Healing Alps:
Tourism based on natural health resources as strategic innovation for the development of Alpine regions
ASP815

Synthesis Report on HEALPS' main outputs: WP 4: Education and Training

WP T1:
Assessment of Alpine regions' Health Tourism Policy and Development Process

D.T1.1.1:
Synthesis report on HEALPS' main outputs (III/IV)

Project Partner 6
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1 Report context

The present synthesis report summarizes the results of work package 4 within the ARPAF project HEALPS for the integration in the Health Tourism Assessment and Benchmarking Tool (HTAB) of the Project HEALPS2. The analysis was carried out by the Department Lived Environment and the Institute for Tourism and Leisure at the University of Applied Sciences of the Grisons.

1.1 ARPAF project HEALPS

HEALPS was a project funded by the Alpine Region Preparatory Action Fund (ARPAF) and built the base for the Alpine Space Project HEALPS2.

Project Title:

HEALPS - Alpine Health Tourism – Positioning the Alpine region as globally attractive health promoting place

Project Partners:

- Innovation and Technology Transfer Salzburg (AT, Lead)
- Foundation Cluster Technologies For Living Environments (IT)
- University of Applied Sciences Chur (CH)

Funding:

The project is co-financed by the European Union (Alpine Region Preparatory Action Funds - ARPAF)

Start and closure dates:

January 2018 to June 2019

Project Outline:

Outdoor recreation in natural environments is becoming an important aspect of healthy living and a remedy against the deficiencies of urban life separated from nature. With its exceptional nature, cultural heritage, healthy climate and long tourism tradition, the Alpine region possesses significant prerequisites to benefit from this trend. However, to date there is no awareness of the unique health-promoting potential of the Alpine region. Major reasons for this lack of awareness are insufficient visibility and knowledge of health-promoting Alpine assets.

In contrast to the current, fragmented approaches towards the promotion of Alpine assets, the project HEALPS aims to develop a common basis for the positioning of the Alpine region as an attractive health-promoting place through data compilation,

generation and the visualisation of unique Alpine assets related to health. The project incorporates four different perspectives: Alpine resources, customers and providers as major stakeholders, education and technology.

This approach addresses EUSALP's strategy of a better utilisation of Alpine-specific resources and creates a basis for the development of Alpine health tourism value chains to drive job creation and growth in remote Alpine areas. In this way, it counteracts depopulation in these areas through new business opportunities and positions the Alpine region as healing environment for tourists and as an attractive environment for working and residing. The project covers six work packages.

