

Amazing Amazon of Europe

Strategic Marketing Plan for AAoE
Destination

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O.T2.5

STRATEGIC MARKETING PLAN

RESPONSIBLE GREEN DESTINATION AMAZON OF EUROPE

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ABSTRACT

Amazing Amazon of Europe destination is a responsible green destination in UNESCO 5-country Biosphere Reserve Mura-Drava-Danube. Amazing Amazon of Europe is a joint 5-country destination that overlaps with the world's first 5-country biosphere reserve: UNESCO 5-country Biosphere Reserve Mura-Drava-Danube (TBR MDD).

This area forms the largest natural river system in Central Europe. Amazing riverine landscapes and riparian forests along Mura, Drava and Danube rivers represent the longest still free-flowing sections of the 3 rivers in Central Europe with inspiring forest and water landscapes, called Amazon of Europe. Preserved nature is combined with beautiful towns, villages and attractions rich in cultural heritage and traditions.

Our aim is that we jointly create a unique destination for nature lovers that would like to enjoy outdoor activities as well as relax in peace and hospitable atmosphere. Destination Amazing Amazon of Europe is a further step in the development of the area which started with Amazon of Europe Bike Trail project in 2019 and envisions itself as a responsible, green (sustainable) and healthy destination that inspires, informs, and educates its visitors about healthy models of interaction with local natural and cultural heritage.

INTRODUCTION

The Amazing Amazon of Europe Destination Strategic marketing plan is based on work package WP T. 2.5. It defines market analysis and market opportunities, marketing objectives, target groups and users of the AoE flagship transnational tourism products, based on the latest Sinus Milieus model, target markets, branding and visual identity guidelines for marketing of the tourism products, for service providers and other stakeholders of the destination, communication objectives, communication channels and marketing budget. The AAoE strategic marketing plan will be the tool to enable the AOE Destination visibility and promotion at key international target markets which are most inclined to high quality nature and culture products, including Germany, Benelux, Great Britain and Sweden. Communication activities and the allocated funds for promotional activities, as well as on the T. 2.4.: The development of Flagship tourism products. The Strategic marketing plan also defines the target groups, brand, visual identity guidelines for marketing, marketing strategies and activities, responsibilities of partners and resources for marketing to promote and upgrade the Amozon of Europe Bike Trail into Amazing Amazone of Europe Destination.

The document is divided into **9 key chapters**:

1. The product: Amazon of Europe Bike Trail
2. External and internal analysis
3. Marketing objectives
4. Target groups
5. The brand
6. Marketing strategies and activities
7. Marketing budget
8. Evaluation
9. References

Because of the nature of the tourism industry, it is expected to take at least 3 years to establish the brand of Amazon of Europe Bike Trail and another two to upgrade it towards the Amazing Amazon of Europe - the flagship tourism product in the region of the future 5-country Biosphere Reserve Mura–Drava–Danube.

The AoE Bike Trail AAoE Destination are going to be a newly established brands entering the sustainable tourism market. Since the brand does not have recognizability on the market or its own market share yet, a key focus of the marketing strategy will be building awareness, expanding reach and getting more people familiar with the brand. The core of the strategy is going to be a digital marketing strategy, as the first contact with the potential customers is most likely going to happen online. In advanced phase of the strategy, marketing activities will focus even more on online communication, media relations, PR stories covering Amazing AoE Moments and promotion on leading mainstream and niche tourism fairs.

1. RESPONSIBLE GREEN DESTINATION AMAZON OF EUROPE

The project **Amazing Amazon of Europe (AAoE)** in its essence seeks to achieve the following objectives:

- Enhance sustainable economic growth and tourism development based on distinctive natural and cultural heritage, which will result in collaboration network of key actors and enabling environment for high-quality tourism, responding to limited resources of ecosystems;
- Bring sustainable development opportunities for managing diversity of natural and cultural heritage and resources in AOE from local to transnational level, while enabling unique experiences for international visitors.

1.1 Sustainable destination Amazon of Europe

The Amazon of Europe area represents the largest natural river system in Central Europe. Amazing river landscapes along Mura, Drava and Danube were protected as the world's first 5-country biosphere reserve. Under UNESCO protection within the Man and the Biosphere programme, biosphere reserves are model regions where nature conservation goes hand in hand with sustainable regional development. However, despite over 20 years of efforts in protecting the area, the 11 border regions of AT, SI, HR, HU and SR are underdeveloped, facing the loss of jobs and emigration.

The Amazing AoE project connects project partners and associated partners in joining the efforts of 5 countries for the sustainable economic development of the region based on the valorisation of natural and cultural resources. The concept is based on a joint integrated solution for sustainable biking tourism in the AoE while preserving the environment. The 5-country Biosphere Reserve Mura-Drava-Danube, located in the larger area of the AoE, is the world's first biosphere reserve established across five countries. The establishment of this biosphere reserve aims to improve human livelihoods across the area and to enable an equitable sharing of benefits while safeguarding the area's natural and managed ecosystems.

The project enhances cooperation between regions and protected areas within the planned transboundary biosphere reserve, contributing to its overall success. The Amazing AoE project also serves as a platform for the sustainable development of areas within the protected zones, establishing the Mura-Drava-Danube region as a five-country sustainable ecotourism macro-destination. Once established, it aims to generate new jobs and create new transboundary connections, establishing a way to support projects that deal with regional development and nature protection in the area.

Spanning across Austria, Croatia, Hungary, Serbia and Slovenia, the lower courses of the Drava and Mura rivers and related sections of the Danube are among Europe's most ecologically important riverine areas: the so-called "Amazon of Europe".

The rivers form 700 kilometres long "green belt" connecting almost 8.499,28 km² of highly valuable natural and cultural landscapes from all five countries and shall therefore become a symbol of unity by becoming the world's first five-country Transboundary UNESCO Biosphere Reserve "Mura-Drava-Danube". The future Transboundary Biosphere Reserve "Mura-Drava-Danube" altogether covers 2,5% of the total surface of the respective five countries.

Figure 1: Trans-Boundary River System of the Mura, Drava and Danube



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Despite numerous man-made changes in the past, this stunning river landscape hosts an amazing biological diversity and is a hotspot of rare natural habitats such as large floodplain forests, river islands, gravel and sand banks, side branches and oxbows. These habitats are home to the highest density of breeding pairs of white-tailed eagles in Continental Europe and other endangered species such as the little tern, black stork, beaver, otter and the early Project co-funded by the European Union funds (ERDF, IPA) extinct ship sturgeon. Every year, more than 250.000 migratory waterfowls use the rivers to rest and to feed.

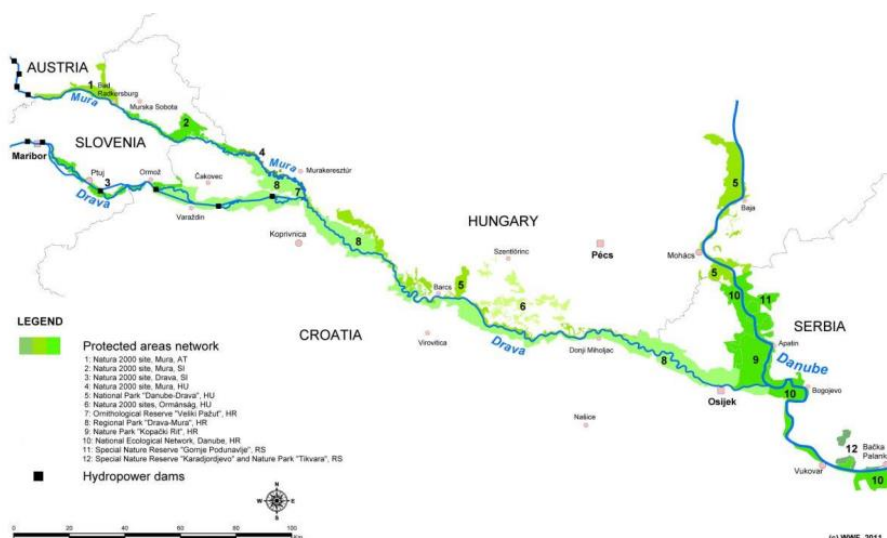
A coherent network of 12 protected areas along the rivers highlights their ecological values, including the world-famous “Kopački Rit” Nature Park at the Danube-Drava confluence, “Drava-Mura” Regional Park in Croatia, “Gornje Podunavlje” Special Nature Reserve in Serbia

and the “Danube-Drava” National Park in Hungary as well as – Biosphere Reserve Mura in Slovenia and Natura 2000 Site and Protected Landscape, Mura in Austria (Amazon of Europe,

2019). Natura 2000 sites in the TBR MDD offer new possible financing opportunities for further

development of the area through the LIFE programme - EU’s funding instrument for the environment and climate action. In total, they represent 2,5% of the total Natura 2000 surface of the five countries in question.

Figure 2: Protected areas partially included in the Trans-Boundary River System of the Mura, Drava and Danube



Protected areas that are partially included in the Transnational Biosphere Reserve Mura-Drava-Danube and are also a part of the Amazon of Europe Bike Trail project territory are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Sizes of protected areas that are partially included in Transnational Biosphere Reserve Mura-Drava-Danube and are also a part of the Amazing AoE

Name of the area	Country	Size (km ²)
Natura 2000 Site and Protected Landscape, Mura	Austria	21,59
Natura 2000 Site, Mura	Slovenia	127,67
Natura 2000 Site, Mura	Hungary	21,35
National Park Danube-Drava	Hungary	504,41
Regional Park Drava-Mura, Natura 2000	Croatia	876,81
Nature Park and Special Zoological Reserve Kopački Rit	Croatia	231,26
National Ecological Network, Danube	Croatia	133,49
Special Nature Reserve Gornje Podunavlje	Serbia	196,05
Special Nature Reserve Karadjordjevo	Serbia	41,84
Nature Park Tikvara	Serbia	5,53

Aside from natural beauty, the Amazon of Europe is very rich in cultural heritage and local crafts that can be found as well in the cities as in rural areas. Ancient castles, picturesque churches, museums and traditional watermills are only a few examples of the most typical cultural attractions in the area. Moreover, many interesting festivals take place in the region, including fairs and cultural, music, dance and cycling festivals that are very attractive to potential visitors. The rich natural and cultural heritage of the area, therefore, represents a great opportunity for further development and strengthening the tourism economy in the region.

The Amazon of Europe area stretches across five countries and 11 NUTS 3 regions:

- Austria: Eastern Styria,
- Slovenia: Pomurska region,
- Croatia: Sombor and Apatin County, Osijek-Baranja County, Koprivnica-Križevci County, Varaždinska županija, Virovitica-Podravina County,
- Hungary: Zala County, Somogy County, Baranya County,
- Serbia: West Bačka District.

The NUTS 3 regions in the Amazon of Europe area cover 8,5% of the total surface of the five countries in which they're located (Austria, Slovenia, Croatia, Hungary and Serbia), and therefore, they represent

a substantial part of national territories. In Figure 3, the whole surface of NUTS 3 regions partially included in the Amazon of Europe area is graphically presented.

Figure 3: NUTS 3 regions of the Amazing Amazon of Europe Destination



1.2. Description of the project objectives and flagship products

Project objectives are clearly addressing the main challenges of 12 border regions along the Mura, Drava and Danube. To overcome the main obstacles for economic growth based on heritage, such as high unemployment rates, depopulation, and lack of skills, Amazing AoE will develop a model for sustainable tourism growth in protected areas. The model will impose measures on how to find the best balance between the three pillars of sustainability. The first set of needs focuses on recognising the protected areas as development opportunities and overcoming the decision-making without sound evidence about the foreseen impact on the economy and the environment. Therefore, the first specific objective is to enhance the environmentally friendly behaviour of locals and visitors and minimise the impact on the environment, especially by avoiding mass tourism. This will be achieved by developing the Responsible Green Destination Tourism Impact Model, which will serve as a basis for proposing measures for regions’ development based on the carrying capacity of ecosystems. Secondly, the area lacks a joint integrated approach for tourism development. There are no joint long-term plans or products. Therefore, the second specific objective focuses on developing a joint solution for sustainable tourism in protected areas, which will integrate the current valorisation efforts of the local and regional governments and tourism boards. The partnership will develop a joint strategy and innovative tourism products, responding to the needs of the locals and visitors. Thirdly, there is a significant need to enhance the knowledge and skills of the local public and private organisations working in tourism and related sectors (nature conservation, economy, mobility). Therefore, the third objective focuses on improving capacities for responsible tourism by implementing a joint educational

programme covering different topics, resulting in enhanced skills for community-led and owned tourism.

Sound and innovative methodology are established for achieving project objectives. **1st objective of stimulating environmentally friendly behaviour in tourism** is ensured by developing the Responsible Green Destination Tourism Impact Model (RGD TIM) in WP T1 (months 1-10) and testing it in WP T3. RGD TIM model will be the first time applied in the international environment and shared with EUSDR PA3 to support Target 2 harmonised monitoring system for sustainable tourism in Danube Region. **2nd objective of developing joint and integrated solutions for sustainable tourism** will be primarily addressed in WP T2 (most intensively in months 6-22). Firstly, a first-ever 5-country destination management organisation will be formed. Afterwards, we will develop a joint AoE destination development strategy based on a carefully planned participatory process, assuring a bottom-up approach and integration with existing strategies, including EUSDR PA 3&6 targets. The strategy will be complemented with transboundary tourism products and finalised after the feedback loop of model and product testing. Service providers will be addressed with the Destination Toolkit (internal guidebook). For wide promotion, we will develop a Strategic marketing plan and online platform. Long-term functioning and transferability to other sectors and areas will be detailed in the Sustainability and transferability plan. Finally, **to enhance skills and knowledge of public and private organisations (3rd objective)**, we will implement several pieces of training in WP T3 (months 13-30). Firstly, we will educate RGD TIM experts at the regional level that will integrate TIM recommendations into regional policies. Tourism experts will be trained in hospitality skills, IT and the digitalisation of heritage. Validation will cover tourism products, application of TIM and innovative digital interpretation of natural and cultural heritage, as well as a feedback loop to the strategy and sustainability plan, resulting in enhanced tourism development in AoE.

To achieve above explained objectives, Amazing AoE offers joint flagship tourism products for international markets that will strengthen the already established brand AoE Bike Trail, communicate the AoE values, create the benefit for the destination and be ready for promotion in demanding international markets. The products will enable a high-quality experience of the whole pentilateral area and will build on main natural and cultural attractions, local experiences and traditions, connected by sustainable mobility options (public transport, electric vehicles) and enhanced by modern digital technology. The tourism products will be developed in cooperation with tourism stakeholders (tourism boards, protected areas as key providers of nature experiences, key attractions etc.) with the goal of increasing regional income.

The Amazing AoE flagship products are the following:

- AoE Bike Trail – a long-distance cycling route along the rivers.
- AoE River Journey – guided canoe tours.
- AoE Amazing Moments – authentic experiences with the locals, e.g. cooking fish stew, truffle hunting, and pottery class.

1.2.1. AoE Bike Trail

The AoE Bike Trail, as a sustainable long-distance cycling tourism product, was developed by connecting 15 project partners and 10 associated partners as a model for sustainable mobility and a unique tourism product along the future five-country UNESCO Biosphere Reserve “Mura-Drava-Danube”.

Aside from cyclists, the Amazon of Europe Bike Trail is open to all visitors and offers spectacular natural landscapes and possibilities for various leisure activities, making it a great destination for all nature lovers.

