



1. General information on the project

➤ Short name

Almenland

➤ Title of the project

Regional Community Initiative Almenland Teichalm-Sommeralm

➤ Themes

- Regional value added
- Governance capacity
- Protected areas
- Mobility
- New forms of decision-making
- Policies and instruments

➤ Region

Almenland, Styria

➤ Are there one or several centres in the region?

(e.g. towns etc.)

There are 3 centres in the region Almenland:

- Municipality Passail is the centre of industry and trade
- Municipalities Fladnitz and St. Kathrein a. Off. are the tourism centres of the region.

➤ Country

Austria

➤ Alpine Perimeter

The project is located within the alpine perimeter.

➤ Duration of the project

From 1995-01-01 to 2006-12-31.

(corresponding to 2 periods within the scope of the European initiative Leader)

➤ Short description of the project

The project Almenland comprises numerous activities and subprojects which all concentrate on the leading product of the region – “Almo“ (meat of alp oxen). For example, the cooperation of Schirnhofner Ltd. with the regional farmers in the production and distribution of high quality meat, the professional marketing of the regional products and the region itself in Austria (Almenland Marketing Ltd.), Almenland Rooms and Almenland proprietors (tourism providers cooperating in the marketing of their offers), Hiking (“Wanderbare Alm”), Almholz Association (20 farmers process and market small dimensioned wood), Almenland agricultural specialities (45 farmers produce and market regional products, e.g. bread, meat, Almenland herbs, honey, etc.), Weizer Bergland Specialities (regional meat products of different agricultural producers cooperate in the distribution of their products), landscape conservation (Almwirtschaftsverein), Almenland Golf, etc.

➤ Project executive



The association „Regional Initiative Almenland“ was founded in 1995. It comprises the 12 municipalities of the region, the tourism office Almenland and all agricultural organisations of the region (Maschinenring Almenland with 1700 members, Waldwirtschaftsgemeinschaft Almenland with 500 members, Consortium Landscape Conservation Almenland, Cultural Committee Almenland, etc.). The inclusion of all these regional organisations and associations guarantees the participation of most inhabitants of the region. For this reason the whole population of the region Almenland is referred to as project participants.

Main responsibilities of the project executive:

- Formulation of the project objectives and an regional development plan
- Realisation of the objectives
- Formulation of projects
- Implementation of the projects
- Installation of cooperations
- Coordination
- Development of offers and marketing for the whole region (for this reason, Almenland Marketing Ltd. was founded)

Association Regional Community Initiative Almenland Teichalm-Sommeralm
(Verein Regionale Gemeinschaftsinitiative Almenland Teichalm-Sommeralm)

Chairman Ernst Hofer

Almenlandbüro

Fladnitz/Teichalm 100

8163 Fladnitz

Telephone: 03179 / 23 000

Email: region@almenland.at

➤ **Contact person**

Contact person for the region and the project executive:

Jakob Wild

Fladnitz/Teichalm 100

8163 Fladnitz

Telephone: 03179 / 23 000

Email: region@almenland.at

Contact person for Almenland Marketing Ltd.:

CEO Willi Schweiger (is CEO of the tourism office Almenland too)

Fladnitz/Teichalm 100

8163 Fladnitz

Telephone: 03179 / 23 000 - 14

Contact person for Schirnhofner Ltd.:

Marketing manager Franz Kneissl

Kaindorf 298

8224 Kaindorf bei Hartberg

Telephone: 03334 / 3131 – 0

Email: franz.kneissl@feinkost-schirnhofner.at

➤ **Participants and external cooperations**

The most important participants are the 13.500 inhabitants of the region. The region has pledged itself to a bottom-up development of projects. In doing so, it provides for the population's participation by including the existing regional associations and organisations in the projects and planning process.

Further important participants are the 12 regional mayors and the 150 tourism companies. The regional farmers are important partners in the range of cultural landscape conservation and production of agricultural products.

In addition, Schirnhofner Ltd. is one significant regional participant. As owner (60%) of the Almenland Marketing Ltd. it instigates important cooperations dealing with the regional lead product Almo (alp ox).



The project itself generates more and more partners and participants, such as Almholz GmbH & Co KEG (Alp Wood), Weizer Bergland, Almenland Golf.

