AN INNOVATIVE TOOL FOR IMPROVING THE COMPETITIVENESS OF COMMUNITY-BASED TOURISM – A HANDBOOK

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Photos: Comcot – Partnership; photo on page 10 Arne Ader

INTRODUCTION

The community-based tourism development tool described in this handbook is based on wide experiences gathered through an international project called *"An innovative tool for improving the competitiveness of community-based tourism (COMCOT)"*. The aim of the project was to improve the competitiveness of rural tourism by using community-based development methods. Since customers' experience in tourism is not only based on the tourism company's services, but on the experiences of whole community, the project starting point was that in rural areas especially, an entrepreneur's activities must be accepted by the local community in order to be sustainable.

Practically, the COMCOT project aimed to build high local ownership of tourism development by providing local communities an opportunity to take part in planning processes and by developing skills and cross-border networks of grassroots level activators. The COMCOT project gathered together academics, international tourism consultants and community activists in order to improve the tourism potential in Estonian and Finnish rural areas. The project used a community-based approach whereby the ideas for tourism development were collected from the communities involved in the project and the same communities also implemented these ideas. By expanding the opportunities for local level actors, the project succeeded in developing competitive tourism by combining cross-border cooperation networks with joint community work at the local level.

All the community-based tourism development experiences from six different pilot regions were analysed and collected together to form a community-based tourism development process (COMCOT tool). The development process presented in this guidebook provides practical help for all those communities and others interested in implementing rural community-based tourism development. In addition to the process, practical methods are also presented and the potential risks in each phase are highlighted.

The COMCOT project was funded through the Central Baltic INTERREG IV A Programme 2007-2013: Southern Finland–Estonia Sub-programme. The lead partner was the Estonian University of Life Sciences. Other project partners were the University of Helsinki Ruralia Institute, Evanter Ltd, the Development Association Sepra, the Association of Water and Environment of Western Uusimaa, Võrtsjärv Foundation, the Union of Rural Municipalities of Setomaa and Maidla Municipality. The three-year project ended in October 2013.

Good luck with your community-based tourism development process!

COMCOT TOOL

The COMCOT tool is a process description, which helps you to plan and implement community-based tourism development projects and initiatives. The development process was piloted through the COMCOT project. Based on the experiences gathered from this project a practical model was designed- see Figure 1. The different phases in the model are described in the text, step by step, while also providing examples of practical methods for implementing each phase and real case examples are given in the yellow boxes. However, when using the tool, it is important to remember that all development processes are individual and no "one-size fits all" model exists! You need to consider the circumstances of the development initiative you aim to conduct and be able to modify the steps accordingly. Also keep in mind that even though the description below gives a rather straightforward picture of the process, in practice this is hardly the case. On the contrary, the process is iterative and sometimes you need to step backwards in order to make progress!

COMMUNITY TOURISM DEVELOPMENT CAN BE CHALLENGING

- Community tourism needs to be developed in a way that is acceptable to the communities. Their representatives must therefore be involved in shaping the development projects from the outset.

- There is a tremendous bank of knowledge at a local level that can never be equalled by external consultants: it is therefore vital that this knowledge is utilised.

- Consultancy reports are "beginnings" and not the "ends" they have all too often become. They should gather momentum and lead to implementation, which is invariably carried out at a local level – and if local people have not been involved in shaping the report and its recommendations they are unlikely to identify with it. Instead of gathering momentum, therefore, these reports are far more likely to gather dust on shelves.

