

Final Report „Connecting Laktasi Tourism to Europe“

BACID Project Nr.: 4-2016_003

1. Initial situation:

In a first project phase, which lasted between January till July 2016, a tourism strategy incl. development of different offerings had been achieved and implemented. In a second project phase, started in Dec. 2017, based upon results from 1st phase, following objectives should be achieved:

- a) beneficiaries should adapt their specific offers according to researched habits of austrian tourism target groups (resulting from market research in Austria - eg. what do older retired people expect from a 3 or 5 day stay in a wellness resort)
- b) participating in intereuropean networking activities between Austria (West Styria), Switzerland (Zurich), Germany (Saarland, Bremen) and Poland (Oppeln) for mutual exchange of tourism and other economic activities like manufacturing etc. Tourism is to start - it acts as a "first step" in cooperation.

Based upon those goals following activities were planned to do:

- Act. 1: do a market research about habits/expectations of potential austrian wellness target groups
- Act. 2: presenting results from austrian market research to Laktasi tourism companies/wellness resorts
- Act. 3: Connecting Laktasi tourism/wellness & spa resorts and austrian clients (eg. via presenting Laktasi tourism in Austria and/or inviting austrians to Laktasi)
- Act. 4: Summarizing results and establishing a detailed plan how to sustainable attract austrian tourists to Laktasi wellness resorts
- Act. 5: Developing a rough plan for tourism quality management (and improvement) of Laktasi tourism

Expected Results should be:

- a) promoting Laktasi (and wider Laktasi Region) in Austria in establishing contacts to Austrian tourism and tourism related agencies (like retired people`s association);
- b) therefore attracting new tourists to Laktasi`s different wellness and spa centers
- c) new ideas for quality management (and improvement) of local touristic offers (by having contact to quality oriented tourists)
- d) Laktasi becoming known as an interesting region for different economic activities

2. Projectmanagement – Activities done:

Based upon above described activity-list following projectsteps had been done:

Step 1:

Doing a market research about habits/expectations of potential austrian wellness target groups

As first step I made market research work to get information about habits/expectations of potential austrian wellness target groups. Those potential target groups had been grouped into following segments:

- Individual tourists (travelling by own car)
- Bus tourists – mainly focusing on
 - o retired people (retired people associations)
 - o clubs/unions/associations
 - o families

I contacted several bus tour operators, tourism agencies, associations and tourism experts (see Appendix 1) and presented/forwarded them informational material I got from Mrs. Bojana Kondic-Panic on behalf of Laktashi tourism companies. This informational material had been:

- Aranzmani final *(to much data volume to mail)*
- Laktasi Adventure final *(to much data volume to mail)*
- Laktasi tours and packages *(to much data volume to mail)*

I also recommended

- <http://www.laktasiturizam.org/91/Accommodation-premises>

as well as

- <http://www.banja-laktasi.info/>

The reason why had been that contacted companies/interview partners get a first impression about what could be done from a touristic point of view in Laktasi area.

Results of my contacts - some of below mentioned I contacted personally, some via telephone, some via e-mail – had been:

1. First of all (and most important): In almost 100 % of my contacts I was re-asked
 - a. Where is Laktasi Area?
 - b. What could be done there from a touristical point of view? (what kind of activities they can offer?)
 - c. What´s about price level and quality?

After short explanation about Laktasi Area and referring to (above mentioned) informational material many of them explained me that offers sound interesting, but because almost no-one knows where the region is and during last years no-one asked therefore. So they don´t expect there will be enough interest from austrian tourists to travel to this region.

2. In requesting my interview partners for more details about habits/expectations of austrian wellness target groups I got following answers:
 - a. Specific requirements for older people:
 - i. Combination of „good food“ with „relaxing offers“ and the possibility to have excursions to discover surrounding area(s)
 - ii. Important: NO special offers for older/retired people („who wants to be old“)
 - iii. In foreground should be „health-offers“ and not offers for healing sick people
 - iv. Elder people prefer personal known tour guides. In many cases before they accept an offer from a bustour operator they ask if personally known tour guides will be available and accompany the trip.
 - v. Also if interest was the information that older people in many cases prefer travelling alone (and not as part of a group)
 - vi. Important are videos for downloading – older people very strong focus on that amenity
 - vii. Also interesting was the information that „health-holidays“ decrease, but „wellness-holidays“ increase
 - viii. Hiking is also very well accepted (importance of a combined offer like hiking and gastronomy)
 - ix. Of great importance will be combined offers like hiking with culture/history, wellness and gastronomy
 - b. specific requirements of older tourists are:
 - i. friendly, german speaking staff
 - ii. clean rooms, tables, toilets
 - iii. friendly ambient (like flowers at the entrance, at tables etc.)
 - iv. international hygiene standards
 - v. very important: Image of destination (!)

