

## CAPABILITY OF E-BIKE TOURISM IN SWITZERLAND

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Synopsis:

This paper examines the standing and the potential of e-bike tourism in Switzerland. The results show a pleasant level of infrastructure and products and point at an increasing demand for touristic e-bike offers in the future.

Abstract:

### AIM OF PAPER AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The primary aim of this investigation was to examine, if tourism in Switzerland can be stimulated by focusing on e-bike offers. Switzerland is an attractive and manifold country for bike tourism. However, there are plenty of hilly and steep areas, where the topography is quite demanding and cycling is predestined to ambitious sportsperson. Less performance-oriented bike tourists are possibly discouraged by the challenges of the landscape. E-bikes seem to be a reasonable alternative to enable less trained person to attend bike tours in steeper regions as well as to keep heterogeneous groups together. E-bikes are already popular in Switzerland for daily routes as the journey to work, but they are not very common in the touristic context. The presented investigation evaluates the current standing of supply and demand for e-bike tourism and asks for opportunities and threats in the future development.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The existing frameworks to analyse capability in the field of sport tourism are limited, because of the broad variation of sports and tourism types. Still several conceptions are valuable to evaluate the opportunities of e-bike tourism in Switzerland. According to Higham and Hinch (2009) the potential of touristic products and destinations always depends on the interaction among the factors place, people and activity. Standeven and de Knop (1999) support this position by identifying the experience of place as a key component of the sport tourism experience. Bull (2005) assumes that place not only affects experience. In his opinion, the specific spatially located resources are even crucial for the existence of nature sports. He identifies four factors determining the attraction of touristic products or destination, as physical characteristics, accessibility and

infrastructural arrangements, political and economic resources as well as cultural and perceptual aspects.

Concerning the demand side (people) the contemporary research is guided by an individual psychological focus delivering mainly results about motives and the decision making process (e.g. Görtz & Hürten, 2011).

#### RESEARCH DESIGN AND DATA ANALYSIS

The presented study is based on a between method triangulation, consisting of qualitative interviews with important stake-holders on the supply side and a cross sectional survey on the demand side. Qualitative interviews were conducted with the first provider of touristic e-bike routes and with the manager of the leading e-bike rental company in Switzerland. The interviews were evaluated by qualitative content analysis according to Mayring (2008). The survey covered a randomized sample of 748 adult persons and focused on interests and needs of potential consumers. The concluding potentials analysis combined the results of the interviews and the survey with the findings of literature research. As central outcome the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats were evaluated and presented by SWOT-analysis.

#### RESULTS

Results showed that the development of e-bike tourism in Switzerland was not initiated by tourism promoter, but by an innovative e-bike producer. However, also for the manufacturer the fit between landscape (place), product (activity) and visitors (people) was the crucial criterion. The first e-bike tours were offered in a demanding and rural region, in order that the experience of place was able to promote a positive overall experience. Due to the success of the first touristic e-bike products, several tourism regions started to extend their portfolio with e-bike offers. To date a nationwide network for signalised e-bike tours, rental stations and changing stations for rechargeable batteries is established. Despite the attractive offer, the demand is only moderate. The obtained results of the consumer survey pointed at a certain barrier to use e-bikes for tourism activities. The most substantial barrier is the missing affinity for bike tourism in general. Another notable group considering themselves as "fit enough for normal bike tourism". Nevertheless 55% of the respondent are interested in tour-istic e-bike products. Looking only at people with e-bike tourism experience, even 92% are interested in further activities.

#### DISCUSSION AN CONCLUSION

The current study findings are encouraging because they suggest a superior suitability and an attractive level of e-bike tourism products in Switzerland. The results of the consumer survey indicate an increasing demand for e-bike tourism. The investigation also points at some risks, as the rivalry for bike tourism or the raised safety hazard because of the increased driving speed. Summing up, the results support the conclusion, that e-bike tourism will become more important in the com-ing years. However, to reach the goal relevant trends as the requirement for customised offers must be considered and marketing activities are supposed to be extended.

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