

EPICAH State of Art Report

(To be developed based on existing studies, the policy instrument documents, the online survey results, the local stakeholders group meetings and knowledge and experience of the partners)

Policy instrument addressed	Interreg VA Estonia-Latvia
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Contents

A. Brief characterization of border area	3
B. Brief characterization of the policy instrument addressed and other existing policy / strategic instruments	8
C. Cross-border natural heritage.....	8
D. Cross-border cultural heritage.....	12
E. Cross-border tourism	15
F. Good Practices	18
In the field of cross-border natural heritage	18
In the field of cross-border cultural heritage	19
In the field of cross-border tourism.....	21
G. Other relevant information	24
ANNEX 1 – Map of the cross-border area	25

A. Brief characterization of the border area

1. Brief historical and social background of the area

Estonia and Latvia, the two northernmost Baltic states, share a long common history. The area has since the 13th century been ruled by the Livonian Order, Poland-Lithuania, Sweden and before achieving independence in 1918, the Russian Empire. Both countries were occupied by the USSR between 1945 and 1991 and both re-established independence in 1991. Countries share a 343-kilometre land border and a 214-kilometre sea border.

After regaining independence Latvia and Estonia were physically separated by the national border. The separation lasted from 1991 to 2007. Only in 2007, after joining and implementing the Schengen Agreement, the border crossing regime ceased. The border infrastructure remains, if ever temporary border-control needs to be established in accordance with the Schengen Agreement.

Population

The programme area's population is about 0.44% of the population of the European Union: approximately two million inhabitants in total, of which 0.5 million are on the Estonian side of the border and 1.5 million on the Latvian side (Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia, Statistics Estonia 2012; Eurostat 2016).

The population has decreased gradually due to economic, demographic and migration changes in both countries. According to Estonian and Latvian statistics, the region has lost around 100,000 people since 2007, which makes up as much as 5% of the population in the programme area; and this process continues. The population decrease is especially rapid in rural areas. Both countries, typically to EU, have an aging population.

The population is mainly concentrated in and around two bigger urban areas - Riga in Latvia (which is also national capital) and Tartu in Estonia.

The average population density in the rest of the programme area is only 16-17 inhabitants per km², which means that the area is very sparsely inhabited.

Languages

Estonians and Latvians speak quite different languages - Latvian language (together with Lithuanian) belongs to the Baltic language group inside the Indo-European language family. Meanwhile, the Estonian language is a Finno-Ugric language. Therefore, Estonians and Latvians rarely speak the neighbouring language. There have

not been prominent efforts to popularise Latvian in Estonia and vice versa. University of Tartu does offer Latvian language courses, yet this has had little overall effect. Estonians and Latvians communicate with each other using Russian or English.

Valga-Valka twin town

The town of Walk (in German) was first mentioned in 1286 and from 1419 was the seat of the Landtag of the Livonian Confederation. The town gained its importance only at the end of the 19th century when the Vidzeme teacher's seminary was operating here, and the important railway junction was developed in the town.

On July 1, 1920 the town was divided between the newly-born Latvian and Estonian states and was marked out by an international jury headed by British Colonel Stephen George Tallents.



Photo 1: Border crossing point in Valga-Valka, in 1937.

After the collapse of Soviet Union, both Estonia and Latvia announced their re-independence in 1991 and Valga–Valka were physically separated by the state border and an international border regime. In 2003 the Schengen agreement was signed by both Latvia and Estonia and 4 years later, in 2007 the Schengen area was implemented easing cross-border interactions.

During the years of independence, twins Valga (on Estonian side) and Valka (on Latvian side) have developed as two independent towns with no integrated infrastructure or joint town planning initiatives. After the removal of the border-checks in 2007, the integration of the townscape has restarted. A good example of

