

## ESTONIA

### Transnational cooperation

#### Location

Vasalemma

#### Programming period

2014 – 2020

#### Priority

P6 – Social inclusion & local development

#### Measure

M19 – LEADER/CLLD

#### Funding (EUR)

Total budget\* 37 770

EAFRD 33 993

National/Regional 3 777

#### Project duration

2017 – 2020

#### Project promoter

LAG Western Harju  
Partnership (Estonian  
partner)

#### Contact

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#### Website

[www.vomentaga.ee/projektid/rannikuala-arendaminecoastal-and-dune-management](http://www.vomentaga.ee/projektid/rannikuala-arendaminecoastal-and-dune-management)

\* Estonian budget

A TNC cooperation project in which partner areas with long coastlines worked together to strike a balance between protecting the environment and opening up their areas to tourists in a sustainable way.

### Summary

A TNC cooperation project between Estonia, Latvia, and Northern Ireland and Finland (lead partner). All partner areas have long coastlines, and each was actively looking at ways of how to find a balance between protecting the environment and opening up their areas to tourists in a sustainable way. The project included some joint aspects – international study trips and videos – but ‘in country’ investments were kept separate.



The activities implemented by the Estonian LAG included transnational study trips to project partners, marketing the coastal area of North Western Estonia. This included producing videos of coastal areas, purchasing and installing small equipment (information stands, trash bins, benches etc) to coastal areas.

### Results

158 km of the Baltic Coastal Hiking route in North Western Estonia has been marked both on the ground and in digital files making it accessible to hikers.

Tourist information about the North Western Estonia area is presented on the Baltic Coastal Hiking website and promotional materials were published.

7700 households in Western Harju municipality were informed about nature friendly recreation opportunities in their region.

### Lessons & Recommendations

- ❑ It was positively surprising that there was enough will and flexibility from all partners (municipalities, Estonian and Latvian partners of Coastal Hiking project, Interreg and LEADER managing authorities, entrepreneurs and communities) to allow to the LAG to ‘jump on an already moving train’.
- ❑ The biggest challenge was combining different funding sources. As the LAG was not an official partner of the Interreg Coastal Hiking project, some tasks (e.g. collecting information, checking materials, etc.) were delayed. However, thanks to flexibility of all partners the project was completed successfully.
- ❑ Another lesson was that with every added partner there are more benefits to gain. However, this also made the project more complicated and time-consuming.

## Context

Finland initiated this transnational cooperation project between Estonia, Latvia, and Northern Ireland and took the role of lead partner. All partner areas in this project have long coastlines and were actively looking at ways of how to keep the balance between protecting the environment and opening up their areas to tourists in a sustainable way. For Finland and Latvia, the focus was more on how to protect their coastlines, whereas Estonia and Northern Ireland both felt their areas were already quite well protected and so they were more focused on how to attract tourists. To reduce the complexities of the project the decision was made to have some joint aspects – international study trips and videos – but keep the ‘in country’ investments separate.

The Coastal line of the Western Harju Partnership area in Estonia is more than 100 km long. It is very multifaceted with high cliffs, boulders, sandy beaches, grassy coastal meadows and breccia rock formations. Nature protection areas interchange with visitor beaches and residential areas. It is important to find balance between nature protection and tourism which allows local people, visitors and nature to coexist in harmony. The most effective way to do this is by providing information such as where to access the coast/beach and use recreational services, which are the residential areas and which are nature protection ones, etc. Exclusion zones do not work as well as providing infrastructure and information to guide people through the nature areas.

When the Estonian LAG Western Harju Partnership started to prepare the Coastal and Dune Management project, they discovered that their neighbouring counties, including some in Latvia, were marking out and providing infrastructure on a part of the ‘E9’ long-distance hiking route. The majority of the 1200 km hiking route was financed through the Estonia-Latvia Interreg programme. However, the Interreg eligible territory ends just before the region of the LAG Western Harju Partnership and therefore is not eligible to participate. Without finding alternative funding the hiking route would stop ‘in middle of nowhere’.

The Estonian section of the E9 lies along the coastline of the LAG area and so it was decided that the extension of the path could be funded through LEADER and incorporate learning from transnational partners about finding the right balance between nature and tourists.

The Coastal area of North Western Estonia has high tourism potential, having a long and multifaceted

coastline, waterfalls, forests and bogs, beautifully restored old churches, manors and lighthouses, wonderful spa and boutique hotels, cosy tourist farms, cafes and restaurants which provide fresh and tasty local food. There are many options for active holidays such as hiking on land and on water, horseback riding, climbing, disc golf, minizoo etc. However, there is very little information for potential visitors on these activities or local amenities, as there are no strong tourism development organisations in the region.

## Objectives

Objectives of the project Coastal and Dune Management in Estonia were:

- Increase the number of visitors to the region while enhancing and maintaining the balance between nature protection and recreation.
- Extend the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route (part of long-distance hiking route E9) from Nõva to Tallinn.
- Provide visitors to North Western Estonia with appropriate and attractive tourism information.
- Give tourism entrepreneurs, local governments and communities an opportunity to learn from best practices of international cooperation partners in Finland, Latvia and Northern Ireland.
- Create good contacts and working relations between municipality workers, tourism entrepreneurs and local communities active in coastal area.

