

LOWER AUSTRIAN CHARTER
FOR THE RURAL AREA



Guideline
for the future.
Commitment
to the regions.

The Rural Area Has a Future



Lower Austria is composed of many different urban and especially rural zones, and the people enjoy living in their communities. Just as a survey also confirms, an overwhelming majority, actually 91% of the Lower Austrian population, denotes the quality of life in their federal province as being high. Rural area and urban centres complement each other. The intense interweaving of both living spheres is a strength of Lower Austria with which we are also generating significant impulses for the rural and urban zones. The rural area in Lower Austria is a dwelling, working, production and recreational zone, and in its diversity is characterised by a farming and forestry industry with a broad spectrum of functions. Our farmers produce high-grade, healthy foodstuffs, husband and shape the cultural landscape and secure the natural living foundations of soil, water and air.

The social, economic and political developments lead continuously to changes. Since the opening of the borders, the new axes to our neighbours have been improving the location quality and accessibility of the peripheral zones and thus facilitating the interaction of central zone and rural area. With this, new options for living, working and doing business are opening up in the whole of Lower Austria.

Dealing with these changes is a challenge out of which opportunities can accrue. Thus, alternative possibilities for gainful employment must even continue to be created, new forms of coexistence be taken into consideration and an appropriate infrastructure be secured. The main focus is placed on a preservation of the quality of life and an increase in the regional creation of value tied in with the positioning of high-quality first-class regional products on the market. Prerequisite for a successful course of development is the population's own initiative and commitment. From being those affected, the people must become those involved. Along the way the Province of Lower Austria supports the most varied endeavours. Of paramount importance for the future of our federal province is the harmony between urban and rural areas - after all: We still have plenty of things in mind.

Dr. Erwin Pröll
Governor of Lower Austria

DI Josef Plank
Minister of Agriculture,
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The goals

The Lower Austrian Charter for the Rural Area

_is a commitment of the Province of Lower Austria to the sustainable development of the rural area and its living, economic and recreational functions.

_is embedded within major strategies of the Province such as the "Project w.i.N. - Strategy of Lower Austria", the Lower Austrian Climate Programme, the Lower Austrian Transportation Concept and others, as well as the movement for village and urban renewal.

_forms the framework for the ongoing policy work towards living on the land in Lower Austria.

_ought to contribute towards cultivating awareness for the rural area and to deliver approaches to acting for the safeguarding and continued development of the rural area.

_ought to validate the many volunteers in the non-profit organisations in their work and continue to motivate them.

_represents the brackets within which the inherent mission statements in the communities and regions can be projected, pondered and implemented.

_is a sign that stands for the Province of Lower Austria being a strong ally for a strong rural area.

_shows that city & country are no rivalling poles in Lower Austria, but rather complementary living spheres - the best out of both worlds creates a unique habitat in the middle of Europe.

_is a contribution towards making the Global Marshall Plan a reality at a regional level.

* w.i.N. stands for "to win" and "we in Lower Austria (Niederösterreich)" at the same time.



The Quality
The Variety
The Developments
The Challenge

The rural area today

Its Quality



The rural area has quality of life

More than two thirds of the Lower Austrians live in the countryside. The rural area is primarily defined by its low population density. However, the rural area in Lower Austria is no remainder category, but rather reinforcement and generator of stimulus for the entire federal province.

The people prize the high value of dwelling, leisure and experiencing life, the scarcely polluted environment, the charming cultural landscape, the straightforward social structures and the personal opportunities for joining in and shaping within the public life in the country.

The rural and the urban zone each have specific qualities and complement one another. They are of equal value in their significance. As a dwelling place, the rural area combines the best of both worlds: close enough to the centres in order to make use of their markets and jobs - enough distance in order to preserve the quality of life and the regional identity.

The Variety

The rural area is multifaceted.

In the history of its origins, the rural area is characterised by its agriculture and forestry. In Lower Austria, various starting premises present themselves for its husbandry, because of the manifold types of countryside. Forms of farmland and settlement that still exist today came into being for reason of the husbandry criteria.

Different national and international basic conditions have characterised the regions and communities in their evolution. There is therefore no rural area with uniform starting premises. Because of partially intended and partially unintended processes, regions have arisen with differing quality and attractiveness.

The Developments

There are two major tendencies in the rural area

Communities that are affected by dwindling homesteads have to struggle with the abandonment of farms, the loss of jobs and the decline of local retailing. Poised against this are initiatives that often come into being due to elevated awareness of the problems.