Important external cooperations:

- Consultancy Agency GfA, Graz (supervision of the whole project),
- Economic Chamber Weiz, particularly the department for tourism and trade (e.g. support in the project „Almenland proprietors“). And what’s more, the chairman of the Economic Chamber Weiz, Hans Spreitzhofer, is one of the key persons for the project.
- Regional banks (Raiffeisen),
- Regional Management Eastern Styria,
- Chamber of Agriculture in Weiz,
- Regional press (Almenland Blick, Weizer Zeitung),
- The province of Styria (support, funding, project processing → the province of Styria presents more than a sponsoring partner but provides support and advice on different issues for the participants)

➤ **Key person**

Ernst Hofer (Chairman of the Association Regional Community Initiative Almenland) and Hans Spreitzhofer (Chairman of the Economic Chamber Weiz) are the project’s key persons for industrial and tourism issues. Ernst Hofer represents the driving force of the project, being responsible for the existing cooperation of the 12 municipalities. His commitment and his altruistic way of thinking become manifest in his honorary activity: he chairs about 200 meetings for the project per year – in an honorary capacity.

The 12 mayors’ willingness to cooperate on all project issues (on financial matters too) is a major driving force for the project too.

In addition, Jakob Wild and Michaela Mohr (Regional Community Initiative Almenland) and Willi Schweiger (Almenland Marketing Ltd.) are key persons on the project’s operational level.

➤ **Identification**

The project contributes to the population’s identification with the region Almenland. Concerning the project activities and objectives there is a broad level of acceptance among the regional population, which is the most important precondition for identification. The increasing interest of local people to benefit from the brand Almenland proves this development. For example, there are inquiries for an Almenland hotel project, an Almenland taxi project, etc. For this reason, the region ensures that projects are developed in a bottom-up way and are not artificially imported from outside the region. Other proofs for the increasing identification include the rising sponsoring inquiries and the ascending number of excursions from all over Europe.

About 95 % of the projects in the region Almenland have already been successfully implemented: with a great amount of equity capital and on the project initiators’ responsibilities. Organisational structures were developed for all projects in order to enable them to pay for themselves.

➤ **Objectives**

The saying „One for all and all for one“ is able to describe the projects overall objective: the precondition for success is cooperation, acceptance, commitment and identification within the region’s population.

Using the region’s resources and boosting its strengths is the only way regional value added may be created. Therefore, the region has to build up economic cycles and instigate a broadly willingness to cooperate among its inhabitants.

- Strengthening the rural region Almenland and its small-sized companies by cooperation on all relevant issues
- Attractive design of the region within the scope of living, recreation and working for the future
- Appreciation of the regional products by the means of a functioning economic cycle
- Improving the competitiveness in the fields of tourism and agricultural products
- Boosting the populations identification with the region for a better quality of living and for the safeguarding of employment



- Implementing solely sustainable projects: developing organisational structures and searching committed partners in order to ensure that the projects can pay for themselves.
- Making use of regional resources and market them inside and outside the region.

➤ **Activities**

- ALMO-Genussregion: The region defines itself via its leading product Almo (i.e. alp ox meat). The regional farmers' yearly production accounts for 4500 Almos, which are processed by Schirnhofner Ltd and sold by 25 Almenland proprietors and 250 Austrian Zielpunkt stores. The farmers comply with strict quality standards (GM-free feeding, free-range husbandry in summer, etc.) as well as the producer Schirnhofner Ltd. The regional quality assurance system is continuously checked by Greenpeace and animal rights groups.
- Almenland golf course: 70 farmers cooperate within the project Almenland golf course. They benefit from the rent and, what's more, employment for 30 mountain farmers was safeguarded. The golf course also represents additional income for regional tourism companies.
- Alp hiking,
- Landscape conservation,
- Almenland rooms,
- GM-free region,
- Professional marketing of the region: the marketing of the region Almenland focuses the regional leading product Almo and is performed by the Almenland Marketing Ltd.
- Almenland proprietors: the community Almenland proprietors consists of 22 regional proprietors, the Almo producers (farmers), the regional abattoir and Schirnhofner Ltd. The community provides for the marketing of the regional products in the region.