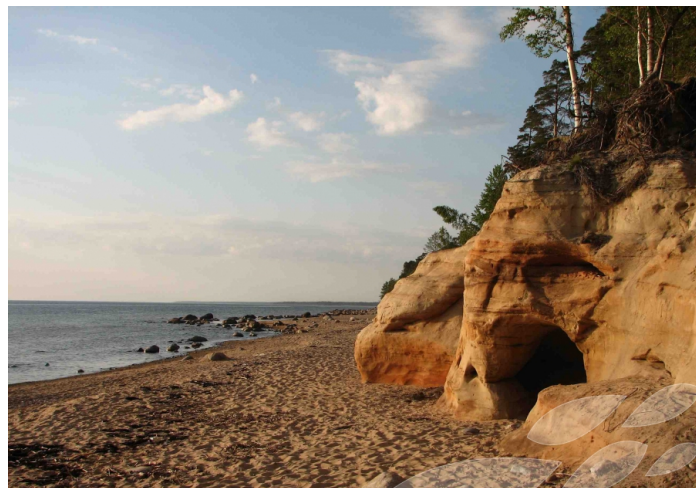
reintegrating the twin town is the construction and joining of the recreation areas along the banks of the Pedeli River.

Pedeli River is a border river that partly forms a natural border in the centre of Valga–Valka. That initiative was co-financed by the Estonia-Latvia Programme 2007-2013. The same programme also supported the renovation of the Valga railway station in Estonia. The station is used by inhabitants of both towns, as there is no railway station in Valka. The initiative also managed to improve studying conditions in Valka art school in Latvia, which has a number of students and teachers from Estonia, as there is no art school in Valga. However, to large extent both towns continue to operate separately and improvements are still needed in communal and other services.

2. Geography of the cross-border area

The Interreg Estonia-Latvia Programme area covers the southern and south-western parts of Estonia and the northern and western parts of Latvia, covering a total amount of 65,968 km², of that 26,668 km² is in Estonia and 39,300 km² is in Latvia. Estonia and Latvia have a 343 km-long land border and a 214 km-long sea border. The territory includes 1,418 islands and islets. The programme area extends as far east as the EU external border with Russia.

The programme's eligible area includes the following NUTS III regions within Estonia: EE008 Lõuna-Eesti (South Estonia) and EE004 Lääne-Eesti (West Estonia) including Hiiu, Jõgeva, Lääne, Põlva, Pärnu, Saare, Tartu, Valga, Viljandi and Võru counties. In Latvia LV003 Kurzeme, LV007 Pierīga, LV006 Rīga and LV008 Vidzeme regions are involved.



Shoreline of the Gulf of Riga.
Photo: www.latvia.travel

The large transport routes of the Via Baltica and Via Hanseatica cross the region from north to south. The programme area includes the large deep-sea ports of Liepāja, Rīga and Ventspils in Latvia. The commercial ports function as parts of an important transit corridor for trade between the European Union and Russia. Transit corridor in Estonia is in northern part of the country and thus outside of the programme area.

3. Geographical and demographic data

Territory designation	NUTS 3	Area (Km ²)	Population (%)							Rate of unemployment (%)			
			Total ('000)	M	F	<15 y	15-24 y	25-65 y	Over 65 y	Average	M	F	15-24 y
Cross-border area		65 968	1920	46,2	53,8	15,5	10,2	54,5	19,7	7,95**	9,15**	7,25**	10,15**
Lääne-Eesti (West Estonia)	EE004	26 668	150	48	52	14,8	10,8	53,4	21	6,8	7,4	6,1	9,1
Lõuna-Eesti (South-Estonia)	EE008		317	47,7	52,3	16	11,4	52,6	20				
Kurzeme	LV003	13 596	251	46,3	53,7	15,5	11,7	52,6	20,2	9,6	10,9	8,4	11,2
Pierīga	LV007	10 132	366	47	53	17,3	10,1	54,9	17,7				
Rīga	LV006		640	44,3	55,7	14,9	8,4	56,7	20				
Vidzeme	LV008	15 246	196	46,9	53,1	14,5	12	53	20,5				

Y=years old; population 15-24y=young people, in the context of unemployment NEET group (neither in education or training). ** The arithmetic average, not the statistical average

Source for population: Eurostat 2016

The programme area is largely a rural one, which also contains the commercial and trading centre of Riga (the capital of Latvia, with a population of about 700,000 inhabitants), the university town of Tartu (the second largest town in Estonia, with a population of around 100,000 inhabitants) and several medium-sized and small regional towns, including the unique bordering twin towns of Valga (Estonia) and Valka (Latvia). The latter two have the potential to grow into one township with an integrated townscape and centre, which would support the mobility of people between towns as well as business development. The regional division of GDP within the programme area is rather uneven, leaving the bigger share to areas around Tartu and Riga.