  Source: The Market Specialists: Lanark, Scotland

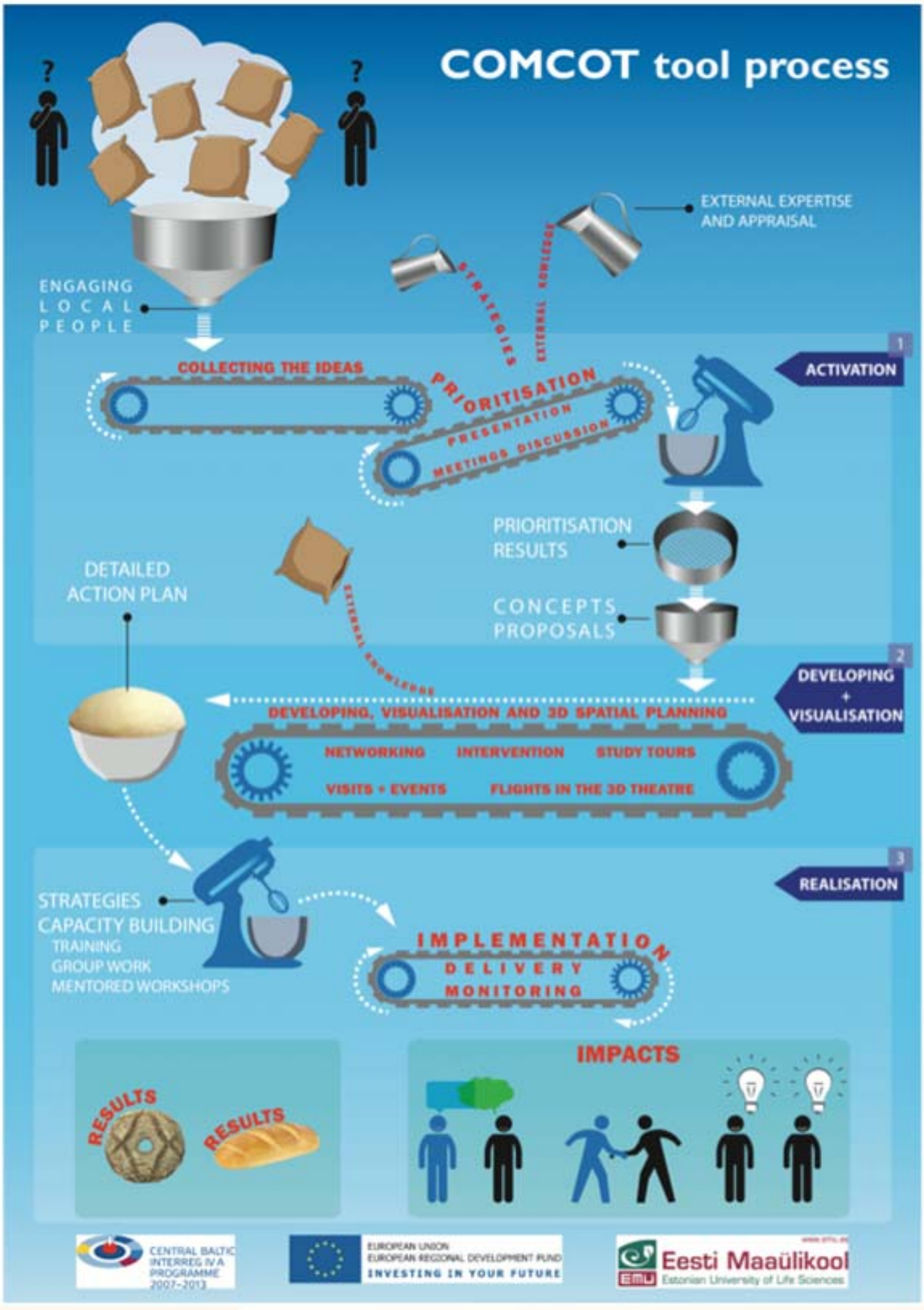


Figure 1: The comcot tool process

Phase 1: Activation

1.1. Bringing local people together

In order to manage a development initiative of any kind, there needs to be a leader for the process and the start point is to identify a local facilitator who takes the main responsibility for organising the whole process and engaging with key people. The facilitator can be an outsider or a member of the community but what is most important is that s/he has trust and credibility among local people and is also aware of previous local level development initiatives, i.e. knows the development history in the area. It is also important to remember that the facilitator him/herself has to be fully familiar with the aims and methods of the project in order to be able to communicate realistically to community members. Note that at the beginning the role of the facilitator is especially vital since his/her main task is to identify the key people in relation to tourism development in the area and engage them in the project. After this crucial phase, the facilitator's role can be reduced, as s/he should be able to delegate tasks and responsibilities of the development work and thus encourage people already engaged to feel ownership towards the project. Ideally, in case the facilitator is later unable to continue in the project for some reason there are other group members who could easily takeover the leading role in the process. Therefore, remember that it is important that the project will not be too much personified with one person. Instead it should be "identified" to the community!

The first task of the local facilitator is to bring the key people together and build a group of local stakeholders with a shared interest towards the development of tourism in the area. During this phase, it is particularly important to identify and engage all those tourism related stakeholders without whose contribution the tourism development would be very challenging or impossible (for example main land owners or tourism businesses).

With the help of these influential key people, it is also possible to attract others to join the development process as they start spreading the word around them. In addition to the key people, the facilitator should also provide opportunities for all others interested in participating in the development of tourism a chance to join in the process. Therefore, it is important to remember to disseminate information concerning the process as widely as possible. Not only does this dissemination help in attracting newly interested parties, it also helps avoid possible conflicts that might result from a lack of awareness of a project's aims and prevent the creation of an image that the process is run by a "group of insiders". The key people and other local community members form a "core group" which takes part in the various project activities. However, note that membership of the core group does not necessarily remain the same since new participants could be identified and engaged into the process during its progress and the role of some originally active people can become smaller. It is equally important to understand that each person participating in the process has his/her own motives for joining the group. These motives can be economic (e.g. an entrepreneur would like to make changes to improve his/her business) or social (e.g. to improve the living conditions of the village, or give the active people just a possibility "hang around" with people sharing their values and visions for the local community). You must be able

ENCOURAGING LOCAL PEOPLE

"*The Finnish people need a lot of encouragement to take part in activities. When persuading new actors to take part in the development process, you need to be able to confirm to them that their ideas and skills are needed and are "good enough" to bring to the common discussion. It is also a matter of building the self-esteem of the local community"* tells Pirjo Sjögren from the Lohja Island Village Association. Otherwise most of the people do not consider that their ideas are relevant for local development nor do they feel that it is their "place" to participate in joint development schemes. For this, general information on a development or e.g. events is not enough.

Personal invitations and connections are the key to getting people interested. It is also vital to maintain the atmosphere in local associations and development groups open for new ideas and people. *"Everyone easily gets stuck in their own routines and way of thinking. You need to keep your mind open for new possibilities. Your way is not necessarily the only or even the best way"* Pirjo continues.

ENCOURAGING LOCAL PEOPLE CAN BE CHALLENGING:

"Discussions with other areas leaders and experts from Eesti Maaülikool were useful. It definitely facilitated our thinking about community-based tourism. However, we probably were not as good at involving our community, as we would have liked to be. We should have involved more community and municipality people to the discussions. But it was difficult to do, since people are already involved in so many different activities. We know it is difficult!"

Setomaa Community Tourism Development Team

to understand these different motivations, plan your activities accordingly and remember that people have to have fun in community meetings and during community activities!

EXAMPLES OF METHODS THAT CAN BE USED TO BRING PEOPLE TOGETHER:

- personal contacts (face-to-face meetings, phone discussions) with key people. This has proved to be the most important method for engaging people in the process. Do not underestimate the role of personal contacts, even though it is rather laborious.
- email marketing: usually on its own it is not effective enough to engage people in the process but still provides an easy method to inform a wide group of people.
- organising local meetings and describing the aims and methods of the process to a wide audience. Note! It is often more effective to join forces with other groups when organising meetings rather than organising one on your own.
- newsletters, stories in the local newspapers to increase the awareness of the community concerning the process.
- participation and informal promotion in the local meetings .
- do not underestimate the role of team building in forming your core group! For example study tours for local key people can be very effective in growing a team spirit among the group, devoting time for discussion and understanding of each other's motivations and goals to the development initiatives.

NEW PEOPLE AND COMPANIES PRESENTED IN LOCAL MAGAZINE

In Lohja Island the local village association tries its best to welcome new residents to the island and integrate them into local development activities. For example a board member of the village association personally contacts all new residents and welcomes them to join the activities. All new residents are also introduced with photos in the Association's magazine (providing that they will give permission to this). *"This helps a lot to integrate new people in to the local activities. Also it gives us a chance to identify any potential new activists",* tells Pirjo Sjögren from the Lohja Island Village Association. Every new company and its activities are also spotlighted in the magazine free for the first two years, in subsequent years they should be able to get such visibility themselves.

MAIN RISKS INVOLVED DURING THIS PHASE:

- the project relies too heavily on the facilitator and thus becomes rather vulnerable where the continuity (sustainability) of the project is concerned
  ➔ delegate responsibilities and tasks among the group. This may take some persuation, but it also helps the local community to feel ownership towards the process.
- the project team develops a clique mentality and new people do not feel welcome (it becomes exclusive rather than inclusive)
  ➔ take care of the team spirit and keep a regular and active communication going on between the project and the local community all the time in order to tempt new and enthusiastic members to join the team. Consider their ideas and opinions with open eyes!
- local atmosphere towards the project becomes suspicious
  ➔ increase communication, use variety of methods, use some trusted community members as middlemen to spread information about the project more widely. Use these trusted people also to gather feedback on where this mistrust has come from.
- the key people are not reached and engaged into the project
  ➔ make communications more personalised, be persistent and open for negotiations and compromises. Remember to emphasise the potential benefits for the key people themselves. Do not waste stakeholders' time – every meeting should have a concrete purpose. Remember to plan the project so that there are also short-term benefits and quick successes, this makes participation more attractive.
- lack of interest among local people
  ➔ consider realistically whether the project is relevant in the area and should it have been started at all?