➤ **Process**

1. Definition of the project (1-2 years): formulation of objectives and information of the population. Strong external support was necessary in this first project phase: consultancy agency GfA Graz (moderation, project development, support with funding applications, etc.) The participation of the regional population was an important element in the drafting of the regional development plan. This participation was accomplished by inviting the existing organisations and associations in the planning process. Representatives of the regional municipalities, of the Economic Chamber Weiz and of the province of Styria were invited too. The broad base of cooperation guaranteed the information exchange in the region.
2. Capital-intensive implementation on a broad level in 2 parts:
 - a. Leader 2: project implementation (2 employees for the administration work).
 - b. Leader+: foundation of the Almenland Marketing Ltd. and initiation of projects focusing the leading product Almo. The marketing by a large concern (Wholesale trade) represents a serious change but at the same time an enormous chance for the region.
3. Actually marketing and development of marketing packages: specialisation and refinement of the existing projects and implementation of specialised projects on the topic Almo. This project phase is very important because it aims at enabling the region and the various initiatives, which have developed within the scope of the project Almenland, to pay for themselves in future.

➤ **Results**

About 95% of the projects have already been implemented in a sustainable way.

The creation of sustainable structures for each initiative ought to lead them into economic autonomy.

- Local Action Group consisting of 12 municipalities,
- Tourism office Almenland (merger of the 12 regional tourism offices into common the tourism office Almenland),
- Maschinenring Almenland (1.700 members),
- Waldwirtschaftsgemeinschaft Almenland (a community of 600 members which provides for the marketing of regional wood. Furthermore, they intend to foster biomass energy),
- Almholz Gruppe (20 farmers process and market small dimensioned wood),



- Weizer Bergland specialities (1000 companies produce high quality meat in the region),
- Almwirtschaftsverein (150 alp farmers provide for the sustainment and the landscape conservation of the alps),
- Almenland agricultural specialities (45 farmers produce and market regional products, e.g. bread, meat, Almenland herbs, honey, etc.),
- Bäuerlicher Gästering Almenland (farm holidays).

Success factors

- The global players in the region entirely support the project Almenland (municipalities, mayors, Economic Chamber Weiz, Chamber of Agriculture, Tourism). This requires that all players agree on common objectives.
- The existence of marketing and distribution partners (Schirnhofner Ltd).
- Rewarding the operative management: such extensive projects may not be conducted on a honorary basis.
- Safeguarding a certain amount of funding for a period of 15-20 years, to ensure the sustainability of the project.
- The regional organisations' willingness to cooperate, directness and trust in each other. This values may emerge only from intensive public relation activities.

➤ Is there made use of endogenous resources? Which ones?

- Regional people who are ready to assume responsibility, i.e. no external management.
- Almo.
- Wood and wood processing.
- Agricultural products (and the processing within the region)
- The alps themselves represents a touristic attraction.

The concentration on the endogenous resources caused an important economic cycle within the region: the cultivation and strengthening of these resources contributes in turn to their preservation: the alp oxen prevent the afforestation of the alps, etc.

➤ What is the specific relevance of the results for the Alps?

Conservation of the cultural landscape (alps), conservation of the traditional form of cultivation (agriculture) by marketing the regional products and ensuring a high level of quality, cooperation of small companies with a large company (guarantees sales for the small companies, a high level of quality and professional marketing in Austria).

➤ Evaluation

Constant evaluation by the province of Styria within the European Community Initiative Leader+.

Own evaluation by the regional organisations and companies: economic development, financial ratios, annual statistics, overnight stays, etc. The Economic Chamber and the Chamber of Agriculture support the region in this evaluation. Almenland Chairman Ernst Hofer is responsible for the consolidation of the different figures and the presentation during the general meeting of the Association Almenland. The results of the evaluation are discussed with the concerned subprojects: developing solutions and improvements and supporting the groups in the realisation of these activities.

Finally there is another evaluation by the Province of Styria because it acts as financial backer for the project itself.

➤ Difficulties

- In the beginning: scepticism among the population and among the politicians. A lot of information and explanations were necessary to overcome this problem. Even today constant information on project activities is an important precondition for success.



- Obtaining financial support from the municipalities: the cooperation in financial issues was a completely new experience for the municipalities which demanded long and difficult negotiations.
- The cooperation with the regional media established very slowly.
- Uncertainty and hardly experience in funding applications in the beginning of the European Community Initiative Leader (1995).
- Raising equity capital in the region: consultancy by GfA in Graz, market analyses and further activities which helped to reduce uncertainties and provide support. These activities were funded to a great extent by Leader+ (Technical Aid).

