

# VESURTE

Vocational Education for the Sustainable Development of Rural Tourism Enterprises  
An EU Leonardo Partnership Project  
with partners in Portugal, Spain, Poland and UK

## Report of fourth meeting at **Bialystok, Poland**

Hosted by Zespół Szkół Technicznych, Białystok

June 4 - 7 2013

### Aim to study:

4) Training material and events (Shared training material as presentation, activities and case studies)

### Learning points

- ⤴ It is important to prepare visitors for arrival by plane, train etc to the country.
- ⤴ First impressions are very important for tourists and hence the tourism sector. Recording first impressions is best done with mobile phone/ camera, using photos, voice recorder and short videos. This allows some review and reflection at the end of the day or later using guidebooks and websites.
- ⤴ It is valuable for the host tour organiser, accommodation staff to ask their visitors about their honest first impressions of the country and local area. In order to learn perceptions and needs of the visitors and discuss this – a form of needs analysis. For example my first impressions from the train and using a camera were of a very wet, flat, wooded country of rich wetlands, sparse housing and strip farming. My first impressions of Białystok were of a neglected, uninformative train station, masses of large bright shop adverts on the outside of buildings and tall blocks of housing, traditional wooden houses being replaced by brick and concrete blocks of flats, European bison as a common local emblem eg. on Zubr beer adverts, and many new churches.
- ⤴ Sharing photos of the visit, during the visit, and with other visitors and hosts, can provide a good focus for learning about tourism for trainers and students, but also for learning about the destination for tourists.
- ⤴ Photos of meals and menus can provide an easy way of remembering the food which is such an impressional aspect of any tourist study visit or trip.
- ⤴ The Technical School was full of remarkable wooden marketry done by past students of the school. It illustrated the great skill of these students in traditional crafts and the high status placed on this old traditional skill.
- ⤴ The Technical school has been involved with a range of EU Lifelong Learning projects – New and alternative tourism enterprises, Healthy eating habits in Europe (Comenius), Vocational training in gastronomy occupation.
- ⤴ Tourist guides can be very good, especially when talking more informally and anecdotally about life in the city and country now – how it has changed and is changing. Purely descriptions of buildings, monuments etc can become tedious and repetitive without the anecdotes, stories that add colour and distinctiveness.
- ⤴ The training and certification of tourist guides is very important for the future of the tourism sector. Many young people have received this training to be city guides as it can provide flexible first employment for good speakers of English or other popular tourist languages.
- ⤴ Websites and guidebooks are a valuable resource for the tourist visitor. So tourism and hotel staff could suggest, or even show, such resources (eg. on a tablet or mobile phone) to visitors.
- ⤴ In some places, such as churches, tourist guides and groups need to be sensitive and respectful to other local users, such as those in prayer, in their use of cameras, asking permissions, walking in certain places, talking loudly.
- ⤴ Case studies of tourism for education are only useful if general lessons can be drawn from them. There needs to be some opportunity for informal review and reflection as a group after visiting the case study destination.
- ⤴ Majatek Howieny – a family-run tourism business – showed the entrepreneurship of a family to present local heritage (reconstructing old farm buildings and artifacts) and providing a rural and heritage experience for urban families from Białystok. In a short time a successful business enterprise has been established, but obviously with much hard work and commitment!
- ⤴ Demonstrations of working buildings, artifact, and livestock could be seen as more sustainable than just storing old artifacts and implements. The skills to make and use buildings, structures, implements and machines are arguably more important to conserve than the buildings and implements themselves, especially if they are not well conserved,

preserved and protected from all weathers.

- ⤴ The Bialoweza Forest National Park has a huge modern interpretation and education centre. The guide, Mr Lukasz Lawrysz, showed us a large range of unlabelled dioramas with many stuffed animals, only two of which were seen on our guided walk through the forest – a shrew and a great black woodpecker (one of the seven species of woodpecker that makes this forest unique in Europe.)
- ⤴ Formal education is not always required for tourism staff. Local knowledge, language skills, practical experience, and storytelling that is informally learned, can be more valued by visitors. The guide was employed by the National Park, one of two full-time guides. He was very informative, knowledgeable, and experienced. Surprisingly he had no formal training in nature conservation or tourism. He was born in the nearby town and educated in forestry at the local technical school.
- ⤴ Without the prior interpretation and introductory build-up to the forest it would have been much less educational.
- ⤴ There was no opportunity for visitors, or even local people, to volunteer to help conserve and manage the national park, or to contribute in some way towards its conservation, other than paying for admission and local tourist goods. Volunteering and contributing to conservation is one of the few environmental benefits of tourism, making it more sustainable.
- ⤴ The zoo for wild animals from the forest and the diorama of stuffed animals was no substitute for seeing and hearing mammals and birds in the forest, however common they were. More on-site interpretation of common biodiversity features would make the visitor experience more real eg. the guide using mobile phone or tablet bird call identification app. This would provide a natural rather than artificial visitor experience.
- ⤴ Siolo Budy is an old and reconstructed collection of 19<sup>th</sup> century small farm buildings and houses, with some accommodation in four new built houses, mainly constructed using traditional designs and materials by the highly skilled owner and his son. It was awarded the “Best kept wooden rural building in Podlaskie Region in 2010” and Eurocertificate 2011 in the “Best Service Practices” category. The welcome and hospitality was overwhelmingly good and very memorable, mainly because of the genial owner, young and efficient Marketing Manager, and other staff.

