



# **Transnational LEADER cooperation project „GREENPARK”**

**Opening Event in Lahemaa National Park  
Tourism area / LAG Arenduskoda area, Estonia**

**04-08.08.2025**

**REPORT BY THE LEAD PARTNER**

**Composed by: Katrin Suursoo**

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## 1. Goal achievement

### Activity 1:

#### Opening Event in Estonia

#### Activity objective in the application:

Introduction of all international partners and participants, an overview of planned international activities and focus topics, as well as presentation of best practices in sustainable tourism in the host partner's region.

#### Achievement of the activity objective:

**The objective was fully achieved** – all international partners and participants were thoroughly introduced, ensuring a shared understanding of the project stakeholders and their roles. Planned international activities and focus topics were presented, enabling participants to better plan their contributions. In the Development Centre's region, an overview of sustainable tourism best practices was provided, highlighting both innovative solutions and approaches that preserve local culture and nature. According to participant feedback, the activity was informative, well-organised, and fostered international cooperation and exchange of experiences.



## 2. Narrative Report on the Implementation of the Activity

### 2.1. Activity Report – 4 August 2025

#### Arrival of guests and accommodation

The first day of the LEADER cooperation project “GREENPARK” was dedicated to welcoming guests and providing an initial introduction to the local environment. Participants arrived in Estonia and travelled to the Lahemaa National Park tourism area, where they were greeted at the Viinistu Art Hotel.

This seaside accommodation, located in a former fish industry building, offered a cosy atmosphere and introduced guests to local cultural heritage through its art collection and historical background.

### Walk in Viinistu and evening programme

After settling in, participants enjoyed a leisurely walk in Viinistu village, which was once a bustling fishing village and has now become a well-known cultural centre. The walk provided a first-hand experience of the area's architecture, maritime culture, and coastal landscape. Attention was given to traditional wooden houses as well as seaside views, which gave an impression of the aesthetics and natural values of the Lahemaa National Park tourism area.

In the evening, a joint dinner took place at the Viinistu Art Hotel restaurant, featuring dishes prepared from local and seasonal ingredients. This was the first opportunity for partners to meet in an informal atmosphere, get to know each other, and share initial thoughts on the activities planned for the coming days.

After dinner, the Development Centre team prepared the conference hall.

In summary, the programme of 4 August fulfilled its goal of warmly welcoming guests, introducing them to the accommodation and surroundings, and establishing initial contacts between partners and the local environment. The relaxed pace and friendly atmosphere laid the foundation for meaningful discussions and collaborative activities in the following days.

Conclusion of the day prepared by Katrin Suursoo, Arenduskoda.



## 2.2. Activity Report – 5 August 2025

### Opening conference in Viinistu

The day began with a formal welcome at the Viinistu Art Hotel conference hall, where the lead partner, the Development Centre, provided an overview of the objectives and expected results of the LEADER cooperation project “GREENPARK.” The opening speech emphasised the importance of international

cooperation in rural development and the role of sustainable tourism in enhancing regional competitiveness.

Representatives from Estonia, Latvia, Slovenia, and Croatia were present, each introducing their organisations, areas of activity, and interest in the project. This part helped to establish initial personal connections and laid the groundwork for closer future cooperation.

The presentations, lasting a total of about 5 hours, offered an informative overview of the work of both local and international action groups. Estonia was represented by four LEADER action groups:

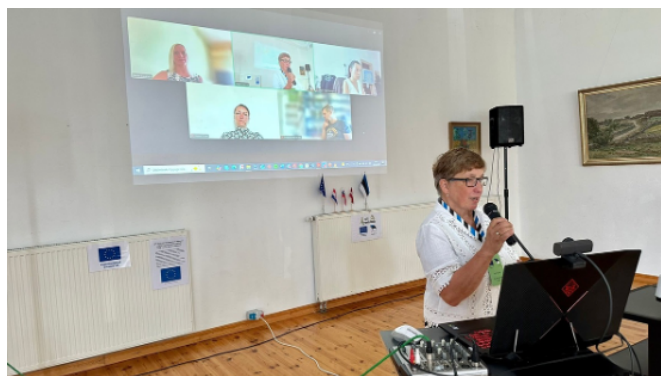
- Development Centre, which presented development activities in the Lahemaa National Park tourism area / Development Centre region and cooperation activities within the EUROPARC network;
- Kodukant Läänemaa, sharing experiences from tourism and community projects in Matsalu National Park;
- Ida-Harju Cooperation Council, presenting community initiatives and tourism development in eastern Harju County;
- Saare Cooperation Council, introducing development projects on Saaremaa and Muhu islands, combining tradition and innovation.

