



Ecotourism development strategy 2019 – 2023 for cross-border areas

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Introduction

The aim of the Ecotourism Development Strategy is to define the vision, objectives and action lines for the municipalities of Latgale and Lithuania's Aukštaitija regions¹, as well as to draw up proposals to integrate the principles of eco-tourism development into regional and local tourism development programmes.

The Ecotourism Development Strategy has two parts:

- a general section contains the concept of ecotourism, a regulatory base for its development, the level of the development of ecotourism in each of the municipalities;
- specific recommendations to the cross-border municipalities – Preiļi, Aglona, Riebiņi (Latvia) and Moletai, Anykščiai and Panevėžys city and the regional park of Grazute and Sartai (Lithuania).

Given that public awareness of ecotourism is not complete, the strategy summarises definitions of ecotourism as well as principles and values, which define directions of sustainable development and provide the basis for actions and activities.

The strategy development process has carried out an analysis of international and Latvian, Lithuanian national tourism planning and development documents and regulatory enactments, an analysis of statistical data and the current situation, surveys, in-depth interviews with experts, tourism entrepreneurs in Latvia and Lithuania, interviews with tourists.

The objectives, action lines and activities set out in the Strategy envisage the introduction of principles and aspects of ecotourism in already existing tourism products and services, raising the environmental awareness of citizens and entrepreneurs, promoting environmentally friendly farming, reducing waste, introduction of the responsible consumption principles, improving the local economy with economic benefits for local communities, social benefits for different target groups.

The proposals recommend activities for the use of natural and cultural history resources to develop a tourist service or product based on ecotourism.

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¹ Counties of Preiļi, Riebiņi and Aglona, districts of Anykščiai and Moletai, Panevėžys city as well as Grazute and Sartu National Park.

Concept of ecotourism

The concepts of ecotourism reflect the values, actions and resources and their application of this particular type of tourism, and the attitude of a hosting entrepreneur and a tourist.

Several definitions of ecotourism are available in various planning documents and research studies. For the first time, ecotourism was mentioned in 1965. Mexican ecologist Klaus Dieter Hecker² described it as a type of tourism with minimal environmental impact, maximum economic advantage and benefits for locals who pay tribute to local cultures. Ecotourism gives a sense of adventure and pleasure to tourists.

The founding President of Ecotourism Society Pakistan, Agha Iqrar Haroon, points to diversity in definitions and describes ecotourism as an instrument that provides ecological, environmental, economic and culture-friendly tourism. He also hopes that ecotourism is an activity that is controlled by locals in any important aspect³.

The most popular definition of ecotourism is the one published by the International Ecotourism Alliance, which is the most adapted definition in the world, – “Ecotourism is a sustainable, natural-resource-based form of tourism that focuses primarily on acquiring experience in nature and its exploration, it is ethically driven to reduce impact on the environment and consumption, at the same time oriented on local conditions that way promoting the well-being of local residents. Ecotourism takes place in natural areas and contributes to the protection of these areas.”⁴

In Latvia, ecotourism is defined as a type of tourism characterised by travelling in a relatively pristine and sparsely populated natural environment to explore nature, biotopes, observe plants and animals in their natural habitats, as well as to learn about nature conservation. It is sustainable, environmentally friendly and responsible tourism, the main objective of which is to promote: (1) the protection, management and administration of specially protected natural areas and natural objects; (2) the welfare of the local population, the increase of income of local entrepreneurs and its fair reallocation; (3) public education about the environment and conservation⁵.

Ecotourism balances economic and environmental interests

Ecotourism, which essentially corresponds with the principles of sustainable development, according to many international studies is considered to be one of the best models for advancing the environmentally friendly tourism industry. Ecotourism combines environmental protection interests with economic ones, first ones dominating over the latter, it plays an increasingly important role in the world's tourism sector and demonstrates itself as an instrument for sustainable development and a new form of green or ecological thinking.

² Critical issues, 2007.

³ Haroon, 2001.

⁴ Fennell, 2008.

⁵ <http://termini.lza.lv/term.php?term=ekot%C5%ABrisms&list=ekot%C5%ABrisms&lang=LV>.

Ecotourism – an instrument for the sustainable development of areas

Ecotourism is an essential instrument for advancing sustainable development, particularly at the local and regional level. Appropriately developed ecotourism can enhance the country's image incorporating elements of sustainable development and the 'green state' and create an environmentally friendly economic sector in the national economy. Consequently, the management of ecotourism and cooperation among the various parties concerned, both domestically and internationally, are important.

Ecotourism develops small and medium-sized businesses

Ecotourism is essential for business development, particularly in rural areas and *Natura 2000* nature conservation areas as well as in the areas of the Project partners. This is considered to be one of the most effective forms for the development of small and medium-sized businesses in the protected nature territories. Environmental philosophy and ethics, as well as the cultural environment, are essential for ecotourism because thinking and consciousness are closely linked to value orientation and refocusing consumer society's behaviour and lifestyle in line with sustainability principles⁶.

The instruments describing the deepest nature of ecotourism are eco-technologies, environmentally-friendly mobility, ecological construction, renewable energy resources, possibilities for the use and implementation of biological products, preservation of the cultural environment, outstanding cultural and historical landscapes. Ecotourism is based on the pillars of sustainable development: improvement of environmental protection, enhancement of the population's welfare including the growth of economic performance in the ecotourism areas, which in turn also affects the solution of social issues.

Ecotourism promotes respect for local traditions, educates and supports locals

Eco-tourists recognise learning and the desire to explore nature and cultural environment as their purpose of travelling. When they are in their own country or in a foreign country, they contribute financially to the local population and cooperate with them, respect local traditions and culture, take care of flora and fauna. The concept of ecotourism highlights its distinctive characteristics, such as responsible tourism, participation in environmental protection and the promotion of the well-being of the local population. Significant part of it is the possibility for tourists to have access to catering, accommodation, information and educational services, as well as the opportunity of purchasing local souvenirs. Ecotourism has in-depth requirements concerning the educational, natural, environmental and cultural aspects, as well as the quality of interpretation, communication and information. It is characterised by high professionalism, intellectualism and environmental ethics.

⁶ Ēriks Leitis, *Ecotourism in Latvia: Problems and Solutions for the Improvement of the Sustainable Tourism Sector*, LU, 2012

Ecotourism protects natural resources and generates income for the local community

Ecotourism can be considered to be a conciliation of two antagonistic dimensions – tourism and environment⁷. It is important for ecotourism as early as in the planning stage to be aware of the acceptable extent of the load on the resource to be used. Nature conservation plans that help to determine this anthropogenic load have been developed for *Natura 2000* sites. At the same time, ecotourism facilitates the awareness of the local population of the need to protect natural resources — the main means of maintaining the quality of life. It also promotes the interest to engage in ecotourism activities. Ecotourism is the latest form of tourism based on natural and cultural resources. It not only consumes natural and human resources, but it also aims to protect the environment and to promote socio-economic development for those citizens in whose territory ecotourism activities take place. In contrast to traditional mass tourism, which aims to find recreation and entertainment, ecotourism aims to gain experience and new revelations by physical effort and less comfort. Ecotourism activity is focused on the outdoor environment to the maximum extent.

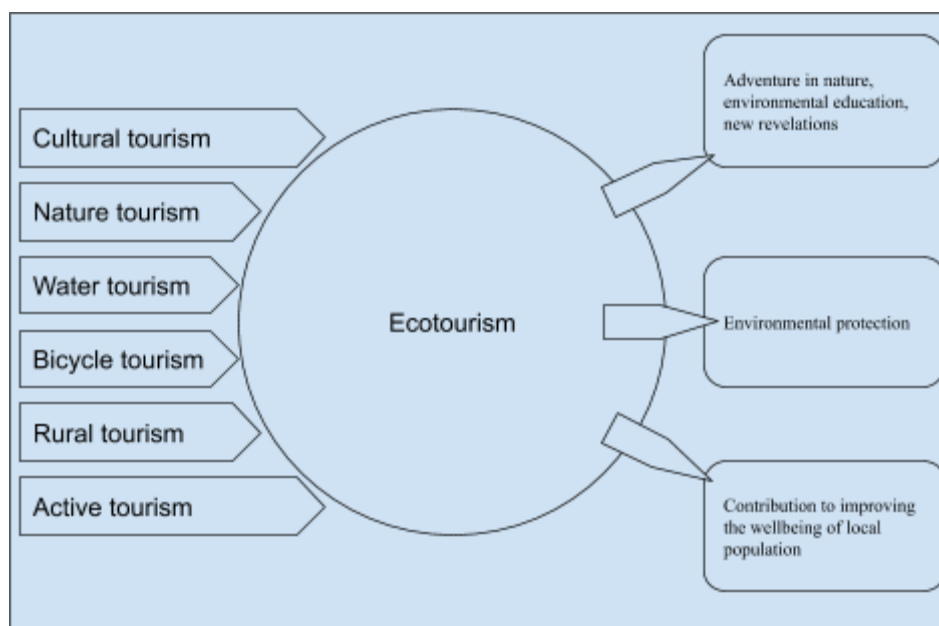


Figure #1 Linking ecotourism to different types of tourism and key aspects. Source: Ēriks Leitis⁸, author of the ecotourism dissertation.

In order to implement the principles of ecotourism successfully, tourism operators and travellers must have a high tolerance and understanding as well as in-depth knowledge of intercultural communication.

⁷ Carolan, 2004.

⁸ Ēriks Leitis, Ecotourism in Latvia: Problems and Solutions for the Improvement of the Sustainable Tourism Sector, LU, 2012

It is essential that any type of environmentally friendly tourism can obtain the ecotourism status if it meets the terms and conditions of ecotourism, which is mandatory, in contrast with the voluntary commitments declared by other types of tourism.

Ecotourism is a sustainable, environmentally friendly tourism whose main objective is to promote the exploration of natural and cultural values and the protection of the environment and to improve environmental education and awareness in society. Ecotourism is a nature-friendly and responsible tourism based on three principles:

- ensuring the true protection, management, and administration of protected natural objects;
- promotion of the wellbeing of the local population, the increase of income of local entrepreneurs and its fair reallocation;
- promotion of the natural and environmental exploration and training for the protection of the environment through ecotourism and travel.

The definition of ecotourism has also determined its essential characteristic requirements:

- a commitment to protect the environment;
- education of travellers;
- a donation or contribution to nature protection;
- benefits for the local population;
- protection of endangered species;
- reduction of waste and other negative impacts on the environment.

Ecotourism – responsible tourism in a natural environment that preserves the environment, enhances the wellbeing of the local community, involves both tourists and ecotourism entrepreneurs in mutual environmental and cultural exploration and education.

1 The regulatory framework for ecotourism in Latvia, Lithuania and the world

National and international development planning documents emphasise that tourism is an important sector of the European Union's as well as Latvia, Lithuania's economy. It promotes employment and economic growth. One of the main tasks is the necessity to strengthen and improve the development of sustainable tourism in order to ensure the long-term competitiveness of the sector. Ecotourism is one of the development directions of tourism, which is most directly linked to the concept and nature of sustainable development and has the potential to affect the well-being of rural areas and the population of regions.

1.1 International Planning Documents

As ecotourism emphasizes its responsibility for environmental protection and makes a significant contribution to the environmental protection process, the legislation of a broad spectrum for the protection of the environment should be taken into account. It defines the permissible impacts of the tourism industry on climate change, the assessment of the burden of tourism on the environment, water management and application for tourism and recreation, and handling of waste problems in the tourism sector. Important conventions of the UN and other international organisations ratified by Latvia and Lithuania:

- The Convention on Biological Diversity (1992)
- United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (1992)
- The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands (1971)
- Berne Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (1979)
- Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (1979)
- The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora alias Washington Convention (1973)
- Convention Concerning The Protection Of The World Cultural And Natural Heritage (Paris, 1972)
- Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (Paris, 2003)
- European Landscape Convention (Florence, 2000)
- Convention On Access To Information, Public Participation In Decision-making And Access To Justice In Environmental Matters (Aarhus, 1998)
- Convention On The Protection Of The Marine Environment Of The Baltic Sea Area (Helsinki Convention, 1992)

These conventions contribute enormously to the development of ecotourism. Although they do not define ecotourism directly, they determine the essential resources of ecotourism — biodiversity, including landscape, species, habitats, wetlands and ecosystems in general, as well as the protection and sustainable use of cultural heritage for scientific, tourism and the general public needs. They contribute to public involvement in environmental protection processes, which being integrated with ecotourism, can create a wider international awareness of this particular type of tourism and the basis for establishing genuine ecotourism.

Cultural and local identity plays a special role in the development of ecotourism. The Oslo Statement on Ecotourism points out that culture is a critical subject for strengthening the sustainability and potential benefits of ecotourism⁹. Ecotourism must be closely linked to the protection of tangible and intangible cultural heritage and cultures, to the preservation and celebration of many unique elements of the local population and native culture, religion and spirituality worldwide (TIES 2007). At the same time, for the purpose of preservation of cultural diversity in the world, the domination of any culture should be avoided in communication.

European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas¹⁰

The Charter defines the principles of sustainable tourism, offers practical guidance for the sustainable development of tourism in nature-sensitive areas, indicating the criteria for natural parks to become a sustainable tourist destination. The key priorities are as follows: preservation of natural and cultural values, sustainability principles in tourism – short and long term assessment of the environmental, social and economic impacts, cooperation in decision-making among all parties concerned, effective planning of the development of tourism, which is based on environmental research data, the wellbeing of the local community, economic activity, sustainable environmental impact, visitor experience assessment and continuous monitoring and evaluation of activity.

The Global Code of Ethics for Tourism¹¹

The Code emphasises the importance of tourism for peace-building, a factor bringing friendship and understanding among the peoples of the world. The Code highlights sustainability — promoting responsible and sustainable tourism that would benefit all sectors of society.

The Code defines the objectives of tourism — achieving sustainable compatibility among environmental protection, economic development and the fight against poverty. It envisages that tourism activities are carried out in accordance with the characteristics and traditions of the host regions and countries and with respect to their laws, traditions and customs.

The principles of ecotourism are defined in Article 3 “Tourism, a factor of sustainable development”, which envisages:

- All the stakeholders in tourism development should safeguard the natural environment with a view to achieving sound, continuous and sustainable economic growth geared to satisfying equitably the needs and aspirations of present and future generations;
- All forms of tourism development that are conducive to saving rare and precious resources, in particular water and energy, as well as avoiding so far as possible waste production, should be given priority and encouraged by national, regional and local public authorities;
- Nature tourism and ecotourism are recognized as being particularly conducive to enriching and enhancing the standing of tourism, provided they respect the natural heritage and local populations and are in keeping with the carrying capacity of the sites.

⁹ Oslo, 2007.

¹⁰ 1995

¹¹ The General Assembly of the United Nations passed a resolution in December 21, 2001. A/RES/56/212.

In planning the development of ecotourism, it is essential to take into account the art, archaeological and cultural heritage which must be protected and passed on to future generations; special attention should be paid to the preservation and restoration of monuments, holy sites and museums as well as archaeological and historical sites, to be widely available for tourist visits; public access to cultural values and monuments of private property should be promoted, while respecting the rights of their owners, as well as the accessibility of religious structures, without harming the needs of religious cults.

One of the most valuable resources of cross-border areas of the project is traditional culture, the sacred heritage of different denominations, craft products, folklore. Tourism activities should be planned in such a way as to ensure the conservation and prosperity of the resources and not to lead to their deterioration and standardisation.

Article 5 of the Global Code of Ethics on Tourism “Tourism, a beneficial activity for host countries and communities” emphasizes the essential principles – local population should be involved in tourism activities and they must receive a fair share of economic, social and cultural benefits created by tourism activities and in particular they must have access to the jobs directly or indirectly generated by tourism activities.

The International Ecotourism Society has declared the following principles of ecotourism:

- minimise environmental impacts;
- improve environmental and cultural awareness;
- treat with respect the environment and culture in areas where the journey takes place;
- provide positive experiences for both visitors and hosts;
- provide direct financial benefits for nature protection;
- provide financial benefits and opportunities for local populations;
- deliver memorable interpretative experiences to visitors that help raise sensitivity to host countries’ political, environmental, and social climates (TIES, 2010)¹².

Several studies indicate that ecotourists are well-educated, middle-class people, with high incomes, willing to spend money purposefully being aware that environmental protection and the well-being of local people can be supported in the country they are visiting, which will continue beyond the experience gained in ecotourism travel. The development of the skills and knowledge, the purchase of expensive equipment – telescopes, binoculars, cameras, professional guide books, and the devotion of one's time for tourism, are all signs of serious involvement of ecotourists.

The European tourism indicator system, 2013

In sustainable management of tourism, it is possible to ensure the limits and opportunities of tourism resources, promote balanced tourism development in order to achieve optimal economic, ecological and social cultural benefits while also ensuring a sustainable future for Europe's tourism sector¹³. It is therefore necessary to strike a balance between the needs of tourists, host communities and the environment, which in turn reduces conflicts, a special approach to managing tourism destinations is required. The competitiveness of the tourism sector is closely linked to its sustainability,

¹² The International Ecotourism Society (TIES)

¹³ The European tourism indicator system, 2013

since the quality of tourism destinations is significantly affected by their natural and cultural environment and their integration into the local community.

The sustainability of the tourism sector includes a number of aspects – the responsible use of natural resources, taking into consideration the environmental impact of activities (waste generation, high impact on water resources, soil and biodiversity, etc.), the use of “clean” energy, protection of the heritage of destinations and preservation of natural and cultural integrity, the quality and durability of jobs created, impact on the local economy and care for customers.

European Tourism Indicators System for sustainable destination management¹⁴

Integration of social, ethnic, environmental, human rights and consumer rights into responsible social business ethics is essential in the management of tourism. Indicators help to identify the social and cultural impacts of tourism (number of events involving expressions of local traditional culture, the number of tourists and availability of objects, etc.), management of tourism destinations, economic effects (the number of employees in tourism, the number of tourists per day/night, month, etc.). Environmental impact assessments, which include climate change indicators (CO₂ transport emissions), collection and sorting of waste, water consumption, energy use, landscape and biodiversity conservation are also essential for ecotourism.

1.2 Planning documents for Latvia and Lithuania

The development of tourism is highlighted in the National Development Plan of Latvia – the development of export-oriented tourism products, by using the unique, natural and cultural heritage of the regions, the infrastructure created in the regions and the potential of the resort services. Ecotourism is not directly highlighted as a development direction, but sustainable tourism is based on ecotourism. Ecotourism is most directly linked to the natural and cultural heritage to which economic potential is added.

Latvian Tourism Development Guidelines 2014-2020

The benchmarks underline the sub-objectives to increase the competitiveness of the tourism sector:

- to increase the number of multi-day travellers;
- to reduce the seasonality effect by increasing the capacity of tourist accommodation beyond the busiest (summer) season;
- to ensure an increase in the profitability of tourism products;
- to ensure an annual increase in exports of tourism products.

Main directions for action:

- promote the development of competitive tourism products by supporting the development of new, innovative, higher value-added tourism products, including the development of infrastructure for tourism growth, promoting the formation of regional tourism clusters and the inclusion of Latvian tourism destinations and products into the common tourism supply of the Baltic Sea region;

¹⁴ European Tourism Indicators System for sustainable destination management, 2016

- contribute to the improvement of the quality of tourism products, including the provision of improved legislation and support for both tourism operators and consumers;
- ensure the visibility of Latvia's tourism supply in the target markets, in particular by using modern means of communication.

The plan of the tasks and measures provided in Latvian Tourism Development Guidelines 2014-2020 also includes targets and actions towards ecotourism.

