

Rural seaside tourism in the Baltic States as a basis for local sustainable development – LT/ LV/EE

1. Policy Objective & Theme

- SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC GROWTH: Balancing economic, social, cultural development whilst enhancing environment

2. Key Approaches

- Socio-economic

3. Experiences that can be exchanged

Active measures are taken to promote a combination of rural, seaside and nature tourism in the coastal countryside as an asset for sustainable economic development to prevent de-population. These efforts can also contribute to the EU Habitats Directive.

4. Overview of the case

Efforts are concentrated on using the structural funds of the EU for education and training of local inhabitants and tourism infrastructure development. These efforts are aiming at local capacity building in provision of rural, seaside and nature tourism services in the coastal countryside of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. As a result of the combination of pristine coastal nature and seaside recreation amenities, unique tourist destinations become competitive internationally and local efforts contribute to the conservation of coastal NATURA 2000 sites.

5. Context and Objectives

a) Context

Differently from the main trends in the rest of the EU, coastal countryside areas of the Baltic States are suffering from rapid de-population facilitated by the emigration of local inhabitants to more prosperous urban areas and foreign countries. This process causes abandonment of semi-natural habitats, particularly, coastal, wooded and alluvial meadows and alvars.

b) Objectives

An interactive training approach based on a “farmers to farmers” principle is being used to build the capacity of local inhabitants to provide rural, seaside and nature tourism services, changing their view towards pristine coastal nature as their main tourism amenity and the key asset for sustainable economic development.

6. Implementation of the ICZM Approach (i.e. management, tools, resources)

a) Management

The process is de-centralized and parallel, occurring simultaneously in all three Baltic States, particularly, in the Nemunas

Delta (Lithuania), the Lake Pape area (Latvia) and Western Estonian coastal areas. Since the majority of the coastal countryside areas in the Baltic States enjoy some protection status, the implementation of the ICZM approach balancing coastal conservation and sustainable tourism development needs in the coastal countryside areas is among the primary tasks of the administrations of the coastal protected areas – national parks (Lahemaa, Matsalu and Vilsandi in Estonia; Kemeru and Slitere in Latvia, and Kuršių nerija in Lithuania), as well as two regional parks in Lithuania (Nemuno Delta and Pajūrio).

b) ICZM tools

Firstly, the ICZM approach in the case of coastal countryside areas of the Baltic States with valuable natural and semi-natural coastal habitats relies on the designation of coastal protected areas with different functional zones and management regimes – from strict nature reserves, where only limited guided tours on nature trails are allowed, to limited management zones, where limited development of leisure facilities is possible. Secondly, the importance of a high quality environment in sustaining tourism activity and the increasing environmental pressure resulting from increased tourism activity has led to a search for national and international funding to enhance the environmental quality. This funding is primarily addressed to finance the maintenance of semi-natural coastal habitats and to support education efforts.

Tourism experts from academic institutions in all three Baltic States (Klaipėda University, Lithuania; School of Business Administration "Turība", Latvia; Pärnu College of Tartu University, Estonia) provide regular user-tailored training and advice to coastal countryside communities, with support from the colleagues from other EU countries. Most of these efforts are financed by the EU structural and regional co-operation funds. Unfortunately, eco-labelling schemes for rural tourism farms are under-developed yet in the Baltic States, despite evidence of high awareness of the importance of environmental protection and the balancing of economy and social questions. The 'Blue Flag' programme is in place which provides municipality awards for beach and/or marina quality. However, the costly process of acquiring the "Blue Flag" for the Baltic Sea beaches is so far confined only to big cities and seaside resorts rather than coastal countryside areas. The only coastal countryside beach, which enjoys the 'Blue Flag' award in the Baltic States, is camping site "Abragciems" (Engure municipality, Latvia), which lies along the coast of Riga Bay. Pāvilosta, which lies on the Baltic Sea coast of Latvia, is the only coastal countryside marina with the 'Blue Flag'.

7. Cost and resources

Information not available.

8. Effectiveness (i.e. were the foreseen goals/objectives of the work reached?)

This case study provides evidence of the understanding of the opportunities afforded to rural coastal areas of re-packaging traditional industries and cultures into a new range of leisure and tourism products thus contributing to coastal nature conservation and preventing de-population.

9. Success and Fail factors

Changes in landscape structure of coastal countryside in the Baltic States will mostly be connected with the balance achieved between recreational use and nature conservation. The case study exemplifies the importance of partnerships of key stakeholders in protecting pristine coastal habitats and fragile ecosystems whilst providing development opportunities for local people, thus balancing the conservation and commercial agendas.

10. Unforeseen outcomes

The case study showed unexpected resilience of the coastal countryside of the Baltic States in the face of current global financial crisis which didn't affect visitors' numbers significantly.

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13. Sources

- Armaitienė, A.; Povilanskas, R.; Jones, E. (2006) Lithuania: Sustainable Rural Tourism Development in the Baltic Coastal Region. In: Hall, D., Smith, M., Marciszewska, B. (eds.) *Tourism in the New Europe: The Challenges and Opportunities of EU Enlargement*, CABI Publishers, Wallingford-Cambridge, p. 183-198