Country report Latvia

Sector-Specific Skills Development inCoastal and Maritime Tourism: Occupational profiles

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Summary in English

This report explores sector-specific skills and qualifications in coastal and maritime tourism in Latvia.The report is part of the Erasmus + Strategic Partnership Skills4CMT project.

The aim of the project is to develop sector-specific skills, enhance the quality and digitalisation of thematic higher education in coastal and maritime tourism in European cold-water destinations. The research aim was to increase understanding of necessary sector-specific skills and qualifications in coastal and maritime tourism in Latvia to tackle skills gaps and mismatches. The research was performed in the same period of time in all the project partner countries - Latvia, Finland, Estonia, the Netherlands, and Ireland. The results are merged and translated into a new sector-specific curriculum and courses in coastal and maritime tourism.

To reach the aim a desk research was performed by analysing the content of the existing curricula, tourism-related strategies and reports. New data were collected with 6 expert interviews and a focus group discussion with 4 experts.

Based on all collected data occupational profiles were developed. They contain description and provisioning of the knowledge, skills and competencies. The results show that such aspects as digitalisation, trend matching tourism product development and cooperation are the most important key words that characterize coastal and maritime tourism development in Latvia. We have to emphasize that themes highlighted by this research are not new, situations reveal unsolved systemic problems.

The results suggest that skills related to hospitality, product design and marketing (especially digital marketing) are essential.

This means that understanding and adapting to the changing needs of customers that are currently shaped by legal requirements that determine the external environment in tourism business in coastal areas is of high importance. Understanding, integration and interpretation of the unique resources of coastal and maritime surroundings is significant, however - based on a product and provider's motivation. The local natural and cultural heritage are the buildings blocks of product development.

Stakeholder cooperation and networking is strongly highlighted in coastal and marine surroundings, since there is a variety of different stakeholders sharing the same territory with different values and aims. This aspect also included problem solving and openness to share the experiences. All stakeholders should also have knowledge of specific legislation and understand its influence on their business activities.

Another layer is connected with the ability to foresight and develop a vision of inclusive development of coastal destinations to achieve sustainable development goals.

Kopsavilkums

Šajā ziņojumā tiek pētītas specifiskās zināšanas, prasmes un kompetences piekrastes tūrisma jomā Latvijā. Šis ziņojums ir daļa no projekta Erasmus + Stratēģiskās partnerības prasmes4CMT projekta.

Projekta mērķis ir attīstīt nozaru prasmes, uzlabot tematiskās augstākās izglītības kvalitāti un digitalizāciju piekrastes tūrismā Eiropas galamērķos. Šī pētījuma mērķis bija uzlabot izpratni par nepieciešamajām nozaru specifiskajām zināšanām, prasmēm un kompetencēm piekrastes tūrismā Latvijā, lai risinātu trūkstošā izglītības piedāvājuma jautājumus. Pētījums tika veikts vienlaikus posmā visās projekta partnervalstīs - Latvijā, Somijā, Igaunijā, Nīderlandē un Īrijā. Rezultāti tiks apkopoti, analizēti un pārveidoti par jaunu tematisku tūrisma nozares mācību programmu un kursiem piekrastes un jūras tūrismā.

Lai sasniegtu šo mērķi, tika veikta dokumentu izpēte, mācību programmu satura analīze, ar tūrismu saistīto stratēģiju un ziņojumu analīze. Jauni dati tika vākti, izmantojot ekspertu intervijas (n=6) un fokusa grupas diskusiju (n=1, dalībnieku skaits - 4).

Pamatojoties uz visiem apkopotajiem datiem, tika izstrādāti profesiju profili. Tie satur zināšanu, prasmju un kompetenču aprakstu. Rezultāti rāda, ka tādi aspekti kā digitalizācija, tendenču pārzināšana tūrisma produktu izstrādē un sadarbība ir vissvarīgākie atslēgas vārdi, kas raksturo piekrastes tūrisma attīstību Latvijā. Mums jāuzsver, ka šī pētījuma iezīmētās tēmas nav jaunas, situācijas atklāj neatrisinātas sistēmiskas problēmas.