## Activities

Initially the project activities were planned to include:

- Transnational study trips to project partners.
- Videos of coastal areas of all partners.
- Purchasing and installing small equipment (information stands, trash bins, benches etc) to coastal areas.
- Marketing the coastal area of North Western Estonia.

After quick, but thorough, consultations with both national and international partners, the LAG Western Harju Partnership decided to also include the marking of the last 158 km of hiking route from nearby Nõva beach to Tallinn port.

Additionally, after further discussions with local municipalities, it was agreed to apply for extra LEADER funding, through a separate project, to purchase and install a total of 34 standard design tourism information stands across the whole region.

Project activities were implemented in parallel on national and transnational level:

The Project started officially in autumn 2017, when the Baltic Coastal Hiking route was inspected along with nature tourism entrepreneurs and hiking enthusiasts in North Western Estonia. All 158 km were walked with GPX recorder to create a GPX itinerary for hikers.

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- In spring 2018, a study trip to Finland was organised. Municipality representatives and tourism entrepreneurs learned about the Finnish experience of protecting dunes in a sand beach area with high numbers of visitors.
- In summer 2018, the Baltic Coastal Hiking route was physically marked by a group of enthusiasts composed of nature tourism entrepreneurs, municipality workers and hiking enthusiasts in North Western Estonia. All 158 km were walked again, this time with paint and brushes to identify the route with white-blue-white marks on trees, stones, posts and walls.
- In 2018-2019, information about the North Western Estonia was collected and published on a Baltic Coastal Hiking website and promotional leaflets were produced.
- In June 2018, a map of the coastal area of Western Harju municipality marking the tourist sites and services was published (7 700 copies) in a local newspaper. The map also included information on how to behave in nature, in order to preserve it, whilst using it for recreation.
- In early autumn 2018, it was the turn of the Estonian and Latvian Local Action Groups to host partners from Northern Ireland and Finland and introduce their best practices in nature and tourism management
- In late autumn 2018, the last study trip to Northern Ireland was organised, where Estonian public and private sector representatives visited investments done in Northern Ireland offering visitor experiences with nature preservation in mind.
- In autumn 2018-spring 2019, tourism videos in three languages were filmed and produced about the coastal area of North Western Estonia. The videos were

released in spring 2019 and they are free to use for municipalities and tourism entrepreneurs of the region.

- In spring 2019, 15 000 copies of tourist maps in three languages (Estonian, English, Russian) were printed and sent to local tourism businesses and tourist information centres.
- In winter 2019/2020, information stands were produced and in spring 2020 in total 34 tourism information stands were installed in Western Harju and Saue municipalities. The information stands are equipped with relevant information about tourism sites, services and instructions on how to behave in nature.



## Main results

158 km of the Baltic Coastal Hiking route in North Western Estonia has been marked both on the ground and in digital files making it accessible to hikers. That means that visitors who start their hiking either from the Lithuanian / Latvian border or from the Latvian capital Riga, can finish their adventure in Tallinn and travel back or further by bus, train, ferry, car or airplane.

Tourist information about North Western Estonia is presented on the Baltic Coastal Hiking website and promotional prints were published <https://coastalhiking.eu/en>.

7 700 households in Western Harju municipality were informed about nature friendly recreation opportunities in their region.

Visitors are attracted to the region by the Baltic Coastal Hiking marketing channels, attractive videos and printed materials.

Visitors and local people have appropriate and attractive information (information stands, maps), on how to access recreation sites in area whilst protecting nature.

Contacts between municipality representatives, nature tourism entrepreneurs and community representatives have been created and they are enjoying good working relations as a team.

The four partners are now working on a new TNC project.

## Key lessons

It was positively surprising that there was enough will and flexibility from all partners (municipalities, Estonian and Latvian partners of Coastal Hiking project, Interreg and LEADER managing authorities, entrepreneurs and communities) to allow the LAG to 'jump on an already moving train'. It was an appealing project to everyone, and it was rather easy to engage volunteers. Volunteers were especially easy to recruit to walk the hiking route inspecting and marking points of interest, but they were also keen to collect information for the website and the printed tourism materials.

Nevertheless, the biggest challenge was combining different funding sources. As the LAG was not an official partner of the Interreg Coastal Hiking project, some tasks (collecting information, checking materials etc) were

delayed. However, thanks to flexibility of all partners the project was completed successfully.

Another lesson was that with every added partner there are more benefits to gain. However, this also made the project more complicated and time-consuming.

One example – at first, the LAG planned to install six information stands. However, the plan inspired two municipalities to apply for project funding as well to add 28 more information stands. But that meant waiting for approval of their application and different kind of procurement processes. Initially, it failed, and another round of public procurement was needed. In the end, instead of the information stands going up in 2018 it took until 2020. Nevertheless, instead of six there are now 34 information stands in a unified design.

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### Additional sources of information

[https://laaneharju.ee/documents/17842239/18599668/LaaneHarju\\_Juuni\\_E.pdf/1e23e26c-bc18-4e2a-adc3-b946de8e81d8](https://laaneharju.ee/documents/17842239/18599668/LaaneHarju_Juuni_E.pdf/1e23e26c-bc18-4e2a-adc3-b946de8e81d8)

[https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC4wdRmTxO3ITeB\\_rqaFWzvg/videos?view\\_as=subscriber](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC4wdRmTxO3ITeB_rqaFWzvg/videos?view_as=subscriber)