



Listen to the News

Newsletter of the Listen to the Voice of Villages project

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Editorial

■ Dear readers,

The second issue of Listen to the News Newsletter has been prepared to provide you with information about the events of the last 6 months. We have managed to successfully launch our project and are progressively completing our goals and tasks for the first year. The main activities were focused on research and analysis – mapping models and government tools – which could be applied to our territories. Furthermore the brand, design and logo of the Vital Villages Association, which is

to be established at the end of the project, has been created. We intend to continue with these successful activities and shall finally begin to implement our pilot projects over the course of the next year.

At the end of October and beginning of November two representatives of LP and the University of Trento (PP2) visited four partner territories, and are keen to share their enjoyable experiences from this visit with you. So please make yourselves comfortable, and we wish you a pleasant and thought-provoking read.

Your PP4 team

Getting to know the Partner territories

A delegation composed of one member of the Autonomous Province of Trento (Ms Lara Torghele for the Lead Partner) and one from the University of Trento (Mr Paolo Grigolli for PP2, the partner responsible for the research and analysis - WP3) visited four Project Partners: the Opolskie Region (Poland - PP5), the Ústí Region (Czech Republic - PP6), the Bohemian Switzerland region (Czech Republic - PP4) and the Forchheim District (Germany - PP8).

■ The aim of the study tour was to visit the partner's pilot area, to focus on tour-

ism resources and attractions in the regions through an excursion, a local stake-



Knowing the Partner territories



Castle in Forchheim

> holders' meeting, a brainstorming session on both the system of government system and on the possible idea for pilot projects etc. The visit also provided an occasion to discuss general questions, problems and suggestions related to the project.

The visit to the pilot territories took place between 27 October and 3 November 2009.

It was not probably the best time of year to visit these locations in the heart of Europe due to the approaching winter time, but thanks to the warm hospitality of the people we met and their willingness to explain the ongoing projects to us, this week provided us with an incredible opportunity to discover hitherto unknown details and some information about the lives of people outside of mass tourism.

All of this made for a genuine travel experience which we hadn't previously expected.

You may go to a place to see for yourself the sights you've seen in pictures on the Internet, in a brochure, a catalogue or a film, and this applies to anywhere where there's an important attraction such as the Coliseum in Rome, the Eiffel Tower in Paris, Big Ben in London... in such cases it's a MUST to go there, with the same feeling you had when you were a child who wanted to complete a "sticker album" with all the football players in it. Furthermore you'd like to have a picture with the monument AND yourself in it, because it's the only way to say YOU WERE THERE.

However, in the territories we visited there are no important or outstanding attractions to compete with world

famous monuments, neither is there a highly developed service culture, which takes a great deal of time to establish, in addition to which the money needed to promote a destination on the tourism market is in short supply. It is in fact in the spirit of the project to look after territories with minor tourist potential.

So what made the experience special?

What are the values and potentials of these places as seen through the eyes of two Italians, "tourists for opportunity"?



The landscape in North Bohemia

First of all we can say that there is a great difference between just seeing things and experiencing them first hand, and this is what we gained during the study tour, as all the partners made their best efforts to provide us not only with information but to enable us to meet with people and get to know their culture, their projects, their passions, their dreams.

And this is what made the difference and enhanced our responsibility in heading a European project.

■ This took place for example whilst exploring typical Upper Franconian culture with a couple dressed in traditional costumes, explaining the exhibits of the small museum they manage, or at a table with Mr Dahlmann Schmidt in Mittelehrenbach, who gave us the oppor-



Rock formations in Bohemian Switzerland



Traditional Upper Franconian costume



Church in the Opolskie region

tunity to see typical fruit processing (distillery) and an example of accommodation, using his agricultural building as a holiday flat. He offered us "Brotzeit" (a typical Franconian snack made of regional produce) and explained the strategy of tourist development in the area as President of the local association of entrepreneurs, having started from virtually nothing 20 or more years ago.

■ We had previously never had the opportunity to encounter a surface coal mine such as the one we saw in the region of Chomutov in the Czech Republic, both from above in a modest light aircraft and also from the inside, in a study tour perfectly organized by the project partner. Again this was more than we had expected, and if it may appear to be a difficult or even overwhelming task to bring tourism here, on the other hand it seems an interesting challenge from the position of a territory which may consider a start-up a strategy from the values and history it has by launching a "future of mining" programme.

■ From the information centre we headed straight into a demanding hiking trip to the most panoramic routes on the hills in Bohemian Switzerland: this took place thanks to the organization of the Czech project partner who helped us to understand the geology, nature, culture of the National Park and the typical regional architecture, derived from German heritage, all whilst enjoying the autumn beautiful colours.