Latvian partners delivered a joint presentation on development projects in their regions, highlighting the potential of nature and cultural tourism in four Latvian areas. Slovenia was represented by LAG Between Nanos and Snežnik(online) and LAG Bogastvo podeželja, focusing on tourism development in mountain and forest areas, community engagement, and support for entrepreneurship. From Croatia, LAG Mura-Drava and LAG Međimurski doli i bregipresented their experiences with cross-border cooperation projects and tourism development.

One of the day's topics was mentoring in rural entrepreneurship, during which all action groups discussed the creation of a mentoring programme to support local entrepreneurs' skills and access to international markets. This idea received broad interest among participants and is planned as one of the project's workstreams.

A discussion was also held on cooperation with the EUROPARC Federation and the topic of certification. Participants learned how the certificate can increase a region's visibility, quality standards, and credibility as a sustainable tourism destination.







## Boat trip to Mohni Island and evening programme

After the official part, participants took a boat trip to Mohni Island, part of Lahemaa National Park. The excursion offered a direct experience of the area's natural values and tourism potential: participants learned about the island's bird diversity, historic lighthouse, and local stories. The trip linked the day's theoretical discussions to a practical example of how natural and cultural heritage can be used sustainably in tourism.



Dinner at the Viinistu Art Hotel restaurant ended the day in a cosy atmosphere. Dishes prepared from local and seasonal ingredients provided culinary enjoyment, while the informal setting allowed participants to exchange impressions and develop cooperation ideas further. The participant introductions, moved to the evening session, offered a good overview of the diversity within the project's partnership network.

In summary, the opening conference day met all set objectives. All partners and participants were thoroughly introduced, the project's international activities and focus topics were presented, the possibilities of mentoring and EUOPARC certification were discussed, and a strong basis for further international cooperation was established.

Conclusion of the day prepared by Katrin Suursoo, Arenduskoda.



## 2.3. Activity Report – 6 August 2025

### Oandu Visitor Centre, Lobi Museum and Workshop

The first stop of the day was the Oandu Visitor Centre, located in Lahemaa National Park, not far from Sagadi Manor.



At Oandu, visitors are introduced to Lahemaa's nature and opportunities for outdoor activities, as well as the history of forest cultivation and use over time. Katrin Freyberg introduced the Lobi Museum and took us on a virtual journey through the distinctive history of the Lobi Peninsula. Lobi Museum holds the EUROPARC certificate.

Timo Kangur from the State Forest Management Centre (RMK), who is the area's visitor manager, provided an overview of Lahemaa's main attractions, noting that the most visited site is the Viru Bog, attracting 77,000 visitors per year.

The Visitor Centre offers films and slide programmes about nature and historical forestry. In the historical foresters' house built in 1860, there is an interactive exhibition *The Story of the Forestry District*, which tells about forestry work through the ages.



Oandu is a hub for nature trails – seven study or hiking trails start directly from the yard or nearby. The centre includes buildings from different eras, each housing one or more exhibitions.

A coffee break at Oandu was provided by Sagadi Manor, after which participants had the opportunity to explore the surroundings and nature trails independently.

Under the guidance of Katrin Freyberg, we learned about many of the plants growing in the area, their uses, and each participant could create their own tea blend during the workshop.





## Vergi Harbour and Wirkes Restaurant

Next, we arrived at the picturesque Vergi Harbour, located on the Vergi Peninsula. The harbour's restaurant Wirkes ([www.wirkes.ee](http://www.wirkes.ee)), which also carries the EUROPARC certificate, operates on two floors with summer terraces offering peaceful sea views – ideal for romantic dinners or gatherings. The restaurant also hosts events such as birthdays, weddings, and corporate functions, ensuring memorable experiences for all guests. The menu features dishes made from local produce, including elk meat and fresh local fish.

