

Final Report „Wellness Destination improvement in Laktaši“

Project Nr.: 2-2015_004

Initial situation:

Basis of all projectmanagement-activities was EC-funded and finalized project „Weldest“, which was developed with my partners from Finland, Austria (CHC, Christian Husak Consulting and FH Joanneum), Germany, United Kingdom, Czech Republic. In this project we developed guidelines how to improve (or how to proceed) a „normal tourism destination“ into a higher-level „wellness destination“. Reason for this project is that Laktaši city and region has a lot of – less quality – wellness destinations. Aim of the project is to improve them to higher quality wellness-tourism destinations. Desired outcome should be

- establishing a coordination management of different tourism activities in Laktaši
- an overview of what could be done from a touristic related perspective in Laktaši
- together developed achievable goals, meaningful strategies, inclusion of stakeholders and development of a proper project organisation.
- a detailed project plan (workpackages, timeframes, responsibilities) what should/could be done to improve current situation.
- At least, this project should be the leading example for other tourism-quality improvement projects in Bosnia. So project team members should afterwards be able to act as consultants for other projects in the region/country. Consultancy is based on gained experience (and complemented by „learning and training on doing“).

Projectmanagement – Workshops/seminars done in the project

According to the application several workshops/seminars had been planned to achieve above mentioned desired goals. 1st Workshop was done from February 8th till February 9th 2016. Following programme was made:

1st Workshop – February 8th – 9th 2016

1st day (Monday):

- Monday afternoon visiting spas in Laktaši and surrounding areas, got a first impression about offers etc.

2nd day morning (Tuesday):

- Tuesday-morning (9 am) meeting in office of Mrs. Kondić-Panić to discuss in detail schedule for meeting/workshop and current tourism-situation in Laktaši.

2nd day afternoon (Tuesday):

Start: 1 pm:

- Welcome & introduction CHC – Christian Husak (5 min)

- Introduction/short presentation participants status quo situation, ideas and need for support (about 5 min/person)
- Presentation Christian Husak (1) (about 90 min incl. discussions):
 - Short impressions from yesterday's spa visit
 - Short presentation of „weldest“-project (research field & outcomings; [presentation „Turku ... pdf; presentation „Customer and stakeholder expectations ppt])
 - Short presentation of marketing strategies of styrian wellness resorts (target groups, strategy etc.) adding potential conclusions for Laktasi resorts
 - Common discussions
- Presentation Christian Husak (2):
 - Presentation „self assessment tool“ from weldest-project (60 min)
- Discussion
- Workpackages to be done till next visit Christian Husak
- Closing the meeting

Impressions of first meeting



1st Part of participants – 1st Workshop Februar 2016



2nd Part of participants – 1st Workshop Februar 2016

Result of first workshop had been that Laktasi indeed has offers in the wellness/spa segment, but most of them are uncoordinated and of less quality. Moreover, there exists a tourism organization, but they act not very supportive for local different tourism providers. In common, it lacks of an organization who takes care for destination development and manages necessary processes of quality enhancement and productivity improvement.

2nd Workshop – April 20th – April 21st 2016

Till 2nd Workshop a lot of planning and preparing work had to be done to be able to discuss with workshop participants.

Planned Assignment of task:

„Developing a tourism-developmentplan for Laktasi(region)“

Basic requirement:

Willingness to cooperate of all (potential) partners in the tourism sector

To achieve a long term strategic target, following first steps had to be done:

Step No 1:

„Define a common preferred longterm strategic target“

As an example, this longterm strategic target could be:

„Becoming No 1 wellness destination in Republica Srpska in year 2022“

To be able to achieve this goal, the group (= partners, ready to cooperate) had to discuss and answer following questions:

- What basic endowments we have?
- What strengths we have (based on the basic endowments)?
- What weaknesses we face (detto)?
- What chances we see for us (detto)?
- What risks we expect (detto)?
- Who are our preferred targetgroups (clients) we want to attract to achieve our longterm strategic target?

