Genomic and Functional Characterization of the Unusual pLOCK 0919 Plasmid Harboring the *spaCBA* Pili Cluster in *Lactobacillus casei* LOCK 0919

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ABSTRACT

Here, we report the extensive bioinformatic and functional analyses of the unusual pLOCK 0919, a plasmid originating from the probiotic Lactobacillus (L.) casei LOCK 0919 strain. This plasmid is atypical because it harbors the *spaCBA-srtC* gene cluster encoding SpaCBA pili. We show that all other *spaCBA-srtC* sequences of the *Lactobacillus* genus that have been previously described and deposited in GenBank are present in the chromosomal DNA. Another important observation for pLOCK 0919 is that the spaCBA-srtC gene cluster and its surrounding genes are highly similar to the respective DNA region that is present in the most well-known and active SpaCBA pili producer, the probiotic L. rhamnosus GG strain. Our results demonstrate that the spaCBA-srtC clusters of pLOCK 0919 and L. rhamnosus GG are genealogically similar, located in DNA regions that are rich in transposase genes and are poorly conserved among the publicly available sequences of Lactobacillus sp. In contrast to chromosomally-localized pilus gene clusters from L. casei and L. paracasei, the plasmidic spaC of L. casei LOCK 0919 is expressed and undergoes a slight glucose-induced repression. Moreover, results of series of in vitro tests demonstrate that L. casei LOCK 0919 has an adhesion potential, which is largely determined by the presence of the pLOCK 0919 plasmid. In particular, the plasmid occurrence positively influenced the hydrophobicity and aggregation abilities of L. casei LOCK 0919. Moreover, in vivo studies indicate that among the three Lactobacillus strains used to colonize the gastrointestinal tract of germ-free (GF) mice, already after two days of colonization, L. casei LOCK 0919 became the dominant strain and persisted there for at least 48 days.

Keywords: adhesion, *spaCBA* pilus cluster, *Lactobacillus*, plasmid, *in silico* analyses, probiotic properties

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INTRODUCTION

The Gram-positive lactobacilli are commensal inhabitants of the gastrointestinal (GI) tract and based on their health-promoting effects on human and animal hosts, these bacteria are commonly marketed as probiotics (Felis & Dellaglio 2007; Bernardeau et al. 2006; Saxelin et al. 2005). One postulated feature that is considered indispensable for probiotic lactobacilli by the FAO/WHO (2006) guidelines for the evaluation of probiotics for human food applications, is their adherence to human intestinal tissues. Bacterial adhesion to the host GI tract may promote a variety of specific interactions with the host in terms of colonization, persistence and potential signaling (Lebeer et al. 2008; Mack et al. 2003; Vesterlund et al. 2006). Probiotic bacteria by adhering to the host gastrointestinal epithelium may influence the indigenous microorganisms, enhance the intestinal epithelial barrier, stimulate the host's immune system, prevent infections of pathogens (Jankowska et al. 2008; Lim & Ahn 2012). It is postulated that highly adhesive bacteria have the greatest beneficial effects on the host's health (Liu et al. 2010). Extracellular matrix (ECM) components important for the adherence of lactobacilli include exopolysaccharides, teichoic acids, mucins and surface proteins such as the S-layer and LPXTG-like proteins (Lebeer et al. 2008). Among them, a major driver of adhesion to the intestinal mucosa and biofilm formation are the mucus-binding pili as those encoded by the spaCBA-srtC gene cluster in L. rhamnosus GG (Kankainen et al. 2009; Reunanen et al. 2012; von Ossowski et al. 2010). These pili are protein fibers that consist of multimers of SpaA covered by the mucus-binding protein SpaC and covalently linked to the bacterial peptidoglycan via SpaB (Reunanen et al. 2012). In lactobacilli, the genes encoding the 3 pilin subunits (SpaCBA) and the pilin-specific sortase (SrtC) are always present at the same chromosomal locus as a gene cluster. To date, comparative genome analyses have shown that L. rhamnosus, L. casei and L. paracasei genomes are highly related (Kant et al. 2011), as supported also by examinations of their spaCBA-srtC gene clusters (Douillard et al. 2013a).

However, regarding the presence of SpaCBA pilus structures in L. rhamnosus and L. casei strains assessed by immunoblotting analysis, electron microscopy, and mucus-binding assays, only L. rhamnosus strains display functional pili that correlate with their mucus-binding abilities. The data in the literature indicate that L. rhamnosus strains remain piliated under different stress conditions, and in contrast, no expression of pili genes in L. casei has been observed under the tested conditions (Douillard et al. 2013a; Douillard et al. 2013b). The identification of the transcriptional start site of the spaCBA-strC operon suggested that its expression is triggered by the insertion of an insertion sequence (IS) element in the L. rhamnosus strains, in contrast to the L. casei strains. The transposition of an IS element upstream of the spaC gene appeared to have a significant impact on the evolution of L. rhamnosus species by conferring a beneficial trait that permitted colonization and persistence in mucosal-associated niches such as the human gastrointestinal tract (Douillard et al. 2013a). The DNA sequence of pLOCK 0919 plasmid that harbors the spaCBA-srtC operon was reported by us elsewhere (Koryszewska-Bagińska et al. 2013). Here, based on in silico analyses, we provide the extended data on the nucleotide sequence of this unusual pLOCK 0919, a plasmid originating from the probiotic L. casei LOCK 0919 strain (Cukrowska et al. 2009; Cukrowska et al. 2010; Kozakova et al. 2015), with a particular focus on the plasmidic spaCBA*srtC* pilus gene cluster. We found, that in contrast to the chromosomal localization of the other lactobacilli pilus clusters described to date, one copy of the spaCBA-srtC operon of L. casei LOCK 0919 is plasmid-localized. Moreover, the results of the comparative analyses indicated that a DNA region containing the spaCBA-srtC cluster from pLOCK 0919 might be more related to that of L. rhamnosus GG than to that of the highly conserved, albeit likely nonfunctional, spaCBA-srtC of L. casei and L. paracasei. In addition to above-mentioned in silico analyses, we also provide results of the *in vitro* and *in vivo* studies confirming that L. casei LOCK 0919 is a highly adhesive strain and this feature might be indeed plasmid-localized.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Data collection and phylogenetic and sequence analysis. Hypothetical protein sequences were analyzed using the HHpred program (Hildebrand et al. 2009). Protein sequences of SpaABC and the SrtC sortase were collected using pLOCK 0919 as the query in the PSI-BLAST program with default parameters (Altschul et al. 1997). The analysis was limited to the genus *Lactobacillus*. The collected protein sequences were analyzed using CLANS, a tool that enables the clustering and visualization of sequence similarities, with default parameters (Frickey & Lupas 2004).

The *spaCBA-srtC* nucleotide sequences were retrieved from GenBank (http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov) by performing BLAST searches (Altschul et al. 1990) using the pilus cluster from pLOCK 0919 as a reference. A graphical representation of BLAST sequence comparison of pLOCK 0919 with other plasmids and trimmed chromosomes was developed using the Circos package v0.64 (Krzywinski et al. 2009). The local, shared syntenies of the *spaCBA-srtC* clusters and genes in terms of overlapping DNA regions were determined and visualized using the Easyfig tool (Sullivan et al. 2011).

