Summary of the Study

„Sustainable Development of Rural Tourism in Latvia”

2004
1. Introduction

Latvia has a wide range of tourism resources – the diversity of landscape and cultural and historical heritage, rich biological and geophysical systems which have mainly developed as untouched by civilisation. After restoration of independence of Latvia, in the beginning of the 90-ties, the state and collective farms were closed. In the process of restitution, the former land owners regained their land property, earlier nationalised by the Soviet power. Small farms were seeking for profitable alternatives to farming, fishery and forestry, which traditionally had been the main occupations in rural areas. Rural tourism became a “rescue” and rural inhabitants viewed it as the only solution to stay living in the countryside.

Initially, as the numbers of tourists were comparatively low rural tourism entrepreneurs offered free rooms to tourists in their family homes. With growing numbers of visitors, the farmers started to transfer from the traditional farming to tourist business, enlarging rooms, building separate cottages for tourists, opening small hotels and guesthouses, opening and improving camping sites. These activities involved a more intensive use of natural resources, increasing volumes of waste, the use of chemicals, etc., thus increasing environmental impact.

Unlike the majority of European countries, Latvia did not have to eliminate the consequences of mass tourism. The task was to promote a well-considered, balanced and sustainable development of rural tourism predicting and preventing the impact of the damaging factors.

The role of rural tourism as a catalyst of rural economy is widely recognised and there are growing numbers of rural tourism business operations. At the same time, lack of information or ignoring the basic principles of sustainable development of rural tourism can create serious problems to rural tourism businesses as well as local population. In this situation, the Latvian Country Tourism Association “Lauku ceļotājs” conceived the idea of the “Green Certificate” project which would change the mentality of the population from the post-soviet consumer attitudes to the philosophy of business sustainability.

2. The aim and methodology of the study

The study “Sustainable Development of Rural Tourism in Latvia” is a summary of the project “Development of the criteria for the Green Certificate, implementation and control in rural areas and small towns in Latvia” which is supported by the EC LIFE-Environment Programme. The aim of the study is to evaluate the present situation and trends in rural tourism, to define the eventual sustainable development directions, to provide recommendations for sustainable development of rural tourism and to analyse the role of the “Green Certificate” in providing for sustainable development of rural tourism.

The study employs the traditional quantitative and qualitative methods of economical research, including reviews of the environmental situation in rural tourism accommodation establishments: the rural tourism provider review in 2002 (136 respondents), in 2003 (76 respondents) and in 2004 (241 respondents); the “Green Certificate” provider reviews in 2003 and 2004 (50 establishments). To show the environmental and economical benefits of eco-labelling the consumption measurements taken in the 4 project demonstration accommodations were used.

To find out the tourist attitudes towards environmental friendly travelling and the “Green Certificate” the data from tourist reviews were used: tourist review in 2001 (64 domestic and 50...
foreign tourists), in 2002 (171 domestic and 78 foreign tourists), in 2003 (775 domestic and 592 foreign tourists), and in 2004 (276 domestic and 77 foreign tourists).

The study was carried out in the period of October 1, 2001 – September 30, 2004.

3. Sustainability and sustainable tourism

The concept of sustainable development appeared in the 80-ties of the 20th century when the society became increasingly aware of the irreversible impact of the rapid economical development on the natural resources and on the environment in general. This is a hot topic of today as acceleration of the national economy must not take place on the account of irresponsible use of natural resources and ignoring the natural and cultural values.

10 basic principles of sustainable development by the World Tourism Organisation:

1. Conservation and prevention of depletion of natural, social and cultural resources
2. Reduction of over-consumption and waste
3. Maintenance and enhancement of natural, social and cultural diversity
4. Integration of tourism development in the local and national strategy planning, evaluation of environmental impact
5. Supporting local economic activities and estimation of environment protection costs
6. Involvement of local population in tourism sector
7. Consultation exchange between tourism industry and local population, organisations and institutions
8. Regular training of service staff and appointment of locals in all company positions
9. Evaluation of travel market responsibility, providing a possibly comprehensive information to tourists
10. Continuous research and monitoring of tourism industry

Ecotourism, rural tourism, nature tourism, green tourism and educational tourism can be regarded as the sectors of tourism facilitating sustainable development.