In common, it was planned to

- to discuss preferred strategic target for Laktasi-region
- develop a SWOT-Analyses
- to define preferred target groups.

Following results had been achieved in this second workshop:

Vision proposal:

Laktaši - the most developed wellness and spa destination in BiH

Potential target groups:

As potential sectors for tourism development, there are specified: wellness and spa tourism, sports tourism, religious tourism, Youth tourism, rural tourism (traditional cuisine), the program for minorities, river tourism - flyfishing, tourism for the retired and older population, hotel development etc.

As a next step, a SWOT-Analyses was done. Following results had been achieved:

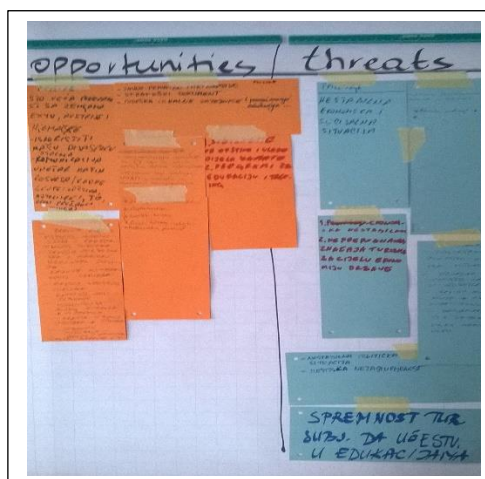
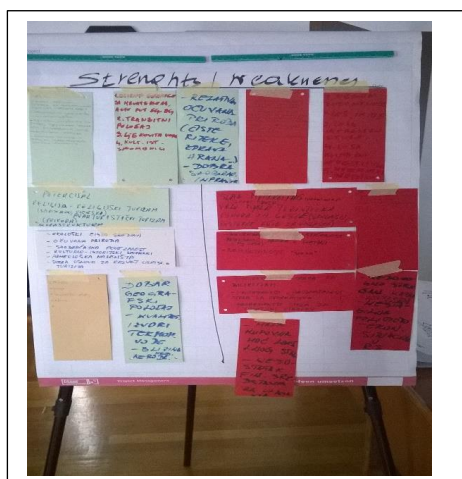
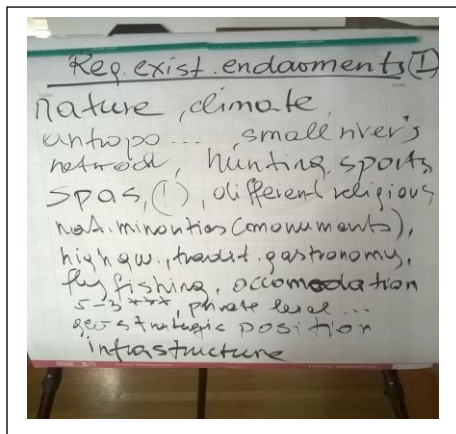
SWOT analysis of tourism development in the municipality of Laktaši