We enjoyed a delicious lunch in the restaurant, located in a former border guard station, admired the sea view, and listened to an introduction by the restaurant's hostess, Kelli, about their operations. In addition to chef Lauri's excellent dishes, a special surprise was the tableware – handcrafted ceramics made by Lauri's mother, with each piece being a work of art in itself.



## Moe Manor: Visitor Centre, Workshop, Dinner

The final destination of the day was the former Moe Manor, home to the Moe Group – comprising Moe Fine Vodka Distillery, Muddise Brewery, and the Moe Museum and Visitor Centre ([visit.moe.ee](http://visit.moe.ee)).

The area has a long tradition of alcohol production – vodka has been distilled and beer brewed in the small village of Moe, Lääne-Viru County, since ancient times. In 1887, the famous pharmacist Jakob Kurberg established a modern steam-powered distillery, liqueur factory, beer brewery, and lemonade factory here. The Moe Fine Vodka Distillery is therefore one of the oldest operating vodka distilleries in the world.

At Moe Fine Vodka Distillery ([moe.ee](http://moe.ee)), high-quality alcoholic beverages are produced, with Moe Vodka being well-known on the local market. Moe was the first in Estonia to obtain a Protected Geographical Indication for one of its products.



The Muddise Brewery, named after the historic Muddise (Moe) Manor, produces craft beers, including the popular New York Lager and IPA, as well as dark and vintage beers. In addition to alcohol production, the company is involved in wine import.

The Moe Museum and Visitor Centre aim to introduce both Estonians and foreign visitors to Estonia's rich history and traditions related to the spirits industry over several centuries. Since 1971, the Estonian Spirits Museum has been open here. The site includes a preserved 18th-century vodka kitchen, 19th-century distillery, brewery, and liqueur factory, as well as beer and spirits cellars. From the Soviet era, significant buildings include the distillation tower, boiler house, and office building. In the old beer cellar, there is the Moe Krog tavern, and the former gatehouse now serves as a factory shop. From 2025, a hotel with eight rooms has also been opened.

Guided by Liisa Luhaste (distillery manager) and Erle Võsa-Tangsoo (spirits industry museum), we explored the history of vodka production, modern manufacturing, and the various services offered by the Moe Group. Each participant also had the opportunity to create a drink suited to their personal taste. Dinner was enhanced by a tasting of various Moe beverages.



Conclusion of the day prepared by Terje Aus and Anu Lomp, Saarte Koostöökogu.



## 2.4. Activity Report – 7 August 2025

### Võhma Village Society and Workshop

The day began with a trip to Võhma village to visit the Võhma Community Centre. The distinctive exterior of the building immediately caught the eye. We were told that in 1907, when an agreement was signed for the use of the land, a designer was sent to Tallinn to observe the most beautiful houses there, and based on this inspiration, the building was constructed in 1910. Originally, it was built for the Palmse Firefighters' Association, the oldest such association in the then Kadrina parish. Limestone for construction was taken from behind the community hall, while other funds were raised through organising events. In three years, the building – with a hall seating about 200 people and additional rooms – was completed.

The Võhma Village Women's Society was first registered on 13 April 1999. On 30 November 2007, the name was changed, and today the organisation operates as the Võhma Community Centre. The centre has a mixed choir, a women's folk dance group, a theatre group, and a newly formed mixed folk dance group. To maintain and develop the community centre, several project applications have been submitted, with funding successfully obtained.

We were welcomed very warmly at the community centre, greeted outside by dancers in beautiful national costumes. Refreshments and snacks were served, followed by dance performances. To our delight, Viivi Voorand, known as the "Song Mother of Virumaa," also performed on various instruments. Guests were invited to join in the dancing.





## Ancient Art House

The Ancient Art House is a museum and exhibition venue in Lahemaa, dedicated to Stone Age rock carvings and paintings. The centre's activities are organised by MTÜ Viru Koda in cooperation with members and friends of the Estonian Ancient Art Society.