Multiple DNA sequence alignments of the trimmed *spaCBA-srtC* clusters at the *spaC* ATG start codon and the *srtC* TAA stop codon were performed using the multiple sequences alignment software MAFFT v7 (Katoh & Standley 2013). The colored text of the multiple DNA sequence alignments of the *spaCBA-srtC* clusters and their upstream DNA regions trimmed above the *spaC* start codon was performed with MultAlin software (Corpet 1988).

The *spaCBA-srtC* sequences were subjected to molecular phylogenetic tree inferences using the phylogeny.fr online tool (Dereeper et al. 2008). Sequences were aligned with MUSCLE (v3.7) configured for highest accuracy (MUSCLE with default settings) (Edgar 2004). After alignment, ambiguous regions (i.e. containing gaps and/or poorly aligned) were removed with Gblocks (v0.91b) (Castresana 2000) using the following parameters:

-minimum length of a block after gap cleaning: 10,

-no gap positions were allowed in the final alignment,

-all segments with contiguous nonconserved positions bigger than 8 were rejected,

-minimum number of sequences for a flank position: 85%.

The phylogenetic tree was reconstructed using the maximum likelihood method implemented in the PhyML program (v3.0) (Guindon et al. 2010). The HKY85 substitution model was selected assuming an estimated proportion of invariant sites and 4 gamma-distributed rate categories to account for rate heterogeneity across sites. The gamma shape parameter was estimated directly from the data. Reliability for internal branch was assessed using the aLRT test (SH-Like). Graphical visualization and edition of the phylogenetic tree were performed with TreeDyn (v198.3) (Chevenet et al. 2006).

Bacterial strains, media, and plasmid removal. *L. rhamnosus* LOCK 0900 (Aleksandrzak-Piekarczyk et al. 2013), *L. rhamnosus* LOCK 0908 (Koryszewska-Bagińska et al. 2014) and *L. casei* LOCK 0919 (Koryszewska-Bagińska et al. 2013) were obtained from the Pure Culture Collection of the Technical University of Lodz (Poland). Bacteria were cultivated anaerobically at 37°C in the MRS broth (Oxoid) or in MRS w/o dextrose (USBiological) supplemented with 1% glucose (G-MRS) or 1% lactose (L-MRS).

The removal of the pLOCK 0919 plasmid from *L. casei* LOCK 0919 was performed by the slightly modified method described by Ruiz-Barba et al. (1991) involving the use of sodium dodecyl sulfate (SDS). Prior to plasmid curing, the sublethal concentration of SDS (defined as the highest concentration allowing for the visible growth) for *L. casei* LOCK 0919 was determined as 0.2 mg/ml. An overnight *L. casei* LOCK 0919 culture in G-MRS was employed as an inoculum (10² Colony Forming Units [CFU]/ml) for fresh G-MRS containing 0.2 mg/ml SDS, incubated and sub-cultured into the same medium every 72 h. At appropriate intervals (after 3, 7, 14 and 21 days of cultivation) the culture was serially diluted and plated on G-MRS

solidified with 1.5% agar. After 48 h of incubation, visible colonies were randomly selected for further plasmid analysis. The absence or presence of pLOCK 0919 was assessed by PCR with primers specific for the plasmidic DNA. The resulting strain devoid of pLOCK 0919, which was selected after 21 day of cultivation in G-MRS with 0.2 mg/ml SDS, was assigned as *L. casei* LOCK 0919 Δ p.

Aggregation, hydrophobicity and adherence tests. First, to maintain the biological activity of LOCK strains, 24 h cultures in MRS were frozen at -20°C with the addition of 20% glycerol. Before application, the bacteria were activated twice in liquid MRS broth (3% inoculum, v/v) and incubated for 24 h at 37°C and the resultant stock cultures were stored at 4°C. All bacterial cultures were centrifuged (3800×g, 15 min, 4°C) and suspended in PBS (pH 7.4). Before experiments the final optical density of the suspensions was measured in a spectrophotometer (Beckman DU640) at 570, 600 or 630 nm (depending on the method) and was adjusted to approximately 1.0 by dilution in PBS.

For hydrophobicity tests bacterial suspensions in PBS were mixed for 2 min with hexadecane (Sigma-Aldrich) (1:5, v/v) in order to form the emulsion. The mixtures were incubated for 60 min at ambient temperature until the hexadecane formed a separated layer above the PBS. Absorbance of the bottom layer (PBS) was measured at 600 nm. The percentage of hydrophobicity was calculated as follows: hydrophobicity [%]=[A₀-A/A₀]×100, where A₀ and A is the absorbance before and after the extraction with hexadecane, respectively.

For aggregation tests bacterial suspensions (in three repeats each) were put in stabile, safe place at ambient temperature. After 2 and 24 h the upper layer was collected for measurement of the optical density. The percentage of aggregation was calculated as follows: aggregation [%]=[1– (A_1/A_0)]×100, where A₀ is the initial absorbance and A₁ the absorbance after 2 and 24 h. The adherence to collagen, glass and polystyrene was tested according to the method described

by Zeraik & Nitschke (2012) with some modifications. Bacterial suspensions in PBS were

added into 96-well polystyrene plate (in eight repeats each), 6-well plate (in three repeats each) with a cover glass on the bottom of the well or 96-well plate coated with collagen (BD) (in eight repeats each). They were incubated for 2 h at 37°C, rinsed with water, fixed with 80% methanol (15 min) and stained with 0.1% crystal violet (15 min, 120 rpm). Next wells were washed out with water and incubated with 33% glacial acetic acid (15 min, 120 rpm). The absorbance was measured at 630 nm with microplate reader (Tristar2 LB 942, Berthold Technologies). To calculate the adhesion ratio of bacteria to collagen/glass/polystyrene the value of absorbance of bacteria was divided by the absorbance of the control sample (collagen/glass/polystyrene only). The adherence of bacteria to gelatine and mucous was determined by crystal violet staining method according to Vesterlund et al. (2005) with some modifications. 96-well plate was coated (60 min, 37°C) with 1% sterile-filtered gelatine (Sigma-Aldrich). In case of mucous, 24-well plate was coated with mucous from porcine stomach (150 mg/ml in PBS; pH 7.2) (Type II, Sigma-Aldrich) (72 h, 4°C). The unattached gelatine or mucous was removed and washed with PBS (pH 7.4). Next, bacterial suspensions in PBS were added to each well (in eight and four repeats in case of collagen and gelatine, respectively) and allowed to adhere (2 h, 37°C). Nonadherent bacteria were washed with PBS and the remaining were fixed (20 min, 60°C). Bacteria were stained with 0.1% crystal violet for 15 min, washed three times with PBS and citrate buffer (20 mM/l; pH 4.3) was added to each well (45 min, 120 rpm). The absorbance was determined at 570 nm. To calculate the adhesion ratio of bacteria to gelatine/mucous the value of bacterial absorbance was divided by the absorbance of the control sample (gelatine/mucous only). Bacteria were characterised as strongly adherent (A>3), moderately adherent (3>A>2), weakly adherent (2>A>1), and non-adherent (A \leq 1).

To determine the statistical significance of observed differences, the analysis of variance (ANOVA) was applied to the adherence data using statistical software (version 12.0.1 for Windows, SPSS Inc., USA). P value lower than 0.05 was considered as significant.