4. Rural tourism resources and infrastructure

The key of rural tourism development is the local people who use the natural resources and man-made cultural and historical values and infrastructure to create tourism products and offer them to tourists.

Nature and rural environment are the main precondition for rural tourism development. The most important resources are the varied landscape and biological diversity, waters (rivers, lakes, springs, wetlands), forests, the seacoast, meadows, marshes, protected nature areas (PNA) – biosphere reserves, national parks, nature parks, protected landscape areas, nature reserves, as well as particular species of wild animals and plants.

Cultural and historical heritage: ancient cult sites (stones, trees, caves, hills, groves), ancient burial sites, hill-forts, castle ruins, churches, manors, pieces of arts and crafts, etc.

In recent years tourists are increasingly attracted by rural life – craft shops and farms where they can take part in work. Countryside events become popular – regional markets, days of crafts, celebrations of yearly festivities, traditions and customs, and daily life of rural farmsteads, which open their doors to visitors.
Tourism infrastructure, especially in rural regions is insufficiently developed. Development of infrastructure facilitates development of rural environment, ensuring compliance with environmental protection requirements.

The number of rural tourism accommodations is growing every year. According to the statistics of “Lauku celotājs”, in 2003 the Association’s database contained 275 rural accommodation establishments – country homes, vacation cottages, hotels, campsites, castles and manors with totally 4137 bed places. The number of accommodations has grown by 13%, and the number of bed places – by 8% as compared with 2002.

Rural tourism development is hampered by the poor quality of roads. At present, there are just few bicycle roads while roads in general are not suitable for bicycling tourism because of poor condition of road surface and high traffic. Most rural tourism establishments are not accessible by public transportation. Passenger railroad infrastructure in rural Latvia is almost completely destroyed.

To ensure compliance with environment protection requirements and enable tourists to access nature attractions, particular infrastructure is built in nature protection areas like trails, small bridges, stairs, protecting barriers, relaxation spots, observation areas, viewing towers, etc. In recent time, nature and educational trails are built with the purpose to direct the traffic of tourists away from sensitive territories, biotypes and species.

5. Environmental impact of rural tourism

Rural tourism has become one of the most popular types of tourism during the recent five years in Latvia. However, the poor infrastructure, the strong interest tourists show in protected areas, sensitive biotypes and particular nature attractions and species, can in long-term, negatively affect the mentioned natural values. The analysis of the situation in rural tourism sector reveals a number of significant problems calling for solution.

There is no sufficient control of consumption of water resources in rural tourism establishments as only in 34% of cases the consumption is regularly registered. According to the inquiries, the only methods to control water consumption are adjustable volume toilet tanks and single lever mixers. Almost all rural tourism providers (93%) save water providing shower instead of bath but 22% offer bathing facilities to tourists consuming more water.

In most of accommodation establishments (70%) the waste waters (household and toilet flushing waters unseparated) are collected in the deposition wells or filtration wells. However, in some instances waste waters are let into the nearest stream. Comparatively small numbers of establishments (16%) are connected to centralised sewage collection systems. Holding tanks and filtration wells are used for mechanical water treatment. The facts show that due to the increasing demand for sauna services, it is necessary to control waste waters from in sauna facilities.

Also household chemicals affect qualities of waste waters. There are no data available on weather the rural tourism providers apply dosage, however, the review shows that dosage of household chemicals is not a daily routine and is practiced only in every second household.

According to the review, in year 2002 only 26% of accommodation establishments had the possibility to practice the waste sorting and giving away for the recycling in their municipalities. Consequently, waste management, including hazardous waste (electric batteries, accumulators,
asbestos, etc.) should be regarded as an essential and complex environment protection problem, solving of which should start from each individual rural farmstead. However, centralised collection of separated waste is a problem in several regions where rural tourism providers, consequently, are not motivated to sort waste in their establishments.

Almost all rural tourism establishments (97%) register total consumption of electrical power, also the consumption of energy per guest is estimated. Still environment friendly alternative forms of energy practically are not used.