Communities with a high level of population growth are distinguished by their enhanced economic performing ability and a greater availability of jobs in the region. Conflict situations result from the coexistence of land husbandry and claims of the right to "dwelling amidst greenery". The phenomena of uncontrolled development are associated with high costs for the infrastructure. Oftentimes problems caused by the high percentage of commuters and a strong growth of automotive traffic are the consequence.

The Challenge

A lively rural area has a future

The rural area ought to serve the most diverse professional groups, all age groups and both genders as a space for living, business and recreation.

The organisation of the daily routine and the coverage of the requirements of its inhabitants must be ensured within the region. There are new axes ensuing, which are drawing in increased investments in infrastructure and accessibility along with them. Altered demands on the dwelling and working spheres must be catered to, such that sustainability is to be drawn upon as the most important deciding criterion.

Telecommunications technologies increase the localised independence and the developmental opportunities of the rural area and permit it to once again be more interesting for many people. To recognise the local distinctive features and to secure them as capital for the future is an important task for policy, administration and committed people. A common mission statement for the future must build on top of the existing activities and be borne by the populace.





Guideline for the future Commitment to the regions

Lower Austrian Charter for the Rural Area

1.

Land Husbandry

The backbone of the rural area

The rural area is inseparable from its agriculture and forestry, meaning associated with the production of foodstuffs. Land husbandry is no longer the only option for value creation on the land. It is, however, a starting premise for the character of the countryside and the scope of the non-agricultural branches of economic activity.

Our farmers produce premium-quality foodstuffs, thus securing the preservation of the cultural landscape and with it the unique appearance of the rural area as the basis for its tourism and its dwelling and recreational experience.

Without a fair income in the agricultural sector, even many upstream and downstream branches of business cannot exist. With this, its agriculture directly and indirectly creates many employment opportunities and thus strengthens the economic basis of the rural area. The support of the agricultural sector is applauded by a broad majority. We want to uphold the husbandry of the land under application of various forms of farming. Particular opportunities exist in the production of renewable carriers of energy and their commercialisation.

The farmers make significant social, cultural and culinary contributions towards securing and rendering the rural area more attractive. The countryside needs innovative farmers, for whom

opportunities of continuing education are being allowed for. The generation, refinement and commercialisation of agricultural and forestry products safeguards jobs and retains added value within the region.

Through environmentally sound and sustainable methods of farming, the production of healthful foodstuffs can be brought into harmony with a multifarious, characteristic landscape.



2. Location and Economy

Sustainable regions are distinguished by a high degree of self-sufficiency

A functionally capable economy is the foundation for the location quality of our towns and for the continued development of the rural area as a whole.

International trends and developments favour the growth of conurbations, of congested centres and their surrounding belts of sprawl. These concentration processes are no phenomena unique to Lower Austria, but are to be observed worldwide. For the rural area, therefore, a good reachability of the urban centres and thus a high degree of interweaving of dwelling, business and recreational zones is important in order to make optimum use of resources and the region's own potentials.

Well-functioning markets and labour market openings in the urban centres and the proximity to the customers and guests of the central zones also strengthens the rural locations. For this reason, a good reachability and equipment of infrastructure continues to be important for the rural area, yet without impairing its ecological and biogeographical distinctiveness. With targeted subsidies and competent service institutions, we are supporting the existing enterprises and founders of businesses in the rural area.

A great potential for a balanced array of available jobs and a regional creation of value lies in the circulating economy. At the same time, environmental resources are spared with this economic model in the sense of their sustainability, and transport routes are kept short. Regional products reinforce one's identity, elevate one's image to the outside and secure the added value locally. They also form the basis for touristic activities. In the networking of agriculture, trade, services and tourism lies the future. Great opportunities are opening up through a strengthened production and utilisation of renewable raw materials. We place special emphasis on the regional provision of energy carriers towards the safeguarding of the energy supply in the communities and regions.



3.

Soil, Air, Water

Environmental quality means quality of life

An intact environment is regarded by the Lower Austrian populace as being a key prerequisite for quality of life. The sustainable exploitation of the environment locally serves the production of healthful foodstuffs and the (nearby) recreation, and globally is a necessary condition for the stability of the climate.

The scarce resource of soil demands a preventive kind of planning and a sparing usage. We want to keep the total terrain consumed in the sense of its sustainability as low as possible.

