FINAL REPORT PILOT ACTION 5 (CROSS BORDER MARKETING CAMPAIGN GERA – CHEB) AUTHORITY FOR LOCAL PUBLIC TRANSPORT VOGTLAND

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Report on cross border marketing campaign Gera – Cheb

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Summary description of the pilot action

As part of the EU project, a tourist guidance system was to be created along the Elster Valley project line. In the first concept, this control system involved the production of 30 information boards along the route (one sign per stop). However, since these signs are limited in their timeliness and there was a risk of decay and vandalism, the concept was changed in the course of a status quo analysis and the resulting action plan. After the concept was newly created via the control system, it was converted into a static and a digital part. The static part of the control system includes floor graphics at selected stops along the Elstertal route and the Vogtlandbahn. The floor graphics are about 2m long and 1m wide and contain the image of a footprint with natural content as a picture, an explanatory text about the guidance system and a QR code as access to the website www.elstertalbahn.de. The digital part of the control system contains the website www.elstertalbahn.de, which can be reached via any browser, the QR code on the floor graphic and an augmented reality (AR) app. This app is a supplement to the control system and was developed and started as part of the action plan. However, the app was paid for by ZVV's internal funds and is therefore only available in one language. The website is readable in German, English and Czech. The name of the control system is "Voglar". This is composed of "Vogtland" and "AR". Voglar is a giant who travels undetected through the Vogtland and leaves its footprints there. An agency developed the idea from the requirement to "wake a sleeping giant".

Investment costs

In the course of the project, a status quo analysis, an action plan and the implementation of the control system were required (realization of the action plan). The control system was the main investment in the project. The status quo analysis included a budget of € 10,000, the action plan € 13,000. These costs were declared as external expenses within the project. As planned in the application form, the cost of the control system was € 50,000. A further € 30,000 was made available through the ZVV's internal marketing budget.

Advertising of the pilot action

There were numerous advertising measures as part of the project and the application for the Elster Valley Route. This includes the production of an advertising film for PR purposes and for publication on social networks. A YouTube channel was created as part of the film project. The video of the project route was posted on the Internet and in social networks.

The route has been widely used in regional magazines, daily newspapers and magazines as well as at trade fairs. Advertisements have been published in the Reading Circle, in the Vogtland Anzeiger, in the Freie Presse, in the Vogtland Month, in the journal Eisenbahnromantik, in the Dampfbahn Route Sachsen and in cooperation with the Vogtland Tourist Association. The Vogtlandbahn as a route operator is also a reliable sales partner and other cooperation partners. Another advertising medium for the project and the Elster Valley Route was the creation of its own in 2019 Facebook site. This now counts (as of May 2020) over 250 likes and reaches several thousand people with some posts. The page contains current and historical motifs along the route as well as facts that are worth knowing about the route and the surrounding area. In addition, the control system, the project, the "EgroNet" public transport network and the steam locomotive journeys taking place in 2019 were advertised. These steam locomotive journeys were not financed by the project, but were used for the route marketing and the attractiveness of the route.

Effects on the observance of the route

Before the EU project started, the Elster Valley Route was not really advertised at all. Due to the tourist potential, this was done by the project. By promoting the route, the EU project and the "EgroNet" traffic network at trade fairs, in print media, daily newspapers, websites and online portals, YouTube channels, in regional tourism organizations and on television ("TV Westsachsen"), greater attention was drawn. Target groups are not only commuters, but also cycling and hiking tourists as well as day tourists. There is holiday potential on the route for several days. Therefore, it should be suggested to travel the route several times. In addition to passengers, public authorities in the region around the route were also made aware of the project. In a project advisory board, this includes mayors, representatives of other railway companies, disabled people's associations, photographers and anyone interested in the railway. Due to the high advertising of the route in social networks and channels such as YouTube, a measurable number of users could be reached (see table "Marketing campaign"), and there were also many positive responses in the form of comments. The implementation and presentation of the tourist guidance system continued to bring users closer to the route. Beyond the end of the project, further marketing and support from local authorities and tourism associations will be important for user behavior.

Satisfaction with the implementation of the pilot action

The objective of implementing a control system was achieved. This resulted in a touristic added value for municipalities along the route, for the railway companies and the tourism association in the form of potentially new guests in the Vogtland. Since the guidance system is the first of its kind in tourism use in Germany thanks to the augmented reality app, there is a unique selling point and competitive advantage and thus good tourism potential. It cannot be estimated whether the number of guests and passengers will change positively. No change could be achieved for the interest groups of the physically restricted persons in the project period, however the answers from the questionnaires are available to the respective task bearers.

Change in passenger numbers

Since the project started in June 2017, 4 passenger counts have taken place on the two lines of the project route (RB4 Gera to Weischlitz, RB2 Weischlitz to Cheb). In general, there was an increase in passenger numbers during the project period. A concrete increase in passenger numbers in connection with the project launch and the resulting control system can only be estimated. Recently there was even a small decrease in the number of passengers in the last survey. It can be justified by the fact that train cancellations due to construction sites, unsuitable vehicles or staff shortages unfortunately occurred again and again. The Adorf - Oelsnitz section was inaccessible for about a year due to flooding and further construction measures meant that the route was never marketable as a whole, but only with restrictions or in sections.