The total length of the Amazon of Europe Bike Trail – without detours – is 1260 km. It has been divided into northern and southern routes, which follow the Mura, Drava and Danube rivers on both sides and affect 5 countries - Austria, Slovenia, Croatia, Hungary and Serbia.

Table 2: Main figures of the route lengths

	Length of the main route	Length of the detours*
AoE BT Northern route	553 km	86 km
AoE BT Southern route	707 km	155 km
Total	1260 km	241 km

** This is the length of the detour endpoints (usually a „must-see” attraction or river viewpoint). The tourists have to cycle this length twice (to go there and back)*

The trail consists of several sections which can be passed and visited in one day by bicycle – called daily stages (the criteria of one single daily stage were defined in the common methodology). A total number of 27 daily stages are part of the trail: 11 of them belong to the northern part of the route, while the southern part of the route contains 16 daily stages. Each of them has an identifier which is a combination of a letter and a number. Letters “N” or “S” refer to northern or southern, while the continuous numbering of the stages, starting from west to east, begins in Mureck, Austria. Stage points are the start/end points of a daily stage. Altogether 27 stage points have been selected along the entire trail. Besides the two main entry points / end points of the trail (Mureck and Mohács) city of Osijek in Croatia is the only spot where the two routes intersect each other, but there are numerous other options (bridges, ferries) to change between routes.

The main route of the trail, by definition, is a continuous connection between two stage points without any bifurcation and has been defined in line with the set of criteria in the route planning methodology. It generally runs parallel to the rivers, but it is not necessarily use the closest road to them. Detours are connected to the main route where it is justifiable, often running perpendicularly to the rivers. A detour has been considered justified if it creates a connection with natural/cultural sites closely related to the values of the project, offering river views, river access, or leading to popular natural or cultural sites called “must-see” points. The total length of the detours regarding the entire trail is 241 km

A total of 11 daily stages has bhave defined along the northern route of the Amazon of Europe. Bike Trail is 553 km. The average length of a daily stage on the northern route is 50,27 km. The shortest stage is N8 Szaporca-Villány, with 37 km, while the longest one is just over 65 km (N7 Drávatamási-Szaporca). Daily stage N2 Murska Sobota-Lendava has extended detour sections (24 km); thus, the combined length (main route + detours) is almost 65 km. The lengths of the stages on the northern route are more balanced compared to the southern.

Table 3: Daily stages of the Amazon of Europe Bike Trail's northern route

Stage	Starting point	Endpoint	Length of the main route (km)	Length of the detours (km)	Country
N1	Mureck (AT)	Murska Sobota (SLO)	47,32	6,45	Austria & Slovenia
N2	Murska Sobota (SLO)	Lendava (SLO)	40,22	23,91	Slovenia
N3	Lendava (SLO)	Letenye (HU)	64,41	2,51	Slovenia & Hungary
N4	Letenye (HU)	Gyékényes (HU)	45,03	4,89	Hungary
N5	Gyékényes (HU)	Nagyatád (HU)	46,75	-	Hungary
N6	Nagyatád (HU)	Drávatamási (HU)	48,54	12,92	Hungary
N7	Drávatamási (HU)	Szaporca (HU)	65,22	10,42	Hungary
N8	Szaporca (HU)	Villány (HU)	37	12,48	Hungary
N9	Villány (HU)	Osijek (CRO)	54	2,48	Hungary & Croatia
N10	Osijek (CRO)	Suza (CRO)	52,64	-	Croatia
N11	Suza (CRO)	Mohács (HUN)	51,63	9,76	Croatia & Hungary

As result of the implementation process, the route has been equipped with different types of elements serving the cyclists.

The total length of 16 daily stages that have been defined along the southern route of the Amazon of Europe Bike Trail is 707 km. The average length of a daily stage on the southern route is 44 km. The shortest stage is S5 Varaždin-Prelog, with 24,59 km, while the longest one is almost 74 km (S11 Noskovci- Belišće). Daily stage S7 Koprivnica-Đurđevac has the longest combined length (main route + detours) due to the extended "network of detours" on the left riverside at Repaš.

Table 4: Daily stages of the Amazon of Europe Bike Trail's southern route

Stage	Starting point	Endpoint	Length of the main route (km)	Length of the detours (km)	Country
S1	Mureck (AT)	Banovci (SLO)	44,57	4,22	Austria & Slovenia
S2	Banovci (SLO)	Mursko Središće (CRO)	28,93	5,18	Slovenia & Croatia
S3	Mursko Središće (CRO)	Donji Vidovec (CRO)	62,18	6,57	Croatia
S4	Donji Vidovec (CRO)	Varaždin (CRO)	43,14	5,88	Croatia
S5	Varaždin (CRO)	Prelog (CRO)	24,59	12,43	Croatia
S6	Prelog (CRO)	Koprivnica (CRO)	56,43	6,98	Croatia
S7	Koprivnica (CRO)	Đurđevac (CRO)	50,73	33,76	Croatia
S8	Đurđevac (CRO)	Pitomača (CRO)	34,89	8,68	Croatia
S9	Pitomača (CRO)	Kapela Dvor (CRO)	25,4	9,22	Croatia

S10	Kapela Dvor (CRO)	Noskovci (CRO)	61,44	9,59	Croatia
S11	Noskovci (CRO)	Belišće (CRO)	73,9	3,98	Croatia
S12	Belišće (CRO)	Osijek (CRO)	32,5	-	Croatia
S13	Osijek (CRO)	Erdut (CRO)	34,15	-	Croatia
S14	Erdut (CRO)	Apatin (SRB)	35,51	3,14	Croatia & Serbia
S15	Apatin (SRB)	Sombor (SRB)	36,8	24,26	Serbia
S16	Sombor (SRB)	Mohács (HUN)	60,9	21,11	Serbia & Hungary
The total length of the southern route			706,6	155	

As a result of the implementation process, the route has been equipped with a different type of elements serving the cyclists.

The trail is similarly signposted everywhere in the affected regions, but in terms of the other elements, the territorial distribution is not equal among the stages. There are some areas where we can find many of them, while elsewhere need to cycle longer distances to encounter even one. Installing these elements was not obligatory for the partners, but regional coordinators commonly accepted that one large info board would be placed at every stage point. The southern route can be considered better equipped compared to the north one since 15 out of the total 17 resting places, or 22 out of 23 small info boards, can be found somewhere along the southern sections. The numbers of the various installed items regarding the whole trail are the following:

- 37 large info boards
- 23 small info boards
- 17 resting places
- 50 other types of elements (17 bicycle repair stands, 26 bicycle racks, 4 solar benches, 2 solar lamps and one e-charging pillar for e-bicycles)
- More than 1700 signposts/signs

1.2.2. AoE River Journey

River Journey will offer a multi-stage river experience on the Mura, Drava and Danube with specified means of transport (e.g. traditional boats, canoe, rafting, SUP etc.) and overnights in towns/villages situated at the shores of the rivers.

Amazon of Europe River Journey offers an experience of the confluence of 3 mighty rivers and 3 historical cultures that shaped the Amazon of Europe – Germanic, Slavic and Hunnic, which fashioned not only the area of the Amazon of Europe, the first UNESCO 5-Country Biosphere Reserve Mura-Drava-Danube but also had a profound influence on Europe as we know it today.

The tailor-made river journey takes visitors through 4 out of 5 countries which form the UNESCO 5-Country Biosphere Reserve Mura-Drava-Danube. Starting at the confluence of Mura-Drava in Legrad, they are paddling on the borders between Croatia and Hungary and finishing at the mighty Drava-Danube confluence and world-famous Nature park Kopački Rit. Along the way, they meet the amazingly hospitable locals who share with them their cultural and natural uniqueness.

AoE River Journey also aims to preserve the largest untouched river wilderness in Central Europe along the rivers Mura, Drava and Danube (Amazon of Europe) by establishing a valorization Programme. Give back to nature in cooperation with WWF striving to give back to this beautiful region and preserving the extraordinary ecosystem of the UNESCO 5-country Biosphere Reserve Mura-Drava-Danube. Hence,

when visitors book river journeys, they are directly giving something back to the nature of the Amazon of Europe.

An example of a general product package includes 8 days, 7 overnights and 6 paddling days and comprises:

- 7 stays in quality-tested partner facilities, including local and accommodation tax
- Accommodation:
 - 7 nights in a double room (single room per surcharge)
 - Boarding: 7x Half Board, 1x Bed & Breakfast, 6x Lunch (picnic/lunch box)
 - Tasting local food and drinks: 2x Wine tasting, 1x Beer tasting,
- Guiding of the River Journey
- Paddling on 5 selected stages on the Drava river
- Guided tour - City of Osijek
- Paddling and hiking with a guide in Nature Park Kopački Rit
- Canoe rental for 6 days
- Entrance to selected Nature Parks and Visitor centres
- Transfers from the river to partner accommodations
- Luggage transfer from accommodation to accommodation
- Shuttle from Suhopolje to Kopački Rit
- Transfer back to the start of the tour
- Kingfisher Service: Comprehensive travel information and trail hotline (7/12)

Day 1: Arrival at the Amazon of Europe Destination

After arrival at Hotel Golf, visitors first tease and pamper tastebuds with local delicacies at the dinner. After a short presentation of the Amazon of Europe destination, they are equipped with all the information regarding the river journey tour program. They continue their journey with the in-house brewery presentation and tasting local beer.

Day 2: The majestic confluence of Mura and Drava

After being picked up at hotel Golf in Donji Vidovec, visitors start their journey on the majestic confluence of Mura and Drava in Legrad. Here, a local representative presents the background and natural hotspots of the UNESCO 5-Country Biosphere Reserve Mura-Drava-Danube. After receiving the first information regarding the area and notes for nature maintenance, the journey continues with a workshop for a safe paddling trip. The canoe guide that will guide visitors on the river tour explains the instructions on how to correctly steer the canoe and how correctly paddle on our long voyage, taking into consideration the river specifics. After the start of the paddling journey on the confluence of Mura and Drava, visitors continue paddling on the Drava river along the preserved floodplain forests. After paddling for 8km, they arrive at Šoderica Lake, where they take a short break for a picnic and swim in the lake. They continue to paddle to the bridge Molve being the last point of paddling for this day. After being collected in a van, the visitors are driven to Lovački dom Čambina. Time for dinner. During dinner, they taste traditional wines from this area.

Day 3: Paddling to the river island of Križnica

The day starts with breakfast which includes all the traditional delicacies known in this area. After the morning farewell from the hosts, visitors take a short van ride to the next starting point. They start paddling day at "Skela Novo Virje" and paddle along the silver river beauty with natural meanders, which represent beautiful part of Podravina and the area of Dravski Peski. The area known as Croatian Sahara is a very important symbol of this mysterious and undiscovered area full of artists, the magic of nature, old secret recipes and cultural heritage. After paddling for approximately 3 hours, visitors arrive

at the famous Ethno houses of the family Karlovčan. Ethno estate is situated in a small village named Brodić in the municipality of Ferdinandovac, just a few hundred meters from the banks of Drava, offering discovering the rich past and beauty of nature and also tasting traditional local food and wine between the paddling break. Afterwards, the paddle continues to Skela Križnica, where visitors climb to a pedestrian bridge which is the perfect place for taking pictures of the mighty river Drava. The paddling day will end in Križnica at the restaurant Dravska lža. After a short time for refreshment, visitors are invited for dinner, where they taste famous well know Fish Soup and typical regional culinary river fish dishes.

Day 4: Paddling the Drava between two countries

After being picked up at the accommodation, Dravska lža in Križnica, visitors take an hour's drive with the van to the starting point in Novo Virje. They start paddling day in the centre of Mura–Drava Regional Park, which was recognized by UNESCO in 2012 because of its outstanding natural values. After half an hour of paddling, they make a short stop to visit the military tower, which is located approx. 150 m from the banks of the river Drava. From the tower, they observe many endangered bird species and preserved nature. This day will be more paddling-oriented. On half of the daily paddling distance, the visitors enjoy a perfect place to set up a picnic, set up a camping fire and grill traditional sausages on an open fire. After a long, adventurous day, visitors are taken to the informative and educational centre, The Drava Story, where they can relax.

Day 5: Discover the rich flora and fauna along the Drava

The day will start with discovering the informative and educational centre The Drava Story. After the start on the dock of the visitor centre, the journey continues by paddling and discovering the majestic nature of the Amazon of Europe. The wetlands of the free-flowing Drava River are host for numerous plant and animal species, resulting in extremely rich flora and fauna. After two hours of paddling, visitors will arrive in a typical village Podravska Moslivina where they will have a short meal break. The day endpoint is Donji Miholjac visitors arriving there in the afternoon. After being picked up with the van, they visit Podpanj Ornithological Reserve, which is especially famous for numerous bird species, out of which 20 are European endangered species. Of the afternoon will be spent in the town of Belišće, where the accommodation for the night is located – the renovated industrial rooms.

Day 6: Premium day on the Drava River around Osijek

After the morning routine, visitors depart with the van to our starting point on the docks of Kašarica. And paddle to Osijek, the biggest vibrant city of the Amazon of Europe, with the great walls of the »Tvrđava« military castle. Visitors have a guided tour through the city centre, full of history originating from the ancient times of Romans, and finish with a lunch break in the city centre. Then the paddle continues to the majestic confluence of the two big rivers, Drava and Danube. Incredible sight of the confluence of the Drava and the Danube and the merging of two mighty rivers will flow visitors to Ajlmaš. The area known as altitude creates flood waters and numerous backwaters, side channels, ponds and ravines that are home to a very rich flora and fauna and numerous protected species of the Special Nature Reserve "Gornje Podunavlje" that have been coexisting for centuries. This place to experience the rivers and nature is a natural rarity and an exceptional area for discovering the preservation of pristine nature in its original form. In Ajlmaš, visitors will have traditional dinners served in the local restaurant.

Day 7: A day in Nature Park Kopački Rit

Visitors spend their last day before departure surrounded by nature in the breathtaking nature park Kopački Rit, which was shaped by the confluence of two mighty rivers – Drava and Danube. Kopački rit is a nature park, placed in the corner formed by the river Danube and its tributary Drava. Depending

on the water level, the water of these two rivers constantly shapes and changes the look of Kopački Rit, creating a beautiful mosaic of lakes, canals, ponds, floodplain forests, reed beds and wet meadows. It is one of the best-preserved floodplains in Europe, characterized by exceptional landscape beauty and great biodiversity. The whole area is widely known as a habitat for numerous waterfowl birds, population of a common deer and the most significant inhabitant – white tailed eagle, which is also a symbol of the Park. After breakfast, visitors depart with the van from Ajlmaš into the wilderness. Upon arrival in Zlatna Greda, they will first visit the Visitor centre, where the story of Kopački Rit and its biodiversity is presented.

