Sustainably Unique

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An exciting heritage journey towards a sustainable future!

Background

A sustainable expansion of cultural tourism can play an important role in the promotion and protection of the tangible and intangible cultural heritage in our countries.

Lithuania and Latvia are well known for the rich cultural heritage such as beautiful mansions located in beautiful natural surroundings, a traditional cuisine and a deeply rooted folk music tradition. The focus on environmental and social sustainability in combination with our cultural heritage is unique and can help us avoid mistakes

leading to over tourism and degradation of nature and other negative impacts on the local societies.

In 2015 the Interreg V-A Latvia – Lithuania Programme 2014-2020 by the European Commission initiated a project to contribute to the sustainable and cohesive socio-economic development of heritage tourism in the border region of Latvia and Lithuania. This with a clear ambition to help making the region's businesses more competitive and attractive for living, working and visiting through the introduction of a system promoting sustainable practices and further development of the interpretation of the rich local heritage and culture.

A scientifically robust definition of sustainability helps!
There is a growing awareness of the fact that we can't continue to use yesterday's energy to exhaust tomorrow's resources, neither can we

allow ourselves to continue to export emissions and injustices for the sake of our worry-free consumption.

The insight that our much needed journey towards sustainability is not limited to fighting climate change, improve human rights or address water scarcity but to do it all and many other sustainable improvements at the same time, has been our guiding light in the development of the system.

To strive for a sustainable society where we no longer are dependent on fossil fuels or rare metals nor are we increasing the concentration of non-biodegradable chemicals or using raw materials from badly managed forests, seas or fields. And in that society, we have also stopped hindering people in all parts of the world to meet their basic needs.

The system is based on a robust scientific definition of sustainability ([the Framework for Strategic Sustainable Development](), FSSD) and

with a clear ambition to make real change in the tourism business sector. It has a practical approach with a focus on social and ecological sustainability and cultural heritage preservation and interpretation. With such a holistic definition of sustainability the participating businesses will deliver on the 2030 agenda and inspire suppliers and the local community to increase their sustainability performance.

With this approach the risk of solving old problems with new ones also decreases dramatically and your solutions continuously move the businesses in the right, sustainable direction.

Creation and implementation of the system
The system has been developed by the Latvian and Lithuanian Hotel- and Restaurant associations in co-operation with their members and the

Swedish based sustainability advisory firm [SleepWell AB](#).

The system was developed in a dialogue with the twenty partnering businesses and piloted at nine of those. In January 2019 the agreed version of the system was launched at an event in Lithuania and will now be available for self-auditing to all interested heritage tourism businesses in the region.

The system in short
The system consists of 126 criteria divided in 11 Aspects of sustainability. 42 of the criteria are mandatory and hence a pre-requisite for being able to state that you are participating. The system currently has a three year continuous improvement rule to adhere to for any participating business stating that each of the two following years of participation an additional two supplementary criteria must be met.

The system is currently built on self-auditing with the demand to openly display the businesses result to guests and the surrounding world. As owners of the system the Hotel- and Restaurant Associations of Latvia and Lithuania can perform random controls of the accuracy of the self-audit. Once a business has fulfilled all mandatory criteria (year one) it can freely use the logotype "Sustainably Unique" in its marketing. The self-audit list shall be made available to guests on-line and in print.

The thinking behind the 11 aspects
Here follows a short explanation of each of the 11 aspects of the system. The 126 criteria established to make the ambitions in the following contexts live, can be find on-line. The topics chosen shall not be seen as a limitation of the sustainability scope but as an inspiration to embrace a holistic approach to sustainability.
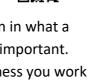
[The full set of criteria can be found here!](#)

1. Training and Education

People in general want to survive and to create a high quality of life for themselves and for their children. The reason, we still behave in an unsustainable way and make decisions that deteriorate our ability to live long and prosperous lives at a thriving planet, is that we lack the knowledge. Knowledge about how we run a planet in a sustainable way.

Check out this explanation:

This is why training and education in what a sustainable world looks like is so important. Insights in how you and the business you work with can be part of the solution instead of the problem. The power of all team members working together with a clear vision of what sustainability

looks like cannot be overestimated, hence an efficient and engaging training covering the different aspects in this program, is the base for success.

A good knowledge about the history and traditions of your venue and the surrounding community also gives all team members the confidence to share it with guests and visitors and to include storytelling in their service offer.

2. Cultural Heritage

The essence of tourism is our desire to experience other cultures, habits and cuisines and to meet new people. Our regions have a rich history to tell, a history and traditions that will exceed the expectations of our guests. This history, when told by us and interpreted in the services and products we offer is unique to us.

We are determined to deliver genuineness and to do it in way that not only enhance the visitors

experience today but also protects and secure our tangible and intangible cultural heritage for future generations of tourists and fellow countrymen.

3. Natural Heritage & Gardening

Few industries are as dependent on our nature as the tourism industry. Nature is for sure one of our biggest assets and well worth caring for.
Man is entirely subordinate to nature and yet we continue to destroy the precondition for our life instead of actively contributing to biodiversity. Gardening is all about recreating nature in our backyard and to do it sustainably and with local species

4. Energy & Climate

Energy efficiency is perhaps the most rewarding sustainability aspect to start with, since every "negawatthour" (not used kilowatt hour) is a direct contribution to both higher profitability and

increased sustainability. A culture of energy smartness in your business pays off quickly and also creates a future hedge against the cost increase we constantly see evolving.
Sustainable energy management is about *saving & changing*. As we speak the whole world is switching to renewable energy and we have good conditions to do this in our countries with good access to biomass, raw materials for biogas and of course, most importantly sun and wind.

