

ESTONIA

Quality of life in rural areas and diversification of the rural economy

Location

Lääne-Viru and Järva county

Programming period

2007-2013

Axis / Priority

Axis 2, 3 and 4

Measures

2.5.1 – Establishment and restoration of stonewalls

3.1.1 – Diversification to non agricultural activities
LEADER

Funding

Total budget 276 602 EUR
RDP support 137 531 EUR

Project duration

2010 - 2014

Project promoter

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Natural potential in rural areas often remains unexploited. In this case the construction of a theme park generated interest in the Estonian countryside and attracted visitors while promoting eco-tourism and environmental education.

Summary

This Estonian project covers 3 smaller projects which were implemented under different measures. Through these projects a Theme Park Of Pure Water was created that offers hiking opportunities and outdoor activities with an emphasis on environmental education.



It created a trail, restored stone walls, developed a 'sense garden' and constructed forest huts, as well as developing active-learning programmes and M-learning possibilities. A total of 26 different activities are now offered attracting a greater number of visitors to the area.

Results

The Pure Water Theme Park was created with a focus on clean water. It also addresses the subject of renewable energy sources, such as solar and wind power, offering workshops on the making of windmills, solar panels and steam engines. The park is also pioneering the concept of M-learning -- i.e. learning through the use of the mobile phones and tablets.

Visitors to the park are benefiting from the hiking opportunities and the sense garden. These were created in cooperation with villages from three municipalities and schools in two counties. The park now offers herbal therapy, training in smart technologies and a nature-learning programme.

The end result of these innovations has been an increase in visitor numbers and an increase in economic activity and job creation. The identity of the local population has also been enhanced, providing a good example to neighbouring villages.

Furthermore, the area is now producing its own electricity in a closed network.

Lessons & Recommendations

- ❑ An area of significant natural value can be sustainably utilised, through cooperation and the development of good ideas that benefit the local economy.

Context

Estonia has great natural potential and is home to an ancient forest dating from the 16th century. The forest hosts many plant and tree species, and it is thus ecologically very valuable.

But tourism is very underdeveloped, and the project team believed that a fresh initiative was required to generate interest in the Estonian countryside and to attract visitors. The idea was to encourage eco-tourism and environmental education.

Objectives

The goal of the project was to improve the attractiveness of the region for visitors and to offer new opportunities to local inhabitants.

The aim was to highlight the natural value of the project areas and to demonstrate how they can be sustainably managed. This aim would be reached in a fun, adventurous and modern way that makes active learning attractive to all generations.

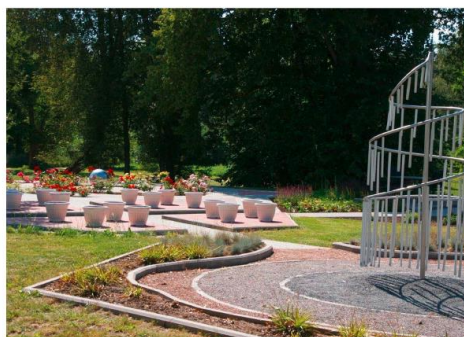
The specific objective was to build a Pure Water Theme Park in order to fulfil these educational aims and to develop sustainable tourism. The park would be targeted at everyone from children to senior citizens.

Activities

The whole project first embarked on the construction of the theme park. It created a hiking trail through the forest park lands that is accessible to disabled people. The trail, which was 45-km long, features information boards and maps. The trail also offers several practical tasks to make it more fun, as well as six observational huts that allow for overnight stays.

The project also developed the park's education centre, which comprises of rooms for training sessions and educational activities. It also devised active-learning programmes on the natural world in line with general school curricula. For disabled people, it created a therapeutic sense garden that engages all the senses.

Furthermore, 1 980 metres of stonewalling were restored on the 90 ha of land. A dedicated website was set up and adjusted for visually impaired people.



Additional sources of information

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