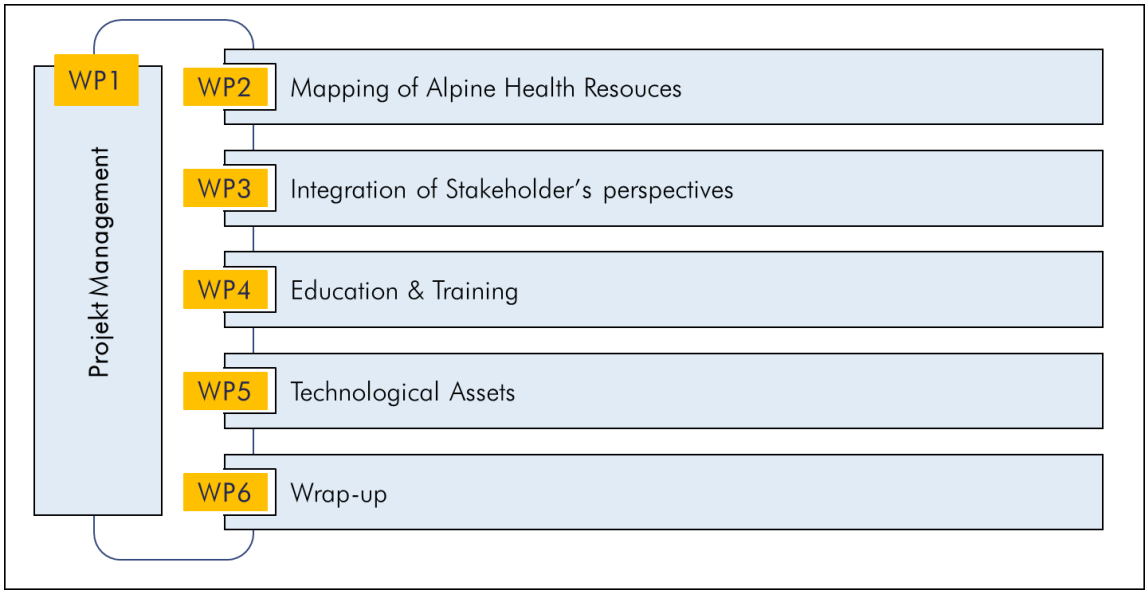

Figure 1: HEALPS work packages

1.2 Alpine Space Project HEALPS 2

Tourism is a major engine for job creation and a driving force for economic growth and development in the Alpine programme area. Yet alpine tourism is currently experiencing challenges such as climate change and is often only focussed on specific regions. Global trends such as a thirst for nature-based experiences and increased health consciousness hold considerable opportunities for developing innovative nature-based health tourism experiences. To fulfil this potential, the project will provide policy-makers, regional developers, Alpine regions and SMEs access to innovation knowledge and to implementation tools.

Building on the ARPAF project HEALPS, the aim is to improve framework conditions for utilising Alpine natural health resources by developing health tourism products and service chains. Lessons learnt from existing innovative, but fragmented cases will be elevated to a transnational level. Supported by the combination of the latest research results with digital solutions, the nature-based health tourism approach will be tested in pilot regions and the experiences then translated into relevant tools for Alpine regional development. By engaging quadruple helix stakeholders, cross fertilisation between tourism, health and other relevant sectors and co-learning is stimulated at transnational level. This shared knowledge at various scales facilitates framework conditions for value generation based on location-bound Alpine assets.

Recommendations for different policy levels as well as guidelines & implementation toolkits for product and service chain development reflect the purpose of a broad implementation of hands-on knowledge for the stimulation of SME- and destination driven innovation. Two international conferences on Alpine health tourism will allow transnational & transversal knowledge transfer from academia to regions and SMEs. Thus, the project contributes to the positioning of the Alpine Space as globally attractive health promoting place.

HEALPS2 lasts from October 2019 to June 2022 and is co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund through the Interreg Alpine Space programme (Total budget: 2.169.952,65€ - ERDF grant: 1.844.459,74€).

2 Introduction

2.1 Aim of the Analysis

The aim of this work package was the development of approaches to develop the educational system needed to meet the requirements of the providers of nature-based health tourism. With this first empirical evidence on skills and knowledge needs for future services in health tourism PP designed and moderated a stakeholder workshop with different stakeholders of the educational system, delivering the vocational trainings needed to implement the ideas for health tourism developed in this project.

2.2 Methodology

To explore the qualification needs in health tourism, in the beginning we started with a desk research on the educational systems in the participating countries of HEALPS. Therefore, information websites from the governmental institutions of Austria, Italy and Switzerland were searched. As well, experts for training and education of the EUSALP Action Group 3 (AG3) were interviewed.

To gain deeper insights of the qualification needs a qualitative research approach was chosen. A workshop setting with an additional semi-structured group interview (roundtable discussion) was developed. The participants of the workshop and discussion had been selected by a convenience sample of important stakeholders of health tourism in the canton of Grisons and the educational system on different educational levels.

Additionally, 2 short questions were added to the questionnaire of WP 3. The customers were asked about their desires concerning education and training in health tourism.

3 Qualification Needs in Health Tourism

3.1 Desk Research on Educational Systems

In the beginning of work package 4, a desk research on the educational systems of Austria, Italy and Switzerland was taken through. As shown in the figures 1 – 3 the three systems look quite similar in relation to Vocational Education and Training (VET). In dependence of the length and level of the secondary school, the apprenticeship takes between 2 and 5 years. However, on the regional level, especially in Italy, there are many differences in the implementation of VET, what would make the implementation of new specialized classes challenging.