From the outside, the modest house hidden in the forest was unassuming, but inside it revealed a wealth of exhibits. Copies and photographs from Scandinavian and Karelian ancient art sites took us back in time. The carvings of Äänisjärv and Alta, first described by Constantin Grewingk, were particularly notable. In 1982, a paleoastronomical expedition was carried out to test the lunar calendar hypothesis for the Äänisjärv carvings, which also triggered the founding of the Estonian Ancient Art Society in 1988. The society's main focus has been the study and presentation of ancient art in Finno-Ugric areas. The research on the Äänisjärv carvings culminated in the discovery of a new site (Luigeneem) in 1986. In 2021, the Karelian rock art sites were added to the UNESCO World Heritage List.

What surprised us most was learning that all this work and research had been done by society members in their free time and mostly at their own expense. The legendary Lahemaa guide Anne Kurepalu explained that in Karelia, between 1982 and 1991, people from various professions used their holiday time and personal funds to conduct this work. They brought their own food, lived for three to four weeks in tents on the shores of Äänisjärv or the Uiku River flowing into the White Sea, and copied, photographed, and mapped the carvings. Anne herself had participated in six summer expeditions, using all her vacation time.

She also noted that the research has revealed that people today actually want very similar things to those desired 600 years ago.

Some interesting statistics: 42% of the carvings depict swans, 13% are moon or sun symbols, 12% depict animals (all resembling elk with antlers), and only 7% depict human figures. Humans were often shown in dance poses and sometimes as hybrids with animals or even trees.

Visitors also had the opportunity to try their skills in the workshop.





## Kuusiku Nature Farm

The small and cosy Kuusiku Nature Farm, located in the Viitna forests, was a true surprise. The farm was beautifully landscaped, with clear signs of the owners Sirje and Rein Kuusiku's care and effort everywhere. The farm focuses on sustainable tourism and local flavours. They grow medicinal plants organically, producing teas and other natural health products. They also offer local and organic food as well as comfortable rural accommodation.





We were first served lunch, which was a delightful culinary experience. Many guests were surprised that such simple ingredients could result in such flavourful dishes. The menu is constantly updated with new dishes created according to the recipes of the two female hosts, using produce from their own garden and nearby forests. They bake their own organic sourdough bread and make herb butter.



After lunch, we toured the buildings and surroundings, and Sirje showed us the Nature House she had built. The wooden structure blended harmoniously into the environment and held many interesting features to explore.

### **Lahemaa Heritage House, Workshop, and Cultural Programme**

In the afternoon, we visited the Lahemaa Heritage House, located near Lake Kahala in Uuri village, at Iisaka Farm, mentioned in church records as early as the 18th century.

According to their website, the farm's goal is to preserve, practice, promote, and pass on our cultural heritage through attitudes, training, events, and ways of life. Upon arrival, it was clear that the hosts, Liis and Roland Burk, truly live by these principles.

We began by learning about sheep farming. Liis explained that of their 10 sheep, 6 are pure Estonian native breed, and they are guarded by a real shepherd dog capable of keeping wolves and bears away. The sheep seemed to know their names well and came when called.



Liis has extensively studied old Estonian wedding traditions and shared them with us, along with the process of making woollen items that, through a certain special technique, did not feel scratchy. Roland possesses a wealth of woodworking knowledge and clever tricks, which he also teaches others. They



also make chaga mushroom drinks and much more. In the workshop, participants could try their hand at crafts.



After dinner at the Lahemaa Heritage House, the cultural programme began – by a happy coincidence, a concert by Uurikad & Marek Sadam was taking place in their barn. This gave us the opportunity to experience local culture at a major community event, with performers from the same village.



Conclusion of the day prepared by Kaja Traagel, Ida-Harju Koostöökoda.

## 2.5. Activity Report – 8 August 2025

### Hike on the Majakivi–Pikanõmme Nature Trail with Wanderlust

The final day of the project's opening event was designed around an active nature experience and a summarising session, to integrate the discussions, visits, and cooperation ideas from previous days into a whole. The focus of the day was the hands-on experience of one of Lahemaa National Park's most



famous nature trails – the Majakivi–Pikanõmme Trail – giving participants a direct sense of the area’s natural diversity and sustainable visitor management.