The quantitative PCR (QPCR). QPCR assays were performed both to assess the *spaC* expression level as well as to quantify *L. rhamnosus* LOCK 0900, *L. rhamnosus* LOCK 0908 and *L. casei* LOCK 0919 in mice feces.

For the *spaC* mRNA quantification total RNA was isolated with the use of TRI Reagent (Sigma) from three independent 20 ml *L. casei* LOCK 0919 cultures grown in G-MRS or L-MRS and harvested in mid-exponential phase ($OD_{600}=0.6$). First-strand cDNA was synthesized from DNAse I (Sigma)-treated 2 µg RNA samples. The synthesis of cDNA was performed by the use of the High-Capacity cDNA Reverse Transcription kit (Applied Biosystems) according to manufacturer's instructions.

The genomic DNA of LOCK strains derived from the study of (Kozakova et al. 2015) and shortly was obtained as follows: eight-week old GF mice (n=6) were colonized by intragastric (i.g.) tubing with 2×10^8 CFU of equal parts of overnight cultures of *L. rhamnosus* LOCK 0900, *L. rhamnosus* LOCK 0908 and *L. casei* LOCK 0919 in 0.2 ml sterile phosphate-buffered saline (PBS). Subsequently, DNA was isolated from mice feces collected on the day 2, 14, 35 and 48 after the bacterial colonization.

QPCR assays on cDNA and genomic DNA from the two abovementioned experiments were carried out on the 7500 Real Time PCR System (Applied Biosystems) and following the previously described methodology (Kozakova et al. 2015). Pairs of primers specific for chromosomal or plasmidic *spaC* and 6 unique (two per each strain) genes harbored by the respective LOCK strains are presented in the Table 1. The results were normalized by the use of the reference genes, which code for the elongation factor TU and DNA-directed RNA polymerase alpha subunit.

RESULTS

General features of *L. casei* **pLOCK 0919.** We have already reported the sequencing of pLOCK 0919 (GenBank accession no. <u>CP005487</u>), which consists of 29,768 bp with an average

GC content of 43.9% and 32 open reading frames (Koryszewska-Bagińska et al. 2013). The average GC content of pLOCK 0919 is among the highest of the available complete *L. casei* plasmids ($42.2\pm1.9\%$, n=13 by 2015) and only slightly lower than the LOCK 0919 chromosomal GC value (46.2%).

All of the identified genes encode proteins that exhibit similarities to proteins present in the public databases. Approximately half of them show similarity to proteins with hypothetical functions (Table 1). Most of the genes encode proteins that are highly similar to proteins encoded in the genomes of the Lactobacillus genus. However, two genes (p02 and p03) encode proteins that are similar to those encoded in the Enterococcus genus (Fig. 1). Moreover, 5 transposases/insertion elements (ISs) and the p20gene encoding the DNA integration/recombination/inversion protein were identified in the pLOCK 0919 nucleotide sequence (Table 1). The presence of open reading frames (ORFs) with similarities to integrases, recombinases and transposases suggests that pLOCK 0919 is a plasmid with a high degree of genetic plasticity and that some genes present in pLOCK 0919 might have been acquired by horizontal gene transfer (HGT).

Comaparative analyses suggested that p32 and p01 are involved in plasmid stability and replication, respectively. The translated product of p32 shows extensive similarity to the ParA family of ATPases, which are involved in active partition mechanisms that counteract plasmid loss during cell division. The p01 gene, which is divergently transcribed with respect to *parA*, encodes the replication protein A (RepA). RepA includes the pfam06970 RepA_N domain in its N terminus, which is known to contain a helix-turn-helix (HTH) motif. This feature is characteristic for pLS32-type theta replication proteins (Tanaka & Ogura 1998) that represent a family of Gram-positive theta replicons, recognized as class F. This group lacks an AT-rich region that could function as a putative origin of replication and contains DNA iterons within the coding sequence of the replication protein (Cui et al. 2015). Accordingly, an inspection of

the pLOCK 0919 DNA sequence revealed the presence of three discontiguous 22-bp repeats and lack of noticeable AT-rich region within and upstream of the *repA* gene, respectively. The further confirmation that pLOCK 0919 follows a theta model of replication is its size (~30 kb). It has been shown that plasmids of that size found in natural isolates of *Lactobacillus*, typically replicate via the theta mechanism (Wang & Lee 1997).

Furthermore, pLOCK 0919 encodes two proteins that are likely involved in the SOS response to DNA damaging factors. Among them, *p29* encodes the UmuC protein, and *p28* encodes a hypothetical protein that is predicted to be a member of the YolD family (Table 1). The YolD family members are functionally uncharacterized; however, it has been postulated that they can represent a functional equivalent of the UmuD subunit of PolV (Permina et al. 2002).

Regarding the unique functional traits that are often localized in plasmids in lactic acid bacteria (LAB), such as the hydrolysis of milk sugar and metal resistance (Cai et al. 2009), we did not identify any genes encoding lactose hydrolysis. However, we found that the metallothionein encoded by the p18 gene might be engaged in copper homeostasis (Table 1). None of resistance genes were detected in pLOCK 0919.

In regard to possible elements of plasmid transmission, the inspection of the pLOCK 0919 sequence revealed the lack of neither conjugation nor mobilization genes. Moreover, no putative origin of transfer (*oriT*) sequence similar to those of other plasmids with mobilization genes was detected in the pLOCK0919 plasmid sequence. The absence of all these necessary key components exclude conjugative mobilization capacity of the pLOCK0919 plasmid.

Finally, the pilus-encoding island known as the *spaCBA-srtC* operon (Kankainen et al. 2009) was detected in pLOCK 0919. This pilus operon comprises three pilin subunit genes and one pilin-specific sortase gene: *p13* (*spaC*), *p14* (*spaB*), *p15* (*spaA*) and *p16* (*srtC*).

The pLOCK 0919 DNA sequence is poorly conserved among bacterial genomes. The comparative analysis of the nucleotide sequence of pLOCK 0919 indicated a low overall gene

synteny with the plasmids available in GenBank. The highest similarity was detected between pLOCK 0919 and plasmids from L. casei (pW56, pBD-II and pLC2W) and L. paracasei (pN2, pN3 and p2) (Fig. 2). However, none of these plasmids has an analogous pLOCK 0919 architecture, and the similar DNA regions are rather randomly dispersed. The total similarity spans 39% of the pLOCK 0919 sequence, including the DNA regions encompassing the following genes: p1-p6 (574 bp - 3762 bp), p11 (9343 bp - 10161 bp), p12 (10353 bp -11405 bp), p17-p20 (17163 bp - 19983 bp) and p25-p30 (24638 bp - 28044 bp) (Fig. 2). Among the pLOCK 0919 genes found in other plasmids, the genes encoding hypothetical or putative proteins are most widely represented. In addition, the L. casei and L. paracasei plasmids harbor the homologs of the majority of the pLOCK 0919 transposases/ISs (p11, p12, p25 and p26). The presence of mobile sequences on plasmids is a common phenomenon and may indicate that

many homologous plasmid-localized operons have a common origin that underwent recombination events within the Lactobacillus sp. Remarkably, the pLOCK 0919 DNA region encompassing the spaCBA genes is not present in any of the Lactobacillus sp. plasmid DNA sequences available in GenBank, but it resides in selected chromosomes of Lactobacillus sp. (Fig. 2).

