Developing quality tourism products in protected nature areas

Asnāte Ziemele
Latvian Country Tourism Association
Conference “Quality Counts – Benefits for Nature and People”.
Bad Urach, Germany, September 24, 2011
Latvian Country Tourism Association

Legal form: NGO
Founded: 1993
Members: ~350 (rural tourism providers)
Staff: ~10
Office: in Riga

Functions:
- RT product development
- Quality control and labelling
- Provider training and consultations
- Promotion and marketing (brochures, maps, Internet)
- Lobbying for interests of members
- Project implementation
Sharing experiences in Europe

Project STEPPA – Sustainable Tourism in Enterprises, Parks and Protected Areas

http://uef.fi/mot/steppa

Project goal: to promote and strengthen the cooperation between the different experiences and certification initiatives for small and micro tourism enterprises working with (Charter) protected areas, through the sharing, leveling and enhancement of their sustainability practices and criteria, and strengthen their competitiveness through the development of working partnerships between these initiatives and specialized research and support centres for tourism sustainability.

SUSTAINABLE TOURISM CONFERENCE 2011

Relationships in sustainable tourism development

Savonlinna, Finland, October 19 – 21, 2011

10 partners from 7 countries:
• University of Eastern Finland (Finland), Leeds
• Metropolitan University (UK),
• EUROPARC Federation (Germany),
• Consejeria de Medio Ambiente (Andalucia, Spain),
• Parco Naturale Alpi Marittime (Italy), Parco Naturale Adamello Brenta (Italy),
• State Nature Conservancy of Slovak Republic (Slovak Republic),
• Latvian Country Holidays (Latvia),
• Nationalparkverwaltung Harz (Germany), and CoaST (UK).
THE TOURISM INDUSTRY OF EUROPE’S PROTECTED AREAS
PROJECT STEPPA: survey of nearly 900 tourism and hospitality businesses from 59 European protected areas
Research by the International Centre for Responsible Tourism, United Kingdom

**Business Model**

- **Gender**: 50% are Female
- **Age**: 64% are 41 to 60
- **Role**: 78% as owners
- **Education**: 44% secondary education
- **Years since business creation**: 30% more than 20 years
- **Family business**: 78% family business
- **Type of Business**: 29% are apartments
- **Size**: 57% small business
- **Number of Stars**: 36% ***
AIM OF THE SURVEY:
To find out if businesses that are more sustainable also perform better financially.

RESULT:
Businesses generally perform better (but same seasonality problems, and differences high/low season in prices)
They are more satisfied with their business performance
They take sustainability decisions based on lifestyle and altruistic (not economic) reasons.
How is business?

The top 3 ways to find your business and reasons to choose it...

- Recommendation from past clients: 77%
- Your web site: 75%
- Repeat clients: 65%
- Quality: 82%
- Location: 76%
- Competitive prices: 45%

62% of respondents: the establishment’s financial health is about average,
24% of respondents: good,
14% of respondents: poor.
Visitor (previous and potential) survey

~700 respondents from Italy, Spain, Germany, Latvia, Finland

• Visitors of protected areas are willing to act according to many sustainable activities while traveling
• Ecolabels are found to be a good indicator of environmentally friendly products and businesses,
• Not sure to have visited green certified businesses or areas or used ecolabelled products
• Indicate to increase the favoring of green certified services and products
Asking businesses about their sustainability practices
Actively finding out sustainable measures undertaken in the business/destination
Buying local products
Using locally produced food
Participating activities enhancing the state of the environment
Give financial contribution to protect the environment
Give my contribution to social initiatives
Save water and energy
Use services of businesses that consider environment in their activities
Use services of businesses that are socially responsible
Use services of businesses that are supporting local economy
Consider the environment when I’m in nature
Use environmentally friendly products
Waste recycling
Ecolabel guarantees the good quality of product/service

Ecolabels ensure that tourism in an area supports the quality of life of local residents

Ecolabels encourage to use specific tourism products which enable discovery and understanding of the area

Ecolabels communicate special qualities of an area or product features

Ecolabelled services guarantee a high quality experiences when I’m travelling

I can trust that ecolabels show that products/services /businesses follow sustainability criteria

Ecolabels and sustainability schemes have increased my knowledge concerning the local people and culture

Ecolabels and sustainability schemes have increased my knowledge concerning environmental issues

By purchasing ecolabelled product or service I feel that I help the nature conservation

An ecolabel helps me to choose and favour sustainably run businesses

Ecolabels help me to recognize environmentally friendly products/services
Developing quality tourist services in Slītere National Park, Latvia

Background:
• Former restricted military area and a protected nature site
• Growing pressure from unorganised tourism
• Local conflicts (residents versus NP administration)

The goal:
To ensure contribution from tourism in the local economy while preserving the nature values in the protected nature territory

Established:
• In 1957 as a Nature Reserve
• In 2000 as a National Park
• Area:
  Land – 16 360 ha,
  Sea – 10 130 ha
COOPERATION at all levels involved – the key of success

- SNP administration
- Local municipality
- Local NGOs
- Tourism entrepreneurs
- Other active local people
To start with: sustainable tourism development vision

- On-site visits (project staff, EU experts)

- Summary of problems, finding solutions (administrative, technical, etc.)

- Product development seminars with local stakeholders – discussing resources and opportunities, suggesting the products
New tourism products/routes

Why start with routes? – the benefits:

- No large investments in service provision required
- Large local participation achieved in itinerary development
- Routes well tested, reliable product
- An example of professional product description created
- Product development experience documented in guidelines
Marking the route in the nature/Guidelines
5 outdoor panels in Slītere NP

- several hundreds of stands analysed
- all players involved – local ownership
- focus on practical information
Product development

Seminars

Guidelines
The Slītere NP Tourism guide
+ guidelines how to develop a guide of a national park

- Based on local stories (> 30 interviews)
- The first tourism guide of a NP in Latvia (developed together with the Slītere people)
- History interacts with life today
- Stories of the Liv minority
- Services and facilities
- Tour Maps
Travel Day to Slītere

- Initiative from the local people
- All players at the negotiation table
- Become a regular event
- New products launched, the existing ones improved for The Day
- Feedback and analysis in follow-up meeting
Free excursions offered by local guides, local businesses

12 PEARLS OF SLĪTERE
COME AND SEE!

Juris Smaļinskis, Lauku ceļotājs

1
2
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FREE EXCURSIONS OFFERED BY LOCAL GUIDES, LOCAL BUSINESSES
How to develop tours

- contacts with specialised tour operators
- visit specialized trade fairs (Bird fair in UK etc.)
- develop products following tour operator specification
- fam tours for tour operators
Tour packages

Spring Birdwatching Group Tour

Day 1. Arrival in Riga. Visit the Latvian capital of Riga and its Old Town, which is on the UNESCO list of global cultural heritage.

Linking touring routes with info on NATURA2000 sites

www.countryholidays.lv
Guidelines for Tourist Monitoring Methodology in the SNP

- Visual monitoring
- Photo monitoring
- Questionnaires
- Electronic visitor counting – first time in Latvia
Electronic visitor counting
Thank you!

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