All this provided us with a genuine experience, both mentally and physically... together with total immersion in Czech cuisine, and later on... dancing...

■ We were also treated to a full experience when visiting a palace owned by a German proprietor in Opolskie region which is open to the public, and then a beekeeping area for honey tasting and a presentation of the project of therapeutical bee inhalators, which may come to fruition thanks to the enthusiasm of a young man...

■ We discovered the interests and competences of the LOHAS philosophy (Lifestyle of Healthy and Sustainability) during a lunch in a small farmhouse tourism company based near Maciejów in Poland, where all the family is involved in the production of "slow food", having participated in the Terra Madre event in Turin (Italy). The LOHAS philosophy is concerned with promoting a balanced and correct relationship between people, the environment, food and tourism, practically applying the sophisticated principles laid down in the sustainability manual. Again we were treated to an authentic experience, whilst the "five-day preparation" soup evoked ancient memories such as "Proust's madeleines"...

Travelling can be full of surprises: this was our experience in the territories we visited.

The people living in these regions have a wealth of interesting stories to tell you: let's give them a VOICE.

Ideas and possible tourism projects to be developed

PP8: Wirtschaftsförderung Landkreis Forchheim (Germany)

■ With regard to the German pilot territory, the ideas in relation to the pilot projects to be implemented are intended to combine an offer of local quality food with itineraries consisting of warm and friendly hospitality for the following **target groups**:

- Families with young children
- Middle aged “slow food” couples
- Groups of friends - “dinkies” (dual income, no kids)



Typical half-timbered house in Forchheim

For any of the **target groups** mentioned above, specific activities should be organized within the territory for 2 to 6 days, creating the conditions for real experiences.

For instance, an effort should be made to develop trails and paths both for hiking and cycling, providing information about the level of difficulty and timing, as well as about related features of interest in connection with attractions in the field and local produces.

Another area of action is intended to promote formal cooperation between tourism and other branches of the

PP6: Regional authority of the Ústí Region (Czech Republic)

■ Coal mining represents the core of the regional economy and covers 50% of the total energy supply of

economy: this means that in the near future farmers and hospitality facilities (hotels, B&Bs, small hotels, managers of restaurants and shops) should combine their efforts with the local municipality in order to create a product club which jointly presents the offer of the territory. It would be interesting to involve a voluntary association of young people for full time work experience during the harvest season in order to assist farmers and at the same time rediscover the values, traditions and culture of the countryside.

The Wine Routes in Europe do not merely represent a simple food and wine itinerary, but embrace a wider and more complex role as a facility capable of combining food and wine with tourism and hospitality. On the basis of this consideration, the strategic pathway of the wine route business will consist increasingly of working to create the basic conditions, in order to provide tourism products and events based on wine and food their proper positioning on the market. Another area to be dealt with regards to **the branding** of Franconian products is the possibility of building awareness of Franconian Switzerland amongst consumers through typical products which are to be found on markets and in superstores. A “healthy product” links to the idea of an unspoiled territory to visit and this is a possible way of introducing a new destination to a niche market and more effective **marketing** of the area as a whole, since small entrepreneurs don't have sufficient critical mass to promote themselves efficiently on the market.

As the target groups seen above (i.e. “dinkies” and “slow food couples”) are becoming increasingly sophisticated in terms of demands for services and quality of hospitality, another area requiring action is **improvement of quality accommodation standards** and providing clear and transparent information for the market, since the territory needs to attract high-spending target groups.

the Czech Republic. The development of the area has to deal with the possibility of utilising cultural and MICE tourism in order to promote the unique values, know-how and competences of the territory, linking together the different communities. As mining concessions will

be in place up to the year 2070, it seems important to understand the values in connection with mining and the perspective of the population, and this may also provide some important suggestions for the pilot projects.

While the North Bohemian Mining Co. has a co-operative approach and assists the local authority in various social programmes, it is important to study the strategy of networking with the universities, schools, associations within the territory on one hand and with tourism management on the other.

If the **concept of the area becomes “the future of mining”**, all the activities to be proposed should tell stories and provide people with living and thematic experiences related to the following items:

- Green technology
- Reclamation
- Sustainability
- Energy saving

The pilot areas should focus on the future, showing what is changing as an example for the world, creating experiences for specific target groups such as:

- Engineers
- Environmentalists
- Geologists
- Primary and Secondary schools in the Czech Republic
- Visitors

Here, more than anywhere else, tourism can play a multiple role to show to specific target groups of people (see

PP4: Bohemian Switzerland public service organization (Czech Republic)

■ The Destination Management Organization (DMO) created here in the form of an NGO involving all the stakeholders of the territory seems ready to implement

above) the values and know-how developed, to increase the feeling of belonging amongst the population, to stimulate innovation through comparison with other experiences, and also to enhance the sense of pride of local people. The first three target groups mentioned above may constitute a basis for the development of a MICE (Meeting, Incentive, Congress and Event) sector in order to attract professional people from other countries affected by the same issues in relation to mining.