An important component of environment is building and room furnishing materials. Roofing materials containing asbestos are still often in use. Utilisation of the roofing slate containing asbestos is still an unsolved problem. More than a half of the review respondents do not pay attention to the chemical composition of painting materials which impact environment as well as human health.

Rural tourism establishments have low energy capacity, therefore wood and natural gas are used for heating which is more environment friendly than coal or mazout. Still the impact on the quality of air can not be ignored. Environment friendly means of transportation are not widely used.

The degree of the impact rural tourism leaves on the natural and cultural environment depends on how sensitive are the biotypes and species, found in the respective tourism site, towards anthropogenous burden. It is not always taken into account. Comparatively often, due to lack of knowledge, rural tourism providers turn a natural forest into a “cultivated park” or an “overgrown meadow” into a “beautiful lawn”. An unfavourable tendency is unjustified transformation of heritage “according to modern requirements”, for example, putting double-pain windows in an authentic country farmstead buildings, etc.

Rural tourism leaves a positive impact on economical environment and development of rural areas and small towns in Latvia – there are growing employment rates, increasing business diversity and activity, improving sales of goods and services, higher amounts collected in taxes, renovation and maintenance of cultural and historical heritage, the local population take pride and care of the natural and historical values of the region, the development levels between regions start to equalise.

6. The “Green Certificate” – a tool for rural tourism sustainable development in Latvia

Eco-certification is introduced in many countries to save tourism resources and encourage rural tourism providers run their businesses according to the basic principles of sustainable development. The main goals of eco-certification are to integrate environment protection requirements in tourism, facilitate providers’ interest and attention towards environment protection and sustainable development and to serve as a communication channel for the consumers to recognise accommodations and services they are willing to use.

Eco-label is a marketing instrument – a special recognisable sign or symbol which is specific to a country or a particular certification system. Tourism products meeting the criteria in a set system are marked with this sign (exposed on the buildings of an establishment, used in catalogue advertising or other). There are more than a 100 different eco-certification systems in the world.

In Latvia the national eco-label for tourist accommodations in the countryside and small towns – the “Green certificate” has been worked out and implemented by Latvian Country Tourism

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Association “Lauku ceļotājs” within an EC LIFE Programme and Latvian Environmental Protection Fund co-financed project (2001-2004).

The “Green Certificate” has joined the “VISIT”, the European association of eco-labels (www.yourvisit.info) which proves the compliance of the “Green Certificate” with the eco-labelling requirements recognised in Europe. The criteria of the “Green Certificate” correspond with the green holiday criteria of the “ECEAT”, European Centre for Eco Agro tourism which makes this eco-certification system transparent and more easily understandable to the consumers.

In order to harmonise the requirements of the different eco-labels, “European Flower”, the official EU eco-label was developed which is in force in tourism sector in all EU countries. It is envisaged that the member countries should introduce this eco-label by creating the necessary infrastructure to continue further development of criteria and perform eco-labelling. The EU eco-label regards cooperation and coordination with the national eco-labelling initiatives as very important. Cooperation between the Latvian Environmental Agency, which is the responsible organization for the implementation of “European Flower” in Latvia and the Latvian Country Tourism Association – the owner of the “Green Certificate” has been initiated in order to find the appropriate way of introducing the EU eco-label in Latvia.

6.1. „Green Certificate” requirements and the awarding procedure

The „Green Certificate” is an eco-label assigned to country houses, guest houses, vacation cottages and campsites in the countryside and small towns of Latvia. The goal, tasks and the assigning procedure of the eco-label are described in the “Green Certificate” regulation.

There are 85 criteria defined in the “Green Certificate” regulation requirements, which fall into compulsory, delayed compulsory and ideal. The certification according to the “Green Certificate” regulation is voluntary.

The extent to which accommodations are in line with the aforementioned “Green Certificate” criteria is determined by a “Lauku ceļotājs” inspector who arrives at the facility at the invitation of the owner and fills out an evaluation form. The inspection occurs simultaneously with an annual service quality inspection.

The decision on awarding a “Green Certificate” is taken by the National Tourism Accommodation Eco-labelling Commission, which has members from the Ministry of Environment and the Ministry of Economics, as well as independent environmental and tourism experts.

The “Green Certificate” is awarded for a period of 18 months. After that period expires, the facility has to undergo repeated certification.