Rezultāti liecina, ka prasmes, kas saistītas ar viesmīlību, produktu dizainu un mārketingu (īpaši digitālo mārketingu), ir būtiskas. Tas nozīmē, ka ir ļoti svarīgi izprast un pielāgoties klientu mainīgajām vajadzībām, kuras patlaban nosaka likumdošanas prasības, kas nosaka ārējo vidi tūrisma biznesā piekrastes rajonos. Tomēr ir svarīgi izprast, integrēt un interpretēt piekrastes un jūras apkārtnes unikālos resursus - pamatojoties uz produktu un pakalpojumu sniedzēja motivāciju. Vietējais dabas un kultūras mantojums ir produkta attīstības sastāvdaļa.

Iesaistīto pušu sadarbība un sadarbības tīkla veidošana ir ļoti nozīmīga, jo piekrastes teritorijās ir daudz dažādu spēlētāju ar dažādām vērtībām un mērķiem. Šis aspekts ietver arī problēmu risināšanu un atvērtību dalīties pieredzē. Visām iesaistīajām pusēm vajadzētu būt arī zināšanām par normatīvajiem aktiem, kuru darbība attiecināma uz teritoriju, īpaši jāsaprot ietekme uz uzņēmējdarbību.

Vēl viens slānis ir saistīts ar spēju paredzēt un izstrādāt vīziju par iekļaujošu piekrastes galamērķu attīstību, lai sasniegtu ilgtspējīgas attīstības mērķus.

Content

Introduction

There is no doubt that in regards to travel preferences - coastal and maritime locations are the most demanded not just in European context, but also worldwide. But we can not forget that tourism is multifaceted activity and usage of resource potential differs from destination to destination. Even in similar destinations historical development of coastal and maritime tourism differs a lot.

In the case of Latvia, internal and external experts often emphasize that especially seacoast and related resources are unused. Despite the fact that the seashore of Latvia has approximately 500 km long with perfect sandy of a bit stony beaches there is just one international level destination - seaside resort city Jurmala and some other destinations of national level significance.

There is a role of historical context as during soviet occupation period (1945 -1991) the seacoast was considered as strategic, military territory (especially Western coast of Latvia), it has been a closed zone with restricted access. As a result nowadays coastal territories are rich with natural heritage, military and fisherman culture heritage, however the density of population and settlements is rather low.

230 km (49%) of Latvian seashore are territories with some nature protection status which means legal limitation of economic activities. Surely that the above mentioned impacts development of tourism services and offer.

Recently tourism offered in other coastal (including inland waters) and maritime territories in Latvia is based on nature, rural, adventure tourism. In the context of COVID-19 pandemic it has been more resilient than traditional mass tourism resorts with large infrastructure objects. One of the recent projects that has raised interest about the seaside as a travel destination is Baltic Coastal hiking (Jūrtaka, https://baltictrails.eu) during which the 1420 km long hiking trail along the Batic sea coast was developed and marked in nature.

There is no specific educational offer in the form of higher education program of specialization within other study programs in regards to coastal and maritime tourism. However the coverage of tourism and business education in general is good, also offer competence development within life-long learning offer (courses, projects).

In the European Strategy for More Growth and Jobs in Coastal and Maritime Tourism it has been stated that education should be used to match the supply of skills with the demand of the labour market. Different research activities were performed to increase understanding of these skills and qualifications in coastal and maritime tourism to identify needs and skills gaps. The same research was undertaken in Finland, Estonia, Latvia, the Netherlands, and Ireland during spring 2021.

In Latvia, the research was performed from the geographical perspective including various coastal and maritime tourism destinations representing the whole territory of the sea-coast, and also some more well developed inland water coast territories. Research activities

contribute to the objective of the Erasmus + Strategic Partnership Skills4CMT project: to develop sector-specific skills and the quality and digitalisation of thematic higher education in coastal and maritime tourism in European cold-water destinations.

Research Aim

The research aim is to increase understanding of necessary sector-specific skills and qualifications in coastal and maritime tourism in Latvia to tackle skills gaps and mismatches. **The research question is:** What knowledge, skills and competencies are needed when a person works as a resort manager, a micro entrepreneur offering blue experiences or a sustainability manager in the context of coastal and marine tourism?

This increased understanding is used to design occupational profiles (including description of the knowledge, skills and competencies in coastal and maritime tourism) which are designed in the context of European skills, competences, qualifications and occupation (ESCO) reference tools to ensure further validation.

