

**LAUKU CEĻOTĀJS****International Rural Tourism Workshop**

June 9, 2010, Hotel „Islande” at Ķīpsalas Street 20, Riga

Summary

International rural tourism workshop on June 9 in Riga attended ~200 participants including 36 foreign participants representing Germany, Spain, England, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Italy, Hungary, Bulgaria, Greece, Slovenia, Estonia, Lithuania, Byelorussia and other countries.

The workshop was opened by Armands Slokenbergs, Director, Latvian Tourism Development Agency, informing participants of the conference about the Latvian tourism marketing strategy in 2010-2015. Its key objectives are to create a product corresponding to the new slogan „Best enjoyed slowly” or Latvian version „Unhurried leisure in Latvia”, improving quality of the service providing co-operation between the government and private sector in marketing, increasing tourism season and creating new products. As Slokenbergs states, Latvia has a lot of good „components”, and these must be properly assembled to create a „delicate dish” – high-quality tourism product.

Panel 1: Rural tourism in Europe – state of art and quo wadis?

The panel discussed changes in rural tourism demand and consumption under present economic conditions in Europe. The presentations offered comparative overview of the situation by countries, effects of the crisis on travelling habits, rural tourism sector reaction to changes and activities of rural tourism organisations and entrepreneurs.

Klaus Ehrlich, Eurogites, „Rural tourism in Europe 1980 - 2010 – a change of paradigm?”

Klaus Ehrlich, President, **European Federation of Farm and Village Tourism Eurogites** gave an overview of rural tourism development in Europe for 50 years when first rural tourism accommodation was launched. Today, about 400,000 rural tourism enterprises operate in Europe, of which 20% are traditional family farms, 20% offer bed and breakfast and about 80% are holiday homes with kitchen for guests. Rural tourism provides 15% of all beds in the European tourism establishments. At present, the most characteristic feature is that target market for rural tourism is not as homogeneous as before. There is a specialisation of interests. Rural tourism offer is not only based on quality of accommodation and additional services, but on the countryside as a whole, with a strong focus on environmental values and healthy lifestyle. Rural tourism products must become more professional. Quality service + added value (free recreational opportunities in addition to the principal service) + quickly accessible, accurate information and easy booking are necessary for the rural tourism product to be interesting for the market.

Peggy Balitsari, Greece. „Guest Inn – The Greek Network of Rural Accommodation”

Rural tourism is developing as an alternative to mass tourism so popular in this country. Greek rural tourism product focuses on the beautiful, little known tourist sites, authentic culture and national cuisine.

Francois Derbaix, Spain. “Toprural – experience in Spain and Europe”

Www.toprural.com portal is an example of cooperation with rural tourism associations. Currently, it encounters about 70 000 rural tourism accommodations in 14 European countries - they all belong to the associations, which guarantee the quality. The Portal is appealing to customers by its particular and wide choice and variety of information available in one place. Strengths of co-operating associations are the close relationship between rural tourism businesses, product management, necessary cooperation with local governments, and education of rural tourism entrepreneurs. Advantages of the commercial web portals: knowledge of customer needs and professional knowledge of Internet marketing and technology opportunities in it; ensure a large number of web site visitors to make bookings via the portal, or contact the hosts using the website information.

Panel 2: Innovations in rural tourism – beyond the traditional concepts

The panel on innovation in rural tourism, new, innovative paths in rural tourism, the need to expand traditional forms of products, services and forms adapting to market demands, while preserving recognisability of the rural tourism product. The panel discussed different approaches and techniques for offer formation and marketing.





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Hans Embacher, Austria. “Innovations in rural tourism products and marketing”

Rural tourism in this country is highly bound to rest in traditional farms and making the emphasis on quality of the rural - farm adventures. There is a need to introduce innovations to the rural tourism product to avoid it becoming tedious, but there is also a need for a joint strategy for innovation to have a single direction. Successful examples include: a horse riding farm that after repairs and restorations works in western style; a rural guest house where there is a garden instead of the parking lot moving parking spaces at a 500m distance from home. A popular product is for children, where during the holiday period a child is responsible for "own" pet – a calf, lamb - takes care of it, feeds, and after the holidays receives a certificate from the host. People like to see in advance in the Internet what others are experiencing during the rural holidays - such as participating in joint work on potato harvesting that the host had placed a video on Youtube portal where you can watch a cow bearing a calf.