➤ **Budget and financial backer**

The annual budget of the Association Regional Community Initiative Almenland accounts for 50.000 € (50% Leader+, 50% municipalities). The Leader+ funding is declining and will be restricted in future to 30%.

Schirnhofer Ltd. provides an annual marketing and advertising budget of about € 360.000 for the common marketing of the region Almenland (Almenland Marketing Ltd.).

The different subprojects are financed by the municipalities (90%), the province of Styria, Leader+ and the member fees of the participating associations and organisations (flat sum of € 35).

There are no external investors and sponsors in the region Almenland. The regional banks support the companies and projects in financial matters (granting favourable conditions, etc.).

➤ **Source of information**

www.almenland.at

➤ **Is the project well documented?**

The homepage was redesigned recently: it offers detailed and well-structured information on project activities. It is focused on touristic usage, i.e. it contains actual offers, information on sights, hotels, restaurants, leisure activities, etc.

You receive further information on the project itself and on the touristic offers on request.



2. Comments on the best practice example

➤ Impact on nature and environment

The existence of the regional farms and the sustainable landscape conservation was safeguarded (150 farmers provide for mechanical weed control amounting to € 70.000). GM-free feeding of 4.500 alp oxen (ensured by an innovative quality assurance system).

The alp oxen contribute to the conservation of the pastures as cultural landscape.

Parking space and means of public transport help to reduce the impacts of increasing traffic in the region (development of soft-mobility offers at present). The processing of agricultural products within the region aims at shortening transport routes.

➤ Economic value added

Since 1995 55 projects have been implemented in a sustainable way, i.e. development of organisational structures for each project to ensure their economic autonomy. The established organisations (Almenland Golf, Almenland Proprietors, Almenland Farmers, Almenland Marketing Ltd., etc.) earn an annual turnover of € 16 millions.

The project produced 80 full time working places and 180 part time working places – 33 new working places in the management of the established organisations for the projects-, and safeguarded the existence of more than 900 companies (farms, tourism providers, gastronomy, etc.) by creating economic value added (new touristic offers, new distribution partners, etc.).

The concentration on the leading product Almo enabled the region to preserve the regional abattoir (400 slaughters per year). This helps to comply with the high level of quality (shortening transport routes).

The annual investment in Almenland Room account for € 5,2 millions and in Almo stabling for €3,5 millions. The increased investment volume leads to further investments in other economic sectors: e.g. some farmers cooperate in the construction of a regional GM-free dairy. That is, the region develops more and more specialised products using the brand Almenland.

The tourism sector benefits from the increasing number of excursions from all over Europe.

The region Almenland managed to turn migration into immigration due to the new self-confidence, the new working places and the prospects within the region.

Especially tourism providers and agricultural producers gained access to new markets: Hungary, Germany and the neighbouring East European countries.

➤ Socio-cultural value added

The region Almenland did not exist prior to the project but intensive public relation activities managed to create a feeling of solidarity among the population. Today the region Almenland bears a meaning for the inhabitants: proud, self-confidence, innovation are only some of the new characteristics of the region Almenland.

This awareness and acceptance produce a great amount of commitment, leading to an increasing interest in using the brand Almenland for different projects and products (rising number of inquiries).

The project refers the regional cultural assets to future generations and tourists.

The regional economy and the municipalities support the conservation of the living space Almenland and intend to rise the quality of living in the region.

➤ Innovative content

- Projects are penned and implemented by people from the region.
- A professional management was established: the marketing of the region focuses on the leading product (Almo).
- Integration of regional organisations which implement the projects on their own responsibility.
- Cooperation of small agricultural companies with the large company Schirnhofen Ltd.: this exceptional cooperation represents a great chance for the small companies in the region. They benefit from a professional marketing and a secured amount of turnover.



Furthermore, this cooperation enables the regional agricultural producers to hold up the high quality of their products.

- The principles of the European Community Initiative Leader+ (endogenous resources, cooperation and networking, acceptance among the population, commitment, bottom-up development, etc.) have been executed in all projects and have become part of the organisations' structures. An imported success factor was the region's maxim "a healthy structure first, subsidies afterwards".
- A honest partnership: the whole region is committed to the project Almenland. Therefore, the region Almenland and its partners will still exist when the Leader+ period expires.
- The municipalities' cooperation in financial issues.
- The population's solidarity with its region. Every project increases this solidarity what in turn fosters the population's commitment and leads to even more projects.