The key occupations chosen for the development of occupational profiles in this research are:

1. **resort manager responsible for destination planning and development;**
2. **micro entrepreneur offering blue experiences;**
3. **sustainability manager.**

In this report, a clear distinction was made between the roles, knowledge, skills and competencies of three above mentioned occupations. It is obvious that there will be some overlapping of the knowledge, skills and competences as sometimes in reality in smaller destinations under the one title there are many functions hidden. The occupational roles are more specialised and distinct in larger destinations characterised with a rich variety of companies and with well-resourced professional managed DMO's.

The occupational profiles (see Table 1.) tourism education and training providers to understand what skills the labour markets need from both employees and employers perspectives. Besides, the occupational profiles improve higher education institutions' capacity to match skills and jobs and provides them labour market intelligence on current and future skills requirements.

Table 1. Descriptions of occupational profiles used in SKILLS 4CMT project

A resort manager in a coastal and maritime destination
Operates on a destination level. She/he is responsible for strategic tourism management and development in a particular area and ensures that all tourism stakeholders have a common goal. She/he is in charge of managing and implementing the national/regional/local tourism strategies for destination development, marketing and promotion.She/he often works in municipalities or in destination marketing organisations
A micro-entrepreneur offering blue experiences
Identifies and exploits business opportunities and creates added value by using blue resources innovatively.

A sustainability manager*
An expert who works in an organisation (commercial company or DMO) committed to sustainability. In larger organisations, sustainability issues can be one's full-time job but in smaller organisations one might be responsible for a variety of different business activities, of which improving sustainability is just one of the duties. A sustainability manager working in the context of blue economy manages and improves organisation's environmental, social, and economic impact as well as ensures the sustainability of business practices

There has been discussion among the project partners to use more precise title "consult" or "broker", which if we take in account the current situation in tourism (huge proportion of SME's or even mirco-enterprises) would be more relevant.

Data collection and analysis process

Data collection process consisted of three phases:
1. Desk research;
2. Expert interviews in depth;
3. Focus group discussion.

In the **desk research** we have focused on:
1. National and regional strategic planning documents for coastal areas / areas including coastal territories analysis as well as development strategies for coastal towns (Liepāja, Jūrmala);
2. Formal and life-long education offer analysis;
3. Relevant projects - related to coastal territories, blue economies.

The documents were reviewed and those indicating different aspects of coastal and maritime development, blue economies (skills gaps, situation descriptions, needs analysis etc.) were chosen for further analysis.

The interviews were conducted in the period of Spring 2021. The participants **(n=6)** were selected with highest accuracy to ensure that whole territory representatives and a wide range of stakeholders are included:
1. **1,** SME (accommodation) board member & active participant in several tourism NGOs (Rural territory);
2. **1,** manager of Municipal agency for tourism and entrepreneurship development, TIC, coastal tourism cluster representative regional tourism association board member (Town, regional body)
3. **2,** TIC, department of tourism and entrepreneurship development- department manager & senior expert in tourism (Sea side resort city)
4. **1,** NGO and SME of rural tourism, HEI, tour guide, tourist route developer in coastal areas, business consultant
5. **1,** Government agency of Nature protection (Coordinator of North Vidzeme Biosphere reserve)

We want to emphasize that the **majority of informants share different roles within their professional duties,** for example, work for private companies and NGO etc. This aspect ensures that various viewpoints are represented. It is important to note that informants also shared some of the research data gathered by their organizations, this also contributed to the desk research.

The informants were asked about their current situation and future vision, impacts of COVID-19 pandemic, sustainability, and skills and knowledge required in coastal and maritime tourism. The emerging themes were identified, grouped together and summarised. Also in focusgroup discussion we used occupation profiles identified in project and asked informants to describe needed knowledge and skills from their perspective.

The focus group was organised in 7.05.2021. online Participants (n=4) were selected by the same criteria as for the interviews.

1. **1,** DMO (Tourism development expert, Tourism project manager);
2. **1**, HEI (researcher, HEI, representative of UNESCO Chair in Biosphere and Man;
3. **1,** TIC, close to capital (tourist generating area), territory with rich and stable cultural heritage resources and tourism traditions;
4. **1,** TIC, peripheral, destination which is just developing.

All data was analysed and summarized in a form of conclusions and profiles.

Limitations

It is important to note that in June 2021 national administrative-territorial reform will be finished and there are still numerous uncertain aspects, especially in destination management level (roles, responsibilities, organization etc.). This aspect also did not have a very positive effect on the informants motivation to express their opinion as they are directly involved.

