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Latvian Country Tourism Association “Lauku ceļotājs”, 2011



ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY AND GOVERNANCE PROPOSALS

for tourism development in protected nature sites

Example: the Slītere National Park

INTRODUCTION

The proposals have been developed under the project POLPROP-NATURA, "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 (LIFE07 ENV/LV/000981).

The proposals concern tourism and nature conservation policy documents and offer practical solutions for development problems in especially protected nature sites (hereinafter – protected sites). The Slītere National park was selected as an example and a project demonstration site as the identified development problems were present in the park. The proposed solutions are relevant and applicable also to other nature protected sites in Latvia.

The proposals are developed in line with the national policy planning documents, such as the Environmental Policy Guidelines for 2009 – 2015 (chapter 4), the National development Plan for 2007 – 2013 (sub-chapter 6.3.4.), Land Policy Guidelines for 2008 – 2014 (chapters 2 - 4, 6 - 7), Coastal Spatial Development Guidelines for 2011 – 2017 (chapters 3 – 5).

The Policy proposal document has been presented to 100 participants of public discussion in the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development on 8.12.2011. Results of discussions have been incorporated in the final version of the policy proposal document.

The document with its annexes has been sent to the following institutions and officials:

- Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development, minister Edmunds Sprūdžs,
- Nature Conservation Agency, director Jānis Strautnieks,
- Tourism Development State Agency, director Armands Slokenbergs,
- Ministry of Culture, minister Žaneta Jaunzeme-Grende,
- Ministry of Economy, minister Daniels Pavļuts,
- Ministry of Agriculture, minister Laimdota Straujuma,
- State Inspection for Heritage Protection, director Juris Dambis,
- Latvian Association of Architects,
- Latvian Association of Local and Regional governments, chairman Andris Jaunsleinis,
- 13 coastal self-governments:
 - Salacgrīva Regional Council, chairman Dagnis Straubergs,
 - Limbaži Regional Council, chairman Aigars Legzdīņš,
 - Saulkrasti Regional Council, chairman Ervīns Grāvītis,
 - Carnikava Regional Council, chairperson Daiga Jurēvica,
 - Engure Region, chairman Gundars Važa,
 - Mērsrags Region, chairman Lauris Karlsons,
 - Roja Region, chairperson Eva Kārcliņa,
 - Dundaga Region, chairperson Gunta Abaja,
 - Ventpils Region, chairman Aivars Mucenieks,
 - Pāvilosta Region, chairman Uldis Kristapsons,
 - Grobiņa Region, chairman Aivars Priedols,
 - Nīca Region, council chairman Agris Petermanis,
 - Rucava Region, council chairperson Līga Stendze.

**Environmental policy and governance proposals for tourism development
in protected nature sites based on the example of the Slītere National Park**
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1. IMPROVEMENT OF LOCAL COOPERATION AND COMMUNICATION IN NATURE PROTECTED SITES

1.1. Involvement of local community and tourism professionals in development of tourism sections of nature conservation plans for protected nature sites.

Proposal: Local residents, land owners, businesses, municipalities and tourism professionals should all be involved as equal partners in drafting the tourism section of a nature protection plan for a protected nature site. Local cooperation and involvement of professionals will ensure constructive process, management of local conflicts and finding a compromise between all stakeholder interests.

Problems identified:

- Tourism sections in nature conservation plans of protected nature sites are often general and formally written. From tourism point of view, they are approached non-professionally, without appreciating the role and impact of tourism in nature conservation. Where tourism professionals are not involved in infrastructure planning, mistakes are often made and the infrastructure is not efficient enough. Often the infrastructure is planned and designed separately, outside the context of other tourism processes in the area. Usually tourism development proposals in such documents are not based on market demand.
- Local community is not informed about development of a nature protection plan in the initial stage of the process. Not infrequently, the information practices are formal. All stakeholder interests and proposals are not listened to, and unclear issues are not explained. This results in strong opposition from all local stakeholders – land owners, businesses, residents, representatives of municipality and state bodies - who not only are against activities and measures of the nature conservation plan, but also are unwilling to listen to any justification of those. In such situation it is very difficult to resume negotiations and find compromise.
- Where local community is not sufficiently involved, or is involved just formally, confrontation and conflicts rise between administration of the protected site and local community. There is negative attitude against nature conservation requirements which are not always balanced with economic development prospects in the area. Where local community does not support nature conservation and tourism, cases of vandalism, infrastructure damage and harm to the nature are observed more frequently.
- Nature conservation plans are usually developed by professionals in nature conservation and environment. In communication with local stakeholders they often use professional terms and language that non-professionals cannot easily understand. This adds to the conflicts between the two opposing sides. Tourism professionals offer constructive dialogue which is based on economic interests and suggest to communicate nature values in everyday language. Solution is often achieved in negotiations when both sides – nature conservation and economic development – are represented.

