

LIMES – From Beacons to Facebook

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1 ABSTRACT

Communication is the basis for trans-border control of networks. With Project LIMES, the central element is the Limes, the ancient frontier region of the Roman Empire. The region is developing as a European cultural heritage site in 10 countries and parts of it have been recognized as a UNESCO world heritage site. The inhabitants of the European regions, the employees of the LIMES prototype project, representatives from the European Commission as well as actors and concerned people with their various interests and cultural backgrounds all have to be incorporated into communications networks. Facebook, Twitter, Google-Translator, Drop Box and blogs also present practical, simple and free (which is important for volunteers) possibilities.

2 LIMES ACTION

2.1 The Historical Region

The ancient Roman eastern frontier, about 3.500 kilometers long, passes through Europe. Even today, from Hadrian's Wall in the north to the Black Sea, its visible trail runs through forests, over hills and along rivers. Until about 1500 years ago, this is where beacons were burning all along the watchtowers. This frontier was also a rapid news chain between military stations (all north of the Alps, all are cities now). The beacons along the Limes were a very early precursor of the military ARPA net which was the predecessor of today's internet.

Today, the Limes passed through 10 countries, 8 of them in the European Union. They all more or less use the cultural heritage of the Romans in today's tourism development.

2.2 The Interests of the European Commission

Commissioned by the European Commission for the project "Cultural Tourism in Rural Areas", analysts see a potential for an annual economic growth of 6 percent. Even two thousand years later, ancient Roman foundations, ruins of watchtowers or the depiction of historical situations in theaters and museum, guided tours on e-bikes or hiking paths can contribute to modern-day European economic growth. – When we talk about sustainability, we should take this 2000 year old economic history into focus.

In the first and second decade of the 21st century the mobile internet with access via smartphones and tablets plays an ever growing role in the life of the consumer. Local based information is an important driver for trade and tourism.

5 partners from three European countries were given 2 years to bring the Limes into the smartphone age. The most important goal is to initiate economic services via the smartphone and to encourage movement into the new economic age. Project LIMES is financed by the European Commission with approximately 500,000 Euro. Project LIMES is one of three large scale demonstrators. These three prototype programs are directly supervised and evaluated by the Commission.

About 1700 years ago, the Roman beacons burned for the last time. It wasn't until the 19th century that the historical significance of the Limes was rediscovered. In the 20th century a comprehensive touristic utilization of this cultural heritage began, initially with Hadrian's Wall in Great Britain. In the meantime, the Limes in Great Britain and Germany is recognized as a UNESCO world heritage site; the Netherlands are preparing a request for recognition of the "wet Limes" (the Rhine). The UNESCO seal and the care it requires are always a guarantee for increasing numbers of tourists. But despite all this, in many regions the Limes is often marketed as locally or regionally and not as an international world heritage site. The internationality of the Roman Limes troops and the monumentality of the construction do not find any comparable network in the millions of people along the 3.500 kilometer route.

From the very beginning, Project LIMES was able to rely upon a sound archeological network along the Limes. For tourism specialists, regional developers, tourism service providers or local politicians, many

Limes kilometers are merely a local historic location. Of course, we must also recognize the down-side of this Roman monument: seen purely from a local standpoint, the pre-industrial construction method of pile walls, watchtowers and castles frequently reduces the monument to “a few foundation rocks”.

3 NETWORKS ALONG THE 3.500 KM MONUMENT

Setting aside all technological joys in the everyday life of a project member, the regular face-to-face meetings with Limes country representatives are the backbone of the project. Proposals and coordination on the business model can be developed much better if everybody works together.

3.1 Europäisches Advisory Board

LIMES-Action started at the beginning of 2012. Even in the European Commission application stage, partners were sought in all 10 Limes countries. All 10 Limes countries should be represented in a project-specific advisory board. But it wasn't until the second year of the project (2013) until this became a reality. The origins and the Limes-related interests of the advisory board members are heterogeneous: maintaining the monument is always the first priority of our archeological colleagues. Tourism and economy representatives do not question this, but they have other priorities. The Advisory Board is a forum for scientific exchange as well as practical advice from the real economy. While, in Great Britain, millions of people visit Hadrian's Wall, parts of the Limes in Croatia are still located in the minefields of the 1991-1995 war. In Germany, Limes-related efforts are concentrated on building reconstructions, while in Lower Austria economic initiatives, like wine growing, are added to the reconstruction efforts.