5. *Waste & Recycling*

On our way from a linear society to a society where the right resources are used cyclically, the recycling of our waste is at the center.

Waste is resources in the wrong place. Smart material usage and efficient sorting at source are profitable measures both from a planetary and economical point of view. Although depending on community infrastructure for waste separation a

business can always put demands on the local community and start with waste minimization initiatives.

6. Water

Less than 1 percent of all water on our planet is easily available drinking water and in a global perspective, over 1 billion people lack access to clean drinking water and over 100 million people die of water related diseases every year.

As a business, we influence the limited water resources of the world in many ways and efficiency in water use, and managing wastewater properly are two areas where smart water management can contribute to both sustainability and profitability.

7. Chemicals, Cleaning & Washing

We are facing future challenges with the still unknown "cocktail" effects of the well over

hundred thousand of chemicals spread more or less uncontrolled in our world. Smart chemical's management is about *saving & changing*.

Saving, by efficient dosing, and *changing*, by replacing any persistent and toxic chemicals with biodegradable alternatives. Eco labels type 1 are powerful tools for this and makes it easier for us as non-chemists to make the right choice.

8. *Food & Beverage*

Food and beverage is at heart of a most tourism experiences. A well cooked and enjoyable meal or a tasty fast snack during a break, both enhances the visitor's experience. To surprise our guests with that little extra and provide sustainable food based on local, seasonal and organic products is sustainability at its best.

These days we are all becoming aware that we cannot continue to waste up to 40% of the food

we produce globally and hence smart systems to eliminate food waste are key to our success as well as a focus on organic, seasonal and locally sourced products.

9. Accessibility

To welcome and cater to all guests and visitors regardless of their physical or psychological abilities is a moral obligatory and makes sense both from a human and economical perspective.

With about 50 million people in Europe with some form of functional variation this is a huge potential for new business. Increased usability of the business enhances the experience for all our guests.

10. Local Collaboration

Collaboration is increasingly seen as the major success factor on our journey towards sustainability. This is true both on a global and

local level. The sustainable development goal 17 states that we "require coherent policies, an enabling environment for sustainable development at all levels and by all actors".

At tourist destinations this is extra true as we often recognize challenges that can only be solved if we collaborate between business and with local authorities

11. Communication & Marketing
Honest, transparent and interactive communication and marketing build confidence in our ambition to interpret a true and engaging picture of our offer and our heritage and in our sustainability ambitions.

All channels from on-line to print and social media as well as the important personal encounter are tools for us to use.

The partnering businesses

The partnering businesses have been part of the project since the beginning and contributed in different ways as in the dialogue at meetings, as pilots and by answering surveys. The list following, is also the base for the creation of the Cultural Heritage Trail during 2019.

Latvian Partner Businesses	Lithuanian Partner Businesses
Hotel Metropole Kuldîga	Angelų Mill
Arendoles Manor	Burbiškis Manor
Mežotne Palace	Tavern „Kryžkelė"
Jaunmoku palace	Pakruojis Manor
Jaunpils Castle	Paliesius Manor
Kukšu Manor	Raudondvaris Manor
Mazmežotnes Manor	Monte Pacis
Skrundas Manor	Šlyninkos Water Mill
	Užventis Water Mill
	Babtyno-Žemaitkiemio Manor
	Romantic Hotel
	Michaelson *boutique* Hotel

The Cultural Heritage Trail

Someone described the rural countryside of Latvia and Lithuania as "well-hidden gems" ready to be explored by so many more tourists. There is also an overall ambition to increase the length of stay for the visitors and "deliver more experiences per travelled mile" to lower the climate footprint of travel and at the same time increase revenue for the businesses.

The Cultural Heritage Trail has the ambition to inspire the visitor to further explore the rich history and tradition of the region and add one or more (or all) venues to the visit when you happen to be here. Welcome to visit us!

Further development of the system

The existing system will be of help to embark on a sustainability journey for all the partnering venues

as well as any other similar business in the region and since all content is published under a Creative Common license it is available to anyone interested. However the system is also well predisposed to be further developed in a possible future project.

For more information please contact:

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This leaflet

This Leaflet is produced as an overview of the system and aimed to serve as an educational tool for the teams at the participating businesses as well as a source of information for the guests and visitors.

The full set of criteria can be found here!

Project „Joint eco sign for Lithuania's and Latvia's restaurants and hotels in cultural objects", Nr. LLI-064 (JESLL). The project is carried out according to the Interreg V-A Latvia – Lithuania Programme 2014-2020 to contribute to the sustainable and cohesive socio-economic development of the Programme regions by helping to make them competitive and attractive for living, working and visiting.

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Leading partner- Lithuanian Hotel and Restaurant Association, Project Partner - Latvian Hotel and Restaurant Association.

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Programme website: www.latlit.eu

Official EU website: www.europa.eu