Justification of the proposal: Involvement of local residents, businesses, municipality and tourism professionals ensures listening to and evaluation of all stakeholder interests, thus implementing the national environmental policy. Through awareness of advantages, social and economic benefits, opportunities to develop high quality nature tourism products and services in protected nature sites, local residents understand and support nature conservation requirements and appreciate the nature values that are at their disposal. Only with local acceptance and support, the state institutions can ensure efficient implementation of environmental policy.

1.2. Improvement of communication practices between administrations of nature protected sites and local communities.

Proposal: Communication skills should be included as a requirement in job descriptions of the leading staff positions of nature protected site administrations.

Problem identified: low communication skills of the leading administration staff result in conflicts or lack of cooperation between the nature protected site administration and local community. It hampers development of local economy and presents obstacles to implementation of nature conservation measures.

Justification of the proposal: Nature conservation concepts and measures should be explained continuously and in understandable form to local residents, businesses and general public. Public information and communication should be regarded as one of the implementation methods of the environmental policy. Insufficient and poor quality communication result in local conflicts, violation of nature conservation regulations, lack of understanding in local society, their indifferent attitude or even actions that damage nature and environment.

1.3. Introduction of loyalty symbol to nature protected sites.

Proposal: A national park's loyalty symbol should be introduced as a sign of recognition (e.g., "friend of the ... national park"). Administrations of nature protected sites shall award the sign to those local businesses which are run in environment and nature friendly way and contribute to the local development. Good cooperation practice rules with local businesses, residents and other partners should be developed.

Problems identified:

- Local businesses not infrequently do not cooperate with the administration of a nature protected site because cooperation conditions, opportunities and forms are not clear. They often regard administration only as a body imposing restrictions and penalties. Businesses require from nature protected site administrations to fulfil such functions that are not in administration's authority. At the same time, they do not use the knowledge and experience the administration specialists can provide in nature and environment interpretation.
- Local businesses do not regard their location in a nature protected site as an advantage. They are not aware either of marketing advantages the expression "national park" grants, or of the land value increase potential in nature protected sites.
- Businesses are not always aware of how to contribute to the territorial development and how to stress its importance. Criteria of the proposed loyalty symbol will serve as a guidance and stimulation to businesses in environment friendly management practices.

Justification of the proposal: Local cooperation partners are residents of the nature protected site, land owners and businesses offering tourism and infrastructure services. Good and clear cooperation conditions would help them to adopt environment friendly business practices, to provide high quality services to visitors, and to benefit from the advantages being located in a nature protected site. At the same time they would promote the respective nature protected site building positive public opinion which is one of the cornerstones in development and implementation of environmental policy.

The Slītere National Park example – Proposals for sustainable tourism development in the Slītere National Park.

(hereinafter – proposals)

http://www.celotajs.lv/cont/prof/proj/PolProp/Dokumenti/SNP_turisms_EN.pdf

(55 pages, 1,02 Mb).



The document discusses the territory of the Slītere National Park as a single tourist destination operating in line with the principles of sustainable tourism. The document looks at the available tourism resources in the territory, infrastructure and tourism products, provides proposals and suggests concrete actions for further development of tourism after 2010.

The document also looks at the tourism impact on nature values, analyses it and suggests how to reduce the negative impact. The goal and vision of tourism development in the Slītere National Park are defined. The tourism section of the Slītere National Park's Nature Conservation Plan has a reference to this tourism development proposal document (2009).