The pLOCK 0919 spaCBA-srtC pilus cluster is highly conserved among some species in the L. casei taxonomic group. Although studies investigating the spaCBA pilus cluster in Lactobacillus sp. are restricted mainly to L. rhamnosus GG, thorough PSI-BLAST searches indicated that homologs of pLOCK 0919 SpaCBA are widely represented among the Lactobacillus genus. Moreover, the results of a CLANS analysis clearly showed a large variety of clans for all SpaCBA proteins from the different species in this genus (Fig. 3A-C). Among them, SpaCBA was present in an overwhelming number of strains belonging to the related socalled L. casei taxonomic group. This group contains four species of the Lactobacillus genus (L. casei, L. paracasei, L. rhamnosus and L. zeae) and is evolutionarily distant from other

lactobacilli (Felis & Dellaglio 2007). Among these species, the SpaCBA proteins were found to be most abundant in *L. casei*, occurred less frequently in *L. paracasei* and were the least represented in *L. rhamnosus* (Fig. 3A-C). The SpaCBA proteins from these species can be found in most clans produced by the CLANS program. In contrast, *L. gasseri*, *L. johnsonii*, *L. plantarum*, *L. ruminus* and *L. brevis* are conserved and produce single clans. Whether this effect results from a large quantity of sequenced genomes in the *L. casei* taxonomic group and a smaller quantity in the other *Lactobacillus* species depends on the timing and presence of new sequenced genomes. A completely different result can be observed for the *Lactobacillus* sp. sortase family, which is scattered, mostly dissimilar and comprises only a few clans (Fig. 3D). This dissimilarity suggests the presence of very little evolutionary pressure on the sortase family or, in contrast, a strong pressure to diversify. In each of these cases, these proteins of *L. casei* pLOCK 0919 and *L. rhamnsosus* GG are positioned in common clans in close proximity to one another, indicating a high level of similarity (Fig. 3A-D).

At the time this report was written, thirteen complete genomic sequences in twelve *Lactobacillus* strains carrying the *spaCBA-srtC* pilus cluster were deposited in GenBank. Among them, we identified its presence only in certain strains of the *L. casei* taxonomic group. Among these strains, the *spaCBA-srtC* pilus cluster was found to be most prevalent in *L. casei* (eight strains), occurred much less frequently in *L. paracasei* (three strains) and was represented only once in *L. rhamnosus* (Fig. 2). It is worth mentioning that only strain *L. casei* LOCK 0919 assessed herein carried the *spaCBA-srtC* gene cluster in a plasmid. All of the other cases demonstrated a chromosomal location. Interestingly, in *L. casei* LOCK 0919, the pilus cluster was also present in the chromosome (Fig. 2), and thus, this strain was identified as the only host carrying two copies of *spaCBA-srtC*.

In addition, the nucleotide BLAST comparison of the pLOCK 0919 *spaCBA-srtC* sequence with other pilus gene clusters derived from the fully sequenced strains of *L. casei* taxonomic

group revealed a high level of overall sequence identity (>97%), which indicated that they were likely inherited from a common ancestor. To analyze the phylogenetic relationships between them, we constructed a maximum likelihood (ML) tree for the approximately 5552 bp of sequence spanning the DNA region of the four *spaCBA-srtC* loci from 12 strains in the *L. casei* taxonomic group (Fig. 4). The tree revealed that the *spaCBA-srtC* clusters of pLOCK 0919 and *L. rhamnosus* GG are closely related to one another and the most different among all of other 10 strains, as evidenced by their clustering in independent branches. This observation indicated that *spaCBA-srtC* of pLOCK 0919 and *L. rhamnosus* GG are genealogically similar and distinct from the pilus clusters of other lactobacilli strains, which is indicative of their ancient divergence from a common ancestor.

The highest sequence similarity was observed in the DNA region encompassing the *spaB*, *spaA* and *srtC* genes, with only very few differences consisting of nucleotide changes. The similarity of the *spaC* genes was much less pronounced because, in comparison to the *L. casei* and *L. paracasei* strains, these genes in pLOCK 0919 and *L. rhamnosus* GG exhibited three regions with 3-15 nucleotide deletions (Fig. S1 supplementary file).

Moreover, a comparison of the layout of the *spaCBA-srtC* genes among the publicly available fully sequenced genomes of lactobacilli revealed a high degree of synteny (Fig. 5), suggesting a strong evolutionary conservation. Despite the high level of sequence conservation, certain strains (*L. casei* ATCC 334, *L. casei* LC2W, *L. casei* BD-II, *L. casei* W56, *L. paracasei* JCM 8130 and *L. paracasei* N1115) appeared to carry some remains of the pili genes in a degenerated form (Fig. 5), which indicated that these clusters are not evolutionarily conserved and may be the result of progressive pseudogenization. In contrast, the pLOCK 0919 *spaCBA-srtC* genes did not appear to contain any critically mutated coding sequences (Fig. 5).

The DNA regions and transposable elements overlapping *spaCBA-srtC* are conserved between pLOCK 0919 and *L. rhamnosus* GG. Comparing the pLOCK 0919-localized

spaCBA-strC up- and downstream DNA regions with the respective DNA sequences of L. rhamnosus GG and other strains in the L. casei taxonomic group, a number of similarities in their genetic organization are apparent between pLOCK 0919 and GG. First, the downstream region of the pLOCK 0919-localized spaCBA-srtC shares common DNA regions (on pLOCK 0919, encompassing the p17 - p20 genes) with L. rhamnosus GG (Fig. 2; Fig. 5). No other Lactobacillus sp. genome carries homologs located in close proximity to the pilus cluster (Fig. 5). This unique similarity suggests that these whole DNA regions (on pLOCK 0919, consisting of the spaCBA-srtC, p17, p18, p19 and p20 genes) of pLOCK 0919 and L. rhamnosus GG may have originated from a common ancestor that was distinct to the ancestor(s) from other Lactobacillus sp. Another similarity between the spaCBA-srtC pili clusters of pLOCK 0919 and L. rhamnosus GG is that they are flanked by numerous IS elements/transposase genes (Fig. 5). Their presence indicates that these IS element-rich DNA regions might be subjected to genetic recombination events within species, such as, for example, the events that led to the acquisition of the spaCBA-strC gene cluster by HGT in both strains. Some of the ISs/transposase genes found in pLOCK 0919 are located adjacent to spaCBA-srtC as in the case of p11 and p12, which are inserted directly upstream of this gene cluster. Transposition events involve both recombination and replication processes, which frequently generate two daughter copies of the original transposable elements. One copy remains at the parent site, and another is present at the target site (Mahillon & Chandler 1998). Interestingly, we found no copies of the *p11* and *p12* ISs/transposase genes in the chromosome of the L. casei LOCK 0919 strain. Their homologs, however, commonly reside in the plasmids and chromosomes of many other species of the Lactobacillus genus (Fig. 2), paradigmatically in L. rhamnosus GG, in which they are particularly widely represented. In this bacterium, the *p11* and *p12* homologs resided in close but not direct proximity to the *spaCBA-srtC* cluster and were assigned as follows: is14, is24 and is25 (Fig. 5). Moreover, two other pLOCK 0919

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ISs/transposase genes (p25 and p26) residing at a greater distance downstream from spaCBAstrC also had counterparts in the vicinity of the pilus gene cluster in the genome of *L. rhamnosus* GG. In this bacterium, these two genes occurred in duplicated form and were designated as follows: *is20*, *is21*, *is22* and *is23* (Fig. 5). The scattering of ISs/transposase genes in the genomes of other Lactobacillus sp. and their absence in the *L. casei* LOCK 0919 chromosome suggest that pLOCK 0919 is not a permanent, long-term resident of *L. casei* LOCK 0919 and that the *p11* and *p12* genes might jump into this host plasmid from the genome of another species. However, we cannot exclude the possibility of a conservative way of the *p11* and *p12* transposition, by which they might be transposed from the chromosome of *L. casei* LOCK 0919 to its pLOCK 0919 plasmid.