4. Economy data

Territory designation	Total		Primary ¹		Secondary ²		Tertiary ³	
	Active population ⁴	GDP (total M euro)	Active population ⁴	GDP (M euro)	Active population ⁴	GDP	Active population ⁴	GDP
Cross-border area		25 047,39		744,879		2129,184		6468,78
Lääne-Eesti (West Estonia)	75 000	1 289,04	5 100**	89,47	25 900	447,68	43 400	751,90
Lõuna-Eesti (South-Estonia)	146 800	3 109,16	10 200	221,56	42 500	933,54	93 400	1 954,06
Kurzeme		2 287,829		162,953		414,754		538,613
Pierīga		3 611,709		1 21,150		722,572		903,414
Rīga		13 157,621		71,505		1 191,755		4031,908
Vidzeme		1 592,028		199,391		333,210		242,945

¹Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing
Transports, Tourism, etc
** incomplete data

²Industry

³Services including Public Administration,

⁴Active Population = employed population between 15-65 years old

Source: Eurostat, Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia, Statistics Estonia.

The discrepancies in GDP are especially vivid when comparing GDP per capita. For example, the Riga region sports a GDP per capita of 20 551 euros, whilst the poorest statistical region Vidzeme has more than two times smaller per capita GDP of only 8 061 euros. What is more, Pierīga the area that should benefit greatly from Riga and its commercial markets has a per capita GDP of only 9 843 euros and Kurzeme 9 047 euros of GDP per capita. (Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia, 2016).

For Estonia the data is similar. The biggest GDP per capita is in the city of Tartu with about 18 421 euros. However, as Tartu itself is smaller than the NUTS 3 region part of that statistics goes dramatically down when added to the whole NUTS 3 region. Other counties in two NUTS regions have GDP per capita between 8 061 (Valga county) and 10 679 (Pärnu county). Thus, only the main urban area of Tartu and its surroundings have a GDP per capita of above 15 000 euro. (Statistics Estonia, 2016)

5. Specific characteristics of the Cross-border area

Discussed in the following chapters.

B. Brief characterization of the policy instrument addressed and other existing policy / strategic instruments

“Interreg V-A Estonia–Latvia “ programme aims to strengthen economic, social and territorial cohesion and reduce the urban-rural disparities through supporting the creation of new businesses and joint actions for developing cooperation between entrepreneurs (Priority 1); through developing natural and cultural resources and improving living and visiting environments (Priority 2); through improving small harbours around the Gulf of Riga that would improve local and regional mobility; promote sustainable tourism development and strengthen local economies (Priority 3), through the better integration of labour markets and expanding opportunities for labour commuters (Priority 4).

The Estonia-Latvia Programme 2014-2020 contributes to achieving European Union headline targets listed in the Europe 2020 strategy in the form of the following:

- the priority axis “Active and attractive business environment” and “Integrated labour market” help to decrease unemployment, create new cross-border job opportunities and promote cross-border flows;
- the priority axis “Clean and valued living environment” aims to raise resource efficiency.

In addition, the programme aims to contribute to the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region by means of the following objectives: “Connect the region” and “Increase Prosperity”. The strategy builds on the National Development Plan of Latvia for 2014–2020, the Sustainable Development Strategy of Latvia until 2030, the National Reform Programme “Estonia 2020“, the National Spatial Plan “Estonia 2030+“, as well as relevant thematic strategies.

C. Cross-border natural heritage and the policy instrument

The programme area is characterized by clean natural environment with high levels of bio-diversity, including: large and partially deep forests, picturesque landscapes with numerous rivers, lakes, marshes and bogs on the mainland. The area has



a large coastal area in the west, mainly around the Gulf of Riga and numerous islands in the Baltic Sea. Bilateral cooperation in the field of nature protection has been carried out for almost two decades. The most noticeable example is the North Livonian Transboundary Ramsar Site, which incorporates wetlands on both sides of the border that are of international importance.

The programme area includes two large biosphere reserve areas (the North-Vidzeme and the West-Estonian Archipelago).

Common water resources are shared mainly in two areas: the river basin of Gauja/Koiva which is situated directly on the Estonian-Latvian border (with a total area of 8,900 km², of which 87.6% is on the Latvian side of the border), and the Gulf of Riga.