Step 2:

Presenting results from austrian market research to Laktasi tourism companies/wellness resorts

Second step was presenting above described results to Laktasi tourism companies and municipal authorities. Workshop was done at Feb. 19th – 21st 2017 (incl. company visits). Participants see Appendix 2.

Laktasi Area is not well known with potential austrian tourist target groups. In other words: they can possess best offers of high quality, because Region is almost unknown nobody will travel there. On the other side: Bosnia is – because of historical reasons – not unknown in Austria. And – more over – Bosnia is not so far away. So information about Bosnia in general and about Laktasi Area in detail would be of enormous support to attract austrian tourists to travel there.

Based on this initial situation and after intensive discussions participants decided to proceed in following steps:

1. I got the order to find out, what opportunities and costs will arise if Laktasi Area incl. interested tourism companies would announce an article in styrian and carinthian daily newspapers. It should be just one „advertisement“. Styria and Carinthia because they are geografically nearest to Bosnia
2. I got also the order to place advertisement for Laktasi Hotels (Hotel Sun, Hotel Vila Victorija, Recreation Area Balkis) at Billa Reisen, Lidl Reisen and Hofer Reisen.

Ad 1)

I requested an offer for an advertisement of Laktasi Area at „Kleine Zeitung“ – an styrian and carinthian very well known daily newspaper. „Kleine Zeitung“ answered me with a letter copied in Appendix 3. This information I forwarded to Mrs. Bojana Kondic-Panic and requested her for information if group will accept or not.

Answer from Mrs. Bojana Kondic-Panic – written at March 27th 2017 – is copied in Appendix 4. As a short summary, tourism companies can't effort to advertise Laktasi Area and their companies at Kleine Zeitung newspaper.

Ad 2)

I contacted Billa Reisen, Hofer Reisen and Lidl Reisen to get information for advertising above mentioned tourism companies in their travel brochures and leaflets. I unfortunately got no answer from them till today despite several attempts to get information.

Because of new status quo I'm very concerned how to succeed to inform potential austrian tourists about Laktasi Area. I therefore decided to start a second attempt and contacted „ÖAMTC“ – austrian automotive and touring club. This agency frequently edits a magazine which includes interesting touristic reports from different regions all over the world. I wrote an e-mail to ÖAMTC at April 19th and got an offer for an advertisement same day back (see Appendix 5) which I forwarded immediately to Mrs. Bojana Kondic-Panic with the request to transfer this to their interested tourism companies. I received their answer at April 28th (see Appendix 6)

Step 3:

Connecting Laktasi tourism/wellness & spa resorts and austrian clients (eg. via presenting Laktasi tourism in Austria and/or inviting austrians to Laktasi)

Connecting Laktasi tourism/wellness & spa resorts and austrian clients will be done in a threefold manner:

- a) Participating Laktasi Area in „mid-european-days“

Chamber of Commerce Styria in cooperation with Bramauer Branding, a styrian based marketing company organizes „mid-european-days“ with regions from Germany (Saarland), Switzerland (Basel) and Poland (Oppeln). Because of existing contacts between municipality of Laktasi (Mrs. Bojana Kondic Panic) zu Bramauer Branding (Mr. Erich Bramauer) as well as bosnian born people living in Styria, participation of Laktasi Area in „mid-european-days“ had been developed. „Mid-european-days“ will be held end of June 2017 in Voitsberg (West Styria). Plan is to bring Laktasi based companies who are interested to cooperate with west styrian companies to Voitsberg to present themselves and establish cooperations in one-to-one meetings. This is an excellent occasion to promote Laktasi tourism in Styria.

b) Cooperation between Laktasi Area and Lipizzanerheimat Weststeiermark

At the occasion of participating at „mid-european-days“ in Voitsberg it is planned to establish a cooperation between Laktasi Area and Tourism organization „Lipizzanerheimat Weststeiermark“ to mutually exchange tourism know-how and guests.

Lipizzanerheimat Weststeiermark is responsible for tourism in west-styria. West-styria is one of several districts in Styria, which is one of nine provinces in Austria. Plan is to present Laktasi tourism companies to west-styrian guests with the support of tourism agency Lipizzanerheimat and vice versa (Lipizzanerheimat presents itself in Laktasi).

