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TOURISM IN THE BALTIC STATES:

DEVELOPMENT DIRECTIONS AND PERSPECTIVES

IN THE CONTEXT OF GLOBAL AND REGIONAL CHALLENGES

ABSTRACT BOOK

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Safety and security training gaps at tourism companies

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Safety and security are among the tasks that tourism organizers must prioritize with even greater respect and attention than ever before, especially considering the significant global transformations that have occurred over the past decade. As the world continues to evolve rapidly, with changes in technology, political climates, and environmental conditions, the responsibilities of those in the tourism industry have also expanded. Ensuring the well-being and protection of travelers has become a priority, demanding a more comprehensive approach to risk management and crisis preparedness. These efforts are crucial not only to maintain the trust and confidence of tourists but also to support the sustainable growth of the industry itself. Even though there is general understanding about what it is and how important it is, surveying travel agent and tour operator representatives it has been concluded that there are general gaps in how to train staff regarding aspects related to safety and security. Following a quantitative survey of tourism industry representatives and comparative analysis of quantitative research results from Latvia, Austria, Bulgaria and Turkey totally 9 training areas have been identified cover aspects from general understanding of tourism types and forms and related safety and security issues to more specific aspects such as leisure tourism or event tourism. Based on results have been developed micro credit training modules which tourism service organizations will be able to use in order to improve training of staff in the areas of safety and security. The content of training modules reflect major areas of existing knowledge and skill gaps employees are facing and can be addressed also by other education institutions involved in the development of professional skills.

Assessing sustainability practices in business tourism events

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The objective of the applied research on the assessment sustainability of business tourism events is to identify the best ongoing practices and compare the existing assessment approaches. This initial report includes findings of the focus group discussion with industry representatives about 1) The advantages and disadvantages of the sustainability assessment platforms and systems used so far from the business side; 2) Motivation for the development of a new sustainability assessment platform for business tourism events; 3) Criteria to be included in the sustainability assessment.

The following tools have been analysed in the Best Practice&guidlines Comparison on Sustainability Assessment for Business Tourism: Travelife, MICE Sustainable Event Evaluation System of Osaka Mice Inspiration, Global Sustainable Tourism Council on MICE Criteria for Venues, Event Organizers, and Events & Exhibitions, Biosphere Sustainable and Global Destination Sustainability Index. A comparison is made using the following criteria: groups of thematic indicators, subject of the assessment, body issuing of the assessment certificate, procedure of the assessment (assessment form, time), and fees.

Conclusion: The thematic groups of criteria include key indicators for sustainability but differ in their level of detail and documentation for assessing the criteria.

Innovation Co-Creation Laboratory for Sustainable Development of Recreational and Tourism Sites at the Latvia's State Forests

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In November 2024 Innovation Co-Creation Laboratory (ICL) dedicated to the topic of Forest Resources for Creation of Sustainable Services was organized at Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences by Vidzeme Open Innovation Hub with support of Vidzeme Planning Region, Municipality of Valmiera and the European University E3UDRES2.

During the co-creation process, entrepreneurs, students and researchers from different fields of science jointly define and solve problems important to the industry. The new value is created by combining and merging the knowledge and skills of researchers with the business expertise of entrepreneurs and novel ideas from students.

One of the challenges addressed by the ICL was sustainable development and management of the recreation and tourism sites at the land properties of the JSC Latvia's State Forests (AS "Latvijas valsts meži" - LVM). Currently there are 340 recreational sites established by LVM that need vise and sustainable management and development. The ICL offered formats for seeing the challenge from different perspectives and generating ideas from different points of view: from digital to non-digital, short term to long term, wide to narrow audience, etc. There were 30 solutions proposed, from which five were selected for validation: (1) data from mobile network operators for analyzing visitor flows, (2) visitor counters at the recreational and tourism sites, (3) online visitor registration and satisfaction survey, (4) on-site visitor surveys (interviews), (5) on-site feedback mailboxes. After the ICL, the cooperation continues among the company, the researcher and the student who will conduct a research paper and undergo an internship related to the above-mentioned solutions.

Change from Disposable to Reusable Food Packaging at Public Events: Lessons Learned from the "Change(K)now" Project

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As experience and studies in many cities have shown, most of the waste generated at public events is accounted for by single-use packaging. In the transition from a linear to a circular economy, where many countries have already banned all types of plastic goods and packaging, the impact of so-called 'eco-friendly' single-use packaging on resource consumption and the environment is also increasingly under debate. Although some event organisers and municipalities are moving away from using such packaging, the transition to reusable packaging in food delivery systems, including public events, is still slow and at different stages of development in various countries and cities.