[Wooden trail at the cross-border Ramsar site.](#)
[Photo: loodusegakoos.ee](#)

In the Gulf of Riga area, the programme is striving to discover solutions that provide an effective response to ecological accidents and pollution risks. The Baltic Sea is famously prone to pollution risks because of its minor access to oceanic salt water. Because of the minor water exchange and high number of people living on the river basins feeding the Baltic Sea, the quality of water and water resource management has always been a high priority for international cooperation.

Both countries are of the same opinion when it comes to promoting environmentally friendly and attractive living conditions. Ecological footprint accounts for households may be introduced for the distribution of a sustainable lifestyle. Such accounts would improve the awareness of households when it comes to the impact of individual consumption by households on the planet's natural capital.

Environmental education continues to be a significant promoter of a sustainable lifestyle, educating pupils and their parents about the necessity of and options available for changing their everyday behaviour, saving money, as also to promote participation in activities that involve a sustainable lifestyle. Small-scale investments that support

and promote the practical benefits of energy saving could supplement awareness-raising activities.

Identified challenges and opportunities related to the environment:

- Relatively low levels of awareness about the long-term benefits of recycling, energy saving and environmentally-responsible behaviour, which results in a careless attitude and wasting resources in everyday life.
- A lack of joint systems for managing common water resources in the sea area. Underused potential of joint maritime planning.
- Advanced cooperation in terms of preserving and developing the existing natural and cultural resources for the diversified use of sites, making them visible for visitors and creating more benefits for local communities.
- Investing both in tangible and intangible cultural heritage when it comes to integrating the programme area, increasing its attractiveness for visitors and improving the quality of the living environment.
- Providing systematic theoretical and practical knowledge about sustainable ways of living in order to change human behaviour, including examples of using innovative technologies and the exchange of good practice.
- Improving, linking and revitalising cross-border urban space on the border of Estonia and Latvia in the middle of Valga–Valka twin town.

Project Gauja/Koiva. In the project "Gauja/Koiva" partners from Estonia and Latvia aimed to further the management of Gauja/Koiva river basin by implementing several joint actions and producing important outputs. For example, joint GIS maps for the whole Gauja/Koiva river basin district were created; an overview of existing methods on the water quality status and typology was produced, new data from monitoring and investigatory activities were obtained to assess the quality status, proposals for necessary changes to harmonize typology and quality classification were elaborated etc. During the project a closer cooperation between Estonian and Latvian scientists was established, particularly to develop common classification system for biological elements of river and lake water bodies. Due to performed intensive investigations in lakes, rivers and coastal waters, the project obtained needed information on the status of the transboundary water bodies shared between two countries, for which sufficient information has been lacking so far. Thus, in long-term the inhabitants and businesses of the Gauja/Koiva basin will have a more economical water management system. Project was financed by the Estonia - Latvia Programme 2007-2013.

Project Riverways. Rivers, lakes and coastline are important resources for the Programme area, especially as it supports water tourism development. Both in Latvia and Estonia water tourism is a part of active, adventure and nature tourism with high development potentials. Water tourism infrastructure was developed, stakeholders and

enterprises trained, joint marketing activities carried out. Project was financed by the Estonia – Latvia Programme 2007-2013.

Green Corridor. In a joint project of the Latvian Nature Conservation Agency and Estonian Environmental Board, partners identified and mapped key ecosystems, habitats, and species in the border areas and developed a joint plan for protection of biological and landscape diversity in the border region. Project was financed by the Estonia - Latvia Programme 2007-2013.

D. Cross-border cultural heritage and the policy instrument

The Estonia - Latvia Programme area is known for its unique cultural heritage, including maritime heritage. It involves historic fishing villages along the shared coastline as well as the culture of the Livs, who lived in north-west Latvia and south-west Estonia, the Suitsi Cultural Space (which has been placed on the UNESCO List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding since 2009), the Kihnu Cultural Space on Kihnu Island (which since 2003 has been on the UNESCO list of Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity) and Seto Culture in south-eastern Estonia (which has been listed since 2009 as Intangible Cultural Heritage).