So far the “Green Certificate” has been awarded to 57 tourist accommodations in the countryside of Latvia, which is ~21% of all accommodations registered in the data base of “Lauku ceļotājs”

Within one year after receiving the “Green Certificate”, the facility must draw up an environmental plan in which the owners evaluate their influence on the environment, set out environmental goals and undertake to take specific steps toward environmental protection in a specific period of time. The environmental plan includes measuring environmental indicators in four categories (energy resources – electrical power and heating materials, water, waste, household chemicals). If the plan is not submitted in time, then the “Green Certificate” can be taken away.
The “Green Certificate” documentation is available on a special professional web site www.eco.traveller.lv.

6.2. Demonstration accommodations

As part of the project “Development of the criteria for the Green Certificate, implementation and control in rural areas and small towns in Latvia”, four demonstration sites were selected in 2003 in Vidzeme – the region where tourism is the most intensive. The demonstration sites represent four different accommodation types: country house “Mūrieki” (Alūksne region), camping “Vējavas” (Limbaži district), guesthouse “Zāķi” (Ogre district) and vacation cottage “Smiltēni” (Ogre district).

These establishments and the measurements of resource consumption taken in them serve as a model to other rural tourism providers willing to implement the principles of sustainable development in their operations and achieve the highest environmental and service quality standards.

A 20-minute training video has been produced by “Lauku ceļotājs” showing the environmental protection activities of the four demonstration facilities.

6.3. Environmental education of the providers

To improve the knowledge of rural tourism providers about basic principles of sustainable management and to train them for the eco-labelling “Lauku ceļotājs” has worked out five training materials, where practical advices in environmental friendly tourism management are described:

- Advice to rural tourism businesses in the gentle use of natural resources;
- Biological diversity and its preservation on the farm;
- Tourist activities in the nature: recommendations and practical examples to develop your offer;
- Use of environmentally friendly materials in building and decorating rural tourism facilities;
- Latvian holidays and traditions in rural tourism offer.

Twice a year “Lauku ceļotājs” publishes the newsletter “Green Tourism News”, reporting on the latest developments in rural tourism and focusing on the “Green Certificate” facilities.

Each year “Lauku ceļotājs” organises four training seminars for rural tourism providers, and several of the subject areas involve “green” management. This helps businesses to get the “Green Certificate” or to improve environmental quality if they already have the certificate. The training film about the project demonstration accommodation experience is used as a training material during the seminars.

Easch year “Lauku ceļotājs” organizes also the National rural tourism conference, where one of the topics is usually devoted to sustainable tourism issues.

6.4. Marketing advantages for “Green Certificate” accommodations

RT providers admit that one of the key motivating factors to apply for the „Green Certificate” is its recognition and advantages in marketing the „Green Certificate” eco-label gives to the labelled establishments thanks to a variety of marketing activities by "Lauku ceļotājs").
According to the tourist review by “Lauku ceļotājs” in 2004, 62% of the users of RT services recognise the “Green Certificate”. In 2003 only 17% of the respondents admitted that this eco-label influences their choice of a holiday site. The older age group and the higher educational levels of the respondents, the better informed they are about the “Green Certificate” and the more important role it plays in choosing a holiday site. Tourist reviews show that the eco-label is more important for foreign guests than the domestic tourists. Foreign guests are less aware about conditions in rural tourism sites in Latvia therefore eco-labels and other quality certificates are regarded as extra guarantees of the product quality.

In order to promote the “Green Certificate” eco-labelled accommodations for tourists, “Lauku ceļotājs” has developed a “Green Holidays” brand. “Green Holidays” promise tourists the following:

- A clean and orderly rural environment
- Traditional farms, natural materials
- Various activities in the open air
- Ecologically clean and local food products
- Information about points of interest in the nearby area
- Celebration of holidays in line with traditions
- Play areas and pets for the children
- High-quality tourism services

Tourist review by “Lauku ceļotājs” in 2004 show that “Green Holidays” is the most popular of all the Association’s rural tourism products.

The “Green Holidays” product and together with it also the “Green Certificate” accommodations are promoted in the annual catalogue “Country Holidays” and in the rural tourism web site www.traveller.lv.