The practical case example demonstrates how the Interreg BSR project "Change(K)now" has launched a process towards circularity in food delivery systems in BSR cities, e.g. Copenhagen, Hamburg, Tallinn, Riga and Liepaja.

This report will delve into the collaborative prototyping process of circular solutions, which involves active participation from stakeholders and users. The process, guided by the SPRINT method, progresses from identifying challenges to developing and implementing solutions in all participating cities.

 The practical case provides a detailed insight into the prototyping process, which involved mapping the ecosystem, identifying the stakeholders and their roles, and understanding the drivers and barriers for each group to implement the reuse system. It also included mapping the circular value chain, exploring ideas and potential solutions, and discussing and facilitating the final prototypes for piloting. A prototype of a strategic management and communication framework for municipalities was developed to provide support and a legal framework for implementing practical solutions in all three food delivery clusters.

International and local travellers` views on outdoor tourism in Latvia (2024)

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Travelling and being outdoors are integral parts of many people's daily lives and well-being. Sustainable and forward-looking management of natural areas and the development of tourism offers are essential to keeping up with travellers' wishes, interests, and expectations while also balancing these with nature conservation.

In 2024, within the framework of the LIFE integrated LatViaNature project, Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences, together with the Nature Conservation Agency of Latvia, conducted a survey of international and local residents to find out their opinions on recreation and travel in nature and their general relationship with nature. The questionnaire included 14 questions on nature as an asset, recreation and travel, and demographic questions. 1113 Latvian residents aged 16-75+ and 180 international visitors from 39 countries responded. This report will analyse the section on outdoor recreation and travel.

Overall, the survey data showed that it is very important for Latvian residents (95%) and international travellers (73%) to take care of nature. The main motives for visiting a particular place in natural surroundings for foreign visitors were attractive scenery, inspiration from the internet, and the desire to be physically active. For Latvians, the main reasons were the desire to be physically active (for example, Stirnu buks), new attractions or good infrastructure, and attractive landscapes. The survey data shows that people value both the use of resources (73% of Latvians said it was important to use recyclable materials in infrastructure, 84% of international travellers) and high moral and ethical principles, indicating that if they saw negative or inappropriate actions from others they would reprimand them (77% of Latvians, 70% of international travellers). The difference between Latvian residents and international travellers can be observed in their active behaviour when relaxing in nature. Although a large number of respondents mentioned that they would be willing to volunteer for clean-ups and other activities to improve and preserve the natural environment, foreign travellers were more positive than Latvian travellers about taking active measures to benefit Latvian nature (e.g. eradication of invasive species) while relaxing in nature.

Water springs - one of the most important tourism resources

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Historically, springs have not only served as important water sources in various regions, but also significantly contributed to biocultural diversity. Biocultural diversity refers to the continuing co-evolution and adaptation between biological and cultural diversities. Springs serve as key tourism features, natural and water recreation, cultural and spiritual resources. The evolution of water springs and their impact on modern tourism include both natural and human-induced factors that contribute to changes in accessibility or quality, geological characteristics and subsequently affect tourism patterns. Understanding this evolution is very important for sustainable tourism management. Over the past three years, by observing around 400 water springs in Latvia, around 100 in neighboring countries and around 200 on five continents and conducting around 1000 interviews, various perspectives have been obtained from the perspectives of spring owners, nature managers, tourists and other natural resource users.

The study shows springs as one of the most important tourism resources from the perspective of nature, history, pilgrims, health and leisure tourists (Interviews, literature, Internet review).

Keywords: Water Springs, Biocultural diversity, Tourism, Contemporary

Financing Public Goods in Nature Based Tourism: Challenges and Approaches

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Public goods play a key role in nature-based tourism, which relies on natural resources as well as infrastructure hiking trails, skiing trails (Brehmer et al., 2024), observation towers (Feldman et al., 2014).

In many cases, these public goods support nature-based tourism and outdoor activities. In some countries, entrance to national parks or protected areas requires a fee (Mach et al., 2020). However, this is not possible in the Nordic countries (Tuulentie & Rantala, 2013), as access to nature is considered a citizenship right. In other cases, countries may not charge an entry fee but generate revenue through fees for services such as car parking, toilets, tour guides, etc. Additionally, some governments impose taxes on nature-based tourism activities or use revenue from the sale of related equipment to fund recreational infrastructure.

