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»THE BUSINESS MODEL OF THE HEART OF SLOVENIA«
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Abstract

In this abstract, we will present the inception and content of The Heart of Slovenia business model; take a look at its key attributes, elements and the connections between them. We will particularly emphasize the content of The Heart of Slovenia, which we cover through three main content pillars: our environment, entrepreneurship and tourism. The framework of the brand, infrastructure and organization are enabled by the manifestation of the prescribed content for The Heart of Slovenia.

The coordinator of all The Heart of Slovenia business model structures is the Development Centre Litija (Center za razvoj Litija), which is also the founder and the owner of the brand The Heart of Slovenia. RCL continues to develop this brand and sub-regional area through different local, regional and international projects. Through developmental partnership, Development Centre Litija creates spreading of positive energy through conscious of identification of the local people. Through networking and upgrading the contents the area reaches better recognition and added (also social) value under uniform brand of The Heart of Slovenia.

1. CONTENT THE HEART OF SLOVENIA

The content of The Heart of Slovenia is designed in such a way, that it assists in optimally and sustainably developing the crucial capabilities of the area in such a way, that its natural and cultural resources create added value and that quality of life is assured.

Under this umbrella brand different individual projects are successfully developed and implemented. With broader networking under common brand, new ideas are born and new projects arise.

Through the process, the pillars of The Heart of Slovenia have been crystallized and content wise, they are quite substantive. They contain well defined goals, tangible projects and measurable results. Through its operations, the brand covers three crucial areas: **our environment, entrepreneurship and tourism**. What drives the entire operation is the desire to increase the creative potential of the area and its quality of life. The levers which ensure the sustainable development of areas, are development partnerships, innovative approaches and the comprehensive development of the individual. The key guiding principle is development, which we execute through the aforementioned content pillars.

A very important area is so called "**our environment**" which focus are the residents of the area. Thus our environment comprises work with schools, co-operation with non-governmental organisations, strengthening of local self-provision and the field of environment protection.

Development Centre Litija in co-operation with the society Geoss founded a regional **NVO focus** of The Heart of Slovenia. We thus assure strengthening of non-governmental sector for assuming the execution of development tasks on our area, new jobs, a civil dialog. 120 societies have already joined, being offered free service, training, assistance at applications for public tenders and promotion. Parallely, via focus i.e. One Stop Shops for societies, recognition of the brand and area of The Heart of Slovenia has been spread.

We are well aware of the significance of the **sustainable local self-provision**. Jarina, Co-operatives for the development of the countryside thus, connects local producers and consumers and ensures provision of healthy food produced in programme of business gifts. The network of bidders included bee-keepers, producers of art craft, herbalists, meat processing producers and cheese producers. This year a network, which successfully works, supplies with local products almost 40 public institutions (schools and kindergartens) in The Heart of Slovenia.

The content areas, as defined within the three pillars of The Heart of Slovenia also manifest themselves through the activity of the projects awarded and co-financed by the European Union. Environment protection is one of the vital elements of the green and sustainable tourism, therefore we are running the project "**CO2NeuTrAlp**" intended to the field of sustainable mobility. Pilot activities are being carried out to reduce exhausts, mostly for daily migrants (workers, students) to Ljubljana. We elaborated the concept of mobility for communes, web site www.deliva.si, common timetables for public transport; we have been co-operating with schools by making them aware of this problem.

Institution **Razvojna fundacija Pogum** (Development institution Courage) was established in 2009. Its activity is focused on support of young people for creative breakthrough on the area of The Heart of Slovenia, which is one of the most important areas under the pillar of our environment.

Second pillar of The Heart of Slovenia is **entrepreneurship** with the objective to uprise the competitive advantage of the area of The Heart of Slovenia, acquisition of capital for execution of tourist and other projects, entrepreneurial breakthrough of the countryside and connection of educational processes with entrepreneurial challenges in the environment of The Heart of Slovenia. In the field of entrepreneurship and within the frame of The Heart of Slovenia we have been trying to develop the environment responding to global trends and needs of local entrepreneurship.

We have founded **One Stop Shops** – all on one spot for potential and existing entrepreneurs in Litija, Grosuplje and Domžale where they can acquire information, advice at public calls for tenders; they can get training and they can register the enterprise. Indirectly we help to open new jobs with our services (670). We have enabled formal start of independent entrepreneurial path to 420 entrepreneurs. We help the jobless people to prepare business plans and to register activity. 3900 entrepreneurs joined our training programmes; they acquired 3,2 million euros for development projects. We have been expanding the entrepreneurial climate to primary and secondary school pupils as 820 pupils have already joined the entrepreneurial circles and the Inco junior workshop.

In the area of entrepreneurship, the establishment of the **Local Action Group The Heart of Slovenia** as public-private partnership with consortium contract in the year 2007 was important to execute the Leader programme. 28 partners from public, private and civil sector joined it. We activate the population for entrepreneurial challenges and by so far supporting 44 projects, we help the local holders to develop and realise the entrepreneurial ideas. Three club's places have been renovated, 74 promotion materials were issued, 7 tourist points have been equipped, 602 participants were trained, 65 farms were included into the system of local self-provision, 10 complementary activities on farms were registered etc. Simultaneously awareness and knowledge of local residents about acquisition of European funds have been improved.