### **Overall Learning Points**

- ⤴ Local people who we met left a stronger impression of the place than the look of the place itself. So their selection and training, whether formal or informal, is vital in terms of their ability to communicate well, and honestly introduce us to their area, experiences, knowledge and skills. Professional guides, however trained, can provide excellent introductions to destinations.
- ⤴ Recording tourist visits in a variety of ways, and reviewing them together at a later time, can add real value to the long-term visitor experience and provide good learning opportunities for both tourists and tourism staff. However most of the learning comes from reviewing these visual or sound recordings together.
- ⤴ First-hand, practical experience by visitors of things and people in their normal or natural settings, can leave a stronger, more honest impression of a destination than artificial experiences (such as dioramas, reconstructed buildings, museums, zoos) which usually provide more unrealistic, nostalgic impressions. This false interpretation increasingly seems to be the basis for many developments of tourism destinations. Reality tourism is more honest, vital and interesting for discerning visitors, and certainly more sustainable.

### **Types of tourism**

- ⤴ Gastro-tourism - local traditional food, photos of meals and menus, home-made vodka.
- ⤴ Agro-tourism – Old farm buildings and some livestock.
- ⤴ Nature/biodiversity-tourism – ancient oak forest, mammals and birds, wetlands, traditional farms.
- ⤴ Sport/recreation tourism – Cycling in and around the National Park.
- ⤴ Heritage tourism – guided tour of Bialystok, Bialoweza Forest National Park. Traditional music, costumes and dancing. Reconstructed old farm buildings.

### **Key sustainable tourism questions - to ask before or during next visit!**

1. What is the curriculum for the catering student at the school? How far is sustainable tourism included for all students?
2. Has Poland an accreditation scheme for sustainable tourism destinations, including hotels, restaurants, centres etc?

3. How would local tourism operators answer the 10 key questions identified by the project?
4. Do local hotels, restaurants, tourism attractions use/know of any sustainable tourism/ eco-tourism accreditation/certification schemes? How widespread are they? Are they promoted? Is training provided? Do customers ask about environmental/ social impacts of the tourism?
5. Tourism promotion is mainly for nature and heritage. How far do the local authorities promote this in Poland and in other EU countries? What are the statistics on tourist movements in the region?
6. What are the strategic plans for diversifying the tourism so it benefits rural communities, and retains young people in rural communities?
7. What are the plans for spreading visitor impacts over a longer season, more than just July and August?
8. What are the conflicts between the promotion of tourism to Podlaskie and the rural communities? We heard about the conflicts in and around the National Park for local communities who want to fell and use the timber. How are the issues resolved? Is there a strategic regional or municipal forum for planning, developing, funding tourism? How do they understand and promote sustainable tourism?
9. What surveys, evaluation of tourism demand by tourists/visitors and supply by tourism operators/staff has been done? Is there a demand for training in sustainable tourism by tourism operators?
10. How is tourism promoted by the local tourism office in Bialystok? How is it funded? Is tourism the main employment/economic sector in Podlaskie?

#### **Tourism operators/businesses**

1. Tour guides
2. hotel, restaurant owners and staff
3. Cooks and catering staff
4. Traditional musicians and performers

#### **Tourists/ Visitors**

1. Esperanto speakers
2. Bird watchers
3. Visitors from Belarus, Lithuania and Russia
4. Visitors from other European countries, including Germany

#### **How the project will be used**

**In Poland** – Case studies from the partner countries will be shown to catering students. Half of these students are from villages with farms of 5 to 300 hectares. Tourism can provide farm diversification and an additional income. 150 students do the 4 year catering course. Each year they have one month work experience. In year 1 they study maths, biology, geography and English. In Year 2 they only do two subjects and more catering. The school has 70 teachers. Tourism is taught through geography, biology and English language. Some students will be asked to submit entries for the Good Traveller Guide challenge.