Further analysis of pLOCK 0919 mobile elements indicated that the majority of them likely represent the remnants of ISs that were once active. An indication of the lack of p24, p25 and p26 functionality is provided by their lengths (372, 471 and 261 bp, respectively), which are considerably too short in comparison to the average length of the bacterial insertion element (0.7-2.7 kbp; Siguier et al., 2006). Similarly, the pLOCK 0919 p11 gene also appears to be truncated because it lacks the HTH motif that is necessary for the recognition and binding of terminal inverted repeats (TIRs). The degeneration of the majority of pLOCK 0919 ISs/transposase genes may indicate that their insertion in the plasmid is evolutionarily more ancient when compared to non-truncated *is14* and *is15* of *L. rhamnosus* GG.

In contrast to pLOCK 0919 and *L. rhamnosus* GG, the pilus gene clusters detected in other *Lactobacillus* sp. are located in chromosomal regions that are devoid of ISs/transposase genes or in which these genes occur only occasionally (Fig. 5). This finding suggests that *spaCBA-srtC* of *L. casei* and *L. paracasei* species were not acquired by HGT but rather originated from an ancient common ancestor. Therefore, it can be suggested that the *spaCBA-srtC* operon hitchhiked from stably inherited genomes to the plasmid sequences.

The pLOCK 0919 spaCBA-srtC upstream non-coding DNA sequence differs from relatives of L. casei taxonomic group species. A comparison of the pLOCK 0919 non-coding sequence upstream of *spaCBA-srtC* with the respective sequences of other *Lactobacillus* strains revealed differences in their similarity. Along their entire length, these sequences are almost identical among all of the Lactobacillus strains excluding pLOCK 0919 and L. rhamnosus GG (Fig. 6). In these two strains, when compared with other lactobacilli, there is a variable degree of similarity that ranges from very high similarity (26 nucleotides directly upstream of the spaC gene start codon), to low similarity in the subsequent nucleotides, and to virtually no similarity upstream of this region (Fig. 6). The observed differences in the spaCBA-srtC non-coding upstream sequence between pLOCK 0919, L. rhamnosus GG and other Lactobacillus strains consist of mismatches, insertions or deletions of single or strings of nucleotides (Fig. 6). This strong conservation of the 26-nucleotide region upstream of the *spaC* gene across species may indicate its significant role in, for example, the *spaCBA-srtC* cluster expression. In fact, a survey reported by Douillard et al. (2013a) demonstrated that in L. rhamnosus GG, the transcription start site (TSS) mapped to 23 nucleotides upstream of the start of spaC translation, which coincides with the end of the region with a high similarity (Fig. 6). Therefore, we can assume that the putative start of spaC transcription in pLOCK 0919 is coordinated similarly to that in L. rhamnosus GG and, thus, that the highly conserved DNA region spans the beginning of the spaC mRNA (Fig. 6). The possibility of spaC expression is strengthened by the presence of a putative transcriptional promoter located approximately 10 nucleotides upstream of the region with a high level of similarity (Fig. 6 and section below).

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At least two putative promoters may drive the expression of the pLOCK 0919 pilus *spaCBA* genes cluster. Data reported in the literature show that in spite of the high level of conservation and sequence identity of the *spaCBA-srtC* pilus gene cluster, some *L. rhamnosus* strains, but none of the *L. casei* strains, produce pili (Douillard et al. 2013a; Douillard et al.

2013b). It has been postulated that this deficiency may be due to a loss of the -35 and -10 consensus regions and the TSSs in L. casei, whereas integration of the IS30 element provided a promoter that allowed the expression of the pili genes in L. rhamnosus GG (Douillard et al. 2013a). This transcriptional alteration of gene expression by the introduction of IS elements is not an unusual phenomenon (Poirel et al. 2003; Reynolds et al. 1986). Interestingly, the DNA region of the pilus cluster identified in pLOCK 0919 differs significantly from the sequences present in other L. casei and L. paracasei strains, both with respect to the non-coding spaCBAsrtC upstream DNA region (Fig. 6) and the presence of transposases (Fig. 5). Thus, it is tempting to speculate that the integration of transposases upstream of the plasmid *spaC* gene in L. casei LOCK 0919 might also affect the activation of pilus gene expression in this strain. To determine whether the insertions might result in the acquisition of the -35 and -10 regions consensus regions, we inspected the upstream DNA sequence of the pLOCK 0919 spaCBAsrtC pilus gene cluster. The pLOCK 0919 spaCBA-srtC pilus gene cluster appeared to be preceded by at least two putative promoters. The first (P1; -35 AAGCCT/-10 TATTAT) was found in close proximity to spaC because its -10 region was located 58 nucleotides upstream of the spaC start codon (Fig. 6). A comparison of the pLOCK 0919 P1 region with the corresponding chromosomal DNA of L. rhamnosus GG revealed that both regions contain similarly positioned promoters, although the spacing between the spaC start codon and predicted -10 promoter region was found to be 8 nucleotides longer in pLOCK 0919. Moreover, although the pLOCK 0919 upstream sequence of spaCBA-srtC lacks a triplet of adenines, which has been designated as the transcriptional start site in L. rhamnosus GG (Douillard et al. 2013a), it contains instead a stretch of other nucleotides that may serve as a TSS (Fig. 6). Further inspection of the more distant non-coding DNA region situated between p11 and p12 revealed presence the second possible -35 GTGAAA/ the of promoter (P2; -10 TAAAAT) located 42 bp upstream of the p12 start codon (Fig. 6). Its presence, and the

absence of a clear terminator of transcription between p12 and spaC, suggest that the spaCBAsrtC gene cluster in pLOCK 0919 may be co-transcribed with the p12 gene encoding a transposase. Although neither promoter fully resembles the canonical promoters defined as TATAAT and TTGACA (Browning & Busby 2004), they may still drive high levels of pilus gene expression, as observed for the non-canonical promoter that drives the efficient expression of the pilus cluster in L. rhamnosus GG (Douillard et al. 2013a).

L. casei LOCK 0919 strongly adheres to different surfaces and colonize mice intestine. For the experimental confirmation of L. casei LOCK 0919 adhesive potential and evaluation whether this potential may reside on its plasmid, series of in vitro and in vivo assays were performed on L. casei LOCK 0919, L. casei LOCK 0919Ap, L. rhamnosus LOCK 0900 and/or L. rhamnosus LOCK 0908 strains. For these experiments, LOCK 0900 and LOCK 0908 strains were used as negative controls since no spaCBA clusters were detected in their genomes (Aleksandrzak-Piekarczyk et al. 2013; Koryszewska-Bagińska et al. 2014).