Tourism represents integral part of the complete development of the area. Being connected and upgraded in the content under the uniform brand, the included participants reach higher recognition on the market and higher added value which is also valid for tourist bidders. The brand The Heart of Slovenia represents the central part of Slovenia which, being a special

destination within the state, offers the place of pleasant staying and experiencing staying rooted in memory. Due to variety and presence of hearty people, this territory enables to perceive the genuine pulse of the Slovenian soul. The brand in its origin tries to create added value and awareness of the territory itself, as well as the products, events and people being a part of it.

The project "**Listen to the voice of villages**" is being carried out on 3 pilot areas, Velika planina, Jablaniška planina and Dole pri Litiji (Dole at Litija – charcoal country). Activities are run to improve competitiveness and attraction of these marginal areas which have unexploited potentials in the field of tourism. The stress is on implementation of development aimed pilot activities and launching of a new management scheme. Great attention is paid to communication and tourist promotion of the areas under the cover brand of The Heart of Slovenia.

In the area of tourism, the Strategy of Development and Marketing of The Heart of Slovenia as a tourist destination has been developed. It was established on the basis of the meetings and workshops held with key providers of tourist services in The Heart of Slovenia area, with the goal, that we come to agreement on the development direction of this area.

2. THE HEART OF SLOVENIA BRAND – DYNAMIC STRUCTURE

For the functioning of the content inside the pillars, a framework is needed, some type of envelope, which in our case is The Heart of Slovenia brand. It is set up as a dynamic structure, which enables all shareholders to adjust their content relative to the needs and potential opportunities presented to them in comprehensive and coordinated fashion.

The Heart of Slovenia geographically connects the area in the shape of the heart with geometric centre of Slovenia GEOSS as the focal point, aiming at development of partnership co-operation and connection of individual participants. In this way it wants to arouse the creative potential of the space, as well as the quality of staying in it. Geographically The Heart of Slovenia covers the area of the central Slovenia easterly of the capital city Ljubljana, i.e. the communes of **Kamnik, Domžale, Komenda, Trzin, Mengeš, Dol pri Ljubljani, Moravče, Lukovica, Litija, Šentrupert, Šmartno pri Litiji, Ivančna gorica, Zagorje ob Savi, Trbovlje, Hrastnik and Radeče.**

The development of the brand The Heart of Slovenia wasn't strategically planned. It happened spontaneously, heartily, at the recognised challenges and opportunities which the central geographic space of Slovenia has been opening. The Heart of Slovenia is the result of evolution, intuition and visionariness of individuals, the brand itself, however, has been launched in 2008 in the Natural Health Park Tunjice which is one of the development partners of the brand.

The Heart of Slovenia is the brand connecting projects, events, initiatives and products, where the key element is connecting people who live and create in this area. In this sense the brand The Heart of Slovenia is a social innovation, its main focus being horizontal connection of the area.

Essentially the brand considers the rational (geographic area), as well as also the emotional component (personal involvement in the pace of happening). At the same time the brand lives on two levels, i.e. on geographic and content level. The first level is mainly related to the delineated area, whereas the content one mainly touches criteria and brand holders.

In the context of the complete brand The Heart of Slovenia image is its **logotype**. On visual level it acts as guaranty that the holder of the sign is formally included among the contents of The Heart of Slovenia. The basic rules for the logotype holders and consequently co-creators

of the brand The Heart of Slovenia is the required appearance (complete graphic image) and putting forward the geographic notion of The Heart of Slovenia for the events and contents complying with the mission of the brand The Heart of Slovenia. The basic recognition elements of the brand The Heart of Slovenia thus are its sign and logotype.

"The Heart of Slovenia" is word relation which together with the pictorial figure clearly defines the geographic origin and at the same time commitment to the brand. The word relation and the figure radiate positive energy representing (establishing) well-being and mutual connection. The logotype of The Heart of Slovenia thus communicates itself the content and value of the brand.

3. INFRASTRUCTURE

A crucial element of The Heart of Slovenia business model is additionally the infrastructure, which covers those elements, which are of crucial importance for the sustainable development of the content and the enforcement of the rules for The Heart of Slovenia brand that were agreed upon collectively.

The infrastructure enables the manifestation of the outlined content of the brand and is composed of the development vision and work conditions; knowledge, wisdom and social capital, as well as material and financial sources.

Mission of the brand The Heart of Slovenia is to develop a place where I'm fond of living, where I am able to create and self-realise and having a quality life at the same time. Its mission represents a hearty networking of potentials within the geographically rounded area, with the target to strengthen the quality staying and development of the mutual identity. Its **values** are heartiness, quality, uniqueness and networking. The basic focal point is therefore socially responsible, due to the brand conception which provides the development of the particular geographic area of Slovenia. The elementary purpose of the brand The Heart of Slovenia, thus could be a simple direction to returning toward the fundamental values of society and consequently to its well-being.

