

POSITIVE AWARENESS OF NATURA 2000

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Introduction

Positive awareness of Natura2000 in all target groups was promoted through dissemination/communication campaign. Each of the campaign activities were addressed at one or several target groups of the project target audience: **rural tourism service providers, administrations of national parks and protected nature areas in Latvia, environmental and tourism organisations, tourism managers and tour operators in Europe, environment and tourism policy and decision makers, administrations of national parks and protected nature areas in the Baltic countries and Europe, members of EU nature protection and tourism development networks and organisations, national parks' authorities in the Baltic countries, general public, mass media.**

Dissemination/communication campaign activities and results are:



1. PROJECT WEB SITE

Since the start of the project, its progress and results are available in the project web site: www.polprop.celotajs.lv in Latvian and English languages.

Project information has been placed in several web pages promoting particular project events and outputs like Travel Day to Slitere, conferences, tourism guides and touring routes. Totally attracted 81508 unique pageviews (Google Analytics).

The web site introduces the project territory as a Natura2000 site and describes the project activities directed at maximising the benefits from the Nature 2000 status to local population and visitors while protecting the nature values.



2. LOCAL AWARENESS RAISING WORKSHOPS

In the initial phase of the project, many local residents and businesses regarded Natura 2000 status as a disadvantage because of restrictions in the name of nature protection. Examples of restrictions causing complaints of local community: complicated and time consuming processes to get building construction permits, local residents are not allowed to cut firewood for household consumption (heating) in their private forests which are designated as Natura2000; installation and maintenance of draining-ditches in the village territory (residential area); forest cleaning, cutting grass in meadows, improving pathways in village territory.

Project awareness raising activities brought together the conflicting parties (local residents/businesses and administration of the national park) to discuss problems and seek for solutions. During negotiation process several local con-



Stakeholder meeting in the Slitere National Park

licts were solved, dialogue and cooperation initiated. According to local surveys made in the final project year, Natura2000 status and promotion of nature values help to attract environmentally responsible visitors to the area.

Local residents and businesses actively and regularly involved in project activities, came up with their initiatives through the whole of its duration. This fact proves their interest to gain knowledge in how Natura2000 sites can be conserved and used for local benefit. Those participating in the final awareness raising event in SNP positively assessed the project activities and achievements. Rural tourism providers marked that nature based tourist activities are well demanded and that project outputs – marked touring routes and their description sheets, information stands, the Slītere tourism guidebook and others help a lot to provide good service to visitors and meet their needs. The national park’s administration stressed that there is no need to build a Disneyland in a national park to bring income to local territory.

Nature based product, properly designed in local cooperation and professionally promoted bring good profits and support nature conservation. The local stakeholders definitely regard Natura2000 and protected nature area status as a benefit to their living environment and business, and admit that all stakeholder cooperation is the key to success.

3. Public discussions on nature and tourism in Natura 2000 sites in Latvia:

3.1. Public discussion – Travel Day to Slītere (12.06.2010. and 4.-5.06.2011.)

To promote environment friendly and sustainable tourism development in Slītere National Park (SNP), a Natura2000 site, and to rise public discussions on tourism development in Natura2000 sites, the event participants were acquainted with the project outcomes: 9 new touring routes, travel guide “The Slītere National Park”, and 5 outdoor information stands.

During the event the Minister of Environment, the Chairman of Dundaga’s Administrative District’s Council and the Director of the Slītere National Park administration addressed the visitors of this public event.