In vitro tests included the evaluation of strains' hydrophobic properties, aggregation, adherence to polystyrene, glass, mucous, collagen and gelatin. The percentage of hydrophobicity varied between strains. The highest value was observed for L. casei LOCK 0919 (3.50%), while the same strain after removing of its plasmid (*L. casei* LOCK 0919∆p) was not hydrophobic at all (Fig. 7A). Similarly, the percentage of the aggregation was strain-dependent and after 2 h L. casei LOCK 0919 aggregated to highest extent (7.2%), whereas L. casei LOCK 0919 dp was the least aggregative (0.58%). After 24 h both L. casei LOCK 0919 and L. casei LOCK 0919Ap strongly aggregated and the percentage of aggregated cells was 93.2% and 89.5%, respectively (Fig. 7B). In both of experiments L. rhamnosus LOCK 0908 was less hydrophobic and aggregative than *L. casei* LOCK 0919 but more hydrophobic and aggregative (after 2 h, only) than L. casei LOCK 0919Ap (Fig.7A and 7B). Also, the adherence ability of tested bacteria varied significantly between strains. L. casei LOCK 0919 showed the highest adherence to all

surfaces, while the lack of pLOCK919 led in all cases to statistically significant decrease of the *L. casei* LOCK 0919 Δ p adherence (Fig. 7C). Among the different strains and surfaces tested, *L. casei* LOCK 0919 and *L. casei* LOCK 0919 Δ p were classified as strongly adhesive to mucous and gelatine; *L. casei* LOCK 0919 was moderately adhesive to collagen. *L. rhamnosus* LOCK 0908 was classified as non-adherent to polystyrene and glass and weakly adherent to gelatine and collagen.

For an *in vivo* assessment of the *L. casei* LOCK 0919 persistence in the gut, we performed a strain specific QPCR on the DNA isolated from feces of GF mice, whom three *Lactobacillus* strains were administrated. As shown in Fig. 8, starting from the second day after bacterial application and throughout of the study, the amount of *L. casei* LOCK 0919 in stools was overwhelming ranging from 97% to 99%, while the *L. rhamnosus* LOCK 0900 and LOCK 0908 strains were barely detected.

Plasmid-encoded SpaC pilin is expressed in *L. casei* **LOCK 0919 and undergoes glucoseinduced repression.** Minor differences between the DNA sequences of the two paralogues *spaC* genes from *L. casei* LOCK 0919 (Fig. S1 supplementary file) allowed us to design specific set of primers (Table 2) and to perform the quantification of the genes expression. In the presence of any of the sugars tested, the level of the chromosomal *spaC* expression was on the threshold of detection (Fig. 9A), whereas the expression of the plasmidic *spaC* was significantly 2.9 or 5.1-fold higher, respectively on glucose or lactose (Fig. 9B). Moreover, the use of two sugars, glucose or lactose, allowed us to test whether the expression of the *spaC* genes may be under the control of the global catabolic repression system. The main example of such a general regulator is catabolite control protein A (CcpA) (Hueck & Hillen 1995) that promotes, in the repressive conditions (mostly in the presence of glucose), carbon catabolite regulation by binding to 14-nucleotide *cis*-acting DNA target sites known as *cre* (catabolite responsive element) (Miwa et al. 2000). A thorough analysis of the DNA sequences upstream

of the plasmidic and chromosomal *spaC* genes revealed no obvious *cres*. Despite the lack of clear cre boxes, spaC expression could be still regulated by CcpA in an indirect manner (Ludwig et al. 2002). Indeed, we found the plasmidic spaC expression to be sugar-dependent as it had 2.9-fold elevated mRNA level on lactose in comparison to glucose (Fig. 9B).

DISCUSSION

L. casei LOCK 0919 is a probiotic strain with an antiallergic potential, which has been proven in a number of clinical trials and animal experiments (Cukrowska et al. 2009; Cukrowska et al. 2010; Kozakova et al. 2015). Among numerous desirable features of microorganisms defined as probiotics is their ability to adhere to the host gastrointestinal epithelium. Adherence of microorganisms to surfaces involves numerous factors such as cell hydrophobicity, electrostatic forces and specific adhesins. Among the bacterial adhesion molecules, the mucus-binding SpaCBA pili are of key importance due to their ability of strong adherence to enterocytes, formation of biofilm and dampening of IL-8 production by intestinal epithelial cells (Segers & Lebeer 2014). According to our in silico analyses, homologs of the individual SpaCBA proteins are widely represented among different Lactobacillus sp. (Fig. 3), however, the encoding genes, in the order of spaCBA, are present in a limited number of species, including L. casei and L. paracasei. This observation is apparent from our analyses of the completely sequenced Lactobacillus sp. genomes (Fig. 5) and their draft genome sequences (data not shown). According to the literature (Douillard et al. 2013b), some of L. rhamnosus strains also produce pili, but so far among them only the genome of L. rhamnosus GG has been released into the GenBank database. All of the hitherto known spaCBA sequences are carried by the chromosomes and, to the best of our knowledge, this is a first comprehensive report on the analysis of the plasmid encoded SpaCBA pili. Our comparative analyses indicate the highest similarity of the plasmidic L. casei LOCK 0919 spaCBA region to the corresponding DNA region of the best ever known SpaCBA pili producer L. rhamnosus GG, and significantly lower

similarity to the corresponding operons from L. casei and L. paracasei strains. We detected this unique homology between sequences of both strains regarding the DNA sequence downstream of *spaCBA*, transposable elements overlapping *spaCBA* and amino acid sequence of the SpaC protein. This result is even more interesting due to the fact that all so far identified spaCBA of L. casei and L. paracasei are not expressed and L. casei LOCK 0919 seems to be an exception in this group since its plasmidic *spaC* is expressed even in the repressive conditions. This expression may be driven by any of two potential promoters found either directly upstream of the spaCBA operon or above the p12 insertion sequence, and absent in other L. casei and

L. paracasei strains. Thus, similarly to L. rhamnosus GG, in L. casei LOCK 0919 the insertion of an IS element upstream of the plasmidic *spaCBA* may trigger the expression of the pilus genes.