Public consultation of the proposals, stakeholder approval:

- 4.08.2009. Proposals are discussed with the residents of the Slītere National Park, tourism development measures and actions (36 participants).*
- 10.11.2009. Final version of the proposal document presented and approved with the residents of the Slītere National Park (23 participants).*
- 18.12.2009. Proposals are presented to the Political Supervision Group which was established to ensure qualitative and justified proposals to improve the policy and legislation documents in force concerning the project areas – environment and tourism (11 participants).*
- 30.12.2009. Specialists of the Latvian Country Tourism Association "Lauku ceļotājs" take part in a meeting to develop the Nature Conservation Plan of the Slītere National Park providing description of the existing situation in the field of tourism. Tourism development proposals are approved during the meeting and integrated in the Nature Conservation Plan.*

2. PROPOSALS FOR THE MANUAL “UNIFORM STYLE OF ESPECIALLY PROTECTED NATURE SITES”

The manual “Uniform Style of Especially Protected Nature Sites” has been developed by the Nature Conservation Agency to maintain a uniform and recognisable style of infrastructure and printed publications in over 600 especially protected nature sites in Latvia.

2.1. Recommendations for outdoor interpretation contents in information stands, panels and other media.

Proposals: Outdoor interpretation should include information not only about nature values in protected areas but also about visitor services. Outdoor interpretation should inform about what visitors are allowed to do in the protected site addressing wide scope of recreation and activity interests.

Problems identified:

- Outdoor interpretation content is often “visitor unfriendly”– written in formal, academic language. Nature history and processes are explained using professional terms that are not clear to average tourists.
- Outdoor information stands usually display information about restrictions and penalties rising negative reaction in visitors. Often there is no information about what is allowed in the protected nature site.
- Outdoor information stands include information only about and from the institutions which installed the stands. There is no visitor oriented and comprehensive information.

Justification of the proposal: The proposed content builds positive visitor attitude to nature values and stimulate use of local services, including nature guide services. Professional nature watching products increase nature awareness and support local economy.

2.2. Recommendations for marking of touring routes on nature objects with painted symbols.

Proposal: To add practical advice on route marking with paint on nature objects in the chapter “Trail marking in especially protected nature sites” of the manual “Uniform Style of Especially Protected Nature Sites”.

Problems identified:

- Touring routes that have been created “on paper” cannot always be found in the nature. Tourists often get lost as they cannot find their way using maps and route descriptions. The usual practice in Latvia is to use special marking signs. Their production is time and cost consuming, therefore usually there are not enough marking signs on touring routes. Not infrequently, marking signs are damaged or destroyed.
- In Latvia there are no uniform system for marking active touring routes. Visitors in many cases find it difficult to orientate, find the route and follow it.

Justification of the proposal: The marking system for active touring routes which was created and tested under the project can be maintained at low costs of materials and labour. It is in line with experience of European countries and is recognizable. Introducing a uniform system would stimulate development of environment friendly and sustainable tourism in nature protected sites and would reduce costs of resources required for marking touring routes.

The Slītere National Park example – How to design an outdoor panel? Guidelines for information contents.

http://www.celotajs.lv/cont/prof/proj/PolProp/Dokumenti/Outdoor_panels_EN_2010.pdf (1,1 Mb, 23 pages).

The goal of the guidelines is to provide an example of visitor friendly, non-academic, attractive and, at the same time, useful and educational information about a territory or an object. The guidelines advise how to structure textual information, describe examples from the Baltics and other countries, and reflect on experience of outdoor panel making in the Slītere National Park.



The Slītere National Park example – Guidelines for marking of touring routes.

http://www.celotajs.lv/cont/prof/proj/PolProp/Dokumenti/Vadlinijas_krasas_markejums_LV.pdf (863 Kb, 18 pages).

The document provides examples from countries in Europe in marking tourist trails with paint on nature objects like trees, poles, stones. Based on experience of the Latvian Country Tourism Association, the guidelines give practical advice on how to choose colours, symbols and forms, what routing principles are to be followed, what inventory is required, etc.



