



The sustainability of Via Hanseatica

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What is Via Hanseatica

Via Hanseatica is an international tourist route between Riga, Tartu and St. Petersburg and it is inspired by historic Hansa trade corridor between Lybeck and Riga.

History

There is a story how mayors of 2 border cities, Valga and Valka, once met up to share good food, drinks and thoughts. During this evening an interesting idea popped up: elaborating Via Hanseatica tourism route. At that time Via Hanseatica was known only as a transport corridor connecting Lübeck and St. Petersburg. So, two mayors thought that why to waste a perfectly good name: Via Hanseactia, and good connections only for logistics. It has to be used for tourism development and cooperation. Especially as in this area some could find very picturesque landscapes, rich cultural heritage and fun activities both for individuals and families.

Then on 15 June, 2001, the 4 Estonian county governors of Valga, Tartu, Jõgeva and Ida-Viru signed a cooperation agreement that led to drawing up the development strategy of Via Hanseatica, creating a relevant tourism product, spatial planning of the development zone and kick-starting for the international cooperation.

From 2004 until 2007, Via Hanseatica was developed as part of the Interreg VHB Zone international project "Development of Baltic Tourist Network in Via Hanseatica Development Zone", mainly focusing on finding out what exactly we have to offer our potential visitors. From 2009 until 2011, various activities were implemented by partners and regions of this initial project. The cooperation activities were lead by Foundation South-Estonian Tourism, supported by numerous development organisations and tourism businesses of Via Hanseatica.

In 2012, Russian partners joined Via Hanseatica: from 2012 until 2014, activities were carried out via the Estonia-Latvia-Russia cross-border cooperation programme and Via Hanseatica officially became the tourism network that connects EU and Russia: Latvia, Estonia and Russia. As a result, Via Hanseatica website and a travel planner were created as well as a book called "Unforgettable Adventures on the Via Hanseatica" is available for free download as an e-book to this day.

By the year 2014, several cooperation projects and activities had led to the development of a route on the 580-kilometre Riga–St. Petersburg section that highlights the culture and history of the three countries, introducing their distinctive features as well as common elements such as architecture, food culture and much more to have an exciting vacation. The cities on the route are St. Petersburg, Ivangorod, Narva, Tartu, Valga, Valka, Valmiera and Sigulda.

From 2017 until 2020, activities that concentrate on food heritage and culture were carried out through the Estonian-Latvian cross-border cooperation programme Interreg. The food route "Taste Hanseatica", which includes the counties of Jõgeva, Tartu and Valga in Estonia as well as Valka, Valmiera and Sigulda in Latvia, was created. There are altogether 80 food

producers and providers on the route. Some of the areas and businesses of the route overlap with the ones on the culinary route "Flavours of Livonia".

From April 2019 to June 2021, Via Hanseatica Plus, financed by the Estonia-Russia programme, was launched. In addition developing the current route, the project concentrated on offering added value to it, expanding the route towards Rakvere and Viljandi in Estonia as well as towards Vyborg and Pskov in Russia. Numerous interesting historic regions were included to the route. Cooperation was strengthened with businesses at local as well as international level.

But in order to have people to who to show all that we have, they need to know we exist. Therefore a lot of effective marketing activities were done during the project: such as social media campaigns and advertising, but also consistent content marketing were done during the project. Of course there were impacts because of the worldwide pandemic, but a lot of activities were re-organized or postponed until the situation was better and travelling was allowed. The travel planner was redeveloped, all data has checked, a lot of marketing materials were created. Also this document was part of the last project.

How we can keep Via Hanseatica sustainable

Travel planner

The new Via Hanseatica travel planner was built with ArcGIS Experience builder and all data is in Tartu City Government servers. Tartu County Tourism has the responsibility to keep it up at least for 5 years. All participated partners have now the responsibility to keep their data up to date. For Estonian partners it is very easy: all data comes from official Estonian tourism site visitestonia.com database, and the chosen objects has shown out at travel planner. If partners want to add new objects they can contact LP.

For Russian and Latvian partners it is so that they have to collect all data in 5 languages and all changes and new objects must be done manually. Russian partners must send all their new information in every 6 months to LP. Latvian partners will get 3 personal accesses to the system in the beginning of Sept 2021. Also the training for system usage will be held then in Tartu. (Due to pandemic, the training was postponed).

Travel planner can be found: travel.viahanseatica.info.

Brochures

All new marketing materials are accessible at issuu.com/viahanseatica. A lot of printed materials were done also and all partners can share them out to tourist information centres, and also on fairs and contact events. As long as the materials are still usable, partners can do the reprinting with their own budgets.

Social media

Last, but most important thing is to continue social media activities. All partners can have access to Instagram, Facebook or V Kontakte accounts. It is up to all partners their region will be presented at Via Hanseatica social media channels. A good practice is to let also other partners know, that something is planned. A Whatsapp "social media chat" has created when the project started and quick communication can be done also there in the future.

Future

How Estonia will continue

Tartu County Tourism Foundation has the responsibility to keep up the travel planner and help all partners with data questions at least for 5 years. The main contacts for other questions about Estonian areas will be South-Estonian tourist cluster and Ida-Viru Tourism cluster responsibilities. (South-Estonian tourism cluster will cover all counties but Ida-Viru) The other questions, such as some entrepreneurs want to join or make cooperation activities can be asked: about Ida-Viru County: info@ivek.ee and about other areas: viahanseatica@visittartu.com

Estonian partners are open to all kind of discussions about future cooperations.

How Latvia will continue

In Latvia the coordinating organization is Vidzeme Planning Region. There was a 5 year cooperation agreement with VPR and 9 municipalities in 2016-2020. The agreement set up the budget to common activities: VPR 2000 EUR/year + municipalities 9 x 500 Eur/year = 6500 EUR/year. In 2021 the new cooperation agreement with same budget 6500 EUR was

signed. As there was an administrative-territorial reform, and new municipalities added to counties the new agreement for the year 2022 will be signed by the end of 2021.

As some parts were not Via Hanseatica territories before the Via Hanseatica will be wider in Latvia.

How Russia will continue

In the future period Russia is planning to continue and utilize the valuable Via Hanseatica experience and results. Our Tourist Information Centers in Pskov Region and Leningrad Region will carry on with the integration of the Via Hanseatica image and activities into their planned events (Olga Iakimenko will remain the RU coordinator). Thus, the Center of Tourism and Creative industries of Pskov, being a subordinate institution of the Committee of Cross-border Cooperation and tourism of the Pskov City Administration as well as the Leningrad Region Tourist Information Center will continue to spread the information about Via Hanseatica among the tourists. They will make and disseminate the printed materials (maps, guides etc.), carry out quests and presentations, participate in the exhibitions and fairs. Also all digital media resources will be uploaded on the Center' website as soon as this website is ready.

Upon the completion of the Project, the "Mineral" State Geological Enterprise will also continue with the Via Hanseatica updates and will be responsible for the natural and sustainable properties of St. Petersburg, as well as dissemination of information about the project through specially protected areas.