While on the VET level our research did not show any results for integrated occupational profiles, on the higher education level there are different study programs available offering an interdisciplinary approach to management of health tourism providers. Those study programs, however, are rather on the management and strategic level than on the operational hands-on level. All systems offer different pathways, as well as, the possibility to get a university degree without visiting baccalaureate schools. Furthermore, lifelong learning courses and continuing education and training (CET) are established in all countries. The similarities of the education systems in the three countries would support the establishment of new occupational profiles. First, we need to be sure that there actually is a real need that would lead to new jobs requiring those specializations.

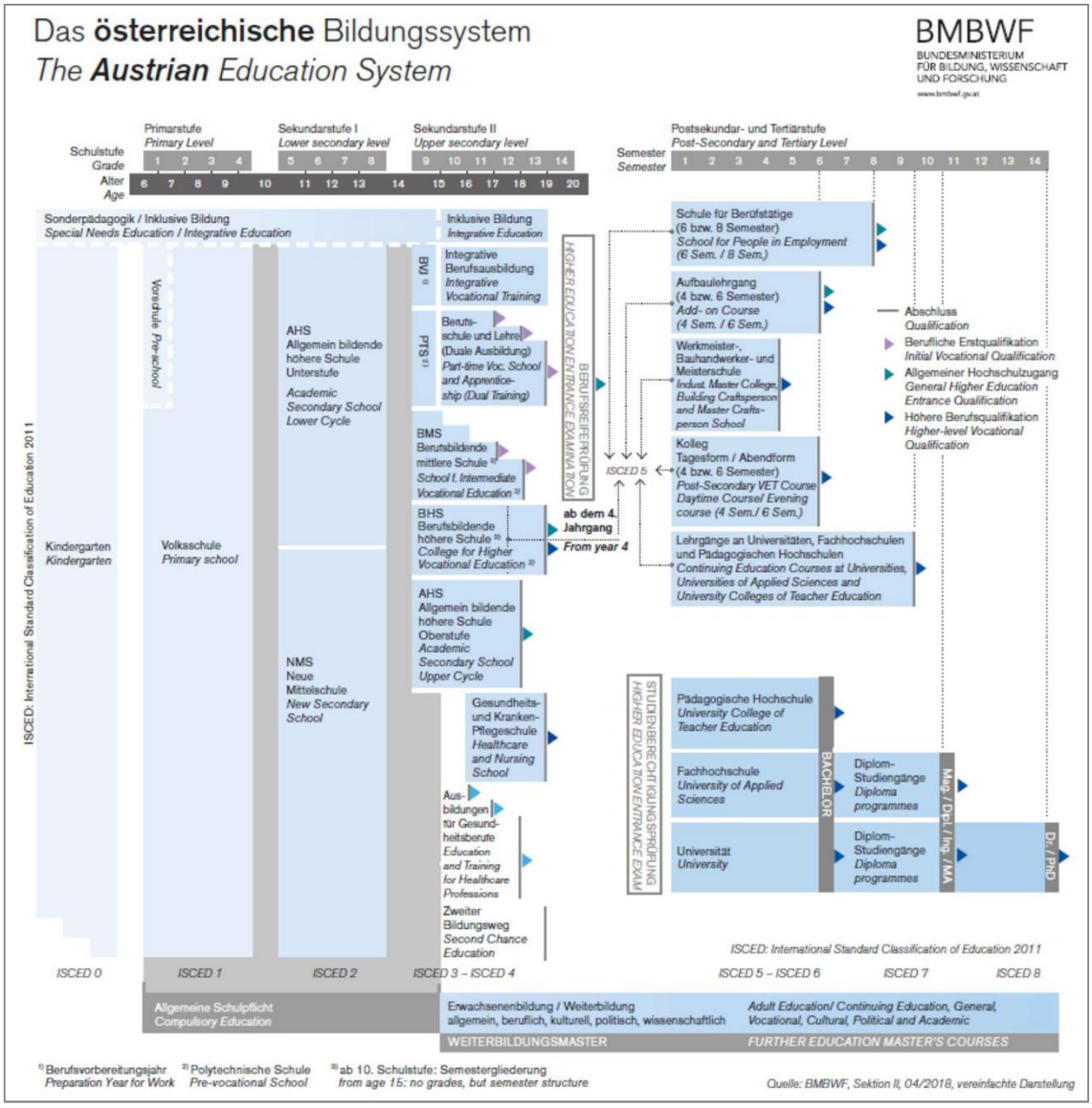

Figure 2: The Austrian Education System (Soucre: BMBWF, 2018)

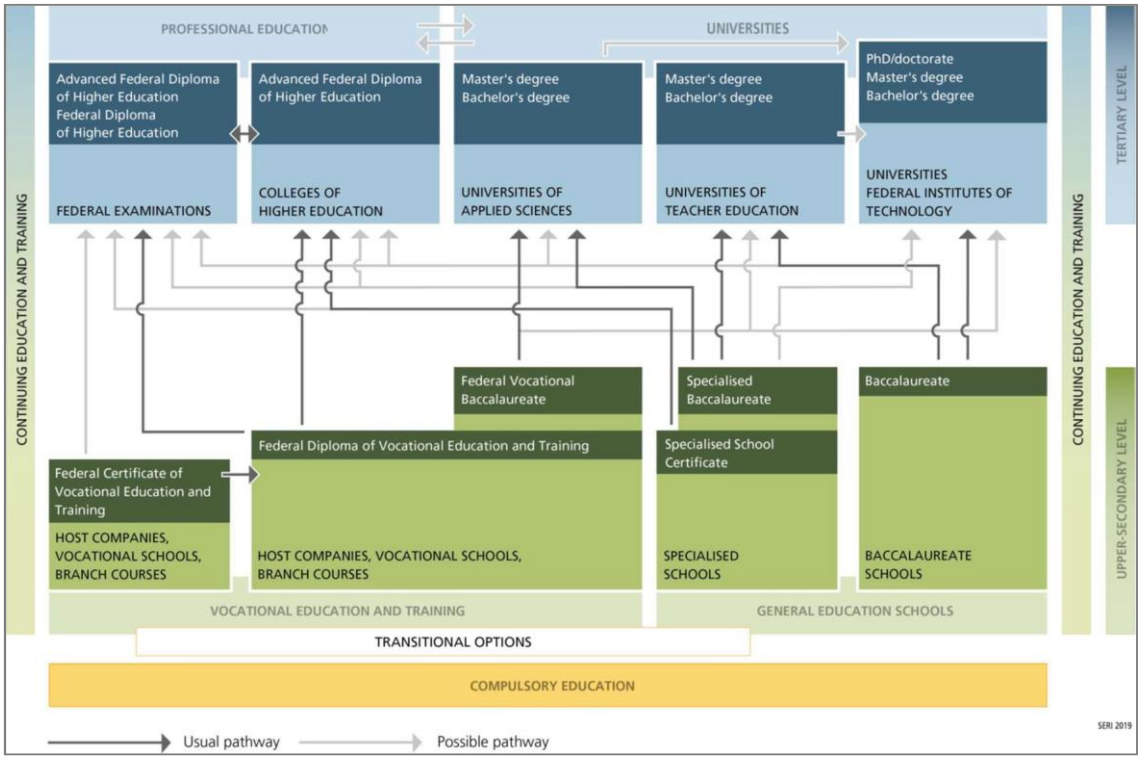

Figure 3: Swiss Education System (Soucre: SERI, 2019)