Public consultation and stakeholder approval:

- 24.03.2010. The authors of the guidelines took part in the meeting at the Nature Conservation Agency regarding the uniform style of nature protected areas. The meeting discussed the use of paints and the contents of outdoor interpretation panels (20 participants).
- 20.08.2010. Practical route marking seminar. During the seminar a cycling route between Mazirbe and Kolka was marked following the guidelines (13 participants).
- 13.12.2010. Both above guidelines presented at the Political Supervision Group meeting in the Ministry of Environment. It was decided to send the guidelines to the Nature Conservation Agency asking to integrate the recommendations in the manual "Uniform Style of Especially Protected Nature Sites" and to the Tourism State Development Agency asking to publish the guidelines in its web site for dissemination (11 participants).
- End of 2010. The guidelines sent to the Nature Conservation Agency and the Tourism State Development Agency.

3. PROPOSALS FOR CONSERVATION OF THE COASTAL CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL ENVIRONMENT – THE TRADITIONAL ARCHITECTURE.

Proposal No. 1. It has to be ensured that building and construction processes in nature protected sites and adjoining areas do not harm biological diversity and protected nature values, and maintain the traditional landscape values. Job qualifications of a municipality architect should require knowledge of the local architectural tradition in order to facilitate its adequate integration in modern situation and provide consultations to land owners and builders.

Proposal No. 2. Normative acts regulating the territory planning should include a requirement on additional public consultation of building and reconstruction projects which are carried out in coastal villages designated as national heritage sites. Specialists from the State Inspection for Heritage Protection and local community stakeholders should participate in public consultation.

Problems identified:

- *Due to chaotic development of coastal territories and lack of precise regulations regarding architectural forms, the cultural and historical values of coastal areas are lost and the traditional landscape is degraded. Ecological value of the environment is reduced. The traditional cultural and historical values like the landscape of fishing villages and the coast suffer under influence of new building trends.*
- *Incoming land owners in coastal areas lack knowledge and understanding of the historical architectural traditions and integration of these values in modern building and landscape. As a result, the territory irrevocably loses its value in the eyes of local residents and visitors.*
- *Public consultations on municipal territorial planning and separate constructions usually are formal (or sometimes omitted at all!). Local residents do not get a clear idea about the planned activities and their consequences as well as about their rights and opportunities to influence the building processes.*

Justification of the proposal: The cultural and historical evidences represent not only an important tourism resource but also an element of the surrounding landscape and environment. It is necessary to maintain and improve authentic building construction principles creating harmonic environment and preventing loss of protected nature, cultural and historical values. In cooperation between municipal architects, administrations of nature protected sites and the State Inspection for Heritage Protection it is possible to control building processes, prevent degradation of landscape and threats to environmental and cultural values.

The Slītere National Park example – Traditional Coastal Architecture in the Slītere National Park.

Description, Analysis, Recommendations.

http://www.celotajs.lv/cont/prof/proj/PolProp/Dokumenti/SNP_apbuve_vadlinijas.pdf (7.42 Mb, 54 lpp.).

The document records, summarises and analyses the situation related to the history of courtyards and housing, constructions, building and finishing materials, joinery and details in the summer of 2010. The document uses the research “Buildings and their use in Liv villages” by Saulvedis Cimermanis that was published during several years in the monthly paper “Līvli”.



Example – Traditional Coastal Architecture Guidelines.

http://www.celotajs.lv/cont/prof/proj/PolProp/Dokumenti/Abuve_vadlinijas_4.08.2011.pdf
(~3 Mb, 36 lpp.).



The document addresses coastal territories in Latvia outside residential areas or in residential areas with low density of buildings. The document does not discuss building solutions in coastal towns and urbanised villages. The goal of the document is to renew and further develop a united visually emotional image of the coastline respecting the unique regional and local features of the area. Recommendations are to be implemented according to the legislation in force. The guideline document can be used as a basis for development of detailed building and construction regulations for a particular territory according to its territorial planning, historical research and other available documents.