An important role to be played by the Local Authority, and a possible pilot project, would be to create a kind of “**Convention Bureau**” which stimulates and organizes meetings and events.

As concerns the **target groups of school children and visitors and external visitors** (not experts), living experiences have to be created using the facilities of the North Bohemian Mining Company, creating a specific path in the area of mines where it is possible to walk and understand the processes of mining and energy supply.



Flight trip organised by PP6

a tourist development which involves also the German side of the natural area.

This level of cooperation is highly recommended in order to further increase exchanges in the region and to focus on the “active holiday” tourism product for families with small children (up to 16 years), hikers, active people and “LOHAS” people (lifestyle of health and sustainability).

Ideas and possible tourism projects to be developed

- > The destination management organization is actively involved in promoting the area and has already produced descriptive brochures for each village of the area, and is currently working to:
- Improve conditions for accessibility and parking in the area (and for the future considering train + shuttle / bicycle services)
 - Place clear signs on the road leading to the Park area
 - Improve signs on the paths providing information about timing and difficulty
 - Create a sustainable adventure park for children (and adults) in the Park
 - Enhance the standard and market availability of accommodation
 - Promote horse riding and cycling, as well as other activities to enjoy the National Park
 - Discover other ways of attracting people (i.e. bird watching and autumn foliage)
 - Develop web marketing appropriate for the promotion of the territory

The area has interesting assets in terms of churches, crosses and other symbols of the difficult relations between Roman Catholics and Protestants. Hence some activities or events may be launched in this field through the coherent use of religious and artistic themes, and of specific paths linked to a religious experience, since we know that "tradition is an innovation which remains in place"...



Typical architecture of Bohemian Switzerland

PP5: Marshal's office of the Opolskie Region (Poland)

- Taking into consideration previous experiences and activities undertaken by the local population and authorities aimed at stimulating tourism in rural areas of



Private Palace in the Opolskie region, open for public visits

the Opolskie Region, the two areas indicated for the pilot projects are "Dinosaur Land" and Kluczbork-Olesno Land (Milk and Honey land).

The first area is actually concerned with different projects because of paleontological discoveries in a territory considered to be of European importance. Thanks to the beauty of the surrounding nature and water surfaces, the activities currently being developed in the Dinosaur land for families with children and active people are hiking and canoeing, but the concession given to a private investor for 99 years to exploit the paleontological site is to be taken into consideration in order to support the possibility for small entrepreneurs to take part into the development of the area. This means the Local Authority should create the conditions for small businesses to enter the network of providers of the Dinosaur Park (accommodation, restaurants, other services) and local farmers should

supply local produces. At the same time private investors should help the territory by investing in important sectors such as sewage and water treatment, which are strategic for the area. The opportunities and threats for the area of the Dinosaur Park deals with its relationship towards private investors. On one hand it is clear that only a vast amount of capital can create a real attraction and market it, but on the other hand if tourism is confined within the boundaries of the Park the small businesses around may have only negative effects (pollution, traffic jams, increase in the price of land and housing...). The most strategic pilot project should focus on **branding the area and creating a product club** combining the offer of the territory under the brand name Dinosaur Land, to be used as an umbrella brand for everything dealing with that territory. As the area still retains attractive potential for developing active holidays for families with young children, active people and schoolboys, there should be an interest in developing cycling, hiking, horse riding, water sports and cross country skiing.

The Milk and Honey land is seen as an open-minded region where the local community seems ready for the implementation of new solutions in terms of organizations of tourism services and the offer of local quality food with itineraries, together with warm and friendly familiar hospitality for middle aged "slow food" couples in search of relaxation and families with young children. For the milk and honey project it is necessary to create a brand in order to boost awareness of the locality and to create better market conditions for dealing with trade. Honey may become a possible tool for attracting visitors in search of new experiences in the field of therapy and wellness. An alliance with the international "slow food" movement may help to bring some special recognition for the local products, whilst farmhouse tourism will soon be developed into **educational farms** where children may find real contact with nature and animals. Old kitchen recipes and summer schools for men and women using the traditional products may also be created in the farmhouses.

Paolo Grigolli and Lara Torghele

