

Estonia – Russia cross-border cooperation programme 2021-2027

DISCUSSION ABOUT THE PROPOSED CHALLENGES AND ACTIVITIES FOR SUPPORTING TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

Overview

Date: 5 March 2021.

Format: online in Zoom environment.

Participants: 27 tourism specialists (14 from Russia, 13 from Estonia).

Introduction and methodology

The discussion was part of the stakeholder involvement activities that took place during the programming process of the Estonia – Russia Cross-border Cooperation Programme for the period 2021-2027 (EE-RU CBC Programme). The programming started in the beginning of the year 2020 and is completed in 2021.

The stage 1 of the stakeholder consultations was carried out by the national authorities of the EE-RU CBC Programme during spring-summer 2020.

During the stage 1 the national authorities collected problems, challenges and activities that could be tackled by the EE-RU CBC Programme. These actions covered wide range of stakeholders both on the Russian and Estonian side of the programme area, including regional authorities and local municipalities, educational institutions, entrepreneurship support institutions and environmental authorities. Based on the materials collected during the stage 1, the Joint Programming Committee of the EE-RU CBC Programme pre-selected 9 specific objectives for the next programme. The choice of specific objectives was based on the list of specific objectives proposed by the European Commission.

The stage 2 of the stakeholder consultations took place during the period September 2020 – February 2021. It was carried out by the external experts Elena Belova and Peeter Unt, and focused on the 9 pre-selected specific objectives. It contained over 50 thematically focused individual interviews, group interviews and interventions at workshops.

The stage 3 of the stakeholder consultations started in parallel with the stage 2 in November 2020 and consists of thematic online joint discussions for Russian and Estonian stakeholders based on the pre-defined specific objectives. The input for the joint online discussions was gathered during the stages 1 and 2.

In addition, the Joint Technical Secretariat of the EE-RU CBC Programme carried out online survey among the stakeholders of the programme in February-March 2021 to collect

additional feedback to the pre-selected 9 specific objectives and activities to be supported by the EE-RU CBC Programme.

On 5 March 2021 the discussion was based on the discussion paper that was sent to the participants of the meeting together with the invitation approximately 2 weeks prior. The discussion paper included:

1. A short overview about the programming process for the 2021-2027 period.
2. The main identified challenges in the field of tourism development that could be addressed with the help of cross-border cooperation.
3. Draft list of activities that could be supported by the EE-RU CBC Programme.

The discussion paper had been drafted based on the three main sources:

- Stakeholder consultations that had been carried out by the national authorities of the EE-RU CBC Programme in the programme regions in spring-summer 2020.
- Stakeholder consultations that had been carried out by the programming experts among Russian and Estonian tourism developers from September till December 2020.
- Regional and national strategies of the Russian Federation and the Republic of Estonia that promote the development of tourism.

The discussion was guided by the five questions listed in the discussion paper:

1. What is your opinion on the identified challenges? Would you like to bring out additional cross-border challenges?
2. Do you think the proposed activities are realistic and meet the challenges and needs of cross-border area? Are those activities appropriate for strengthening the cooperation links and networks in the border regions?
3. What kind of change could be brought along in the tourism field through cross-border cooperation?
4. Are there organisations that have interest and capacity to implement proposed activities in the cross-border area?
5. Are there any common needs of some type of tourists, which are not met in the cross-border area?

The event included both, joint sessions and work in 3 break-out rooms in order to give enough time for all the participants to express their views.

Altogether, invitation was sent to 33 tourism stakeholders in Estonia and Russia. 27 persons participated (13 from Estonia and 14 from Russia), representing wide range of tourism development organisations (representatives of tourism clusters, municipalities, NGOs,

regions, regional development organisations, educational institutions, etc) from both sides of the border.

Summary of the discussions

In general, the challenges and activities that had been proposed in the discussion paper were recognised as relevant by the participants. None of the proposed challenges was questioned and the proposed activities were in general supported. The participants proposed also a number of additional challenges and activities that could be considered during further development of the next EE-RU CBC Programme.

Additional challenges proposed by the participants

In addition to the challenges listed in the discussion paper, the following challenges were proposed.

1. How to increase the number of visitors especially in the remote regions?
2. How to restart tourism and move towards more sustainable management models?
3. How to make maximum use of the authenticity of the regions and use it as an advantage?
4. There are too few stops of international bus and train carriers in the regions, which complicates the accessibility of smaller places, even if they are close to the big transport corridors.
5. How to motivate the visitors to turn off the main roads and visit also smaller places between bigger cities and towns?
6. Development of cycling routes with the aim to harmonise the level of services offered (incl. infrastructure) on both sides of the border.
7. Problems with border crossing, incl. for tourism groups.
8. The need to apply for special permissions for visiting Russian border regions, both for foreign visitors and citizens of Russia.
9. Impact of the Covid-19 on the tourism industry.

Additional activities proposed by the participants

In addition to the activities listed in the discussion paper, the following activities were proposed.

1. Investments into tourism infrastructure, including investments into bike routes, waterways, cultural heritage objects, safe accessibility of the tourism sites for general public and people with special needs, modern rest areas by the highways that provide necessary basic services, but also promote the tourism sites and services of the region nearby the big roads.

2. Creation of various common thematic routes or target group-based routes: gastronomy, cycling, nature, cultural heritage, religious diversity, routes for people travelling with motorhomes, water tourism routes, routes for younger generation (including educational trips), routes for families with kids, etc.
3. Implementation of various forms of capacity building: work shadowing, online conferences, experience sharing between tourism network organisations and entrepreneurs.
4. Wide use of digital tools for marketing and providing information about the sites and services of the region.
5. Creation of creative, innovative and entertaining products (services, events, etc) that would motivate the visitors to stay longer in the region.
6. Promoting green and sustainable tourism.
7. Installation of road signs to tourism sites.
8. Developing the strategy of tourism development in the programme area.

Organisations, who have interest and capacity to implement proposed activities in the cross-border area (as proposed by the participants)

The list includes the organisations, who could be project partners, but also those, who should be involved during implementation of the projects to amplify the impact of the projects.

1. National and regional tourism associations.
2. Regional tourism umbrella organizations, for example clusters.
3. Regional business development organizations.
4. Regional and local public authorities.
5. Tourism entrepreneurs, *i.e.* local service providers.
6. Tourism agencies and tour operators.
7. Operators of international bus and train lines.
8. Transport service providers of the border areas.
9. Associations of guides and other tourism NGOs.
10. Tourism information centres.
11. Education and research institutions.

Main conclusions of the online discussion

In the light of the proposals of the online discussion, the content of the programme document of the EE-RU CBC Programme should be elaborated further, considering:

- review of the currently described challenges and complementing the texts with additional focus on sustainability, difficulties with border crossing, the issues with special permits necessary for visiting the border areas on the Russian side, the

importance of focusing the activities of the programme on more remote regions, etc.

- review of the currently described activities and complementing the texts with additional focus on infrastructure investments, development of joint routes, capacity development activities, digital promotion and marketing, and promotion of the importance of sustainable tourism.
- review the list of possible target groups to be inserted in the programme document.