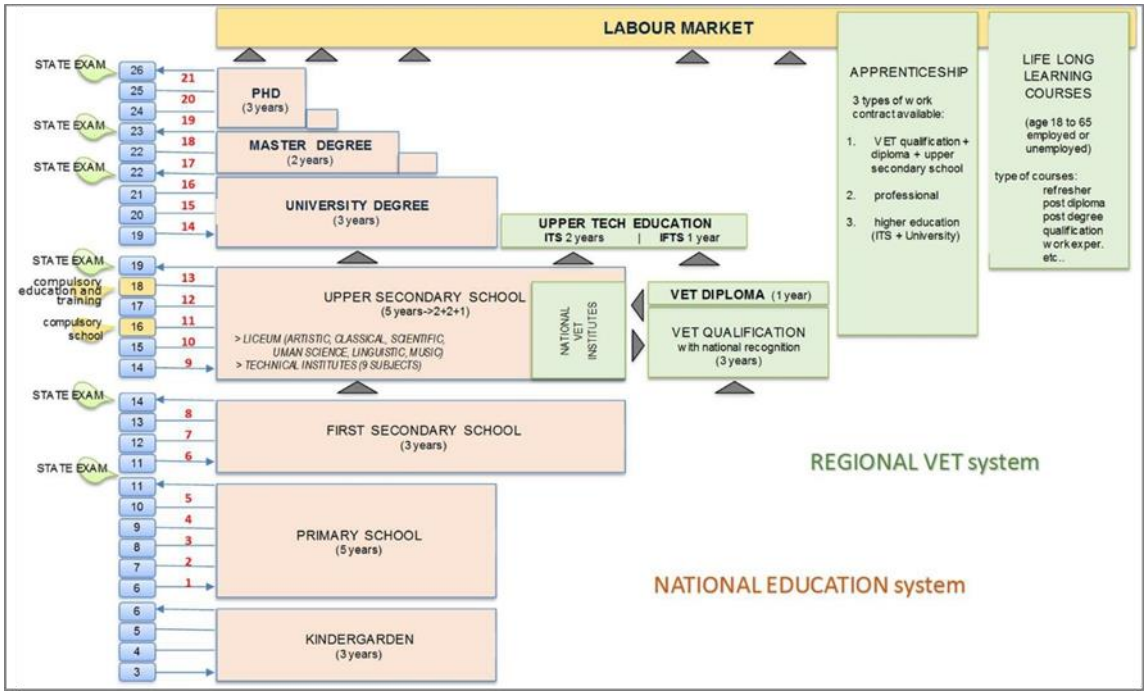

Figure 4: Italian Education System (Colinassi 2018, own source)

3.2 Interviews with AG3 Experts of Education Systems in Europe

Discussions with the EUSALP AG3 members showed that particularly in Italy there are major regional differences in the educational system. But, the output regarding the need for further vocational profiles would be valid also for Italy. Likewise, the EUSALP AG3 members point out, that the regulatory effort of the development of a new VET profiles is extremely high.

As a conclusion from roundtable discussion: Mingling of different professions is not required, service providers are seeking for experts in their field with brief insights of the other side, e.g., physiotherapists with experiences in tourism facilities. It is important to carefully distinguish between skills and competences provided by the VET and higher education programs on the one hand and on the other hand information about services in health tourism. Providers of course articulated the need for well-informed staff but do not agree upon the need for new VET programs in the dual education system.

3.3 Workshop and Roundtable Discussion on the Qualification Needs in Health Tourism Workshop Setting

To build a common understanding and basis for discussion in the beginning the group was divided into two groups with a similar composition. Two set cards of different destinations were created, Davos in the mountains of Grisons and Lugano at the lakeside in Ticino. Location-based key figures were presented, e.g.: height above sea level, air pollution indicators, length of hiking trails etc.

Based on the information of the set cards the participants were asked to develop different health tourism products in line with the natural alpine resources of the region. Afterwards the staff needed to offer these services, as well as, their qualification needs, were derived by each group.