The Travel Day to Slītere (TDS), a Natura2000 site was promoted through a number of specialised publications, each of them bearing the Natura2000 logo for recognition:

- **Two issues of the TDS newsletter disseminated to stakeholder target audience and media:**



Travel Day to Slītere



1st issue (2010)



2nd issue (2011)



- **The TDS event program**



- **The TDS special web site:**



<http://www.celotajs.lv/conf/conf/conference/110604-CD/info.html>

Results: positive feedback was received from visitors (general public), local community – service providers, SNP administration and municipality representatives during the event follow-up meeting. The Travel Day to Slītere achieved wide and highly positive mass media coverage. The event/public discussion convincingly proved the benefits of tourism development in Natura2000 territory and contributed to positive Natura2000 awareness among the 1000 visitors, 50 local stakeholders, in the government level via participation of the minister, and through the audience of mass media.

The feedback after the first Travel Day to Slītere was highly positive, and it generated the local initiative to make the event a tradition. With the support from the local municipality, the SNP administration, local businesses, residents, volunteers, the 2nd Travel Day to Slītere (June 4-5, 2011) offered even wider program and attracted ca 2000 visitors. The next Travel Day to Slītere is scheduled for June 2012, after the end of the project.

3.2. Public discussion - presentation of the Coastal Architecture Guidelines (09.09.2011.)

Public discussion event took place in the Papes Ķonu village, Rucava region. The site was selected to demonstrate on the local example the influence and impact of inappropriate building construction on local values like landscape and biological diversity. The Coastal Architecture Guidelines provide advice and recommendations to those, responsible and involved in development and maintenance of residential areas in coastal zone – land owners, municipalities, residential developers and others - willing to maintain the authentic and traditional style in modern constructions.

The key issue of the public discussion was that traditional architecture and landscaping principles respect nature values and have to be maintained not only for the sake of cultural heritage, but also as a tool to maintain biological diversity.



Public discussion participants listening to presentation of the guidelines in a renovated barn – an example of traditional architecture

The public discussion involved local community and municipality representatives, leading Latvian architects, biologists, administrations of protected nature sites, including Natura 2000, and other stakeholders. Before the public discussion, the Guideline document was sent to stakeholders electronically. The event attracted 55 participants, including 14 media journalists. Coverage followed in 4 web portals, newspapers and on the radio.

The Coastal Architecture Guidelines



Traditional coastal architecture in the Slitere National Park.

3.3. Public discussion of environmental and tourism policy proposals (8.12.2011.)

Public discussion “Environmental Policy Proposals Demonstrating Environmental, Social and Economic Benefits from Tourism Development in the Slitere National Park” took place in the Ministry of Regional Development and Environmental Protection. The policy proposal document was presented to the audience for discussion. Speaker presentations explained the policy proposals through different aspects of the project experience.



Attending were 131 participants and media representatives. The policy proposal document is sent to relevant departments of the Ministry of Regional Development and Environmental Protection, the Ministry of Regional Development, The Ministry of Economics, the Ministry of Culture and to the Nature Conservation Agency of Latvia and is publicly accessible from the project web site.

Public discussions raised different issues related to Natura2000 like management, financing, benefits, protection of biological diversity, balancing nature conservation with economic development and demonstrated positive solutions to conflicts and problems. Natura 2000 positive awareness in general public and stakeholders is raised through positive examples. The results of public discussions demonstrated that positive, professional and correct communication and PR for Natura2000 changes public opinion and initiates activities in line with the purposes of Natura2000 network.





4. CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

Nature based tourism development in Natura2000 sites was on the agenda on three conferences during the project:

- **National rural nature tourism conference, Riga, 11.03.2009 (251 participants)**
- **International Rural tourism workshop, Riga, 09.06.2010 (200 participants)**
- **The Baltic Nature tourism conference, Riga, 21.-24.03.2011 (258 participants from 18 countries)**

The conferences brought together Latvian and European professionals in rural tourism, nature tourism and management of protected nature areas.

The conferences served well for practical exchange of positive management examples of Natura2000 sites nationally and internationally contributing not only to positive awareness but also inspiring nature conservation and tourism specialists for dialogue and cooperation.