Andy Woodward, Great Britain. “Innovations in rural tourism”

growing number of travellers at a national level. Non-traditional accommodations become popular - cottages built of hay cocks, yurts, and wigwams. Successful marketing includes events with popular health food products - in supermarket buying a yogurt with a tourism organization's logo one can win the rest in the countryside.

Kiril Kaloyanov, Bulgaria. “Rural tourism product in Bulgaria”

Rural tourism organization helps farmers to create a product by transforming local resources in a format that is attractive to foreign customers. This organization recognizes importance of maintaining cultural diversity because curiosity leads people to new sites. It is also teach about rich cultural heritage - both tangible and intangible - in a way understandable to people in the today's globalized world.

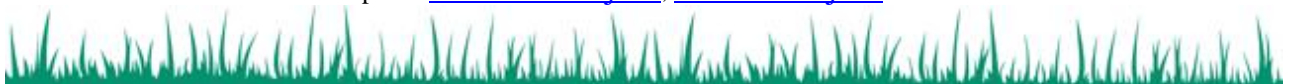
Asnāte Ziemele, Latvia. “Innovative rural tourism products in Latvia”

Ideas for promotion of innovation to tourism products are put in the project "Sustainable use and management of natural resources at Natura 2000 sites - popular and potential tourism destinations", which provides tourism development plans for four areas, thus, inciting local entrepreneurs to create a variety of products. The crisis has taught to think of new and interesting products that perhaps are less innovative on a European scale, but are new in Latvia. As good examples we can mention a dog sleigh rides in Forster, amusement ship in Dunte estate, wine tasting, boating in floods, botanic paths with attractive guides in the protected natural areas, thematic historic activities, open craft classes, herbal spa treatments, military heritage, ski routes maintained by enthusiasts and hiking trails and bicycle trails around the house – the list is long and versatile. Moreover “Lauku Ceļotājs” has developed new products, such as boating during floods in Dviete flood-land. In order to reach as much audience as possible, there is a special section on www.celotajs.lv where every day are placed messages from local people about flood. It is resulted in a video on boating in flooding that is placed on youtube.com. It is also necessary to create products for particular location, for example: beaver glands tea made in Bebrene located in Dviete natural park.

Create a new product, it is necessary to find the right balance between innovation and demand. Most importantly is that customers pay for basic services - accommodation and meals, but choose for holidays the place where it is possible to see something and do for free. Although the basic income may still be earned from accommodations, the time has come when it is difficult to lure out the town people to the countryside only by offering a high quality overnight stay, if there is only accommodation without anything else, it is difficult to get a town resident out of home. It is important for additional product be free of charge. It is important for accommodations become a part of the local tourism product. To make any place to be an obligatory tourism destination, the consistent and concerted activities are required involving everyone and everything - from local stories and legends to local authorities, as it is in Slītere Latvian National Park case, where the Slītere travellers day jointly arranged by “Lauku ceļotājs” and Slītere people perfectly shows all the diversity of the national park's current tourism product- there one can see animals and birds, go with fishermen to sea, go h guides to look for the longest railway bridge, leave bike and go on walk paths, or learn to bake sklandrauši or communicate in Livonian language.

Panel 3: Regional and specialised rural products – a chain of values

Topic of discussions: how to initiate essential products for tourism by involving local people. The panel discussed the best practices in formation of regional and specialized tourism products, involving the local community - rural entrepreneurs, local governments, protected area administration, etc.





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Latvia

Juris Smaļinskis, specialist of Latvian Country Tourism Association "Lauku ceļotājs"

Presentation of "Creation of tourism product, motivating and involving the local community. Experience of Slītere National Park in EC project LIFE +" Proposals for environmental policy and governance based on demonstration of environmental, social and economic benefits from tourism in the Slītere National Park -a Natura 2000 territory".

Activities in the national park are carried out by "Lauku ceļotājs" under the project "POLPROP-Nature". Things we do in Slītere - we recommend to take over in the country, prepare offers for policy documents.

Before establishment of a national park in Slītere, it was a double-closed area: Sanctuary and the military zone. It had a status created by local people's attitudes to customers.

Promotion of local initiatives - a unique area where stories can be written about the survived experience involving local inhabitants. The stories are worth, for ex.: to create a database.

Creation of tourism routes - constructive work - continuous communication process in which the local community became involved and actively participated. Conflict between the park administration and the local community was lessened by this constructive work.