Not only keeping the air that we breathe clean, but also reducing CO₂ emissions are important environmental targets, which are primarily to be taken into account in the questions of obtaining sources of energy and of mobility. Many countries envy us our clean drinking water. In its Water Charter legislated in 2003, Lower Austria commits itself to the comprehensive protection of its water.

Climate protection and the preservation of our water are anchored in the Lower Austrian Provincial Constitution.



4. Culture and Knowledge

Building on top of the old and promoting something new

In order to be able to retain knowledge and experience within the region, an adequate number of educational institutions locally is essential. A good educational palette for children and youth holds a high significance for the populace. For the exchange and the imparting of knowledge, there is a need for personal networks and the necessary technical prerequisites, such as a high-capacity Internet connection.

We want to support structural conditions in the communities under which traditional culture can be groomed and contemporary (youth) culture finds a place. In a climate of tolerance, it is possible to have a feeling of self-worth and at the same time to find common values.



5. Dwelling and Living

The rural community as the focus of living

Community is homeland. Town centres are the core of the rural communities, where one meets others casually or by design. Versatile and attractively designed communal centres are the hubs of communication.

The communities have to take care of there being a best possible dwelling quality in place in the town centres.

This affects in particular the local retailing, the furnishing of open spaces, as well as the way of dealing with mobility.

Measures towards revitalisation of the town centres ought to observe energy-saving aspects and militate against the advancing fragmented growth.

In order to keep the rural area attractive in its diversity, there is also a need for (small) urban centres within the region. With this, additional ranges of choice and impulse for the surrounding country are planted. It is not a matter of a competition between urban and rural communities, but rather of a regionally tailored range of choice. In the Lower Austrian mini-regions the joint process of development is being worked on an intercommunity basis.



6. Living Together

A coexistence of young and old, women and men

Social structures are essential for the organisation the daily routine and for the happenstances of life. In adaptation to the different living blueprints of different people, needs-driven service models are to be developed.

We are going to support the people locally and make showcase examples better known.

An adequate healthcare system and caretaking of children and seniors are starting premises for living conditions of equal value in the rural areas.

The creation of opportunities for obtaining income, especially for women, is regarded on the part of the populace as being a substantial step towards making the rural area more attractive. A society with a future needs the common living and the cooperation of the generations and genders as well as places for communication in the communities.

The rural area lives through the involvedness of its populace. Starting with a neighbourly helping hand and continuing with the work of many volunteers, a sense of belonging to one's province and respective town is growing.



7. Involve Citizens

Country development grows in the town.

The rural area lives through the involvement of its population. Through the work of many volunteers within and outside of non-profit associations and federations, the identity of the town and its solidarity with the land grow.

Sustainability forms the umbrella for living, for culture, for businesses and a healthy environment. Successful participation processes as expressed by the Local Agenda 21 give the opportunity to join in the shaping of, and to better identify with the town and the region.

In the spirit of the general commitment towards equal entitlement in all sectors of living (gender mainstreaming), we are going to contribute to it by granting women in particular the opportunity to be brought into the local processes of participation and to be able to reach decisions jointly.

The cooperative work between politics, administration, interest groups and committed citizens going beyond party and community borders is an important factor in success. "Community cooperation projects" are a royal discipline for the rural area.



* The Agenda 21, which with its 40 chapters addresses all significant policy areas of an environmentally sound, sustainable development process, is the action programme that was passed in Rio de Janeiro by more than 170 countries for the 21st Century. In the local field it is the foundation for participatory processes.





This Is How We Implement the Charter for the Rural Area

- ### 1 The husbandry of the land forms the backbone
- _ Opportunities for its agriculture are yielded by the production of healthful products and their refinement and commercialisation. The Province supports its farmers in the promotion of regional products, as, for instance, with the "This Is What Lower Austria Tastes Like" initiative.
 - _ Farmers are furthermore supported, for example, through market organisation premiums, agricultural environmental programmes such as ÖPUL (Austrian Agrarian Environmental Programme), which includes the regional programme Ökopunkte NÖ (Lower Austrian Eco-points), equalisation payments, through projects in the context of land development as well as measures towards the preservation and improvement of alpine grazing and pasture farming and of the economic and ecological value of the forests.
 - _ Promotion of environmentally sound cultivation practices, for example organic farming and ecopoints (More than 4,000 agricultural operations are striving towards the preservation of the countryside through their participation within the context of this measure.)
 - _ Promotion of renewable types of energy (Centralised warm-water plants, biogas campaign, for example). In 2006 there were already around 320 biomass heating plants and over 70 biogas installations in operation. The trend towards increased utilisation of biomass keeps on going, and this usage more than doubled from 2004 to 2006.