Public consultation and stakeholder approval:

- 13.05.2010. The first meeting of the project authors with architects in the State Inspection for Heritage Protection to listen to ideas and recommendations for policy proposals (14 participants).
- 13.12.2010. Presentation of the draft version of the “Traditional Coastal Architecture Guidelines” and discussion with the Political Supervision Group (11 participants).
- 07.04.2011. Presentation of the draft version of the “Traditional Coastal Architecture Guidelines” and discussion in the State Inspection for Heritage Protection (14 participants).
- 09.04.2011. Participants of the Coastal Municipalities’ Association are informed about the “Traditional Coastal Architecture Guidelines” at the meeting in Užava.
- July, August 2011. Draft version of the “Traditional Coastal Architecture Guidelines” is sent for approval to the State Inspection for Heritage Protection, the Latvian Association of Architects, the Association of Self-Governments, the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development and other relevant institutions and specialists.
- 23.08.2011. Presentation and public consultation of the “Traditional Coastal Architecture Guidelines” with residents of the Slītere National Park (34 participants). It was agreed that both documents – the “Traditional Coastal Architecture Guidelines” and the “Traditional Coastal Architecture in the Slītere National Park. Description, Analysis, Recommendations.” will be publicly accessible to all interested individuals from the architect’s office of the Dundaga municipality.
- 09.09.2011. Presentation and discussion of the “Traditional Coastal Architecture Guidelines” at Pape, Rucava region in presence of media journalists (55 participants).
- 14.10.2011. Presentation of the “Traditional Coastal Architecture Guidelines” at the meeting of the Coastal Municipalities’ Association in Roja.
- 10.11.2011. Presentation of the “Traditional Coastal Architecture Guidelines” in Saulkrasti municipality.

4. VISITOR MONITORING IN PROTECTED AREAS

Proposal: United visitor monitoring should be introduced in nature protected areas in Latvia (mainly in the national parks, protected landscape areas and nature reserves which are popular tourist destinations). The goal of visitor monitoring is to assess the visitor impact on nature values and socio economic benefits from tourism in these territories. Monitoring should be supervised and implemented by the Nature Conservation Agency in cooperation with partners – municipalities, tourist information centres, tourism NGOs.

Problem identified: So far in Latvia, data on visitor numbers in especially protected nature sites have not been available either in total, by regions, or by individual protected sites. Nature conservation plans of many especially protected nature sites mention tourism as one of existing or alternative economic activities. In Latvia, there is no responsible institution collecting and summarising data on visitors in protected sites in whole country and by regions. Statistics are available mainly from accommodation businesses or from individual objects selling entrance tickets. The data are very fragmentary and incomplete. There are very few objects providing statistics in longer term to show the trends and influence of various internal and external factors on tourist flow in the territories. Interpretation and analysis of the available data is not sufficient. Without knowing at least approximate total number of visitors and main directions of visitor flow it is hard to make judgements regarding tourism impact on nature values and economic development of these sites.

Justification of the proposal: Objective tourism statistics shall contribute to better management planning of especially protected nature sites, including building a well-considered infrastructure. It will also help to solve tourism related issues in municipalities where there are nature protected sites.

The Slītere National Park example – Monitoring Methodology for monitoring the dynamics of tourism environmental, social and economical impact in the Slītere National Park.

http://www.celotajs.lv/cont/prof/proj/PolProp/Dokumenti/1.version_monitoring_methodology_EN.pdf (575 Kb, 16 pages).

The methodology document describes and analyses the visitor monitoring methods used in the Slītere National Park in 2009 – 2010: visual observation of objects, sample plots, electronic visitor counting, interviews, surveys. The data collected via these methods are analysed, describing environmental, social and economic aspects of tourism impact.

Public consultation and stakeholder approval:

- 11.05.2009. – Specialists of “Lauku ceļotājs” inform the participants of the seminar „Cooperation for development of new tourism products in Kurzeme” about the planned visitor monitoring methods in the Slītere National Park (35 participants).
- 18.12.2009. – Specialists of “Lauku ceļotājs” inform the Political Supervision Group about the selected monitoring methods (11 participants).
- 07.07.2010. - Specialists of “Lauku ceļotājs” inform the Slītere National Park residents, businesses, municipality and administration about the first visitor monitoring results in the Slītere National Park (23 participants).
- 13.12.2010. – Specialists of “Lauku ceļotājs” inform the Political Supervision Group about the first visitor monitoring results and efficiency of the monitoring methods (11 participants).