➤ **Good governance**

All projects during the last 10 years were penned by local people. This requires numerous meetings and negotiations with different groups (farmers, tourism providers, entrepreneurs, etc.). The communication and information exchange is one of the requirements of the European Community Initiative Leader+.

The region Almenland is becoming a nature park. For this reason a Local Agenda 21 process is implemented at present. In addition, awareness for the themes nature and environment is raised among the population.

The project Almenland was implemented in a professional way: creating organisational structures, payment instead of honorary commitment and foundation of the Almenland Marketing Ltd. The organisation is characterised by an broadly based regional participation (12 municipalities, tourism office, marketing cooperations and organisations) and, therefore, ensures the transparency and the democracy of decisions within the region. Ideas and concepts are presented and discussed in regional meetings. The members of the Association Regional Community Initiative Almenland decide in their meeting on the implementation of new projects.

➤ **PR impact and publicity**

As there have always been little funds for marketing activities within the region Almenland, the Almenland Marketing Ltd. was founded in cooperation with the project partner Schirnhofner Ltd. The Almenland Marketing Ltd. is responsible for marketing activities concerning the project as well as regional marketing. That is, the public relation for the region was put on a professional footing.

The regional newspaper "Almenland Blick" (Almenland View) informs the population currently on the projects and thereby contributes to the creation of acceptance among the region's citizens.

Publicity for free arises due to the hard-working project activities: ORF film "Picked up in Almenland", reports in daily TV magazines, film location for "Country Kids", etc.

The distribution of Almenland meat products by Schirnhofner (supplier for the Austrian supermarket chain Zielpunkt) creates publicity too: the packages of the products contain the URL of the region Almenland. Furthermore, Almenland participates in the annual marketing campaign of Schirnhofner Ltd.

The impacts result in a rising excursion tourism and in increasing inquiries from regional businesses and people who develop new projects and want to use the label "Almenland" for it.

➤ **Multiplier effect and networking**

The linkage of agriculture, tourism and culture is extraordinary in the region Almenland due to the central partner of this network: Schirnhofner Ltd. The cooperation of small agricultural companies with a large company allow for a professional marketing strategy and a quality assurance system. The leading product Almo has fostered various multiplier effects: tourism, culture and agriculture develop new products, cooperations and initiatives concentrating on Almo. That is, a cross-sector network has developed within the region.

Networking is promoted by motivating the regional population to instigate new projects.



The cooperation of municipalities on financial issues is especially in rural regions with weak patterns of finance necessary to guarantee a purposeful use of the funds.

Leader network Austria: exchange of know how and experience on a national level (local action groups). The Styrian local action groups have meetings for the exchange of information too.

The number of excursions (information on the project and its success factors, exchange of know how) from other regions, organisations and countries is rising steadily.

Furthermore, Franz Kneissl, Ernst Schirnhofer, Karl Schirnhofer and other regional key persons are invited for discussions, lectures, presentations, etc.

➤ **Transferability**

The project may be transferred to other regions if they provide for the implementation of some basic conditions:

- Using endogenous resources and developing cross-sectoral economic cycles within the region. The resources have to be processed within the region in order to create economic value added.
- Developing some kind of leading product or leading theme for the region in order to ensure that all participants and stakeholders stick to the same overall objectives (concerning the region's future)
- People in the region have to cooperate: commitment, awareness, self-confidence, interest in the region and proud are necessary. A lot of information, talking, convincing and discussing may help to shape the regional population's opinion. The decision-makers have to originate from the region, in order to ensure a certain level of credibility.

➤ **Remark and further information**

➤ **Further interview partners**

Wirtschaftskammer Weiz Obmann (selbst Almenlandwirt):

Hans Spreitzhofer

Gleisdorferstr. 43

8160 Weiz

Telefon: 03172 / 22 73

Email: weiz@wkstmk.at

Obmann der Regionalen Gemeinschaftsinitiative Almenland

Ernst Hofer

Almenlandbüro

Fladnitz/Teichalm 100

8163 Fladnitz

Telefon: 03179 / 23 000

Email: region@almenland.at

Regionale Gemeinschaftsinitiative Almenland

Jakob Wild

Almenlandbüro

Fladnitz/Teichalm 100

8163 Fladnitz

Telefon: 03179 / 23 000

Email: region@almenland.at