

Living on the Edge -

Route through South-Estonia marked with yellow “National Geographic” windows

*Open the window of
your mind and explore!*



Map of places to be
discovered in South-Estonia



Summary

The “Living on the Edge” route which comprises of 21 different sites presenting the nature, culture and history of South-Estonia is identifiable by the use of a yellow frame, the iconic symbol of the “National Geographic” magazine. The route has the added attraction of introducing innovative small enterprises along the way.

Often good examples are not picked up and implemented elsewhere, this however is an example where a good idea was picked up from the Netherlands and put into practice in another country. Cooperating with Local Action Groups (LAGs) in South-Estonia, tourism entrepreneurs and the “National Geographic” have brought public attention to beauty spots within South-Estonian. For Estonia this project is also noteworthy due to the high degree of collaboration which included 6 LAGs and a number of other partners contributing to this one project.

Funding period: 2007 – 2013

EAFRD Measure: 413 (Leader)

**In the period 2014-2020
potentially fundable under
Measures:**

M 19, M 16

**(Potential) Contribution to
Priority (2014-2020):**

P6 Promoting social inclusion,
poverty reduction and economic
development

**(Potential) Contribution to
Focus area (2014-2020):**

6B Local Development

Key words:

Private-public partnership,
LEADER cooperation projects,
Other categories, keywords, Rural
tourism, Region branding,
destination marketing,
Knowledge transfer

Funding

Total project cost: € 125 000

EAFRD contribution: € 90,886

of which EU: € 68,114

of which national: € 22,772

Public and private co-financing: ca. € 34,114

All six LAGs applied for the support in their own region separately. In total with support and co-financing the project activities made up approximately 125 000 Euro. Key partners take over the overall management costs. Other partners contributed to the success of the project by setting up the frames on own costs.

Type of beneficiary/ies

LAGs

Other actors involved in the project

Municipalities, Tourist association, SMEs

Duration: 2013 – 2014

Location: Estonia

Website: <http://visitsouthestonia.com/>

Description

Official project title

Umbrella project title: Living on the Edge (Elu kahe maailma piiril)

Context and needs

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 and 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 East-Groningen LAG was very supportive of the idea to implement a similar project in Estonia and there was continuous contact with the original project holder. 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) are 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 on 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 (<http://visitsouthestonia.com/en/>), 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 organising 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 in the creation of the “Living on the Edge” route 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”; a photo and 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.

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 have been 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 have been 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 - generated by the “Living on the Edge” route. 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.

The “Living on the Edge” project in Estonia is an ideal example of a unique destination programme revealing what can be done when stakeholders from different counties, communities, local governments, entrepreneurs, tourism organisations and Member States come together to develop a joined up and inclusive cooperation project.

Lessons

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

Contact

Project promoter: Triin Lääne,
Tartu Rural Development Association
E-mail: triin@tas.ee
Phone: +3727430088, +37253029203
Web: <http://visitsoutheastonia.com/>

Language(s) for contact: Estonian, English

References

Photos: Photos/Pictures: <http://www.tas.ee>