21 April, 2016

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • S - Strengths <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Geo-strategic position and mineral water - thermal mineral springs – Low cost of stay compared to the surrounding – Underdeveloped tourist diversity that favors new investments – Pleasant and sociable population – Transit position of the municipality – Interconnection with neighboring countries – Developed transport infrastructure – Proximity to the international airport – Healthy organic foods – Archaeological sites – Rich forest fund – The nature and climate – Good potential for development of religious tourism – Ecologically clean and preserved nature – Sports hall in Laktaši and in Aleksandrovac and successful sports clubs - a good basis for the development of sports tourism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • W - Weaknesses <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – competitiveness with neighboring countries – bad image abroad – insufficiently developed tourist infrastructure – lack of connection of tourist companies and the lack of developed tourism products for visitors – lack of a Financial resources – bad political and economic climate for investors – insufficient promotion of Laktaši Municipality as a tourist destination – lack of entrepreneurial initiative – poor tourist offer – unstable political situation – inadequately trained and motivated staff – low purchasing power of the local population – lack of private accommodation – lack of hotel – unformed youth tourism – rough trails for biking and recreation – insufficiently regulated nature – underdeveloped rural tourism – insufficiently promoted local cuisine
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • O - Opportunities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – programs for education in the field of tourism – cooperation with the Diaspora – established economic contacts with neighboring countries (Austria, Slovenia, Germany) and international interconnection – organizing permanent working meetings within the existing tourist resources – pre-accession negotiations, which leads BiH with the European Union, which could lead to increased investments in BiH 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • T - Threats <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – economic instability – Unstable political climate in the country and the region – departure of skilled staff abroad – closure of tourist facilities due to insolvency – the progress and development of the competition while we stagnate – lack of basic knowledge of tourism – poor media coverage of the municipality as a tourist destination – unwillingness of tourist capacities to participate in education and training

- projects conducted and implemented by UNDP in cooperation with local communities
- the potential for the development of sports, health and other types of tourism
- Public - Private Partnership
- making strategic document subsidize part of the interest rates by the RS Government and the local community
- Support local communities
- development of gastronomic tourism

Pictures from 2nd Workshop – April 2016:



3rd Workshop – May 27th 2016

As a result from 2nd Workshop in April 2016 following procedure had been prepared to be discussed with participants:

Potential tourism strategies for Laktasi

First, based on SWOT-Results following strategies to be pursued had been suggested from CHC:

1) Strenghts - Opportunities (S-O) Strategies:	
S 1: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Geo-strategic position and mineral water - thermal mineral springs- Low cost of stay compared to the surrounding- Transit position of the municipality- Interconnection with neighboring countries- Developed transport infrastructure- Proximity to the international airport- Healthy organic foods- Archaeological sites- Rich forest fund- The nature and climate- Good potential for development of religious tourism- Ecologically clean and preserved nature	O 1: cooperation with the Diaspora + established economic contacts with neighboring countries (Austria, Slovenia, Germany) + international interconnection
S 2: Healthy organic food	O 2: Development of gastronomic tourism
S 3: Sports hall in Laktaši and in Aleksandrovac and successful sports clubs - a good basis for the development of sports tourism	O 3: the potential for the development of sports, health and other types of tourism

2) Weaknesses - Opportunities (W-O) Strategies:	
W 1: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- bad image abroad	O 1:

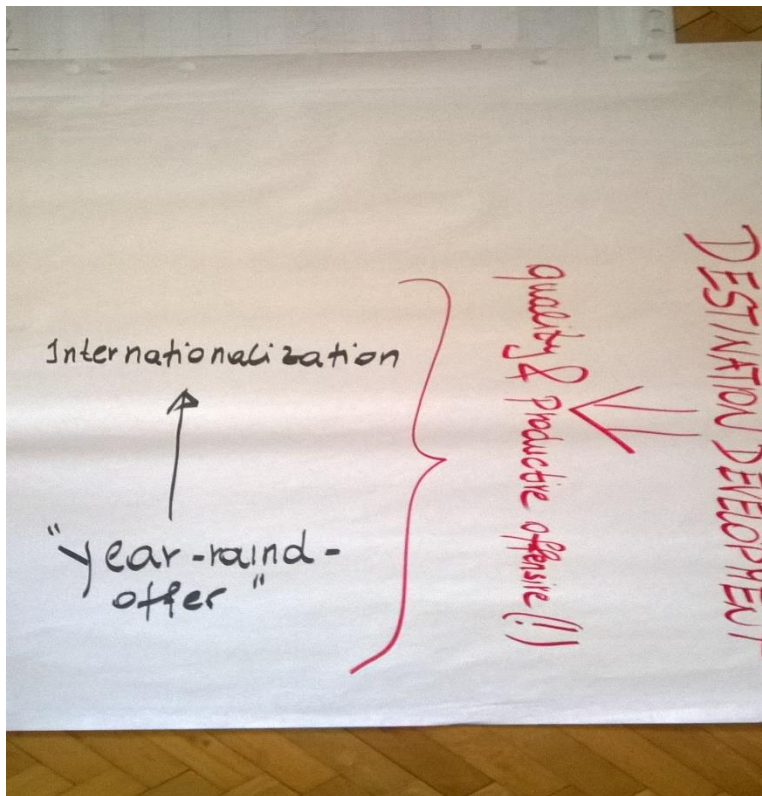
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - insufficiently developed tourist infrastructure - lack of connection of tourism companies and lack of developed tourist products for visitors - insufficient promotion of Laktasi Municipality as a tourist destination - poor tourist offer - inadequate trained and motivated staff - lack of private accommodation - unformed youth tourism - rough trails for biking and recreation - underdeveloped rural tourism 	cooperation with the Diaspora + established economic contacts with neighboring countries (Austria, Slovenia, Germany) + international interconnection
W 2: insufficiently promoted local cuisine	O 2: Development of gastronomic tourism
W 3: inadequately trained and motivated staff	O 3: organizing permanent working meetings within the existing tourist resources