However, the regions and communities are still not making full use of the potential of existing natural and cultural resources and of the fact that the common cultural and natural space does not end with the borders of a county, region or member state. The sites are often situated in



[Seto women in traditional costumes.](#)

Photo: www.visitsetomaa.ee

relatively remote areas and lack a range of related

infrastructure and services that could help to attract visitors. What is more, these sites usually also lack concepts that would link the existing sites into joint cross-border routes or packages. In addition to protecting and maintaining these areas, there is a need for an intelligent wide use of tangible and intangible common heritage in order to strengthen the area's unique identity and stimulate local communities. If done, the communities could benefit from existing privileges and cooperate more intensively with similar communities on the other side of the border.

The development of new and complex services for preserving and promoting natural, cultural and maritime heritage serves the communities in return. In addition to creating positive impact on local economies, it raises the attractiveness of the living environment (inviting young professionals and families to move into rural areas) and serves to unite people within the programme area. In managing natural and cultural heritage, the sustainable use of NATURA 2000 and other protected areas is ensured. The previous Estonia-Latvia programme made steps towards unifying the cultural and

natural heritage potential from both sides of the border in the frames of several projects that laid a good basis for further development of this field and creation of strong and sustainable thematic networks.

Project “Cultural Heritage”. A group of ethnographers, archaeologists, foresters and other experts, as well as the local people with their local knowledge and collective memory were involved. All in all, people from various regions of Latvia and Estonia got involved in revealing and mapping previously unidentified objects. The focus was primarily on cultural sites found in nature. After a comprehensive field work, altogether around 20 000 cultural heritage sites were revealed in both countries, inserted into an electronic database, and their protection was further discussed with the relevant institutions responsible for cultural heritage preservation. Various public activities were organized to increase people's environmental awareness and knowledge on local cultural heritage. Project was financed by the Estonia - Latvia Programme 2007-2013.

Project “Seto-Suiti renaissance”. Seto and Suiti are small ethnic groups, who share common problems and challenges related to teaching culture and traditions to new generations, as well as preservation of traditional architecture. What is more, the groups also struggle to make information about their history and culture available for different target groups. Together partners were looking for the best solutions and ideas for dissemination of information about cultural heritage, for preservation and promotion of traditional architecture and for integrating heritage culture lessons to the educational programmes. Project was financed by the Estonia - Latvia Programme 2007-2013..

Project “SDF - Song and Dance Festivals”. The project was implemented to activate cultural life and stimulate cultural exchange in the Estonian-Latvian border area. Altogether around 3000 participants from both countries participated in various singing and dancing events organized in Estonia and Latvia. Thanks to the project, people from small villages and remote border felt that the song and dance festivals are a commonality between the countries. What is more, due to the heightened participation in cross-border activities many communities, groups and people have established new contacts and friendships. Various amateur groups continue to cooperate beyond the project. Project was financed by the Estonia - Latvia Programme 2007-2013..

Project “Singing neighbours”. This cooperation project helped to build many new cross-border contacts, meanwhile strengthening the local cultural identities and sustaining choral music traditions in Estonia and Latvia. During the project, five children and youth choirs from Estonia and Latvia developed and furthered a close cooperation. They spent time together in joint camps and rehearsals where they learned both Latvian and Estonian songs, along with some basics of each other's language. In

the following joint concerts, the Latvian children performed the Estonian music (and vice versa) with the same enthusiasm as when singing their own well-known songs. What is more, within the project framework, workshops and trainings for conductors were organized and a new Estonian-Latvian songbook was compiled and published. The project closed with an emotional festival in Baldone, where all the choirs joined in a traditional festival parade and a large concert. Project was financed by the Estonia - Latvia Programme 2007-2013.

E. Cross-border tourism and the policy instrument

The region is known for its unique cultural heritage and natural richness and thus also one of the targets of the Estonia - Latvia Programme is tourism based on cultural and natural heritage.

Main stakeholders are Estonian and Latvian Tourist Boards, Rural Tourism organizations, regional and county tourism organizations, local municipalities, tourism schools, enterprises and local communities.

Main cross-border activities are based on EU projects as these are remote areas lacking enough resources for tourism development. Main funds are received from the following cross-border and transnational cooperation programmes: Estonia – Latvia, Estonia – Latvia - Russia, Central Baltic and Baltic Sea Programme.