Table No. 1. Actions which are applicable to the development of ecotourism in project areas, defined by Latvian Tourism Development Guidelines 2014-2020.

Latvian Tourism Development Guidelines 2014-2020	
OBJECTIVE	promote sustainable development of Latvian tourism by increasing the competitiveness of Latvian tourism products in foreign markets
Strategic types of tourism	MICE (business and events) tourism, health tourism, nature tourism, cultural tourism and creative industries
Actions	1.2. Development of international and local nature tourism products in specially protected natural areas and specially protected habitats. Results to be achieved: constructed and reconstructed infrastructure in specially protected nature areas, including coastal areas.
	2.3. Promotion of access to tourism information, including support for businesses to provide information on the Internet, provision of information stands and signs at tourist sites.

Natural and cultural tourism can be developed as ecotourism, health tourism also has the potential to be based in ecotourism. However, the development of tourism products in specially protected areas is a direction toward ecotourism, if environmental protection requirements are met and the permissible load on natural sites has not been breached.

A study and proposals for the new guidelines for Latvia's tourism development for the next programming period (2020-2026) are already being worked on.

The Lithuanian National tourism development programme of 2014-2020 also envisages increasing the competitiveness of the economic sector of tourism. The plan identifies the most significant challenges for achieving the target:

- to develop public and private infrastructure in priority areas of tourism ;
- to establish and develop attractive tourism routes;
- to ensure accessibility of tourism sites and objects;
- to improve the qualifications of workers in the tourism sector, including business skills;
- to ensure consumer protection in conformity with the legislation;
- to promote licensing and accreditation processes for workers in the tourism sector;

- to implement e-marketing projects, to improve tourism information systems and marketing activities for priority tourism markets;
- to cooperate with neighbouring countries in the organisation of international marketing activities;
- to develop, increase the number of cultural events beyond the active tourism season;
- to create tourism clusters by combining public and private initiatives.

In addition to the Latvian tourism development guidelines, the Lithuanian tourism development plan highlights cross-border cooperation, licensing activities. Both countries have a common objective - to ensure the competitiveness of the sector, to become active in e-environment. However, unlike Latvia's planning documents, the tourism development plan of the neighbouring country dividing four priority types of tourism (culture, business, health, green or ecotourism) also emphasizes the development of ecotourism. Besides giving special attention to the capital in terms of tourism, development directions also define regions: Aukštaitija and Žemaitija (partly project sites). It can be concluded that Lithuania has paid special attention to the sustainability principles during the planning process, putting ecotourism forward as a priority.

Guidelines for the development of sustainable tourism in Lithuania¹⁵ indicate the results to be achieved in ecotourism – 30% of foreign tourists will visit the regions in 2025. The development of regional tourism is one of the priorities for sustainable tourism. Regional tourism is also identified as one of the strategic objectives of tourism development, thus sustainable tourism provides an economic upturn not only for the local community, but also for the protection of cultural and natural heritage.

Latvian Tourism Marketing Strategy 2018 – 2023 underlines that tourism plays an important role in job creation, it is the fastest-growing economic sector. 1.2 billion people travel around the world and 7.7 million people cross the border of Latvia. The strategy identifies the advantages of Latvia – fresh content of the offer, uniqueness, and the weakness- undeveloped tourism outside Riga. Ecotourism is not mentioned as Latvia's competitive tourism product. The closest to ecotourism is health, nature and cultural tourism. Nature and naturalness and unique cultural experiences are highlighted as an important advantage of the sector's offer. According to the marketing strategy, nature (quiet, undamaged nature) and health (baths, medical plants, and meditation) are among the activities/resources to be developed.

The Lithuanian tourism marketing strategy for 2016 – 2020 emphasizes the necessity to increase competitiveness of the tourism products and to efficiently develop the tourism communication channels. The main resources of national tourism for rational use are mentioned: nature and culture, national traditions and annual events, promotion of tourism services on the local and international markets. The strategy defines one of the objectives of tourism development: Lithuania – an attractive country for ecotourism. The Lithuanian promotional campaign is planned as follows: Lithuania – ecotourism destination.

¹⁵ 2017

The study **“The use of natural tourism resources and the ethics of tourism – opposites, a compromise or sustainable approach?”**¹⁶ analyses the issues of the tourism sector, which relate to ecotourism - the accessibility of nature/cultural environment, the conservation of the resources to be used, promotion of adverse sites, “formal” involvement of local population, a message that many important natural objects are neglected, and the fact that current information is not always gathered. A tourism development mission is formulated, including the following key words: an exciting journey, an opportunity to explore history, cultural and historical heritage, identity, a new experience, positive feelings and unforgettable adventures.

The study **‘Sustainability aspect of tourism development in the East Aukštaitija region, in Lithuania’**¹⁷ highlights the main issues of sustainable tourism, which are also relevant to the development of ecotourism in the project area: seasonality, lack of investment in sustainable tourism, lack of knowledge on the nature and principles of sustainable tourism, undeveloped infrastructure. The key tasks for the development of sustainable tourism mentioned in the study are the sensible use of natural resources, the inclusion of sustainable tourism principles in national and regional planning documents, investment in sustainable development activities. The researcher points out that the Lithuanian National Plan for the Development of Tourism does not examine indicators to determine the impact of tourism on the environment, cultural heritage and the local community, which is essential to identify problems in tourist destinations. As opportunities for the development of sustainable tourism, the survey mentions the infrastructure for cycling and water tourism, information and marketing activities, the development of ecotourism.

The Marketing Plan for Cross-Border Culture (Museum) Tourism Products¹⁸ indicates the values of the three border regions (Latvia, Russia, Lithuania) - quality, sustainability, individualisation, engagement of tourists and gain of experience - in which the development of cultural tourism products is grounded. The economic objective of the plan is to increase the competitiveness of the museums of Latgale, Utena and Polock and to achieve the maximum use of the newly established cross-border route, to increase the flow of domestic and foreign travellers and the duration of their stay in destinations. An assessment of the achievements of this plan is not available.

The Marketing Plan for Tourism Development in Latgale Region¹⁹ extends Latgale's positioning. In Latvia's market, Latgale region was historically referred to as the Land of Blue Lakes. However, for several years now in the Lithuanian market Latgale has been promoted as the land of the Baltic Lakes, as the neighbouring region of Aukštaitija is also part of this holiday destination²⁰. The slogan “Two sunsets every evening. Two-month holiday” was used for communication about the tourism products of the land of the Baltic Lakes. The plan highlights the current trends in tourism, – residents spend their vacation in the country of residence and travel more around the regions, seasonality is reduced and people take short recreational trips even after the end of the active tourism season (autumn, winter and spring).

¹⁶ Juris Smaļinskis, The Latvian Country Tourism Association "Lauku ceļotājs", Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences.

¹⁷ Narkūnienė, Ramutė, Utena University of Applied Sciences, Mykolas Romeris University, Lithuania. 2018

¹⁸ „Museum Gateway” (Nr. LLB-2-208) LPR, Daugavpils, 2014.

¹⁹ 2010

²⁰ The Marketing Plan for Tourism Development in Latgale Region

Domestic tourists are the main segment in Latgale and Lithuania. The number of people who prefer peaceful recreation has recently increased in Latvia. The reason behind this choice is a change in the lifestyle, a desire to relax from everyday stress by enjoying Latvia's nature, culture and simply spending time with family. The number of private tours is increasing. The most popular type of tourism is cultural tourism, promoted by the creation of new cultural tourism destinations. Social media and the Internet are the most important marketing tools for the promotion of tourism.

By December 2019, within the framework of *the EuroVelo11* project, a strategy for the development and marketing of Latgale's cycling tourism will be worked out. It will also include Latgale region's branding values, positioning and actions to be taken.

2 Foreign experience integrated in the development of an ecotourism product

The world's experience in the development of ecotourism has been described in studies by many of the researchers in Latvia and Lithuania. The ecotourism product is slightly different in each country, but there are many common features and activities that characterize ecotourism.

Ecotourism – part of the local people's lifestyle and values

Ecotourism is part of the ethical lifestyle - lifestyle entrepreneur and entrepreneurship. This can gradually bring about progressive changes in travel destinations, particularly when ecotourism is compared with mass tourism and other forms of economic activity that require extensive environmental transformation. The use of ecotourism as a principle of life and sustainable housekeeping transforms people's ecological awareness, human and environmental relations determine the sense of place: how one understands, uses, and emotionally relates to their environment, and in this respect language and ideology play an important role. The dialect of the local population is a phenomenon which particularly strongly reflects the specificities of the ecoregions (Merchant, 1992).



Photo: Māris Justs. The Country house “Juri” offers culinary heritage – cheeses. The house of the family has been authentically renovated, maintaining its traditional proportions and design. A gentle attitude towards cultural history, environmentally friendly materials and the hosts’ lifestyle are grounded in ecotourism.

Nature and culture: essential resources in ecotourism

Natural and cultural resources are among the most important in ecotourism, and their use in an environmentally friendly way requires high competence. The legal framework for protecting these resources is extensive as well. It particularly covers the protection of biodiversity on a global and local scale. The priorities of the development model of ecotourism are localism, traditional knowledge and nature conservation, reinforced by the philosophy this model contains- the harmony between people and nature (Butcher, 2007). Specially protected nature areas shall be particularly highlighted among natural resources. Ecotourism resources are enriched by the multiplicity of landscapes with river valleys, lakes and coasts, forests and terrain, as well as the life cycle of farmhouses, crafts, folk art and music. Ecotourism is characterised by an in depth quest for authenticity and adventure for one’s self education and development, in which natural and cultural exploration is essential (Richards, Wilson, 2004).

Indigenous population’s culture is linked to ecotourism because it is deeply rooted in the surrounding environment. The potential of ecotourism is to transform perceptions into ecological consciousness, which some analysts say is necessary to ensure a sustainable human-environmental relationship. This coincides with the transformation of the consumer's lifestyle into a greener one thinking about reducing waste by choosing more environmentally friendly technologies and ecological homes. In the past few years Romania has placed emphasis on the development of ecotourism. It has developed the National Ecotourism Strategy. Criteria based identification of ecotourism destinations, certification of eco products, creation of walking routes and education of the workforce have been carried out within the framework of the strategy.

The creation of businesses and jobs is based on local crafts, organic farming and the cultural traditions of a region. The daily life and culture of the local population are often used in tourism promotion and marketing strategies because they are the things that attract tourists.

An additionally essential resource for ecotourism is a landscape, particularly places with a symbolic landscape that integrates both natural and cultural heritage. In Latgale in the project areas it is Latgale Heights, etc. The landscape is dynamic and tourist experiences are more valuable in certain landscapes (for example, cycling along a scenic road in Latgale can be a special experience).



Photo: Māris Justs. Traditional window ornaments in Latgale. In scenic environment such facades are often replaced by a plastic covering which minimizes the visual charm of houses.

Professional nature guides and interpreters

Ecotourism is designed to provide satisfaction to the customers when being accompanied by a professional guide or nature interpreter. It may involve watching birds and animals, hiking, going on boat trips, rafting, diving, mountain climbing and participation in cultural events, photography and painting, listening to nature sounds and watching the processes of nature. The story has great value. Guides are mediators who help you understand the place, connect to it, provide emotional context, and encourage you to discover more. There is a lot of information available, but how to highlight the most essential and provide the most up to date information, and how to give it an emotional vibe, to help you see the positive – these are the challenges for creating a story of the site and attracting visitors. The global tourism trend is also linked to history – the creation and reinforcement of legends. In order to attract travellers a fascinating story about some sort of event, place or personality is necessary. Loch Ness in Scotland is a great example. Also, the places where episodes from ‘Game of Thrones’ or ‘The Lord of the Rings’ were filmed. In Latgale – Mindaugs and Queen Marta, ancient castle mounds and

places of sacrifice, hills of pagans and witches. Also, there is Slutišķi village, which is a historic village of old believers in Daugavpils County.



Photo: Māris Justs. In a farmhouse museum, cycling holiday group of travellers have been welcomed by a guide, a cultural and historical programme on the history of the local community has been prepared for the visitors.

Landscape- specific buildings, renovated country houses

In ecotourism, everything is prepared so that travellers see the identical, the different and the essential belonging to the area where travelling is taking place. In the world, cultural diversity and originality are the fortune of the tourism industry, therefore it is necessary to maintain the ancient construction traditions in Latvia, which are diverse in their manifestations in different counties. Tourist areas have a large number of rural farmhouses, but many of them are not populated and have not been looked after and thus they create an impression of decaying environment. In addition, during the renovation of old country houses the owners do not always use natural traditional building materials, so the renovated houses often create a view that does not match the requirements of ecotourism. One option is to educate the public on the environmentally friendly, authentic home renovation, popularizing magnificent examples from the borderland areas and adopting best practices.

The panoramic identification of the surroundings of ecotourism routes should be supplemented with the following landscape features:

- picturesque water landscapes: mirrors of lakes and rivers, valleys;
- fauna and flora, domestic animals and birds, wild animals associated with the agrarian landscape;
- high- quality forests, peatlands, marshy areas;
- unique geological and geographical formations, coastal landscapes and beaches;
- physical characteristics of nature associated with a historical value, an event or a person;

- the seasonal colourful changes of vegetation, the possibilities of watching the shades of sky and the impact of urban lighting on the landscape at dusk and night (starry sky, moonlight);
- physical characteristics of nature related to spirituality, religion, mythology, folklore;
- the relationship of the landscape with a particular artwork (music, painting, literature).

For example, Norway is developing national hiking routes demonstrating the diversity of natural resources and cultural wealth.

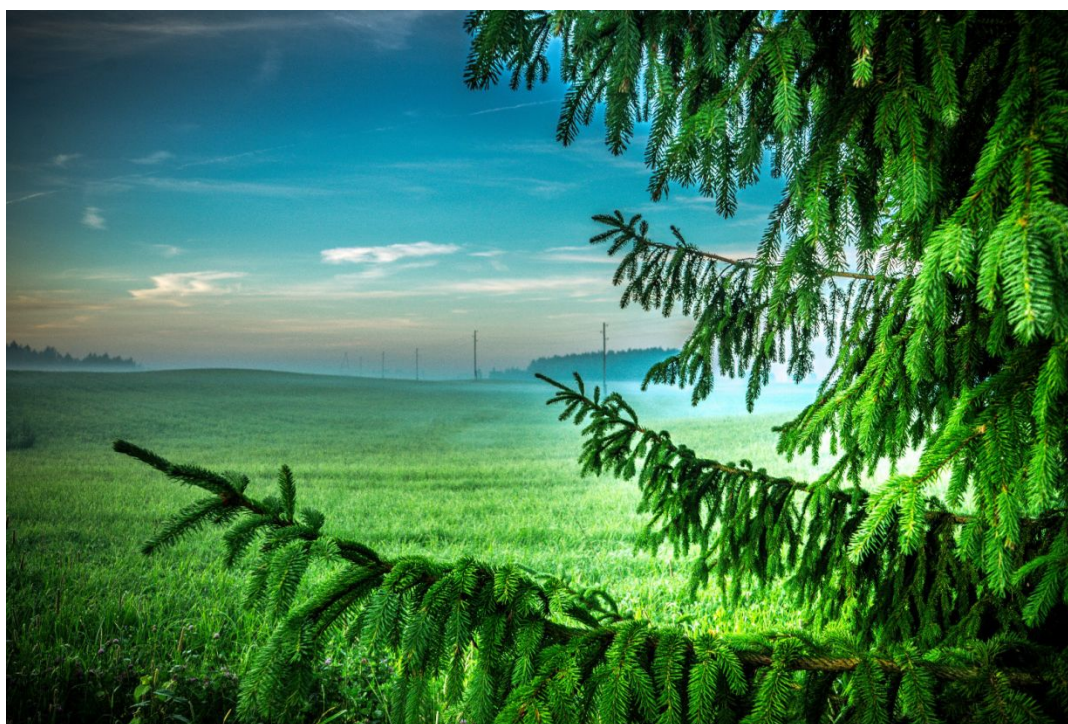
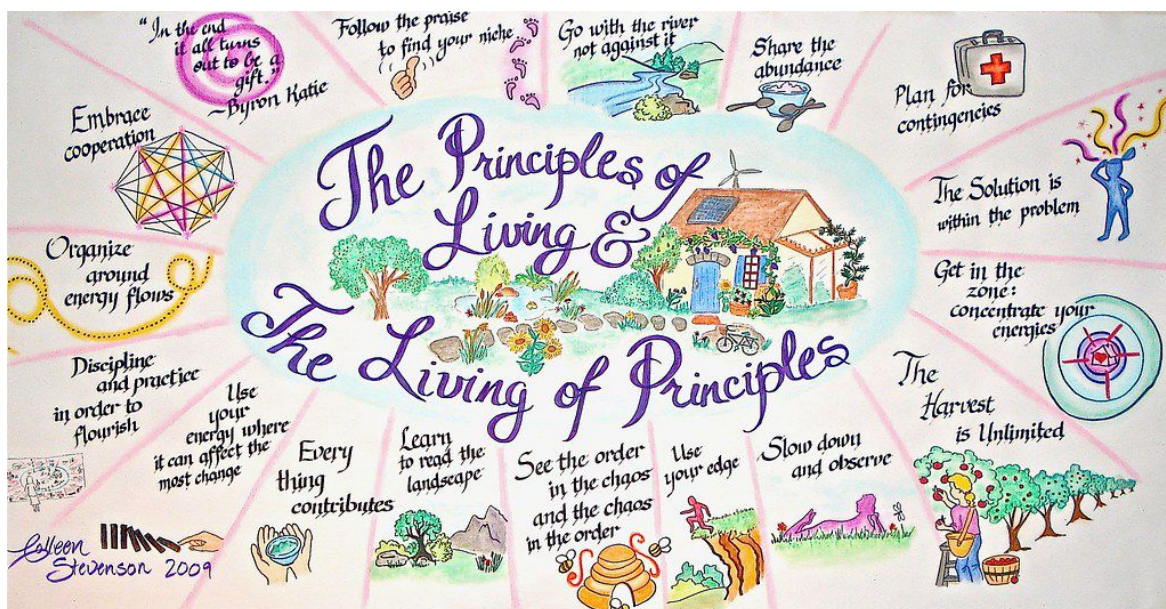


Photo: Normunds Mortukāns. Colourful summer light in the natural landscape. Photographers take advantage of 'golden hour' – an hour before sunrise.

Permaculture settlements

Important components of permaculture are building people's houses and organizing living in line with environmentally friendly principles. Integrated agriculture and ecological engineering are widely used in permaculture in individual homesteads as well as in villages. Permaculture creates and maintains productive ecosystems, helps to restore the health and naturality of degraded ecosystems. Permaculture practices are developing in Peru, Chile. Permaculture movements are also forming in Europe and Latvia. In Latgale, permaculture is associated with countless archaeological monuments and events – *Kroma kolna bruoliste* and the offer of ancient traditions, including the lifestyle. The project area in Aglona has a large number of ancient castle mounds and sacrifice places, unfortunately not many have been transformed into modern tourism experiences.



Principles of permaculture,

https://www.google.lv/search?q=permaculture+principles&source=lnms&tbn=isch&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjqu4CDilfjAhXmo4sKHS-wBrcQ_AUIECgB&biw=1280&bih=615#imgsrc=JiCOoqqKOcl6yM:&spf=1561549186631

Art, culture in the content of ecotourism

The content of ecotourism, which can be successfully discovered through environmental communication possibilities, is also enriched by art, music, sculpture and literary works dedicated to the interaction of men and nature, as well as by the masterful interpretation of the natural and cultural environment – the Museum of Literature in Anykščiai, the Stone Park in Panevėžis, the King Christ's mount in Aglona.