Table 5: Daily stages of the AoE River Journey – guided canoe tours

Day	Starting point	Endpoint	Length of the river (km)	Length of the paddling (h)	Accommodation
1	Donji Vidovec	Donji Vidovec	0	0	Hotel Golf
2	The confluence of Mura and Drava in Legrad	Repaški most in Molve	27	5	Country House Ivančan
3	Skela Novo Virje	Dravska Iža – Križnica	31	6	Dravska Iža-Križnica
4	Novo Virje	The Drava Story Noskovci	33	6	The Drava Hostel
5	The Drava Story Noskovci	Dravska plaža Donji Miholjac	32	6	Rooms Industrial
6	Kašarica	Ajlmaš	31	6	Etno Kuća Stari Dud Erdut
7	Ajlmaš	Zlatna Greda	10	2	Zlatna Greda

1.2.3. AoE Amazing Moments

AoE Amazing Moments will enable exploration of cultural pearls along the Bike Trail, such as historical towns (i.e. Osijek or Varaždin), magnificent castles (i.e. Siklos), and authentic experiences with the local population (e.g. cooking experience, where people learn how to prepare traditional and local sweet dessert from Prekmurje or manufacturing the traditional straw basket) or visits to local cultural events.

Five countries, five different cultures, a wide variety of national cuisines and a great diversity of flora and fauna. There is so much and even more to discover by bike in the UNESCO 5-country biosphere park Mura-Drava-Danube. With its promise of "Cycling for Nature", it opens up to us the largest untouched river wilderness in Central Europe along the rivers Mura, Drava and Danube, the "Amazon of Europe". As part of tried and tested "Explorer Tour" package, visitors will be immersed in a magical yet little-known destination on the most spectacular sections garnished with an attractive supporting program and accompanied by experienced guides and local experts. Since it is impossible to get to know all 27 daily stages in one week, the Explorer Tour focuses on explicitly selected stages and cultural programs to give visitors the best experience on the Amazon of Europe Bike Trail.

An example of a general product package includes 8 days, 7 overnights, and comprises of:

- 7 nights in quality-tested partner facilities in a double room (single room per surcharge), including local and accommodation tax
- Boarding: breakfast, light lunch and dinner
- Pioneer Amazing Moments:
 - Untouched by light Gornja Radgona

- Kopački rit Nature Park Experience, canoe rental, birdwatching equipment
- Osijek City Tour
- Apatin Town Tour
- The old town of Sombor Tour
- Wine Experience Villany
- Jungle Tour along the Drava River
- Guiding the Amazing Moments Explorer Tour
- Guided bike tour (in English) on 4 selected stages along the Amazon of Europe Bike Trail
- Bike rental 4 days
- Small bus transfer for the whole itinerary
- Entrance to selected attractions, nature parks and visitor centres
- bottles of water a day
- Kingfisher Service: Comprehensive travel information and trail hotline (7/12)

Day 1: Austria – Slovenia – Croatia: Bad Radkersburg, Gornja Radgona, Legrad, Djurdevac

Meeting in Graz or Mureck (AUT). City tour of the romantic town of Bad Radkersburg and crossing the bridge to Slovenia; First Amazing Moment: Untouched by light - the tasting of special sparkling wine in complete darkness and local delicacies tasting (cheese, ham, local vegetable plate). Transfer to Legrad. Visit the spectacular wild nature at the Mura-Drava confluence in Legrad. Wine tasting of special Sand wines in Djurdevac (Croatian Sahara); Overnight in Djurdevac.

Day 2: Croatia: Famous Kopački rit Nature Park

Nature Park Kopački rit is one of the most preserved wetlands in Europe, having extraordinary biodiversity. The special value of Kopački rit is the continuous change of the landscape according to the season and the inflow or outflow of the water. The tour starts at the visitor centre exhibition. After lunch in a local restaurant, an Amazing Moment will follow, experiencing Kopački rit in various forms: by canoe, hiking, watching the birds. Local dinner and overnight in the vibrant city of Osijek, the biggest city in the Amazon of Europe, located directly on the banks of the Drava River.

Day 3: Croatia: Croatia, Serbia: Osijek, Apatin

Starting the day in Osijek with Amazing Moment 3: “Back in time” City tour, where visitors meet a nobleman that will guide them through the rich history of this picturesque city. Transfer via the large bridge over the Danube River to Serbia. Time to check the Amazon of Europe Bike Trail! Cycling on stage S14. Arrival at Apatin, a town with a marina on the Danube. Amazon of Europe is a place where many cultures meet, and visitors experience this by visiting the Orthodox Church, The Council of the Holy Apostles. Dinner in a local restaurant on the Danube.

Day 4: Serbia: Apatin, Sombor

Cycling on the stage S15 (Apatin – Sombor, Serbia) on Amazon of Europe Bike Trail to Kupusina; Amazing Moment Apatin: “Tastes of the nature of the Upper Danube” at Čarda Smuđ in Kupusina; Cycling to Bački Monoštor and then to continuing the cycling to Sombor; Dinner in Sombor.

Day 5: Serbia, Hungary: Sombor, Mohacs

Old town tour “On the track of the Donau Schwaben” in Sombor; Transfer to Mohacs; Late lunch break in the historic town of Mohacs at the Buso Court; Visiting the Buso exhibition; Transfer to the spa and thermal bath of Harkany; relaxing in the spa and dinner in the hotel.

Day 6: Hungary: Harkany, Villany

Cycling on the Amazon of Europe Bike Trail from Harkany to Villany; Visit the Mosque of Malkoc Bey and a castle in Siklós; After lunch, cycling to the Sculpture Park Nagyharsányi; Cycling to Villany; The Devil's shaft tour - exploring the wine hills of Villany and wine tasting; dinner and overnight in Harkany.

Day 7: Hungary: Szaporca, Nagyatad

Transfer to Szaporca and a short hike with a ranger along the Drava River (Jungle tour); Cycling on Amazon of Europe Bike Trail, stage N7; After lunch, transfer to Nagyatad; Time to relax and dinner at the hotel.

1.3. Stakeholder inclusion

Stakeholder collaboration builds up relationships, increases trust and establishes a common ground, which provides a fruitful ground for innovation (Grabher, 2004). Therefore, the exchange of resources and ideas, as well as the sharing of risks and benefits, is necessary to achieve best possible results (Sørensen and Torfing, 2012).

The AAoE Destination partnership work approach in developing a joint integrated solution for sustainable biking tourism in the Amazon of Europe is strongly based on stakeholder inclusion. We believe that only that way, we can assure fair distribution of benefits for the locals, visitors and nature. Key stakeholders included in the AAoE Destination development are regional development agencies, tourism boards and organisations, local tourism and cycling service providers and associations, municipalities, counties, protected areas, etc. We are constantly informing relevant stakeholders about the project and how it is proceeding and involving them in our working process through implementation of consultation workshops and trainings, preparation of outputs, and by offering them a possibility to take part in long-term cooperation under the AoE Bike Trail and AAoE Destination Brands.

Apart from the benefits for the development of our tourism product, stakeholder inclusion also enhances cooperation between regions and protected areas within the future UNESCO 5-country Biosphere Reserve Mura-Drava-Danube, contributing to its overall success. Once established, the AAoE Destination will generate new jobs and create new transboundary connections, ensuring a way to support sustainable regional development of the area.

The AAoE Destination project partnership consists of:

- Regional development expert
- DMOs
- NGOs
- Tourism service providers
- Regional Development Agencies
- Public Authorities

The exact configuration of project partners showing the stakeholder inclusion is presented in Table 6 below.

Table 6: AAoE Destination Partnership

Role	Name	Acronym	Country
LP	Iskriva, institute for development of local potentials	LP - Iskriva	SI, SLOVENIJA
PP	Arctur Ltd.	ERDF PP1 - ARCTUR	SI, SLOVENIJA
PP	Municipality of Velika Polana	ERDF PP2 - Velika Polana	SI, SLOVENIJA
PP	West Pannon Regional and Economic Development Public Nonprofit Ltd.	ERDF PP3 - WPRED	HU, MAGYARORSZÁG
PP	CROST Regional Development Nonprofit Ltd.	ERDF PP4 - CROST	HU, MAGYARORSZÁG
PP	Tourism Board of Međimurje County	ERDF PP5 - TZMŽ	HR, HRVATSKA
PP	Osijek-Baranya County	ERDF PP6 - OBŽ	HR, HRVATSKA
PP	Association for nature and environment protection Green Osijek	ERDF PP7 - Green Osijek	HR, HRVATSKA
PP	Koprivnica Križevci County	ERDF PP8 - KKZ	HR, HRVATSKA
PP	Varaždin County	ERDF PP9 - VZZ	HR, HRVATSKA
PP	Trail Angels GmbH	ERDF PP10 - Trail Angels	AT, ÖSTERREICH
PP	8Cities	ERDF PP11 - 8Cities	AT, ÖSTERREICH
PP	Municipality of Apatin	IPA PP1 - MOA	RS, SERBIA
PP	City of Sombor	IPA PP2 - COS	RS, SERBIA
AP	Ministry of Tourism		HR, HRVATSKA
AP	Active and Ecotourism Development Center		HU, MAGYARORSZÁG
AP	World Wide Fund for Nature Austria - WWF Austria		AT, ÖSTERREICH
AP	Zala County Government		HU, MAGYARORSZÁG
AP	Government of Somogy County		HU, MAGYARORSZÁG
AP	Government of Baranya County		HU, MAGYARORSZÁG
AP	Virovitica-Podravina County Tourist Board		HR, HRVATSKA
AP	Tourist Board of Osijek-Baranja County		HR, HRVATSKA
AP	Varazdin County Tourist Board		HR, HRVATSKA
AP	Public institution Kopacki rit Nature Park		HR, HRVATSKA
AP	Slovenian National Commission for UNESCO		SI, SLOVENIJA
AP	Slovenian Tourist Board		SI, SLOVENIJA
AP	Tourist Association of Slovenia		SI, SLOVENIJA
AP	Thermenland Süd- & Oststeiermark Marketing GmbH		AT, ÖSTERREICH
AP	Central Podravina Tourist Board		HR, HRVATSKA

2. EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL MARKET ANALYSIS

In order to plan marketing activities, we need to first understand the current situation (market trends and competitor analysis) and secondly being able to assess the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT analysis) of our AAoE destination.

Therefore we firstly review the current trends in cycling tourism and follow with the presentations of our internal and external markets before performing a SWOT with a self-critical lens.

2.1. THE NATURE OF CYCLING TOURISM

2.1.1. Cycling

Cycling is an activity that, regardless of age and status in society, engages individuals to be sport active. Cycling is a form of soft - recreational tourism with many positive effects: it is environmentally friendly, promotes a healthy lifestyle and is a cheap means of transport. Cycling is also relevant from an economic point of view, as it represents an important tourist product. More and more domestic and foreign tourists are opting for active holidays, which is why the demand for programs related to cycling is also increasing. Natural attractions can additionally attract different target groups of cyclists; therefore, tourism destinations need to develop holistic cycling infrastructure (roads, forest paths, cycling points with information, cycling stores and options to store and repair the bikes (Gantar, Kočiš and Pehnec, 2012).

Europe is one of the most desirable destinations for cycling tourists. (European Cyclist Federation - ECF, 2019). The development of cycling tourism in Europe is influenced by trends such as active holidays, participation in so-called "green holidays", and holidays in the countryside and outside major cities. Given that the number of cyclists who use a bicycle daily for commuting and recreation is highest in countries such as the Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden, Finland and Belgium, these countries have the most significant potential for developing cycling tourism. Besides that, Dutch, German, and Danish women cycle as often as men, and rates of cycling fall only slightly with age. Countries such as Germany and Great Britain have the potential for the development of cycling tourism due to their size and diversity of landscape. Given the variety of the countries of Europe, both geographically and given cultural factors and the extraordinary potential that Europe has in terms of cultural heritage and historical importance for the world, the idea arose in 1995 to establish a network of cycling routes between the member states and in this way take full advantage of Europe's diversity and its potential. According to the original plans, EuroVelo was supposed to have 12 cycling routes between EU member states. In 2018, 43 countries across Europe were included in EuroVelo, and it contains 17 cycling routes. In 2020, when the network of trails is expected to be completed in its entirety, the total length of the network of EuroVelo cycling routes should amount to 70,000 km. The cycling route network is intended for cyclists who want to get to know Europe and its residents for shorter cycling trips. The EuroVelo network consists of LF-Trails, German D-Trails and routes of the English national cycling network. At the same time, EuroVelo also uses the existing road infrastructure, on which sections of cycling routes are added to connect cycling routes and road infrastructure (European Cyclist Federation - ECF, 2019).

2.1.2. Cycling tourism and cycling destinations

Cycling tourism is considered a sustainable form of tourism consisting of economic, social, and environmental benefits for tourists and destinations. It combines leisure alongside physical and mental health benefits for tourists (Rejón-Guardia, García-Sastre & Alemany-Hormaeche, 2018). UNWTO considers it to meet several standards for sustainable tourism development, such as:

- The optimal usage of environmental resources,
- respect for the authenticity and culture of destinations,
- socio-economic benefits, partnerships between stakeholders, and high levels of visitor satisfaction.

The European Parliament (2012) also supports that view, categorising cycle tourism as sustainable and environmentally friendly tourism. Additionally, UNWTO considers cycling tourism to meet several standards for sustainable tourism development, such as the optimal usage of environmental resources, respect for the authenticity and culture of destinations, socio-economic benefits, inspiring partnerships between stakeholders, and high levels of visitor satisfaction. Based on the above facts, the EU parliament categorises cycling tourism as a form of sustainable and environmentally friendly tourism (Simonsen & Jorgenson, 1998; Dickinson & Lumsdon, 2010). Moreover, Europe's sustainable development and transportation policies have included cycling routes and cycling tourism in their sustainable development plans. In 2020, the Commission put forward a comprehensive Strategy for sustainable and smart mobility, which replaced the outdated Transport White Paper from 2011. Another transport-related measure relevant to ECF is the revision of the Trans-European Network-Transport (TEN-T) Directive in 2021. ECF has made the long-time case to include EuroVelo, the long-distance cycle route network, within the TEN-T network. As a result, plenty of national and international cycling networks, such as Eurovelo and Sustrans, were developed and inspired not only cycle tourism but the use of bicycles as means for sustainable urban and rural mobility (Faulks, Ritchie & Fluker, 2007; Weston, & Picket, 2012; Stoffelen, 2018).

When developing cycling tourism and the tourism offer adapted to it, the essential condition for attracting tourists is adequate infrastructure. No matter how good tourist guides and excellent marketing of a particular location is, it will not bring the desired results in the form of arrivals of cyclist tourists if we do not have:

- Adequate cycling infrastructure on which cyclists could cycle safely, and
- Accompanying services and support activities/services that cyclists need.

The selection of a cycling tourist destination by cycling tourists is significantly influenced by the following factors (Strategy of development of the tourism product of cycling in Slovenia, 2005):

- Quality of cycling infrastructure: cyclist-friendly roads and paths – wide enough for cyclists and other users, adequate signage, access to scenic routes and natural areas, cultural and historical attractions.
- the quality of catering service, accommodation and additional service infrastructure.
- high-quality additional offers: theatre, music and art festivals, a wide range of other sports programs, a variety of historical and cultural attractions, ethnological specialities, an offer of relevant and exciting thematic routes.
- quality promotional and presentation materials.

- the quality and diversity of the natural environment.

An example of how to properly develop cycling tourism offers is Germany, where the German Cycling Club (German: Allgemeiner Deutscher Fahrrad Club, (ADFC)) takes care of the development of cycling and cares for an appropriate tourist offer by setting standards. The main goals of ADFC are the provision of information, the appropriate standardisation of cycling routes and areas, and the provision of services - both for the benefit of guesthouses/accommodation facilities and cyclists. With this, ADFC wants to achieve better mutual knowledge between providers and cyclist tourists and thus increase the quality of cycling tourism (ADFC, 2019).