Despite these different approaches, one common challenge remains: How can the sustainability of these public goods be effectively financed? As part of the Visitor Monitoring and Management in Protected and Recreational Areas: New Challenges, Novel Solutions for the Anthropocene (VIMAS) project, this issue will be addressed by evaluating various existing financing models and analyzing their applicability.

Brehmer, J., Heldt, T., & Fredman, P. (2024). Understanding visitor compliance with funding models of open acces tourism products. 32nd Nordic Symposium on Tourism and Hospitality Research, Stavanger, September 18-20, 2024.

Feldman, R. L., Nedelka, P. S., & Davidson, M. A. (2014). William Brooks Park boardwalk extension and bird observation tower, Chickasaw, Alabama: final environmental assessment.

Mach, L., Winner, C., Rojas, C., & Klemond, M. (2020). Protected area entry fees and governance quality. Tourism Management, 77. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2019.104003

Tuulentie, S., & Rantala, O. (2013). Will "free entry into the forest" remain? argumentation analysis of Finnish and Swedish Discussions on everyman's rights. New Issues in Polar Tourism: Communities, Environments, Politics, 177–188.

Enhancing Media Literacy to Combat Gender-Based Disinformation in Tourism: Insights from the MEDEA Project

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In an era where tourism thrives on digital engagement, media literacy has become a cornerstone for sustainable and ethical industry practices. The MEDEA project— Developing Media Literacy to Debunk Gender-Related Media Manipulation and Fake News (ERASMUS+, No. No. 2024-1-LV01-KA210-ADU-000243248) —offers critical insights for tourism professionals navigating the complex landscape of online content. This presentation explores how tourism stakeholders can harness media literacy to foster inclusivity, counteract disinformation, and support gender equality.

Tourism, reliant on storytelling and digital narratives, is particularly vulnerable to the spread of gender-based disinformation, which can shape perceptions, influence travel decisions, and impact brand reputations. The MEDEA project addresses these challenges through a comprehensive toolkit designed to enhance critical thinking, identify biases in media consumption and production, and combat Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence (TFGBV).

Key outcomes will include strategies to recognize and mitigate the effects of biased or harmful narratives, both in marketing and customer interactions. The presentation highlights MEDEA's cross-sector collaboration with educators, journalists, and NGOs across Europe, showcasing best practices for integrating media literacy into professional development within the tourism sector.

Attendees will gain actionable insights on creating authentic, inclusive content, fostering digital safety for diverse audiences, and leveraging media literacy as a tool for ethical tourism promotion. By understanding the interplay between media narratives and gender dynamics, tourism professionals can contribute to more equitable and responsible industry standards, aligning with global commitments to diversity, inclusion, and digital transformation.

Deepl Translate as a Tool for Intercultural Communication in Tourism

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DeepL Translate as an aid to intercultural communication in tourism (German-Latvian language pairs)

Nowadays, automated translation tools that are freely available to everyone, such as DeepL Translate, have become an important resource also for professional translators. DeepL Translate, with its artificial intelligence, offers a wide range of possibilities and can also translate expressive texts (according to K. Reiss's text typology). After translating an average of 1500 pages of expressive, informative and appellative texts with DeepL Translate in a German-Latvian language pair, the advantages and challenges of using this tool in text production are analysed.

The aim of the study was to summarise the advantages of DeepL Translate as well as the most frequent/systematic errors in order to ensure an optimal translation/target text result (corresponding equivalence). The focus is on the possibilities and limitations of DeepL Translate, the role of the human factor, with particular attention to how DeepL Translate "interacts" with the information producer and/or translator in the tourism sector.

It concludes with a summary of the aspects to which translators/tourism agents or editors should pay particular attention when using DeepL Translate. It is concluded that DeepL Translate is an excellent tool for German-Latvian pairs in the translation process, but only if the copywriter maintains a critical approach and combines the tool's capabilities with his/her professional skills. The use of automated translation requires the active participation of the text producer, flexibility and the ability to consider ethical and authorship issues. The paper concludes with a summary of these aspects of working with DeepL Translate in the German-Latvian language pair, providing recommendations for text producers as well as DeepL Translate developers regarding systemic translation errors in the German-Latvian language pair.

Keywords: DeepL Translate, source text, target text, cultural specificity.