Detailed plans will be developed within next few weeks.

c) Cooperation between Laktasi Area and Tourismusverband Attergau – Oberösterreich

Same Idea like cooperation with west-styrian tourism agency „Lipizzanerheimat“ is planned to establish with upper austrian tourism agency „Attergau“. First contacts have been established – a detailed plan will be developed within next few weeks.

Step 4:

Summarizing results and establishing a detailed plan how to sustainable attract austrian tourists to Laktasi wellness resorts

Results so far (Mid May 2017) are:

- Laktasi Area has beautiful wellness & spa resorts and a lot of interesting touristic services to offer
- These offers are interesting because of favourite cost-benefit ratios
- Main problem is that Laktasi Area is almost unknown with austrian tourists
- Because it is unknown there are no queries to austrian bustour operators to visit Laktasi Area with their wellness & spa resorts
- Several attempts (see above) to promote Laktasi Area and their wellness & spa resorts so far failed either because Laktasi Area based companies are not willing to invest in advertisement

activities/campaigns or failed because of no response/no interest of important tourism operators like Billa Reisen, Hofer Reisen and Lidl Reisen.

Based on these experiences following steps are recommended:

- establish partnerships with different austrian regional tourism agencies – first steps are planned/done with
 - o Tourismusverband Lipizzanerheimat Weststeiermark
 - o Tourismusverband Attergau – Oberösterreich
- participating on external economic activities like trade fairs, cooperation days, workshops etc. – first steps are done with
 - o „mid-european-days“ in west-styria
- try to announce articles of Laktasi-area based companies, sent by Mrs. Bojana Kondic-Panic (see Appendix 7) in local styrian and carinthian newspapers/and magazines (like Gleinalmblick, Murtalblick, weststeirische Rundschau etc.). This will be done after project finishes by Christian Husak – he translated articles and contacted/still continues contacting local and regional newspapers/magazines.
- establishing marketing/advertisement campaigns in german speaking social medias (facebook, xing, linked in) by promoting cost-benefit ratios, offers, 3-5 day packages, historical background and gastronomy

Step 5:

Developing a rough plan for tourism quality management (and improvement) of Laktasi tourism

Following steps to improve tourism quality management had been developed:

- first step: an excursion of Laktasi tourism representatives to styrian tourism agencies to learn from them about how to support regional companies, touristic sites and touristic offers. First contacts had been established with styrian tourism agency, Tourismusverband Lipizzanerheimat and Tourismusverband Attergau – Oberösterreich.
Excursion is planned to take place in fall 2017
- second step – especially for potential tourists from Austria:
 - o train staff of Laktasi tourism agency in english language (and even just a few words in german)
 - o train staff of touristic sites/hotels/wellness & spa resorts in overall know-how about Laktasi Area (means historical know how, know how in opportunities for having sport activities in pure nature like river Vrbas, know how to promote gastronomic locations etc.)

Training programm has to be developed Planned start is also fall 2017.

- third step: choose a benchmark – for instance this could be Hotel Kaldera north of Laktasi – develop common quality criterias to be achieved. Recommendation is to cooperate with

bosnian tourism training and education institutions like university of Banja Luka. Planned start will be fall 2017.

- Fourth step is to draft a common project plan for all participants how to proceed. Project plan should be developed till fall 2017 at the latest!

3. Final remarks & recommendations:

Laktasi Area has very interesting and beautiful tourism locations:

- Wellness & spa resort like Hotel Sun etc.
- pure nature (like river Vrbas)
- an interesting history (as being located in north bosnia)
- a favourable price-earnings ratio
- vicinity to Banja Luka

My recommendations to promote Laktasi tourism is therefore:

- Understand that advertisement in countries abroad (in the case that foreign tourists are welcome) is of absolut necessity
- Promote Laktasi Area together with Banja Luka (!) – Banja Luka is capital town of Republika Srbska, very close to Laktasi (it´s almost one city), has partly international reputation and a lot of services to offer. So promoting without Banja Luka will be of no effort.
- In some cases, quality improvement is of absolut necessity (concerning foreign language speaking staff, quality of services and hotel infrastructure).
- Local tourism agency should establish deeper cooperations with local tourism companies, e. g. by establishing an electronic information system about available rooms in hotels etc.
- Local tourism agency should engage in promoting Laktasi area in different social medias