In order to increase the quality of services to tourist cyclists, in 1995, ADFC (2019) started implementing the "Bett&Bike" bicycle-friendly guest houses and accommodations project, where guest houses and accommodations are evaluated as bicycle-friendly facilities based on pre-specified criteria. In 1995, the "eng. Bett&Bike" included 216 lodgings, and in 2015 already 5,500 lodgings.

One of ADFC's activities is also the evaluation of cycling routes and cycling areas:

- Evaluation of the track or areas according to predetermined criteria,
- Assessment of the infrastructure on the cycling route or area and preparation of proposals for improvements,
- Implementation of supporting marketing activities and
- Assigning ratings to individual cycling routes (ratings from three to five stars).

In 2015, 34 cycling routes with a rating of three stars or more were designated as "premium cycling routes". ADFC carries out all the above-mentioned activities with the aim of setting standards for cycling routes and making it easier for cyclists to compare, and at the same time, through the above-mentioned activities, it influences the improvement of the quality of the cycling offer.

Other ADFC activities include the production and printing of cycling maps (the cycling map published by ADFC is the best-selling cycling map in the world with 2 million copies) and GPS coordinates, managing the application (ADFC mobile) for smartphones, and publishing brochures and literature for cyclists. The example of how ADFC co-shapes cycling tourism in Germany is an example for countries that want to increase the number of cycling tourists (ADFC, 2019).

Cycling tourism promotes remote and rural areas while benefitting urban areas as well (Lőrincz, Banász, & Csapó, 2020). Urban cycling infrastructure attracts cycle tourists while giving them the opportunity to any tourist to explore big cities in a more ecological way while supporting the sharing economy and decreasing emissions. As a result, big cities benefit from developing sustainable mobility systems (Nilsson, 2019).

Many cycling tourists are involved in different types of cycling tourism. As we can imagine, there are several types of bikes cycling tourists use, from road bikes, mountain bikes, cyclocross bikes, trekking bikes, etc. This is especially true with the introduction of new types of bikes (for example, gravel bikes) and new technologies in velomobility (Serna, Gerrikagoitia, Bernabe & Ruiz, 2017). The new trend called "gravel biking" is a new movement that is making its way among two-wheel enthusiasts. Gravel bicycles were designed exactly to cover the specific market segment who wants to be more independent while exploring tourism destinations. The request of the consumers was counting on a multi-use bike, suitable to cover asphalted stretches but able to perform well on unpaved roads or rougher terrains. Gravel biking is very popular for many tourist destinations, especially those which can offer countryside roads. Gravel bikers explore various terrains with their mountain bikes. Gravel

bikes are suitable for riding on all sorts of paths, like gravel, forest and single track. They are in search to make a mass migration toward a more human-tailored experience in nature. The gravel bike allows them to be less dependent on asphalt roads rather than search for unpaved roads or rougher terrains and be more connected to nature and less stressed about the motorised traffic while enjoying the cycling tours. This trend is represented by the so-called Bikepacking. This is a form of cycling tourism similar to backpacking. Bikepackers are self-supported cyclists that carry their own luggage and explore a variety of trails on a multi-day journey. Bikepackers often use gravel bikes because they are cycling on different terrains. They often go off the beaten track and seek out local experiences on their own. They are very minimalistic travellers and carry their own luggage. Bikepackers do not want to be supported by a tour guide but make use of travel blogs, social media and maps to gain inspiration and tips.

It is also worth noting that the social identities of cyclists and cycling tourists are changing because of the type of cycling and the motives they're involved in during a specific period (Mueller, Landon, Graefe, 2019). Overall, the problem arrives from the fact that cycling tourism is a heterogeneous market that consists of a few homogenous segments. A lack of research has been carried out on the heterogeneity of this market and its corresponding motivations and behaviours (Ritchie et al., 2010).

Cycling tourism is mostly isolated as a separate phenomenon or a niche market and somehow a specialised form of tourism. However, there are many synergies that can be achieved with many other forms of tourism and other sectors like urban and rural development (Maizlish et al., 2013; Gossling & Choi, 2015; Blondiau, Zeebroeck & Haubold, 2016; Lórinicz, Banász, & Csapó, 2020). The concept of sustainable tourism is not a separate part of the tourism market as a set of niche products; it is a condition inherent to the sector as a whole, and it should be an objective of the entire industry (UNWTO, 2013).

To make cycling an attractive option, destinations need to focus on the following:

- Safety,
- convenience,
- culture, &
- comfort for people on a bike.

This is relatively straightforward in engineering terms but can be politically challenging due to opposition from groups that expect to be negatively impacted. Destinations should promote cycling's huge benefits:

- For residents, they are fast and low (or no) cost transport options with health benefits,
- for cities, they are zero-emission and relatively inexpensive transport infrastructure options, and
- communities and locals benefit from increased green initiatives.

Using cycling is connected with positive messaging that focuses on what residents will gain, such as cleaner air and reduced congestion. Destinations need to invest in building cycling infrastructure to improve the cycling experience and ensure connectivity with other transport networks.

2.1.3. The popularisation of e-Bikes and e-Bike tourism

E-bikes represent a trend in cycling that will influence the way people cycle, choose tourist destinations and cycling routes, with whom they will cycle, and in which facilities and places they will stop on their way. Cycling with electric bikes is easier and faster and allows riders to experience and see more. E-bikes also open up requests for additional cycling infrastructure, especially for the possibility of replacement or fast charging of batteries for electric bicycles, and at the same time, offer the possibility of intergenerational cycling and allow cyclists of different physical fitness to cycle together.

The sale of electric bicycles in Europe is thus on the rise, where the share of electric bicycles sold is higher than the share of ordinary bicycles sold, and as a result, the share of E-bikes in the total share of all bicycles in use is increasing. In 2018, more electric bicycles were sold in the Netherlands than conventional bicycles, a total of 409,400 different E-bikes. E-bikes saw a 40% increase in sales in 2018 compared to 2017, and the average purchase price of a bike (E-bikes and regular bikes) rose to EUR 1,207 per bike (The Guardian, 2019). In Germany, 980,000 different electric bicycles were sold in 2018, which represents a growth of 36% compared to 2017. In 2019, every fourth bicycle sold in Germany was an electric bicycle. The current share of electric bicycles in Germany is 23.5%, but in the medium term, it is estimated to rise to 30%. Long-term estimates predict the share of E-bikes in Germany at the level of 35% of all bicycles in use (Bike Europe, 2019). In France, 338,000 electric bicycles were sold in 2018, which represents a growth of 21% compared to 2017. In France, electric bicycles represent 40% of all bicycle sales by value (Bike Europe, 2019).

Advantages of electric bikes over classic bikes (Cyclingabout, 2019):

- They offer a speed comparable to running, while at the same time, the cyclist uses energy that he would use when walking - as a result, he arrives at the destination with more energy and can participate in other sports and other activities,
- E-bikes make it possible to overcome long distances on the same day with less effort and to overcome higher ascents,
- Cyclists with different physical fitness can cycle together (intergenerational inclusion),
- E-bikes are also suitable for people with injuries who would otherwise not take part in cycling,
- Enable longer cycling tours - as a result. The cyclist can see and experience more on the same day,
- Enable people with injuries to be included in cycling tourism.

Due to their driving characteristics and way of use, electric bicycles will have an impact on tourism service providers, who will have to adapt their offer to the possibilities that electric bicycles bring. At the same time, due to the advantages they have, electric bicycles will directly affect the daily behaviour of cyclists. In a survey conducted in Belgium among electric bicycle owners, as much as 90% of all journeys, both to work and after errands, are made by electric bicycle. The only exception where the use of a car is preferred over the use of electric bicycles is represented by larger purchases of everyday items or larger pieces of equipment (Astegiano, Tampère and Beckx, 2015).

The ever-increasing demand for cyclists for e-bikes and their active use will affect tourism service providers. Greater use of e-bikes for daily cycling to school and work and for daily errands and, consequently, greater demands for adequate infrastructure such as free parking spaces and adequate public charging stations for equipment (Astegiano et al., 2015). Electric bicycles, in combination with modern navigation systems, will enable cyclists to independently carry out longer cycling tours without local guides, which will affect the changing demands of e-cyclists for accompanying services. Intergenerational cycling will increase cycling by families with children and people of different

generations (as a result, the need for an accompanying offer will change, which will have to be adapted according to age, from the youngest cyclists to seniors). Increased intergenerational cycling will affect more hours that existing cyclists will devote to cycling (e.g., the whole family will be able to cycle longer distances with e-bikes instead of visiting an amusement park), and all this will affect increased demand and occupation of cycling infrastructure, which will need to be further developed and adapted to e-bikes and the age structure of e-bikers (Bike Tour, 2019).

2.1.4. TRENDS IN CYCLING TOURISM

Cycling tourism is seeing several trends shaping it that stream from the cycling industry. These trends offer opportunities for you to advertise, attract European cyclists and meet their demands.

2.1.4.1. Increased social media and blog usage

Cyclists often take their inspiration from cycling travel blogs. These blogs provide descriptions of other travelers' cycling experiences on certain tours. Cyclists look for these blogs to gain inspiration and to get information on the cycling tour, facilities along the way, safety and things to do, such as:

WeLeaf offers a website including many blogs. It was developed by two very experienced cycling tourists from the Netherlands and Belgium and offers travel tips, inspiration, information on equipment and more. The blogs include a route description, highlights, information on accommodations, food and water and much more. Its main focus is on tour cycling, but it also has information on hiking, sailing and canoeing.

Epic Road Rides offers a platform for road cyclists with a huge number of tours all around the world.

Single Tracks is a platform with tips on gear and offers inspiration on mountain bike trails all around the world.

Cycling tourists often also use Instagram or Facebook to show their followers, friends and family pictures or videos of their trip. Some cyclists, especially mountain bikers, use a GoPro to film their trip and post it on Instagram or YouTube.

E-bike cyclists often go on one-day trips because it is often challenging to find facilities to charge the bike in remote areas. Next to that, apps to navigate cycling trails are becoming more popular. It is important for cycling tourists cycling in remote areas to access the navigation app at all times. Internet access is not always available in remote areas. It is important to be able to download a cycling map from the app so that cyclists can still travel safely.

Apps that are popular among cycling tourists are EuroVelo, Strava and Komoot. The EuroVelo app provides cyclists with an interactive map, sights to see in the area and the opportunity to share the cycling trip with friends and family. Strava is often used by road cyclists. The app maps out routes and can calculate heart rate, speed and distance. You can follow other road cycling friends and share your achievements with them as well. Komoot is also particularly popular. This app is ideal for planning routes and is full of highlights from other cyclists. Offline use is possible by downloading the maps.

2.1.4.2. Local experiences

Cycling tourists want to be immersed in the local experience. This means that they like to enjoy local food, connect with local people and join in on local activities. Many cycling tourists would rather have a local experience than cycle to popular sites that are often overcrowded.

Cycling tourists find it important to support the local community they bike through, such as having tea or lunch in a local home, staying overnight in a homestay or helping out a local farmer for a day. An example of a company combining cycling with exploring local cultures is Follow me Bangkok Tours.

2.1.4.3. Make sustainability part of the experience

Many cyclists care about sustainability. At least 7% of the daily cyclists travelling to work or school are motivated to cycle because it is more sustainable than travelling by car.

In order to attract Europeans, it is important to find ways to be sustainable and communicate this to the customers. Sustainability comes in many forms. Western Europeans find it important that they are offered local products, are connected with sustainable hotels or homestays and offered sustainable activities. While sustainable cycling tourism focuses on travel with a minimal impact, regenerative tourism aims to improve the destination. Therefore, regenerative tourism is the next step in sustainable travel. For example, One bike is a cycling tour operator in Tanzania that organises special tours that empower the local community and clean up the local environment. For example, it organises 'Re-Cycle Tours', where cyclists clean up litter found in nature and bring it to a recycling manufacturer in the neighbourhood. It also has a 'One Bike Nomad' tour, where One bike and volunteers cycle to a nearby town in Tanzania and help the community fix their broken bicycles.

2.2. Internal Marketing

The main objective of the **internal marketing campaign** is that:

All stakeholders know the Amazon of Europe story, identify themselves with it and are able to present it in a comprehensive way.

To achieve this, the academy and the networking platform will be utilised. This will build the capacity and understanding of the importance of joint quality standards (visual identity and brand book, regional communication strategies, brands, products and services). The later will unify the understanding of the expectations of the incoming tourists.

The DDO will also develop a Toolkit for the service providers.

The identification of the stakeholders with the Amazing Amazon of Europe story will be strengthened through the following annual networking events (the attendance is mandatory for all DDO members, whereas all stakeholders are invited – live or online where possible):

- DDO annual meeting
- Amazing AoE conference
- Study visits and networking
- Fairs of local products

2.3. External Marketing

To attract the tourists and bring them into the destination Amazing Amazon of Europe, external marketing plays the most crucial role.

The marketing campaigns will be designed with the purpose of creating a pull through the 3 phases:

1. Awareness
2. Interest
3. Desire

2.4. Market analysis

Objective of the measure is to define focus markets which also represent a guideline for the allocation of the resources (people, money, time). We follow the model presented by Slovenia's national tourism strategy (STRST, 2017), which proposes key markets from three different perspectives.

Market prioritization has been done from three perspectives:

- 1) Analysis of the share of overnights in CEE
- 2) Growth-share matrix for the period

3) Market assessment model based on market attractiveness and ease of access to AAOE Destination

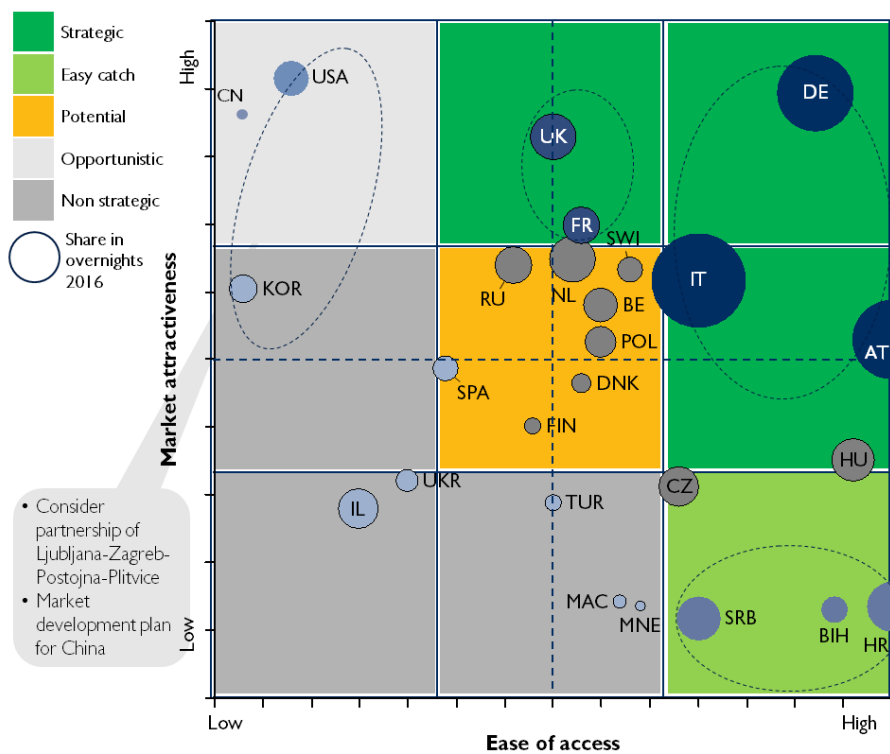
Marketing attractiveness criteria includes 4 indicators:

- GDP PPP per capita
- GDP PPP per capita growth
- International travel expenditure
- International departures

While Ease of access criteria considers 3 indicators:

- Drive in (drive duration)
- Flight connections (direct flights, flight duration)
- Other (distance, duration – bus, train)

Figure 4: Priority market groups for Slovenia



AT-Austria, DE-Germany, IT-Italy, NL-Netherlands, CN – China, CZ-Czech Republic, HU-Hungary, HR-Croatia, PL-Poland, BE-Belgium, RU-Russia, SRB-Serbia, FR-France, UK-United Kingdom, IL-Israel

Source: STRST 2017-2021

1. **Primary focus markets** which are attractive and stable for Slovenia as well as for AAOE are:

- a. Austria
- b. Germany
- c. Italy

Those markets should get highest level of focus and highest allocation of resources.

