



Criteria for mountaineering villages

in Austria –

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Purpose and function of mountaineering villages

Austrian mountaineering villages are exemplary, regional development cores with a relevant tradition in sustainable alpine tourism. They guarantee a high-quality tourism offer for mountaineers and hikers, provide an excellent landscape and environmental quality and are committed to preserving the local cultural and natural values.

Mountaineering villages as alpine centres of excellence focus on individual responsibility, capacity and authority as well as on the environmentally friendly and responsible conduct of their guests in the mountains.

The role-model effect of mountaineering villages also covers their active commitment to achieving the goal of sustainable development in the Alps. The promotion and further development of mountaineering villages are in line with the implementation protocols of the Alpine Convention. In case of doubt, values such as nature and landscape shall always have priority.

Function of the criteria

In general a criterion ("standard") is a characteristic, which is relevant in decision-making. An important function of mountaineering villages' criteria is the operationalization (measurability) of target objectives where both, objective facts and subjective evaluations, must be taken into consideration.

Mountaineering villages do not exist in a vacuum, but they each have their own history of development. To do justice to both, the great variety and commitment to quality promise of mountaineering villages, the system of criteria will be divided into three sections:

a) Exclusion criteria: these are employed either for new entries or in case of considerable changes in existing mountaineering villages. In case of new entries, it is not important whether the village itself can influence events because it is irrelevant for the guests.

b) Mandatory criteria: these are part of the basic equipment of a mountaineering village and in many cases already exist. In some cases they need to be upgraded. A serious deterioration of conditions in mountaineering villages, so that they no longer meet the mandatory criteria may lead to exclusion.

c) Evaluation criteria: these are “additional qualifications” of mountaineering villages and are used as distinguishing features in the ongoing process of quality control and quality improvement. Target criteria help clearly differentiate mountaineering villages from other similar sounding initiatives. Mountaineering villages aim at the achievement of the target criteria in terms of a comprehensive regional development.

A) EXCLUSION CRITERIA

A1) Insufficient tourism infrastructure

- Lack of accommodation facilities that can offer sufficient quality (rooms with shower and toilet, buffet breakfast with mainly local products are considered to be the minimum standard; other services are regulated by partner company criteria).

A2) Little alpine landscape character, landscape damage, dominance of technologies

- Limited relief energy (the difference between the lowest and highest point in the municipal area must be at least 1,000 meters of altitude)
- Damage caused by human intervention, which seriously disturbs the overall character (this also applies to activities taking place outside of the municipal area, when clearly visible and thus resulting in a significant disruption of the overall picture).
- Interventions in protected areas, affecting their character and the purpose of protection.
- Tourism-intensive winter sports facilities, in particular opening of skiing routes connecting valleys and the related infrastructure in the valley
- Facilities for energy production such as hydropower plants, in particular storage power stations, photovoltaic plants and wind turbines in supra-local dimensions (for mountaineering villages registered before 2014 the “status quo” is preserved).

A3) No village character

- Number of residents is too high (limit 2,500 per municipality/district – may be exceeded in valley communities).
- Companies, which are too large, measured by the number of employees (limit: 50 per company, in individual cases exceptions are possible, if the local character of the village is not affected).
- Unfavourable character of the building development: proportionality, design and arrangement of the more recent construction activities in particular in the outskirts – problem of industrial estates.
- Urban sprawl – loss of harmonious settlement patterns.
- Prevailing non-hotel accommodation (spacious holiday parks, apartment buildings, time sharing properties and the like).

A4) Located close to high-performance traffic routes

- In particular highways, expressways, airfields.

B) MANDATORY CRITERIA

B1) Tourism quality

- Refuges by alpine clubs or comparable private huts (usually over 1,500 meters above sea level; visitors can access them only on foot, accommodation facilities) which, if possible, are part of or wish to join the common initiative "That's what mountains taste like" introduced by the OeAV (Austrian Alpine Club), DAV (German Alpine Club) and AVS (South Tyrol Alpine Club) to promote the production and marketing of regional products.
- Partner companies of the mountaineering village in the valley (exceptions may apply in specific cases for contract houses of the Alpine Club and nature park operators which satisfy the same or similar criteria)
- Good range of accommodation categories (ranging from simple to sophisticated)
- Good range of restaurants/inns.