Summary:

- 1) Use strengths to benefit from opportunities (strengths: see above – opportunities: attracting markets in neighboring countries as well as in the diaspora)
- 2) Focusing on gastronomy (using existing products, promoting gastronomy to develop gastronomic tourism)
- 3) Using sport equipments/endowments incl. nature (river ...) to develop sport/youth tourism
- 4) Improvements in touristic infrastructure, quality, staff motivation and staff training to benefit from neighboring countries as well as from diaspora

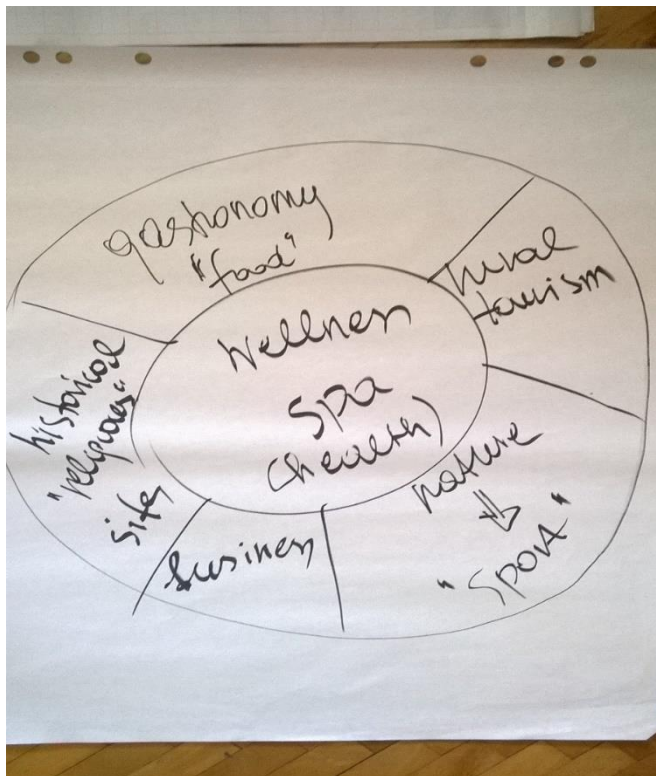
This leads to following main strategies:

- 1) **Development of “year-round-offers”**
- 2) **Focusing on Internationalization**
- 3) **Quality- and productivity-offensive**
- 4) **Destination-Development**



Those main strategies led to severe discussions who is responsible for destination development activities. Almost all participants agreed that local tourism organization should do this job. As a result, next workshop beginning of June, local tourism organization will invite participants to join common discussions about potential „year-round-offers“.