Photo: Normunds Mortukāns. There are events of traditional culture and an offer of artisanal art in each area of the project.

Bird and animal watching

One of the most fascinating ecotourism offers is the observation of animals and birds in any season, but during the planning process of these activities the boundaries of human and wildlife interaction should be evaluated very carefully in order to minimise the effect of visitor presence during the observation. New offers are emerging in the existing range of ecotourism activities around the world, such as fish watching in the US and canyoning, which is becoming more and more popular in many countries, as evidenced by the formation of canyoning associations (Hardiman, Burgin, 2010). Belgium's Walloon region focuses on increasing tourism capacity, highlighting the regional benefits which are based on ecotourism – natural treasures, cultural history heritage, gastronomy, events. Lowering noise levels is one of the approaches to reducing the negative impact of tourism, including ecotourism, on wild species. Ecotourism information centres, which not only promote environmental education, are also an effective means of limiting tourist flow.



Photo: Māris Maskalāns. The grouse, found in the oldest fir forests of Lithuania and Latvia, is on the list of protected species.

Water tourism as part of ecotourism

France, while working on tourist attraction, as one of the key elements, includes the development of unique local offer – waterways and cycling tourism. There are so called destination contracts, within the framework of which the parties involved in the development of tourism offer in a certain area are joined together in order to create a common inspiring theme. As part of these contracts, national and municipal authorities and private tourism service providers agree on the strategic objective to ensure the attractiveness of the offer, the quality of the services and international recognition. This creates an attractive and understandable offer for both local and international audiences²¹. Water tourism is one of the most attractive elements of tourism aesthetics and recreation. In Latvia, boat trips

²¹ Promotion of Tourism Development in Regions of Latvia, August 2018, Saeima of the Republic of Latvia, Synthesis Report

along rivers are highly popular, and water tourism at sea and in lakes is also developing. The regions of Latgale and Aukštaitija are particularly attractive for water tourism in lakes.



Photo: Ivars Matisovs. Boat trips are a summer tradition for many corporate events and groups of friends; a simple plank in one of the quays.

Cycling tourism as part of ecotourism

Cycling tourism is particularly suitable for ecotourism, because it is environmentally friendly, dynamic, flexible in planning, has great options for sites and distances, and it gives profound contact with the environment. The development of cycling tourism in the framework of ecotourism should focus on:

- the planning of new cycling routes and the safety of cyclists on the roads;
- create secure bicycle parking spaces at tourist sites, information, commercial and catering establishments, and at the accommodation;
- waymarking cycling routes, the creation of appropriate maps and information leaflets.

Switzerland has been operating a network of non-motorised vehicles for tourism and recreational activities since 2008 - *SwitzerlandMobility*. This network provides an opportunity for local residents and visitors to rest in a healthy environment with a natural landscape. It aims to develop, manage and promote hiking, cycling and canoeing routes at national, regional and local levels. The Internet site of the network serves about five million visitors a year, and as a result, the tourism service providers earn around 550 million Swiss francs a year.



Photo: Māris Justs. The rural roads of Lithuania and Latvia are scenic and astonishing.

Nature, educational and adventure trails as ecotourism offers

One of the examples in the world is Italy, with €372 million allocated at the national level in 2016-2024, for providing both basic infrastructure and the creation of cycling and walking paths and routes. As part of this initiative, 2016 was declared the year of the Italian Trail (I Cammini d' Italia) and various information activities and events were organised to promote the popularity of cultural and historical value of such routes²². Finland also pays special attention to the development of slow tourism and ecotourism by offering regional routes to pedestrians and cyclists. In Latvia, a great experience in building natural and educational paths has been accumulated since the end of the 19th century. In the 80s of the 20th century, on the basis of scientific findings, a group of students and teaching staff of the Daugavpils Pedagogical Institute started working together, and the first professional schools for environmental interpreters (nature guides) were formed there. The project areas have a significant resource for the development of nature and educational trails and they already have some positive examples - forest and meditation trails in Anykščiai, the island trail of Cirītis lake, the history information trail in Antalieptė.



Publicity photo. Treetop Trail in Anykščiai District, one of the most successful new tourist attractions in Lithuania.

²² Promotion of Tourism Development in Regions of Latvia August 2018, Saeima of the Republic of Latvia, Synthesis Report.

3 Description of the tourism and ecotourism situation

In the context of ecotourism, the most popular combined infrastructure objects in the project area are eco trails, landscape trails, educational trails, cycling paths and walking paths in nature. However, according to the experience, ecotourism standards and aspects of other countries, they cannot yet be called ecotourism paths to a full extent. The most developed infrastructure can be found in the national parks of both countries, with special centres for education, information and exhibitions. There are also adjacent paths or routes in nature. The borderland cooperation projects have also produced tourism sites/routes/offers partly based on ecotourism principles. Lithuania has developed infrastructure for water activities, Latvia has a more modest offer of water activities and corresponding equipment.

3.1 Ecotourism awareness in project areas

‘Ecotourism is becoming more and more popular in Latvia. People more often choose to spend their spare time in nature riding a bicycle or rowing a boat or simply walking along a nature path. For this purpose, the infrastructure of nature trails and other natural sites should be established and restored (Aglona county, Latvia).’ ‘It is a journey in nature, most often with your family, because it excites! (Preiļi and Riebiņi counties, Latvia)’ When thinking about ecotourism, an American saying comes to mind: ‘We do not inherit the earth from our ancestors; we borrow it from our children.’ Ecotourism is a tourism industry that does not affect nature. It is an environmentally friendly journey through natural areas, enjoying and preserving them. Ecotourism contributes to the appreciation of natural resources and understanding how indispensable they are. It pays great attention to authenticity, heritage, culture, maintaining and continuing the traditions, the distinctive character of communities and genuine experience. Ecotourism is a sustainable value of tourism (Anykščiai county, Lithuania)’.

3.2 Values or resources

Aglona County (Latvia) is rich in waters, with 63 water bodies. Lakes account for about 8% of the total area. The largest lakes of Aglona County: Lake Geraņimovas Ilzas, Lake Cirītis, Lake Jazinka, Lake Užuņū and Lake Bērzgales. In Aglona county there are 13 rivers, the largest ones – The Balda, The Dubna, and The Tartaka. In Aglona county, there are 4 specially protected nature sites *Natura 2000*, 2 of which are nature parks – ‘Cirīša ezers’ and ‘Cārmaņa ezers’, and nature reserve ‘Čertoka ezers’, as well as the natural monument ‘Krastiņū pansionāta aleja’.



Publicity photo: Latvia.travel. The Basilica of Aglona and Čertoka Lake, with well-fitted and environmentally friendly wooden platforms and paths.

The most popular tourist places of Aglona County – the Basilica of Aglona, sacred site of international significance; one of the oldest wooden churches in Latgale, the Bērzgale Roman Catholic Church of God's Providence; the Aglona's Museum of Bread, The World War Museum, the Mount of King Christ with 230 biblical sculptures; the most clear and the most mystical lake of Latvia, – Velnezers (Čertoks).



Publicity photo. The Aglona's Museum of Bread offers an opportunity to enjoy the culinary heritage. The Mount of King Christ – outdoor wooden sculptures.

Riebiņi County (Latvia) is also rich in lakes – there are 32 of them, 24 of which are in Rušona Parish. The county is crossed by several rivers: Malta, Oša, Feimanka, Sauna, Preiļupe, Jaša, Rušonīca, Čornaja, Malmute, Zvergža, Varaža. Four *Natura 2000* sites are located in Riebiņi County: Lielais Pelečāres Bog, Islands of Rušona Lake, Jašas – Bicānu Lake, Protected Landscape Area 'Kaučers'. The most popular tourist activities in Riebiņi County: resting by the lakes, riding horses at the Stable 'Trīs Vītoli Staļi', enjoying an authentic environment of Latgale in the farmstead 'Juri' in Rušona Parish.



Publicity photograph: The Nature Conservation Agency. Lake Kaučers. Silajāņi old school.

Preiļi County (Latvia) is not rich in surface water, it belongs to the River Daugava Basin. It has 8 lakes and 4 rivers: Duba, Feimanka, Jaša, Oša. There are many tributaries to the rivers of Preiļi County which form a large water network.

There are Special Areas of Protection (established in 2004): *Natura 2000* sites - nature reserve 'Jaša', nature reserve 'Pelēču ezera purvs' (Pelēči Lake Marsh), protected landscape area "Kaučers". The town of Preiļi has a Site of Community Importance which is specially protected nature area, a natural

monument, a dendrological plantation 'Preiļu pilsētas parks un dižkoku aleja Raiņa bulvārī' (Preiļi town park and veteran trees lining Rainis Boulevard).

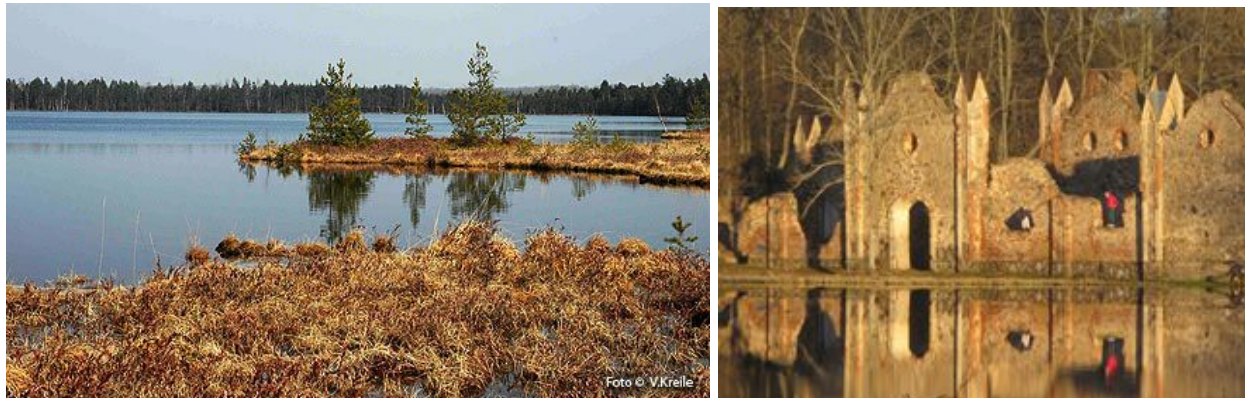


Photo: publicity, Ivars Matisovs. A bog trail is under construction in the Great Pelečāre Bog. Preiļi Manor and Park for slow walks and enjoyment of nature.

The most favoured tourist places: Preiļi Manor complex with the beautiful park, the Museum of History and Applied Arts of Preiļi, the Miniature Kingdom of Preiļi - Puppet Gallery, the Polikarps Čerņauskis's house-museum of ceramic, the Museum of Rainis 'Jasmuiža', the Roman Snail Farm 'Ošu Mājas', the farmstead 'Kalni' (country wine and gingerbread production), I. Pličs's collection of artefacts.



Publicity photo: celotajs.lv, Latvia travel. The Roman snail farm is a popular tourist destination in Preiļi County. 'Jasuiža' – the site of tours, traditions and events.

Anykščiai district (Lithuania) is rich in lakes and rivers. The largest is Lake Rubikiai, with 16 islands.



Publicity photo. The farmhouse of the writer Jonas Biliūnas – the museum depicts the characteristic landscape of the Lithuanian countryside. The Museum of Angels is dedicated to traditional Lithuanian wooden sculptures. Wooden sculptures are typical outdoor elements, too.

The most popular tourist areas in the Anykščiai district: Anykščiai Regional Park (*Natura 2000* area), Anykščiai pine forest, The Forest Museum (forest exploration road), The Horse Museum, The Angels Museum – sacred arts centre, the *Voruta Mound* history complex, the Narrow Gauge Railway Museum, the Treetop Walking Path, the offer of the local cuisine in farmsteads and cafes.



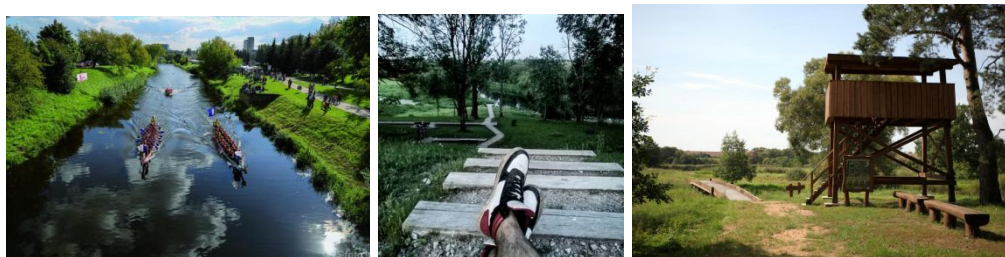
Publicity photo. The only maze park in Lithuania where you can test your sense of orientation. The Horse Museum popularizes a peaceful and close to nature lifestyle.

Moletai district (Lithuania) has become one of the most popular tourist destinations. The motto of Moletai tourism – ‘Everything is real here!’. The Moletai area has around 300 lakes and forests, including the longest Lithuanian lake - Asvejos, which was part of the Great Duchy of Lithuania. Parts of the Asvejos and Labanoras regional parks are also located in Moletai district. Tourists are attracted by the wilderness, Moletai Sculpture Park near the lake Pastovis, Alanta Manor, the ancient village of Luokesai, an interactive digital tour of ‘Moletai in the turn of the centuries.’ Investments are being made in the development of the Museum of Ethnocosmology.



Publicity photo. Ethnocosmology Museum, Diversity of Moletai lakes, Moletai viewing tower.

Panevėžys (Lithuania) is located in a convenient place for tourists from the Baltic States, i.e. halfway between the two Baltic capitals – Vilnius (130 km) and Riga (150 km). Panevėžys lies on the banks of the river Nevėžis, the sixth longest river in Lithuania and one of the main tributaries of the Nemunas - the longest river in Lithuania, that flows into the Baltic Sea. Panevėžys is the capital of Aukštaitija Ethnographic Region.



Publicity photo. The Nevėžis river is already used for water tourism, but there is still potential for developing onshore infrastructure. Krekenavos nature park trails, the Nevėžis river information trail.

Panevėžys district has the Regional Park of Krekenavos, founded in 1992 in order to preserve the medieval valley of the Nevėžis river, its natural ecosystems and cultural heritage values. Tourists' favorite places: The Ethnography Museum, the largest in Lithuania and famous for its collection of insects from all over the world; the Krekenavos regional park, with 53 local sites of interest, 5 exhibitions/ museums, and the opportunity for renting canoes. Popular objects are the Bistrampolis Manor, the alpaca farm, the home producer of medicinal plants and herbal teas, the museum of railway and puppet theatre as well as nature watching – the blooming of tulips and forget-me-nots in the neighborhood of Panevėžys. During the summer the special Panevėžys offer is Friday's festival.

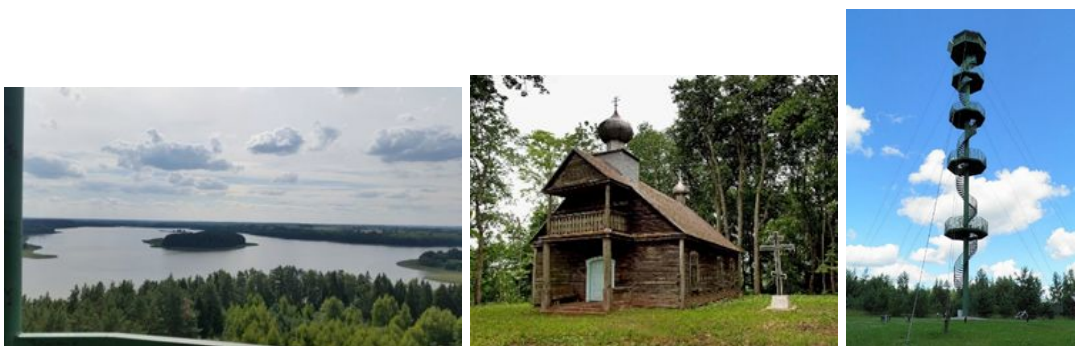
Gražutes Regional Park (Lithuania) is located in the part of Lithuania which is the richest in lakes. It has more than 70 water reservoirs: picturesque lakes of Luodis, Samavas, Asavas, Šiurpis, Veprys, Ligaja, Ažukalnis, Zalvas, Antalieptė water reservoir, lake Dūkštas, lake Šventas, etc. The Šventoji, the most beautiful river in eastern Aukštaitija has its source in the park. The wilderness has maintained a great variety of plants and animals: there have been identified 858 plant species and 395 lichen and mushroom species, 725 species of insects, 23 of which are included in the Red Data Book of Lithuania. There have been identified 190 bird species, 50 of which are listed in the Red Data Book and 43 species are listed in Annex I to the EU Birds Directive. 40 animal species inhabit the park area (9

species are in the Red Data Book and 11 species are in EU Habitats Directive): rare white hares, otters, etc. 7 bat species which are protected at national and European Union level.



Publicity photo. Lake-rich Gražutes Regional Park, where you can see the diversity of plants and animals and enjoy natural treasures traveling along cycling routes of 100 km.

Tourists' favorite places: Vida Žilinskienė's 'Maritime Museum' (unique collection of marine creatures, colourful corals, shells, fossils, and gifts), Salakas regional ethnographic exposition, as well as Tiberias - the Catholic religious brotherhood monastery in the village of Baltriškės. There is the Church of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Sorrows in Salakas, which is the highest (72 m) church in Lithuania made of local boulders. In Gražutes regional park, which is rich in water and forests, tourists can take 4 educational routes and cycling routes for over 100 km await for cyclists. Almost all water reservoirs are suitable for active recreation. There are campsites as well as boat, canoe, kayak, water motorcycle rentals in 2 tourist service centres. There are also 3 guided water tourism routes.



Publicity photo. Lake Sartai , stretching for over 15 km in length as well as the protected cultural heritage sites of Sartai Regional Park can be viewed from the top of the 36 m high extraordinary viewing tower.

Sartai Regional Park (Lithuania), which attracts visitors with its water reservoirs and hills, is designed to preserve the unique landscape, natural ecosystem and cultural heritage of Lithuania's fourth largest lake with the longest coastline (79 km)- Lake Sartai.

There are 29 lakes (Zaduojys, Ilgis, etc.), a lot of swamps and forests in the park. The altitude of the surrounding hills of Lake Sartai reaches 150-170 m. The park includes a nature reserve as well as protected nature, cultural heritage sites and species: 4 natural heritage objects (trees), 48 cultural heritage objects (17 archaeological, 7 architectural objects, 2 greenhouses, 10 historic, 9 memorial, 3 art objects), the Red Data Book of Lithuania has registered 120 species (36 plant, 34 mushroom and lichen

species, 21 invertebrates, 3 species of frogs, 24 bird, 2 mammal species), 15 *Natura 2000* sites with 19 habitat types and 6 plant and animal species recognized as important in the European Community.

Tourists' favorite places: Sartai Lake, which has 4 large islands, and a 36 m high viewing tower. Every year on the first Sunday in February, horse-drawn sled races take place on the frozen lake. The exhibition of the Sartai Regional Park Visitor Center tells the story and allows you to feel the park in an interactive way. Protected cultural heritage sites of the 18th and 19th centuries are often visited, particularly St Michael church in Babriškės.

3.3 Organisational aspects of tourism

Tourism industry is composed of both private and public sectors, which can be either directly involved in the sector or perform supportive functions. In Latvia The Ministry of Economics and the Investment and Development Agency are responsible for the development and implementation of tourism state policy. In the process of policy making representatives of the tourism industry act as consultants. Whereas the implementation of the policy and activities of the industry depend on private and public sector, i.e. action of local authorities²³.