Matka korraldas ja juhtis Wanderlust Matkad, kes on EUROPARC sertifikaadiga loodusturismi ettevõte. Sertifikaadi olemust ja tähtsust tutvustati ka matka käigus, rõhutades selle rolli kvaliteedi tagamisel ning keskkonnahoiu põhimõtete järgimisel. Rajal nähti Lahemaa suurimat rändrahu Majakivi (7 m kõrgune ja 32 m ümbermõõduga) ning külastati Pikanõmme vaatetorni, mis paikneb poolsaare kõrgeimal kohal ja pakub panoraamvaateid ümbritsevale loodusele. Matka käigus räägiti piirkonna geoloogiast, taimestikust ja pärimustega seotud lugudest, mis lisasid kogemusele kultuurilise mõõtme.

Matk oli ühtlasi suurepärane näide sellest, kuidas loodusturism saab olla ühtaegu elamuslik ja keskkonnasäästlik, pakkudes osalejatele võimalust tunnetada Lahemaa rahvusparki väärtust vahetult ja isiklikult.

The hike was organised and led by *Wanderlust Matkad*, a nature tourism company with EUROPARC certification. The meaning and importance of the certificate were explained during the hike, highlighting its role in ensuring quality and adherence to environmental principles. On the trail, participants saw Lahemaa’s largest glacial erratic, Majakivi (7 m high and 32 m in circumference), and visited the Pikanõmme observation tower, located at the highest point of the peninsula, offering panoramic views of the surrounding nature. The hike also included information about the area’s geology, vegetation, and folklore, adding a cultural dimension to the experience.

The hike was an excellent example of how nature tourism can be both engaging and environmentally responsible, giving participants a personal and immediate appreciation of Lahemaa National Park’s value.

## Hara Harbour

In the afternoon, participants visited Hara Harbour, which has a unique history. Built during the Soviet era as a secret base for submarine demagnetisation, it has since been transformed into a tourism and cultural centre, hosting various events and excursions. The visit included insights into the harbour’s historical role, its restoration process, and its transformation from a military facility into a publicly accessible site that creates value for the community.

## Official Closing of the Opening Event

At the end of the day, the official closing of the project’s opening event took place. Together with

partners, all activities, presentations, and workshops of the event were reviewed. Discussions highlighted key lessons learned and confirmed preliminary agreements for further cooperation, including the schedule for upcoming meetings and priority topics. Several partners emphasised that the structure of the opening event – combining official discussions, practical field visits, and cultural experiences – had been an effective way to strengthen the network.

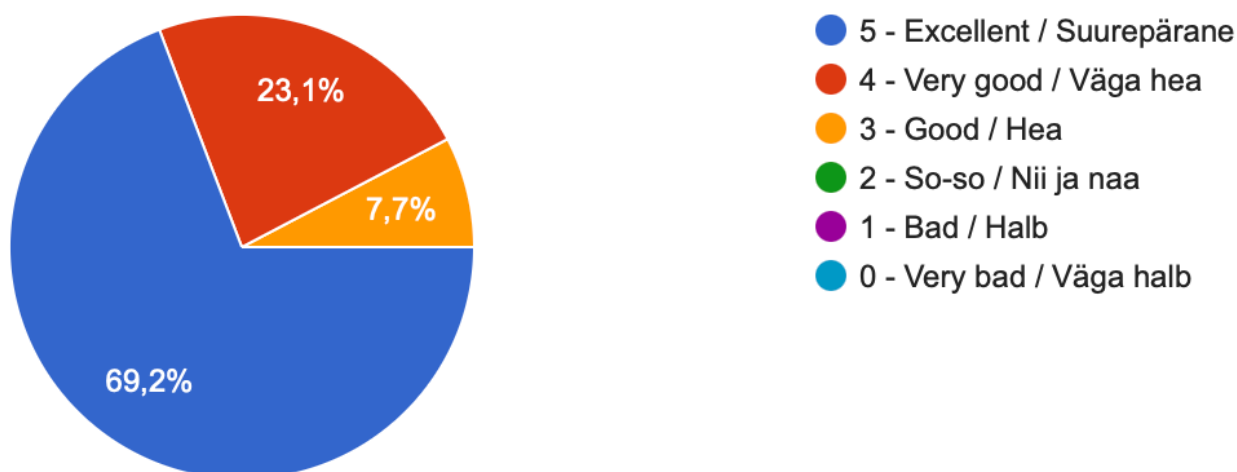
In conclusion, 8 August provided participants with both deep nature experiences and important strategic discussions. The Majakivi–Pikanõmme Trail and Hara Harbour visits showcased the unique natural and cultural values of Lahemaa National Park and its surroundings, while the official closing allowed all experiences and knowledge to be distilled into a clear action plan for continued international cooperation. The day provided a strong and inspiring final chord to the opening event.