In the end both groups presented their result and the roundtable discussion started with the following questions:

- Which qualifications are needed to offer nature-based alpine health services and products?
- Do we need integrated jobs profiles?
- Are these solutions sustainable and competitive?

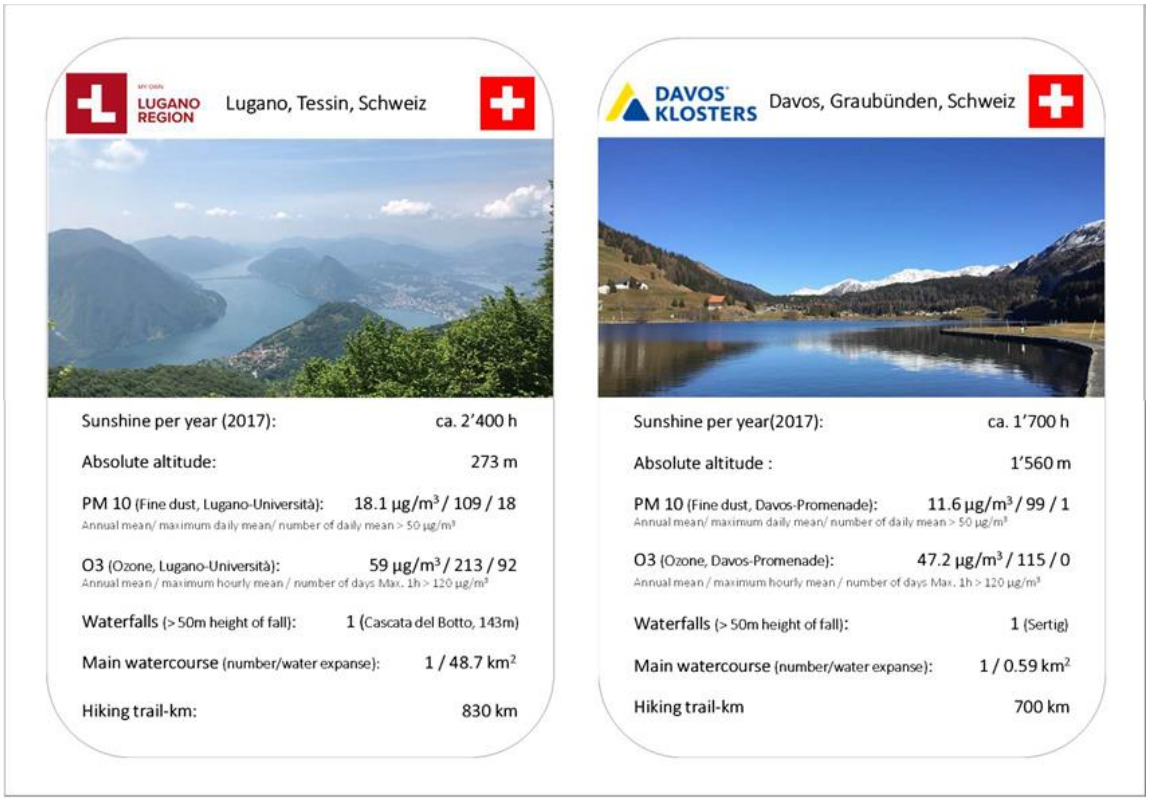

Figure 5. Workshop set cards of Davos and Lugano (own soucre, 2019)

3.4 Participants

Participants of the discussion had been selected by a convenience sample of important stakeholders of health tourism in the canton of Grisons and the educational system on different educational levels. All participants had been asked to do a short homework before attending the roundtable: What are you going to contribute to developing health tourism in the Grisons. Table 1 shows all participants and their individual future contributions to the development of evidence-based health tourism in the Canton of Grisons.

Table 1: Participants of Roundtable «Qualification Needs in Health Tourism" (own source).