Main problems are the lack of resources and connectivity. There are not enough resources available for tourism development in both countries for the border-region. Usually those resources are spent promoting easily accessible areas and capital cities. According to the development of international tourism routes the main roads were risen in priorities and reconstructed by government. Foreign tourists can visit the region by car or by bus, but there is not yet joint trainlines passing both countries, no ship/ferry lines, no airlines. Combining many modes of transport to visit the border area demands effort, patience and time. Thus, it is difficult to market the area without specific target groups in mind and a functioning plan and infrastructure in place.

Problems are also related to the joint development of tourism, as there are no joint cross-border strategies and action plans. Tourism projects are planned according to the ideas of a project partner with a better strategy or human resources, but once an initial project plan is formed, its internationalisation and finding equally good solutions for

Cycling in Estonia

Photo: www.visitestonia.com



both sides is usually complicated.

Also differences in legislation can cause difficulties. Even though countries share the EU acquis, detailed domestic procedures and laws can cause ineffectiveness and problems if there is no network in place.

For example, problems

have risen due to different procurement laws, or simply because of different cultural background and language. Often enough, the solutions are found thanks to a tight network that unites different stakeholders with professional knowledge in their fields of expertise.

All in all, cooperation improves with every experience and project. Now there are more and more joint activities and several tourism products have been and are being developed in the framework of cross-border cooperation:

- **Twin-towns Valga (EE)–Valka (LV)** position themselves as one destination: “One town, two countries”. Main attraction is the Estonian-Latvian border that runs just across the streets in the centre of the town. Valga–Valka also has good examples of the development of the neoclassicism in Baltic architecture.
- **Tourism route Via Hanseatica.** The tourism route that connects Riga and St. Petersburg includes region's cultural and natural tourist attractions and events, highlighting the uniqueness of each country, thus creating particularly attractive tourism destination. Via Hanseatica markets the route as one discoverable trail, trying to get tourists outside of the capital cities and exploring the heritage and history of the region.
- **Cycling route “Tour de LatEst”** criss-crosses through two countries – Latvia and Estonia. The total length of the route is 1075 km. By going on this tour, tourists can learn about the heritage and cultural history of Latvians and Estonians, visit the most popular tourism objects and national parks and see the daily lives of the local inhabitants. Project was financed by the Estonia - Latvia Programme 2007-2013.
- **Project “Heritage Tourism”.** In this project, small rural enterprises were targeted to participate in consultations and trainings about the use of national heritage in tourism service design. Project was financed by Interreg Central Baltic programme 2007-2013.

At the moment there are five new tourism projects going on within Interreg Estonia – Latvia Programme 2014-2020:

- **“Coastal Hiking”** – development of joint hiking route along the coast through Latvia and Estonia.
- **“Industrial Heritage”** – revival of industrial heritage objects for tourism development in Estonia and Latvia.
- **“Livonian Culinary Route”** – development of food tourism.
- **“Green Railway”** – development of new cycling and hiking route along former railway lines.
- **“UNESCO-Tourism”** – developing tourism products based on UNESCO cultural heritage sites in Estonia and Latvia.

- “**Valga–Valka Centre**” – development of joint town centre of Valga-Valka twin town.

F. Good Practices

In the field of cross-border natural heritage

Towards joint management of the transboundary Gauja/Koiva river basin district

Partners: Latvian Institute of Aquatic Ecology (LV), Baltic Environmental Forum - Estonia (EE) Baltic Environmental Forum - Latvia (LV) Estonian University of Life Sciences (EE) Institute of Biology, University of Latvia (LV) Ministry of the Environmental Protection and Regional Development (LV) Tallinn University of Technology (EE).

Description: The river basin district Gauja/Koiva is transboundary, shared between two countries - Estonia and Latvia. Even though a majority of the basin lies in Latvia, the waters from Latvia flow into Gulf of Riga, which also is shared by both countries. Due to stream directions, the waters from Latvia are brought to Estonian coasts before the



River Gauja near Sigulda, Latvia.

Photo: tourism.sigulda.lv

stream directs the waters to the open Baltic. Thus, it is essential to cooperate and agree on environmental objectives. Furthermore, it is important that people living in the river basin know the shared waters and know how they can improve the situation by using water resources better.

