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Feasibility Study

Promoting economic cooperation and social engagement between the regions of Lithuania and Poland through the development of experiential tourism

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Introduction

This feasibility study has been prepared for the project "Sustainable Culture for Sustainable Tourism," which is funded under the 2021–2027 European Territorial Cooperation Interreg VI-A Lithuania-Poland Cross-Border Program. The feasibility study was created to promote economic cooperation and social involvement in the border regions of Lithuania and Poland through the development of Experiential Tourism. The study is focusing on analysing tourism resources and the potential for Experiential Tourism in the Pagėgiai Municipality (Lithuania) and in Zabludowo Municipality Poland.

Context. Pagėgiai Municipality is in Western Lithuania, in the ethnographic region of Lithuania Minor. Almost its entire territory is in the lower Nemunas lowland, which extends further west to the Curonian Lagoon. Pagėgiai Municipality can be proud of its unique natural and cultural heritage sites, which make this region attractive to both local and foreign tourists. However, tourism and its infrastructure are still underdeveloped compared to other parts of Lithuania.

The Municipality of Zabłudów is located in the Podlaskie Voivodeship, it is an intriguing area on the region's map, characterized by its rich natural, cultural, and historical assets. Situated in the picturesque landscapes of northeastern Poland, the municipality combines a tranquil, rural atmosphere with unique cultural heritage and easy access to the region's greatest natural treasures. The proximity of natural and historical areas makes the Municipality of Zabłudów an excellent location for sustainable tourism and nature-based experiences.

This feasibility study examines how Experiential Tourism could unlock the potential of the mentioned regions.

The purpose of the feasibility study – To assess the market and economic viability, as well as the potential for the development of Experiential Tourism in the project area.

Objectives of the study.

1. Define the concept of Experiential Tourism and identify potential products, trends and good practices in Lithuania, Poland and other countries.
2. Analyse local Experiential Tourism resources and potential.
3. Review local Experiential Tourism strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.

4. Present possible Experiential Tourism products that could be adapted and executed in the territory of Pagėgiai and Zabłudów Municipalities.

This study contains of the parts mentioned below:

1. A section analysing the concept of Experiential Tourism and potential products, which reviews articles and reports on Experiential Tourism.
2. A section reviewing tendencies and presenting good practises in Lithuania, Poland and other countries.
3. Experiential Tourism products in Pagėgiai and Zabłudów Municipalities: case study. Presentation of tourism resources and their assessment in the context of Experiential Tourism.
4. SWOT analysis: assessment of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats in both (Pagėgiai and Zabłudów) Municipalities
5. Proposals for potential Experiential Tourism products. Identification of new tourism products that could be introduced in Pagėgiai and Zabłudów municipalities.

The concept of Experiential Tourism and Its Associated Products

The concept (concepts) of Experiential Tourism. Experiential Tourism is new to our world, which emerged as an opposition to mass tourism for travellers to gain new and authentic experiences and sensations while traveling. In the past few years, the term "Experiential Tourism" has become widely used in the world of travel marketing, as travellers have become increasingly demanding: they want new and deeper experiences during which they can develop their knowledge and skills[1]. However, it needs to be noted that due to the same novelty factor, the perception of the meaning of Experiential Tourism is not always and everywhere understood the same. For some people, it defines activities that go beyond the usual sightseeing or visiting museums. From the viewpoint of others, the most characteristic feature of Experiential Tourism is interaction with locals and as well exploring places that are not usually a choice for visiting by tourists[2].