Conclusion of the day prepared by Katrin Suursoo, Arenduskoda.

### 3. Participant Feedback

#### 3.1. Answers to the questions

##### 1. How satisfied are you overall with the organisation of the opening event?



##### 2. Please comment on your previous rating.

- A very well-organised programme that provided a good and diverse overview of tourism entrepreneurship in Lahemaa.
- Excellent organisation. The room had a bit of an echo and little fresh air. An open door helped to improve the situation.
- The presentations were interesting and the participants were very nice.
- It was well organised.
- The organisation was flawless. All workshops and excursions were extremely interesting.
- The programme was interesting both for us Estonians and for foreign guests, the schedule was well planned, nothing ran late and nothing was left undone, and there was no rushing.
- Everything on-site went perfectly.
- Everything was great; there was a small problem with water in the hotel, but it was resolved quickly.

- As it was my first time in Estonia, the location was very interesting for me. The entire programme was well thought out and structured, it was not overloaded, and we had enough time for everything.
- The participants' well-being was ensured, there was a variety of venues for exchanging experiences, the guides did an excellent job, and the programme ran according to plan.
- I participated only on two days; everything was very well organized.
- The overall organization was good, the activities were well thought out, the food was of good quality, and the schedule generally worked well.

### **3. What did you like most about the opening event?**

- The overall structure of the programme, the opportunity to interact and exchange ideas with people from different countries.
- Presentations that included short video clips.
- I can't really point out anything in particular. I liked everything.
- Visits and the seminar.
- Organisation.
- I especially liked that the programme was very interactive and involved the participants directly.
- Since I missed one day, I can only comment on the first day. I liked all the introductions. Everything was well prepared and interesting. I enjoyed the Pärimuskoja and Uurikad concert, and the Majakivi hike was great – everyone enjoyed it.
- A very content-rich and well-organised programme of visits. The opening seminar was also comprehensive and informative, of just the right length, while including presentations from all partners about their local action groups. Personally, I would have also included introductions of the participants from each partner area during the opening event itself, either before or after each presentation.
- The workshops, including the approach taken. Active participation from participants in many of the workshops.
- We especially enjoyed all the workshops where we could participate hands-on.
- We particularly enjoyed the joint dancing and music-making at Võhma Community Centre.
- All the people we visited did what they do with great passion. Such people remain in your memory for a long time and inspire and motivate us as well. I am very grateful for the opportunity to have a glimpse into their world.
- The visit to Moe, also Sirje's farm, and the presentations.

### **4. What did you dislike about the opening event?**

- It's hard to find anything to criticise.
- I liked everything (2).
- The room's echo. Regarding presentations, it would be nice to also see a drone's-eye view of the Estonian LAGs.
- Accommodation was not on the same level as the rest.
- I liked everything.
- I liked everything, nothing negative to point out.
- If I have to point out something, it's the accommodation during the opening event – the bar closed at 9 pm, and the room didn't have a balcony. The only complaint was about the accommodation.
- No negative feedback from participants, everyone liked it.
- These comments are rather nitpicking. The sound at the opening event – it required a lot of effort to hear and understand the presentations. The sound was better at the back of the hall. This issue can always arise and is very difficult to prevent entirely. There could have been a bit more information about the trip to Mohni. Some ladies were not dressed quite appropriately. As organizers,



we assume people will think of these things themselves, but that may not always be the case. People also did not take into account that there could be strong wind, and the return trip from the island was quite a challenge.

