years ago the author was able to participate in a workshop on this topic. At that time the participants were shown drawings from pupils which displayed frightening visions of a landscape covered with roads and buildings. Thanks to the awareness of the local people and the public discussion on tourism which had set in early enough, this scenario did not come true.

**Contest criterion:**

**Participation of a broad local population strata regarding the positive economic, social and cultural effects of tourism.**

In addition to the sectors mentioned above this criterion is also met by the inauguration of the “Cheese Street“ in May 1998. This project is to promote direct marketing on the farm (excursions per bus or car to selected dairies, distilleries and farms) - apart from the regularly organised farmer markets in the respective localities. Furthermore, the brochure “Masterly female“ offers a range of hand-made gifts (embroidered felt shoes, herbal cushions, Christmas decoration, liquor) some of which are already sold in hotels.

All the activities offered by the local tourism bureau are available both for local people and for the visitors (such as guided tours, day-care and animation for children). This goes of course also for the tourist infrastructure (lifts, swimming pools, tennis courts, health resort facilities) - and it also includes the musical highlight, the “Schubertiade“, an event which takes place every year and which, in a small place like Schwarzenberg (1,700 inhabitants), would not be possible without tourism. On the other hand, such as in Au - the local people, in cooperation with the local Tourism Bureau, welcome holiday guests for an evening in their homes (sewing, embroidery, making figures from straw, music, discussions and stories) - as an alternative to the conventional “Heimatabend“.

**Contest criterion:**

**Guarantee of the attractiveness of jobs in tourism for the local people by improvement of working conditions in relation to payment, social security, working hours, education and training.**

Since there are hardly any cheap seasonal workers in the gastronomy of Bregenzerwald, social dumping does not take place. On the contrary, the Austrian legislation with regard to work and social security being similar to the German one (40 hour week) a number of enterprises have introduced prolonged closing day regulations (one and a half/two days) - unless they were able to afford additional personnel.

Since NATURE AND LIFE BREGENZERWALD sees itself not only as a pure tourist project but as a programme around tourism, it incorporates a variety of indirect factors - or as one interview partner formulated it - "we don't only have prosperity in mind, but also and always a sense of well-being".

This is the reason why some initiatives relate to aspects which are often neglected. The association "Profession and Training" for example offers a variety of courses and trainings in the rooms of the College for Trade and Tourism in Bezau, such as:

- New entrepreneurs are needed! - A guide set up an enterprise in Bregenzerwald
- Professional recruitment of personnel
- Introduction to a tourist-oriented information system, data processing, online networking etc.
- Communicating with the guest
- Barkeeper course
- Breakfast à la Bregenzerwald - illustrated and calculated
- Tax law for landlords and landladies of private rooms
- The chamber maid, personality and pillar of the enterprise
- English/French/Spanish for tourism etc.

Only 20 percent of the training fees have to be paid by the participants, the remaining amount is covered by public funds.

The above mentioned project „Masterly female“ (women-work-market) - a kind of job agency - organises part time jobs for women wanting to resume work after a family pause (such as children's animation) and a household service.

**Contest criterion:**

**Reinforcement of the local culture as well as the cultural identity of those living in tourism destination areas.**

In the supposedly conventional realm the local population shows a lively involvement in associations preserving traditional culture and traditional costumes, choirs etc. From talking to the people responsible for these activities one gets the impression that cultural and traditional events are not only instigated for the sake of the tourists, but that most of what is happening in this field has remained authentic and is still alive. This is also true for the various museums of local history and for the traditional crafts such as shingle-making and turning.

The "Culture Forum Bregenzerwald" tries to impart contemporary culture. This covers the whole range of issues such as street theatre, rock, jazz and cabaret, it organises

discussion forums on the “think tank Bregenzerwald“ (discussions/hearings concerning problems with environment, traffic and tourism), it invites Turkish-Kurdish folklore groups or arranges for the performance of “Hamlet“ in the Wälder dialect.

In order to tie the young people to the region and to enhance social identity (which is often enough impaired by tourism) the people of Bregenzerwald are prepared to invest in a “youth coordinator“. Not a social worker employed as a “professional youth“ but a genuine young man who, provided with his own budget, co-ordinates all of the six youth clubs in Bregenzerwald and who organises discos, dances and concerts, supports theatre projects, who solicits sponsors, tries to find jobs for jobless youths, organises night busses and takes up such (amazing?) topics as “Eating disturbances with young people“.

**Contest criterion:**

**Avoidance, minimization of social and cultural damage caused by tourism in destination areas.**

The examples mentioned above show that almost all efforts have been concentrating on this objective for at least a decade.

**Contest criterion:**

**Application of new methods in qualifying partnership and cooperation between the external tourism and the local people.**

In view of the broad cooperation, as described earlier in this paper, through, with and among almost all relevant forces in the society, a high level of cooperation between internal and external parties has been achieved. The author has never before found such an interlinked and tightly woven approach in any other tourism region.

**Contest criterion:**

**Creation of other favourable conditions for a socially responsible tourism development in destination areas.**

When the appraiser conducted his research in Bregenzerwald he was on several occasions asked why this criterion was applied. The tenor of the remarks he heard was, that it was after all natural to create favourable conditions and parameters for a socially responsible tourism - and not to act against the well-being of one’s own, local population. Only when the author pointed out that this was a world-wide contest, this issue was no longer brought up.

**Contest criterion:**

**Projects/measures entered for the contest must be in line with the principles of environmental compatibility.**

The milk and cheese production in Bregenzerwald takes place in a “silo-free“ area (the fodder provided is exclusively grass or hay), fertilisers may only be used very restrictively. This is the basic prerequisite for the extraordinary quality of the cheese culture in Bregenzerwald. Combined with the traditional 3-stage farming ( farm in the valley, preliminary pasture and alpine pasture) it is justified to say that alpine agriculture

practised in the region is still close to nature and environment-friendly. The majority of the farmers belong to the association for biological agricultural products. Considering this background a number of well-renowned and exemplary enterprises in the hotel and gastronomy sector of Bregenzerwald were prepared to participate in the "Eco-profit programme". As such they have the status of ecologically oriented enterprises which, after having been controlled, gained a distinction for their performance. The concept worked out by the Austrian Institute for Ecology runs under the motto "Living and working ecologically in Bregenzerwald" and it requires from the enterprises participating in the programme to deal with issues such as energy analysis, water/sewage, waste/purification, foodstuffs and regional supply, energy and mobility, environment costs and environment controlling. This happens both in workshops and, resulting from these, also in concrete actions. The net-results of an ecologically managed enterprise are intended to serve as a guideline for entrepreneurs and, based on a broader scale, will be of help for regional resource management.

The same procedure is also envisaged for commercial and manufacturing enterprises so that in the end the three economic pillars in Bregenzerwald will form a consolidated socially responsible and environmental-friendly unit.