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## 2nd seminar on „Tourism and Water resources in Gauja River basin District”

in frame of the Project “European Network of Municipalities and Rivers - ENMaR”

*16 November, 2006, Sigulda*

### ***Report***

#### **Objectives of the seminar:**

- To continue discussion on interlinks between tourism and water resources.
- To discuss possibilities and limitations for sustainable tourism development in connection to impacts on environment and water resources.
- To learn about best practice examples from Latvia on promoting of tourism development and visitors management.

#### **Brief overview on ENMaR project activities with regard to tourism component**

*Anda Ruskule, Vides projekti, tourism expert*

A. Ruskule gave an overview on ENMaR project activities and involved partners. She pointed out that this is the second seminar in frame of the project on tourism in relation to water resource management in the Gauja River basin district. A. Ruskule reminded the main findings from the first seminar on the trends of tourism development in Latvia and its impacts on environment and water quality. As one of the key-conclusions was mentioned, that good water quality is not only objective for environmental policy, but also precondition for tourism development, therefore expected incomes from tourism can not compensate the losses caused by deterioration of water quality. It was also admitted in the seminar, that existing tourism infrastructure in Latvia is insufficient, taking into account foreseen increase of tourists in coming years. At the same time it is not expected that in the nearest future the tourism sector can cause significant impact on environment, however, problems might be faced in “hot spots” of tourism destinations. The main instruments for regulating the tourism impacts are various planning documents, where principles of sustainability have to be integrated.

#### **Carrying capacity of the tourism destinations and sustainable tourism marketing**

*Aija van der Steina, School for Business Administration „Turība”, lecturer in the Faculty on International Tourism*

A. van der Steina explained role of marketing in tourism sector and how it is linked with sustainable tourism development. The main goals of the tourism marketing are studying of trends regarding different tourism segments, focusing on needs of the client, future based view and innovations in product development as well as balancing of sustainability principles, needs of clients and income opportunities. It was pointed out that, that economic success in the tourism business is depending on

satisfaction of the needs of tourists, what depends also on environmental quality of the tourism destination.

The speaker introduced to the concept of the carrying capacity of tourism destination. Tourism development of each country or region usually goes through several stages of development, starting with investigation of development possibilities, development, maturity, repletion, when the critical level of the carrying capacity is reached, and the following decline. The carrying capacity of tourism consists of physical, ecological, social, economic, psychological and infrastructure capacity, which are effected by such factors as sensitivity for changes in environment, number of visitors and their behaviour, awareness of tourists and local inhabitants on environmental issues, role of tourism in local economy, level of planning and management of the tourism destination, etc.

Further A. van der Steina explained the planning process of marketing and how to influence with it tourism development and its impact on environment. The main steps in tourism marketing are the following:

- Assessing the situation – „where we are?": defining tourism demand and offer, patterns of tourism behaviour (how long they stay, amount of money spent par day, etc.), carrying capacity of the site, assessment of tourism impacts and future development scenarios. It is also important to define, which is the type of tourists what we want to see here.
- Defining the goals – „what to we what to achieve”?”
- Choice of marketing activities, including development of the sustainable tourism product; defining of the adequate price, what would be at the same time accepted by tourists and would provide economic benefit for tourism entrepreneurs and local society as well as cover the costs for used resources; providing of information and communication.
- Assessment of achieved results.

There was mentioned also the concept of demarketing, which has to be applied when there is need to reduce or balance number of tourists by using complex of marketing activities. Reducing of tourism demand can be applied to the sites overcrowded by tourists, to certain time periods or to particular unwanted groups of tourists because of their behaviour or paying ability.

### ***Questions and discussion***

- Feelings of a person within the environment and consequently environmental quality become more and more important in tourism marketing.
- People are used not to pay for the tourism objects in nature or for nature and water as tourism resource. However, if the tourism resource is free of charge, it is not adequately valued, causing negligence or even vandalism.
- Appropriate information about the tourism objects and rules for visitors has to be provided at the site to raise the awareness of tourists and nature friendly behaviour, there is need for.

### **Environment as tourism resource: good and bad examples**

*Juris Smaļinskis, Association of rural tourism „Lauku ceļotājs”, expert on tourism and environmental projects*

J. Smaļinskis introduced to the project „Sustainable use of nature resources in the tourism offer” carried out by the Association „Lauku ceļotājs”. In the frame of this project there is a map and tourism guide developed including more than 200 carefully selected nature friendly tourism objects, and guidebook on „bad” and „good” nature tourism practice in Latvia is being prepared. J. Smaļinskis pointed out that nature is the main tourism resource in Latvia, therefore future of tourism sector is depending on that, if this resource is handled with care.

To gain information about good and bad practice examples lot of questionnaires has been sent around, however the level of response was rather low, particularly with regard to bad examples. 30 tourism objects in different parts of Latvia have been inspected by project team during 2006, where careless exploitation of nature resources has been observed. As the most common mistakes were mentioned following:

- Popularisation of the objects without securing appropriate infrastructure, or over exceeding carrying capacity of the site (e.g., popular swimming place - lake Laukezers in Jēkabpils district; sandstone outcrops - Saņaiskalns in the Salaca River valley);
- Popularisation of very vulnerable or rare species and habitats (e.g., caves);
- Setting up of inappropriate infrastructure elements (e.g. stairs not comfortable for rising, which therefore are not used causing erosion on the slopes);
- Over management of parks and other nature objects (e.g. removal of all deadwood, etc.)