Latgale Planning Region implements the projects of regional importance in promoting business, improving infrastructure and identifying tourism products.

Table No. 2 The Organisations of the tourism sector and their functions.

No.	Organizational structure	Function attributable to the tourism sector	Action Directions and Marketing Activities
1.	Local governments	Plan the overall development of the area, including the tourism sector, ensure the functioning of tourist information centres, raise funds and attract investment for the development of tourism and related infrastructure.	Advertise the territory as a tourism destination, use official local webpages and local government's social networks; participate in the establishment of information stands, campaigns, events.
2.	Tourism Information centres Tourist Information centre of Preiļi and Riebiņi municipalities Tourist Information centre of Aglona	A service company owned by a municipality, that provides its services all year round, serves foreign and local travellers as well as local residents. The main task is to inform about tourism	Gathering and systematising of information; providing information to tourists; creation and implementation of marketing campaigns of a territory; cooperation with entrepreneurs, promotion of

²³ Rokasgrāmata tūrisma informācijas sniedzējiem,
http://www.latturinfo.lv/images/dokumenti/darbiba/Latturinfo_Rokasgramata_2014_Web_versija.pdf

	<p>Molėtai tourist and business information centre</p> <p>Anykščiai tourist and business information centre</p> <p>Panevėžys regional tourist information centre</p>	<p>services and to provide assistance in the use of tourism services.</p> <p>In Lithuania, in addition to information on tourism offers, advice on starting a business and selection of business forms is also provided.</p>	<p>tourism business; cooperation with local governments and their specialists in promoting the development of local tourism, dealing with professionalism and education issues, organising participation in tourism exhibitions; training and workshops for the workers of the sector. Development and distribution of thematic maps and informative materials, provision of information on tourism homepages.</p>
3.	<p>The Nature Conservation Agency</p> <p>Directorates of regional parks in Lithuania</p> <p>(Gražutes, Sartai, Krekenavos, Labanoro)</p>	<p>Coordinate administration and management activities in specially protected nature areas; implement the national nature conservation policy in the field of protection of species and habitats.</p>	<p>Organise and monitor the development and renewal of nature conservation plans for specially protected nature areas, and coordinate the implementation of these plans; organise the necessary nature conservation activities in specially protected nature areas; carry out international projects concerning nature protection, provide information on specially protected nature areas to the public, educate the public about nature protection issues; encourage public involvement in the management of specially protected natural areas. Install information stands, viewing towers in protected areas, distribute information on nature protection issues.</p>
4.	<p>Non-governmental organizations (NGOs)</p> <p>“Innovators Valley”, associations of environment and nature friends, associations and foundations of local</p>	<p>One of the functions is a contribution to the strengthening and promotion of environmental education, facilitation of eco-friendly lifestyle.</p>	<p>Cooperate with local governments in the development and management of tourism infrastructure, organise and implement environmental awareness-raising projects, involve the community in the activities.</p>

	governments – Euroregion “Country of Lakes”		
5.	Travel agencies, tour operators - “Ceļojumu bode”, “Impro ceļojumi”, “Jēkaba ceļojumi” etc., offers of individual guides	Combine and offer for sale or sell to travellers package tourism services directly or through another service provider.	Advertise and organise travel offers in the project areas – Cheddar cheese enjoyment and metal art gallery in Preiļi, Preiļi Park, Burgundy snails, wine enjoyment. In the routes of blue lakes in Latgale operators usually include the Museum of Bread and Aglona. Some of the travel packages include cheese tasting on the farm ‘Juri’, a sculpture garden in ‘Karaļkalns’, Lake Čertoks. Lithuania's tours in most cases include the offers of Anykščiai district. Marketing activities on tour operators’ homepages and mass media. The most extensive marketing campaign – the Lithuanian treetop trail in Anykščiai.
6.	Private sector - service providers	Guesthouses, catering businesses, equipment rental companies	Advertise their offer both on local government web pages, in the materials issued by tourist information centres, as well as individually in the social environment, on their own web pages.
7.	Networks of craftsmen and entrepreneurs – Pūdnīku (Potters) School, Latgale Art and Craft Centre, craftsmen associations	Ensure the preservation and passing down of craft traditions, craft as a lifestyle, by hosting tourists in their rural houses or workshops, promote environmentally friendly farming, old professions as well as cultural and historical traditions.	Collaborate with tourism operators, local governments, tourism information centres, carry out individual marketing activities and are included in common routes.
8.	Information on the Internet: latvia.travel, latgale.travel, visitlatgale.com,	Promote destinations, typical routes and resources of Latvia and Lithuania. Among the top 10 is Daugavpils in	From the sites of the project, the webpages have included Aglona County (Museum of Bread, accommodation and catering in

	lithuania.travel	Latgale. Latgale is described as a land of traditions and hospitable people who make it so special. The Lithuanian digital shop has a separate section – ecotourism, promoting forests and water resources in the project area. Different viewing towers and the Etnocosmoology Museum are being promoted as not so well known places	the county, Velnezers), the Miniature Puppet Kingdom of Preiļi; in Lithuania - the Salaka Church, the walking trails of bogs and forests.
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Source of Data: Study of Consultants.

3.4 The offer

3.4.1 General description of the offer

The sites of Latvia and Lithuania, included in the strategy, offer ecotourism services, often not highlighting them as belonging this particular tourism sector (but as tourism opportunities in general), yet referring to the recreation of nature, the enjoyment of local culinary heritage, the exploration of natural resources, the possibility to use environmentally friendly means of transport. In addition, it also has an educational and protection function. In **Aglona County**, located in the south-east of Latvia and rich in waters, 5 water routes have been developed, offering boating on rivers and lakes of the region. In addition, there are 4 local cycling routes available as well as bicycle rentals. In Aglona, you can go for a walk along specially created paths in nature: Cīrīša Upursala's trail, The trail of Dreams, and the trail of Strawberries. There are farmsteads in the county that offer to see domestic animals and birds. For example, you can watch Red deer, Fallow deer and Père David's deer, and learn interesting facts about them and their rearing in the local deer garden. Also, there are two museums in operation in the county.

In the counties of Preiļi and Riebiņi, which are located in the south-east of Latvia, 6 cycling routes have been developed and marked. In several places in Preiļi and in two places in Riebiņi it is possible to rent bicycles. It is the same with boat rentals (the boats available in Riebiņi Secondary School and in Riebiņi Youth Centre are free of charge). Fishing is possible at all kinds of accommodation located by rivers or lakes. Many tourists are interested in visiting manors and castles. Preiļi Manor and also Rušona Manor houses are currently undergoing restoration.

Two Latvian tourism destinations have won EDEN contests²⁴. In 2015 in the theme "Tourism and local cuisine" – Latgale – a region that stands out with its unique landscape, local traditions and culinary heritage. Another in 2008 "Local heritage tourism" – Latgale potters – clay masters in Latgale, where ceramic traditions are an essential part of culture and tourism. Both winning destinations are based on

²⁴ Source: EC, 2018b.

ecotourism – a direct local culture – pottery and culinary heritage that do not create an excessive environmental burden. It shows that the existing resources must be developed and used for ecotourism.

There is also a wide offer in **Anykščiai District** located in the north-east of Lithuania: boating, cycling routes, campsites, eco-walks, animal watching, a tree-top walking trail, horse riding, exploration of the natural heritage.

Panevėžys District, located in the north of Lithuania, offers boat and bicycle rentals, fishing, learning about animals, organic farming. The development of ecotourism can be based on cycling tourism, since in the vicinity of Panevėžys there is 176 km of bicycle infrastructure available and route maps and materials are also provided. The opportunities for cycling are promoted by the local cycling club, whose organised cycling trips are gaining increasing popularity. Although a standardised offer often is in demand, tourists are becoming increasingly interested in innovative proposals. According to the employees of the Regional Tourism and Business Centre of Panevėžys, in Panevėžys and in its immediate neighbourhood, the Krekenavos Regional Park is the most relevant to the concept of ecotourism. It was established in order to preserve the landscape of the Nevėžis river, its natural ecosystems and cultural heritage values. Thus the park's offer was created to exploit natural resources rationally.

In **Moletai District** tourists can enjoy boat trips, local cuisine, cycling, fishing, watching domestic animals, etc. Moletai is a resort located in the northeast of Lithuania. It is particularly popular among the residents of Vilnius.

Gražutes Regional Park, which is rich in waters and forests, has 4 educational paths and cycling routes of over 100 km for those who prefer cycling. Almost all water reservoirs are suitable for active recreation. Camping, boats, canoes, kayaks, water motorcycles are available in 2 tourist services centres. On 3 water tourism routes you can be accompanied by a guide.

Sartai Regional Park has 3 educational trails, 12 campsites, 4 breathing points, 1 viewing tower, there are 3 museums and 1 art gallery available to visitors, as well as 3 natural and 48 cultural heritage sites.

3.4.2. Catering services²⁵

In each of the areas included in the strategy document local culinary heritage is offered, which is essential for eco-tourism: healthy local food that includes the traditions and continuity of the particular site.

In **Aglona County** (Latvia) there are 7 service providers offering catering. In the centre of Aglona there is a café 'Turība' and other 6 tourism service providers, 4 of which are members of the 'Culinary Heritage' society, which places particular emphasis on including the dishes of Latgale's culinary heritage

²⁵ Catering companies can be large with many employees, but they can also be small family businesses with only a few people (often owners themselves) who do all the work. Catering services are provided not only in cafes and restaurants, but also in farmsteads or guest houses.

in the menus. The 5 catering service providers of Aglona county, which prepare and honor Latvian dishes and traditions, have been assigned the logo 'Latvian cuisine'²⁶:

- the country house 'Upenīte',
- the guest house 'Aglonas Cakuļi',
- the country house 'Mežinieku mājas',
- The Museum of Bread in Aglona,
- the café "Turība".

Catering services are provided in 11 locations in **Preiļi and Riebiņi counties** (Latvia). The national cuisine can only be enjoyed at one site in Riebiņi county – in the farmstead 'Juri'.

Anykščiai District (Lithuania) - there are more than 30 restaurants and cafes, at least 5 of which provide Lithuanian national dishes.

Moletai District (Lithuania) has 2 traditional food restaurants (potato dumplings cepelinai, fish, tree cake šakotis), they also have classes in preparing fish soup and other traditional dishes. There are 19 catering sites in total.

The **City and the District of Panevėžys** have 14 restaurants, 43 cafes and pizzerias, most of which offer Lithuanian dishes. Meanwhile, 3 of the catering providers pay more attention to the national cuisine, offering masterclasses and tastings. There is a high demand for local culinary heritage.

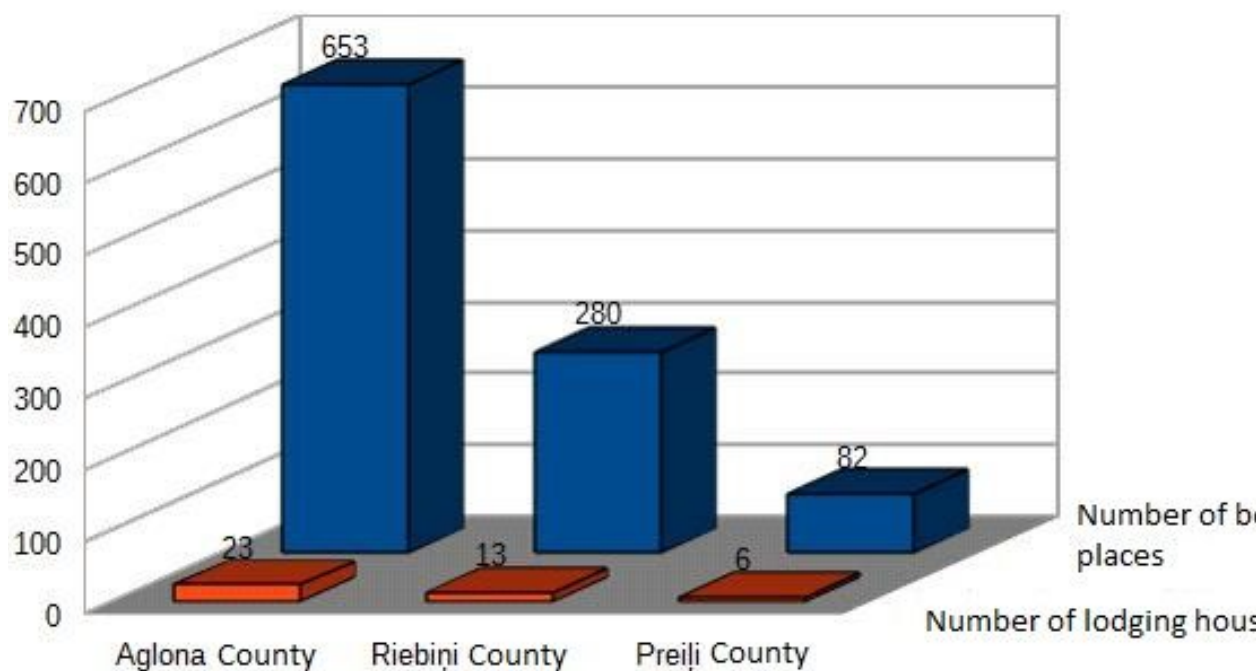
In the area of **Gražutes Regional Park**, more than two catering locations provide culinary heritage dishes.

3.4.3. Accommodation

One of the preconditions to make tourists stay longer is the offer of accommodation. Most of the guesthouses and country houses on the Latvian side of the project territory are located in Aglona County, namely 15 guest houses and 11 farmhouses. There are also 4 recreational complexes, 2 hostels, 8 campsites. The accommodation is offered by 40 tourism service providers, which, according to an assessment of the municipality of Aglona, is a sufficient number in the present situation.

In Riebiņi and Preiļi counties, the number of accommodations is significantly lower. In Preiļi County there are 2 guest houses in the town of Preiļi, 1 country house, 1 hostel, 1 campsite for tents. In Riebiņi County there are 4 guest houses and 4 recreation centres, 2 youth hostels, 1 holiday house, 1 campsite and 1 – another type of accommodation.

²⁶ The logo "Latvian cuisine" refers to the places where to enjoy Latvian dishes: for example, potatoes with herring and curds; smoked meat or fish; rasols; cold beet soup; fish or sorrel soup; wild mushroom sauce; pork shank with sauerkraut; savoury porridge, layered rye bread dessert, carrot buns, groat sausage. www.laukucelotajs.lv



The number of accommodation establishments and bed places in the counties of Aglona, Riebiņi, Preiļi in 2019, according to the figures of Latgale accommodation institutions, other facilities and the tourism information centre of Aglona County.

There are 77 accommodation sites available in Lithuania's **Anykščiai District**, namely, the service is available in 5 hotels, 30 apartments, 1 campsite, 1 private house, 40 rural houses.

In **Moletai District** the service is provided in 83 places: the most beds are in 59 rural houses (in total 1900 beds), in 12 guest houses, holiday houses and hotels (1096 beds), in 10 campsites and camps (400 beds), as well as bed and breakfast is offered in 2 more places (70 beds). In total, accommodation is available to 3466 people.

In the **City and District of Panevėžys**, accommodation is available in 32 locations. In the city there is one guest house that accommodates 15 people. There are 23 rural homes with 606 beds in the district.

The area of **Gražutes Regional Park** has 15 guest houses, 1 party house, 1 motel, 1 leisure and entertainment complex. You can also stay for the night close to nature at 6 camps and in the hotel of 5 thousand stars.

Sartai Regional Park (Lithuania) has 12 campsites.

The 'Green Certificate' ('Zaļais sertifikāts') — an eco-label affirming environmental quality in rural tourism farmsteads which, while saving natural resources and operating environmentally friendly

farming provide a pleasant recreation for tourists. The certificate has been granted to only 3 tourist farmsteads in Aglona County (Latvia):

- the farmhouse 'Upītes',
- the farmhouse 'Mežinieku mājas',
- the holiday home 'Ceļmalas'.

The culture label '**Latvian Heritage**' (Latviskais mantojums), which is presented to tourism-related entrepreneurs who preserve and promote Latvian culture and lifestyle heritage by presenting it to visitors, has been awarded to at least one entrepreneur in each of the counties of Aglona, Preiļi or Riebiņi:

- the farm "Juri" (Riebiņi County),
- the country house "Upenīte" (Aglona County),
- the Museum of Bread (Aglona County),
- the workshop-museum of Polikarps Čerņavskis.

In Latgale 5 cross-border tourism routes have been developed (LV, RU) which partly relate to ecotourism and include the project sites:

- crafts route (ecotourism components: natural materials are used with minimal impact on the environment, visitors learn about traditions; includes Preiļi);
- nature route (visitors explore natural landscapes and protected areas; Preiļi);
- cultural route (visitors explore cultural heritage and local identity; Preiļi);
- rural tourism route (local farm produce, lifestyle; Preiļi);
- sacral tourism route (cultural heritage; Preiļi, Aglona).