- ### 2 Sustainable regions are distinguished by a high degree of self-sufficiency
- _ Upgrading of the location quality and the reachability of the rural area through the targeted improvement of its infrastructure and ease of access (Lower Austrian WIN strategy)
 - _ Subsidies through the Lower Austrian Economic and Structural Improvement Fund
 - _ Targeted marketing initiatives for the business locations in the rural area
 - _ Promotion of impulse projects, among other things through ecoplus

- ### 3 Environmental quality means living quality.
- _ Membership of the Province of Lower Austria

in the Climate Alliance and in the Soil Alliance. In the context of the climate programme from 2004 to 2008, about 180 measures towards CO₂ reduction have been implemented. In 2007, the Province started the "Our Soil - We Stand on and by It!" campaign.

- _ Promotion and support of communities that join the Climate Alliance and the Soil Alliance, for example, through the Lower Austrian Landscape Fund. In 2007, Lower Austria is already leading the pack in Europe with around 300 Climate Alliance and 45 Soil Alliance communities.
- _ Implementation of the Lower Austrian Water Charter. Each year, water supply projects with an investment volume of approximately 35 million Euros are implemented.

Building on top of the old and promoting something new

- _ Education for sustainable development within the context of the UN Decade for Sustainable Education from 2005 to 2014
- _ Training of youths and adults, for example, agricultural schools, chambers of agriculture. 20 specialised agricultural schools with different fields of concentration give instruction towards the putting of innovative farming methods into practice.
- _ As the largest organiser of cultural events in Lower Austria, the theatre festival managed to greet over 240,500 attendees in the course of 500 played performances at 23 playing sites from the middle of June to the beginning of September, 2007. In the course of the Lower Austrian Quadrants Festival, 50,000 visitors come into the regions each year.
- _ Subsidies for artistic and cultural institutions and projects at both the regional and super-regional level

The rural community as the focus of living

- _ Initiatives within the context of village and urban renewal. Lower Austria is building on the experience gained through 20 years of village renewal. Ten thousand volunteers work in over 600 non-profit associations for the improvement of the quality of life in their own towns.

- _ Vitalisation of the urban and town cores through targeted dwelling construction subsidies in order to militate against outward migration.
- _ Energy counselling by the Province. Already in the first three months 2,000 inquiries have been answered.
- _ Counselling sessions within the context of the town image designing.
- _ Transportation counselling and projects towards promotion of an environmentally sound mobility in the communities, for example within the context of the "Cycle Land Lower Austria" initiative

A coexistence of young and old, women and men

- _ Development of new models for the healthcare system and caretaking of children and seniors
- _ Implementation of gender mainstreaming not only in the Provincial administration, but also in the communities. Lower Austrian participation in EU pilot projects such as "Gender Alp! - Developing Space for Men and Women"
- _ For the period from 2004 to 2008, the Lower Austrian Working Committee for the Promotion of Shopping in the City Centres (NAFES) has been provided with a budget of 6 million Euro for its commitment towards sustainable vitalisation of lower Austrian town and urban cores.

Land development grows in the town

- _ "Community 21" as an instrument for getting the populace involved. After a test phase, meanwhile 25 communities are concerned with an LA21 process.
- _ Support of non-profit associations and volunteer organisations. Institution of the "Service Volunteers" association, with the goal of supporting volunteer involvement in Lower Austria.
- _ Promotion of the cooperative work of agriculture, trade and tourism within the context of LEADER+. 497 communities in 18 regions will participate in the new LEADER promotional programme by the Year 2013. With 90 million Euro, already four times as much funding has been made available for 2007 to 2013 than for the previous funding period.

The Province of Lower Austria is providing for the development of the rural area through an optimum employment of EU funding within the context of co-financing.

Called upon towards the implementation of the targets of this Charter are in particular the communities and their inhabitants. In many questions about the development of the rural area, the cooperative work of the communities in regional federations is essential. Positive examples and results of research ought to become well known and serve as a stimulus. The task of the Province within the context of land development lies in the stimulation and support of the processes towards activation of the available potentials and strengths within the Communities and regions.

We still have plenty of things in mind.