J. Smaļinskis informed also about few good practice examples – nature trails and watching towers, adjusted for handicapped people (e.g., nature trail in Planču bog, with information in Brail script and watching tower in Riga, adjusted for wheelchairs).

### **Tourism infrastructure along Gauja river and its maintenance**

*Ēriks Andžāns, Gauja National Park (GNP) administration*

E. Andžāns gave an overview about history of tourism infrastructure development in the GNP, present infrastructure elements and problems with regard to its maintenance. Providing possibilities for cognitive tourism and recreation are among the main objectives of the GNP, moreover tourism infrastructure has been developed here already before establishment of GNP in 1973. Presently there are established nature trails with total length of 100 km, 30 campsites, out of which 23 are for water tourists, 3 information centres, 4 parking lots etc., as well as developed unified visual information system, including info-stands, signs, description of objects, border signs. Employees of GNP administration are responsible for renovation of existing infrastructure, while maintenance is insured by sub-contracted service providers.

Among the biggest problems of the GNP administration E. Andžāns pointed out maintenance of the campsites for water tourists. The number of water tourists in Gauja during the recent years has increased considerably (from 20 boats and 50 people per day to 140 boats and 500 people per day), resulting in overload of campsites during the peak season and related problems with regard to firewood and waste management. Additional load on campsites is also caused by local inhabitants who use them for partying, often followed by public nuisance and demolition of infrastructure. Often campsites do not have sufficient infrastructure – as most common problem was mentioned facilities for removal of boats from the river (at least in 14 campsites there would be need for special boat-keys or stairs). At the moment administration of GNP looks for more simple solutions how to improve infrastructure, however available state financing for that is insufficient. In future it is foreseen to restore and improve facilities in already existing campsites, to establish „green” campsites with minimum facilities and ban on making fire and leaving of waste, as well as to develop campings where the full service is provided.

New tourism infrastructure is being set up in frame of separate projects, financed by Latvian Environmental Protection Fund (LEPF) and ERDF. LEPF financing is mainly used for equipping of particular tourism objects, while the improving of the basic system of tourism infrastructure in order to optimise the visitors management and protection of nature values is foreseen in the frame of ERDF project (this includes establishment of the Nature and Education Centre, as well as making a nature trail along the Gauja River trough almost entire territory of GNP and restoration of the objects connected to it).

## **Tourism development plan for the nature park „Engure Lake”**

*Aiga Petkevica, company NK Consulting, project manager*

A. Petkēvica introduced to the process of elaboration and content of the tourism development plan for nature park „Engure Lake”. This is the first such type of plan in Latvia, therefore considered as pilot project. The plan was developed from January – June 2006 in frame of the Baltic Sea Regional Project, financed by the World Bank, 2<sup>nd</sup> component „Inland and coastal management actions”. Development of the plan was organised as interactive process, involving experts on tourism, environment and spatial planning. 30 interviews were carried out with representatives of local authorities and tourism entrepreneurs, 4 workshops organised involving all concerned stakeholders and 5 field studies carried out in the territory of the nature park, to assess the condition of the existing tourism infrastructure and to find out the development possibilities.

As result of this process the document was developed consisting of 4 parts:

1. Analysis of the present situation and problems – tourism development by now, SWOT analysis of the tourism resources, comparison of the tourism offer in the nature park „Engure Lake” and other protected areas, as well as tourism impact assessment on environment;
2. Visions and goals of the tourism development – role of tourism in protection of biodiversity, environmentally related conditions for tourism sector and role of tourism for improving of socio-economic situation.
3. Description of the planned measures – development of new ecotourism products and routes, needs for new infrastructure objects, implementation of the plan and mechanism for its financing.
4. Monitoring and feedback – requirements for tourism monitoring and methods for assessment of the tourism flow, mechanism for assessing implementation of the plan and costs for monitoring.

### *Questions and discussion:*

- Elaboration of the tourism development plan included also assessment of the cultural heritage, integrating that in the SWOT analysis. Cultural historic objects has important role in balancing of the visitors flow – if besides the nature values territory can offer also cultural heritage, that can reduce the pressure on nature values. Therefore, when preparing nature management plans or tourism development plans, it is important to pay attention also to the development of infrastructure for cultural historic objects.
- Tourism development plan for the nature park „Engure Lake” is recognised as very good initiative, also highly evaluated by the Ministry of Environment.
- So far national legislation prescribes the procedures for development and role of the nature protection plans, while tourism development plans are considered as voluntary initiative. However, it is also possible to define responsibilities and tasks in the tourism development plan of the involved stakeholders – e.g., owners of the boat rent, who benefit from the fish resources, has been asked to contribute financially to the actions for increase of the fish resources.

### **Main conclusions:**

- Nature (including water) is the most important tourism resource for Latvia. But at the same time tourism has an impact on nature and environmental quality.
- Impacts of tourism can be regulated by sustainable tourism marketing, planning of tourism development and appropriate infrastructure.
- When developing tourism in a nature area, it is important to decide which nature objects can be advertised and which not, not to cause damage to rare or threatened species and habitats.

- If the tourism objects are free of charge, they are often undervalued, and may suffer from overexploitation of the resource. Therefore it is essential to develop mechanisms how to charge tourists for use of the nature and water resources.

*Report by Anda Ruskule*