Applied science and scientific research at the department of tourism, University of Applied Sciences – München – EU-Project ALPSHEALTHCOMP

“Strengthening the competitiveness of the Alpine Space as a sustainable health and wellness destination”

Contrary to fundamental research in science, which has been conducted traditionally at universities for many years, University of Applied Sciences – München focuses on applied research in cooperation with national and international business establishments. Altogether there exists a long tradition of scientific research at University of Applied Sciences – München, but mainly within classical areas such as mechanical and electrical engineering. Recently, a new development has taken place which leads towards a continuously increasing number of research projects in human-based sciences, for example in social sciences and tourism management.

For the first time, the department of tourism at the University of Applied Sciences - München participated in a large, trans-national and inter-sectoral research project. The “Alpshealthcomp” project was part of the EU Community Initiative Interreg IIIB Alpine Space Program (http://www.alpinespace.org/). The Alpine Space is by far the largest coherent mountainous landscape in Europe. It is a living space for about 70 million people in an area of 450,000km². Recreation traffic plays an important role in the economy of the Alps. The “roof” of Europe with more than 100 million visitors each year ranks among the most important and favoured destinations. The Alpine Space on the other hand is also an ecologically fragile but very valuable natural and mountain area that requires especially sustainable development strategies. Therefore the Alpine Space Program supports above all a well-balanced economical, social and ecological development.

The aim of the “Alpshealthcomp” project (http://www.alpshealthcomp.org/) has been the establishment of a competent network to strengthen the competitiveness of the Alpine Space as a health and wellness competence destination in tourism in a sustainable way. The possibility to increase the added value of the Alpine Space as a whole and to boost the competitiveness in the fields of alpine health and physical / psychological well-being by crosslinking the health- and the tourism sector was one of the major ambitions within the project. We also truly believe that as a result of the uniqueness of the wellness products in the Alpine Space, new target groups can be approached and therefore economic growth, even in traditionally underdeveloped areas which are greatly suffering from the vanishing of traditional rural life and work style, will be possible.

Altogether, there were 7 institutions from Italy, Austria and Germany participating in the “Alpshealthcomp” project. The project started with the signing of the subsidy contract and the partnership agreement in spring 2005 and came to an end in February 2008. The overall project budget was about 971,650 €.

Tanja Hanslbauer and Stefan Nungesser, assistants and PhD students of the department of tourism, worked full-time on the project. Prof. Dr. Theo Eberhard, head of department of tourism, and Prof. Dr. Thomas Bausch were responsible for the “Alpshealthcomp” project of the University of Applied Sciences - München.
The research team was mainly working on two large work-packages, which consisted of

Work-package 7 “Labour Market”:
This WP aimed at boosting the competitiveness of the intensely service-oriented health and wellness sector. Therefore the labour market was investigated. A large study on existing education and training institutions and programmes in the field of health services offered in the Alpine Space was conducted. In a subsequent, second study more than 70 entrepreneurs in the alpine health and wellness tourism sector were interviewed. Through a synopsis of study results, deficits in the health and wellness training and education sector could be identified. Based on these findings, a new alpine-specific education / training structure was developed. Finally in WP 7, a WEB-based trans-national job-fair for the alpine region was installed.

Work-package 9: “Monitoring and Decision Support by Harmonized Market Information”
WP 9 was developed to optimise the proceedings in the individual WPs. Therefore national market peculiarities, trends and future developments were investigated to identify factors of success and to guarantee the long-term prosperity of the project results. A large compilation of research materials in the fields of economics and service marketing and in the health and wellness sector were collected in order to form a broad knowledge base. One of the crucial queries in WP 9 was why and how consumers decide in particular for alpine wellness and health tourism products, prior to other offers. Therefore a large, representative survey were conducted, including 1600 subjects in Germany and approximately 1000 subjects in Italy, in order to identify connotations, attitudes and motivations specifically related to alpine health and wellness tourism. Aside from the consumer point of view, critical factors of success for entrepreneurs in the health and wellness sector were investigated by interviewing more than 50 entrepreneurs in the Alpine Space. Interest therein was focused on how these entrepreneurs personally generate and measure success in business.

The overall results of the project were presented at the “Final Conference Workshop” which was be held at the University of Applied Science – München on February 11th 2008.

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