As part of several near border projects, 14 Latvian-Lithuanian cross-border tourism routes have been developed. These tourism products also include eco-tourism components: involvement of local population, learning about local traditions, use of local products, slow and nature-friendly getting around on foot, by bicycles and boats, informative and nature trails, environmental education programmes:

- **'Visit the masters of the ancient crafts in the Land of Baltic Lakes'**, ecotourism elements in project areas – ancient organization of work in the Horse Museum, design of wood products, Basilica and Museum of Bread in Aglona, pottery and the Puppet Kingdom in Preiļi; 13 resting places have been established by the lakes and rivers in Lithuania;
- **'Get to know the diversity of cultural history at the border of the European Union'** – Anykščiai museums and sacral buildings;
- **"Circle of Happiness in Latgale and Aukštaitija – tales and stories"** – 3 Anykščiai sites and well-equipped beaches as on previous routes;
- **"A horse for health, beautiful posture and soul harmony."** The ecotourism component — slow movement and harmony with nature — includes 4 informative trails in the Gražutes Regional Park. Walking around Moletai town, 2 museums in Anykščiai and well-equipped water access sites, Šavaša informative trail, Antalietpe, Jaskoniškių informative trail, Sartu Regional Park, Jaskoniškių forests, Ilgašilis exploration trail, Oak exploration trail;

- **“Cycling route in the Land of the Baltic Lakes”** - environmentally friendly travelling. The route includes Aglona Basilica, the Museum of Bread, 2 guest houses and bicycle rentals in Aglona and Puppet Kingdom in Preili. 4 sites and access to water at Anykščiai, two Moletai museums and the cycling route ‘Kamastos žiedas’. A cycling route of approximately 40 km around Ambraziškiai neighborhood and Kamastos landscape reserve. The route includes two bends: one around the lakes of Grabuosto and Kamastos, the other winds along the Lake Ambraziškiai and the valley of the Dumblės river. In the great Gražute cycling route (45 km) one can explore the most valuable cultural and natural treasures. The small cycling circle of Gražute (37 km) begins from the Zarasų campsite, winding past the lakes of Apiričio, Ilžikio, Asavėlio, Asavo, Tūmiškio and Samavo. The traveller will have to ride the paths of the famous Gražute forest, which is surrounded by a number of the kurgans of 9th-12th centuries and visit the ecological farm of Janinos Milašienės in the village of Pagrundi. The farmers have been engaged in beekeeping for 40 years;
- **‘The Land of Baltic Lakes for gourmets’**. The route includes the sites of the project: Aglona Basilica, the Museum of Bread, the Puppet Kingdom in Preili and guest houses. On the Lithuanian side: guest houses, Moletai Ethno Cosmology Centre, the bread farmstead, the educational programme ‘Saulės blynas’, JSC ‘Anykščių vinas’, the Horse Museum, the rural tourism manor ‘Barono vila’. Well-established rest places at Rubikiai and Nevežis lakes. The Šventoji river beach, the beaches of Dusynas and Juostinas lakes. Local culinary heritage and traditions — ecotourism components.
- The winter offer of **‘Over the snowy hills in the Land of the Baltic Lakes.’** Sites and activities related to the project areas: a traditional ice fishing competition on lake Sartai, ‘Romuvos parkas’ in Anykščiai, Šventoji river valley, cross country skiing, ‘Nature harmony’, downhill skiing centre ‘Kalita’, ‘Health oasis’, country houses;
- **“Your green holiday in the Land of Baltic Lakes – nature tourism in Latgale and Aukštaitija”**. Anykščiai - a stone ‘Puntuko brolis’, an arboretum and a sculpture park, Anykščiai Regional Park, a quartz sands outcrop, a wild animal garden, Šventoji informative trail, In Gražutes Regional Park – Šavaša informative trail, Moletai District, Asvejos Regional Park, Antalieptės reservoir (Antalieptės sea); Degučiai, Ilgašilis, Jaskoniškių informative trails, the visitor centre of Gražutes Regional Park. Sartai Regional Park.
- **‘Adventure Tourism’**, a nature park ‘Cirišs Lake’, Cirišs nature trail, Summer bobsled track in Anykščiai, Moletai airfield, country houses, organized trips along the Šventoji river in canoes and kayaks.
- **“Recreation in the national parks of Rāzana and Aukštaitija”**.
- **‘Pleasure in the magic of Latgale’** – Aglona Basilica, the Museum of Bread, The King’s Hill, 2 country houses, Devil’s Lake, ‘Health Oasis’ in Anykščiai;
- **‘Traditions tour’** – Ecotourism aspect – In Latvia traditions are not kept alive for tourist entertainment only, they are a part of everyday life. A special place in tradition tourism is for learning ancestral skills and wisdom. Aglona Museum of Bread, Anykščiai bread baking demonstrations, Horse Museum, Nuron village, Anykščiai district, a traditional state trotter horse racing competition ‘Run, run, horsey!’ with a chance to enjoy traditional folk singing, crayfish eating championship in Sartai Regional Park, an ancient house at the Horse Museum in Aukštaitija district tells the story of the path of bread from grain to a freshly baked loaf of bread;

- **‘Enjoy the refreshment of the Land of Baltic Lakes!’** Nature parks, scenic landscapes, countless lakes and rivers for water tourism admirers, the possibility of going on a trip by canoes and kayaks in the valley of the Šventoji river, at least 4 homesteads offer water tours, boat and sports equipment rentals;
- **‘Pilgrimage around the land of the Baltic Lakes’.** Crucifixes at the roadside in Latgale and Aukštaitija, church visits, Aglona Basilica, the King’s Hill and Aglona Museum of Bread, the Roman Catholic Church of St Anna in Bērzgale, the Museum of Rainis ‘Jasmuiža’, the Roman Catholic Church of Preiļi, Preiļi Park with the Borhs manor complex, the Church of St Peter and Paul in Moletai, Burbiškis St Sacred Heart of Jesus Church, the Orthodox Church of Alexander Nevsky, Church of Apostle Evangelist St Matthew in Anykščiai, a former monastery of barefoot Carmelites, Antalieptė Church of the Discovery of the Holy Cross.

As part of the projects, 33 thematic village routes have been developed in Latgale and Lithuania, of which 8 thematic villages refer to the project area. Each village offers has ecotourism-oriented activities:

- A village of active recreation ‘Aglona Alps’ – activities in nature, water activities, nature exploration;
- A village of creative skills in Aglona County- preservation of ancient crafts and the involvement of tourists in their exploration;
- Upeņu siera ciems (a black currant cheese village) is located in the surroundings of Cirišs Lake Nature Park. A variety of cheeses there come from milk produced on the organic farm. A village of ancestral traditions – educational nature tours for adults and children, the possibility of tasting homemade cheeses, baking bread, making tasty meals on the fire;
- Gūdu saimineiču cīms (a village of home chefs for festive events) is located in Aglona County and offers Latgalian dishes, cooked on a firewood stove or in a bread oven, a story about Latgalian “kukņa” (kitchen), dishes on special occasions and everyday dishes, a story about bread, a chance to bake bread yourself;
- Meža burvības ciems (a village of the forest charm) invites to enjoy the healing power and charm of the forest. Walk a guided tree trail, learn to communicate with trees and feel their healing power by addressing them with healing words;
- Kotleri wine village is located in Preiļi County. Hosts of Kotleri grow and process different berries. Berries grown on the farm “Kalni”, mainly blackcurrants and raspberries, are processed into domestic wine;
- A footbridge village in Antalieptė, Zarasu District. This village contains bridges and walkways on the Šventoji river, there is also a cableway bridge.

Tourist attractions and facilities overlap in the routes and offers. In Latvia, the most popular sites are Aglona Basilica and Aglona Museum of Bread, guesthouses in all areas of the project, as well as Anykščiai Horse Museum and Moletai Ethnocosmology Museum, Sartai and Gražutes nature and informative trails. Access to rivers and lakes is very popular because, despite the water wealth in the project area, access to water bodies is limited (private property, accessibility difficulties). In Lithuania, the range of guest houses, homesteads is wider, in Latgale only two are mentioned, in Aglona county.

3.5 Demand or tourist dynamics

The statistics reflect the total number of tourists.

3.5.1 Aglona County

According to the municipality of Aglona County, over the last 5 years 1 601 751 tourists have visited the county, but this data is not accurate because it is not possible to list individual visitors who arrive at sacred or natural sites without booking in advance. (see Figure No. 2).

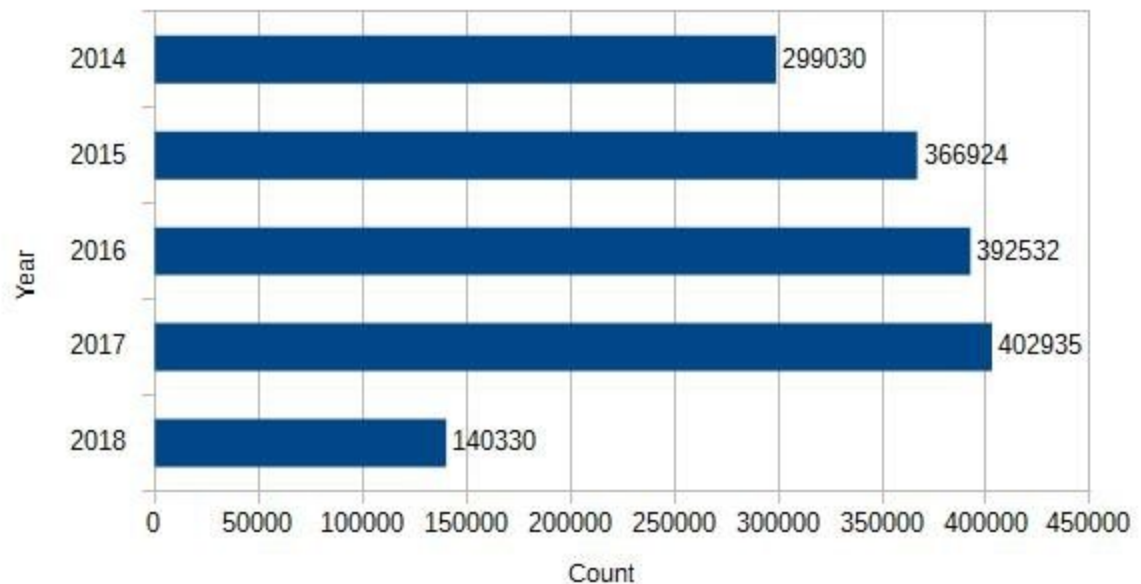


Figure No. 2 The number of tourists visiting Aglona County in 2014-2018, according to the data of Aglona County Council.

According to Figure 2, the data shows that from 2014 to 2017, the number of tourists increased by 10 3705 people, or by 26%. The decrease occurred in 2018, which Aglona County explains with the above-mentioned data collection inaccuracy: the inability to count all tourists, particularly those visiting sacred sites, enjoying culinary heritage, spending spare time at a lake but not using accommodation, therefore they are not registered.

3.5.2 Riebiņi County

As Riebiņi County is smaller than Preiļi County in terms of area, the number of tourists is lower. However, there are differences between the two counties: if the number of tourists has decreased in Preiļi County, it has increased in Riebiņi County (see Figure No. 3).

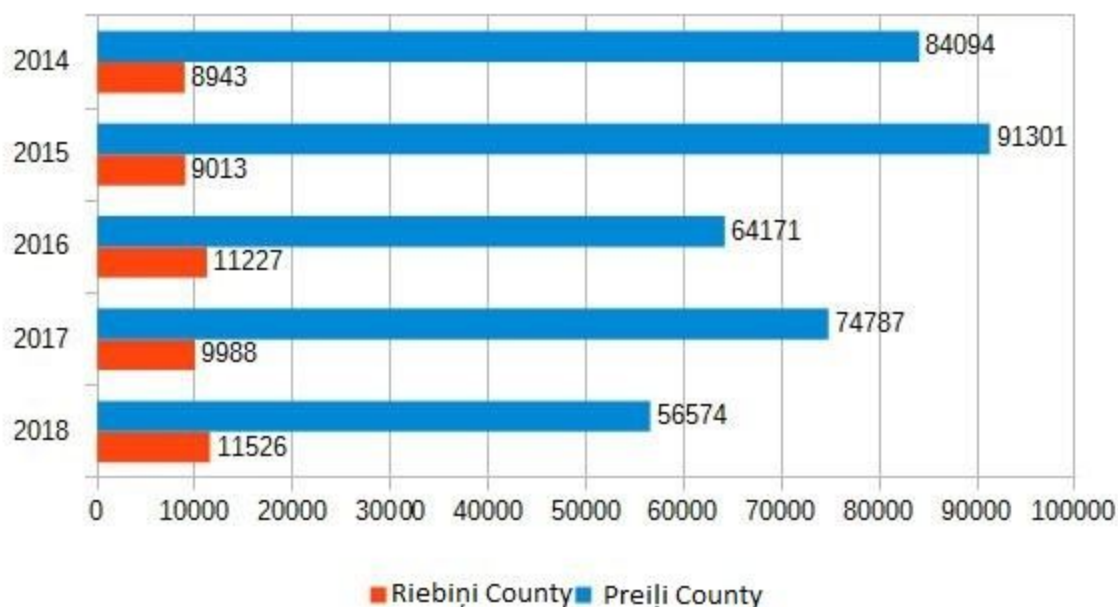


Figure No. 3. The number of tourists visiting Preiļi and Riebiņi counties in 2014-2018, according to the figures of the Tourist Information Centre of Preiļi and Riebiņi.

8 943 tourists visited Riebiņi in 2014, with a steady increase in the following years (with the exception of 2017, possibly due to the cool and rainy summer in Latvia), the number reached 11 526 in 2018. Over 5 years, it rose by nearly 30%. (See Figure No. 4)

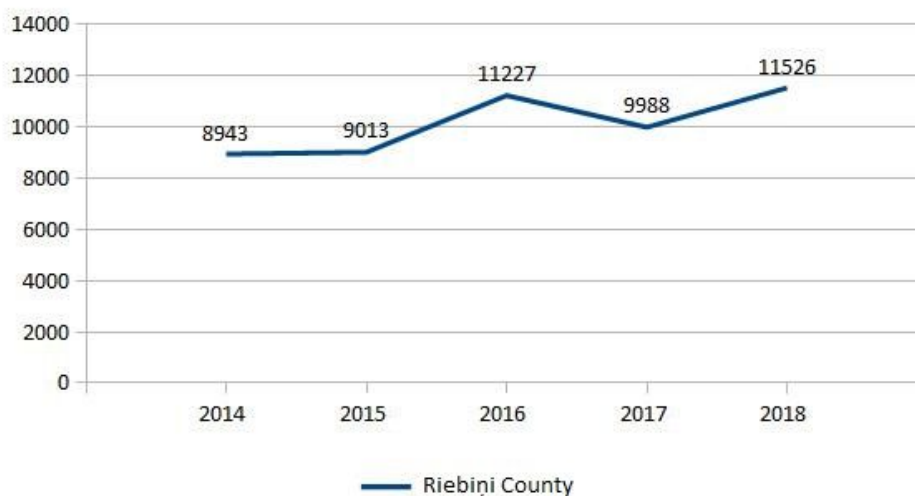


Figure No. 4. The number of tourists visiting Riebiņi County from 2014 to 2018, according to the figures of the Tourism Information Centre of Preiļi and Riebiņi.

3.5.3 Preiļi County

However, in Preiļi County in 2018 the number of visitors had fallen by 27520 tourists (33%) in comparison to 84094 tourists in 2014. The decline has been seen since 2016, with a slight increase in 2017 and reaching its lowest point in 2018 (see Figure 5).

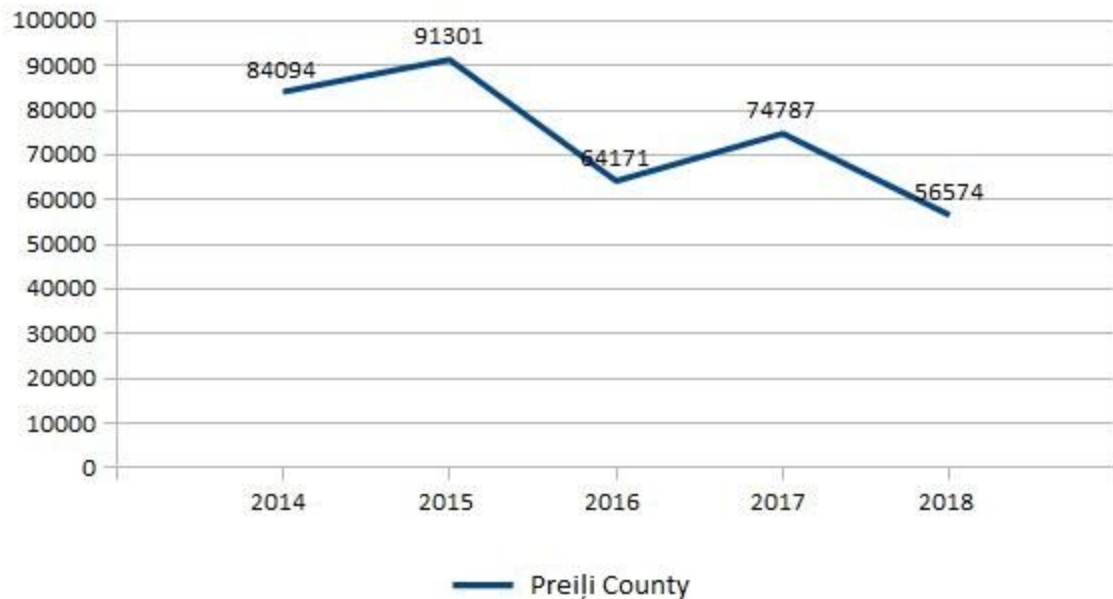


Figure No. 5. The number of tourists visiting Preiļi County in 2014-2018, according to the figures of the Tourism Information Centre of Preiļi and Riebiņi.

This is probably directly related to the tourism sector – ecotourism, to the increase in the number of holidaymakers who want to spend more of their spare time in nature. Besides, tourist attractions in towns visited in previous years are no longer so fascinating.

3.5.4 Anykščiai District

In the course of 5 years, the number of tourists registered by the municipality of Anykščiai in Lithuania has increased more than 4 times. A significant rise was seen in 2018, with the number of visitors to Anykščiai District approaching one and a half million. It should be noted that the summer of 2017, as previously indicated, was rainy and cool. As a result, the number of tourists visiting Anykščiai District decreased. It also shows that it is the summer period that is the most active tourism time and that ecotourism is largely dependent on the weather conditions (see Figure No. 6).

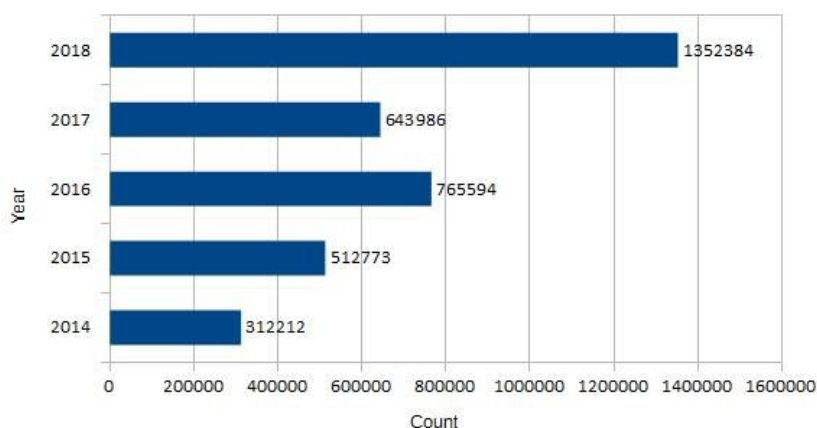


Figure No. 6 The number of tourists visiting Anykščiai District in 2014-2018, according to the figures of the Tourism and Business Information Centre of Anykščiai District.

3.5.5 Moletai District

According to the figures provided by the Tourism and Business Information Centre of Moletai District, the number of tourists in Moletai District increased by 3691 people, or 33%, between 2014 and 2018 (see Figure No. 7).

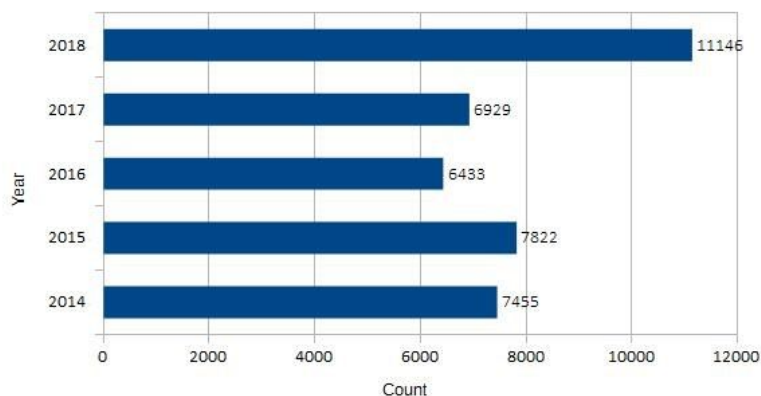


Figure No. 7 The number of tourists registered in Moletai District in 2014-2018, according to the figures of the Tourism and Business Information Centre of Moletai District.

3.5.6 Panevėžys District

According to the data provided by Panevėžys Tourist Information Centre, the number of visitors has slightly decreased during the last few years. In 2014 - 12500 tourists, but in 2017 - 11900, which is 600 people less or almost 5% decline. The Panevėžys Tourist Information Centre has provided an

incomplete database for 2018, indicating that in the 3rd and 4th quarters Panevėžys was visited by 8960 tourists and therefore no objective comparison is possible (see Figure No. 8).

