The story of the Fen-Rail
From the transportation of coal and ore to cycle tourism

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Ernst Miglbauer  I  invent Büro OÖ, Linz (Austria)

• Consulting in cycle-tourism since late 80s
• Projects  I  Expertises  I  Studies (Austria, Germany, Belgium, France)

• Key-competencies
  – Strategies
  – Product development
  – Marketing & Communication
  – Economic impact of cycling
  – Quality management

• Presentations, lectures and workshops in European Countries;

• Publications: travel magazines as scientific literature

• Passionate cyclist
Fen-Rail Cycle Route

**Facts**

Aachen – Troisvierges

- Route: former train track of the former Vennbahn
- Length: 125 kilometer
- Steepness: max. 2 %
- 3 countries
- 15 border crossings (5 exclaves)
- Opening: 2013
- Themes: railway, borders, landscape;

Touristic position

- High frequency ...
- ... has stimulated tourism business
- Several awards (Greenways Award 2013, Cycle Route of the Year 2014 – fietsenwandelbeurs etc.)
Aachen Rothe Erde – a pivot in the early industrialisation, with help from Luxembourg and Belgium

The rise and fall of the Monschau textile mills

Minette Region – Luxembourg, Lorraine;

Luxembourg - Minette ores and raw iron

The Fen Rail

(Fire and steam mark Raeren’s history)
Storytelling

Understanding

- Ancient cultural technique
- Since some years a „modern“ instrument of communication, marketing and social media in tourism;

Essential

- Dissemination of explicit and implicit knowledge (metaphors) by ...
- ... involvement of the audience (connectability, shareability)
- Authenticity and emotions
- Mediation: oral, visual and audio tools;

Structure

- Storyline (plot) – Substories (interlinking stories)
- Opening (setting, protagonists) > Rising action (conflicts) > Climax > Falling action > End

Storytelling in cycle tourism

- Some restrictions by focus on stage-cyclists (storyline ≠ cycle route A > B)
Fen-Rail Cycle Route - Storytelling

Elaboration and Preparation

- Formulation of key themes and potential storylines (plot)
- Interviews, research and workshops with locals, contemporary witnesses, experts and scientists; circular process;
- Definition of media of communication
- Writing and editing (incl. graphics, photos)
- Identification & commitment by local level
- Realising measures: infrastructure, web content;
Fen-Rail Cycle Route - Storytelling

Themes of the Storyline

The mutation of a vital nerve
• From the railtrack for hard coal, ores and row iron, commuters and tourists, to the route for cyclists;

The mutation of borders
• From drawing up new borders to their crossover and overcoming

The changing relationship between nature and man
• From the landuse by the rail to exploring of landscape by cyclists

14 Substories
Fen-Rail Cycle Route - Storytelling

Storyline - The Mutation of a Vital Nerve to a Cycle Route

Mid 19th century: Industrialisation Uk, Belgium, Germany; exchange of raw iron, iron ore, hard coal; the triumph of the railway starts on the continent (Belgium);

Mid 19th century: demand for a rail, above all the textile industry empire of Scheibler (Monschau)

1843: overcoming European borders - German Customs Union + Luxembourg

1850: Scheibler is leaving for Łódź

Enthusiasm and fear (“fire breathing steamhorse”)

1882: Decision by the Prussian government to build the “High Venn Bahn”;

1889: Fen rail operates on the whole length

From modest earnings (peat mining) to regular wages

Prospering market towns and villages

1890: “Golden Times”

1900-1914

1919: Track - Belgian territory on 35 kilometers (5 exclaves)

After 1920: Decline of the Fen Rail (changes in technologies and customs law)

1919: Track - Belgian territory on 35 kilometers (5 exclaves)

1944/45: Battle of the Bulge, devastation of viaducts by the Wehrmacht;

50s: Decline of passenger transports

After 1930: First steps of demolition

After 1980: Last freight trains

After 1990: First steps of joining protection of rail heritage & cycle routes

2001: Last tourism trains

2000: Opening of the Fen Rail cycle route

2012: Last tourism trains

2012: Opening of the Fen Rail cycle route

After 1990: First steps of joining protection of rail heritage & cycle routes

Emerging tourism towns and villages

1900: Emerging tourism towns and villages
By train, by stage coach or by bike - The appropriate mode of travelling

1889: competition between railway and stage coach on the Fen Rail – demonstration of the “new” dominance of fast transport by the rail; background: discussion of appropriate mode of travelling; some arguments of yore are back today by cyclists (“true” experience of landscapes, perception of flowers etc.);

• Essential: “Come back” of well known arguments in a long term historical view (acceleration of travelling and its slowing down by bike);

Viaduct of Born: Disappearance of its history from public consciousness

In 1916 the Fen-Rail was connected to the line Luxemburg – Spa by the viaduct at Born, named after Friedrich Freiherr von Korff, the last Prussian Landrat of the Malmedy District; after the First World War the plaque with his name was removed, after some decades the name “Korff” and its history disappeared from public consciousness, the “Korff viaduct” was no more than the “viaduct of Born”.

• Essential: On the elimination of physical elements (plaque) follows the disappearance of its history (sponsorship) from public consciousness;
Fen-Rail Cycle Route - Storytelling

Mediation and Education (1)

Information boards

• Teasers of substories

Website

• Storytrack
Guided Tours

- Local Guides (Example: Smuggling)

Vennbahn-Toure

**Mit dem Fahrrad zu legendären Schmuggler- und Grenzorten**

Grenzlandzauber einst und heute, Landschaft und regionale Spezialitäten genießen - Mützenich, Ruitzhof und Monschau


*Dauer*

8,0 Stunden (10:00 - 18:00), ohne Anrufe

*Länge*

22 Kilometer, davon zu etwa gleichen Teilen auf der Vennbahn und am Rurüfer-Radweg

*Ablauf*

10:00 h. Ankunft Vennbahn-Infotafel (ehemaliger Bahnhof Mützenich, 0,0 km) - Fahrt mit dem Rad zum Schmugglerdenkmal nach Mützenich (1,5 km) - Treffen mit Jaqueline Hupperts (Ortsvorsteherin) und Klaus Gehlen, Künstler, und einem ehemaligen Schmuggler > Einweihung in die Kunst des Schmuggelns der Nachkriegsjahrhunderte, Kaffeepause mit einer „Schwarzen Kats“ (legendärer Schmugglerkaffee) > Weiterfahrt auf der Vennbahn nach Ruitzhof, Treffen mit Ortsvorsteher Norbert Rader (11,0), Leben in einer deutschen Exklave im Wandel der Zeiten > Rückfahrt auf dem Rurüfer-Radweg nach Monschau (20,5 km) > Konzert eines erfolgreichen Abschluss der Radtour im Restaurant Senfmühle (22:00), 1/7/00.

*An-/Abfahrten*

Guided Tours

- Tour operator
  (example: www.velosophie.lu)
Measures still to realise in years to come (focus on soft skills and social media):

- Involvement of players with focus on visitor education (incoming agencies - eifel naturetreisen etc., national parks etc.);

- … training members of staff in hotels, tourist information service etc. in information competence and advice of guests;

- Social Media: Apps, Instagram etc.
Thanks for your attention!