

ESTONIA

Local development

Location

South Estonia

Programming period

2007 - 2013

Axis / Priority

Social inclusion and local
development

Measure

M413 - Quality of
life/diversification

Funding (EUR)

Total budget 125 000
EAFRD 68 114
National/regional 22 772
Private 34 114

Project duration

2013 – 2014

Project promoter

Tartu Rural Development
Association

Contact

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Website

<http://visitsoutheastonia.com/>

The “Living on the Edge” route comprises of 21 different sites presenting the nature, culture and history of South-Estonia using the yellow frame, the iconic symbol of “National Geographic”.

Summary

This is an example where a good idea was picked up from the Netherlands and put into practice in another country. Cooperation between Local Action Groups in South-Estonia, tourism entrepreneurs and the “National Geographic” brought public attention to beauty spots within South-Estonian.

The cooperation developed the “Living on the Edge” route which comprises of 21 different sites presenting the nature, culture and history of South-Estonia, by using the yellow frame, which is the iconic symbol of the “National Geographic” magazine. Additional activities were initiated by local entrepreneurs including photo and video competitions; a souvenir competition and developing a book with South-Estonian stories.



Results

New cooperation networks created between the entrepreneurs.

Local communities and local entrepreneurs jointly participate in tourism development.

The number of both, domestic and international tourists in the region increased.

The income from tourism in the region increased, which in turn increased employment and attracted investments.

Lessons & Recommendations

- ❑ Good networking both at the national and the international level and knowledge transfer can be seen as key factors in achieving such good results.
- ❑ Within this umbrella project RDP funds have been used to support individual actions in a wise and complementary way to broaden the regions’ economic base and bring new life to local communities.

Context

The Tartu Rural Development Association strategy for 2014-2020 identified the fact that tourism in South-Estonia is concentrated in the city of Tartu, even though the area as a whole has great tourism potential. The strategy identified that there was a need to spread tourism services more evenly across the region. The challenges presented lie in the development of the tourism related cooperation at different levels, the development of new tourism products and services and in improving access to tourism services in the whole region.

The project idea was originally developed in the Netherlands where the community of East-Groningen implemented a LEADER-supported project which placed the yellow frames characteristic for the magazine “National Geographic” at various locations across their area. The frames were strategically placed to capture regional characteristics and grab visitors’ attention, with the frames giving the illusion of looking through an open window. The project in the Netherlands has been very successful with the number of visitors to the area doubling within a year and a half. Hopes are high that a similar community based project in Estonia will also lead to an increase the number of visitors to their area as well as strengthening the region’s identity.

Long term relationships have been developed between the South-Estonian LAGs and the LAG in East-Groningen. In 2011 study trips were arranged to share and exchange experiences. It was at a LEADER networking event in the Netherlands that the Tartu Rural Development Association learned about the project idea and brought it home and presented it as an interesting and transferrable project example. After more in-depth research it was decided to develop this project in Estonia and create it on a larger scale than had been done in the Netherlands.

Objectives

The objectives of the project were to strengthen regional identity, bring recognition and visitors to the region thus increasing revenue and to promote South-Estonia’s values both to domestic and international tourists.

Activities

The project in Estonia was initiated by six South-Estonian LAGs (Tartumaa Arendusselts, Piiriveere Liider, Põlvamaa Partnerluskogu, Valgamaa Partnerluskogu, Võrumaa Partnerluskogu, Jõgevamaa Koostöökoda) working with

their main partner National Geographic Estonia. In addition, a number of towns (Tartu, Valga and Mustvee) and different tourism related organisations (e.g. Peipsimaa Turism, Võrsjärve SA) were involved in the project, making a total of 21 partners.

In the winter of 2013 there was a competition to collect ideas to find the most suitable places for the yellow National Geographic frames. Local communities proposed 125 possible places, out of which a selection panel consisting of the 21 project partners chose 21 sites. The chosen sites represent attractive South-Estonian historical sites as well as sites of cultural and natural value. Some local information about the area accompanied each of the frames. All partners were involved in the project planning and execution.

The Tartu Rural Development Association invited the East-Groningen LAG to take part in a workshop on cooperation networks and destination marketing to share their knowledge and experience to help ensure the Estonian project’s success.

Activities carried out within the project included the route itself “Living on the edge” comprising of 21 yellow National Geographic frames which were placed across South-Estonia; a project web page was created, booklets of the route were printed giving visitors more information on the history and culture of the sites, along with opening events for the “Living on the Edge” route. The project also organised a number of different promotional campaigns.

The official LEADER support ended in 2014 but the frames will remain in situ until 2020 along with the promotion activities. All the LAGs applied individually for support to set up the frames in their own region and to ensure the project continues after the LEADER support ended the partners meet regularly.

The LEADER supported activities that took place between 2013 and 2014 included working out the theme routes and associated packages and setting up most of the 21 yellow frames which are supported by strong network of high quality tourism services. Although there is a strong cooperation element to this project, each LAG and their project partners set up the yellow frames and coordinated the related activities in their own region. Some of the LAGs created complementary activities such as a photo competition with the added advantage that all the photos and videos made as part of the project can be used by all project partners for promotional purposes.

Over and above the LEADER supported project a number of additional activities have been initiated by local entrepreneurs who have often received funding from other sources. These include a photo exhibition entitled “Life on the Edge”; video competition; a souvenir competition and a book with South-Estonian stories and best local deals.

A series of route maps for active holidays, nature lovers, on innovation and inspiration have also been prepared. In addition to using the magazine “National Geographic” branding, the magazine offered space for articles and advertising for reduced fees.

Main Results

The project inspired towns and rural areas in South-Estonia to more intense cooperation. The focus of the project for local communities was about bringing out local characteristics and stronger cooperation between different parties. For visitors the project provides new products, well prepared routes, better channelled information and amazing experiences.

Results of the project:

- New cooperation networks were created between the entrepreneurs.
- Local communities and local entrepreneurs are now jointly active and involved in tourism development.
- In the locations where the frames and local information boards with stories characterizing the area were placed, the local identity has increased.
- The number of both, domestic and international tourists in the region has increased.
- The income from tourism in the region has increased, which in turn has supported employment and economic investment in the region.

There are a number of more qualitative outcomes – quite novel especially in the Estonian context:

- There has been a huge increase in cooperation and knowledge transfer between LAGs, both internally within Estonia and externally with the Netherlands.
- The people living and working in the local communities which host the yellow frames have really taken ownership and they are responsible for bringing the project to life.

- The unique opportunity to link such a strong international brand as National Geographic with local values has been a great experience.

Key lessons

From its beginnings as a community-led project in the Netherlands, the “Living on the Edge” project was transferred extremely well to Estonia, where it was adapted to local conditions, developed further and proved a great success.

Good networking (both at the national and the international level) and knowledge transfer can be seen as key factors in achieving such good results. The project transfer was warmly welcomed by the LAG in the Netherlands.

Within this umbrella project, RDP funds were used to support individual actions in a wise and complementary way to broaden the regions’ economic base and bring new life to local communities.



Additional sources of information

n/a