This „year-round-offer“ could be of following characteristic (see next page):



Second, because of inadequate developed target groups an amendment had to be done. The initial developed target groups had been:

- wellness & spa tourists
- older/retired people
- sport tourists (what kind?)
 - o flyfishing
 - o river – kajak ...
- “religious tourists” (what kind? – we don’t have a “Medjugorje” ...)

CHC gave a short impression about different target groups in tourism like:

- Health tourists
- Sport tourists
- Culture oriented tourists
- Tourists interested in gaining education
- Tourists visiting cities
- Thermal bath visitors
- Event tourists
- Nordic walking tourists
- Hikers

- Bikers
- Family tourism
- "50+ generation"
- Youth tourists
- Camping tourists
- "short break" tourists ("getaways")
- "Rehab-tourists"
- Cross-country skiers
- Local recreation looking people
- Rail-tourists (Interrail – young people)
- Business tourists
- Rural tourists
- ...

Participants commonly agreed that target groups must be specified in further discussions.

4th Workshop – June 7th – June 8th 2016

4th Workshop was divided in a plenum session with all participants; agenda had been:

- a Developing /improving ideas for specifying target groups who should become tourists in Laktasi Region
- b Developing ideas for develop a „year-round-offer“
- c Developing ideas for „3“ and „5“-day packages
- d Developing ideas for a quality and productivity offensive
- e Developing ideas for destination development activities

Second part included separate meetings with different tourism actors such as hotel managers, tourism agency and visiting surrounding of Laktasi and Banja Luka to discuss opportunities, what offers should be included in the „year-round-offer“ as well as 3/5-day packages.

Ad a) Developing /improving ideas for specifying target groups who should become tourists in Laktasi Region

Based upon previous discussions and the main orientation of Laktasi-Region to wellness tourism, participants identified as main (specified) target groups:

- Older, mainly retired people seeking for alternative wellness offers and reasonable price-performance ratio
- Older, mainly retired people interested in history (as well as older people, seeking for a combination of wellness tourism, history-discovering-activities and cuisine-gourmets)

- Young(er) people, interested in alternative opportunities for vacation (eg ecological oriented/interested people, people interested in adventure-tourism ...)
- „Diaspora-people“ (this are people born in Bosnia but now living and working abroad), who came back for holidays every year once, twice or three times – those people should be offered special services like massage (for recovering after a long journey) etc.

Ad b) Developing a „year-round-offer“

This item had been seriously discussed because it seemed to be that a lot of offers would be possible to be developed. Participants agreed that

- a lot of different opportunities still exist but remain uncoordinated
- the Laktasi tourism organization should be responsible to collect all known offers and opportunities, send it to Mr. Husak and discuss them at next meeting in July. Based upon this information a commonly developed „year-round-offer“ should be established.

Finally, all participants agreed that the „year-round-offer“ mainly should orientate on identified target groups.

Ad c) Developing „3/5-day-packages“

For this item the same is valid as for Developing a „year-round-offer“. Following development-steps should had been agreed:

- First, travel agency collects all existing offers, sends them to Christian Husak to be discussed at next meeting in July.
- Afterwards all participants develop together a 3-day-package as well as a 5-day-package for target groups.

Ad d) Developing ideas for a quality and productivity offensive

As a main successfactor participants agreed that it is absolutely necessary that common quality criterias should be implemented in the middle term. Following this awareness intense discussions begun what quality criterias should be developed and implemented. In the ongoing discussions participants came to an agreement on following quality criterias:

- Receptionists at hotels should learn basic english
- Receptionists at hotels should learn basic knowledge about local (and partly regional) history
- In the middle-long term local tourist-guides should be educated for being able to inform tourists about local/regional history in more details
- Different services – eg. Massage service from professional masseurs – should be bookable via internet
- In the long run, local gastronomy should focus on typical local products, mainly drawn from local/regional farmers

- In the long run a commonly developed local/regional quality seal should be established to separate „good“ from „bad“ companies

All participants agreed, that those steps will be postponed to later phases in the project. First of all it is important to coordinate different existing offers and develop above mentioned packages as well as a „year-round-offer“.