B2) Alpine competence

- Regularly well-served and periodically controlled alpine pathways with a consistent signage system based on the guidelines of mountain paths concepts.
- Competent local alpine advisory service (tourism association, section of the alpine club, alpine school, office of mountain guides etc.).
- Rental of special mountaineering equipment (e.g. avalanche transceiver, probe, rackets, snow shoes, climbing helmet,...), guidebooks, maps.
- Touring programme (hiking, climbing, challenging mountain tours, alpine tours, skiing tours) for guests (involving competent local alpine clubs, mountain guides, hiking guides, ski guides, alpine schools, nature reserve service etc.) on-the-spot or in the close surroundings (up to 10 km of distance).
- Close cooperation with locally competent alpine clubs.

B3a) Quality of overall appearance of the locality

- Establishing a mountaineer's village-oriented strategy to take care of the local landscape and the development of the landscape within the local development model (spatial development concept, local development concept...)
- Identifying the village as "mountaineering village" by staging what fits the region and the character of the mountaineering village, at the entrances to the village and/or at the centre of the village (stone with logo, sign-board, flags,...).

B3b) Landscape quality

- Certain mountain peaks should not be open to roads/cable railways (the public infrastructure should end at least 200 meters of altitude below the peak and at least 500 meters in horizontal distance).
- Absence of new infrastructure or large-scale expansion of skiing resorts (according to the Salzburg technical programme for skiing infrastructure, Tyrolean regional planning programme for cableways)
- No external take-offs and landings of powered aircraft (except supply and rescue flights).
- No motor racing tracks used permanently to organize mountain races, rallies, motocross, skidoo races and the like.

- No new construction of hydropower plants, wind turbines and photovoltaic plants in supra-local dimensions affecting the quality of landscape and/or impairing the nature reserve inventory and no overhead electrical power lines (hydropower plants and wind turbines: in particular, the compatibility with existing conservation purposes should be examined as well as the economic efficiency and the trans-regional significance of streaming waters and landscapes (e.g. Natura 2000)).
- When facilities for the energy production or roads, high-voltage power lines, skiing resorts, etc. are being built outside of the municipal area, having however a significant impact on the criteria of the mountaineering villages, the local authorities shall not support these activities actively.
- Sufficient water circuit all year round (= sufficient residual water) in streaming waters according to the specified guidelines.
- Alpine pastures and mountain forests shall be kept free from motorised individual transport if not on public roads.
- The percentage of nature reserves in the municipal area shall usually be above 20%.

B4) Mobility quality

- Mobility-offers suitable for mountaineers (local public transport, taxi services, pickup service, organised carpooling).

B5) Cooperation quality

- Different players – municipality, tourism, alpine clubs, nature reserve services, population etc. must be willing to cooperate as a basic requirement for proactive, productive cooperation.
- Project working group with a defined contact person is available.
- Close collaboration with locally competent alpine clubs.
- Publication of the cooperation in the project of the mountaineering villages (website of municipality and tourism associations with logo and link, newsletter of the municipality, promotional material, media presence, participation in trade fairs, etc.).
- Participation of the representatives of the mountaineering villages in the annual convention
- Participation of the extended group for each mountaineering village in the regular quality sessions.
- The Alpine Convention – implementation, application, guidelines – is an integral part of the municipal policy.

C) TARGET CRITERIA

C1) Tourist quality

- Sufficient local supply in the village regarding everyday necessities (purchase,...)
- Possibility to arrive using public transportation (including weekends and holidays) and mobility options for holidays without personal car on-site; appropriate information processing in all relevant tourist media and best possible communication when booking the trip.

C2) Cultural and regional special features

- As mountaineering villages are proud of their tradition, clubs and societies and regional products, special attention should be paid to the interconnection between the strengthening of existing initiatives and offers ("That's what mountains taste like", Austrian Gourmet Region (Genuss Region Österreich), handicraft, clubs and societies, etc.).

C3) Alpine competence

- Updated guidebooks and maps, which are useful for mountaineers (in particular maps from alpine clubs wherever available) available in central places (tourist associations, municipal offices, library, mountaineers meeting points, partner companies, etc.)
- Contact person for all information related to mountaineering (alpine school, mountain guides, section of an alpine club etc.)
- Updated online route information and more extensive information services – alternatives in case of bad weather.
- Alpine courses and training opportunities locally.
- 2-3 bookable all-inclusive packages (summer and winter) for each mountaineering village.
- Sports shop with an advisory service suitable for mountaineers and rental possibilities in the village or nearby (up to 10 km of distance).

C4) Landscape quality

- Nature reserve services are up and running and enhance the offer on site with nature guided tours, workshops, etc. to convey the sensitivity for the natural and cultural area which has been characterized by mankind for centuries.