NEW STIMULUS IN PYHTÄÄ VILLAGE CENTRE

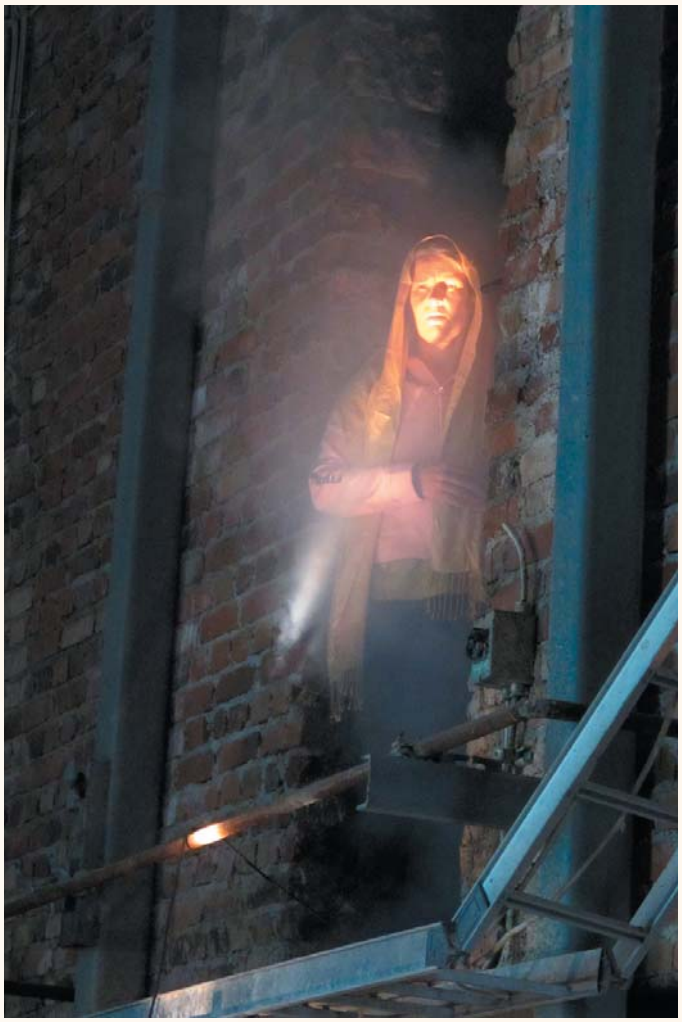
In one of the COMCOT pilot regions, bringing the local people together was a very challenging process for the pilot area facilitator. Even though she contacted a number of people in the area and organised meetings, nothing seemed to be happening.

After 1,5 years of activation and no results, COMCOT experts were taken to comment on one ”package” that outside actors had planned to implement in the central part of the village writes Marjo Lehtimäki of SEPRA. As a result people saw in practise what kind of help and support they could get and from that one event different organizations and enterprises started working together.

After deliberating on the methods to use to activate people to participate further, the facilitator used her local knowledge and personally contacted a local, noted entrepreneur. After explaining the aims of the project she invited him to join the next community meeting to be held in the area. The entrepreneur was interested in the idea of tourism development insomuch that he invited some key people in his own personal networks to also join the meeting.

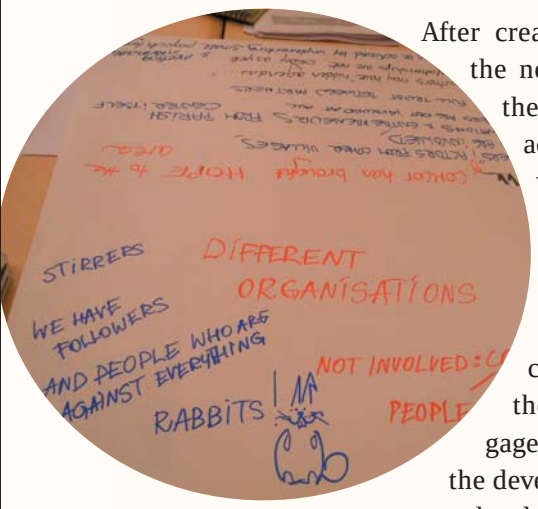
The community meeting was a success – over ten people took part in the meeting in which the ideas for the tourism development started to easily rise among the participants. As a result, there is now an active group of local people discussing and planning tourism development together. The persistence of the facilitator thus resulted to a sense of ownership towards development issues in that area and some new tourism ideas. Indeed, during the COMCOT project, these community members established an association to organise tourism development activities in the locality and started to seek funding for their development ideas.

Medieval fair Pyhtää village centre



Community theatre production Pyhtää

1.2. Collecting tourism development ideas



After creating the core group the next step is to involve them in planning the actual initiatives that will be taken further during the process. It is vitally important that the ideas come from the local core group, not from the facilitator! This engages them personally in the development process and creates local ownership for the development initiatives. Remember that all ideas are valuable at this stage! In order to collect these development ideas the facilitator can, for example, invite the group for community meetings and discussions. Local community meetings are a very important means of collecting ideas and the timing as well as content of them is critical to maintain the motivation and interest of community members. In community meetings, all participants should feel free to introduce their visions and ideas for local tourism development.

In an ideal situation, this results in a number of different suggestions which creates a fruitful basis for subsequent community meetings. In addition to these meetings, ideas can also be collected through other more anonymous methods which might allow people to present their ideas less conspicuously, for example, by organising an e-mail or web-based questionnaire related to the topic. However, this method is never likely to be sufficiently interactive enough on its own to replace community meetings but it can be used as an additional activity.

EXAMPLES OF METHODS THAT CAN BE USED TO COLLECT TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IDEAS:

- local meetings
- internet based solutions
- competitions for e.g. schools/community in general in order to generate tourism development ideas

MAIN RISKS INVOLVED IN THIS PHASE:

- gathering of tourism ideas is not sufficiently wide or representative of the community, ideas are presented by only a very few people which may lead to increased conflicts in the future –> plan carefully the processes used for collecting ideas and suggestions, create a welcoming atmosphere so that everyone feels comfortable to present their ideas. Do they allow for all sectors in the community to be represented and to put forward their ideas? Use different methods to collect ideas – do not analyse / criticise the ideas too much during the collection process.

BALANCING SECTORS IN KLAMILA VILLAGE

In the area of the fishing harbour, NGOs and active people from different sectors (village movement, fishermen and entrepreneurs) were not cooperating, in fact they hardly communicated with each other. Since one aim was to develop opportunities for both fishing and tourism simultaneously Sepra organised a meeting for all local actors, which was also attended by both Marjo Lehtimäki (project coordinator) and the fisheries (FLAG) coordinator. The meeting was successful since Sepra was seen as neutral and both sides also felt that they had someone "representing" them in the meeting.