Ad e) Developing ideas for destination-development-activities

In all discussions so far it has been shown that it is of utmost importance that an organization takes care to organize and coordinate different tasks to be fulfilled. All participants agreed that this organization only the existing tourism agency could and should be. Based on this perception a discussion began about the existing tourism agency. Result was that most participants indeed knew that tourism agency exists but didn't know what they are doing and in what way they could cooperate (or be supported by them). Tourism agency itself complained about lack of cooperation with existing tourism companies like hotels, gastronomy etc. Also, until this project never before participants sat „on one table“ and discussed common items of interest. So, one major outcome of this project had been that now

- a) all tourism actors now better know each other
- b) all tourism actors realized, that they will have to cooperate if they want to be successful in international tourism business
- c) all tourism actors will meet each other regularly in future time to better coordinate and develop common useful and beneficiary activities.

As a kind of first step, tourism agency got the order to collect all existing touristic offers and opportunities to be discussed in next meeting in July. Based on this material, a common brochure should be developed to be presented above mentioned target in Diaspora-Regions (mainly Austria, Germany, Switzerland) as well as in BiH itself and neighbouring countries.

Second part of 4th workshop had been separate discussions with following tourism and tourism-related companies:

- 5* Hotel Kaldera
- 4* Hotel Sun
- Hotel Villa Viktoria
- CERD (this is a regional development agency)
- Laktasi tourism agency

Important to notice is:

- 5* hotel Kaldera is the „leading edge“ of hotels in Laktasi. They act as „flagship“ of Laktasi-hotels and are also international well known. They own a separate wellness-center and now are happy to cooperate with other tourism related institutions to widen their offers.

- 4* hotel Sun is well known for its medical offers and popular with slovenian guests. They so far marketed themselves alone but now will cooperate with others to become more attractive for guests.
- Hotel Villa Viktoria is very close to Banja Luka and mainly benefits from travelling guests on the road to south Bosnia. They will invest in wellness-equipment to become more attractive also for local guests
- CERD has made a summary of different regional opportunities to be used by tourists. They are convinced that for Laktasi alone it will be hard to survive in tourism. They recommend to cooperate with Banja Luka as well as with other surrounding regions of Laktasi.
- Laktasi tourism agency got a new manager in spring this year. He will focus on more cooperation amongst all different tourism companies and act in future as the main tourism coordinator for Laktasi tourism companies as well as a kind of a „connector“ outside.

5th Workshop – July 7th – July 8th 2016

As a result of 4th workshop in June participants agreed that all of them send their ideas for developing the 3-day and 5-day package as well as for developing the „year-round-offer“ to tourism agency. They collect ideas and material, forward it to Christian Husak and he will present different proposals. Unfortunately, they didn't keep timeline, exceptional one company – Hotel Villa Victoria. They sent following paper:

Laktasi – Wellness and spa destination

As first, I think tourism in Laktasi might be alive, because it has all preconditions for quality stay of tourists, and for that is necessary, better and more promote Laktasi as a tourist destination, make brochure about tourism in Laktasi, make 3, 5 and 7 day package tour.

Idea for better promotion municipality Laktasi as a tourist destination with slogan “Laktasi wellness and spa destination are:

- In brochure write basic things and terms about municipality Laktasi and its touristic potencialities. Touristic potencialities I think are:
 - 1.) Spa – most important and most text about spa Laktasi, what illnesses is good for, about its therapeutic characteristics, temperature of water etc. and all others much less,
 - 2.) Wellness,
 - 3.) Sightseeing,
 - 4.) Some sports or recreational activities (with food in nature, for example, when tourists have a walk, they making a pause and have a lunch),
 - 5.) Banja Luka citysightseeing (I think that Banja Luka must find its place in brochure of Laktasi in the promotion on the fairs and other places (only picture and below picture to write Banja Luka citysightseeing),
 - 6.) Few hotels (3 to 5) with basic data,

7.) Few restaurants (3 to 5) with basic data,

8.) Healthy food (from eco area, healthy zone, small producing in the villages).