The Advisory Board meets every 3 to 4 months.

3.2 Partners

The five partners of Project LIMES are now cooperating for the first time. The PER GmbH in Rheinland-Pfalz is a regional development agency of the state. The technological start-up business MARVIS hails from this region. It is the core of all technical tasks: developing and testing a smartphone app. In Lower Austria, CEIT (Central European Institute of Technology) is a partner whose specialty is public relations and dissemination. In Bulgaria, our partner is the German-Bulgarian enterprise INI-Novation. INI is an international business consulting company with a focus on innovation management and technology commercialization. The company has been providing tailored services to local governments, universities and R&D institutes. The Bulgarian city of Ruse is also a member of the partner team. The industrial city of Ruse develops cultural tourism on the historic foundation of the Roman fleet harbor. Every partner is responsible for individual work packages which are compiled separately or in cooperation with others.

The focal point for partnership cooperation is the weekly telephone conferences. Experienced partners were initially critical of the weekly coordination and regarded it as time-consuming. Nevertheless, the Friday morning conference has proven helpful. There are hardly any more time delays, the coordination is without problems, and even regular changes of personnel can be accommodated effortlessly. In the three partner countries, there is a total of about 12 people working on the LIMES project.

3.3 Stakeholders

In the three test countries Bulgaria, Austria and Germany, several steps the partners want to take need to be discussed with regional stakeholders. The tourism structure in Rheinland-Pfalz is compartmentalized and must often be addressed at the local decision-making level. In contrast, there is the simple city model in Ruse which is responsible for tourism development. Small working groups meet regularly in the test regions to coordinate ideas on economic initiatives and Smartphone app service offers. One of the essential questions continues to be which project-relevant data can be used and networked for the LIMES project. The partners communicate on a regular basis, often in weekly e-mail newsletter (in the local language plus English), with the stakeholders.

A total of about 1,500 actors are involved in the LIMES Project in the three countries.

4 SOCIAL NETWORKS, NEW MEDIA AND DIGITAL TOOLS

There are dramatic changes in the opportunities for international projects by social network systems (SNS), micro-blogs and blogs.

At the moment, the LIMES Project operates 6 blogs, micro-blogs and websites in three languages (German, Bulgarian, English): information is passed in a timely and cost-effective manner to a large number of people. Smartphone messages or photos on Project LIMES provide a positive impression of a very abstract project. The first photo of the app prototype was published via digital media.



Fig. 1: The common LIMES Blog

With the LIMES App as the project’s core element, a lot of rural area actors are initially left out. Awakening an interest or understanding for a European network and a mobile phone service for tourists regarding the entire Limes in the over-40 population is slow. Even by eliminating postal deliveries almost completely we found that the communicative backbone in the non-commercial area tends to be e-mail versus Facebook or Twitter.

In addition to the LIMES App, the activities in the Rheinland-Pfalz Limes region are focused on regional services in the 2013 tourist season.



Fig. 2: The Facebook page of Creative Tourism Limes

Creative Tourism Limes offers digital (and thus inexpensive) services with around 30 programs presented by 90 providers. In partnership with professionals, market newcomers are given the opportunity to enter the market without financial risk. A central editorial staff and common market-related, standardized modules (web building blocks, Facebook page) provide assistance.



Fig. 3: The common Creative Tourism Limes Homepage.

For its internal work Project LIMES does not employ a joint server but uses private, free-of-charge cloud services for document administration.

5 CONCLUSION

For internal administration as well as telephone and mail services, the helpful services provided by Facebook, Twitter and blogs are the most important tools for the European prototype project LIMES. When it comes to “office-to-office” communications, however, social network systems do not play any role. With external contacts and for information and communication purposes within the project environment, social network systems (SNS) are becoming increasingly important today. At the moment, the role played by social networks when designing and offering regional tourist services remains to be seen. An answer will be found in the 2013 season.

6 REFERENCES

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