5. AWARENESS RAISING IN GENERAL PUBLIC – TOURISTS

The project produced a number of promotion and marketing publications making Natura2000 accessible and understandable to general public – tourists. All publications carry the logo and brief annotation of the Natura2000 network, as well as explain particular nature values found in Natura2000 sites in Latvia. Their distribution channels and methods were carefully planned to reach the target audience.

It is estimated that the publications promoting Natura2000 sites and values through tourism products have reached the audience of 158500 recipients (web site hits, copies of promotional materials distributed in trade fairs, number of survey responses, etc.).



5.1. Tourism guide “The Slitere National Park”.

- The most significant events and facts on the history of nature and people in the project area;
- Worth seeing and knowing, – descriptions of more than 100 natural and cultural heritage sites in the SNP;
- Touring itineraries –walking, cycling, boating, bird and animal watching, and driving routes
- Calendar of events;
- “Green” and practical advice for travellers;
- Services and facilities – accommodations, food, etc.;
- The map of the Slitere National Park.

Printed in 4000 copies in Latvian, 2000 copies in English. Distribution: travel fairs, tourist information offices, office of the Latvian Country Tourism Association”, media trips, Travel Day to Slitere in 2010 and 2011, in project seminars and public discussions, in Nature Conservation Agency and Kurzeme Regional Administration, in tourism objects in the SNP.

5.2. Tourism guide “Baltic National Parks. Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia”

The guidebook invites to visit 14 national parks – Natura2000 sites in the Baltic countries and describes the nature tourism products to experience natural beauty and biodiversity.

Printed in 2000 (LV); 3000 (EN) Distribution: the guide is distributed to administrations and visitor centres of the national parks, to tourism providers operating in N2K sites. Distribution also takes place through the office of Lauku ceļotājs and Latvian State Tourism Agency.

5.3. Botanical guide

The guide includes: the plant finder containing over 250 frequently observed plant species; the botanical tours, routes and separate objects or sites related to plants and botany, like dendrological gardens, botanical trails, gardens, etc.

Printed in 1000 copies in Latvian, 500 copies in English. Distribution: Baltic nature tourism conference, rural tourism accommodation providers as an example how to promote for guests the Natura2000 values, tourist information offices, in project public discussions and other events, Nature Conservation Agency, Ministry of Environment, Travel trade fairs, the Nature Museum.





5.4. Touring route descriptions

9 touring routes in SNP as Natura2000 site were developed within the project. For better dissemination, their descriptions with maps and photos of the sites are downloadable from the web sites:

www.celotajs.lv, www.ziemeļkurzeme.lv
www.kolkasrags.lv, www.slitere.lv
www.daba.gov.lv

5.5. Travel trade fairs

Natura2000 was promoted in the Balttour travel fair in 2009 (16 765 visitors), in 2010 (17 042 visitors), in 2011 (22 500 visitors). The stand exposition featured walking, boating, cycling and self-drive touring routes in the Slitere National Park and other Natura2000 sites.



5.6. Visitor monitoring, surveys

Customer survey in 2009, 2010, 2011 (1241 respondents). At the end of the project 33% of the respondents state they are aware of what is Natura 2000. Most of respondents show positive attitude to nature conservation and Natura2000 network.

Natura2000 awareness survey in 2009 and 2010 showed better awareness results:

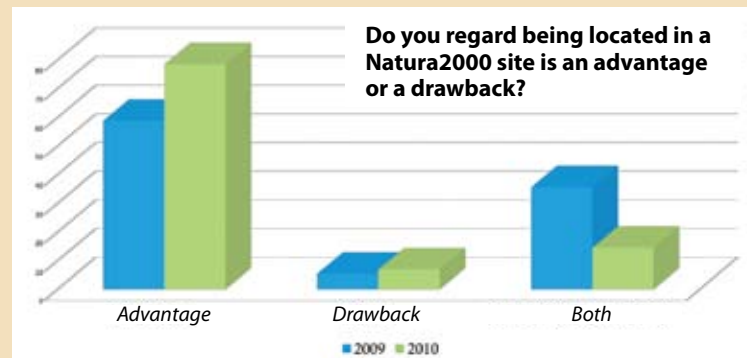
446 respondents: rural tourism providers, staff of municipalities and state institutions). During the project, Natura2000 awareness increased by 10% among rural tourism providers (from 67% to 80% Natura2000 aware respondents).

