

## New online marketing/sales system for products from the Carinthian part of the *Salzburger Lungau und Kärntner Nockberge* Biosphere Reserve (Austria)

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### Abstract

Within the framework of the Interreg project *Balance for Nature and People (BANAP)*, the management of the Carinthian part of the *Salzburger Lungau & Kärntner Nockberge* Biosphere Reserve has developed an online Marketing/Sales/Distribution system for products from the Nockberge region. Regional producers are provided with a modern, future-proof distribution system in order to optimize internal ordering processes on the one hand, and to offer customers, both business and private, the possibility of ordering products online 24/7. In addition to the ordering option, customers can access more detailed information about the products, including availability.

### Profile

Protected area

Salzburger Lungau &

Kärntner Nockberge

Biosphere Reserve

Mountain range

Alpes, Austria

### Introduction

In 2018, the management of the Carinthian part of the *Salzburger Lungau & Kärntner Nockberge* Biosphere Reserve (BR) decided to submit the project *Balance for Nature and People (BANAP)* as a lead partner within the framework of the EU cooperation programme *Interreg V-A Slovenia-Austria*, which ran from 2019 to 2022. In addition to those from the Nockberge region, four other partners were involved in the project: the Institute for Nature Conservation of the Republic of Slovenia, *Naturschutzbund Steiermark* (Nature Protection Association of Styria), Business Agency Burgenland (which manages three nature parks), and the Slovenian municipality Črna na Koroškem (BANAP 2019).

The background to the cross-border project is the expected significant increase in temperatures due to climate change, which will have dramatic impacts on biodiversity affecting both the natural and the cultural landscapes. The latter especially form the basis for agriculture, tourism and society in the project regions.

The focus of the project was the common goal of preserving biodiversity in the project regions across national borders. The framework for it combined the national biodiversity strategies of the participating countries, Slovenia and Austria, which aim to preserve the diversity of plants, animals and habitats and to minimize the causes of their endangerment. Biodiversity is indispensable for sustainable agricultural production. Whether wild bees for pollinating crops, beneficial insects for controlling pests, a diverse soil fauna for maintaining soil fertility, or wild plants as a food source for beneficial organisms – all contribute to food production (Weissenbacher 2022).



Figure 1 – Some regional products from the Nockberge Region. © BSP Nockberge

The aim is that a series of pilot projects in the partner regions will all lead to achieving the common goal of the project. For example, the three nature parks in the south of the Austrian Federal Province of Burgenland worked in cooperation with the schools within the nature park on upgrading and valorizing meadow orchards, while the aim of the pilot action of the Slovenian Agency for Nature Conservation was to restore overgrown alpine and subalpine meadows on the Uršlja gora and Peca mountains by establishing appropriate management. In addition, the objective of an expansion of the environmental and educational programmes was to sensitize visitors to the protection and preservation of natural heritage. In turn, the Nature Protection Association of Styria aimed to develop nature conservation measures for neophyte-infested grassland in order to preserve the species-richness of these valuable areas. The goal of the partner activities of the municipality of Črna na Koroškem, situated in

the transboundary UNESCO Global Geopark Karawanken / Karavanke, was to establish a centre for the conservation of the natural and cultural heritage in the village of Koprivna, with a view to creating opportunities for educational, promotional and experiential projects in several domains (e.g. past rural life, peasant traditions, traditional crafts in agriculture, agricultural products). One specific project, under the title *Raziskujemo svet travnišč* (Exploring the meadow world), was the production of a 34-page bilingual manual for children and young people focusing on the grasslands in the Karawanken-Karavanke Geopark (Vernik et al. 2021).

One of the main results of the project was the creation of the *Handbook of the BANAP project* (Weissenbacher 2022), for which concrete measures were developed and evaluated on the basis of all pilot projects, and proposals for the conservation of biodiversity in the pilot regions and beyond were formulated. The handbook provides suggestions for how to plan biodiversity measures and offers ideas for disseminating them (Weissenbacher 2022).

### **Pilot project for a marketing/sales system for a BR partner network in the Nockberge region**

Agriculture and forestry are important branches of the economy in the Nockberge and shape the landscape and its inhabitants. Centuries of cultivation and grazing have contributed to the development of the typical and unique cultural landscape of the Nockberge. The preservation and development of mountain mowing and grazing are therefore important as the foundation for the preservation of biodiversity in the BR. An important goal, but at the same time also a major challenge for the BR management, is to keep the farms in the region alive while preserving the alpine pastures and mountain meadows that are characteristic of the area. Consequently, several measures (e.g. certificates for BR partner enterprises, marketing of farm products) have been taken in recent years to promote farms (Köck 2019, 2021). Although the BR management cooperates intensively with regional farms to market local products and to create networks between producers and tourism/gastronomy businesses, the cooperation between local producers and the BR management has not yet been consolidated. In fact, an overview of the situation in Austrian BRs indicates that successful regional networks between producers and catering businesses are still under-developed (Köck 2021).