2. **Growth focus markets** which are lucrative and growing
 - a. UK
 - b. France

Those markets are second priority and should get corresponding level of focus as well as allocation of resources.

3. **Potential growth markets**
 - a. Benelux
 - b. Switzerland
 - c. Denmark and Finland
 - d. Poland, Hungary and Czech R.

Those markets represent a significant potential for further growth. As there are many markets in this group, with major differences and it's own market rules and specifics, they have to be addressed and planned appropriately. Set of initiatives for further planning of those markets has been defined and covered in Measure 4 together with other specific markets which should not be neglected.

4. **Value for money markets**
 - a. Croatia
 - b. Serbia
 - c. BiH

Those markets are also very interesting especially due to ease of access. On the other hand, low average purchase power as well as overall market attractiveness has to be considered when marketing particular products on those markets. Croatia needs to get corresponding focus and allocation of resources in order to leverage upside potential of the market (increase brand and product awareness, ensure better positioning). Serbia with a potential to become one of top markets of AAoE, and synergies in terms of regional marketing activities, should get corresponding focus and allocation of resources. BiH is currently not at the same level of priority like Serbia, but should be considered in terms of regional synergies in marketing activities especially in the long run (if the political and macro-economic situations turn more positive).

Based on the characteristics of AAoE, the nature of cycling tourism and through multiple consensus-making workshop between the partners and external experts, the main target markets for the Amazing Amazon of Europe external communication activities based on the above presented model and ranked by their importance are as follows:

1. **DACH market – Germany, Austria, Switzerland**
2. **BENELUX – Belgium, Netherlands, Luxemburg**
3. **North America – Unites States of America and Canada**
4. **Local – Austria, Slovenia, Hungary, Croatia, Serbia, BiH**

5. CZ/POL – Czech Republic and Poland

For reaching the mentioned target groups online and offline media will be utilized.

Defining a target market is the foundation of all elements of a marketing strategy that will help us to choose the right marketing channels for promotion.

According to our estimation future visitors of the Amazing Amazon of Europe Destination could be divided into three main groups (see Figure 5):

- international tourists coming for longer cycling vacations,
- domestic tourists coming for shorter cycling vacations,
- locals using the bike trail for recreational purposes.

Figure 5: Three main groups of expected future AoE Bike Trail visitors



Source: Trail Angels, 2019.

Our prognosis is that the international tourists will mostly book via official booking center while the domestic tourists and locals will mostly cycle self-organized. Based on the following assumptions we chose the group of international tourists as our main target market that we narrowed down by analysing visitor trends of similar existing bike trails (e.g. Drava Cycle Route in Austria) to **cycling enthusiasts from Germany, Austria, the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg**.

2.4.1. Target groups per age

In the first phase, after launching the product in 2020, the AoE Bike Trail product target market will be further divided into two specific target groups structured by age/profile:

- **46+ baby boomers/ Best-agers:** typical booking centre cyclists; they don't expect the unexpected, they require access to convenience and services
- **Modern escapists 30+:** they are more self-organized, they want to escape the pressures of modern society.

46+ baby boomers/ Best-agers profile

"I want adventure with comfort and services."

- Age: 46+
- Location: Germany, Austria, Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, etc.
- Highly educated, higher income or retired
- Travel solo, in pairs or in groups
- Value nature, culture, heritage, local food and drinks, genuine hospitality, events, folklore, etc.
- Use electric bikes (50 km range)
- Environmentally conscious
- Typically book online or in booking centres
- Active in daily life
- Influential in their home environment.

Modern escapists 30+ profile

"I want adventure to escape my daily routine. "

- Age: 30+
- Location: Germany, Austria, the Netherlands, Belgium, Switzerland, Luxembourg, etc.
- Highly educated, higher income, young professionals
- Environmentally conscious
- High achievers
- Active on social media, they are influenced by others and they influence others
- Want adventure, but also value comfort and convenience
- Travel solo, in pairs or in groups.
- Value nature, culture, heritage, local food and drinks, events, festivals, etc.
- Like to discover something new, that no one has visited yet.

In the second phase, after 3 years on the market, when our product will already be more established, we plan to add another target group:

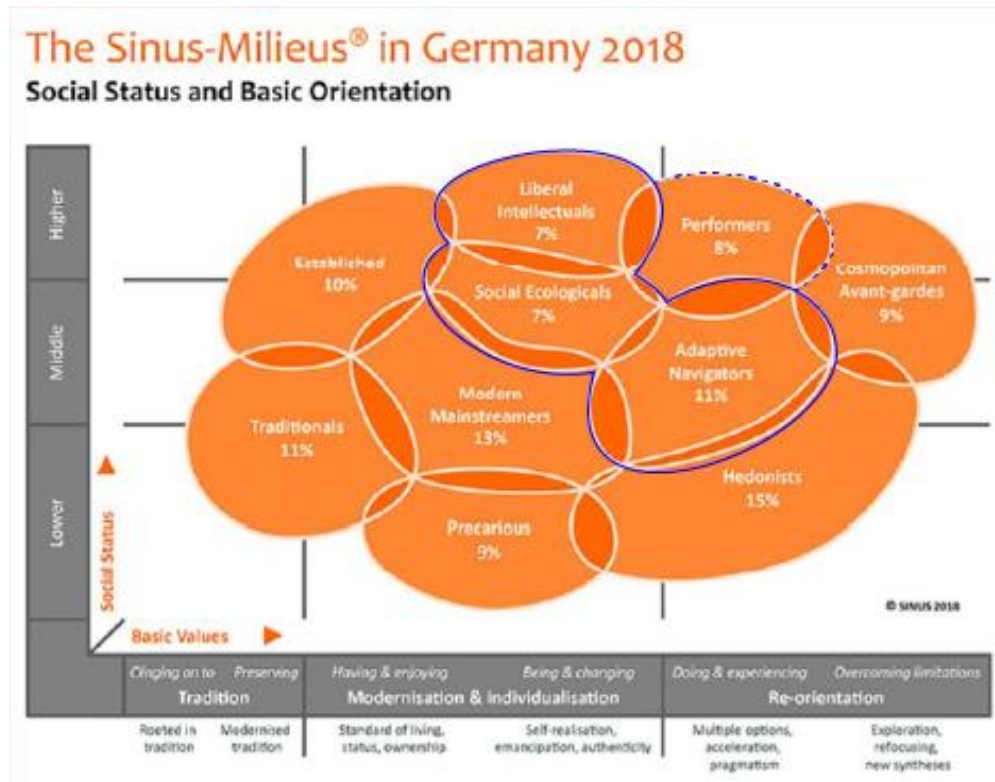
- Families with kids 12+: typical booking centre cyclists; they require access to convenience and services.

2.4.2. Sinus Milieus Target groups per lifestyle

The Sinus-Milieus model offers a true-to-life image of the sociocultural diversity of the modern world, providing accurate descriptions of people’s attitudes and orientations, values, lifestyles and life goals, and social backgrounds and positions.

Sinus-Milieus identify groups of like-minded people that can be visualized along two dimensions: social situation (status/class) and basic normative orientation. The areas of overlap among the bubbles on the milieu chart indicate that transitions between milieus are fluid. The Figure 6 presents the Sinus-Milieus in Germany in the year 2018 (Sinus-Milieus - Sinus-Institut, 2018).

Figure 6: The Sinus-Milieus in Germany 2018



Source: Sinus-Milieus - Sinus-Institut, 2018

According to the Sinus Milieus model, the AoE Bike Trail main target groups are:

- Liberal intellectuals (7%)
- Social ecologicals (7%)
- Adaptive navigators (11%)
- (Performers (8 %) – only in the beginning of the 1st phase to help us raise awareness about the product)

Liberal intellectuals

The enlightened educational elite (upper class): discerning view of the world, a fundamentally liberal outlook and postmaterial roots; desire for self-determination and personal development.

Social ecologicals

Socially engaged and socio-critical milieu with normative notions of the ‘right’ way to live (middle class): a pronounced ecological and social conscience; globalization sceptics, upholders of political correctness and diversity (multi-culti).

Adaptive navigators

The modern young center of society with a markedly pragmatic outlook on life and sense of expedience (middle class): motivated and prepared to adapt, but also keen to have fun and be entertained; ambitious, flexible, cosmopolitan – at the same time a strong need for social ties and a sense of belonging.

Performers

Additionally, there is another group that we plan to target in the first phase mainly from marketing perspective to raise awareness and spread the word about our product among wider public: the multi-optional, efficiency-oriented top performers (upper class): a global economic mindset; self-image as avantgarde when it comes to consumption and style; very technically and IT minded; establishment tendencies, erosion of visionary verve.

2.5. Competitor analysis

A competitive analysis can help learn the ins and outs of how the competition works, and identify potential opportunities where AAoE can out-perform the competition and is thus a fundamental part of any strategic marketing plan.

AoE Bike Trail is a long-distance cycling trail crossing future UNESCO 5-country Biosphere Reserve Mura-Drava-Danube. It is spanning through five countries (Austria, Slovenia, Hungary, Croatia, Serbia), 11 NUTS3 regions and is connecting 10 protected areas. The Amazon of Europe Bike Trail bookable product offers comfortable full-package cycling holidays along Mura, Drava and Danube in one of the most beautiful and pristine riverine landscapes in Europe.

The Amazon of Europe Bike Trail is the first cycling trail Europe with its own booking center offering full-package cycling holidays. However, there are many other tour operators offering cycling holidays in Europe, as well as other popular long-distance cycling trails attracting our potential visitors. Therefore, main competitors of the Amazon of Europe Bike trail can be divided into two groups:

- already existing long-distance cycling trails in Europe,
- tour operators offering cycling holidays in Europe.

Popular long-distance cycling trails in Europe:

- **Danube Cycle Path** – cycling route from Passau, Germany to Vienna, Austria (ADFC, 2019; TheGuardian, 2018; Matadornetwork, 2020; AFAR 2019),
- **Via Claudia Augusta** - cycling route on an ancient Roman road that runs across the Alps through southern Germany, Austria and Italy (ADFC, 2019),
- **Lake Constance Cycle Route** - a cross-border-cycle through Germany, Austria and Switzerland around the entire lake (ADFC, 2019),
- **Via Francigena** - the pilgrim route from Canterbury to Rome (TheGuardian, 2018; Matadornetwork, 2020),

- Iron Curtain Trail (AFAR, 2019),
- **Cornish Coastal Way** – Cornwall, England (TourRadar, 2018),
- **Adige Cycle Path** - Northern Italy, from Innsbruck to Bolzano (TourRadar, 2018),
- **Baltic Coast Cycle Path** - Along the Baltic Sea, starting in Flensburg and ending in Usedom (TourRadar, 2018).

Long-distance river cycling trails in Europe:

- Danube Cycle Path,
- Elbe Cycle Path,
- Drauradweg – Drava Cycle Route,
- River Mur Cycling Trail.

Tour operators offering cycling holidays:

- Wheel2Wheel Holidays: Cycling Holidays in Europe and beyond ([LINK](#)),
- EuroVelo – the European cycle route network ([LINK](#)),
- Eurobike Cycling Holidays | Cycling fun in Europe ([LINK](#)),
- BSpoke | Cycling Holidays | Solo & Group Tours Available ([LINK](#)),
- Cycling For Softies® | Cycling Tours In Europe ([LINK](#)),
- Flexitreks | River Cycling Holidays in Europe ([LINK](#)).

One of the competitors, Drava Cycle Route, is presented more in detail below.

2.5.1. DRAURADWEG – Drava Cycle Route

The Drava Cycle Route stretches from the Dolomites to the Pannonian Plains on the south side of the Alps. It runs from the source of the Drau River in Toblach Field, Italy's South Tirol, for 510 km along the eponymous river, through the Austrian Provinces of East Tirol and Carinthia, through Maribor in Slovenia until it reaches Varaždin in Croatia. From Varaždin onwards, the Drava cycle path in Croatia overlaps with the Amazon of Europe South Route.

The Drava cycle path leads through natural areas of international importance and guarantees optimal mobility, as it lies alongside the railway line. It connects warm, alpine bathing lakes with rugged mountain formations, lively towns with sleepy villages, diversity with beauty and quality. The Drava cycle path was the first eBike cycle path in Europe to be awarded 5 stars (Drauradweg, 2020).

The map and the stages of the Drava Cycle Route are showed in the Figure 7.

Figure 7: The map of the Drava Cycle Route

The 510-kilometre long Drau cycle path runs from Toblach/Dobbiaco to Varaždin



Source: <https://www.drauradweg.com/en/>

Main information and visitor statistics of the Drava Cycle Route in Austria are presented in Tables 7, 8, 9 below.

Table 7: Overview of the Drava Cycle Route in Austria in numbers

	Distance	Number of cyclists/year	Average revenues/year	Average spending/cyclists/day (including accommodation)	Average spending/cyclists/day (without accommodation)
Austria	510 km	200.000	6.000.000 €	80,00 €	20,00 €

Table 8: Percentage of visitors of Drava Cycle Route in Austria by the duration of their stay

Duration of stay (days)	Cyclists (%)
2-4	30
5-7	30
8-14	32
15 +	8
Total	100

Table 9: Percentage of visitors of Drava Cycle Route in Austria by type of accommodation

Type of accommodation	Average	Range
Hotel	40%	30 - 60%
Pension	45%	30 - 60%
Camp	15%	10 -20%
Hostel	7%	5 - 13%
Private rooms	11%	5 - 15%

2.6. SWOT analysis

This chapter includes SWOT analysis for the AoE Bike Trail marketing strategy that will help us understand internal (strengths and weaknesses) and external (opportunities and threats) factors of our product/brand important for the development of an effective marketing strategy and efficient use of our resources. The SWOT analysis is presented in Table 10.

SWOT analysis is an established method for identifying and analyzing internal strengths and weaknesses and external opportunities and threats that shape current and future operations and help develop strategic goals and can thus be extremely beneficial in any destination development and marketing planning.