Desk research results

It is obvious that in the case of Latvia coastal and maritime tourism has not been emphasized as something specific in a strategic planning, educational offer and project context.

Tourism development strategies, also for the coastal territories, do not integrate the "coastal" or "blue" aspect in the terms of skills, knowledge and competences. Similarly, previous studies (BOOSTED, SPECHALE, Entrepreneurs survey in Limbaži (Eastern coast or Riga Gulf) district etc.) regarding lifelong learning connected with entrepreneurial needs and motivation to learn and obtain support from public organizations, demand in tourism or other educational needs do not refer to specific competences related to management or entrepreneurship in coastal areas.

Tourism projects aimed to develop tourism in coastal areas refer to the coastline; however, no focus to the specific education needed to develop tourism (military tourism, nature tourism) in the area. Specifically, at the company level there is a need to have rapid consultation instead of study courses in regards or topical, "hot" themes that appear and disappear continuously due to changes in external environment(e.g. how to organize tourism services for persons who need self-isolation, how to apply to certain funds etc.). Entrepreneurs prefer individual consulting instead of courses or seminars in bigger groups.

National and regional level strategic Planning documents (*National long-term thematic plan for the development of public infrastructure on the Baltic Sea coast*) emphasize Baltic Sea coast as a significant territory of economic activity important for tourism and recreation, however, the plans are focused on the development of infrastructure, in the coastal areas. The planning documents allow us to make general conclusions after the infrastructure (yacht ports, cycling infrastructure, roads, walking paths etc.) would be established till 2030, there will be a need for related skills.

In formal and life-long education (implemented by NGOs and relevant projects) in tourism , no direct link to the "blue" or "coastal" aspect management in tourism or leisure can be found. Current offer and also demand is related to general management aspects, hospitality, digital marketing, service design. Life-long learning offer was implemented in the form of modules or single lectures on the topic.

Relevant **formal educational** offers were found by researching curriculums of **higher education institutions**. In context of destination management, the offer is covered in Master level programs (strategic management). Skills, knowledge and competencies associated with **Entrepreneur producing blue experiences** are covered in Bachelor level programmes however in none of them the focus specifically on Blue experiences can be found. **Sustainability manager in Latvia** is a relatively new concept without professional standards. Formal education offer is relatively covered in a few Master level programmes with high focus on environmental aspects.

Overall previous studies, planning documents and educational programs identify areas of competences related to weaknesses in entrepreneurship or destination management and sustainability management; however, there are no indications on demand in terms of blue resources and blue economy.

Analysis of relevant projects revealed results, that the majority of projects associated with tourism development of coastal areas are focused on infrastructure, development of tourist routes etc. As one of the rare, more directly linked project we have identified project RETROUT (Interreg, 2018 - 2020), implemented by Kurzeme Planning region and partners which aims to develop and promote the Baltic Sea region as a final destination for coastal fishing tourism, focusing on sea trout as a product of coastal fishing tourism, to develop sustainable and efficient management methods focused on sea trout, to strengthen the Baltic Sea region fishing tourism management framework. The outputs of the projects are: research of the impact of fishing tourism on the economy of destination, handbook for fishing tourism development, video lectures and seminars for entrepreneurs.

There are several ongoing tourism entrepreneur education linked projects (e.g. SPECHALE (Erasmus +Vidzeme planning region) etc.), however no direct link or emphasis on the coastal development has been detected.

Interview results and Focus group discussion results

Despite the fact that coastal resources (500 km seashore) and inland water (lakes, rivers) shores are significant resources they have not been perceived as something above in comparison with other natural territories. Intensive coastal tourism development (appearance of new companies and offers) has not been observed in the recent years due to market saturation, existing companies adjust their product or even close business (aging of entrepreneurs, depopulation of countryside). Tourism enterprises, destination management organizations in general face the same problems, that are mainly not grounded in location or resource aspects. This statement does not mean that there could not be changes in future.

The main challenges identified by informants of coastal and maritime tourism were diverse as they represent different destinations and sectors. In general - **coastal resources are considered to be important ones; however there are no significant differences regarding destination/tourism company management**.