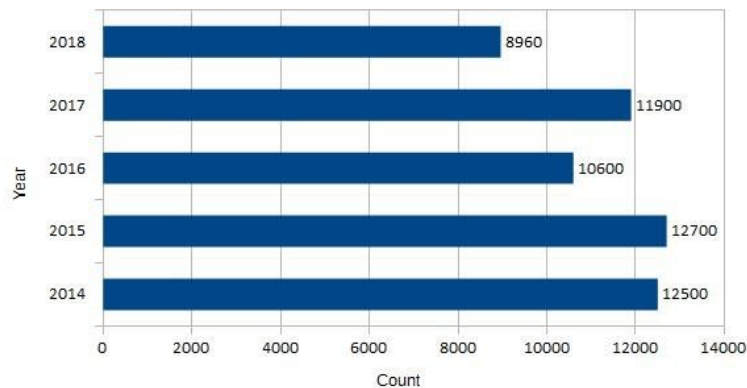


Figure No. 8. The number of tourists visiting Panevėžys District in 2014-2018, according to the data of Panevėžys Tourist Information Centre.

There is no precise information about the number of visitors to Gražutes Regional Park and Sartai Regional Park.

3.5.7 Tourists by country of origin

Latvia's counties (Aglona, Preiļi, Riebiņi) and Lithuanian districts (Anykščiai, Moletai, Panėmanas) are mainly visited by tourists from Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Russia, Belarus, Poland, Germany, Netherlands, the UK, the Nordic countries (Finland, Denmark), as well as Italy, Spain, Portugal. Also, tourists from the USA, China and Turkey are registered in Anykščiai District.

Panevėžys Tourist Information Centre has examined the trends of the last two years - the number of tourists from certain countries (see Figure No. 9) - by randomly asking tourists where they come from.

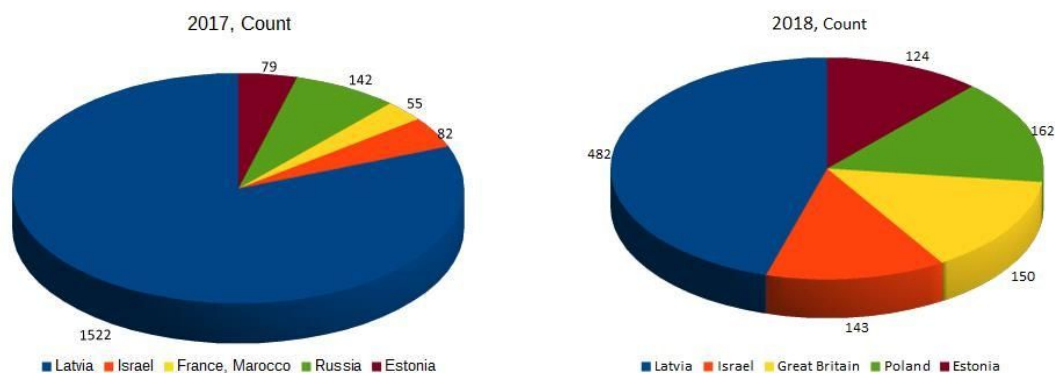


Figure No 9 The number of tourists from certain countries visiting Panevėžys District in 2017-2018, according to the data from Panevėžys Tourist Information Centre.

Figure No 9 shows that in both years Lithuania's Panevėžys district was mainly visited by residents of its neighbouring country Latvia, as well as tourists from Poland and Russia.

3.6 Service providers' language competence and guides

In the areas described in the strategy, the most common foreign languages spoken by tourism service providers are Russian and English. Guide services are available in each place as well, but in many cases, they are not sufficient enough in order to meet the needs of tourists.

In **Aglona** (Latvia) service providers talk to foreign tourists in Russian, English and German. Each site has its own guide, so information is generally provided only about the site. Only 2 guides are able to provide information about the county as a whole.

In **Preiļi and Riebiņi counties** (Latvia) mostly Russian is used as a foreign language. English language competence is insufficient. When necessary, service providers engage their children who speak English. The Tourist Information Centre of Preiļi and Riebiņi has 1 singing guide who leads tours around the park and town of Preiļi. At P.Čerņavskis' ceramic house, the Metal Art Gallery and the Puppet Gallery tours are also delivered in Russian and English. At the beach terrace café 'Pampūkas' cheese tasting and a story, as well as guide services at Preiļi Museum of History and Applied Arts, are lead not only in Russian and English but also in Lithuanian. There is still a shortage of nature guides (except for the owner of the campsite "DUNI", who rides a raft on Pelēči Lake and tells you local legends).

In **Anykščiai District** (Lithuania) services to foreign tourists are provided in English, Russian, German and Polish. Tours of natural heritage, cultural monuments and history can be led by 10 guides, of whom 2 speak Russian.

In **Moletai District** (Lithuania) service providers talk to tourists from other countries in Russian and English. There are 8 guides in total, 4 of whom organise tours in Moletai, 2 in Dubingiai (Asvejos Regional Park) and 2 in Labanoras Regional Park.

Panevėžys District (Lithuania) has a large number of local (Lithuanian) visitors, especially seniors. The biggest demand is on holidays. Tours for foreign tourists are also provided in English and Russian. The lack of guides is particularly notable in the city, especially during the summer season.

Visitor Centre of **Gražutes Regional Park** has 5 employees, the information is provided in Lithuanian, English, Russian, German and Latvian.

3.7 Problems

There is no high-quality accommodation (hotels) in **Aglona County** (Latvia), although there is a demand for it. Thus many tourists are discouraged from spending more days in Aglona County and

choose to stay elsewhere (mainly in towns of Latgale). Consequently, the number of visitors has decreased, particularly over the last year.

In **Preiļi County** (Latvia) there are few nature paths suitable for families with children, despite the demand. There is lack of cycling lanes leading to Riebiņi and Aglona, where the area is more attractive to ecotourists, due to access to lakes, *Natura 2000* sites. Nor do entrepreneurs see the possibility of profit in the creation of bicycle rental services. In Preiļi County there is no accommodation near the lakes, so tourists are forced to look for lodging in neighbouring counties, such as Riebiņi and Aglona. Unsatisfactory quality of the roads does not promote tourism either, as many tourist buses do not want to take gravel roads, for example, to get to the farm 'Kalni'. Problems are caused by a lack of tourist signs and information panels on municipal borders.

In **Riebiņi County** (Latvia) several cultural and historical sites do not have appropriate infrastructure to be available to all interested people, including people with disabilities and parents with young children. There is a lack of parking lots and bicycle stands at tourist sites. There is not enough accommodation and other tourism facilities. The spread of giant hogweed and unsatisfactory quality of the roads are mentioned as limiting factors.

In **Anykščiai District** (Lithuania) there is little information about ecotourism for residents and visitors. Therefore, according to the Tourism and Business Information Centre of Anykščiai District, the overall number of visitors is not high. There is not enough accommodation in the district, there is also a lack of ecotourism infrastructure and promotional activities.

There is a need for new tourism products in **Moletai District**. This would promote small and medium-sized businesses and organic farming, alongside developing environmentally friendly, attractive recreation and rural landscape. It is essential to ensure the preservation of cultural heritage and its successful management. It is necessary to develop a positive image of tourism in Moletai County, which must be done systematically.

In the areas of **Gražutes Regional Park** and **Sartai Regional Park**, it is not possible to access all water bodies because some of them are located on private property. Cooperation with churches and their congregations should be encouraged, inviting to pay more attention to attracting tourists. More publicity is needed for both sites so that information reaches broader society.

Panevėžys District needs attractive objects and captivating programmes; the city lacks Polish and English speaking guides, especially during the summer season. Outside the city, there is a need for guesthouses, especially in the lower price category. Infrastructure needs to be developed (tourist signs, information materials on natural values, well-established rest areas) for walkers at the Moon Stone Park and for families with children (playgrounds), including new nature trails. The people engaged in Panevėžys tourism sector admit that the existing tourism offer covers only one-day trips in the city and its neighbourhood. Ecotourism should also be developed along the Nevežis river (which can be traveled by boats) providing tourist services on its shores – rest areas, catering, setting up commercial sites.

The development of ecotourism is supported by a well-established infrastructure that preconditions cheap travel. Hiking in the hills and retreats have become particularly popular lately. One

of the preconditions for a rest in nature is non-intervention in its cycles, but organic and harmonious integration into it without harming the surrounding environment. In Latgale, the supply of tourist accommodation is homogeneous, there is not enough accommodation closely related to being in nature, despite the fact that Latgale is referred to as the Land of Blue Lakes.



Source: Aivars Provejs, Project 'Latgolys atpyutys parks(Latgalian Recreation Park)'.

In Latgale there is a lack of accommodation which would allow you to enjoy nature as closely as possible – little glass houses, floating houses, houses on piles. The seasonality of tourism must also be taken into account, because in winter tourism is in a passive state, so the cross-seasonal offer must be planned.

4 Relation of SWOT²⁷ analysis of the tourism sector in the project area to ecotourism

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nature diversity, uncongested environment, specially protected areas, landscape, • The abundance of lakes in the project areas, • Rich cultural and historical heritage (tangible and intangible), sacral buildings, • In all areas of the project there are tourism activists who have a different attractive local offer (the Museum of Bread in Aglona, the Treetop trail in Anykščiai, canoeing trips, walking paths and stories), • Recognition of Latgale and Aukštaitiya as the Land of Blue lakes, • Growing demand for ecotourism products in Europe and around the world, • Annual recognizable events attracting visitors (Friday talks, the bloom of forget-me-nots, etc.), • Aglona as a pilgrimage site on the 15 August, • Aglona – historical link to the King of Lithuania Mindaugas and his wife Marta. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Underutilised ecotourism resource: nature, cultural and historical heritage, traditions and environment, • Underdeveloped waste sorting and waste-free (zero waste) movement, • Low- quality rural road infrastructure, • Poor marketing activities, underuse of the social environment, the tourism products and resources are unrecognised abroad, • Lack of tourism products and services (guest houses, catering facilities in the countryside), • Low level of entrepreneurship and productivity, many involved in the tourism sector lack vocational training, • Language barrier, • Little use of the multilingual environment for the promotion of tourism offers on the Internet, • Insufficiently exploited cooperation between the private sector, state and local authorities, NGOs, • Limited quality of tourism products.
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of products and services based on ecotourism, • Environmental education and growth of awareness, including promotion and gradual implementation of <i>zero waste</i> idea, • Improvements and investments in ecotourism based infrastructure (slow movement – paths, cycling trails, water tourism), • Promotion of self-initiative of society, development and strengthening of local culture, • Recognition of the importance of the interactive (electronic) environment in the 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The slow growth of the EU economy, which has a negative impact on the number of visitors, • Increase of anthropological burden on natural objects, soil erosion and depletion, • Population and workforce drain from regions, decline in economic activity, ageing population, • Loss of biodiversity, • Depletion of local culture, standardisation and adjustment to consumers.

²⁷ strategic planning technique used to help identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats related to project planning

<p>promotion of tourism products internationally,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Global demographic changes and changes in motivation to travel, lead to new niches in tourism market, • Integration of the image of the green /eco country into the development of tourism, • Development and popularization of infrastructure , • improvement of the product in order to extend the tourist season, • Active cross-border cooperation can lead to the development of new competitive tourist attractions. 	
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5 Strategy for the Development of Ecotourism in the Project Area

5.1 Vision

<u>Vision</u>
Border regions of Latvia and Lithuania – a model of the development of ecotourism for the world, rooted in local traditions and synergy of cooperation between nature and humans.

5.2 Objective

<u>Objective</u>
Increase the visibility and competitiveness of the project area by creating desirable products and services grounded in ecotourism.

5.3 Courses of action

1 <u>Course of action: Improvement of environmental awareness and a waste-free approach</u> (education of society on the importance of sustainable development and personal benefits; building active community)
2 <u>Course of action: Sustainable use of natural resources</u> (sensible use of natural resources in the development of tourism offer and services)
3 <u>Course of action: Cultural and historical heritage and traditions</u> (utilisation of local identities, cultures, traditions in the development of tourism and placemaking)
4 <u>Course of action: Creation of quality and inclusive tourism management</u> (cooperation between tourism information centres and service providers, partnerships between state and local governments, nature conservation agencies)

5.4 Indicators

Course of action	Indicators
1 Course of action: Improving environmental awareness and a waste-free approach (education of society on the importance of sustainable development and personal benefits; building active community)	The implementation of ecotourism principles in existing tourism products and services; A nature-friendly tourism product and offer; Creation of place identity based on local environmental resources; The waste-free principles in households and in the economic activities of tourism enterprises; Waste-free travel.
2 Course of action: Sustainable use of natural resources (sensible use of natural resources in the development of tourism offer and services)	Creation of new jobs and ensuring an increase in visits to natural sites, contributing to the sustainable development of cultural and natural heritage; Improved quality of landscape; Improved or created environmentally friendly access to natural sites (lakes, forests, bogs); Well-planned tourism offer in specially protected natural areas
3 Course of action: Cultural and historical heritage and traditions (utilisation of local identities, cultures, traditions in the development of tourism and placemaking)	Ecotourism-driven visibility of tourism offer; Marketing activities, in particular through social networks and the Internet ; The content and quality of the ecotourism offer, based on the identity of counties; The creation of genuine culture-based tourism offers; Assured public access to cultural-historical and sacral objects, created varied, captivating content of the offer
4 Course of action: Creating quality and inclusive tourism management (cooperation between tourism information centres and service providers, partnerships between state and local governments, nature conservation agencies)	Cooperation and partnership between the institutions for the development and sale of tourism offer and nature conservation institutions in order to promote tourist destinations, increase the quality of tourism services and products, protect nature and stimulate the economy.

5.5 Recommendations and Action Plan 2019-2023

5.5.1 General proposals

No	Activity	Implementer, partners	Description of the activity
Course of action: Improvement of environmental awareness and a waste-free approach			
1.	"Nature Schools"- camps for children of different ages	Local Government, Entrepreneurs, Associations, Educational Institutions	Education of young people about the principles of sustainable development in an attractive and active way, by engaging in hiking, geocaching, exploration of environmental sites and natural diversity
2.	Information campaigns on waste-free household management for different target groups	Local Government, Entrepreneurs, Associations	Information on how to reduce the daily amount of waste, environment-friendly consumption, <i>zero waste</i> awareness-raising by introducing and promoting environmentally friendly rules in public institutions, organising campaigns, promotions, training, competitions
3.	Promotion of good practices in ecotourism-based householding and management.	Local Government, Entrepreneurs, Associations	Experience exchange trips in Latvia and abroad, networks with ecotourism farms, inspirational stories, their promotion in mass media, including social media. Promotion of ecotourism as sustainable tourism to potential ecotourism companies
4.	Involvement of pupils into active nature exploration	Local Government, Entrepreneurs, Associations	Creation of special ecotourism-based autumn and spring hiking trips, tours; marketing and offers to different educational institutions; addressing youth directly
5.	Promotion of cycling as an environmentally friendly way of travelling	Neighbouring municipalities and tourism information centers, local entrepreneurs	Joining Latgale cycling network, preparing cycling tourism relating information, promotion of cycling routes, development of bicycle rentals
Course of action: Sustainable use of natural resources			
6.	Preparation and promotion of ecotourism product/service offer for Latvia's priority tourism markets – Germany, Estonia, Lithuania, Finland, Sweden, Norway	Tourism information centres, local government, cooperation between agency and tourism operators	Development of 3 or more ecotourism-based routes and their offer on the market, marketing activities, participation in tourism exhibitions with the offer

Course of action: Cultural and historical heritage and traditions			
7.	Renovation manual and ecological standards for the authentic renovation/construction of rural homesteads according to the local landscape and tradition	Private sector, associations of architects, cultural heritage experts, local authorities, mass media	Sketches, practical recommendations on the use of environmentally friendly construction/restoration materials, key conditions for the true integration of buildings into the landscape, traditions of rural homestead cultural heritage, technical sketches. This will contribute to the development of local identity-specific private infrastructure, the renovation of rural homesteads and adaptation to ecotourism requirements
8.	Promotion of environmentally friendly home renovation/construction practices and formation of public opinion	Private sector, associations of architects and cultural heritage experts, local authorities, mass media	Information campaigns, formation of public opinion on the landscape value of traditional rural homesteads, promotion of good restoration/construction practices
Course of action: Creation of quality and inclusive tourism management			
9.	Creation of a management system	Local governments, State institutions, tourism service providers	Developed an effective tourism management model, defined responsibilities, duties, developed an action plan
10.	Cooperation at local, national and international level	Local governments, State institutions, tourism service providers	Cross-border cooperation in the development of tourism

5.5.2 Proposals for Aglona County

#	Activity	Implementer, partners	Results
Course of action: Improvement of environmental awareness and a waste-free approach			
1.	Preparation and dissemination of information on ecotourism principles and their use in business and daily life	Local government, Nature Conservation Agency, environmental societies	Promotion of waste-free approach, compliance with sustainability principles in business and daily life in the form of captivating, attractive campaigns, addressing different target groups
2.	Information panels and signs for routes and objects	Local government, Nature Conservation Agency, environmental societies, tourist information centres	Tourist signs, information panels at objects, information on nature diversity and treasures, environmentally friendly behaviour requirements and guidance. Dissemination of information on natural diversity on municipality websites, in social

			networks, thereby raising environmental awareness
Course of action: Sustainable use of natural resources			
3.	Establishment of boat piers and plankways on the shores of the lakes – ensuring of an environmentally friendly approach	Local government/ Nature Conservation Agency/ JSC "Latvian State Forests" in cooperation with landowners	Shores and lakes accessible to visitors, boat rentals, swimming areas. Displayed tourist signs, environmentally friendly behaviour requirements. Information disseminated on the Internet, social media
4.	One-day tour/ Multi-day tour on the lake islands of Aglona and Riebiņi Counties "Life without a digital print"	Local government, nearshore landowners, Nature Conservation Agency, local entrepreneurs, tourism operators	An environmentally friendly tourist picnic package has been prepared, including an information package on natural treasures, behaviour in nature conservation areas. Nature guides. Improved rest areas, tourist signs. The information is also entered in the QR code so that information on nature treasures and routes can be available on an application or the Internet.
Course of action: Cultural and historical heritage and traditions			
5.	Legend of Mindaugas and Marta in ancient Aglona	Local government, Nature Conservation Agency, The State Inspection for Heritage Protection, local entrepreneurs, tourism operators	Exploration of Aglona castle hills, creation of corresponding stories, setting up a nature route, ensuring accessibility of objects, training a guide, marketing activities aimed at Lithuanian tourists, marketing activities on different types of media.
6.	Annual Historic Festival of Marta and Mindaugas in Aglona	Local government, local businessmen and craftsmen, historians, traditional folk dance and music groups.	Annual international festival for tourist attraction; festival themes and activities are in line with the archaeology of the century when the Lithuanian King Mindaugas lived, theatrical event.
7.	Spiritual camps in Aglona	Basilica of Aglona, educational establishments, tourism entrepreneurs	An offer of camps to families, singers, socially vulnerable groups in the low tourism season in cooperation with associations; creation of the offer, identification of camp leaders, supporting staff.
8.	Black sauna for health and meditation	Tourism entrepreneurs, farmers	Renovation of the black sauna and its offer to local and overseas visitors, individual approach, healing and medicinal plant tale