Name, function and organisation/role	***Individual Contribution***
***Judith Fasser**, Spital St. Maria, Director, CEO*	*Link existing potential of the region as an offer for tourists*
***Seraina Hostettler**, Economic Development and Tourism Agency of the Canton of Grisons*	*Support of health tourism providers*
***Ulrike Kuhnhenn**, SSTH Swiss School of Tourism and Hospitality, Vice Chancellor*	*Develop and offer training programs and occupational profiles*
***Carmen Mathis**, Klinik Gut, Member oft he Board*	*Integration of the Klinik Gut project South Grisons*
***Dr. Katrin Schillo**, Swiss Institute for Entrepreneurship SIFE (HTW Chur), Senior Researcher, Projecleader HEALPS*	*Support in the innovation process from ideas to testing and business model development*
***Sandra Weder El Sammra**, Alpine Health Tourism Destination Davos*	*Contemporary, digital platform for linking service providers*
***Prof. Dr. Frank Bau**, Center for Business Studies (HTW Chur)*	*Nature-based strategic positioning for sustainable competitive advantages*
***Adrian Dinkelmann**, Economic Development and Tourism Agency of the Canton of Grisons, Head of Regional Development*	*Linking and networking of various activities in the canton as well as advice on funding opportunities*
***Philipp Gunzinger**, Governance Board Health Tourism for the Canton of Grisons*	*Support and advice to institutions in health tourism; development of tools and partnerships*
***Thim van der Laan jun.**, THIM, International University of Physiotherapy, Director*	*Network and knowledge in education, exercise and health*
***Dr. Rudolf Leuthold**, Public Health Department of the Canton of Grisons, Chief Officer*	*Appraisal of projects, granting and obtaining operating licenses*
***Prof. Dr. Jan Mosedale**, Institute for Tourism Research (HTW Chur)*	*Initiate projects in health tourism and develop products*
***Stefan Steiner**, Region Prättigau/Davos*	*Create and market concrete offers*

3.5 Findings

3.5.1 Clear need for further education and training in health tourism

The central issue of the discussion was to find out if there is a need for education and training in health tourism and if so in which manner this should be designed and offered and to whom. This work package was also closely connected to the activities of EUSALP Action Group 3 (adequacy of labor market, education and training).

The group of debaters very quickly came to the unanimous answer that the combination of health-related service and tourism services clearly require a new set of skills of the employees. With specific examples from the traditional tourism industry at the one end of the continuum and the public and private hospitals at the other end the field of health tourism is clearly underrepresented in any vocational training. Actually, there are some higher education study programs but no vocational trainings.

3.5.2 Too early for the integration of heath tourism as a specialized programme into the dual education system

The second unanimous result of the discussion was that health tourism is still a niche market and the number of students will probably remain too limited to justify the enormous time consuming efforts needed to design and establish an educational programme on health tourism in the dual education system. The debaters agreed upon the sense of such a programme but also agreed upon the fact that before the educational program, the markets must deliver the proof of concept and confirm the real needs for those professions on the labor markets.

3.5.3 Measures on the company level

While the participants agreed that, the market need for new interdisciplinary VET programs is not yet there, practitioners' experiences showed that there are different possible solutions on the company level. Professionals not only need to know each other but need to learn to think in both ways.

> More importantly, people need to learn to think differently. For example, nursing staff in a hospital does not think of guests but of patients. They are serving people who in many cases do not want to be there but would prefer to be healthy and home again. In tourism and hospitality, the opposite is the reality. One way to respond to that challenge is the establishment of mixed teams that create intrinsic motivation for learning, personal development and a better understanding for the development of health tourism in the Alps.

3.5.4 Implementation and qualification plan

The discussion has shown that the problems often do not lie in finding nature-based health products and services. These are developed easily. Rather, it is about the implementation and simultaneous training of employees. It is not enough to develop great products and services, in order to establish them sustainably on the market, the employees have to be prepared and trained for the new customers. The hotel industry is a sector with high cost pressure and seasonally changing staff. Therefore, for cost reasons, the training of employees is often omitted. However, if health tourism providers want to be successful with high-quality nature -based health products and services, they have to train their employees accordingly. Train-the-trainer concepts at the company or destination level can be a solution.