In order to promote recognition of the “Green Holidays” brand, “Lauku ceļotājs” has launched a special publication series under the same title. Each year at least one thing is published within the series that promotes environmentally friendly tourism in Latvia’s countryside.

- the map of Latvia “Worth Seeing” (in 2002 and 2003),
- the non-traditional guidebook “Countryside Bounty” (in 2003 and 2004)
- the active tourism guidebook “Active Holidays” (in 2004).

All these publications contain the “green” advice to tourists on environment friendly behaviour during a trip with regard of nature protection and respecting the local community.

In order to promote environmentally friendly behaviour among tourists, all “Green Certificate” facilities have information stands with information about the eco-label itself and about nearby points of interest, local foods and traditions, etc. Comic strips produced by “Lauku ceļotājs” which illustrate environmentally friendly behaviour in various situations are framed and hung on the walls of “Green Certificate” facilities.

As a results of PR activities of "Lauku ceļotājs”, the "Green Holidays” brand and the "Green Certificate” eco-label often feature in the biggest Latvian newspapers and electronic media. The PR activities include press releases, press conferences and press trips visiting the eco-labelled tourist establishments.

6.5. Economical and environmental benefits in the “Green Certificate” establishments
The "Green Certificate" sites have to supply a table of \textit{environmental indicators} once a year showing the consumption of the natural resources and other environmental indicators within a fixed period of time. These measurements and the \textit{experience of the 4 demonstration sites} prove the economical and environmental benefits in eco-labelled establishments.

The environmental indicators are coordinated within another EC LIFE co-financed project “Tourbench” (www.tourbench.info), where the measurements of eco-labelled accommodations in different countries in Europe are compared with each other in order to estimate the average resource consumption levels.

\textbf{Economy of water resources}

The "Green Certificate" requires rural tourism establishments to practice economy measures of drinking water resources, e.g., to follow the water consumption, to prevent leakage of taps; mixer taps and showers with adjustable water supply should be installed; tourist attention should be drawn to using shower instead of bath, etc.

Single lever mixers and flush toilets with adjustable tanks are “ideal” requirements of the"Green Certificate", (there are „compulsory”, „delayed compulsory” and „ideal” requirements). They should not be present at the moment of eco-labelling inspection. Many of the eco-labelled establishments at present have installed the single lever mixers and flush toilets with adjustable tanks even if this is not a compulsory requirement.

Calculations show that establishments where \textit{single lever mixers} are installed, consume 25\% less of water to satisfy the daily hygiene needs than establishments using installations with traditional mixer taps. Single lever mixers not only help to reduce the consumption of drinking water. Reduced is also the environmental burden created by vehicles arriving to howl away sewage waters.

The establishments where \textit{adjustable toilet tanks} (3l and 6l) are installed, use 65\% less of water than the establishments where single volume water tanks are used (9-12l).

Environmental indicator measurements show that an eco-labelled site, compared with a non-labelled establishment, saves 28,72 m$^3$ of water a year thanks to single lever mixers, adjustable volume toilet tanks, taps with automatic stop of water flow). The demonstration sites save 35,90 m$^3$ of water.

Since at present majority of the establishments do not buy water as they have own deep-wells, it is not yet possible to prove \textit{economical benefits}. However, knowing that the hotels in Europe pay in average ~1,05 EUR per 1m$^3$ of water, it is possible to conclude that an eco-labelled establishment in Latvia could save ~30,77 EUR per year on water consumption for tourist needs. The savings in a demonstration site would reach ~36,92 EUR a year.

\textbf{Economy of energy resources}

To comply with the"Green Certificate” requirements, RT providers register and control the consumption of energy resources (electricity, gas, heating materials, etc.). There should be good thermal insulation in the establishment and the room temperature adjustable according to the customer needs. Energy saving bulbs, A-class household equipment are required; all equipment should be switched off when there are no tourists in residence, etc.

The data prove that using 23W \textit{energy saving bulbs} instead of 100 W bulbs (equivalent light levels) can help to save up to 70\% of energy.
Using a washing machine of A-class energy efficiency instead of a C-class equipment, can save 27% of energy.