- There was a little extra time left over for the medicinal plants workshop.

#### **5. What ideas did you gain from these days for developing your region/organisation?**

- The various wonderful workshops offered by entrepreneurs were inspiring. I liked how warmly we were welcomed everywhere; it felt very inviting. It seemed that the local entrepreneurs work well together. As a tourism organisation manager, the overall experience of the opening event was very inspiring, and it was nice to see the excellent level of hospitality among local companies.
- As an entrepreneur from East Harju, I realised that such a diverse programme should also be created for the East Harju area.
- It was interesting to see how the hosts (entrepreneurs and NGOs) welcomed guests, the workshops, the hospitality.
- I learned more about others' activities and what kind of information I could add to my own website.
- Inspiration to diversify activities.
- Our region has many natural and cultural values. This trip taught me the importance of raising awareness among residents about these values and developing tourism related to them.
- How to offer guests different experiences, workshops, and introduce them to your area.
- To research more about Vilsandi National Park and the companies providing services there. It was nice to see how Lahemaa companies proudly highlight the EUROPARC label and use it in their marketing. Our companies are rather modest in using the UNESCO MAB label.
- Ways to interpret natural heritage. We got many ideas, as our area has many interesting places without developed interpretation or active involvement in tourism through workshops.
- We will definitely transfer this approach to our own region.
- The Latvian delegation greatly appreciated Estonian entrepreneurs' ability to take pride in their achievements – we would like to see the same in our country.
- Cooperation can always be improved.

#### **6. How satisfied were you with the accommodation? Please comment on your answer.**

- Nothing terrible, but certainly there are more comfortable places (especially beds). However, the view from the balcony was wonderful. Breakfast was quite rich and there was a good variety.
- Normal, although a cleaner could have come by occasionally.
- Accommodation – it was what it was, I had no particular expectations, so it was just one part of those days.
- I am not very satisfied.
- Accommodation rating: 3. The room and bathroom were dirty. Cobwebs, and the shower curtain was awful.
- Rooms with an excellent view. Everything necessary was available. Beds were rather uncomfortable; turning over would definitely wake up your roommate.
- So-so – the bar closed at 9 pm, there was no balcony, and the bathroom water was coloured.
- The accommodation was simple and would have been perfectly fine if the water had not had a strange smell and been dirty. It was not drinkable, and after showering, there was residue of sand or metal particles on the skin. It would be advisable to inform the hotel owners.

## **7. How satisfied were you with the catering? Please comment on your answer.**

- The food in all places was of a very high standard; each place was unique and managed to surprise in some way.
- Wonderful.
- The food was excellent.
- Quite ok, 4.
- Very good and varied.
- Very satisfied.
- The food was tasty; at the hotel breakfast, the bottleneck was the coffee machine – there was only one, which is clearly too few for a large group. As a tourism entrepreneur, I can say that breakfast at the hotel could be improved – for example, coffee condiments should have been logically placed so that you take the coffee first and then move on to add milk and sugar. Now you had to go back for them, where people were still queuing for coffee. The meals in the visited locations were culinary experiences. I don't want to nit-pick, but I noticed that, for example, at Võhma Village Hall, everything was great, coffee cups were delightfully nostalgic from grandma's era, but then suddenly the welcome drink was served in plastic shot glasses. At Kuusiku Nature Farm, everything was perfect too, but coffee cups were paper.
- Very good.
- Very good, tasty.
- Most meals were excellent. Perhaps we are used to having a much wider selection at each meal, but the simpler offering was still sufficient, and no one went hungry. This is also something we should learn from you – to keep things simple and not overthink food.
- Very good.
- I participated for two days. Here's what I especially liked: lunch in Viinistu – especially their fish soup, it was superb. Lunch at Kristiina and Sirje Kuusik's place was also excellent. I especially liked that Sirje explained how and why they serve the food the way they do. The final evening's dinner was also very good.
- The meals I participated in were all of very good quality. Some special requests had also been taken into account.

