

Workshop

Rural tourism: changing concepts for quality?

state of art – innovation – local values

June 9, 2010, Riga, Latvia

General Conclusions

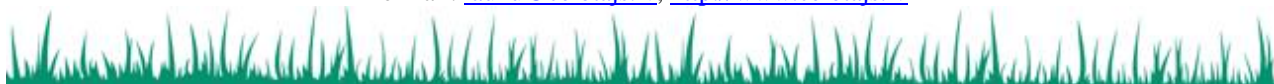
Competitiveness through a New Understanding of Quality

The International Workshop “Changing concepts for Quality?” was celebrated on 9-June-2010 in Riga gathering ca 200 participants from 24 countries of Europe. It was organised by the Latvian country tourism association Lauku Celotajs in cooperation with EuroGites – European Federation of Farm and Village Tourism and with support from the EC Leonardo da Vinci program.

Unanimously considered by participants as the best and most effective event of this kind the last years, this workshop provided a wide scope of contributions. They can best be summarized as a new understanding of quality, creating competitiveness based on a close connection to the expectations of the visitor, providing quality through cooperation, high level of professionalism, and innovative approaches along the whole value chain of the rural tourism product.

The unique assets and values offered by rural tourism to the increasing market segment of LOHAS (lifestyle of health and sustainability) face the challenge of any small and individual product and service to find its customer and thus, to be transformed into a profitable activity. To achieve this, new forms of cooperation need to be defined amongst the different stakeholders involved, where each of them concentrates on those activities where they have comparative advantage and high competence. Bundling these different activities along the value chain into a comprehensive product will then allow to deliver a high-quality holiday experience to the visitor that would be impossible to achieve individually.

The first panel opened the workshop under the heading “Rural Tourism in Europe – State of Art and Quo Vadis?” It presented the past, present, and future situation of rural tourism as product that is developing from a traditional concept based on domestic demand, into market-driven services that put in value a wide range of assets in rural areas to an increasingly international demand. It proved the need of transparency through common standards, providing rural tourism entrepreneurs with practical tools and training as represented by the ongoing QUALITOOL project, and highlighted the synergies that can be generated through the cooperation between trade organisations, travel industry, and promotion platforms.



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The second panel focussed on innovations as the driving element for continuous improvement and development of attractive rural tourism products. Several examples from four countries showed the wide range of possibilities and approaches in this field, ranging from conceptual policies to generate innovation as a whole, to more specific aspects such as personal skills of the hosts and emotional binding through stories, or focus on specific assets such as nature and gastronomy.

In the third panel, several examples showed the importance of acting on the whole series of elements that compose the value chain of rural tourism. The active involvement and participation of the local population, as bearer of the specific identity of each destination including culture, landscape, and nature conservation was especially highlighted with the case study of Slītere National Park, and confirmed by the other contributions from Slovenia and Lithuania. This was complemented by the first operational case of using ICT for combining all these elements into a tailor-made final product according to the individual needs of the visitor.

All three panels reserved considerable time for discussion and interaction between panellists and the audience. These contributions enriched the content presented by speakers, and decisively supported the overall conclusions as presented above.

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Lifelong Learning Programme

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