The measurements made in the "Green Certificate” establishments show that, compared with non-labelled sites, the saving of energy resources used for tourist business activities is 1149 kWh which equals to ~79,55 EUR (use of energy saving bulbs, A-class equipment, etc.). The demonstration sites save 2082 kWh equal to ~144,14 EUR.

Waste management
As an eco-labelling precondition, establishments should have a contract with a waste management company collecting and removing unsorted waste. Organic waste should be separated and composted. Hazardous household waste should also be separated from other waste. Eco-labelled establishments do not use individually packaged foods and disposable tableware. It is recommended to use toilet paper and kitchen towels made of recycled paper. Refrigerators and freezers with CFC and fluorocarbon refrigerants are not allowed to use.

According to calculations, the establishments practicing waste sorting (paper, plastic, glass, organic waste) for composting and recycling, produce by 70% less waste to be removed to central waste deposits that those establishments where waste is removed unsorted.

The ”Green Certificate” establishments produce by 107,7 kg less waste to be removed to central waste deposits than non-labelled accommodations thus saving removal costs of ~5,14 EUR a year. Demonstration sites produce by 179,5 kg less of unsorted waste for removal saving ~8,57 EUR a year.

Use of chemicals
The ”Green Certificate” establishments do not use detergents containing chlorine and boron compounds and those containing more than 5% phosphoric compounds. Disinfectants containing chlorine and boron compounds are not used.

Even if the detergents and cleaning agents not containing harmful compounds often are more expensive and there is no immediate economical benefit, using them significantly contributes to environment protection.

It is proven that using phosphor-free detergents spares water basins from being polluted with 3,5 kg of phosphor a year even when the waste waters are being treated in a RT establishment. Waste water treatment plants can not process high volumes of phosphor, it gets into waters and causes eutrophication.

Transport
Eco-labelled establishments protect environment, promoting the use of environment friendly modes of transporation. E.g., the ”Green Certificate” requires that public transportation schedules are available for tourists in eco-labelled establishments. If necessary, the providers should pick up tourists from the nearest train or bus station. Facilities should be provided for parking tourist cars and bicycles.

Quality of landscape and biodiversity maintained
The “Green certificate” concept and eco-labelling criteria require particular environment friendly practices to be adopted in rural tourism establishments which means preserving the rural landscape, the biological diversity, as well as preventing pollution, economy of resources, etc.

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Eco-labelling criteria also encourage rural tourism providers to practice traditional crafts, produce local foods. The greatest variety of species in nature is observed where people practice traditional farming mixed with maintenance of semi-natural biotypes within one farm (fields, orchards, ponds, pastures, forests, etc.)

**Improvement of quality of life for the local communities**
The “Green Certificate” encourages the use of locally produced materials in building and renovation, consumption of locally produced foods and products. Thus the eco-label stimulates rural community to develop production and processing businesses in which are not directly related to tourism and facilitates diversification of local economy. The “Green Certificate” stimulates the cooperation between the rural entrepreneurs, which is a key towards the common sustainable rural development.

Sustainable development of rural tourism ensures regular flow of tourists, secures the existing jobs and creates new workplaces, thus improving the economical well-being of the local population.

**7. Solutions to provide for sustainable development of rural tourism**

This table shows the main problems in sustainable development of rural tourism and the suggested solutions.