COVID-19 pandemic has made negative effect on bigger and traditional coastal tourism destinations (e.g. Jūrmala) where tourism services are mainly representing the big scale or there are too many service providers. In this case some of them have been closed until the summer season, some have reconsidered their business perspective and changed the services or closed for not-known time. Simultaneously, in peripheral areas (especially ones where some nature tourism offer and infrastructure is developed) tourism demand has risen. Small tourism businesses observe disappearance of classical seasonality, however they are still challenged about the organization of offer accordingly to epidemiological safety. Success is based on the ability to adapt and react fast.

Other challenges in coastal and maritime tourism were related to **legislation and restrictions**, as mentioned above - economic activity (incl. tourism) in coastal territories often have been regulated by all level legal acts (municipality specific (territory development plans, local rules), nature protection, coastal zone specific etc.). Mostly there is an effect on development of stationary infrastructure, public event organisation, accessibility of coastal zones. It is important to admit that the legal base is dynamic and sometimes it is a challenge to follow the changes, interpret them correctly and adapt.

Another aspect often mentioned by informants is related to the **lack of cooperation** among all the stakeholders in the territory. There are some territories where this issue has been solved, however in some cases it is still in process. One of the stakeholder groups that is often reacting negatively even in non-intensive tourism development cases are local inhabitants (both - those who already live in territories in generations and new-comers) not involved in tourism as their expectations about life in coastal areas and sharing the space with visitors differ. Sometimes lack of collaboration and system thinking results in non-existing or incomplete vision about the complex territory development (Integrated Coastal Zone Management).

Sustainability issues were rarely mentioned as significant due to the self-explanatory nature of this dimension nowadays. Still it is important to admit that mostly informants do refer to nature protection aspects and neglect others such as society, economy etc. Market has

reached some saturation in regards to "ecolabelled" tourism enterprises. This is nothing specific as contemporary customers demand responsible choices. On the other hand, the guidance of customers and setting an example for them was seen important.

If analysing offers, informants highlighted the role of skills, knowledge and competencies related to **hospitality**, **product design** (creative and unique solutions, prolongation of the visitor stay, attracting new segments etc.). Some reported need for enhancement of **digital marketing skills, informative seminars on available funding** etc. Also there were some references on **quality management** and response generation in fastly changing situation.

Both - commercial and public sector representatives emphasized that **entrepreneurs and other stakeholders nowadays do not need educational programs, they need short and practical advice on how to solve problems that just appeared (individual consulting, short seminars or webinars).** Entrepreneurs are interested in participating in various training in developing ideas for joint projects (which support entrepreneurship).

Occupational Profiles

The occupational profiles (see Table 2) were designed using the pre-determined descriptions of occupations and connecting the identified knowledge, skills and competencies with them.

This chapter presents the three occupational profiles (Table 2): a resort manager (destination level occupation), a micro-entrepreneur offering blue experiences and a sustainability manager (company level occupation). According to the position of **sustainability manager - in the case of Latvia we can conclude that this would be a more relevant position in DMO level**, as more than 80% of tourism companies represent SME or micro sectors where capacity and resources are limited and devoted to cover the core needs.

In the further process of project, occupational profiles will be summarised with the similar profiles created in Estonia, Latvia, the Netherlands, and Ireland. They will be merged to joint profiles covering the European cold-water destinations and translated into a new curriculum and courses.

Table 2. The occupational profiles designed after the research in SKILLS 4CMT project, Latvia

	Micro entrepreneur	Sustainability manager	Resort (destination) manager
Description	Identifies and exploits business opportunities and creates added value by using blue resources innovatively.	Manages and improves the organisation's environmental, social, and economic impact as well as ensures the sustainability of the business practices.	Responsible for strategic tourism management and development at the destination level.
General knowledge, skills and competencies	Hospitality; Contemporary management and marketing skills; Creativity; Product design; Resource valorisation and management; Fast reaction on trends; Networking; Practical skills.	Networking; Practical experience in field; Funding and projects; Communication skills; Networking.	Networking; Visionary, foresight; Problem solving; Work with wide range of stakeholders; System thinking; Spatial planning; Funding management; Large and medium scale public project management.

Coastal tourism specific knowledge, skills and competencies	Legislation; Nature interpretation: flora and fauna in coastal areas; Lifestyle business organization.	Legislation; Coastal resource specifics (incl. Territories with nature protection status) .	Territory specific problem solving; Stakeholder analysis and management; Integrated coastal zone management.