The different sectors are now working together creating tourism packages where they and many others are included.

INNOVATION IN LINKING COMMUNITY GROUP DEVELOPMENT AND LOCAL HERITAGE- VÕRTSJÄRVE FOUNDATION

In trying to encourage participation organisers from Võrtsjärve Foundation asked people to bring along examples of local food to meetings: coastal fish dishes typical of the region or grandmother's pancakes. The excitement and flavour of surprises! The food motivated people to come.

To provide some motivation to come together, spread information and to learn from others, people were also asked to bring along local stories and old photos for promoting community tourism and product development. As Jaanika Kaljuvee, Manager of Lake Võrtsjärv Foundation said: *"A good example of the importance of stories is the Scottish Loch Ness phenomenon. Maybe Võrtsjärv is hiding even more amazing creatures and somebody could create better stories than it"!*

Setomaa community members planning the “pop-up” café day

Fish and handicraft fair – Võrtsjärve (Photo: Arne Ader)

1.3. Prioritisation of tourism development ideas

Strategies and the actions to deliver them, however, demand, prioritisation: any strategy that does not involve it is most unlikely to succeed. Both financial and human resources, after all, are limited which is why choices have to be made. This is done through what we call here the "prioritisation process".

The ideas suggested in the collection/brainstorming phase (1.2. above) should be prioritised in some way. The main idea in this phase is to reduce the number of ideas by merging similar ideas under larger themes and removing those that are not widely supported and creating a vision for the ways forward. Prioritising of the ideas is a challenging phase of the process, since it determines what ideas the community considers are the most interesting actions to start working with. In a way the decisions made during the prioritisation form the basis for all the following activities. There may well be some compromises to be made between community members, since not everyone will agree with the prioritisation results. Therefore, it is important to plan enough time for prioritisation and the discussions based on it!

The prioritisation results, as such, represent the tourism development ideas the core group (or possibly an extended group) feels are interesting and important to be developed further. In this sense they often represent a production orientated approach to tourism development. Local people do not, however, always have all the required knowledge of customers' needs and expectations related to rural tourism products. They may lack experience or knowledge of what new product development might be possible and also be a bit "blind" concerning their own ideas and products, either not seeing the potential or being too optimistic without fully understanding the realistic marketing potential of new products or services. Therefore, ideas arising during prioritisation need to be carefully evaluated as to whether they have a realistic potential for success among customers. For this phase, it might be useful to arrange for some external assistance in the process to provide an outside perspective and additional information.

This assistance can be in the form of external consultancy or expertise to provide help with marketing surveys and analysis of data from existing tourism surveys in order to provide further information for the prioritisation process. The external expert's role is to help local communities in analysing and evaluating their local development ideas as a part of the prioritisation process.

EXPERT INPUT GREATLY HELPED SETOMAA WITH PRIORITISING THEIR IDEAS

"Meetings with foreign experts were good for discussion and for better understanding what else could be done to develop tourism. However fewer people participated in the discussion than we would have liked because of the English language" says Ülle Pärnoja from Setomaa Toursim Development.

Prioritisation was good task to handle. It pushed the people to think about future. It was good that we had some months between meetings, so tourism actors could think longer about the issues. *"Looking back on it we could have improved the wording of some statements to better present our situation"* concludes Ülle.

It will also be very useful to collect together key research data concerning markets for local tourism products and services along with the community's opinions for the prioritisation process. It should be taken into account that if the ideas do not seem realistic and feasible in the light of the information provided by surveys and/or the external experts, then these unsuitable ideas should be dropped from the list. In some cases, it might even be that the process of collecting ideas and prioritising them should start afresh in order to identify more realistic and suitable ideas.

The prioritisation phase should result in descriptions of those tourism development ideas which the community agrees upon as being the most important. In this description, the selected development ideas are given a brief outline in terms of: the idea (product or service), the markets/supply channels, quality standards, the beneficiaries and who will take the main responsibility for development.

METHODS THAT CAN BE USED TO PRIORITISE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IDEAS:

- local meetings
- use of external experts
- study tours

- surveys to support the decision-making process, like market survey, community survey, business survey. While gathering this external information, the local schools (e.g. vocational high schools) could be utilised
- case study examples from other areas

MAIN RISKS INVOLVED IN THIS PHASE:

- development ideas are produced top-down which endanger the community-based approach
  ➔ take enough time to collect the ideas fully from the community and let them prioritise them even though it may take time and sometimes may feel frustrating. Communities should be allowed to discuss the ideas for as long as they need in order to reach a common decision. Otherwise community members do not feel ownership towards the ideas.
- community members do not reach a common decision on the prioritisation
  ➔ prioritisation should be well-argued, supported and guided and should be based on objective information rather than personal emotions. The role of external information/experts can facilitate the process. Be sure that everyone understands the reasons behind opposing arguments.
- not all community members feel they got an equal input into the decision making process due to timing or language constraints
  ➔ ensure that meetings are held at times different community groups can attend, where foreign language experts are providing input have suitable translation provided and manage the meetings to give equal opportunity for both shy and confident participants.
- prioritisation is based on information which is too vague regarding the potential value of ideas
  ➔ use objective external information when making decisions concerning the prioritisation and remember to evaluate the external information critically.
- those community members whose ideas are not rated highly in the prioritisation process will withdraw from the whole process
  ➔ be sure that everyone understands the reasons behind arguments for including ideas in the high rated selections.
- local community's expectations of the role of external experts is too high and are thus disillusioned when these are not realised
  ➔ it should be made clear what is and is not expected from external consultation

The following case exemplifies the way in which prioritisation was undertaken in the COMCOT project following the instructions of the external experts involved in the process: David McIntyre and Kathy Velander (The Market Specialists).

PRIORITISATION

The prioritisation process was undertaken in 3 steps. The first step in the process was to review the outcome of community meetings at which those present identified various actions for potential implementation.

In this first stage all those involved in the local community were asked to produce their long lists of potential actions to deliver the desired outcome and achieve the vision. The prioritisation process began by reducing the list of potential actions to a manageable number. If, for example, there were 50 actions on the initial list the first step is to ask each of the key community players to individually (not collectively) identify the 23 actions they would drop from the 50 to leave their preferred 27 actions. The votes of the individual players are then counted by the local facilitator and the final list of 27 actions for prioritisation is defined. The process can be easily undertaken by email.

