

Recreation, education and wellbeing: The community-led Nature Park in Feldkirch, Austria

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Organisation: Feldkirch Nature Park Association

Country: Austria

Level of government: Local government

Sector: Environmental protection

Type: Partnerships, Public Service

Launched in: 1963

Overall development time: 1 year(s)

Link to the innovation's website

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Description

Feldkirch (about 33 000 inhabitants) in western Austria is a very scenic area. One of its attractions is a Nature Park, which was set up by local residents through a partnership with a new community association in 1963 on the Ardetzenberg (Mount Ardetzen), close to Feldkirch. Since then, it has grown from strength to strength, increasing the range of its offerings to a rising number of visitors of all ages and walks of life.

Why the innovation was developed

- On 17 Julie 1963, Felix, a steinbock (or Alpine ibex), an endangered species of wild goat in the mountains of the European Alps, was brought to the Nature Park in Austria. Other animals were added afterwards to the Feldkirch Nature Park was born, to help protect local wildlife.
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Objectives

Improve access, Increase citizen engagement

- The objectives of Feldkirch Nature Park were to bring local animals, including endangered species, close to local residents and to educate children and young people about local wildlife.
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Main beneficiaries

Civil Society, Families, General population, Students

- Endangered animal species
 - Wildlife education for young people
 - Community of Feldkirch
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Results

Service quality

Other:

- The estimated 150 000 visitors per year show that the co-production model of the nature park works. Furthermore, the number of schools and other education facilities partnering with the nature park has increased.
- As a result, the number of sponsors has also been increasing, which has allowed the Nature Park to extend the range of animals and the number of animal runs further.

Development

Design

The key drivers of this initiative were three people – the former mayor of the local authority of Feldkirch, the forester of the district and a businessman who shared a love for animals and had the idea to found a Nature Park in Feldkirch. They decided to found an association (in German 'eingetragener Verein') and managed to transfer a piece of land from the local authority to the new association through a lease contract.

They also mobilised volunteers and sponsors to allow them to buy animals. Today the Nature Park includes 18 fenced-off animal runs, over an area of about 110,000 square metres. It provides for visitors a restaurant, a playground, nature trails, a public barbecue area, hiking paths and a pond. Entrance to the park is free all 365 days of the year.

Implementation

Tools used:

- Animals: There are now 18 animals living in the nature park, each in their own fenced-off animal run, including (among others) red deer, wild boar, wolves, foxes, goats, marmots, raccoons, blue hares, eagles and eagle owls.
- Visitors: The Nature Park now has about 150,000 visitors per year. Most visitors greatly appreciate the Park and value their visits, whether for education or leisure purposes.
- Education: The idea of the Nature Park is not to educate visitors through giving them lots of abstract and theoretical information but rather to enable them to learn in and from nature.
- Nature trails: Another new feature of the Nature Park is the set of nature trails, which was designed by the local authority of Feldkirch in 1997.

Resources used:

- The cost of running the Nature Park is about EUR 220 000 per year. This includes the costs of food and care for the animals, maintenance, staff salaries and equipment.
 - The costs are met through the membership fees of about 700 Association members and through grants from the regional government of Vorarlberg and the local authority of Feldkirch (who together meet about 50% of the costs), as well as donations and sponsorship, e.g. of particular projects or 'godparenthood' of specific animals.
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Diffusion

- To increase further the attractiveness of the Nature Park as an educational institution, it started to organise games at the beginning of July each year, before the school summer break.
- Now 20 school classes, with about 440 pupils from all over Austria, are challenged to demonstrate their knowledge on nature topics, such as identifying tree leaves to understanding the relationship of animals to the overall ecological system.
- Furthermore, the young people need to show their agility, speed and creativity on the nature trails in the woods. The competition aims to raise the awareness and knowledge of school children about nature. It is organised by a partnership of the Nature Park Association, the government of the region of Vorarlberg, the Foresters' Club in Vorarlberg, and the local authority of Feldkirch.

Lessons Learned

Lessons Learned

- The Nature Park would not have been possible if the three founders had not shared their ideas during an informal round table (in German 'Stammtisch') and their personal networks which enabled them to mobilise volunteers and funding from business.
- The Association has also managed to harness the enthusiasm of Nature Park Visitors and get at least some of them engaged in supporting the Nature Park and making a contribution. For example, when the Association needed a financial officer the Board members of the Association quickly identified an accountant who liked to visit the Nature Park but currently took care of her children which gave her the opportunity to do voluntary work for the Nature Park.
- The Association also managed to recruit a retired employee to take care of the administration of members. Other members are only prepared to make occasional contributions during events. However, the mix of volunteering opportunities makes the Association sustainable and ensures that it constantly develops new offers.