5.5.3 Proposals for Preiļi County

#	Activity	Implementer, partners	Results
Course of action: Improvement of environmental awareness and a waste-free approach			
1.	Thematic environmental camps for the promotion and use of goods provided by local nature	Local tourism entrepreneurs, in cooperation with Daugavpils University, Rzekne Academy of Technology, Nature Conservation Agency	Organisation of thematic camps, workshops for different target groups, including pupils. Treasures of Pelēči vineyard, education about medicinal plants, poisonous plants in the county and Latvia, wild food etc., promotion of camps on the Internet.
Course of action: Sustainable use of natural resources			
2.	Creation of a network of cognitive paths in the county	Local authority	Pedestrian and cycling paths in the city and county of Preiļi, development of the infrastructure
3.	Development of infrastructure for caravans	Local authority	Creation of a caravan site with appropriate infrastructure, as close as possible to cycling and educational trails.
4.	Educational and recreational activity trails in the town park	Local authority, local entrepreneurs	Ensured access to the park for different activities, development of zones – recreation, entertainment, active entertainment; appropriate infrastructure, advertising of opportunities.
Course of action: Cultural and historical heritage and traditions			
5.	The sacral path from past to present	Local authority, local entrepreneurs, congregations	A tourist route to churches of different denominations in Aglona, Preiļi and Riebiņi counties, including outdoor prayer sites – castle hills, places of sacrifice; collection of legends, creation of a story, stops - catering at farmsteads. QR code or other technologies to supplement the information – play music or songs: marketing activities
6.	The history trail “The Story of One County Through the Century”	Local authority, local entrepreneurs, witnesses of history, libraries, museums	Educational trail covering the paths of national partisans, deportation sites and local stories, daily life of kolkhoz era..., preparation of captivating educational materials for different audiences; marketing activities

5.5.4 Proposals for Riebiņi County

#	Activity	Implementer, partners	Results
Course of action: Improvement of environmental awareness and a waste-free approach			
1.	Permaculture information camps	Local entrepreneurs, farmers, craftsmen	Annual permaculture events at a farmstead/building of Silajāņi School, attracting visitors from different countries; management of households according to environmentally friendly principles; promotion of environmentally friendly lifestyles.
2.	Promotion of cycling mobility	Local authority, tourist information centres	Creation of cycle lane between Riebiņi and Preiļi, popularization of slow mobility.
Course of action: Sustainable use of natural resources			
3.	Creation of a professional guide service	Local entrepreneurs, educational establishments, tourist information centres	Training of guides on various topics of nature information – fishing, medicinal plants, wild food, the richness of fish species and marking of places in lakes, language training, creation of a route story, fishing/hiking equipment rental.
4.	Local bird and animal watching with a guide	Tourist information centres, local entrepreneurs and nature experts, hunters	Fascinating stories of local nature lovers, beaver/elk paths, bird-watching equipment, bird-watching trails, information on digital platforms, creation of an animal/bird-watching centre.
5.	Site recovery and landscape discovery	Local authorities, landowners	Hogweed elimination, slum revitalization projects in collaboration with the owners, the scientists of Rēzekne Academy of Technologies and Daugavpils University; student involvement in research, area recovery and planning processes.
6.	Creation of nature trails along the banks of rivers Feimanka and Oša	Local authorities, landowners, Nature Conservation Agency	Cleanup of river banks; tourist signs; strengthening of natural surfaces, creation of environmentally friendly stops.
7.	Bog educational activities in Aklais purvs (Blind bog) in Sīļukalns	Local authorities, landowners, Nature Conservation Agency	Exploration of the bog and careful adaptation for educational activities
8.	Cleanup of the lake islands and their adaptation for visitors	Local authorities, landowners, Nature Conservation Agency	Boat rental provided, invasive plants eliminated, legends about the islands found out, service providers involved – campsites, saunas, picnic areas.

Course of action: Cultural and historical heritage and traditions			
9.	Creation of cultural and historical heritage center of Riebiņi county	Local authority, libraries, museums, local community	An interactive centre which collects information on the spiritual, traditional, cultural heritage of Riebiņi County, using existing infrastructure by making adjustments, actively involving the local community at all stages of development
10.	Creation of the offer of local products and culinary heritage	Local entrepreneurs, farmers	Tastings, catering provided by farmers, creation of a local café in the county.
11.	Historical tales of Rušona monastery and manor	Local authority, libraries, museums, local community	Renovation of the monastery of Rušona church, establishment of a community centre, cleaning up and accessibility of the grounds of the manor, appropriate infrastructure with tourist signs, marketing activities for the available product.

5.5.5 Proposals for Panevėžys Municipality

#	Activity	Implementer, partners	Results
Course of action: Improvement of environmental awareness and a waste-free approach			
1.	Promotion of slow mobility opportunities in Panevėžys	Municipality in cooperation with Krekenavos regional park, associations, entrepreneurs	Cycling trips, exploration of surroundings in different cycling routes.
2.	Tastes on a picnic 'Taste the Local!'	Homemade food producers, municipality, entrepreneurs, tour operators	Special campaigns for the promotion of local products, events and picnics on tourism offer involving local catering companies; food supply during events.
3.	Training of ecotourism guides	Municipality, associations, individuals	Trained ecotourism guides, use of different languages with visitors (English, Polish)
Course of action: Sustainable use of natural resources			
4.	Improvement of the cycling infrastructure	Municipality	Linked cycling trails, creating a united route without gaps; available bike rental, established bike parking stations; marketing activities for the available services.
5.	Adaptation of the Nevežis river to active	Municipality, entrepreneurs	Cleanup of the river and its banks has been carried out in order to develop entrepreneurship in the blue areas of the

	recreation and provision of services		city, including the offer of services on water and on the river banks applying environmentally friendly conditions and materials.
6.	Ensuring pedestrian access to the Moonstone sculpture park	Municipality in cooperation with Krekenavos regional park, associations, entrepreneurs	Improved pedestrian infrastructure – nature trails in this area.
7.	Educational nature routes in the vicinity of Panevėžys	Municipality in cooperation with Krekenavos regional park, associations, entrepreneurs	Developed educational nature routes, involving local entrepreneurs (cultural, catering and nature exploration components), digitalisation of the offer.
8.	Development and promotion of ecotourism-based offer on Japanese and Chinese markets – a pilot project in Panevėžys District	Tourism entrepreneurs, tourism agencies and operators, municipalities	Consultations on the content of the supply to these markets, finding representatives, development and promotion of the offer to the target market, the information in foreign languages on websites, information in the particular languages, marketed supply, specialised campaigns.
Course of action: Cultural and historical heritage and traditions			
9.	Šakotis and bread baking workshops	Entrepreneurs, homemade food producers	Constant offer is developed and is available – workshops in šakotis and bread baking, tastings, advertising of the offer on digital platforms.
10.	Creation of children playgrounds and relaxation sites for families with children	Municipality	Environmentally friendly playgrounds and equipped recreational areas located in green zones for families; involvement of local craftsmen and the use of environmentally friendly materials

5.5.6 Proposals for Anykščiai Municipality

#	Activity	Implementer, partners	Results
Course of action: Improvement of environmental awareness and a waste-free approach			
1.	Setting up bike rental points to reduce carbon footprint, facilitation of the use of railway network	Municipality, tourism operators, entrepreneurs	Enhancement of the slow mobility and use of more environmentally friendly transport, promotion of slow mobility in specific campaigns and on digital platforms.

2.	Enhancement of the opportunities for the use of environmentally friendly transport	Municipality	Increased number of electric car charging points
3.	I live in an old wooden house	Municipality, associations, entrepreneurs, local community	Promote in other municipalities the experience of Anykščiai Community in the renovation and use of old houses for either creative industries or living; promote environmentally friendly lifestyles in rural areas as an opportunity to participate in the creation of an ecotourism product, adjustment of the rural environment for ecotourism activities
Course of action: Sustainable use of natural resources			
4.	'Little Lithuania' - Anykščiai – an oasis of peace and quiet in the world	Municipality, associations, entrepreneurs, local community	Activities and events to achieve the status of 'Slow City'; to comply it is important to follow ecotourism principles (There are 252 such cities worldwide. Status refers to nature, food, local products, history, architecture.).
5.	The Šventoji river trails 'The way of health'	Municipality, associations, entrepreneurs	Includes the construction of cycle lanes and pedestrian paths, tourist signs, well-developed swimming areas and environmentally friendly rest areas, the creation of pedestrian bridges, the use of environmentally friendly local materials.
6.	Water and quartz therapy in the quartz quarry	Municipality, associations, entrepreneurs	Water quality tests, swimming and relaxation facilities, entertainment, use of water for treatment and recreation.
7.	Forest meditation camps	Municipality, associations, entrepreneurs	Use of forest resources for hiking, learning about local medicinal plants, forest flora and fauna; barefoot trail in the forest, QR codes with digital information on riches of the forest.
Course of action: Cultural and historical heritage and traditions			
8.	Anykščiai – a station of the UNESCO Literary Cities network	Municipality, associations, entrepreneurs, local community	Development of ecotourism services in the field of literature and reading encouragement, outdoor reading areas, digital stories and their promotion in the e-environment.

5.5.7 Proposals for Moletai Municipality

#	Activity	Implementer, partners	Results
Course of action: Improvement of environmental awareness and a waste-free approach			
1.	Establishment of an ecotourism information and exhibition centre	Municipality, associations, entrepreneurs, educational establishments	Promote the best examples of ecotourism based product development, information is digitised; a supply of tours and training programmes for young people and pupils.
2.	Model of Eco lifestyle in Moletai District	Municipality, associations, entrepreneurs, local community	Collect information and develop a model of green lifestyle based on Moletai's resources and experience (rural environment, forests, lakes) and promote it through educational programmes, mass media and on the internet.
Course of action: Sustainable use of natural resources			
3.	Educational forest hiking trails	Municipality, associations, entrepreneurs, local community	Ready guide stories on tree and plant species, creation of a route with safe rest and picnic sites; digital information on natural processes, geocaching and various events, entertainment in the learning process.
4.	Nature-sensing camps	Municipality, associations, entrepreneurs, local community	Environmental education camps in rural areas which include cleanup events and environmental education, listening, description of feelings and creation of environmental stories.
Course of action: Cultural and historical heritage and traditions			
5.	Archaeology of ethnocosmology	Municipality, associations, entrepreneurs, local community	Offer of culinary heritage from different centuries at a vicinity of Cosmology Museum; counting of time in stone stories, parking lots, utilisation of eco-friendly local materials in the development of paths.
6.	Development of a Moletai brand based in ecotourism	Municipality, entrepreneurs, local community, experts	A story and a brand created for the place that works in marketing campaigns and makes it widely known.

5.5.8 Proposals for Gražute and Sartai Regional Parks

In the project area there are important regional parks bordering several municipalities. Therefore, the proposals for the regional parks of Gražute and Sartai have been developed separately.

#	Activity	Implementer, partners	Results
Course of action: Improvement of environmental awareness and a waste-free approach			
1.	Setting up a nature school	Municipality, local entrepreneurs, associations, administration of Gražute Regional Park	Establishment of a sustainable nature school where nature protection enthusiasts and scientists cooperate and share their knowledge and experience.
2.	Development of an environmental training programme for educational establishments, including training and active learning in nature	Municipality, associations, administration of Gražute Regional Park, experts	A developed programme that promotes the principles of sustainable ecological thinking and economy
Course of action: Sustainable use of natural resources			
3.	Creation of self-catering accommodation in the old school building for Antaliepte nature lovers	Municipality, local entrepreneurs, associations, administration of Gražute Regional Park	Reconstruction of the old school building and creation of visitor accommodation
4.	Creation of car parks near nature areas/ cycling/ walking trails	Municipality, local entrepreneurs, associations, administration of Gražute Regional Park	Environmentally friendly development of tourist facilities using local materials (stones, wood)
5.	Nature can cure and calm	Municipality, local entrepreneurs, associations, administration of Gražute Regional Park	Camps for social risk groups (using local resources in woodwork workshops; to utilize created items in landscaping and building up business skills); support staff, voluntary work
6.	50 Island Stories of Antalieptes reservoir	Municipality, local entrepreneurs, landowners, associations, administration of Gražute Regional Park	Canoe route and stories about castle hills, burial-grounds, depiction of human interference in the environment, skilled interpretation of the natural environment and cultural environment; boat rental points and car parks
Course of action: Cultural and historical heritage and traditions			
7.	Expedition to study the culinary heritage of Augustinian monastery	Parish, local entrepreneurs and community, associations,	Collection of information and making records on local culinary heritage, the study of

		administration of Gražute Regional Park	historical materials, collection of recipes for future use in the tourism offer
8.	Creation of a village-specific vegetarian/monastery cuisine of monks using local produce	Local entrepreneurs, associations	Visitors have an opportunity to enjoy local site-specific cuisine.
9.	Antaliepte monastery's educational programme 'One Day in the Life of a monk'	Parish, local entrepreneurs and community, associations, administration of Gražute Regional Park	The programme combines nature protection, possibilities to utilize local resources, the history of the village, legends; tourist attraction activities.

5.6 Indicators for monitoring the implementation of the strategy

S/N	Indicator	Base year	2023	Data source
Course of action: Improvement of environmental awareness and a waste-free approach				
1.	Established Nature Schools	0	2	Local authorities, associations
2.	Developed and approbated environmental training programme for school children	Data not available	1	Project management group (PMG)
3.	Ecotourism information and exhibition centre	0	1	PMG, tourist information centre(TIC)
4.	Number of activities to promote eco-friendly lifestyle and management of a household or farm	Data not available	More than two activities per year in each project area	Mass media
5.	Created bicycle rental points		At least 1 in each project area	TIC
6.	Information campaigns about Zero waste economy	Data not available	2 and more per year in each project area	Mass media, web pages of local authorities and associations
7.	Issued Ecotourism Guiding Manual	Data not available	1	PMG
Course of action: Sustainable use of natural resources				
1.	Number of educational nature camps in project areas	Once a year	3 times a year in each project area	Local authorities, associations
2.	Environmentally friendly car parks in the project areas		1 in each project area	Local authorities

3.	New thematic nature paths have been created		1 in each project area	TIC
4.	Number of school children involved in the nature exploration	Data not available	At least 120 in each project area during a year	Educational establishments, service providers
5.	Development and implementation of a pilot project for attracting Asian tourists	Data not available	1, Panevėžys	TIC, local authority
6.	Number of local ecotourism guides		1 or more in each project area	TIC, local authority
7.	Development and offer of ecotourism-based routes on the market		3	TIC, local authority
8.	Forest educational hikes and camps	Moletai, Gražute Regional Park, Anykščiai	In other areas of the project	TIC
9.	Preservation of natural and cultural heritage values – no degradation from tourism activities has been identified		Qualitative rating	Local authority
Course of action: Cultural and historical heritage and traditions				
1.	Increase in the number of tourists		Up 15% over 3 years	Central Statistical Bureau (CSB), TIC data
2.	TIC registered visitors inquiring about ecotourism	Data not available	At least 5% of the total number of visitors	TIC
3.	Increase in culinary heritage offer		2 and more new sites in project areas	TIC data
4.	Growth of employment in the tourism industry			CSB, State Revenue Service
5.	Ecotourism-based brand development	Data not available	1 in project area	PMG
6.	Campaigns, publications and events to promote environmentally friendly home renovation/construction practices	Data not available	At least 3 campaigns in project areas	PMG, social media, mass media
7.	Annual Marta and Mindaugas Historical Festival in Aglona	-	Annual traditional Latvian/Lithuanian	TIC, local authority

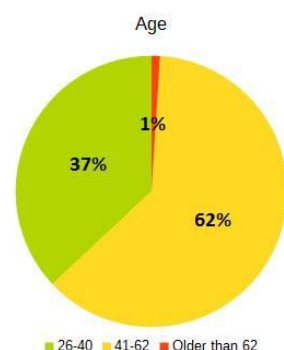
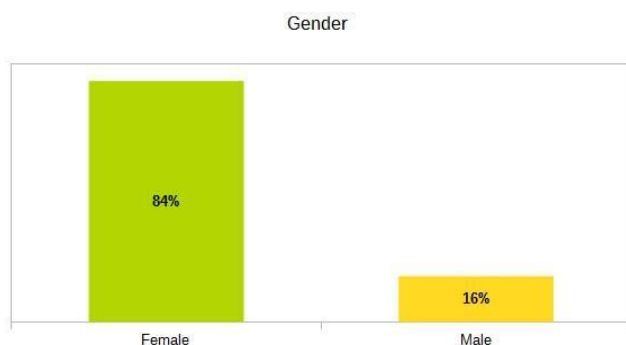
			friendship event	
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6 Results of the survey of local residents and tourism industry workers

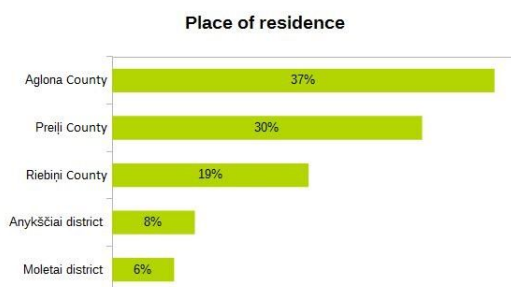
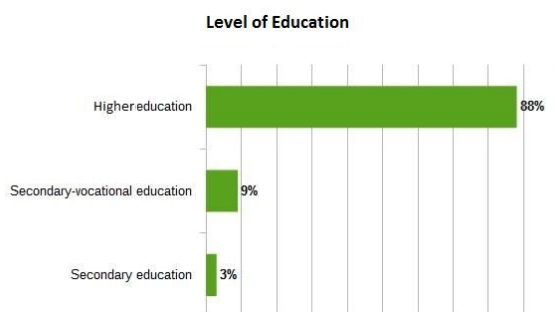
In the course of the project *Interreg Latvija-Lietuva* Project #LLI-349 'Development of eco-tourism by using water resources in Latvia and Lithuania' (Learn Eco Travel), residents were surveyed on ecotourism and the possibilities for its development in the municipality. 34 in-depth interviews were conducted with tourism professionals, decision-makers and travellers.

In the course of the project *Interreg Latvija-Lietuva* Project #LLI-349 'Development of eco-tourism by using water resources in Latvia and Lithuania' (Learn Eco Travel) 70 residents were surveyed on ecotourism and its opportunities for development.

Information about respondents

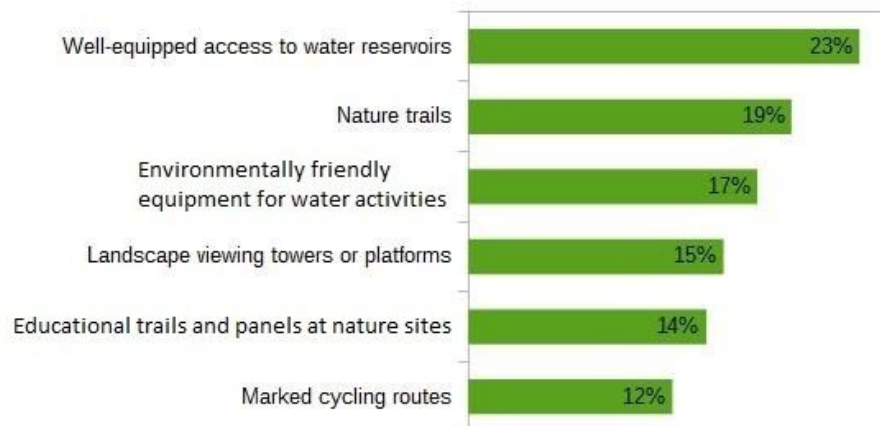


In the survey 84% of participants were women and 16% were men. The majority - 62% of those surveyed were in the age group 41-62. 37% of those surveyed were in the age group 26-40, only 1% of all respondents were 62 or older. Almost all those surveyed were employed. 1% of the participants in the survey were studying.