Although canceled trips were mostly compensated for by rail replacement traffic, the guidance system could not be used there and the passengers were also unable to respond positively. Furthermore, floor graphics were destroyed, so that the AR applications could not be started at the hot spots of the route. However, these floor graphics were reattached in spring 2020.

passenger numbers Elster-talbahn (Vogt-landbahn lines RB2 + RB4)	entries Mo - Fr	entries Sa	entries So	exits Mo - Fr	exits Sa	exits So	total entries	total exists
2. HJ 17	360.157	50.115	39.411	362.958	51.428	41.673	449.683	456.059
1. HJ 18	343.267	55.081	58.038	337.880	52.494	57.307	456.386	447.681
2. HJ 18	354.611	61.659	52.548	353.688	60.905	51.722	468.818	466.315
1. HJ 19	346.902	58.474	60.968	346.973	58.864	60.935	466.344	466.772

Transferability to other territories and stakeholders

The Zweckverband ÖPNV as a project participant was the first German company to use the idea of an augmented reality app for tourism purposes. This pioneering role has made the technology of AR applications known not only to a specialist audience, but also to the general public. This idea, and in general the idea of a touristic guidance system, can of course also be applied to other touristic and non-touristic companies. The AR application is currently a unique selling point, but it is not foreseeable that the partners cannot be expanded due to a lack of budget funds. Since ZVV, as a pioneer of this idea, has of course paved the way for other companies to use it, it is very likely that new AR Apps and applications will also be used in the future. These companies do not necessarily have to come from the transport or tourism industry, since the fields of application are open to all product lines.

In order to guarantee a high level of sustainability, all parts of the control system must be kept up to date with the latest technical standards. This includes regularly adapting the AR app to the technical conditions of the operating systems (Android, iOS). The website must also be kept up-to-date; compatibility with the operating system should also be kept in order to be able to continue to offer a mobile view. In addition, the functionality of the floor graphics should be checked regularly. The QR code and the image of the footprint should always be easily recognizable for mobile devices.

Findings after implementing the pilot action

As part of the project, important knowledge about the implementation of a new control system was gained. The cooperation of various interest groups in the region is important for the feasibility of an implementation. In addition to the transport service providers on the route, this also includes political representatives of the cities and municipalities as well as tourism decision-makers. It will always be important for the implementation of such a tourist system to involve a wide range of interest groups in the project in order to be able to better deal with possible bureaucratic obstacles (e.g. permits). All interest groups should be actively involved during the implementation process in order to be able to use their specialist knowledge. This means that financial and time resources can be used. It is important for marketing-related advertising of such a control system, also during the implementation and publication phase, to continuously inform and involve stakeholders about the project. This effort is enormous.

In addition to the stakeholders mentioned, this also applies to potential passengers. The application should continue to be made in print and social media.

When designing and creating a control system, the needs of potential users should also be taken into account. Since not every cyclist or hiking tourist can and does not want to use a digital solution of the guidance system, the floor graphics and the brochures created at the end of the project should always be up-to-date and distributed with a large range. With a mix of static and digital control systems, regional marketing will be possible.

The lack of follow-up funding for the project remains a disadvantage, as all partners also have no financial and personnel options. Demographically, a "car-free tourism" project would be sensible and up-to-date for rural areas and could help to attract holidaymakers and passengers and live up to the ecological zeitgeist.

Pictures of pilot

Logo "Voglar"

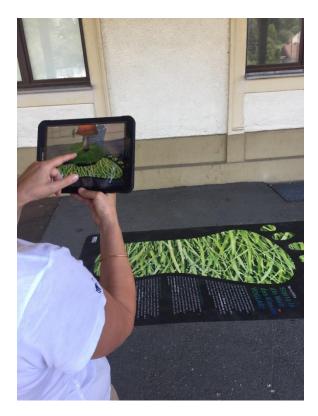Presentation of the guiding system at the project advisory board 2019

Size of an originally used floorgraphic (length approx. 1.90 m)

Floorgraphic at the train station "Weischlitz"

Floorgraphic at the train station "Bad Elster"

Floorgraphic at the parking lot in "Bad Elster" and a guiding shield in the forrest

Interreg
CENTRAL EUROPE
European Union
European Regional
Development Fund
Peripheral Access

Floorgraphic at the train station "Plauen Mitte"

Floorgraphic in the train of the "Vogtlandbahn"

Marketing measures for the project & the guiding system

YouTube contribution on "TV West Saxony" to the guiding system

Advert in the ZVV customer magazine, "Vischelant"

Advert in the magazine "Lesezirkel"

Articles in the daily newspaper "Freie Presse" about the commercial clip about the project route

Article in the daily newspaper "Freie Presse" about the guiding system

Adverts on the project route for use on social media and print media