During the next stage the local facilitator sent the agreed list back to the participants and asked each of them within each of the communities to break the 27 actions listed into three groups of nine according to:

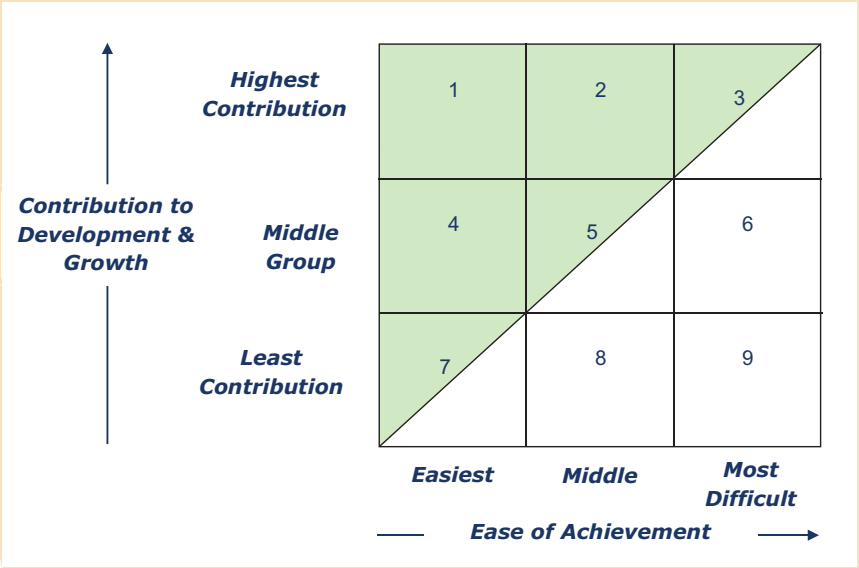
- those that will make the greatest contribution to delivery of the vision;
- those that will make the least contribution;
- and those that are left in the middle.

It is vitally important that all involved in the prioritisation process exercise their judgements on an individual rather than collective basis throughout the prioritisation. This will be done by the participants in communities on an individual basis.

In final step, the experts collated the returned, individual contributions into 3 equal groups of 9. The individual members within each community group are then asked to break each of the three earlier groups of nine actions down into three groups of three actions according to:

- those that are easiest to achieve (three actions);
- those that are the most difficult to achieve (three actions);
- and the three actions left in the middle.

This produces nine groups of three actions, based on their respective contribution to the delivery of the desired outcome of the development and their relative ease of achievement, as indicated in the diagram below.



The Prioritisation Process

Actions in each of boxes 1, 2 and 4 – all of which are in the top triangle in the diagram (those shaded green) – are accepted as priorities; and those in each of boxes 7 (low contribution but relative ease of achievement so might be "quick wins"), 3 (most difficult to achieve but high contribution to vision delivery), and 5 (middle all-round) are considered on an individual basis.

This process will produce a number of prioritised actions which can then be described in between 7 and 10 strategic objectives and included in the community action plan.

Phase 2: Developing and visualising

2.1. Developing and visualising

After finalising the priorisation i.e. creating an action plan for future tourism development, the community can still make an essential choice concerning what development idea(s) they will first start working with in practice. Thus, even though the ideas resulting from the prioritisation process might all be important and widely accepted, it is important to understand that local communities seldom have sufficient resources to work with many ideas at the same time – at least not with the same intensity.

After the core group of the community has defined the development ideas they want to commence working with it is time to start planning how these ideas can be implemented in practice. People often have to see the different alternatives in order to fully understand and comment on the different development plans. Therefore, it is important for these ideas to be visualised so as to generate wider discussion concerning them and thus, provide once again, an opportunity for the whole community to comment on the proposals.

Such visualisation can provide clarification in several aspects of planning. It can show, what will happen in the landscape, how a particular area will look e.g. after some new development initiatives or its environmental impact. On the other hand, it can illustrate the general tourism development potential in an area and raise discussion on the topic. Therefore, it can be used as a tool also in the Collecting tourism development ideas- phase.

In the first alternative, the visualisation should include two or more optional scenarios from the same development ideas. In this way, the visualisation provides local people with information concerning the kinds of changes any planned development ideas would make to the landscape and environment and what the end result might possibly look like. The role of the visualisation is to assist the decision-making process while the best possible solution for a particular development idea is being chosen.

In the second alternative the visualisation can be used as a overall catalyst to increase discussion among members of the community regarding tourism development in general. The whole point of the visualisation is, however, in both cases to engage the community with the planning process. Therefore, remember that it is vitally important that the results of the visualisation are widely introduced to the local community in order to provide the opportunity for people to comment on the plans and thus ensure a good atmosphere for further realisation.

THE METHODS THAT CAN BE USED:

- maps
- photos
- architectural plans
- videos/2D presentation
- 3D presentation

VISUALISATION BROUGHT PORLA AREA INTO A NEW PUBLIC DISCUSSION

Porla area is a beautiful area with extensive biodiversity close to the centre of Lohja city. This old fish farming and research area by the lake of Lohja has been abandoned for years and kept as recreation area by local activists for free. Due to the close vicinity of the centre of the city, there has been a lot of discussion on building apartment houses to the area. This would close the area from the locals. Also other alternative uses for the area has been presented, one being a lake centre. In COMCOT project a 3D-model was created of the area as it is now and illustrating the area after a lake centre would have been built into it. These models were presented to the local people as well as the municipality officials. 3D being a real life-like way of presenting the changes in the area, instead of e.g. maps, raised a lot of discussion on the Porla area. It also brought the area to the common discussion in Lohja. The people did not want to lose the access to the area, but not the extensive lake centre changing the "spirit of the area "either. At the end the city decided to change the area's building plan and keep the area as a recreation area for the locals, at least for now. Also new planning for the areas restoration was started by the city.

All these methods can be introduced to community members by organising community meetings, or having them visible in e.g. community halls, libraries etc. E-based solutions also provide many interesting possibilities. Note, however, that not all community members understand or can visualise development initiatives shown only via maps or architectural plans. Instead use more videos, photos and other tools that provide easily realistic ideas of the development to all community members.

At the end of this phase, commonly agreed plans for implementation of the ideas should exist and the goals for the development initiative set.

MAIN RISKS INVOLVED IN THIS PHASE:

- there are a lack of resources (knowledge) to transform the ideas to development ideas
  ➔ utilise external expertise.
- visualisation is not illustrative enough to raise discussion amongst community members
  ➔ consider more fully the methods you want to use, e.g. maps are not always the best method for illustrating plans.
- the visualization events are not attracting sufficient people or key stakeholder groups
  ➔ remember to use personal invitations and marketing.
- the community cannot agree on which action to take forward
  ➔ revisit the prioritisation process and, within resource constraints, look at ways in which the community's differing desires can be merged.
- limited resources mean that although the community would like to implement their plans they are unable to do so
  ➔ to avoid disillusionment, plan for the availability of implementation resources through further project application, train community members for the application process.