A knowledge based company, as a model of the successes of modern society and a global way of doing things is the basis for development. Considerable emphasis is on education, seminars and the training of shareholders, which make up the local environment. Through connecting and networking, individuals have an easier time finding someone to speak with and find partners for innovative, different ideas. The awareness of the importance of wisdom and the transfer of the value system, as well as the connection between the present, past and future, brings added value in creating. With this goal in mind, the constant search for patterns from the past and present and the tracking of the sustainable continuity through the development of The Heart of Slovenia brand continues.

The brand as such aims at involving all the participants, considering the principles of the activity, into the further development of the brand The Heart of Slovenia and simultaneously providing that all activities and contents should strengthen the social capital.

Material and financial sources are an important factor in the realization of the prescribed content of The Heart of Slovenia brand. Development Centre Litija successfully launches supporting programmes co-financed by European, national and local grants, into the area. To execute supporting programmes we can organise ourselves appropriately and timely. Some key development programmes, indicating our path and future, have been implemented and are being implemented in the area.

4. ORGANISATION

From an organizational perspective the tasks manifest themselves on three levels: the executive, tactical and operational. For the structure described to fully come alive and function, all of them are needed.

On the **executive level** of The Heart of Slovenia, the mayors of the Development Partnership of the Centre of Slovenia cooperate. The brand The Heart of Slovenia has been recognised as common identity by Development Partnership of the Centre of Slovenia, which has been active since 2006. The Heart of Slovenia thus also formally connects 10 communes: Kamnik, Lukovica, Moravče, Litija, Šmartno pri Litiji, Dol pri Ljubljani, Zagorje, Radeče, Domžale and Mengeš. This year, two additional municipalities are joining (Šentrupert and Ivančna Gorica).

On the basis of adopted annual work programmes for building up and strengthening of the identity of the area of The Heart of Slovenia, we have been carrying out activities for the further development of the brand (interdisciplinary approach) for increasing the number of participants (systematic field work), communication activities and event management (communication plan). In 2009 Development Centre Litija founded a project office to manage the brand The Heart of Slovenia to optimize work and to strengthen efficiency and it has formed a work group which by its project approach realizes the set objectives.

On the **tactical level**, we enquire about the needs in the field, build upon them and convert them into tangible projects. We are successful at connecting different sectors of the economy, with which we develop different program content by including key people from the areas of tourism, entrepreneurship and the non-governmental (NGO) sector.

We are aware that the biggest challenges in connection with future economic development lie in the creativity, innovativeness, education and training, as well as the ways that we cooperate. The competent expert team of the Development Centre Litija has the competence to execute on the operational level, in particular in realising soft projects. With its openness to connecting, it has the advantage of industry sectors cooperating with one another. On the tactical level, we cooperate with a group of municipality coordinators, for which we organise expert consultations. The expert-management council of The Heart of Slovenia brand has also been operating successfully, made up of interdisciplinary experts and managing The Heart of Slovenia Brand.

On the **operational level**, it is of crucial importance to include the greatest amount of groups and representatives of The Heart of Slovenia in crucial projects. Development Centre Litija is recognised and wanted partner in European project networks. Within the harmonised development of the area The Heart of Slovenia more than 100 related projects were implemented which help to realise the development strategy of the area.

For regional development, communication and cooperation are of ultimate importance on the operational level. In this way, a critical mass is created in terms of interest, people and capital. In the past, it was an accepted rule that one could plan anything; however today we know that it is better to communicate, cooperate, create the vision, direction, quality standards and encourage people to think about what's best for them. For the communication of the development projects, the identity of The Heart of Slovenia area is utilised with the goal of increasing the recognition of the area. The goal of communication is to inform the public about The Heart of Slovenia brand in this fashion and include residents to create stories, as well as establish closer contact with selected targeted members of the public. With our brand communications, we follow the communications plan, which covers the activities of reporting and encompasses general goals, as well as the direction given in the Guidelines for the Management of The Heart of Slovenia brand.

The coordinator of all the structures of The Heart of Slovenia business model is the Development Centre Litija, which is also the manager and owner of the brand The Heart of Slovenia. Development Centre Litija was founded by the Commune of Litija in 2000 as

motivator of entrepreneurial environment on local level. We are recognised today as coordinator of development projects in the area of mutually linked communes; with our projects we successfully enter the wider regional and European environment. We have been launching innovative recognitions as added value into educational, economic and local fields and we have been interconnecting them. In this way, by our work, we develop environment to be open for new development challenges.

Our goal is the transfer of experiences, best practices and knowledge through various tools: working in the field, workshops, meetings, individual work, communication through media, organisation of events, taking part in conferences, etc.

The understanding and management of the comprehensive model is of crucial importance to the development of The Heart of Slovenia brand, as with this its influence on the local, regional and national level is increased. What sets us apart, is the fact that we know how to recognise the needs in the field and how to set up support environments for the acceptance of new challenges. We are aware of the importance of connecting and developing the public, private and the civil sector and we wish to develop stories which include, improve and connect.