From shepherd's cottage to mountain restaurant: Touristic uses in Austrian Alpine summer farming areas

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Alpine summer farming in Austria

- Alm: Seasonally used alpine and sub-alpine grassland sites and their buildings
- Different regional terms:
  - Alm (official term in Austria)
  - Alp (Vorarlberg)
  - Kaser (partly in Tyrol, Carinthia)
  - Schwaig (partly in Lower Austria, Styria)
  - Planina (Slovenian, Carinthia)
- Grassland types:
  - Pasture
  - Hay meadow (today almost vanished)
Alpine farming as vertical transhumance

- Farming at two or three levels of altitude
- Utilisation of temporarily available additional food sources
- Cattle as nutrient collector and energy carrier between altitude levels
- Requirement for additional infrastructure at all sites (barns, cottages, etc.)

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<td>High alm 1100 - 1700 m</td>
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<td>Low alm 800 - 1100 m</td>
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- B Barn feeding
- G Grazing
- H Hay production, in valleys also cropping

Three-level grazing system in the Bregenzerwald/Vorarlberg (Drexel)
Traditional hay transport

- Summer: from meadow to hay barn
- Winter: from hay barn to valley

1930

today
Changes in products from almen

- Traditional products:
  - Butter, rendered butter, cheese (produced on site)
  - Beef
  - Whey from cheese production for feeding pigs -> pork, lard, bacon, sausages
  - Berries, roots, herbs -> jam, schnaps, liquer, medical drugs...

- Today’s products:
  - Beef (often organic)
  - Milk, butter, cheese (mostly produced off site)
  - (Schnaps)

http://www.kaesestrasse.at/
http://www.bildarchivaustria.at/Pages/ImageDetail.aspx?p_iBildID=8395320
Alpine summer farming in Austria

| Total area (incl. unproductive land) | 10.600 km² (= 13% auf Austria) |
| Production area                    | 4.500 km²                     |
| Total number of alm sites          | 8.700                         |
| Almen with dairy production        | 24%                            |

Decline until 1960s has been stopped by comprehensive subsidisation programs.

number of animals on almen in Austria 2009

- 126.800 milking cattle
- 55.600 other cattle
- 9.600 sheep and goats
- 276.000 horses

25% of all cows spend time on almen

Bundesanstalt für Bergbauernfragen 2010
Grazing density

Livestock units / ha

- 0
- > 0.5 - 0.76
- ≤ 0.5
- > 0.75

Bundesanstalt für Bergbauernfragen 2010
Social significance of life on almen

- Harsh living conditions
- Lower level of social control: „Auf der Alm da gibt's ka Sünd“: There is no sin on the alm...
- Idealisation and mystification by (urban) writers, painters, moviemakers prepare the ground for touristic marketing

Movie scene from 1915

Movie scene from 1974
Tourism and almen in Austria

- Alm-tourism: touristic income generation on Alm sites
  - sale of own farm products (milk, cheese, schnaps, bacon); 12% of all almen
  - gastronomy
  - accommodation: guest beds, rental as holiday home
  - guided tours, entertainment
  - lease of use rights of alm sites for ski lifts, pistes, mountain bike routes etc.

www.schoetzerhof.it
Economic significance of alm tourism

- Data quality very bad
- Last full inventory of touristic infrastructure on almen 1986, new data from 2009 not yet fully published
- More estimates than records, many transactions off records

Influencing Factors

- Land tenure and management
- Internal resources
- Legal framework
- Touristic environment
- Cooperation and marketing

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## Land tenure and management

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Land owner</th>
<th>Alm management</th>
<th>Touristic operation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Farmers as touristic operator on their own land</td>
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<td>Touristic activities managed by family members, friends etc.</td>
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<td>Touristic activities managed by external operator (Tenant)</td>
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<td>Farmers as touristic operator on leased land</td>
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Touristic operations on leased land „Einforstungsalmen“

- Many alm areas are properties of large forest owners (e.g. Austrian Federal Forests)
- Historic pastoral rights do not include touristic activities
- Many conflicts with hunting interests
- Who profits from value generation?
- Risk/profit sharing between owner and operator?