In the project "Gauja/Koiva", partners from Estonia and Latvia united efforts aiming to enhance the management of Gauja/Koiva river basin by implementing several joint actions and producing important outputs. For example, joint GIS maps for the whole Gauja/Koiva river basin district were created; an overview of existing methods on the water quality status and typology was produced, new data from monitoring and investigatory activities were obtained to assess the quality status, proposals for necessary changes to harmonize typology and quality classification were elaborated etc. During the project a closer cooperation of Estonian and Latvia scientists was established in particular in development of the common classification system for biological elements of river and lake water bodies. Thanks to the intensive investigations and analysis of lakes, rivers and coastal waters, the project obtained

needed information on the status of the transboundary water bodies. Sufficient information had previously been lacking. Thus, in long-term the inhabitants and business of the Gauja/Koiva basin will have more economical water management system. The project provided very valuable results for state authorities. With the provided information the authorities can elaborate the river basin management plan of Gauja/Koiva river. The project delivered proposals on coordinated and harmonised methodologies and tools for river basin management planning.

More information on project website: <http://gauja.balticrivers.eu/>

Budget: 865 585 €, ERDF contribution within Est-Lat CBC programme: 718 435€.

In the field of cross-border cultural heritage

UNESCO Tourism Development and promotion of small ethno-cultural regions as tourism destinations

Partners: Alsunga Municipality Council (LV), Dundaga Municipality (LV), Ethnic Culture Centre "Suiti" (LV), Foundation Kihnu Cultural Space (EE), Kihnu Municipality Council (EE), Kuldiga District Council (LV), Meremäe Municipality Council (EE), Seto Institute Foundation (EE), Setomaa Tourism NGO (EE), The Latvian Country Tourism Association "Lauku ceļotājs" (LV), Vārskā Municipality Council (EE), Ventspils County Municipality (LV).

Description: Project is implemented during 2017-2020 and aims to further the potential of small ethnic culture regions in Estonia and Latvia included/applying to the UNESCO List of Intangible Cultural Heritage as tourism destinations. The objective is to create a sustainable tourism product involving small ethnic culture regions that lean on the uniqueness of “living cultures”.

There are 4 unique regions in Estonia and Latvia – Setomaa, Kihnu, Suiti and Livi coast. In these regions local people still use cultural heritage in daily life. Old traditions are alive, including singing and dancing traditions, national costumes, celebrating religious and traditional holidays, food and handicraft traditions etc. Three of them (Setomaa, Kihnu and Suiti regions) are included to the UNESCO List of Intangible Cultural Heritage. Livi coast, which includes 12 Livi villages, is applying and trying to get included to the list. What is more, the old-Võrumaa smoke-sauna tradition was recently included to the list, this tradition is also alive in Setomaa. The potential of unique cultural heritage and well-known UNESCO-label in promotion of those regions as tourism destination has been underused both in domestic and foreign markets.

By offering a joint holistic and attractive tourism product it is easier for the visitors to acquire and access these experiences.



As a result of the project, the partners formulate joint product and marketing themes which combine local cultural heritage, services offered by local tourism businesses and attractive sites to an integrated tourism offer.

Total budget: 1 123 547 €, ERDF contribution within Est-Lat programme: 955 015 €.

In the field of cross-border tourism

ViSoEst by Bike (Go Cycling through Vidzeme and South-Estonia)

Partnership: Amata Municipality Council (LV), Ape Regional Council (LV), Gulbene Municipality Council (LV), Latvian Tourism Development Agency (LV), Madona Regional Council (LV), Mālpils Regional Council Ogre Regional Council (LV), Sigulda Regional Council (LV), Valga County Government (EE), Valka Municipality (LV).



Cross-border cycling route Tour de LatEst.

