

## AUSTRIA

# Bioeconomy

### Location

Kalkalpen National Park

### Programming period

2014 – 2020

### Priority

P5 – Resource-efficient,  
Climate-resilient Economy

### Measure

M19 – LEADER/CLLD

### Funding (EUR)

Total budget 117 000  
EAFRD 66 857  
National/Region 26 743  
Private: 23 400

### Project duration

2019-2021

### Project promoter

Regio- Tech  
RegionalentwicklungsGmbH

### Contact

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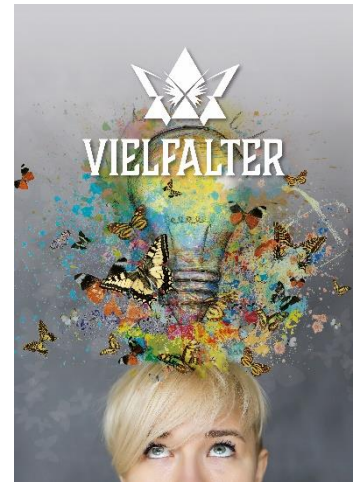
### Website

<http://regio-tech.at/page.cfm?vpath=klima--und-energiemodellregion>

Organising a competition to support and encourage businesses and their sustainable projects in tourism, health, agriculture and forestry in the Kalkalpen National Park, Austria.

## Summary

The Kalkalpen National Park's Start-Up Challenge sought to promote sustainable entrepreneurship in the park through a competition for business ideas in tourism, health, agriculture and forestry. The competition involved publishing a call for innovative business ideas across different categories (idea, start-up or consolidation), awarding winners in each category, and implementing an accelerator programme to help bring the ideas to business maturity. Regional networking and public engagement were key components throughout.



The project sought to identify innovative ideas consistent with the National Park's philosophy of having a positive impact on both biodiversity and the bioeconomy. These innovative ideas could then lead to establishing new sustainable businesses with the support of the accelerator programme. The project also aimed to increase the public's appreciation of renewable natural resources and to create and demonstrate a replicable model that can be applied to other national parks in Austria in the longer term. This would create stronger links between environmental protection and the regional economy.

## Results

In total, 55 projects were submitted across the categories of idea, start-up and consolidation/company. Eight winners were awarded, and several businesses are now running very successfully. Public events raised the profile of the winning submissions. The format will be applied and further developed in the Kalkalpen National Park in the next programming period, with a focus on agriculture and regional food.

## Lessons and recommendations:

- ❑ The structure of the competition was developed with local partners, the Chamber of Commerce and the "Friends of the National Park" association. It built on the experience of other bioeconomy projects, to give participants ideas and examples of business models that have worked in the past.
- ❑ The project explored new ways of financing, impact investment, how to support rural entrepreneurs and sectoral networking, and enabled the project administrators to gain a diverse experience on which to build on in the future.

## Context

The mountain forests between the rivers Enns and Steyr represent the largest connected forest area in Austria. In its centre is the Kalkalpen National Park which is a UNESCO World Heritage site of beech forest. Together with the other neighbouring protected areas, it is considered a hotspot of biodiversity, and a central part of Austria's natural heritage.

The Kalkalpen National Park is considered an ideal breeding ground for entrepreneurial innovations that add value to the land, nature and economy. Approximately 350 000 visitors enjoy recreational activities within the park area every year. As well as tourism, there are agriculture initiatives such as the "Biokalb (eco-veal)" initiative, which shows that agriculture can profit from the region's ecological offer. However, the potential for sustainable entrepreneurship in and around the National Park is far from exhausted.

## Objectives

The overall objective of the project is to promote new forms of ecologically sustainable entrepreneurship in the national park, specifically;

- To increase the public's appreciation of natural resources and their understanding of the importance of protecting the national park through entrepreneurship.
- To find innovative ideas that are consistent with the National Park's philosophy (a positive impact on both biodiversity and the bioeconomy) and can lead to the establishment of new sustainable businesses helped by an accelerator programme.
- To establish cross-sector partnerships to enhance corporate environmental protection.
- To create and demonstrate a replicable model that can be applied to other national parks in Austria in the longer term, to create stronger links between environmental protection and the regional economy.