Percentage of leased alm areas

Hellebart, S. (2006): Weiterentwicklung von Einforstungsalmen; AlpAustria Teilprojekt
Influencing Factors

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- Touristic environment
- Internal resources

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Internal resources

- Investment capital
  - Own resources
  - Public support (EU-projects)

- Labour resources
  - Organisation and capacity utilisation
  - Coordination with home farm and family
  - Non-family staff (employment contracts, workplace safety….)

- Know-How
  - Gastronomic know-how
  - Commercial know-how
  - Language skills
  - Interaction with visitors („A Hirt is ka Wirt“)
    - „Authentic“ versus professional?
    - Relevance of training courses
Influencing Factors

- Land tenure and management
- Cooperation and marketing
- Legal framework
- Touristic environment
- Internal resources
- Tourism
Legal framework

- Spatial planning/zoning
  - Permissibility of accommodation on alm huts (different in each province)
  - Huge demand for hut rentals in ski areas
- Legal/tax status: two options
  - "Farm enterprise" (offering "own products" or "usual local drinks", up to 10 guest beds; minimal accounting, minimal taxation; only for summer operation)
  - "Licensed enterprise" (full accounting requirements, normal taxation)
- Legal conditions for operation
  - Food hygiene legislation
  - Waste and waste water management
  - ...
  - Difficult to implement in practice
Influencing Factors

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- Tourism

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Touristic environment

- Visitor structure and numbers in the region
- Seasonality
  - Two-seasonal operation for better use of capacity
  - High summer visitation in winter sports regions
  - Linkages to winter tourism: Ski pistes, skit tours, toboggan runs
### Assessment of regional touristic significance of Almen

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<th>Domain</th>
<th>Indicator</th>
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<td>Guest nights in summer</td>
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<td>Guest nights in winter</td>
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<td>Persons transported on cable cars and lifts in summer</td>
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<td>Persons transported on cable cars and lifts in winter</td>
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<td><strong>Offer</strong></td>
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<td>Number of almen with catering</td>
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<td>Number of almen with marked hiking trails</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Area of almen with winter sports infrastructure</td>
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<td>Number of almen with ski lifts</td>
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Arnberger, Muhar, Sterl 2006
Typology of touristic uses on almen

- **Alm with occasional catering:** no license, one-seasonal; managed by farmer without additional personnel; dominant type in regions with low tourism levels
- **Managed alm hut:** with or without license; mostly one-seasonal; 30-70 seats; managed by farmer with additional personnel for service; frequent type in regions with high tourism levels
- **Alm restaurant:** with license, mostly two-seasonal; more than 70 seats, managed not by farmer, but within family; good road access; partly with accommodation; frequent type in winter sport regions
- **Self-catering hut:** Guests rent whole building; very important in winter sport regions, partly also used in summer
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Cooperation: horizontal or vertical?

Alpine huts (Alpine Clubs) and valley enterprises (tourism boards) well networked internally; almen not part of these networks
Horizontal cooperation

- Joint information activities
- Knowledge exchange
- Webpages, brochures
- Marketing only for niche groups
Horizontal cooperation at province level: Salzburger Almsommer

Summer in the hills
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- 1,800 active hill farms with thousands of cows, calves, sheep and goats
- 220 huts serving refreshments to visitors
- 142 exceptional “summer in the hills” huts
- Special experiences: bake your own bread, make your own cheese, distill your own schnapps!

© Summer in the Hills, A-5020 Hallein bei Salzburg, Tel. +43 (0)62 5689-0, info@salzburgerland.com
Obstacles for a vertical cooperation („mountain – valley coalition“)

- Tensions between alm tourism and hotellery
  - Special taxation status of almen
  - Doubts about the origin of products offered on almen
  - Hotel guests should not spend their money elsewhere
  - Overnight stays of hotel guests in an alm difficult to manage
- Tensions between alm tourism and forestry
  - Forest enterprises do not profit from tourism
  - Hunting far more profitable for forest owners
- Tensions between alm tourism and lift/cable car operators
  - Cable car companies try to lead the visitors to their own restaurants
  - Operation of cable cars in summer rarely profitable, seen rather as service to other businesses
Best Practice example Großarltal Salzburg „Valley of Almen“

- Almen as central aspect of the touristic profile of the whole valley
- Systematic cooperation between almen, local gastronomy and hotels
Best Practice example Großarltal Salzburg „Valley of Almen“

- Hiking packages with overnight stays at hotels, almen and alpine huts
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Thank you!

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