3.6 Findings from Customer Survey

In the customer survey, the following question about qualification needs was asked: How important are the following medical factors for you during a nature-based health holiday? 241 people answered as follows: “Personal aptitude of staff (appearance, communication skills, empathy)” and “Trained staff at all levels” were rated 97% as "very or somewhat important". "Certified medical and therapeutic expertise of staff" received 96% "very or somewhat important" votes. This result is not surprising, as all customers expect qualified personnel, especially when it comes to their own health.

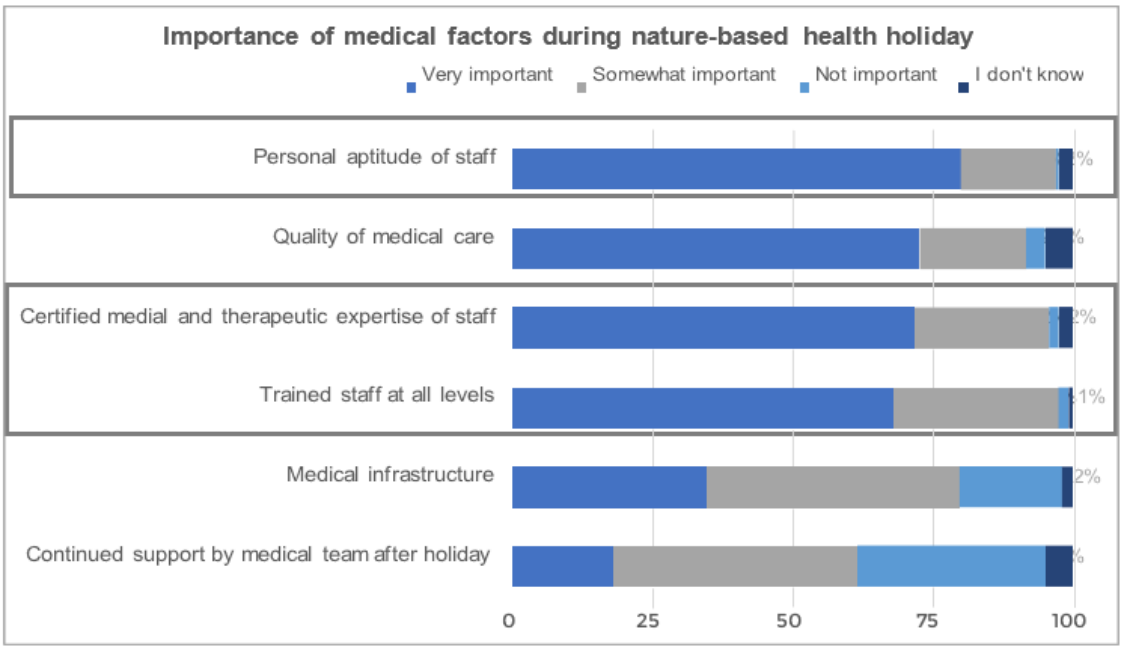

Figure 6: Customer Survey WP 3: Question 16 (own source, 2019)

4 Summary

Putting together the results of the Interviews, Roundtable discussion and survey the following conclusions regarding the qualification needs in health tourism can be derived:

1. There is a clear need for further education and training for providers of health tourism services.
2. However, health tourism is still a niche market and yet too small for the integration of a specialized health tourism education into the dual education system.
3. The qualification needs should be addressed on the company level by implementing the new services with mixed teams integrating professional experiences and education from both tourism and medical/therapeutic institutions.
4. Providers need to develop carefully an implementation and qualification plan. Product development by itself is not sufficient to create a deep understanding for health tourism in the company.

5 References

Bundesministerium für Bildung, Wissenschaft und Forschung (BMBWF) (2018): The Austrian Education System, URL: https://bildung.bmbwf.gv.at/schulen/bw/ueberblick/bildungswege2018_grafik.pdf?6g0eth

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