Description: To popularise cycling tourism in the region of Vidzeme and Southern Estonia, this project connected bike roads and smaller routes in both countries and developed an impressive cross-border route Tour de LatEst. This route goes through both countries and is 1296 km long. It is very versatile - by taking this route, one can learn about heritage and cultural history of Latvians and Estonians, visit popular tourism objects, as well as see the daily lives of the local inhabitants. The route crosses several protected natural territories of European importance – national and nature parks, scenic areas, and a biosphere reserve. The project involved comprehensive route preparation and testing work, as well as lots of technical adjustments - over thousand special road signs for Tour de LatEst route were installed in both countries, around 60 informative stands were placed throughout the whole route. What is more, almost two hundred bicycle parking places were installed and more than thirty resting places were created. Technical projects were made for improving the road quality in future. Tour de LatEst route has been widely promoted by route-map and guiding brochure in Latvian,

Lithuanian, Estonian, English, Finnish, Russian and German. These materials have been distributed in tourism info centres and municipalities, as well as during route presentations in variety of international thematic events in Helsinki, Utrecht, Tartu, Riga, Hamburg, Tallinn and Vilnius. Tour de LatEst was officially launched with an opening marathon in July 2010, where around 100 participants tested the whole route. There has been extensive publicity for the route, as well as for its notable opening marathon. At the end of the project, a conference was organized to discuss the future of the cycling tourism in the region and to brainstorm for ideas to develop it further.

Read more: <http://tourdelatest.vidzeme.com/en/>

Budget: 1 703 139 €, ERDF contribution within Est-Lat programme: 1 447 668 €.

Advancing remote areas by developing cross-border VH tourism route based on local resources (VIA HANSEATICA)

Partners: Vidzeme Planning Region (LV), Committee for Culture of the Leningrad Region Administration (RU), NGO International Centre for Social and Economic Research “Leontief Centre” (RU), Valga County Development Agency (EE), Foundation Tartu County Tourism (EE), Jõgeva County Development and Enterprise Centre (EE), Ida-Viru Enterprise Centre (EE) with 11 local and 22 associated partners.



Cross-border tourism route Via Hanseatica.

The “Via Hanseatica” project has become a unique, 580 km long international tourism route, linking undiscovered tourism pearls in remote regions of Latvia, Estonia and Russia. The main task was to route the tourism flow outside of the capital regions by offering unique experience. What is more, through the experiences the tourists can experience the diverse cultures standing side by side.

Route website travel.viahanseatica.info helps to plan your individual trip based on special interests or use predefined thematic routes named “Culture to greet, people to meet”, “Adventure in nature” and “Family Fun”. Via Hanseatica mobile application both for iOS and Android mobile phones was also developed and works both online and offline. In addition, a tourism map in 6 languages was printed and 8 videoclips have been produced to promote the Via Hanseatica route.

As many representatives from different countries were involved, one of the challenges was to create a common understanding of high quality tourism services. It was achieved by organizing joint thematic workshops and activities for the project partners and other involved stakeholders.

Investments in the small-scale infrastructure have been implemented as well, resulting in 12 improved tourism objects. Altogether 208 road signs, 41 direction signs, 22 information boards and 9 information terminals have been installed to promote the Via Hanseatica. These betterments also rise the visibility of Via Hansaeatica and serve as investments into local tourism development.

Read more. www.viahanseatica.info

Budget: 1 803 966 €, ERDF contribution within the ENPI Estonia-Latvia-Russia Cross Border Cooperation Programme 1.623.569, 66 €.

G. Other relevant information

Transportation and mobility, urban areas and peripheries, etc

The interregional mobility when it comes to public has been on the rise. In part, it is due to the general trend of globalisation. But also, because of the attractiveness of Riga airport for Estonian and Latvian commuters, the Tartu-Valga-Valmiera-Riga line is decently serviced by international bus routes. Most of the problems for locals as well as the tourists is that the market for transport services is small. With the region being a home to only 2 million people one cannot expect many convenient connections in a day.

Local transport is sparse. While local buses service villages and county centres actively, it still only amounts to bigger villages getting only a few connections a day. Thus, for tourists or locals to commute a certain independent mode of transport is often needed. Estonia has been trying to promote a park-and-drive system when it comes to trains. Locked mobile parking places for bikes in the train stations have been installed and these have gained seasonal popularity. However, trainlines cover only part of the project area. Thus, every project has to take into consideration the potential hurdles of transport. With cycling tourism, ample availability of rest areas and connected services has proved cycling a viable transportation mode option for the tourists in the region.

However, cycling or driving will alienate a portion of potential tourist base. Tourist-oriented services and development plans have to either acknowledge these limitations and the specifics of the target group or offer copious amounts of information and alternatives.

ANNEX 1 – Map of the Estonia – Latvia Programme area