Table 10: AAoE Destination SWOT Analysis

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Bike trail is going through the first future UNESCO 5-country Biosphere Reserve Mura-Drava-Danube, the area with pristine nature, well-preserved landscape and the rich wildlife, - bike trail crosses five countries, - bike trail goes along the rivers, - the product offers a wide range of complementary activities (natural and cultural sights, reach local cuisine, festivals, possibilities for bird watching, horse riding, water sports, fishing, guided tours wellness & spa), - it is a first bookable cycling product of that kind, - it includes a unique valorisation programme supporting nature protection projects, - it offers completely personalized cycling holiday and all-time support to the customer that correspond to the needs of the demand for safe and comfortable travel, - it has as informative website, on-line reservation system and mobile app that offer good digital support to the product - it has successfully transferred from an initial project initiative to a long-term destination development process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the AoE Bike Trail is a new product that is not yet established at the market, - poor overall marketing of the area of future UNESCO 5-country Biosphere Reserve Mura-Drava-Danube, - limited budget for marketing activities, - low accessibility of some parts of the future UNESCO 5-country Biosphere Reserve Mura-Drava-Danube area - lack of public transport, especially public transport offering bike transport services, - lack of tourism and cycling infrastructure or underdeveloped infrastructure in some parts, - lack of accommodations and restaurants in some areas, - some parts of the trail are not very attractive or safe (bad maintenance, high traffic, etc.) - inadequate internet coverage and poor signalling of mobile networks in some places along the trail, - lack of bike guides, - lack of skills and knowledge between tourism workers and other stakeholders, - lack of digital skills in host populations, - uneven entrepreneurial capacities of host populations, - difficult access to funding especially across the Southern route. - language barriers
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - underdeveloped tourism destination with a great potential for tourism development, - long distance bike trails are gaining popularity in the past years, - EU Policy actions are promoting sustainable tourism and sustainable mobility, - many on-going tourism and cycling related projects in the respective regions are raising awareness about the opportunities and benefits of cycling, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - competition of other already existing bike trails and tour operators offering cycling holidays, - local population is not always open minded and well-motivated, the same partially applies in case of local service providers, - current low awareness about significance of cycling tourism in some regions of the Amazing Amazon of Europe, - challenges of working in 5 countries: different legislation, administrative barriers, language barriers, cultural barriers,

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - a growing trend of tourists that want to create something meaningful while traveling – the opportunity for the valorisation programme Cycle for nature, - increasing number of tourists seeking for comfortable adventures and peaceful undiscovered places, - collaboration with relevant stakeholders – opportunity for using their channels for promotion, - many social media influencers are active in the field of cycling, responsible travel, etc. – possibility for promotion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - War in Ukraine, - Emergent crisis and unfavourable macroeconomic forecasts for growth of tourism.
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Source: Own elaboration

3. MARKETING OBJECTIVES

3.1 Short-term marketing objectives

In the first phase, the main objectives are:

- **Raise awareness about the brand** and tourism product locally, regionally, nationally and in the end also internationally, with the focus on our target markets,
- **Motivate people to purchase the product** and visit the AoE Bike Trail.

In the Socio-economic analysis of tourism potentials of the future UNESCO 5-country Biosphere Reserve Mura-Drava-Danube area we prepared projections of revenues for the AoE Bike Trail for the following three years (realistic, optimistic, pessimistic scenario). We have decided to follow the optimistic scenario and have set our marketing goals accordingly (see Table 11). For details on the assumptions, please see the Socio-economic analysis. Moreover, the projections were prepared before the Covid-19 crisis and will need to be adapted when the consequences of the epidemic and conditions for implementing tourism activities in the future will be clearer.

Table 11: AAoE Destination Projections of revenues and planned marketing objectives in the optimistic scenario

Year	OPTIMISTIC scenario				
	Number of cyclists	Number of bookings	Estimated AoE BT Booking Center Revenue	Marketing objective: People reached*	Marketing objective: Overall sales
2021	1000	400	45.000€	40.000	400
2022	1200	480	54.000€	48.000	480
2023	1440	576	64.800€	57.500	576

The most important marketing objective is to motivate 1000 cyclist enthusiasts within our set target groups to purchase our product. All strategic marketing activities will be planned, implemented and evaluated by utilizing available marketing budget in the most efficient way, to reach this goal and ensure the future life of the product.

*This number is based on following calculation:

50% of the extrapolation of the standard conversion rate (0,5%) referring to all bookings

3.2 Long-term marketing objectives

In long term, we aim to develop a destination and tourism product that will:

- Stimulate environmentally friendly behavior in tourism sector
- Develop an integrated solution for managing sustainable tourism
- Improve capacities for responsible green tourism

In the long term, marketing activities will focus on:

- brand image and equity,
- relationship marketing, to obtain regular, returning visitors,
- building strong relationships with the media (locally, regionally, nationally and internationally),
- building strong relationships with local inhabitants and tourism providers,
- strong online presence,
- creative marketing campaigns,
- valorisation programme.

4. TARGET GROUPS

In order for AAoE to establish itself as a destination that it wishes to become in its vision, the key target groups the partnership needs to involve are the following:

- Local public authorities
- Regional public authorities
- Sectoral agencies
- Interest groups including NGOs
- SMEs
- Infrastructure and public service providers
- National public authorities

5. THE BRAND

5.1 Vision and mission

Vision and mission represent the essence of every brand and within AAOE we lean on the ones developed in 2020 for AoE Bike Trail and thus systematically take care of the project's continuance.

VISION

Amazing Amazon of Europe is a leading sustainable cross-border tourism destination, preserving the natural and cultural heritage and inviting its explorers to slow down along the mighty rivers, reconnect with nature and recharge their batteries through amazing local stories.

MISSION

We will achieve this through acting as one destination, which will enable us to implement green economic and socially sustainable projects, give back to nature (ensure nature conservation) and raise awareness internally and externally about the unique undiscovered riverine destination in the first UNESCO 5-country biosphere reserve in the world, where health and nature are always the priority.

5.2 Brand values

Our aim is that we jointly create a unique destination for nature lovers that would like to enjoy outdoor activities as well as relax in peace and hospitable atmosphere. Destination Amazing Amazon of Europe is responsible, green (sustainable) and healthy destination that inspires, informs, and educates its visitors about healthy models of interaction with local natural and cultural heritage and bases on the brand of the already established Amazon of Europe Bike Trail.

5.3 The story of AAOE

The story of Amazon of Europe Bike Trail is based on:

- name of the product,
- logo (visual representation of the brand),
- slogan (also called claim), that embodies the character and values of the product,
- teaser, a slightly longer description of the experience the product is promising.

The brand story is also a promise to our visitors. The brand promises cycling holidays in pristine nature, along the rivers and protected natural areas. This is a region where time slows down, there is less traffic and less noise, while the nature is beautiful, culture is rich and the hospitality of local people is genuine. Although this might be an unknown area for many visitors, it is safe and all the services are available.

SLOGAN/CLAIM: "Cycle for nature"

TEASER: "Discover Amazing Amazon of Europe by cycling along Mura, Drava and Danube."

The key words are "discover", "experience", "cycle for nature" & "travel sustainably"

DISCOVER: Amazon of Europe Bike Trail is a long-distance cycling trail offering you unique opportunity for cycling holidays, following the pristine meanders of the rivers Mura, Drava and Danube for over 1.250 km. The cycling tour leads you along both sides of the rivers, on North and South Route. Cycle through natural riverine landscapes of five countries where nature knows no borders.

EXPERIENCE: Cycle along three rivers on 27 stages where the route takes you through deep shades of mysterious forests and refreshing blue colours of the ancient rivers. Enrich your cycling holidays with canoeing or birdwatching. At the end of the day, enjoy authentic hospitality of the locals, relax in a spa and taste the unforgettably delicious local cuisine.

CYCLE FOR NATURE: By booking your next cycling holidays with us, you will support nature conservation programmes for endangered species of the area. On your cycling adventure the route will lead you through world-famous protected areas, where you can spot charismatic white-tailed eagle or extremely rare black stork, you might even meet turtles and otters.

TRAVEL SUSTAINABLY: Use slow modes of travel such as bike and boat and make sure to engage with local population – together you can make the destination even better and contribute to its economic and social development.

5.4 USP – Unique Selling Proposition

The most unique characteristics, important for the story which represent the competitive advantages of AoE Bike Trail, are:

- Future 5-country Biosphere Reserve Mura – Drava Danube (TBR MDD).
- 5 countries – 3 rivers – 1 biosphere reserve (rivers connect).
- Valorisation programme Cycle for nature.
- Design of the route (nature & river experience).
- Unique travel experiences (TOP 6 must-see activities at each stage of the route; these are natural, cultural or outdoor experiences).
- Online bookable product (online accessibility, safety in booking a holiday in advance).
- Safety and comfort.

These are the most important competitive advantages, compared to other cycling routes in the area.

5.5 Corporate identity

The brand we use for the AAoE is the one owned by the AoE Bike Trail Destination Management Organization. Only the contracted tourism providers (or other partners) are allowed to use the brand, under set standards and criteria.

Standards and criteria were previously developed specifically for:

- The official AoE Bike Booking center (licence contract)
- AoE Bike Trail Booking center Partners (contractors such as accommodations, mobility services, tour operators, other service providers)
- Other partners (e.g. corporate marketing, tourism boards).

5.5.1 Logo, brand book, slogans

Because the AoE Bike Trail aims to become a flagship tourism product of AAoE Destination, there is a need to present the product as a stand-alone brand. The product has to stand out among its competition, which is why a proposal for a new logo has been prepared, based on its story, USP, values, vision and mission. Additionally, different thematic categories will be added, such as:

- Partner, Info point,
- Must see,
- Discover Mura/Drava/Danube

Figure 8: Official AoE Bike Trail product logo



The logo includes the name of the product and **key visual elements**:

- The outer circle represents the 1 biosphere reserve connecting 5 countries,
- The three rivers represent Mura, Drava and Danube,
- The light green colour inside represents rich biodiversity of the biosphere reserve, wetlands/meadows,
- The kingfisher represents:
 - peace and prosperity,
 - rich fauna and endangered species endangered species as the main treasure of the area,
 - Valorisation programme Cycle for nature
- The colours are harmonised with the Amazon of Europe Mura Drava Danube logo to keep the connection.

- Circular shape also represents all cyclic movement, bike wheel, used to explore this beautiful landscape, totality and timelessness.

The **colours** used are green and blue, each representing natural elements:

- Green: nature, forests, eco-friendly, health, biodiversity.
- Blue: rivers, water, trust, security, reliability.

Both colours are also known for having calming effects on its spectators, which is in line with the story of the product.

5.5.2 Photos, Merchandise, starter kit, badge and other visual materials

All visuals should embody the brand vision, values, story, USP, colours and messages, as well as pictured target groups (e.g. nature, riverine landscape, cyclists).

Suitable photos are the following:

- Photos of nature, riverine landscape, animals, attractions.
- Photos of the AoE Bike Trail infrastructure (info boards, resting area, etc.)
- Photos of cyclists:
 - All cyclist in the photos must have proper cycling equipment (trekking/hybrid bikes, sneakers/sport shoes, cycling trousers, cycling T-shirt, cycling gloves, helmet, sunglasses).
 - Photos of cyclists by the river in visitor areas – the best is that the infrastructure for visitors is visible (e.g. benches, tables, bird watching towers, etc.).
 - Photos of cyclists cycling on the bike trail with the river, fields or forest in the background.
 - Photos of cyclists near/using the AoE Bike Trail infrastructure (info boards, resting area, etc.).
- Photos showing nature-oriented activities: birdwatching, swimming (where it is allowed), etc.
- People in the photos must agree that the photo of them is used for promotional purposes.
- Photos must have copyrights – approval for publishing from the author of the photos.

Examples of inappropriate photos:

- Photos of bikes on the gravel in the unspoiled nature where there is no existing infrastructure for visitors.
- Photos of cyclists cycling off road: on grass, gravel, etc.
- Photos of badly maintained trail.
- Photos showing scenes and activities inconsistent with our brand values.

6. MARKETING STRATEGIES AND ACTIVITIES

6.1 Promotional print publications

Even though the importance of digital marketing is highly important in today's digitally driven world, it turns out that promotional publications are still indispensable and useful marketing tool. Promotional publications are budget-friendly tools for marketing that can reach the audience in many ways. A well-made brochure design conveys the values and message of a business impeccably while emphasizing its offerings. The statistics from Bentley University give an overview of their importance (Carton, 2019):

- 7 out of 10 tourists, as well as visitors, tend to pick up brochures,
- 95% visitors that obtain brochures become aware of a business,
- 80% of people consider visiting the business they saw in brochures.

Promotional publications including brochures and other media related texts and materials planned for the promotion of the AAoE are due to economies of scale and recognition the ones developed within the AoE Bike Trail:

- **AoE Bike Trail route map and brochure,**
- **press releases:** they will be prepared aside bigger achievements and events and shared with local media in all five countries in their national languages,
- **articles and travel reports** in biking magazines and specialized guides, editorials, etc., attracting the specific target groups interested in new biking products,
- **promotional cycling material:** common concept for promotional materials will be developed (e.g. cycling T-shirts, water bottles, backpacks),
- **newsletters on the AoE Bike Trail DTP website:** two will be prepared every half of the year (each reporting period).

6.1.1 AoE Trail route map and brochure

AOE BIKE TRAIL ROUTE MAP

The route map will serve as a product promotional brochure and will include the map of the whole AoE Bike Trail, information about the trail and key information about 27 stages including one must-see per stage.

AOE BIKE TRAIL BROCHURE

The brochure will be designed as a guidebook of the AoE Bike Trail. Detailed maps and route descriptions for all 27 stages of the route will be included, with a clear breakdown of time, distance and the profile of each stage. Additionally, accommodation details for each stage and information on local public transport, culture, food and language will be presented, as well as the must-see attractions and experiences on the way. It will be published in a small, handy-sized format which is easy to pack and carry around on a cycling holiday. The brochure will be available in six languages: English, German, Slovenian, Croatian, Hungarian and Serbian. It will be issued in the pdf and printed form.

Two versions of the route maps and brochures will be prepared:

- **Initial AoE Bike Trail route map and brochure:**
 - Developed in July 2020,
 - will be upgraded to include the accommodations and other service providers offering complementary activities in 2022,
 - 2.000 copies of each publication will be printed in the 6 languages of the AoE Bike Trail.
- **Final AoE Bike Trail route map and brochure:**
 - Developed April 2021,
 - will include all updated information and maps, including accommodations and other service providers and will be reissued in 2022,
 - 8.000 copies of each publication will be printed in the 6 languages of the AoE Bike Trail.

6.1.2. Articles & Press releases

All the press relapses are regularly translated into 6 AAOE languages and posted on the project website <https://www.interreg-danube.eu/approved-projects/amazing-aoe>, as well as lined to AoE social media profiles and AoE official website.

6.2 Digital marketing

Digital marketing is deemed crucial success factor in today's tourism business and thus special attention within AAOE has been put into upgrading the existing domains and practices established with the AoE Bike Trail project. Thus we critically assess the current state of affairs through the Digital Customer Journey Analysis and subsequently present the optimization potential tips in each touch point.

6.2.1. Digital Customer Journey analysis

When we consider the digital customer journey today in travelling, a customer not only physically travels, but travels all the time through different phases, channels and touchpoints.