**In Portugal** – The project will be used as part of the informal curriculum. The school will “try to have a responsibility to the environment in the whole school”.

**In Spain** – Not yet identified.

**In UK** – Case studies from the UK and some partner countries will be used with about 20 students per year at New College Stamford for their Level 3 BTEC course in Tourism on the Unit 12 – Responsible Tourism. For the first and second year of the project SustEd will contribute to the course by leading a study visit to Rutland Water, and giving a presentation and lecture on sustainable rural tourism to the students. SustEd will also develop and promote its website

<http://learnsustainabletourism.weebly.com> to local vocational colleges, and promote the Good Traveller Guide to other EU project partners.

#### **Visit Programme**

##### **Day 0 – 4th june/tuesday**

18:00 arrival; check-in Titanic hotel, pogodna street

20:00 evening meal ( must be confirmed ) (1)

### **Day 1 - 5th june /wednesday**

10:00- meeting mr tadeusz halicki ,the headteacher of zespół szkół technicznych in bialystok  
10:30 – 13:00 discussions and working on project at zst in bialystok, stołeczna 21 street ( with wifi)  
13:15 -lunch in school canteen  
14:00 – 15:00 - discussion about the first year progress report ; a mid-term evaluation of the project  
15:00 – 16:30- guided stroll of bialystok  
17:00 – visiting majątek howieny ( an interesting example of family- run tourist business )  
18:00 – evening meal in “majątek howieny “

### **Day 2 - 6th june/thursday**

8:30 -meeting in front of cristal hotel  
8:30 – 10:00 – journey to bialowieza  
10:30 – 11:30 – visiting the nature and forest museum  
11:30 – 12:30 – presentation about bialovieski national park and eco- tourism given by mr lukasz lawrysz ( the employee of bnp). Discussion and questions.  
12:30- 13:30- lunch in parkowa restaurant  
13:40- 16:30 – walk to strictly protected area of bnp, taking an unmarked path named “ to the oak of jagiello” with a professional tour-guide licenced by bialowieza national park ; case study  
17:00- visting siolo body ( skansen-museum , totally authentic, last old borderland farm from the first half of the 19th century in poland ) ; case study  
18:00 – evening meal in siolo body restaurant; certificates  
(siolo body won : first prize in the competition for the best kept wooden rural building monument in podlaskie in 2010 and eurocertificate 2011 in the "best service practices" category)

### **Day 3 - 7th june/friday**

10:30 – 12:30 working on project in zst stołeczna 21 street  
12:00 Depart

### **Video**

You Tube - The study visit in Bialystok, Poland, by Polish partners in June 4 – 7, 2013

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=qqyON-hJZnA&feature=youtu.be](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qqyON-hJZnA&feature=youtu.be)

You Tube – The study visit in Baiao, Portugal, with Polish students in April 16-20<sup>th</sup> 2013

Trzecie spotkanie projektowe Baiao Portugalia 16-20. 04. 2013

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=tMSEcNGaQ0c](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tMSEcNGaQ0c)

### **To Do**

- ♣ Send details of bird identification app to forest guide.
- ♣ Invite Siolo Body marketing manager to Rutland Water Bird Fair ( The biggest such fair in Europe [www.birdfair.org.uk](http://www.birdfair.org.uk) ) with National Park staff, perhaps the guide, to promote the National Park and associated accommodation to bird tour operators.
- ♣ See course details for catering students, and details of earlier EU tourism and catering projects.
- ♣ To do a blind test on bottled v. tap water as a way of exploring and discussing water and energy conservation, recycling, marketing and “greenwash”. Many hotels and meeting centres offer bottled water to visitors and tourists. However is it sustainable, better quality than tap water, and better tasting?
- ♣ Use a carbon and ecological footprint calculator (from ecolfoot on session 1 of <http://learnsustainability.weebly.com>). Add bestfootforwardcalc.pdf.
- ♣ See You Tube films – Objectives of tourism development – Unit 12 Responsible tourism, Conceptualising sustainable tourism development, one planet tourism – Cornwall Sustainable Tourism project.
- ♣ Add Unit 12 powerpoint and student's work, and Good Traveller Guide competition applications to website.
- ♣ Photo Polish leaflets and add to website. Add selected photos from Adam and Suzy.