THE 3D THEATRE

The following case exemplifies how the visualisation process was realised in the COMCOT project. A new tool in participatory tourism planning was introduced: a portable, immersive and real time 3-dimensional (3D) computer based visualisation program. Specialists from the Estonian University of Life Sciences constructed 3D models of each pilot area, added the new development ideas into the model and thus provided the local community a chance to have a virtual tour in the potential future landscape.

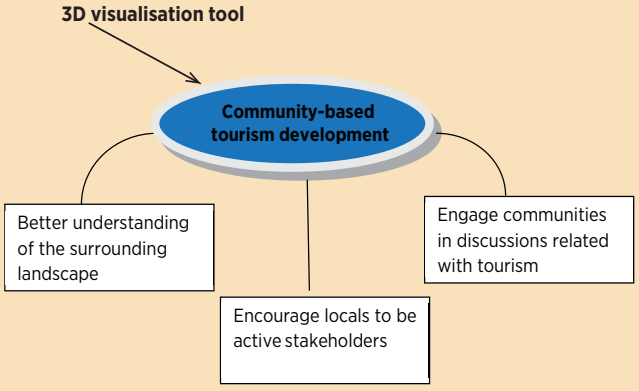
The aim of the 3D visualisation was thus:

- to help local community members understand tourism related changes in their environment before they occur,
- to create discussion and activate the locals to influence and take part in the development,
- to help communities reach consensus and make decisions concerning the future tourism development,
- to strengthen the relationship between people and their environment.

3D "flights" in Kymenlaakso

Development Association Sepra arranged 3D presentations in its area as "Flights". Invitations were handed out as "flight tickets" and during the 3D "flight" staff was dressed in genuine Finnair-airlines costumes. Flights were targeted towards different groups of people and after the flight in the afternoon a one hours session was held where local action plans were discussed and worked with. This gained a lot of positive attention from the press and even radio.

The 3D visualisation tool provided an excellent means for increasing communication concerning tourism development at the local level. In the 3D model, people were able to see the planned tourism ideas "ready" from any angle and reflect their impact on the landscape and environment with their own eyes. In the COMCOT regions, feedback was collected concerning the 3D presentations. According to this feedback, people consider that the 3D modelling was a very impressive and effective tool in illustrating tourism development.



2.2 Networking

Networks are an effective means of informing, inspiring and empowering local people in rural communities although there is no single definition of what a network means in the context of community-based tourism development. Thus the terms network and networking can mean different things to different people and are often used to describe a wide range of activities or any kind of social connection. However, one major issue that all of these networks aim to address is helping people to, "learn how to do community-based tourism development," particularly through encouraging learning based on the experience of others in the network.

According to research, many rural networks are created in order to improve the well-being, capacity and resilience of rural communities. They do this by supporting and facilitating interaction between, and action by, different actors and stakeholders that helps the flow of information and the sharing of resources which is relevant to community-based tourism development.

2.3 Action plan

Based on the information gathered in the previous phases of the process, the local community should write an action plan to guide the realisation of their tourism development ideas. The action plan consists of those ideas selected through the prioritisation and visualisation phases. The action plan should be a detailed scheme of how to meet the set objectives. The action should answer at least the following questions: what is the objective, who will take the main responsibility for realising the objective, what is the timetable, what are the resources for the development and what kinds of indicators are there to follow the realisation of the idea.

The action plans have in many respects already been defined through the earlier prioritisation process: the next step sees them populated through definition of the timescale for delivery; the lead partner in the delivery process; the associated financial and human resource implications; the identification of potential funding sources; the identification of key performance indicators (KPI's); and the means of measuring them.

CROSS-BORDER NETWORKING BETWEEN COMCOT PILOT REGION MEMBERS

During the COMCOT project, Estonian and Finnish entrepreneurs and other stakeholders within the pilot regions had opportunities to built cross-border cooperation networks while undertaking familiarisation (FAM) visits in each country. A Finnish stakeholder group had the privilege of making the first FAM visit in Estonia on May 2011. The group visited the recently completed recreational area in a former oil-shale quarry and future water sport centre in Maidla community and took part in a conference on development of the Lake Vörtsjärv area in Viljandi. At the Estonian University of Life Sciences the group had a chance to see the first presentation of the 3D Landscape Theatre visualisation of Finnish pilot areas. In addition to these visits, the most important purpose of the study visit was to network the actors at both national and cross-border level. To help them get to know each other and identify potentially common interests.

Networking takes time to fully develop and rarely happens based on only one meeting; this is very important to understand within any development process.

In order to keep up the contacts created during the first FAM visit therefore, another visit was organised half a year later in the autumn of 2011. A delegation of key active Estonians visited Lohja in September 2011. Stakeholders from the three Estonian pilot areas learned about tourism in Lohja by visiting cabin providers, community tourism sites, a manor house, local mill, lake side café, local food fair and other tourism related sites. Further support to cross-border neworking between Finnish and Estonian participants was provided through tutored workshops in December 2012 and January 2013. In these workshops, participants got to a chance to further develop their contacts and learn from each other's experiences and working methods in development of community-based tourism and activation of local people

Phase 3: Realisation

3.1 Capacity building

In this phase, one of the main tasks is to help the local active key people to take over and continue the development of the ideas after the process. In order to achieve this, the locals need to have the required knowledge and skills to implement the idea. If this does not exist already within the community, there is need for capacity building. This can be roughly divided into two different sets of activities: a) providing the required underpinning knowledge and skills, i.e. training the community members in relation to the chosen development ideas and b) creating the necessary networks for the local key actors to increase their own knowledge (share their experiences and thus learn from others) and to be able to carry out the implementation of the chosen development initiative. Remember, though, that networking should be an ongoing process throughout the whole project!

THE VALUE OF STUDY VISITS

"During study visits we learned what other regions have done and we did present our own activities to other regions. The discussions with visitors were most useful and eye opening (e.g. summer academy participants). It makes you think more about your area and how things are there." Setomaa Tourism Development Team

Many communities are lacking in skills to develop and deliver all the products and services expected by modern tourists and visitors. It is vitally important that a lack of knowledge or expertise should not inhibit communities from becoming involved in tourism developments in their areas. Possessing the required skills and knowledge for community-based tourism development will greatly help community members develop the confidence to become involved and take greater ownership of developments which affect their communities. In order to find out, what kind of skills concerning the tourism development the community members need to improve upon, a training need analysis (TNA) can be conducted and based on the outputs of this a series of mentored workshops or training sessions can be implemented.