The BR management was therefore confronted with the following questions, among others:

- How can local farmers continue to practise extensive agriculture in harmony with nature and thus make their valuable contribution to biodiversity in the Nockberge region without threatening their own livelihoods?

- Which producer-supporting measures are required in order to achieve significant added value for all?

The first step in this development process was the certification of BR partner enterprises. The aim of the BR management was to define quality criteria for regional products in a participative process that included many regional stakeholders and to award certificates to producers fulfilling these criteria (BRSL&KN 2018). This umbrella brand should quickly establish itself in the region and stand for regionality and quality. In addition, the BR management also supported the producers in sales and marketing, and in consultation with them developed activities that were tailored more closely both to the producers' own needs and to those of their clients.

To further develop the cooperation, the management initiated a discussion process, which has resulted in the creation of a modern online distribution system for BR products. With the approval of the BANAP project, the necessary financial means were finally available to explore the producers' needs more deeply, by means of a survey among the main businesses within the BR and several workshops. It became clear that the businesses need not only actual shop premises, but also an efficient online-based marketing/sales/distribution system in which orders, invoices/delivery notes and logistical processing are streamlined. Until now, businesses were faced with the challenge of many time-consuming processing steps, some of which had to be done twice, when handling orders. It was clear that a new automated sales system would make the ordering process much more customer-friendly, and an online marketing/sales/distribution system was developed in collaboration with an experienced IT company.

### **Online distribution system**

This system provides regional producers as well as consumers with a modern, future-proof online tool to process orders more easily and efficiently. The primary goal was a centralized data management system that integrated the desired functionalities, was user-friendly, and permitted ongoing further development. The system addresses the following stakeholder groups:

#### **Producers**

Producers can save a considerable amount of time by using the centralized online ordering system and can also offer customers the possibility of placing orders 24/7. Furthermore, the coordination of order deliveries should increase efficiency and thus save costs.

#### **Advantages**

- Allows a convenient possibility to sell products online;
- visibility and traceability as a producer from the region;

- raising awareness for regional products;
- cost-effective alternative to creating own solutions;
- clear and simple solution for managing orders (B2B and B2C).

#### Business to Business (B2B) customers

Historically, many orders from tourism and catering businesses have been placed by phone or email. Now, with the first phase of the new system (launched in October 2022), B2B orders can be placed online. In addition, delivery dates, availability and other important information are communicated to B2B customers on a daily basis.

#### Advantages

- 24/7 ordering possibility;
- information about availability and delivery times;
- reduction of delivery costs through better-coordinated delivery service.

#### Business to Customer (B2C) customers

Interested customers can already find occasional opportunities to buy regional products online. However, consumers currently lack a central platform on which a wide range of products is offered regionally or trans-regionally. In the second phase of the project, the online system will make it easier for B2C customers to buy an extensive range of regional products directly from their local producers. At the same time, awareness of sustainability and of a region's distinctiveness will be raised.

#### Advantages

- Locating regional products that are available;
- orders or pre-orders placed directly with the producer;
- delivery and / or pick-up service;
- raising awareness and appreciation of regional products.

An additional added value for users is the fact that the system is linked to the online stores of the project partners from Slovenia, Styria and Burgenland, and thus their local specialties can be purchased in the Nockberge region.

In order to increase acceptance and uptake of the distribution system, it is being promoted via the region's leading businesses and the media work of the BR management. Further information on the online distribution system can be found on the homepage of the Nockberge part of the *Salzburger Lungau & Kärntner Nockberge* BR (BRSL&KN 2022).

#### Conclusion

The new online distribution system provides regional producers with a tool for marketing their valuable products regionally and trans-regionally. In addition, cooperation between producers and regional

tourism / gastronomy / retailers is strengthened, allowing catering and other businesses to offer high-quality regional products. The project should not only raise local awareness of the uniqueness of their region and regional products, but also contribute to increasing the economic success of the farms. Only in this way can the cultivation of the alpine grasslands in the Nockberge and thus the preservation of biodiversity be secured in the long term.

In summary, through the stronger involvement of regional stakeholders, the BR management expects improved cooperation with producers and thus also hopes to ensure the long-lasting success of its measures both economically and ecologically.

Since the launch in October 2022 of the online platform, which is characterized by its ease of use, eight businesses, including all the leading enterprises in the BR, have registered as users, indicating that it is being accepted by producers, tourism and retailers. In this way, a regional economic cycle is being created, keeping the added value within the region.

This project is intended to serve as a best-practice example and is available to the other BANAP project partners for implementation. If successful, the distribution system could also be expanded beyond the region.

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