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<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Problem</th>
<th>Solution</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Threats to natural resources</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Decreased quality of landscape</td>
<td>Municipal territorial planning to count with aspects of landscape protection. To subsidise agricultural production with a purpose to prevent agricultural lands from overgrowing and to facilitate small scale rural businesses. To support rural tourism providers who construct buildings from the materials typical for the region (e.g., wood). To raise environmental awareness of municipal officials and rural tourism providers.</td>
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<td>2.</td>
<td>Decrease of biological values</td>
<td>To Develop and implement nature protection plans. To educate municipal officials, rural tourism providers and tourists in the protection of nature and biological diversity.</td>
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<td>3.</td>
<td>Poor quality and insufficient infrastructure of nature protection</td>
<td>To attract EU funding for financing projects which develop nature protection infrastructure.</td>
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<td>4.</td>
<td>Conflicting interests of nature protection and tourism</td>
<td>To create new, nature friendly tourism products. To direct the traffic of tourists in nature friendly direction.</td>
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<td>5.</td>
<td>Insufficient waste sorting facilities</td>
<td>To influence the respective municipalities to organize collection of sorted waste and delivery for recycling.</td>
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<td>6.</td>
<td>Insufficient economy of energy resources</td>
<td>To promote the use of alternative energy resources. Thermal insulation of tourist accommodation buildings.</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Poor quality tourism infrastructure</strong></td>
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<td>7.</td>
<td>Poor quality of roads</td>
<td>To use EU structural funds for the modernisation of the road network.</td>
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<td>8.</td>
<td>Insufficient signposting</td>
<td>To take part in the Latvian Tourism Development</td>
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<td>9.</td>
<td>Insufficient management infrastructure of waters</td>
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<td>To access funds of the EU ERDF for project financing.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>To introduce economy measures of water resources.</td>
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<td>10.</td>
<td>Incompliance of rural tourism establishments with eco-certification requirements</td>
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<td></td>
<td>To introduce voluntary environment protection measures.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>To educate tourism stakeholders.</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Lack of information and awareness in rural tourism stakeholders</strong></td>
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<td>11.</td>
<td>Part of land owners ignore the basic principles of sustainable tourism and misuse natural resources</td>
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<td></td>
<td>To involve land owners in development of environment friendly rural tourism products by making the rural tourism quality criteria more strict and including the environmental criteria in the quality system.</td>
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<td>To promote biological farming and other partners for sustainable land use.</td>
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<td>To solve conflict situations using methods of motivation.</td>
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<td>12.</td>
<td>Part of tourism enterprises develop nature unfriendly tourism products</td>
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<td></td>
<td>To promote environment friendly tourism products.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>To limit spreading of consumer philosophy.</td>
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<td>13.</td>
<td>Not all rural tourism stakeholder have sufficient levels of environmental awareness</td>
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<td></td>
<td>To organise environmental education events.</td>
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<td>To produce information materials.</td>
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<td>To promote positive examples.</td>
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<td>14.</td>
<td>Not all rural tourism stakeholders try to improve their environmental awareness</td>
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<td></td>
<td>To implement eco-certification</td>
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<td>15.</td>
<td>Part of local population are unwilling to see strangers on their private land.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>For rural accommodation owners to involve the neighbours in the tourism activities, sharing the income and improving the local population life quality. To cooperate in order to make the rural tourism offer richer.</td>
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<td>To explain the benefits of co-operation and differentiation of the offer from the marketing perspectives for the rural entrepreneurs.</td>
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<td>16.</td>
<td>Part of tourists have consumer philosophy which is not compatible with sparing attitude to nature resources</td>
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<td></td>
<td>To offer environment friendly tourism products.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>To explain the value of nature resources pointing to the necessity of compensation.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>To increase the price of nature/environment unfriendly products.</td>
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<td>17.</td>
<td>Environmental awareness of some individuals differs from that of the society’s</td>
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<td></td>
<td>To familiarise guests in rural tourism establishments with the nature protection requirements.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>To limit actions that are harmful to environment.</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Problems in implementation of eco-certification</strong></td>
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<td>18.</td>
<td>Only part of tourism establishments are involved in eco-certification process</td>
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<td></td>
<td>To provide the benefits for the government support to the establishments joining eco-certification schemes and contributing to the environmental protection.</td>
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<td>19.</td>
<td>The numerous eco-certificates mislead tourists</td>
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<td>To promote the “Green Certificate” as the national eco-label and support its implementation.</td>
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8. Conclusions

Sustainable development
- Sustainable tourism development is inevitably linked to the use and conservation of nature resources. Sustainable rural tourism is characterised by development of balanced entrepreneurship and control of tourist traffic with a view of the local tourism resources, capacity and infrastructure development level.
- Sustainable development of tourism can be facilitated by tourism organisers and travellers who prefer to spend holidays in such an environment where the principles of sustainable management and resource saving are followed.
- The rural environment in Latvia is not united; it is fragmented and consists of isolated segments which usually do not have links (e.g., rural tourism providers do not sufficiently co-operate with farmers, craftsmen, local producers, rentals, etc.). In general this fragmentation is an obstacle to sustainable and balanced development therefore it is necessary to achieve maximum co-operation between the isolated segments for sustainable development purposes.
- EU funding, national subsidies, provider training opportunities create a positive basis for business activities and sustainable development of rural tourism in Latvia.