Informative stands - an opportunity to create something tangible and lasting. Preparation of information involves all who want. Stands present practical details - what you can do, where to sleep, the information is supplemented by good cartographic material. Pictograms are more positive. Findings, observations obtained in the preparation of stands, we will recommend for the SAC single style addition. We prepare also directions to the sea.

Route paint marking on trees. We offer to simplify the system. Such marking does not require special approvals.

For the first time in Latvia we implement electronic monitoring of visitors.

Slītere National Park Guide - two years of work involving local people in form of interviews, stories, based on the local memories. Qualitative information, not the copy / paste one. There are also non-traditional things - the Livonians. It is not sustainable without language, that is why some words are translated to Livonian language.

Public discussion - Slītere travellers' day - 12. June. Initiated by local people. Support by local authorities - Dundaga County Council. Opportunity for travellers to test new tourism destinations with new travel guide, sharing their views on their experience in Slītere.

Slovenia.

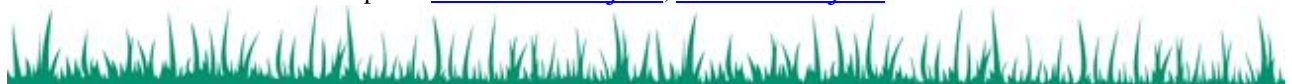
Vesna Čuček, Chamber of Agriculture and Forestry of Slovenia, Agriculture and Forestry Institute, Head of Agriculture Advisory Department

Presentation of "Rural tourism products based on local gastronomy"

Creation of rural tourism products, based on the culinary heritage, involved not only accommodations, but also other agricultural producers.

Prepared a CD with high-quality, professional photos. Introduction of ~ 300 articles in the media were the culinary heritage. It also published the cooking recipes.

Slovenia developed a gastronomic strategy – catalogue, it is available on LC homepage. There are 23 gastronomic regions. 170 typical, traditional dishes with Slovenian names that can not be translated.





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Organizes practical training within the project events. Eg., presentations how to serve the meal. Serving culture is very important for visitors. Quality is also important. We must think of ware to serve in. It can also be sold in wares. Participation in festivals is also necessary. On rainy days visitors may be engaged in sweet cooking.





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Lithuania.

Linās Žabaliūnas, Head of Lithuanian Rural Tourism Association

Presentation of "Craftsmen yards - new product in Lithuanian countryside tourism"

Lithuanian Rural Tourism Association has 13 years experience. It started with 17 homesteads, now it has more than 300 homesteads. Some accommodations work only in summer. They join the Association for information to be placed in the Internet. Most time of the Association work takes lobbying.

Web site is structured in 3 parts: 1) farmsteads, 2) craftsmen yards 3) places of sightseeing.

Lithuanian National Heritage Law gave an impulse to development of craftsmen and farmers. Legal framework of the law includes definitions, principles, scope and so on.

Lithuania has 19 sorts of crafts. Most popular are handicrafts, wooden crafts.

Craftsmen yards - the options to see how this product is being made. Craftsmen yards - four different shapes: 1) demonstration; 2) training; 3) tasting; 4) selling

German

Landerlaub Meklenburg – Vorpommern. Cornelia Hass

Presentation "Regional and specialized rural tourism products in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern" in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern located in Northern Germany. The largest city is Rostock. Tourism between the agriculture and forestry play an important role in the regional economy.

Rural Tourism Association was established in 1991. It currently has 230 members, which totally offer 4,100 beds.

Regional specialized projects. Holiday at farms is only a small part of rural tourism. We like horse riding, leisure at estates. Each year we issue a catalogue "Rural tourism in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern"

In 2008 we issued the catalogue "Horse riding in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern". Horse riding is a new product. In order to succeed, cooperation at the community level is required. There should be signs, indications.

The third – we made a map of the regional agricultural farms and places where you can enjoy a coffee. The reverse side contains contact information and web links.

We created a new on-line booking system TRIIDO - accommodations and activities. Justification: What are rural tourism strengths? - The traveller can sleep anywhere, why people must go to our region. That means people come for experience, which can not be obtained elsewhere.

The set up reservation system combines accommodations and activities and opportunity to reserve those online. Travellers can book a package they want. Booking system produces regionally specialized tourism products, provides practical communication, and improves service value by the marketing and professional sales.

What is the benefit for tourism service providers to be in the reservation system? - Professional advertising for both accommodations and activities. Once registered, they are offered in different packages and by different tour operators.

What is the benefit for the visitors? - Easy to find and make a choice. User-friendly. Not actual offer is not shown.