EXAMPLES OF METHODS FOR UNDERTAKING CAPACITY BUILDING:

- training needs analysis
- mentored workshops
- study tours
- networking

MAIN RISKS INVOLVED IN THIS PHASE:

- the training needs cannot be identified? It may be difficult to evaluate what level of the skills are needed for development initiatives
  ➔ try engaging with the core community group and supporters as widely as possible to discuss how they feel about their levels of skills.
- the skill needs may be very varied, so organising common training sessions can be difficult
  ➔ look careful at timing of training delivery, try small group sessions supported by online or by distance learning techniques.
- community members do not bother to take part to the training
  ➔ make sure that the benefits of the workshops/ training are visible and clear to the participants. If needed, combine the more boring or general topics, like language skills to the development activities that is of greater interest to the participants (e.g. tourism).
- there are personal conflicts in the group or between the group and other parties that hinder their networking
  ➔ look carefully at the group composition – can this be changed in some way to reduce conflicts. Look at conflict resolution techniques to identify points of difference and bring a greater understanding between conflicting parties.

MENTORED WORKSHOPS TO SUPPORT THE PROJECT SKILLS OF LOCAL PEOPLE

During any community development process or project it is essential to ensure that local people have the skills and competencies to undertake and implement the ideas that have been brought forward and to continue with the development.

In all too many cases activities cease after the development project has been finalised, a major question is the availability of resources. Rural development has been project based for years and although there are a number of sources of financing, nevertheless, local people rarely have sufficient knowledge of how to access and utilise these resources in order to realise their ideas. Such skills are, however, central to the sustainability of such development projects, since by providing them, community development initiatives and associated investments are much more likely to be implemented.

During the Comcot project in Lohja, Finland a series of the mentored workshops was organised in order to help active local people understand the principles of project based rural development and help them to learn how to write project applications and what project management requires. The learning by doing methology was selected, since this typically best motivates community activists. During the workshop programme a group of locally active key people from Lohja Island were trained in how plan and prepare a project application. As a result of the training the group felt sufficiently empowered to complete a Leader application in order to implement ideas identified during the prioritisation phase. The application was submitted to the local Leader group and received a positive decision in autumn 2013.

ENGLISH FOR RURAL TOURISM ENTREPRENEURS: SETOMAA REGION

"English language training was very good. Participants liked it a lot. We realised, though, that it is complicated to organise such courses in a region such as ours because the distances between entrepreneurs are quite long and the participants' starting language levels differed quite a lot" said Ülle Pärnoja from the Setomaa Development Team.

The training course in English for rural tourism entrepreneurs was organised for SME owners and staff in the Setomaa region. The aim of the course was to improve English language skills in the areas of tourism and accommodation, hospitality, service provision, activities in the countryside. Other objectives were to help the learners appreciate and understand the value of up-selling and cross-selling of rural tourism products, and to promote the use of local food.

After completing the course, learners were able to speak about themselves, their family and their everyday activities e.g. on the tourist farm. They also learned how to use appropriate forms of address when communicating with visitors e.g. by phone and in writing, how to provide directions and describe both indoor and outdoor activities which can be found locally, how to recommend such activities and describe accommodation in terms of room and B&B facilities

3.2 Implementation, delivery and monitoring

In this phase the development activities are started and practical steps taken according to the plans and understanding gained from the planning and visualisation. For example a hiking trail is actually built, existing or new products are packaged together and marketing and supply systems arranged.

SETO KÜLAVÜÜ KOSTIPÄIV – SETO VILLAGE BELT POP-UP CAFE

The tourism route "Seto Külavüü (Village Belt)" was developed as an attraction for tourists when visiting Setomaa. In developing the community tourism destination the 3D Landscape planning tool was used to show community members what the Seto Külavüü would offer to visitors.

During the community tourism development process an idea to showcase local hospitality whilst also motivating members of the community to take part in tourism development evolved. The Seto Kostipäiv or pop-up café concept was born!

Every person who was interested in opening the doors of their family homes was invited to workshops in order to create a common understanding of the event, including designing the marketing materials, signs and labels and discussing hospitability and accompanying activities. The pop-up café idea was very successful since there were many more visitors than expected, visitors got only good memories, there was a lot of publicity and the local communities showed that it was possible to act as "all for one"!