Resources
- In general, there are favorable preconditions for the development of rural tourism in Latvia based on the diversity of the available resources. One of the hampering factors is the inadequate quality of infrastructure which threatens sustainable use of resources.

Legal and institutional basis
- Rural tourism is a multifunctional branch, linked with many other branches. Its development is affected by legislation governing a number of sectors. The current legislation on tourism, nature and environment protection in Latvia is sufficiently detailed, however it does not regulate the traffic of tourists but prescribes a number of restrictions to protect nature.

Environmental impact of rural tourism
- Rural tourism can impact the environment in two ways – growing numbers of tourists increase the anthropogenous burden on the natural environment and potentially threaten sustainable use of nature resources, while targeted and correct development of tourism products and control of tourist traffic prevent the decrease of environmental quality and facilitate infrastructure building.
- Development of rural tourism facilitate economical activities, improves rural infrastructure and employment, raises self-esteem of the local population and makes to find alternative forms of business.

Eco-certification
- Implementation of the “Green Certificate” in Latvia has to be mentioned here as an example of an important and efficient tool for development of sustainable tourism.
- Implementation of the project “Development of the criteria for the Green Certificate, implementation and control in rural areas and small towns in Latvia.” has facilitated sparing...
and economical use of natural resources in rural tourism establishments, stimulated interest of rural tourism providers, tourists and mass media in green enterprise management and biological farming, enhanced environmental awareness, created a nationwide positive reaction, and identified a new target – to unite the many isolated segments of rural environment in a co-operation network offering new tourism products to the market.

- The current practices show that eco-certification ensures compliance with environment and nature protection requirements in rural tourism sector, increases competitiveness of establishments, brings economical and environmental benefits as well as gives recognition of the quality, service and food at rural tourism establishment, increases environmental awareness among customers and improving public attitudes towards environment and nature protection.
- The “Green Certificate” informs about compliance of the accommodation establishment with the standards of environmental quality thus helping tourists to choose a holiday site that best suites their interests and needs.
- The national certificates, including the “Green certificate” should unite in the European association of eco-labels in order to achieve recognition and harmonize eco-certification in European countries. The national certificates should provide links for rural tourism providers to the certification schemes applied Europe wide, like EMAS, ISO, “European Flower”.

9. Rural tourism providers about the “Green Certificate”

*Sandra Pētersone, owner of the vacation cottage “Smiltēni” – the project demonstration site:*
“The Green Certificate not only brings more tourists, it also attracts ‘better’ ones. Guests often see the Green Certificate on the wall and ask what it means. After I explain the certificate, I no longer have to pick up discarded paper and bottles after they leave. They respect my work and my ‘green’ thinking.”

*Irēna Kazaka, owner of the country house “Mūrnieki” – the project demonstration site:*
“Since I bought a Class A washing machine and an electric cold laundry roller, I have significantly reduced the consumption of electricity in the guest house. I’m glad that I have to pay less for electricity now!”

*Maija Krieva, owner of the vacation cottage “Pie Maijas”:* “When I attended a “Lauku ceļotājs” environmental seminar for the first time, I was pleasantly surprised - it turns out that there are lots of people in Latvia who are similar to me and ‘think green!’”

*Valts Ratkevičs, owner of the guest house “Zaķi” – the project demonstration site:*
“We replaced our old slate roof with financing from the Non-farming Business Development Programme. We used SAPARD financing to install a biological purification system. In the future we plan to take part in the eco-tourism section of the “Sower” competition that is being organised by the Ministry of the Environment and the Ministry of Agriculture.”

*Dace Klēviņa, owner of the campground “Vējavas” – the project demonstration site:*
“Since we installed separate containers for different kinds of waste in our yard, our guests have found that sorting waste is even somewhat entertaining. They very carefully separate out the plastic bottles, the glass bottles and the paper so as to put these things in the appropriate containers. This means that my “Green Certificate” has also changed the attitudes of the tourists!”