## **8. What are your observations on how future international events could be organised better? What must definitely be included, and what must definitely be avoided?**

- It seems the opening event was so well organised that the next hosts started to worry :)
- For the boat trip, safety and age suitability should be considered. Fun is not necessarily perceived the same way by everyone. But again, an extremely well-organised and content-rich programme. Thank you.
- I liked it, and others liked it too. Participants praised the organisation without being asked.
- No criticism, everyone does the best they can.
- Continue in the same spirit.
- I think all future events should be designed based on this one, as the programme was fantastic. Accommodation, however, should be better.
- An event organised in this way is proper, interesting, and makes guests want to return.
- Well organised! Thank you!
- Drinking water must be available 24/7 in the accommodation. There should be an excursion, and perhaps the accommodation could be near a bigger town or somewhere that offers something to do nearby.
- We will try to apply everything I have already commented on in our region – simplifying meals and adding more interaction with participants at locations where it is possible.
- Every place has its own specifics; it is difficult to make suggestions. The opportunity for everyone to talk about themselves should be preserved.

- Lesson for myself: think through my own presentation more carefully, taking into account who the audience is. In the daily schedule, describe activities in more detail (how long the hike is, what clothing might be appropriate – assume that people will not think of these things themselves). Take into account that by the evening of the third day, everyone will be tired.
- Since everything seemed to work well at present, this still requires some further thought.

## 3.2. Conclusions

### Overall assessment

The opening event was highly successful – 100% of respondents rated it as good, very good, or excellent. The programme content, organisation, and schedule were largely praised. Particular value was placed on the diverse and well-structured programme, opportunities to interact with participants from different countries, and the practical and engaging nature of the workshops and visits.

### Strengths

- A very well-thought-out and smoothly executed programme.
- Numerous practical and interactive activities (workshops, concerts, hike).
- Excellent hospitality and cooperation among entrepreneurs.
- Good balance between informative and experiential content.
- International dimension – opportunities for networking and exchange of experiences.

### Areas for improvement

1. Accommodation – the most criticism was related to accommodation quality: bed comfort, cleanliness, water quality, and restrictions on additional services (e.g. early bar closure). It should be noted that in many tourism areas within national parks (including Lahemaa), accommodation options for large groups are limited. In the case of the opening event, unfortunately, there was no other venue in the area that could host such a large group at once. Planning for the event only began in May when the project started, and by that time, the other two large-capacity accommodations in the area were already fully booked.
2. Catering – overall highly praised, but some details could be improved: smoother organisation of coffee service at breakfast, visual match of tableware and serving style with the overall level of the event.
3. Technical conditions – echo and lack of fresh air in the presentation room. In the programme schedule, describe activities in more detail (e.g. hike duration, recommended clothing, etc.).
4. Consideration of special needs and safety – for example, taking into account age and health conditions for boat trips.

### Inspiration and impact

Many participants gained ideas for developing tourism and events in their own regions:

- Diverse workshops and experiential activities.
- Showcasing and interpreting local natural and cultural heritage.
- More active use of quality labels (e.g. EUROPARC, UNESCO) in marketing.
- Delivering a comprehensive experience at visitor sites and accommodations, from hospitality to the smallest details.

### Recommendations for future international events

- Maintain: diverse and well-timed programme, practical activities, opportunities for participants to present their own regions, hospitality, and active involvement of local entrepreneurs.

- Improve: accommodation quality and 24/7 access to drinking water, catering details and related logistics, acoustics and ventilation in presentation rooms.
- Add: more opportunities for spontaneous conversations and networking, activities with varying levels of physical intensity, and a visual overview of regions (e.g. “bird’s-eye view” mapping of local action groups).

## **Summary**

The opening event fully achieved its objectives – it offered high-quality and diverse content that inspired both local and international participants. Going forward, it is worth maintaining the strong existing concept while placing greater emphasis on accommodation and technical conditions to ensure an even more complete and positive overall impression for guests.