Brochure need to be attractive, in other words well designed, readable etc. In the brochure would be good to involve inheritance from roman and austrohungarian period. In the same way I think that wound't be bad to make one brochure Laktasi – Banja Luka together and promote it to the fairs together with tourist organization of Republic of Srpska and its potencialities.

In the tourist organization of Laktasi establish travel agency (non profitable) to deal with, in other words its activities direct or point to bringing tourists to the area of municipality Laktasi. Its duties should have been to contact all tourist organization in Republic of Srpska, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Croatia, Montenegro, Macedonia, Slovenia, Austria, Germany (Bavaria area mostly), Italia and to present tourist product of municipality Laktasi. On the same way should have to contact all travel agencies in this area which are most important, and present them tourist product of Laktasi and tourist arrangement with prices for three, five, seven days stay in the hotels with 3,4,5 stars.

On the web site of tourist organization to do its own reservation system that tourist can directly on one site reserve hotel wich they want, rent a car, transport to the airport and so on. This would be serve for those guest who coming individually, and precondition for that is to hotels have touristic arrangement with prices in their offer. If can not right now, then ought to establish when it can. Need to highlight that expansion of tourism came right with air traffic offer, and because Laktasi have the airport that is only advantage, guests can come with airplane if emitive travel agency include this in offer.

Likewise, Laktasi ought to have tourist guide, who would represent tourist potencialities to the tourists. With prices for individual guests, till 10 tourists, till 30, 50 and so on.

Municipality of Laktasi ought to finance education of staff through seminars, to be involved all hotels and restaurants and others trade and service workers, and all in order to better presentation in front of tourists. And also ought to finance hoteliers in making of packet arrangement which will be presented to the tourists.

Dane Sovilj

Because of lacking ideas/material from participants Christian Husak once more emphasised the importance of 3/5-day packages as well as the „year-round-offer“ for being able to promote Laktasi. I suggested to concentrate on following items:

- Wellness and medical treatment
- Local gastronomy
- Local history
- Unpolluted nature
- Sports activities in an unpolluted natural environment (such like boat trips on river Vrbas, fly fishing etc.).

All of them should be presented in internet, a brochure containing these offers should be developed and being advertised in german speaking countries as well as in BiH itself and its neighbouring countries.

Because destination management is crucial for having success in tourism Christian Husak presented and discussed the initial presented and now adapted self-assessment tool, he developed for Laktasi-tourism (especially for tourism agency) to realize „goods“ and „bads“ and opportunities for improvement (please see this self-assessment tool in connex/mail attachment).

Seminar finished with deciding to have another meeting – without Christian Husak – at coming Tuesday, at which potential further ideas will be discussed and decided. Project work will continue in Fall this year because now it became summer time, this means „high-season“ for tourism. They will not have enough time to continue project work until fall.

Recommendations/Next steps

Basis for being successfull in international tourism has been created by

- realizing that local tourism agency should act as main coordinator of relevant tourism activities / offers from local tourism companies
- different offers/activities will be collected and coordinated
- 3-day and 5-day-packages will be developed and commonly marketed
- same will be done with a „year-round-offer“
- continue common development work after summer season in fall 2016

Next step will be that tourism agency prints leaflets and brochures, forces internet-presentation as well as cooperation. This material in a next phase should be promoted in german speaking countries as well as in Bi Hand neighbouring countries. Also a market research will be done especially for austrian guest about their habits in wellness and medical tourism. Afterwards target groups will be contacted and Laktasi as affordable and interesting tourism region being presented.