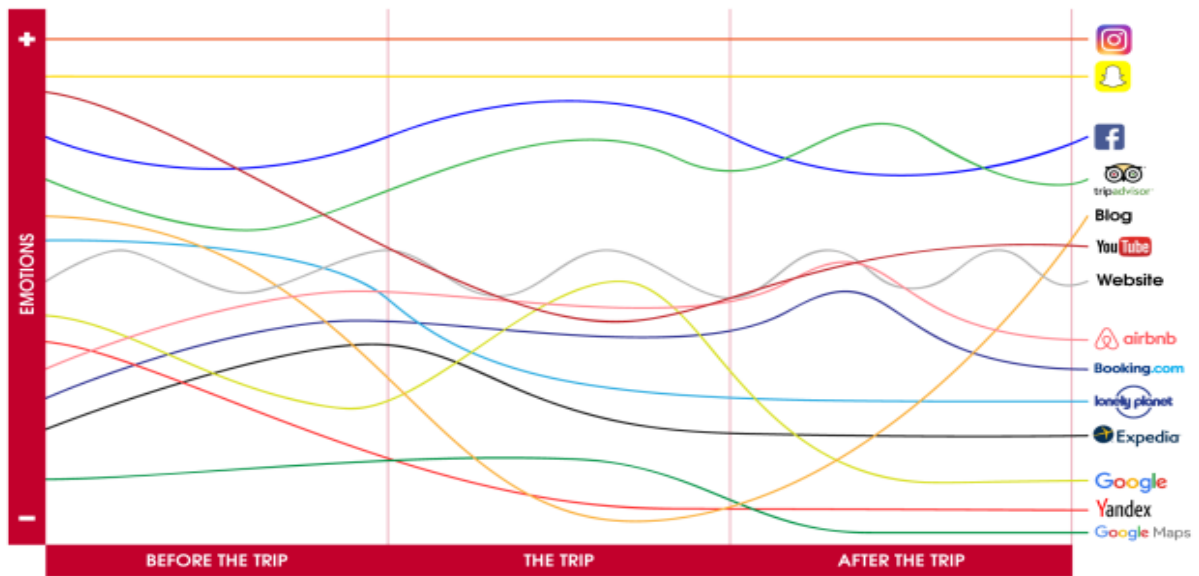
Some channels are more important in one phase, some in other and customers' emotional submergence differs from phase to phase, from channel to channel.

In Figure 1 – the overall framework of Digital Customer Journey is presented. Customers while travelling go through three phases which will be analysed in details in following chapters:

- Phase 1 – Before the trip
- Phase 2 – The trip
- Phase 3 – After the trip

In each of the phases, customers interact with different channels within the ecosystem. Depending on the phase of the journey – customers' emotional levels differ which is also presented within Figure 1. Considering the emotional aspect can help in strategic adjusting of content and communication on specific channel depending on the phase of the journey in question.

Figure 9: Relevance of communication channels during each phase of the customer journey

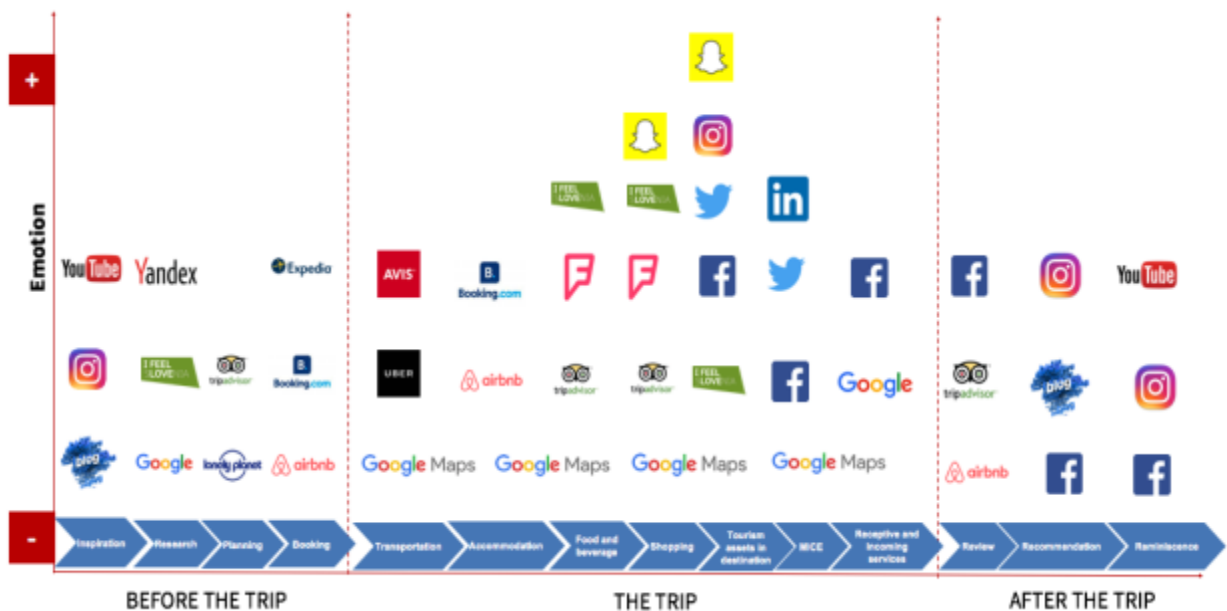


Source: STRST 2016-2021.

6.2.2. Micro moments analysis

In each of the given phases, customer interacts with one of the following channels, sometimes even seamlessly with a few of them at the time. We consider each of these a micro moment itself within the overall customer journey analysis. Analysis presented is structured according to phases and within each phase a micro moment (customers' interaction with channel in a specific moment of the phase is analysed).

Figure 10: Overview of key channels in each micromoment of the customer journey











Source: STRST 2017-2021.

6.2.2.1. Before the trip phase





During this phase, visitors form impressions of potential locations from touch points such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube or influencers through blogs and articles. Those accumulated impressions then become crucial because they shape the initial-consideration set which they further research through Google/Yandex, country official web page or travel sites like TripAdvisor.

Table 12: Assessment of the Inspiration micro moment

Channel	Assessment	Key findings	Improvement potential
Facebook 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Low level of proactive communication with visitors and potential for further utilization ▶ 52% Facebook users said their friends photos inspired their travel plans 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Facebook are affecting consumer travel decisions at every stage. ▶ Encouraging interaction and foster a strong community of loyal visitors to create content that will drive active evaluation phase
Instagram 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ #AoE is driving some engagement and is utilized by AoE & AAoE partners. Apart from that there is no other initiative for driving customer engagement that is worth mentioning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Create more active engagement content.
YouTube 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Missing segmentation topics, especially for younger visitors. nothing in VR/360 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Creating more targeted content especially for children and families. According to Google travel study children play an influential role in family travel destination decisions ▶ Creating Virtual reality/360 movies and utilize AoE and AAoE Destination story to really feel it through modern storytelling.
 PR articles and bloggers		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Low levels of content produced, lack of SEO 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Influencer utilization, PR articles production





Source: Own analysis

Table 13: Assessment of the Research micro moment

Channel	Assessment	Key findings	Improvement potential
Google/Yandex 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Search results are confusing because of existence of more web sites with information on AoE & AAoE. Plus some other project related websites. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SEO optimization and uniform communication.
Web page 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Confusing communication on diverse sites and possibility for better utilization of trip key selling website & planning tool 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> UX improvement initiatives and improvement of overall structure and quality of information.





Source: own analysis

Table 14: Assessment of the Planning micro moment

Channel	Assessment	Key findings	Improvement potential
TripAdvisor 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lots of activity regarding Slovenia, lack of reviews 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work with B2B to make sure they request reviews as much possible to increase their conversions and give travellers better service.
Lonely Planet 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Slovenia is very well represented with plenty of locations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> n/a

Source: Own analysis

Table 15: Assessment of the Booking micro moment







Channel	Assessment	Key finding	Improvement potential
Booking.com Airbnb 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lots of accommodation possibilities on both Booking and Airbnb 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> n/a
Expedia 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There are many hotels, apartments and car rental deals available but lacking Things to do section 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work with Expedia local expert program and local agencies to improve Things to do section

Source: Own analysis

6.2.2.2. During the trip phase








During the trip phase, visitors jump back and forth between all possible touchpoints using them in a mixed way to get the fastest and most reliable info. As their decision-making process tends to be spontaneous while on location, providing the right information from the right source in the right moment is crucial for a positive user experience.

Table 16: Assessment of the Transportation micro moment

Channel	Assessment	Key findings	Improvement potential
Uber 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ There is no Uber available yet along the trail, apart from Croatia. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Since there are queries on Google for “uber AoE” we recommend adding link to AoE website with transportation recommendations info.
Avis/Hertz 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ All of the major car rental brands are available. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ n/a
Google maps 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Public transportation is covered in cities like Ljubljana. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ n/a

Source: Own analysis







Table 17: Assessment of the Accommodation micro moment

Channel	Assessment	Key findings	Improvement potential
Booking.com Airbnb  		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Lots of accommodation possibilities on both Booking and Airbnb. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ n/a
Google 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ AoE is just on second page of search results on Google search for terms like: bike trails in Europe 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Use location targeting search AdWords to take user to English AoE Website. Especially when they search from mobile.
Website 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ There are booking options but these should be upgraded. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Change language on booking engine to English by default.

Source: Own analysis

Table 18: Assessment of the Food and Beverage micro moment







Channel	Assessment	Key findings	Improvement potential
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<p>TripAdvisor/ Foursquare</p> 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ TripAdvisor and Foursquare should be better filled with the information. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Local businesses, especially new ones to put signs on a visible place and ask for some recommendation on those platforms.
<p>Website</p> 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Food and wine should be represented as a special section on the site. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Add more content about food and wine to increase SEO positioning on search results.
<p>Google maps/ Search</p> 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ When searching for what to eat along the AoE, there are no convincing results. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Put more effort to SEO and SEM activities for this specific category as it is the main engagement driver.

Source: Own analysis







6.2.2.3. After the trip phase

Table 19: Assessment of the AAoE Destination Partnership Review micro moment

Channel	Assessment	Key findings	Improvement potential
<p>Airbnb</p> 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ In this phase, AAoE Destination does not have much space to influence communication – review phase is narrowed to accommodation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ A light initiative could be created – guideline for accommodation business along the AoE in terms of “how to write a review and additionally promote the AAoE”. Each accommodation provider could link for example the official AoE FB page and invite customers to leave a review for their AAoE experience as well.
<p>TripAdvisor</p> 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ The official AoE description and content on TripAdvisor needs to be upgraded and the key message needs to be better streamlined. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Content could be more structured and organized in terms of main message that wants to be sent and communication of main touristic products – at first it seems a bit unclear. ▶ Additional, guides for businesses (e.g. restaurants, museums, tourist spots etc.) along AAoE Destination could be provided to ensure aligned communication.
<p>Facebook</p> 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Customers tend to be very prone on leaving Facebook reviews – it is a very quick way to state your opinion and share your experience. ▶ On AoE FB page – the potential of customer reviews is not utilized yet. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Enable review option and actively communicate with customers who are leaving a review and define a consistent tone of voice for communication. In this phase, with aligned communication, there is an opportunity to motivate customers for leaving more recommendations and sharing more content regarding AoE Bike Trail and AAoE Destination.

Source: Own analysis







Table 20: Assessment of the Recommendation micro moment

Channel	Assessment	Key findings	Improvement potential
<p>Facebook</p> 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Similar to previous phase – reactive communication should be improved. In this phase – proactive activities should also be included. ▶ In this phase time has passed as customers came back from their vacation and need a small reminder to share recommendations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Proactive communication protocol should be initiated – following tourists who checked in a AAoE location and posting towards them proactively e.g. “We see you visited us, we hope you liked your stay. Share your recommendations with us.”
<p>Blog</p> 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Besides link to official SM accounts no proactive featuring of review stories on official website/s - there is additional possibility in encouraging visitors to share their experience through blogs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Feature existing blogger and/or PR articles more on official websites. Organize a content creation competition with LG goal (e.g. write a blog, recommend AAoE to a friend and receive a gift).
 <p>Instagram</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Current communication is ok, the look & feel is nice, however lack of proactive communication can be noticed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ More proactive communication with visitors who posted within one month and centralizing all content on one page - within one hashtag so there is consistent and memorable communication.

Source: Own analysis

Table 21: Assessment of the Reminiscence micro moment

Channel	Assessment	Key findings	Improvement potential
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<p>Facebook</p> 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ When we look from customers' perspective the reminiscence phase- on official FB page there is enough content for customers to feel inspired and remember their holiday along AoE and within the AAoE Destination. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Focus communication on Facebook to be more oriented towards customers and active communication with them and develop content that addresses the reminiscence phase.
<p>Instagram</p> 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Similar as above: Current communication is ok, the look & feel is nice, although a lack of proactive communication can be noticed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Utilize the #throwback moment - communicate with followers and engage user generation of content in this phase.
<p>YouTube</p> 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ YouTube channel needs to be created as the current content is sparse.. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Set up and ambassadors program for visitors through proactive communication with visitors sharing content - for example - each visitor that shares a vlog becomes an AAoE ambassador, receives special discounts for them and/or their friends when again in AAoE Destination.

Source: Own analysis

6.2.3. Web page

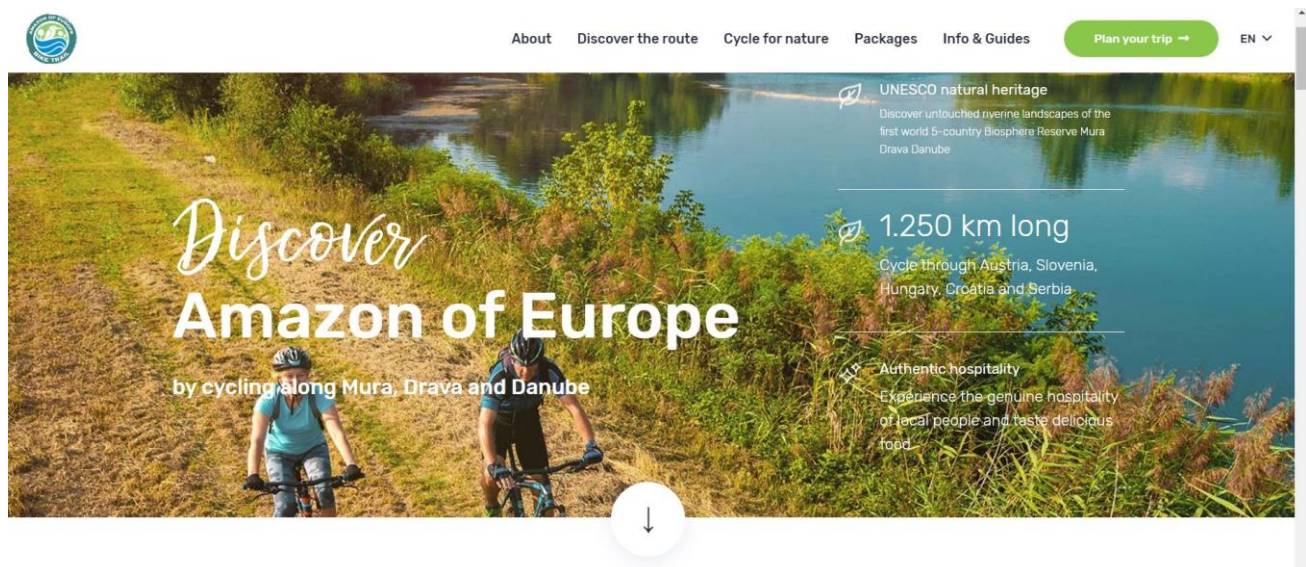
The main access to the market is going to be through the official product promotional on-line platform (already implemented within the AoE bike Trail project), so it has to be handled as an online tourism destination (presented at the state of art website). Potential guests' online experience of our website will affect their decision making whether to buy our product or not and therefore, all the contents must be informative, accurate, clear and attractive and the on-line platform simple, logical, and easy to use. Within the AAoE the platform has been enhanced and further upgraded to newest technical characteristics.