In order to confirm the results of our bioinformatic predictions implying occurrence of an adhesive potential in L. casei LOCK 0919 and to gain information on the genetic localization of structural properties that are indispensable for the adhesion, series of the *in vitro* assays including hydrophobicity, aggregation and adherence to abiotic and biotic surfaces were conducted in Lactobacillus strains. The fact that a high percentage of L. casei LOCK 0919 cells adhered to a nonpolar solvent - n-hexadecane, demonstrated a hydrophobic cell surface of this strain. The removal of pLOCK 0919 from L. casei LOCK 0919 resulted in a complete abolition of the L. casei LOCK 0919Ap cells hydrophobicity indicating the plasmidic localization of genetic determinants of this phenomenon. Bacterial adhesion initially depends on non-specific physical interactions between two surfaces following specific interactions between mostly proteinaceous adhesins and corresponding receptors. Previous studies have shown cell hydrophobicity to be positively correlated with the presence of a proteinaceous surface-coat and thus leading to the aggregation and adherence ability (Kos et al. 2003; Lukić et al. 2012; Ren et al. 2012). Indeed, our further research on cells autoaggregation confirmed this observation - the most hydrophobic (3.5%) strain L. casei LOCK 0919 was also shown to be highly aggregative (93.2%), while L. rhamnosus LOCK 0908 was the least hydrophobic (1.5%) and aggregative (60.6%). The removal of pLOCK 0919 resulted in a significant decrease of L. casei LOCK 0919 Δ p autoaggregation (0.58%) implying the plasmidic localization of genetic determinants encoding a proteinaceous surface-coat involved in this phenomenon. The fact that after 24 h of the autoaggregation experiment this effect was not pronounced anymore in L. casei LOCK 0919Ap (89.5% of aggregating cells) implies that pLOCK 0919-encoded cell surface proteins may be important factors in the process of initial attachment and in the early stages of biofilms establishment. The further experimental indication that an adhesion system may indeed operate efficiently in L. casei LOCK 0919 was the strong adherence of this strain to collagen-, mucus-, gelatin-coated or bare polystyrene plates. In contrast, the control L. rhamnsosus LOCK 0908 strain was barely able to adhere to these surfaces. The observed lack or low level of L. rhamnsosus LOCK 0908 adhesion to abiotic and biotic surfaces seems to be reasonable since no spaCBA pilus cluster has been detected in its genome (Koryszewska-Bagińska et al. 2014). The deprivation of pLOCK 0919 caused a statistically significant decrease of L. casei LOCK 0919Ap adherence indicating the plasmidic localization of L. casei LOCK 0919 adhesive potential.

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The further confirmation of *L. casei* LOCK 0919 adhesive potential are the results of our *in vivo* studies demonstrating that among the three *Lactobacillus* strains used to colonize GF mice, already after two days of i.g. bacteria application, *L. casei* LOCK 0919 became the dominant strain in the gut. As shown in Fig. 8, starting from the second day, the amount of *L. casei* LOCK 0919 in feces was overwhelming ranging from 97% to 99%, while *L. rhamnosus* strains were barely detected. This long-term persistence and high abundance of *L. casei* LOCK 0919 in mice gut may indicate that its functional adhesion system prevented its immediate elimination by peristalsis as it happened in the case of *L. rhamnosus* LOCK 0900 and

LOCK 0908 strains that do not encode the SpaCBA system. However, we cannot exclude the possibility that the other than the lack of a functional adhesion system and yet unknown factors contributed to the weak persistence of LOCK 0900 and LOCK 0908 in mice guts.

Therefore, we determined that the plasmid-encoded *L. casei* LOCK 0919 cell surface proteins may be important factors in the process of the attachment and in the initial stages of biofilms establishment. Consequently, we may infer conclusions regarding the prospective, invaluable role of pLOCK 0919 in terms of its adhesive potential. The possession of such a plasmid by any bacterium greatly increases the range of inhabited environments, allows for colonization and longer persistence in the host's gut, and provides a competitive advantage over other bacteria (including pathogens) in this tough to survive ecosystem.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This work was partially supported by a grant awarded by the Polish National Centre for Research and Development (no. 12/P01/2010/10) and RVO 61388971 of the Czech Republic.

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GeneID	Gene name	Description of the encoded protein ^{<i>a</i>}
16110888	p01(repA)	Replication protein
16110857	p02	Putative ATP synthase
16110858	p03	Hypothetical protein
16110859	p04	Hypothetical protein
16110860	p05	Hypothetical protein
16110861	p06	Hypothetical protein
16110862	p07	Hypothetical protein containing DUF1381 and Exonuc_VII_S domains
16110863	p08	Putative C39-like peptidase
16110864	p09	Putative GTPase-like guanine nucleotide exchange factor containing Ecp6 and C39-like peptidase domains
16110865	p10	Collagen adhesion protein
16110866	p11	Transposase
16110867	p12	IS30 family transposase
16110868	p13 (spaC)	Cell wall surface anchor family protein (ancillary protein involved in mucus-adhesion)
16110869	p14 (spaB)	Pilus specific protein (minor backbone protein)
16110870	p15 (spaA)	Fimbriae subunit (major backbone protein)
16110871	p16 (srtC)	LPXTG specific sortase A
16110872	p17	Putative pyridoxine 5'-phosphate oxidase V related flavin-nucleotide- binding protein
16110873	p18	Putative metallothionein containing Cu(I)-thiolate, metal binding protein and apicomplexan Apetala2 domains
16110874	p19	Putative cytosolic protein BRCT (Replication factor C subunit 1)
16110875	p20	DNA integration/recombination/inversion protein
16110876	p21	Ribonucleotide reduction protein NrdI
16110877	p22	Ribonucleotide reductase of class Ib, beta subunit
16110878	p23	Ribonucleotide reductase of class Ib, alpha subunit
16110879	p24	Transposase
16110880	p25	Transposase
16110881	p26	Transposase
16110882	p27	Hypothetical protein PhoU
16110883	p28	Hypothetical protein YolD
16110884	p29 (umuC)	DNA-repair protein SOS response UmuC-like protein
16110885	p30	Putative secretin-like protein
16110886	p31	Putative ParG protein
16110887	p32 (parA)	Putative ParA protein

TABLE 1. Protein details for *L. casei* pLOCK 0919.

^{*a*} Protein functions listed here are significantly updated in comparison with the protein functions assigned basing on the *L. casei* pLOCK 0919 genome annotation and deposition in GenBank.

TABLE 2. Primers for QPCR amplifications.

Gene or encoded protein	5'-3' DNA sequence of forward/reverse primer ^a		
Primers to quantify the plasmidic or chromosomal <i>spaC</i> expression level			
Plasmidic spaC	GGTGGCGAATCGGGT/CCATCGAAGTTGTGCGGTATCGCT		
Chromosomal spaC	CGGCAATAAAACCACTGG/ATTTTTAAGTTCTGCGGTATAGCC		
Primers to quantify <i>L. rhamnosus</i> LOCK 0900, <i>L. rhamnosus</i> LOCK 0908 and <i>L. casei</i> LOCK 0919 in mice feces			
Primers for L. casei LOCK 0900-specific genes:			
Phage anti-repressor protein	GGGCTGCTCTACAAAGATG/AGTTGATGGATGCCAGTTAC		
DNA repair protein RecT	CCAGTAACGCCCTCAATTC/CCCTTGTATCACCATGTTCAG		
Primers for L. rhamnosus LOCK 0908-specific genes:			
DNA helicase YeeB	GGCACGAGTCTATCAACATC/CCTTTCGGACACCTTGATTAG		
YeeC-like protein	GCGAAGAAGTTGAGCTTAATG/CCATACAGAGATGAGGCAAG		
Primers for L. rhamnosus LOCK 0919-specific genes:			
Ornithine cyclodeaminase	GAAGATCGTATCCGTTTACCC/CTGTTCGAAGCTGAGTAAGG		
Phospholipase A2 family enzyme	GTATGGGAATTATTGCGGTAAAG/CGTTGACGAAATTCCTGATTAC		
Primers for reference genes			
RNA polymerase α subunit	GATATCGTCGCTGATCCTG/GTCAGCTGCCACATACC		
Translation elongation factor Tu	GACCTTGGATCTTGGTGAAG/TGGATTGAACCTGGCTTTG		

^{*a*} All primers were designed on the basis of the *L. rhamnosus* LOCK 0900, *L. rhamnosus* LOCK 0908 and *L. casei* LOCK 0919 genome nucleotide sequences, which are available from NCBI (http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/genome) with the respective accession no. CP005484, CP005485, CP005486 (chromosomes) and CP005487 (plasmid).