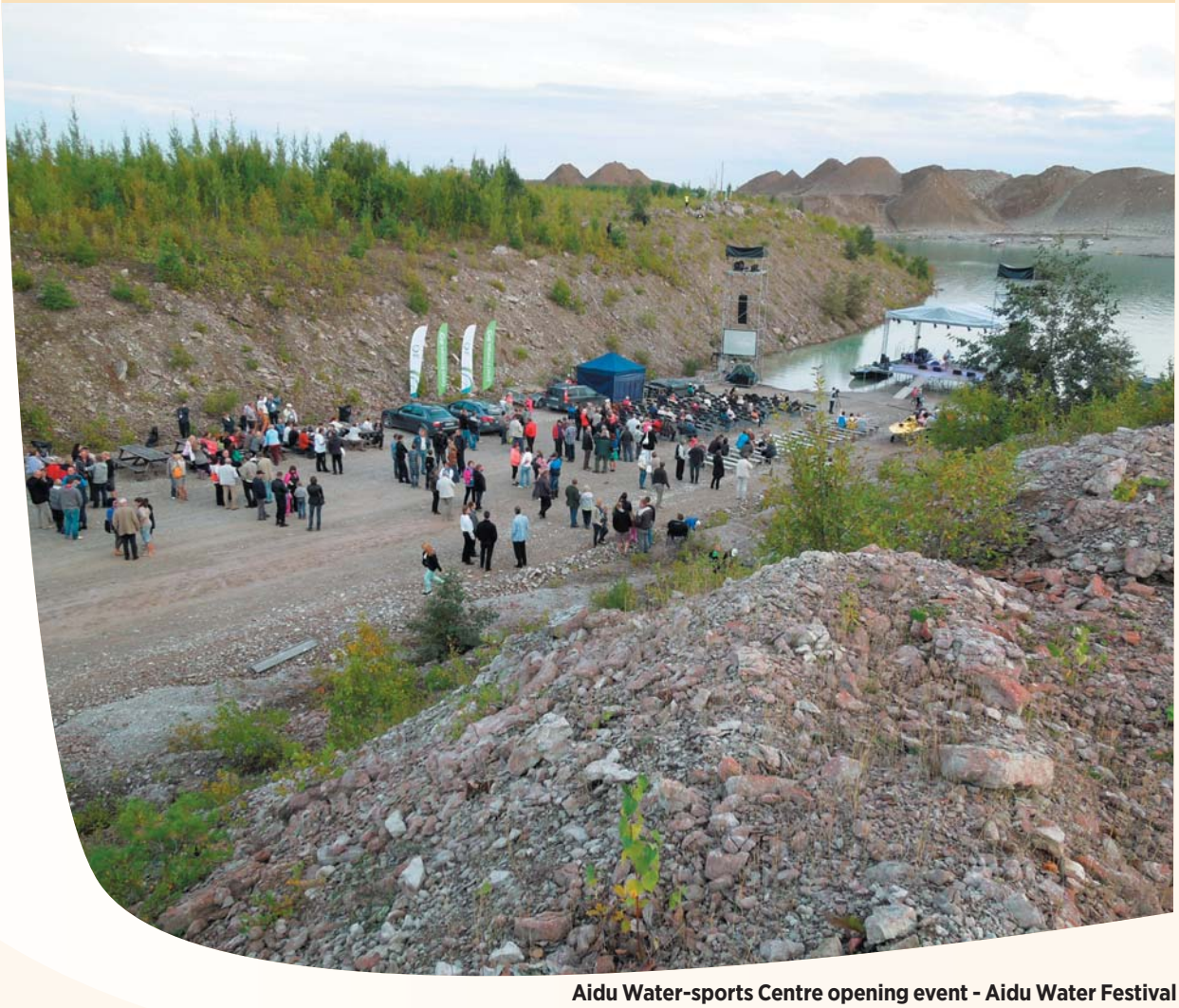
Floating pop-up café, Setomaa

AIDU WATER-SPORTS CENTRE OPENING EVENT - AIDU WATER FESTIVAL

The Aidu Water-sports Centre sits alongside a 2.3 km rowing channel created as part of a restoration process by the Estonian Energy Company on the site of the former Aidu oil shale surface mine. A Water-sports stadium will be built in the centre to cater for international sports events, support will also be provided for tourism development through building of accommodation, entertainment and catering facilities and a tourism providers network has started. In addition a wind-power generating park will be sited nearby.

New uses for waste oil shale have been found through landscape development and the creation of a pyramids park.

The opening of the Aidu Water-sports channel took place on 24, August 2013. The confidence of local community people and their willingness to participate in local development activities was greatly enhanced through the planning of the Water-sports Centre, 3D landscape theatre presentations and related events



Aidu Water-sports Centre opening event - Aidu Water Festival

Island museum, Kaunisaari

DEVELOPMENT OF SERVICES ON THE ISLAND OF KAUNISAARI

The island has a unique and natural environment, all physical developments (including providing tents/yurts and camping sites) and infrastructure should be very carefully and thoughtfully designed to fit sympathetically with the natural environment and landscape; it will be important to avoid ghettoisation of any development and to avoid damaging the environment including becoming a blot on the landscape.

A number of suggestions and comments on the potential for development of the island's tourism product were put forward by COMCOT partners:

A / establishment of a community benefit company with responsibility for:
- developing the tourism product,
- managing/supervising/maintaining the public areas,
- raising funds for activities supporting development of the island's tourism product.

B / providing more activities for children/families,
C / improving the "welcome to Kaunissaari" at the harbour side,
D / development and diversifying the accommodation base.

During the implementation phase it is important to regularly monitor the development and results of it. There are six keys components of project monitoring (the routine and systematic collection of information) that will help you to check the progress towards achieving your outcomes.

1) Don't leave monitoring until the final stages of the project

Sometimes we only start to think about monitoring at the end of a project, when we remember that we've got to report our outputs to stakeholders. It is easiest and avoids that last minute rush to gather evidence and prepare a report; it's essential to start thinking about monitoring from the beginning, during the project planning stages.

2) Decide what you're going to monitor, and how often

Start by clearly identifying the indicators for your outcomes, how you're going to measure them and make sure the whole project team is aware of them. Then you can work out how often you will measure them e.g. on a weekly or monthly basis, or just at the beginning and end of the project?

3) Keep it proportionate

As long as the indicators you are monitoring are appropriate, and you have taken the time to think about the best way to measure them, you don't need to gather huge quantities of information, or use lots of different methods. Focus on quality rather quantity, and be realistic about what you have time to do.

4) Decide which techniques to use for monitoring

Have your tools for collection of information ready, such as qualitative methods e.g. questionnaires, interviews, focus groups or observations from different people involved in the project. Or collecting quantitative data such as the numbers of new visitors to your community, numbers of new tourism products created or new businesses started/new job places created.

5) Have someone responsible for monitoring

Monitoring is one of those tasks that can easily be forgotten, or can fall between job responsibilities so it is essential to be clear about who is in charge of monitoring. Sometime it will be the project

Comcot final conference delegates enjoying a cultural heritage study tour (the tour has subsequently been considered for commercialisation as a community tourism product)

leader or in a large project a person whom has time allocated to them for this work. In smaller community projects this may be the task of a volunteer and providers of the community tourism products or services can assist them.The most important thing is that everyone is clear about what's expected of them.

6) How and to whom should you report the findings?

It is important that there is a clear feedback/ reporting methodology for the people collecting the monitoring information; in what format it should be given. Another equally key decision is what the project team will do with the information when it has been received, how it will be analysed and acted upon. Deciding this at the beginning is one way to make monitoring a practical process, rather than a wasted exercise.

THE METHODS THAT CAN BE USED VARY BASED ON THE DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE IN QUESTION. IN GENERAL THE MOST IMPORTANT THINGS TO REMEMBER ARE:

- to share the responsibilities in this phase so that the activities can continue without help from outside.
- to ensure smooth and regular communication during the implementation!
- to make sure that sufficient ownership has been generated among the community towards the development idea to keep the activities alive in future. If the role of the facilitator is still very significant in this phase, it is possible that the community is not yet ready to take up responsibility for continuity of the project. You may need to find a way to extend support for the project to avoid problems with the development running out of energy!

In conclusion

The challenges and issues faced by the COMCOT partner regions implementing the COMCOT tool and the factors contributing to its success formed the basis for the development tool of community-based tourism described above. The key risks and potential solutions were described in each phase and are summarised as follows:

- Remember to take into account the stage of development of the area in question – don't repeat something already done!
- All the participants should know the objectives of the process as well as its progress – it's important to invest time in the creation of a common vision and understanding.
- Encouraging local people to participate in local development may take some time – try to be innovative in your methodology, be persistent!
- Community-based tourism projects are a dynamic process – things don't necessarily always go straightforwardly from one phase to the next, retracing steps can be a natural part of the process. You may also need to repeat some phases several times.
- The available resources for local development work are often rather limited – don't try to accomplish too much at any one time. Progress on even small things increases local people's motivation to be involved in the process!
- Everyone has to feel free to express their opinions concerning common developments – be sure that there is an open, democratic and encouraging atmosphere for discussions.
- Objective, external experts can greatly contribute to the success of the process – the comments and suggestions of these experts should, however, be accepted by community members.
- Community-based tourism development usually requires the development of new skills by community members - be sure that there are sufficient opportunities to learn new skills so as to safeguard the sustainability of the development. Learning from each other's experiences is also very important!
- Ongoing monitoring and evaluation enables flexibility in the process – don't be scared to make changes to the development plans if necessary!
- Community-based tourism development is based on trust – the process should be understood as a long-term investment in the community. Also do not underestimate the importance of proper networking to ensure long-term co-operation.

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