



# CoP Public Infrastructure and Social Services

## Example of Good Practice

April 2020

Federal Institute of Agricultural Economics, Rural and Mountain Research &  
Regional Management of the Metropolitan Area of Styria

Theresia Oedl-Wieser and Kerstin Hausegger-Nestelberger

[theresia.oedl-wieser@bab.gv.at](mailto:theresia.oedl-wieser@bab.gv.at)

## akzente Hand : WERK – gemeinnützig.nachhaltig.fair

Living Lab Metropolitan Area of Styria, Austria

**Key words: social enterprise, job creation women 50+, re-cycling of textiles,  
up-cycling processes**

### 1. Introduction

The social enterprise “akzente Hand : WERK – gemeinnützig.nachhaltig.fair” which means literally "akzente female : CRAFT – charitable.sustainable.fair" started as a two years project in the framework of the non-profit association akzente. In general, the non-profit association is committed in the region to future issues – equality, education, business and employment. “akzente Hand : WERK” is located in the district of Voitsberg which is about 40 km west of the City of Graz and it comprises 15 municipalities (see figures 1 and 2). In addition to the district capital town Voitsberg with 9.385 inhabitants, the small towns Köflach (9,872 inhabitants) and Bärnbach (5,644) are the regional centers of the district. The other communities are very rural. Since many years there has been a continuous loss of population especially in the remoter parts of the district. There are also many daily commuters to Graz as well as to the surrounding municipalities and small cities.

The intention of “akzente Hand : WERK” was manifold: On the one hand it should create new jobs for long-term unemployed women over 50 years in the region and on the other hand it should contribute to resource-saving in the regional economic cycle through the creation of new products by re- and upcycling of textiles. Furthermore, the project contributes to rural-urban interactions in the economic and creative sphere because major clients of the products (e.g. a big bank) are situated in Graz or high school media students who collaborate with “akzente Hand : WERK” are studying in Deutschlandsberg, a district city in South East of Styria.

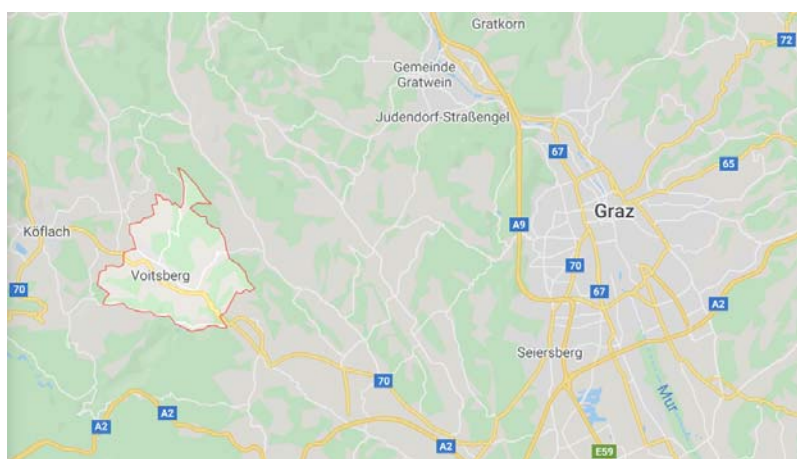


Figure 1: Map of the Metropolitan Area of Styria



Source: Land Steiermark & RMSZR and BAB, 2019.

Figure 2: Municipality Voitsberg in the Metropolitan Area of Styria – 40 km west of the City of Graz:



Source: Google Map, 2020.

## 2. Project Intention / Background information

As part of an active labor market policy the supportive organisation (Trägerorganisation) “akzente” in Voitsberg implemented a well-founded project which aimed to train long-term unemployed women in tailoring. The project “akzente Hand : WERK” took the opportunity to take part in the “Action 20,000” in Austria. This public employment creation campaign aimed at creating a total of 20,000 jobs for long-term unemployed people over 50 years through a government funded program. The jobs eligible for these schemes could be located in communities, non-profit organizations and social enterprises, whereby only jobs should be created that would emerge without appropriate financial support.

Figure 3: Leaflet of the project “akzente Hand : WERK”



Source: akzente

Within the project “akzente Hand : WERK” six women from the district of Voitsberg were employed and therefore, participated in professional training courses to acquire or improve tailoring skills. The cost of salaries for the women were covered by the state during the duration of the project. Four of these women went into retirement after their employment, one woman could keep her job and one woman had to search for another job because she couldn’t be financed anymore, which is one obstacle in the project as well as the small number of employees.