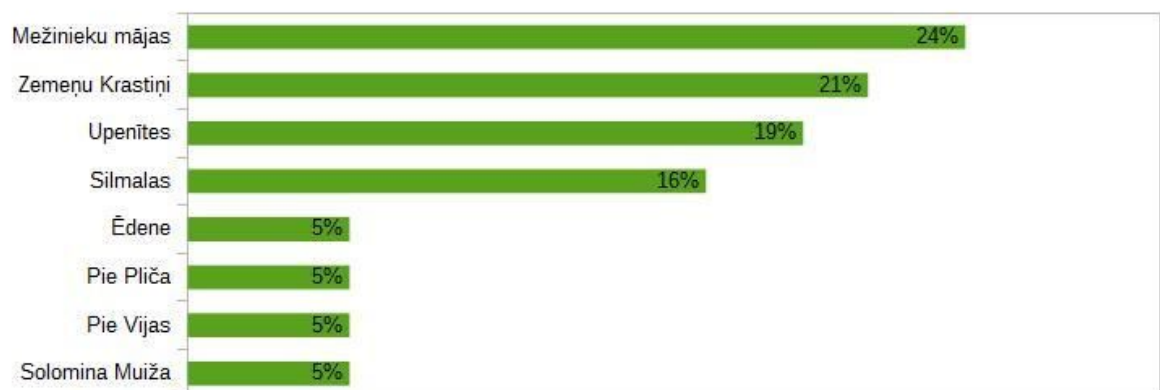
The majority of respondents (88%) had some degree of higher education, 9% had secondary-vocational education and 3% had secondary education. The majority of respondents were the residents of Aglona County – 37%, Preiļi County residents – 30%, Riebiņi County residents – 19%, Anīkščai District residents – 8% and residents of Moletai District– 6%.

1. What kind of ecotourism infrastructure is available in the county?



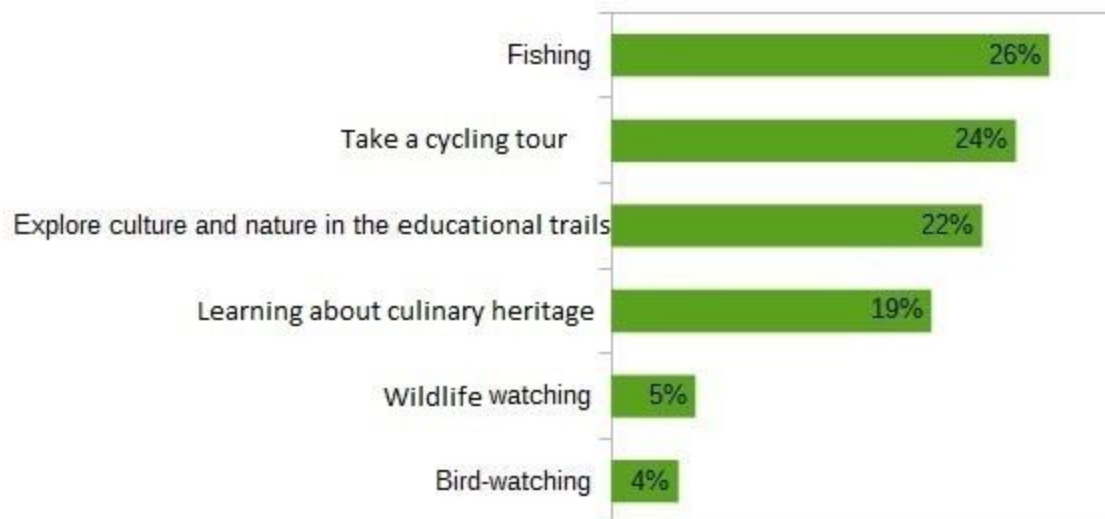
According to the respondents all tourism offers mentioned in the questionnaire are available in the counties. 19% of responses are related to the nature trails and the residents mention that more of these are needed. In 12% of all responses educational trails and information panels at nature sites are mentioned, in 15% of cases - landscape viewing towers or platforms, in 23% - well-equipped access to water sites and in 17% of all answers - environmentally friendly equipment for water activities.

2. Which accommodation in the county, in your opinion, meets ecotourism requirements and why?



According to the opinion of the respondents, ecotourism requirements are best met by 'Mežinieku mājas' in Aglona County - 24%. 'Zemeņu Krastiņi' - 21%, 'Upenītes' - 19%, 'Silmalas' - 16%; 'Ēdene', 'Solomina muiža', 'Pie Vijas' and 'Pie Pliča' - 5% of respondents.

3. In what ecotourism activities one can be involved in the county?



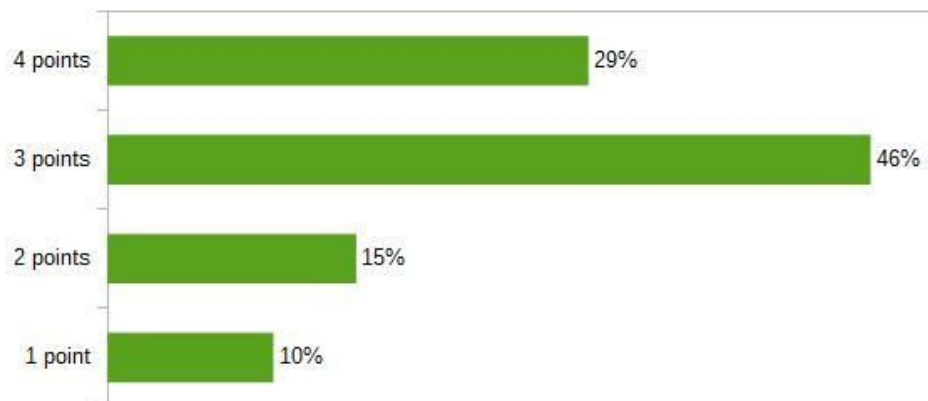
According to 24% of the respondents, in the areas mentioned in the survey, it is possible to participate in cycling trips; 22% of those surveyed mention that it is possible to explore culture and nature in the educational trails, 4% of the respondents mention bird-watching, 19% mention learning about culinary heritage, fishing is mentioned in 26% of the cases, while 5% of those surveyed refer to wildlife watching.

4. Is there enough information about ecotourism opportunities in your municipality?



The respondents' replies show that there is not enough information on ecotourism in the municipalities, so this is necessary. 27% of the respondents think that the amount of information is sufficient, 37% believe that it is insufficient, 36%, which is almost a third of all, have never thought about it.

5. How do you assess the current level of development of ecotourism in your municipality?



Assessments in the 5 point scale, of which 5 – very high, 1 – very low.

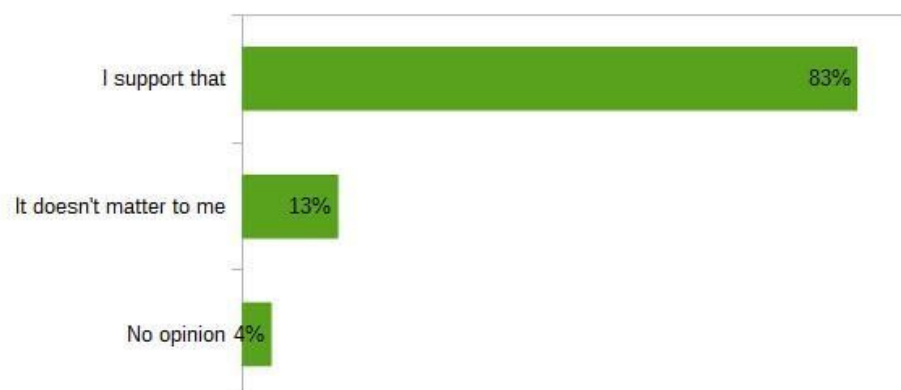
10% of the respondents have assessed the level of the development of ecotourism in their municipality at 1 point, 15% at 2 points, 46% at 3 points and 29% at 4 points.

6. What are the most important advantages for the development of ecotourism in the county?



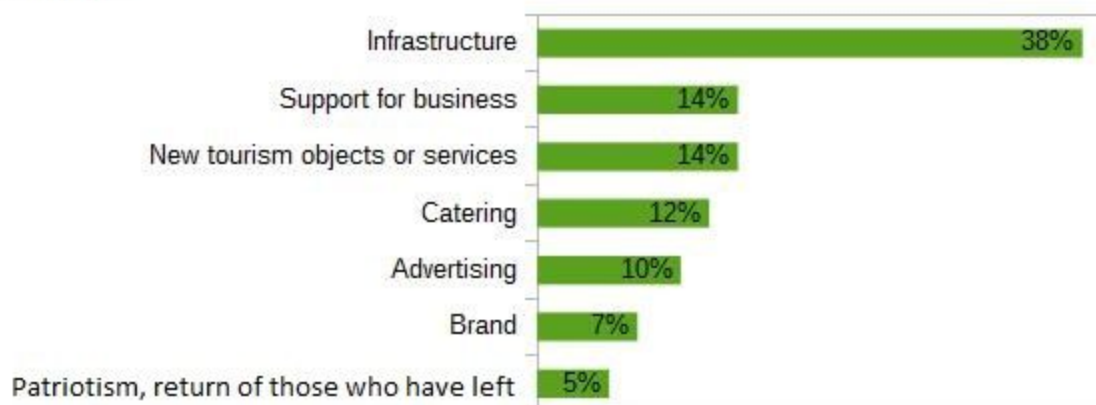
The most important advantage according to 24% of the respondents is nature, cultural and historical heritage and traditions - 19%, a recognisable brand of the site - 19%, advanced tourism entrepreneurs - 15%. Local government's support is also mentioned as significant in 12% of the replies but active residents in 11% of the replies.

7. Assess the efforts of your municipality and entrepreneurs in the field of ecotourism development.



83% of the respondents support the efforts of the municipalities and entrepreneurs in the development of ecotourism, while 13% of those surveyed do not find this subject important, but 4% of those surveyed have no opinion on this issue.

8. In your opinion, what needs to be improved or established in the county to make it more attractive to visitors, to promote environmental protection and the economic development of the county?



As potential future tasks in order to make the area more attractive to visitors, promote nature protection and economic growth, 38% of respondents highlight infrastructure development, both support for business and the creation of new tourism facilities and services receive equal percentage – 14%. 10% of the respondents find advertising activities essential.

6.1 Insights, suggestions, ideas from interviews and polls

- the ecotourism approach is often implemented through cycling trails;
- we ourselves need a strategic vision - what to do?
- an ecotourism marketing plan is required;
- ecotourism directly emerges from the demands and needs of tourists;
- it is important that entrepreneurs understand the need to take action towards ecotourism;
- life experience comes from attitude and responsibility; if it is said that it is cheaper to bring lamb from New Zealand, then quality, stable supply, low price is important. But if we are to support the local farmer, but it is more expensive, then most commonly the product is not purchased from the locals; we face the reality and conclude that thorough ecotourism is not possible, it can only be carried out in some activities;
- there are not so many entrepreneurs here. The market is too dense to separate one niche and to say that it will work into the eco direction; actually, everything needs to come closer to ecotourism. If there are no other directions and everyone turns to this one, we can talk about the principles of ecotourism;
- there are very few ecologically aware and responsible ecotourists; people come because they find Latgale interesting and Latgale's most popular route includes Aglona and Preili.
- the most efficient way to address and attract tourists is through the Internet;
- it doesn't matter if people are only interested in nature or culture. It is usually in proportions, more through culture, or sometimes nature tourism dominates, but not all nature tourism is ecotourism. The moment foreigners are brought to a stork's nest, the stork will abandon the nest. ecotourists, therefore, are responsible for their actions;
- today's viewpoint - there is only eco-tourism and only sustainable one. If we're promoting something, then it has to be something worth spending public money on. Sometimes there are obvious contradictions, such as a motorcycle race organised in a national park;
- another component - as many non-motorized vehicles as possible;
- the slow mobility is economically justified as a traveller has new needs every 3 hours;
- combine culture with natural landscapes in one day; create foreign market-oriented objects focused solely on nature;
- specializing;
- there cannot be eco for which no tax is paid;
- authentic, original, pure culture;
- the black sauna; it is characterised by authenticity, if it is linked to archaeology, then you can feel the continuity of 4000 years through the black sauna. It is humility and intimacy, but not everyone understands how it can be sold;
- if a tourist lives in the community for free, then you can ask them to put some money into a donation box. It is acceptable to foreigners;
- It is not easy to attract foreigners at once, the local entrepreneur must have a global vision;

- Latgale's problem – a resource is promoted: a lake with fish. But is there anyone who can take to these fishing places? There are no fishing guides. Where are you supposed to go then?
- there must be knowledge, language skills and the ability to sell a service. Why doesn't it work now? Because there are no ecotourism products despite the fact that we have advantages, we have the resources. When it has to become a product and to enter the international market, difficulties arise;
- a brand that allows you to look at tourism more broadly: place identity. The feeling that you are needed lets you be able to present to the outer world – what needs to be restored, where nature trails will lead;
- our partners are in Moletai, in Panevėžys, in Zarasai. This cooperation is important, we are working with neighbours to implement joint projects. We also support cooperation with the Baltic States, we have joint seminars, various activities. We know a lot about each other, we can counsel our visitors;
- tourism based in community– I like what I do, I like the lake. I have nothing against sharing with others;
- although the possibility of getting information on tourism offers in Latvia is quite extensive, the foreign tourism industry experts consider that there is not enough information on points of interest outside Riga or on hotels and events in small towns;
- funding is invested with the idea: I own, I earn, but I also use it myself. It is separable from industrial production. I work and live, rural tourism is more linked to lifestyle, business. I like to live in the countryside, I like people whom I have and share similar values with;
- ecotourism is also a matter of socializing;
- to ensure that the local is in demand;
- the quality of the landscape is important;
- to see value in the ancient - black sauna;
- ecotourism must be included in Latgales overall strategy;
- astronomy as a resource in ecotourism, the component of astronomy should be considered as a new product in ecotourism;
- when planning ecotourism routes, it is important to assess the need to include secure parking services, since most tourists will not want to leave their vehicle in unsecured parking places when going on a long-distance cycling trip, boat trip or hiking trip in sparsely populated or uninhabited nature areas;
- there are many lakes in our region. The cleanest, due to its surrounding forests and lack of farming, is Lake Svente and it is also isolated. There are many rare plant species;
- a unique place is a lake with 50 islands. There, in 1959, a hydroelectric power plant was constructed by building a dam on the Šventoji river. The Water levels rose and connected 26 lakes into one large lake. Now there are graveyards on the islands, you can go on a canoe trip there, it's unique. In some places the water has destroyed the graves and bones can be found in the water;
- there are many forests around here, different bird species, owls;
- an interesting place is Baltriškės. In 1909, monks from Belgium arrived there, built a monastery and renovated the church. They developed pilgrimage tourism there, offering a place to stay, pray, relax. The interesting thing is that about eight years ago local residents asked to include their village in the protected area that had already been established in the neighbourhood. It was the

- first time in Lithuania's history that someone willingly volunteered to have their homes included in a nature reserve. Their aim was to protect this beautiful place from further construction work;
- local entrepreneurs provide canoes. A lovely family lives in Visaginas, offering nature tours to small groups (up to 12 people) with bicycles, canoes, dinner cooked over a campfire, etc. Their business is developing successfully. Tourists travel both from Vilnius and abroad. These entrepreneurs are trying to attract tourists from Europe, the service is not cheap;
 - we have an organisation of nature education called 'nature guards'; it offers hiking in a forest to families and groups, then they cook pancakes together;
 - the nature reserve is located in two municipalities, Zarasai and Ignalina. The place has potential for fishing holidays. The municipality could advertise the opportunity more, which truly is a duty of the municipality. They could provide the service in such a way that when a person comes, there is already a boat and all the equipment provided, so the only thing which is left up to the person is to enjoy;
 - we have a lot of guesthouses, but we should develop new accommodation facilities;
 - another issue – access to the lake. At the weekends, the only two public access points to the lake are overcrowded. The rest of the shore is on private property. A private landowner could develop access to the lake and make money with it, but people do not want to do it;
 - the monastery has cultural heritage status. It belongs to the church, but the church is not interested in tourism. But in the neighborhood there is an NGO called 'Innovators Valley' which bought a building 9 years ago and is now developing it. Here we organize art workshops, summer camps, etc. We've started cleaning up the place. The idea is to offer the place to independent professionals as a co-working site. Funding is received from different projects;
 - in the future, we want to set up an educational programme for tourists and tell about the history of the site;
 - there is a plan to create a vegetarian restaurant because monks were vegetarians. It will also be an educational project;
 - the most important aspect – the local one. If it is a restaurant, it must offer the food of local origin. If a tour is provided, the guide must be from the local neighborhood. Also, accommodation facilities – not a large chain company, but a local family that offers its own housing. Everything must be related to the local area.
 - there must be local herbal tea in cafés;
 - learning is an important aspect. Eco is a popular word. Sometimes it is misused to create a better image. But it is essential to learn and educate about nature;
 - The idea of *Zero waste*, which we also want to implement, means as little waste as possible. In our organisation we do not use disposable materials – plastic bags, etc. We do not use paper towels either, but the traditional ones -made of fabric;
 - nature can be used in lessons in schools. If you teach about World War II, you can ride bikes to a place where partisans hid. In a geography class you can take students to a place created by glaciers;
 - a panoramic bridge on Lake Cirītis;
 - improving infrastructure, promoting diversity of activities, restoring existing resources;
 - well-equipped parking lots;
 - local government's support for the promotion of entrepreneurship;

- well-designed nature trails (walkways), rest stops in the vicinity of nature objects, viewing towers;
- better maintained parks and rest areas by the water;
- cycling trail Preiļi-Aglona;
- the return of the population;
- transparency, information about the existing and future plans, permanent service of a gardener and an arborist.
- waste containers, recycle areas, sorting;
- create a brand of the county;
- develop a public beach;
- the infrastructure of the tourism sector needs to be improved;
- extensive advertising;
- would like to have a well-managed public swimming area during the summer;
- support the development of environmentally friendly tourism and service infrastructure;
- the development of a quality tourism product and its strengthening on the market, following the principles of sustainable development;
- State and local government's support for entrepreneurs;
- ensure catering services for tourist groups during holidays;
- patriotism education in elementary schools;
- more information on existing events, service providers; local government's support for those who would like to start a business in this field, the involvement of the population (including volunteering);
- firstly, the administration of the county should be interested in advertising the county at different levels, from culture, sport, then also in promoting products and services created by tourism and entrepreneurs, not only on the county's not very successful web page but also on social networks; we should start with ourselves, through communication, cooperation and mutual support;
- it could possibly be advertising;
- to offer a higher level of service in both catering and accommodation;
- nature trails, bird-watching facilities;
- development of the cycling infrastructure would be the first big job, but then the development of sightseeing objects - such as horse stables and various mini-zoos, then a tree top adventure trail in Preiļi Park and a quattro cycle track (4 seater bike) with sightseeing objects, so that families would be happy together and learn something while having leisure time;
- to facilitate support for tourism entrepreneurs ;
- accommodation, nature trails with workshops;
- to develop a unified approach to promoting natural and cultural-historical values (uniform tourist signs, captivating information). It is necessary to allocate more local government's resources to the development of Preiļi Manor Park - infrastructure, nature values, marketing, human resources, as it is the most potential tourism site of the county;
- to create educational nature paths which lead to the most famous sites in the county;
- there are already positive initiatives, attracting project funds, cleaning up and adapting the environment;
- public awareness and engagement should be promoted;
- renovation of Preiļi Manor House, further care of the park;

- further development of catering facilities, a summer eco cafeteria, a viewing tower on the bank of Lake Cīrītis, because of the fantastic natural landscape;
- catering services;
- new high-quality tourism products and services are needed;
- public bicycles;
- bypass; forest therapy system in Anykščiai; to carry out more educational activities with natural resources for children: sand, forest goodies.
- we should not exploit nature, we should feel it.



“We don't have a fancy restaurant in our guesthouse, but there are several picnic spots surrounded by veteran trees.”