Rural tourism providers, municipality and state officers show better Natura2000 awareness than general public – visitors to Natura2000 sites. Natura2000 are increasingly used in development of sustainable, nature friendly tourism products (walking trails, bird watching, berry picking, etc.).

Question "Do you regard being located in a Natura2000 site is an advantage or a drawback?"

59% of the responding rural tourism providers regarded their location in a Natura2000 site rather as advantage than a drawback in 2009 while in 2010 already 78% viewed this status as a benefit. Rural tourism providers find the following advantages:

- Natura2000 as a resource for product development, attraction sites;
- Natura2000 as a resource and added value in marketing;
- Maintenance of biological diversity and unique values;
- Natura2000 status as an opportunity to attract project funding;
- Rural tourism providers and their clients can use infrastructure in Natura2000 sites.



5.7. Tour operators

For better dissemination, to promote the tourism products of the Slitere national park and the Baltic national parks – Natura2000 sites to European tour operator market two manuals for tour operators: “Wildlife Tours” and “Active Tours” were produced and distributed accordingly in 14 countries/~200 tour operators.

The routes bring visitors to Natura2000 sites and descriptions explain the biological diversity and other nature values there. Tour operators in Latvia were addressed via ALTA, the Association of Latvian Travel Agents. Specialised nature tour operators in other countries were addressed directly and with assistance of the project partner ECEAT who has a relevant database. Tour operators received also the Botanical guide, Tourism guide “The Slitere National Park” and Tourism guide “Baltic National Parks. Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia”.

5.8. Mass media

Three media trips to Natura2000 sites in 2009, 2010 and 2010. 130 media representatives participated, 263 press articles and radio coverage followed. 16 press releases have been sent to media during the project and 3 press conferences organised. Media trip participants received project materials to use in their publications. Each media trip was lead by a project staff member to explain the project aims and efforts in NATURA2000 positive awareness building.



6. SUSTAINABLE TOURISM MODEL

Natura2000 awareness is increased promoting the sustainable tourism model experience via a number of guidelines on management and sustainable tourism development activities in Natura2000 sites. All the guidelines of the sustainable tourism model have been distributed to administrations of nature protected areas in Latvia, to Nature Conservation Agency, relevant state institutions and ministries. They are available from the web site of „Lauku ceļotājs”.



7. MANUAL “A STARTER GUIDE TO DEVELOPING SUSTAINABLE TOURISM IN PROTECTED AREAS”

The manual focuses on protected areas that are in early stage of their tourism development and wish to do this in a well-planned and sustainable manner. Examples of such areas are more than 26000 Natura2000 sites which have recently been recognised by 27 European countries. The manual brings together state-of-the-art knowledge and experiences from different parts of Europe and can serve as a basic reference document. The manual is disseminated to administrations of national parks and other nature protected areas, Natura2000 sites in European countries.



8. Conclusions

Every possible effort was made to explain Natura2000 values in all the project documentation and events. One project is not enough to achieve overall 100% positive awareness of biodiversity and importance of Natura2000. However, the project made serious steps in initiating stakeholder dialogue and exchanging practical experiences internationally.

Natura2000 positive awareness can be achieved in long term and through a complex of activities. Regulations and directives should be adequately explained in understandable, simple terms, demonstrating specific and concrete benefits society and involved communities gain from nature conservation. Problems should be defined, discussed and solutions found in public consultation, listening and attending to interests of all involved stakeholders.

Positive and adequate communication messages and practices is the key to increasingly positive Natura2000 awareness.



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