The selected domain name of the product on-line platform is **aoebiketrial.com (.eu/etc.)**.

Contents of the website:

- **Landing page** with main information about the AoE Bike Trail.
- **About:** presentation of key facts, experiences and services, biosphere reserves, AoE Bike Trail DMO, all the partners and main cooperating regional and national authorities from the field of tourism.
- **Discover the route:** descriptions of all stages.
- **Cycle for nature:** presentation of the future UNESCO 5-country Biosphere Reserve Mura-Drava-Danube (TBR MDD), included protected areas and valorisation scheme.
- **Packages:** presentation of thematic pre-prepared bookable packages for cycling holidays.
- **Info & Guides:** a subpage where different brochures, maps and guidebooks for cyclists will be available.
- **Plan your trip:** presentation of the AoE Bike Trail booking center and the option to book cycling holidays directly through the AoE Bike Trail online booking system or send the request without obligation to the AoE Bike Trail booking center team.
- **Link to** download the AoE Bike trail **Mobile-App** for navigation on the trail.
- **Links to social media channels.**
- Professional **photo and video materials.**

Figure 11: Landing page Layout



A successful website does three things (Powered by search, 2020):

- It gets people to the website.
- It gets people to stick around after the first glance or two.
- It gets people to convert or perform the action(s) you want them to while on the website.

6.2.3.1. GETTING TRAFFIC TO THE AOE BIKE TRAIL ON-LINE PLATFORM:

- **Backlinking and referrals:** links to our on-line platform from other websites such as websites of National/Regional/Local tourism organizations, AoE Bike Trail DMO partners

and booking center partners, cycling organizations, etc., as well as from the e-mails, social media accounts, etc.

- **Keyword optimization (SEO):** frequent use of the keywords Amazon of Europe Bike Trail, cycling holidays, cycle tour, river bike trail, best bike trails, nature travel cycling.
- **Citations on different review websites:** e.g. TripAdvisor, Expedia, Foursquare, Viator, etc.
- New content on a regular basis.
- Social media integration: Facebook, Instagram.
- A mobile-compatible version of the website.

6.2.3.2. *GETTING PEOPLE TO STAY AT THE AOE BIKE TRAIL ON-LINE PLATFORM:*

- **Simple layout and aesthetics:** clear and intuitive navigation menu, avoiding clutters of elements (text, photos), using complementary colours and good colour contrast for better readability, etc.
- **Content quality:** informative, clear and accurate texts and catchy headers.

6.2.3.3. *GETTING HIGH CONVERSION RATE:*

- **Effective calls to action:** they can be found on different website subpages, the text is convincing but not aggressive, the design is pleasant to the eye.
- Security in money and information.
- **An “About” page and contact information** that will help establish the brand as a real and legitimate business.

6.2.4. Social media

We plan to upgrade the social media channels already started within the AoE Bike Trail Project to carry out our marketing activities in the following social media. The following SM will be systematically further developed and upgraded as suggested in improvements within the Digital Marketing Journey :

– **Facebook:**

- KPIs: growing the audience and engagement; content reach and engagement by content type; response rate and quality; negative comments; referral traffic to the AoE Bike Trail on-line platform; conversion rate.
- Strategy: regular posts and campaigns, FB events, tagging and backlinking, engaging with the audience by responding to their messages and comments, audience profiling and targeted ads, use of Facebook analytics.

– **Instagram:**

- KPIs: audience growth and engagement per follower; content reach; most engaged hashtags; comments received; referral traffic to the AoE Bike Trail on-line platform; conversion rate.
- Strategy: regular posts, stories and campaigns, use of hashtags and backlinks, audience profiling and targeted ads.

– **Youtube channel: still in the process of creation**

- KPIs: total amount of video views; total watch time; video engagement; viewer retention; number of subscribers; subscribers’ demographics; referral traffic to the AoE Bike Trail on-line platform; conversion rate.

- Strategy: regular posts of videos, tagging and backlinking, engaging with the audience by responding to their comments.

6.2.5. Newsletters

Regular quarterly newsletters to the subscribers of our site are planned starting with Q3 of 2022.

6.2.6. Travel blogs/bloggers

Explorer/study tours were organized to attract blogger and influencer crowd, yet we still need to perfectionise this sort of marketing collaboration in the future as we also gain more expertise.

6.3 Events

6.3.1. Promotion at specialised tourism fairs

Tourism fairs are a very powerful marketing medium because they bring together large number of international buyers and sellers in one place in a short space of time and provide a comprehensive overview of the entire market and industry.

Main aims:

- Assessing the overall industry situation and competition.
- Increasing brand awareness – AoE Bike Trail as a flagship sustainable tourism product.
- Promotion of the business model at the specialized sections for responsible/sustainable travel.
- Testing market reactions to the newly introduced AoE Bike Trail product.
- Forging successful partnerships, especially with outbound tour operators from our main target markets (Germany, Austria, the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg).
- Networking and generating new business contacts – trade fairs provide a unique venue for people with common interests to connect with one another.

We are planning to attend the following **specialized tourism fairs in and outside DTP region**:

- **International Tourism Fairs**
 - BTEXpo, Brussels, October 2022
 - WTM London, November 2022 - awarding for category Responsible travel
 - Vakantiebeurs Utrecht Tourism and Leisure Fair, January 2022
 - ITB Berlin, March 2022 – presenting at the Responsible Travel Hall
- **Outdoor Tourism Fairs on EU Markets**
 - Eurobike Friedrichshafen, September 2022
 - TourNatour Düsseldorf, September 2022
- **National Tourism Fairs** in Austria, Slovenia, Croatia, Hungary and Serbia, Jan 2021 - Dec 2022.

Later in the project, a special strategy will be prepared for a trade show marketing with the focus on enhancing our recognizability especially in the segment of responsible travel/eco-tourism/sustainable tourism.

6.3.2. International and cross-border promo events

In the scope of the international and cross-border promo events the International Biking festival is going to take place in 11 participating regions in 5 countries, giving the opportunity to the locals and national visitors to get to know better the Amazing Amazon of Europe Destination. The International Amazon of Europe Biking festival aims to become a traditional international cycling festival. Altogether, there are 11 cycling events, taking place in summer or beginning of autumn every year.

Concept: separate local cycling events are joined into a festival with common promotion and common story. The goal is to promote cycling tourism and establish a positive connection between people and nature, while simultaneously promoting safe cycling culture.

In the scope of the AAoE Destination project a 3rd & 4th International Amazon of Europe Biking festival are taking place organized between August – October 2021 and 2022. 11 cycling events are going to take place in all regions of the Amazon of Europe: Eastern Styria (AT), Pomurska region (SI), Međimurje County, Osijek-Baranja County, Koprivnica-Križevci County, Virovitica-Podravina County (HR), Zala, Somogy and Baranya County (HU) and West Bačka District (SR).

6.3.3. Explorer/promotion tours for different target groups

Explorer/promotion tours are organized for specified target groups: specialized agents, biking guides and experts, journalists, test users and social media influencers. They will have the opportunity to visit the AAoE Destination and test the Bike Trail and its services and will be asked to promote our Bike Trail to broader public, as well as to provide assessment so that we can evaluate the standards and improve services where necessary. The explorer tours of the AoE Bike Trail are taking place mainly in 2022 as the effects of pandemics have largely vanished.

An example of communication following a successfully implemented explore tour from the project website:

AMAZING AOE - JOURNALISTS VISITED AMAZON OF EUROPE

17-05-2022

We are delighted to announce that we had an opportunity to host media representatives from Kurier AT, Punksfer.hr / Nova TV HR, Kleine Zeitung AT, Radlobby.at and Kilometermacher.at last week on the Media tour, a tailored explorer tour whose purpose was discovering the destination Amazon of Europe and its flagship products: Amazon of Europe Bike Trail, Amazing Moments, and River Journey.

The participants gathered in Mureck, Austria, and after introduction at lunch, started cycling at the starting point of Amazon of Europe Bike Trail. During our trip, we have visited four countries: Austria, Slovenia, Hungary, and Croatia. To name a few highlights from the tour: city tour Bad Radkersburg, activity Amazing Moments called Untouched by light in Dom Penine in Gornja Radgona, Vinarium Lendava, Visitor Center "Med dvema vodami" in Medjimurje, River'sCool in Muraszemenye and Velika

Polana, as well as Copek Mill in Velika Polana, and Expano pavilion in Murska Sobota. Unfortunately, we could not go on Rafting tour in Hungary as the weather conditions did not allow it, but we surely had the chance to reconnect with nature and make the best out of the whole experience, despite the weather challenges.

Therefore, we are happy to conclude that the Media tour was a success, as nature enthusiasts got a good insight into the Responsible Green Destination Amazon of Europe firsthand by cycling, discovering natural and cultural heritage, exceptional experiences, local cuisine, and we're looking forward for them to help us raise the awareness of the destination by spreading the word via media.

Figure 11: Explorer Media Tour Participants



6.4 Partner Responsibilities

The AoE Bike Trail partnership includes the regional and topical partners. Since the marketing tasks of partners are closely connected to their role in the project, we are using this division to present the responsibilities of partners.

6.4.1. Topical partners

Topical partners in the AoE Bike Trail project are **LP Iskriva, WWF Austria, Trail Angels, WWF Adria and Westpannon**. The marketing activities for each topical partner are presented further below.

LP Iskriva

Digital marketing:

- Development and maintenance of the AoE Bike Trail on-line promotional platform and Mobile app for cyclists.
- Social media marketing: managing AoE Bike Trail accounts on Facebook, Instagram and Youtube.

- Promotion of the AoE Bike Trail on their website and social media.

Promotional publications:

- Giving support to WWF Adria in the Initial and Final AoE Bike Trail route map and brochure preparation.
- Giving support to WWF Adria in the Newsletters' and Press releases' preparation.

Promotional events:

- Organization of Interim conference in Apatin (11.-12. 6. 2020) in cooperation with MOA.
- Organization of Final conference in Velika Polana (May 2021) in cooperation with Velika Polana.
- Preparation of the concept for the 2nd International Biking Festival that will be held between August-October 2020.
- Promotion of the AoE Bike Trail on the International Tourism Fairs in cooperation with Trail Angels: BTEXpo, Brussels, WTM London, Vakantiebeurs Utrecht Tourism and Leisure Fair, ITB Berlin.

WWF Austria

- Promotion of the AoE Bike Trail on their website and social media.
- Providing input for on-line platform, promotional publications and social media campaigns: content and photos.
- Promotion of the AoE Bike Trail through the WWF database of clients and other channels, as well as cooperation with the WWF Travel Club.

Trail Angels

- Preparation of articles and promotion on travel blogs.
- Promotion of the AoE Bike Trail on their website and social media.
- Providing input for on-line platform, promotional publications and social media campaigns: content and photos.
- Promotion of the AoE Bike Trail on the International Tourism Fairs in cooperation with Iskiva: BTEXpo, Brussels, WTM London, Vakantiebeurs Utrecht Tourism and Leisure Fair, ITB Berlin.
- Promotion of the AoE Bike Trail on the Outdoor Tourism Fairs on EU Markets: Eurobike Friedrichshafen, TourNatour Düsseldorf and other similar fairs.
- Organization of Explorer/promotion tours for different target groups in Summer 2021/2022.

WWF Adria

- Promotion of the AoE Bike Trail on their website and social media.
- Providing input for on-line platform, promotional publications and social media campaigns: content and photos.
- Translating the content of the on-line platform to Croatian.
- Preparation of the Initial and Final AoE Bike Trail route map and brochure.
- Translating Initial and Final AoE Bike Trail route map and brochure and printing it in English and Croatian.
- Preparation of Newsletters and Press releases.

- Promotion of the AoE Bike Trail through the WWF database of clients and other channels, as well as cooperation with the WWF Travel Club.

Westpannon

- See the common tasks of regional coordinators.
- Promotion of the AoE Bike Trail on the National Tourism Fairs.

6.4.2. Regional coordinators

Regional coordinators in the AoE Bike Trail project are **Velika Polana, TVRBR, TZMZ, PIVPC, KKZ, BfNPI, SMVKA, COS** and **MOA**.

The activities same for all regional coordinators are:

- Organizing professional photo and video shoot along the trail in their regions to provide photos for promotional publications and on-line promotional platform (photos showing cyclists, nature, AoE Bike Trail and infrastructure, beautiful photos for stage headers and photos of must-see attractions).
- Cooperating with local/regional/national tourism boards, service providers or other relevant stakeholders and promoting the AoE Bike Trail through their channels (e.g. their websites and promo materials, as well as common campaigns on Tourism Fairs).

Digital marketing:

- Providing input for the on-line platform and social media campaigns: content and photos.
- Promotion of the AoE Bike Trail on the websites and social media of their organizations.

Promotional publications:

- Providing input for the promotional publications: content and photos.
- Translations of Press releases into national languages and to local media.
- Other publications about the AoE Bike Trail in sending them local media.

Promotional events:

- Organization of regional events in the scope of the 3rd & 4th International Biking Festival that will be held between August-October 2021 and 2022.
- Community marketing in 5 countries: organization of local events - Opening days of the AoE Bike Trail and AAoE Destination in Summer 2021.
- Supporting Trail Angels in organization of Explorer/promotion tours for different target groups in Summer 2022.
- Participating on local/regional/national events connected to similar topics (e.g. sustainable tourism, cycling, biosphere reserves, etc.) and promoting AoE Bike Trail there.

6.4.3. National tourism boards & authorities

To boost up the promotional activities and disseminate the achievements of AAoE Destination across national networks of EU tourism, we associated with national tourist boards who are vital support in our destination building process.

Among our high-level partners we can list:

- Slovenian Tourist Board
- Croatian Ministry of Tourism
- Slovenian Tourist Association

6.4.4. International organisations

International organisations associated with the AAoE partnership are the following:

- WWF
- GSTC

7. MARKETING BUDGET

Marketing budget is prepared based on the planned budget for communication activities in the AAoE project Application form and includes the budget of WP C. The overview of budget is presented in the tables below (Table 22)

Table 22: Overview of marketing budget per activity

ACTIVITIES	AVAILABLE BUDGET (€)
WP C - COMMUNICATION	
A.C.1. - Startup activities incl. communication	111,615.10
A.C.2. - Communications	118,591.05
A.C.3. - Public Events	118,591.05
A.C.4. - Promotional materials	45,343,65
TOTAL	347,797.17

8. EVALUATION

As this marketing strategy is based mostly on online activities, there is a clear need for **constant evaluation of the results** (analytics) and adapting the strategies and tactics to reach set goals. Digital marketing is a very dynamic process and it is going to be crucial to regularly monitor new trends in tourism marketing and adjust the channels accordingly. Initial step in realising the success of the strategic marketing plan for AAoE is that we critically reviewed and assessed what has been achieved previously in AoE Bike Trail as we heavily lean on the channels and communication strategies that were established within that particular project.

The evaluation methods we will continuously employ:

- all media materials will be recorded in a form of press clippings,
- reviews on Tripadvisor or similar websites,
- number of followers and comments on social media,
- interviews with AoE Bike Trail partners (tourism providers),
- comments from local inhabitants,
- reviews in the media,
- the most important and most tangible result: number of bookings generated through the website, booking centre and partner networks.

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