All of these activities focus on renewal biological resources.



## Activities

The project consisted of two phases. The first phase involved a call for competition entries. The submissions were then categorised and published as being in either the idea, start-up or consolidation (bringing the project or business together) phase of development. The most innovative submissions for each entry category were then selected through a multi-stage selection process.

In the second phase, the winners in each category were awarded and received support specific to their needs. This was either prize money, through an accelerator programme and / or assistance with public relations over a fixed period of time. The total prize money for innovations in the 'ideas' category amounted to EUR 20 000, divided between the first, second and third place rankings. In addition to receiving funding, these winners were supported by local mentors to further develop their ideas over a three-month period.

The winners of the 'start-up' category benefited from an 'Investment Ready Programme' worth EUR 15 000, while in the category "consolidation" the winner received a PR package worth EUR 5 000.

Activities in both phases included public events to disseminate information to the wider population in the region. Phase 1 culminated in a festival to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the national park's foundation, while Phase 2 concluded with a pitch of business ideas to the public. A board of regional experts, stakeholders and VIPs evaluated the projects according to the defined criteria and awarded winners in each category, which created a lot of public interest.

Throughout the whole project a steering committee supported all the project activities.

## Main results

In total, 55 projects were submitted across the three categories of 'idea', 'start-up' and 'consolidation/company'.

In total eight submissions won an award:

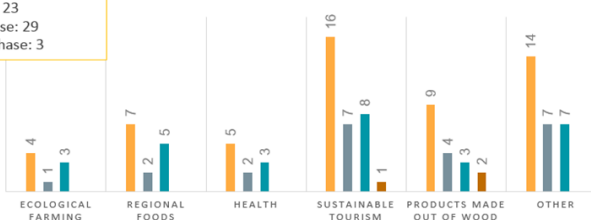
- A harvesting machine to efficiently farm meadows with scattered fruit trees.
- Promoting biodiversity by reactivating and conserving alpine meadows.
- Commercialising meat from wild game as a premium brand.
- Developing and manufacturing sustainable skis and snowboards.
- Producing regional and CO2 neutral kindling wood.
- Developing combustion technology for small and medium-sized farms.
- Producing essential oils and hydrolats with a portable distillation plant.
- Modular wood constructions for each stage of life.

The "Vielfalter" project disseminated plenty of good practice project examples to the general public in and around the Kalkalpen National Park. Recommendations for more sustainable entrepreneurship in and around the park were published to enable the project to be transferred to other Austrian National Parks.

### OVERVIEW OF APPLICATIONS

total idea startup company

Total: 55  
Idea-phase: 23  
Startup-phase: 29  
Company-phase: 3



## Main lessons

Motivating local people to use natural resources sustainably can lead to innovation, appreciation and protection of these resources, and ultimately to regional progress.

The project included a significant networking effort, involving important contributors to the development of the bioeconomy, including the Upper Austrian National Park Authority, the Park's LEADER authority, the neighbouring LEADER authority, the regional forum Steyr Kirchdorf, the Chamber of Commerce, the Scheuch Foundation, sponsors from the regional economy, the Upper Austrian Regional Management and the Impact Hub Vienna.

The dedicated goal of the project was to create a replicable format for other national parks and nature areas. Accordingly, the experiences and lessons learned from the project were analysed and recorded after the project had been completed and are now available for other regions.

New approaches to consulting with applicants have been particularly innovative, and the Scheuch Foundation intends to replicate these in other regions. In the Kalkalpen National Park Region, the format is to be applied and further developed in the next programming period, 2021 – 2027, under LEADER, with an increasing focus on agriculture and regional food.

*"We offer the many creative people, organisations and companies in the region the chance to develop themselves with professional help. All in all, this competition should help us to make progress in positioning our region as a living space with a future."* stated Dr. Christian Dörfel, the Chairman of the Steyr - Kirchdorf Regional Forum.

### Additional sources of information

[www.facebook.com/regio3.at](https://www.facebook.com/regio3.at)  
[www.instagram.com/klimaundener-gieregio3/](https://www.instagram.com/klimaundener-gieregio3/)

\*This project has been categorised under 'Bioeconomy' by the nominating National Rural Network