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Fig. 1. The genetic map of pLOCK 0919. All of the identified ORFs are indicated by arrows showing the direction of transcription. ORFs encoding proteins of hypothetical function are colored in grey, transposases and IS elements are shown in red and ORFs encoding proteins that are homologous to bacteria other than lactobacilli are striped. The pilus *spaCBA-srtC* operon is depicted in green.

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pLOCK919

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Fig. 2. Relationship between the complete sequence of pLOCK 0919 and respective chromosome fragments and plasmids of other lactobacilli genomes. The DNA sequence of L. rhamnosus GG is inverted. The sequences are placed around a circle in a counterclockwise direction, with the query sequence located at the bottom. The genomic nucleotide sequences are not fully drawn to scale - for better visibility the sequences of pLOCK 0919 and L. rhamnosus GG have been disproportionately enlarged in relation to the other genomes. The ribbons represent the local alignments produced by BLAST (with a normal E value of 10^{-10}), the width shows the alignment length, and the colors blue, green, orange, and red correspond to the alignment bit scores in the four quartiles. Blue represents the lowest values of the maximum bit score (i.e., a bit score below 25%), green - the next 25%, orange - the third quartile, and red ribbons - the best relative bit scores of 75% to 100% of the maximum bit score. The ribbons are inverted if the local alignments are inverted. The coordinates of homologous regions between query sequence and other genomes are indicated on ribbons from pLOCK 0919. The names above the sequences represent the respective chromosome or plasmid deriving from the respective organism (chromosomes: L. casei LOCK 0919 GenBank accession no. NC_021722.1; L. rhamnosus GG GenBank accession no. NC_013198.1; L. paracasei subsp. paracasei 8700:2 GenBank accession no. NC_022112.1; L. casei ATCC 334 GenBank accession no. NC_008526.1; L. casei str. Zhang GenBank accession no. NC_014334.1; L. paracasei N1115 GenBank accession no. CP007122.1; L. casei LOCK 0919

GenBank accession no. NC_021721.1; *L. casei* LC2W GenBank accession no. NC_017473.1; *L. casei* BL23 GenBank accession no. NC_010999.1; *L. casei* W56 GenBank accession no. NC_018641.1; *L. casei* BD-II GenBank accession no. NC_017474.1; <u>plasmids:</u> pLOCK 0919 GenBank accession no. NC_021722.1 from *L. casei* LOCK 0919, pW56 GenBank accession no. NC_020057.1 from *L. casei* W56, pBD-II GenBank accession no. NC_017476.1 from *L. casei* BD-II, pLC2W GenBank accession no. NC_017475.1 from *L. casei* LC2W, p2 GenBank accession no. NC_022123.1 from *L. paracasei* subsp. *paracasei* 8700:2, pN2 and pN3 from *L. paracasei* N1115).

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Fig. 3. CLANS clustering of SpaCBA and sortase protein sequences from the Lactobacillus genus. The color coding of the species is as follows: red -L. casei, green – L. paracasei and navy blue – L. rhamnosus. Proteins of other species present on panels, but not colored, include L. plantarum, L. brevis, L. gasseri, L. johnsonii, L. delbrueckii, L. crispatus and L. ruminis. Proteins encoded by L. rhamnosus GG and in pLOCK 0919 are indicated by salmon-colored larger squeres. The intensity of the connecting lines reflects the level of sequence similarity. In cases of L. casei and L. paracasei SpaB and SrtC are overlayed because of identical protein sequences. The sortase sequences do not form any well-defined groups excluding a few L. casei/L. paracasei clans.



Fig. 4. Genome-based unrooted phylogenetic tree of the *spaCBA-srtC* **clusters.** Phylogenetic relationships between the 13 nucleotide sequences of the *spaBCD-srtC* **clusters** from 12 sequenced lactobacilli strains. The scale bar represents the evolutionary distance. The bootstrap values (%) are indicated at the nodes.



Fig. 5. Synteny between the complete sequence of pLOCK 0919 and the respective DNA fragments of other lactobacilli genomes. The DNA sequence of *L. rhamnosus* GG is inverted. The respective genome designations are indicated on the right side of each genome line. The predicted ORFs are shown in their respective orientation as boxes with arrows. Conserved genes between pLOCK 0919 and *Lactobacillus* sp. genomes are depicted in the same color. The local genomic maps are drawn to scale. The direct nucleotide similarity between individual sequences of neighboring genomes is shown as pale pink bands, and inverted similarities are indicated as blue bands. The color shading indicates the level of similarity, with greater saturation of a similarity band indicating more conservation of two ORFs pairs. For better visibility, two IS-reach regions of pLOCK 0919 and *L. rhamnosus* GG are enlarged in blue circles. The names of homologous ISs from pLOCK 0919 and *L. rhamnosus* GG are shown in the same colors.



Fig. 6. Multiple sequence alignment of the *spaC* gene upstream region in selected strains of the *L*. *Gasei* taxonomic group. The complete consensus nucleotides are marked in red, and nucleotides with a low level of consensus are marked in either blue (majority) or black (minority). The DNA regions with a variable similarity are separated from one another by three rectangles. Yellow-shaded sequences highlight the potential -10/-35 promoter regions upstream of pLOCK 0919 *spaC* and *p12* (IS30). The putative ribosome binding sites (RBSs) are shaded in red, and the start and stop codons are shaded in green. The position of the TSS and the -10 and -35 regions in *L. rhamnosus* GG (as determined previously by Douillard et al., 2013a) are highlighted in yellow and dark gray, respectively.



Fig. 7. Hydrophobicity (A), aggregation after 2 and 24 hours (B) and adherence to abiotic (polystyrene, glass) and biotic (collagen, gelatin, mucous) surfaces (C) of *Lactobacillus* strains. *** Results statistically different from *L. casei* LOCK 0919 (P<0.05).



Fig. 8. Representation of the *Lactoctobacillus* **LOCK strains isolated from mice feces at indicated time points.** Data are shown as the percentage of each strain from all detected *Lactobacillus* LOCK strains at the given day after GF mice colonization.



Fig. 9. The relative plasmidic and chromosomal *spaC* expression level (A), *spaC* plasmid/chromosomal ratio on glucose or lactose and glucose repression ratio (B). The relative *spaC* genes expression level was measured by QPCR; plasmidic/chromosomal *spaC* ratios were calculated as a quotient of the relative plasmidic and chromosomal *spaC* expressions in *L. casei* LOCK 0919 grown in G-MRS or in L-MRS; glucose repression ratio of the plasmidic *spaC* was calculated as a quotient of the relative plasmidic *spaC* expression in *L. casei* LOCK 0919 grown in L-MRS and in G-MRS.

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