In addition to employment costs, parts of the cost for equipment (e.g. new sewing machines) for a sewing workshop were financed by LEADER funding from the LAG “Lipizzanerheimat”. The other furnishings required for the workplaces were bought second hand by akzente. The raw materials for the handicrafts, like textiles and fabrics are mostly remnants and donated by the local population or companies. Together with bottoms and zippers they are upcycled to new workpieces. To sum up, the project created new jobs for long-term unemployed women over 50 years in the region and beyond this, it tries as social enterprise to contribute to economic sustainability through re- and upcycling of textiles and develops new creative products for different target groups (dementia sufferers, tourists, ...).

Figure 4: Woman working in the studio of “akzente Hand : WERK”



Source: akzente

### 3. Main Description

The project “akzente Hand : WERK” can be seen as a good practice example in the sense of its multi-dimensional structure and its remarkable regional impact. It can be characterised as an instructive example of social innovation in this region. Social innovation can be defined as “... the reconfiguring of social practices, in response to societal challenges, which seeks to enhance outcomes on societal well-being and necessarily includes the engagement of civil society actors” (SIMRA 2017, 6). The social enterprise “akzente Hand : WERK” fulfills these aspects by addressing social and demographic challenges, increasing power of “weak” members of the rural society and orientating its activities on the common good.

Moreover, the female operators of the project are co-operating with different institutions, such as the Labour Market Service in Voitsberg and the LAG Management “Lipizzanerheimat” as well as with other organisations, such as the association for people with dementia or the high school for media in Deutschlandsberg. These cooperation activities enable the development of innovative and valuable products. An important product line manufactured by “akzente Hand : WERK” are so-called "Agera"-products, which are produced especially for people with dementia and ready for use in geriatric care institutions. They are created in collaboration between the job trainer of “akzente Hand : WERK”, the master tailor, and representatives of the association for people with dementia. These products like motoric cushions or dementia figures underwent a pre-test before the production started in the studio (see Figure 5).

Figure 5: Motoric cushion for elderly people with dementia



Source: akzente

Due to the fact that “akzente Hand : WERK” is a social enterprise, the products are provided to geriatric care institutions in return for a voluntary donation. The range of products is wide and includes purses and bags, special “Lipizzanerheimat”-bags with the Lipizzaner horse motif,



table decorations, other decorative items, toys for children, pen rolls, shopping bags, aprons, etc. The exclusive use of sorted textiles and used materials does not only fulfill criteria of ecological sustainability, but also implies a special character to each individual product. Therefore, “akzente Hand : WERK” pursues the following guidelines:

- Products which are not used any longer by individuals and businesses, such as old clothes and other used textiles, are transformed into new products. Thus, the life-time of those resources is extended and resources are used more efficiently.
- Individual workpieces made from used textiles are produced on individual request. Companies in the region often ask for specific products as gifts for their customers.
- Courses and seminars on re-cycling and up-cycling are organised.

Figure 6: The big variety of products of “akzente Hand : WERK”



Source: akzente

There is another interesting collaboration between the social enterprise “akzente Hand : WERK” and the students from the high school for media in Deutschlandsberg. The project is supported by LEADER and is called “Innovation meets Sustainability”. The students are invited to design products that are representative for a specific region in Styria, called “Schilcherland”. Furthermore, the students planned a marketing and sales concept for these products and put it into practice. While students were engaged in design and marketing activities, the women from “akzente Hand: WERK” were responsible for the production of these special workpieces.

Through this project, the young people in the region become committed to the conscious use of resources and learn how to combine careful use of resources with the implementation of theoretical knowledge on project management and marketing. In this

way, education is combined with innovation and creativity, which not only consolidates theoretically acquired knowledge, but also increases identification with the region.

The focus of the social enterprise of “akzente Hand : WERK” is not on profit, but on the common good. All proceeds and profits are reinvested in the creation of jobs, acquisition of work materials and other charitable projects of the association akzente. The products are made with great care and craftsmanship and they contribute to a sustainable circular economy through re- and upcycling of textiles.

To summarize, this project stands for social innovation and a holistic approach of sustainability. Since “akzente Hand : WERK” is a social enterprise economic success is not in the foreground but gaining is reinvested immediately. Due to the other aspects of sustainability – ecological, social as well as cultural – it can be deduced that it contributes to re- and upcycle textiles and to the revitalizing of the rural area. It further improves lives of unemployed, elderly and disabled people and finally, co-operations with the association for people with dementia or the high school for media in Deutschlandsberg lead to new creative processes, high quality handicraft products as well as to intergenerational projects.

#### 4. References

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