To briefly and clearly define this new phenomenon and produce an explanation that everyone can understand, some tourism experts have produced various descriptions to try to define what Experiential Tourism is. For example, Ph.D. M. G. Dimitrova, a lecturer at the University of Varna, Bulgaria, writes in her 2023 study on Experiential Tourism in the field of culture and heritage: Experiential Tourism is associated with authentic, meaningful, and transformative experiences, their creation. This type of tourism can connect travellers not only with the place they are visiting, but also with the local community. It is about actively interacting with people, integrating into their culture and environment. Experiential Tourism is a sustainable type of tourism that encourages tourists to create unique, meaningful, and individual experiences that can touch people on both an emotional and intellectual level[3]. On the Western Australian Tourism website, its authors describe Experiential Tourism as going beyond traditional travel activities. Tourists have unique and memorable experiences that involve learning about the local culture, people, and environment. Instead of observing tourist attractions, tourists actively engage in the action, lifestyle, and thus feel more a part of the culture they are observing. The authors distinguish several areas of experiential tourism: cultural, adventure, cognitive, and wellness

[1] Andrulienė Rasuolė. Darnios turizmo plėtros Varėnos rajono savivaldybėje strategija. Varėna, 2023, p. 7.

[2] Lew Josh. What Is Experiential Tourism? 2017-08-24 [interactive] [accessed 2024 08 08]
Link on the internet: < https://www.treehugger.com/what-is-experiential-tourism-4869029 >

[3] Dimitrova Miroslava. Heritage – and Culture Based Experiential Tourism. 2023, p. 5 [interactive] [accessed 2024 09 14] Link on the internet: < https://www.researchgate.net/publication/372627292_Experiential_Tourism >

experiences[4]. If we look on the other side of the world, in Canada, Experiential Tourism has been defined here as the result of a global movement where people create meanings for themselves through their direct experiences while travelling. And this happens in many ways: people, places, activities, accommodations, etc. Experiential Tourism encourages travellers to engage more deeply with the way of life and culture of local communities[5].

Lithuanian authors are writing more often about Experiential Tourism. In their publication about the opportunities of Experiential Tourism in the Suvalkija region, Gabrielė Birbilaitė and Audronė Lukštaitienė, citing foreign authors, write: The niche of Experiential Tourism has emerged in the world as a response to mass tourism. This niche of tourism requires a distinctive way of delivering the service, not only in terms of service provision, but also in terms of user involvement and participation in the service delivery process. The authors mention that the scientific literature begun to analyse more often the psychology of experiences, concluding that experiences can be effective in appealing to tourists' emotions and increase their arrivals. Concluding: Experiential Tourism is a unique tourism niche. It combines tourism services and products that stimulate the five most prominent human senses: hearing, sight, touch, smell, and taste. Through the prism of the senses, tourists are provided with brand new, unprecedented, and unique experiences[6].

It is precisely the senses that are emphasized by the organizers of the joint British and French Experiential Tourism project *"Experience"*. One of the most important goals of their project is to awaken those five senses mentioned above in tourists. Moreover, through these sensations, the aim is to also evoke five positive emotions: happiness, cheerfulness, surprise, joy, and satisfaction. And all these emotions and feelings are presented by the project organizers as the main guidelines for businesses oriented towards Experiential Tourism[7].

In conclusion, Experiential Tourism as a phenomenon does not yet have a single and concrete definition that would give us a clear and concise idea of what it is and what it means. Instead, different authors from distinct parts of the world have given their own interpretations of what Experiential

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[4] What is Experience Tourism? Everything You Need to Know. [interactive] [accessed 2024 07 25] Link on the internet: < https://tourismcouncilwa.com.au/toolbox/blog/what-experience-tourism-everything-you-need-know >

[5] Smith William L. Experiential tourism around the world and at home: definitions and standards. *International Journal of Services and Standards 2 (1),* 2006, p. 2-6.

[6] Birbilaitė Gabrielė, Lukšaitienė Audronė. Patirtinio turizmo plėtojimo galimybės Suvalkijos regione. *Verslo aktualijos būsimųjų specialistų požiūriu*, 2021, p. 299-300.

[7] What is experiential tourism? [interactive] [accessed 2024 11 15] Link on the internet: <https://www.tourismexperience.org/resources-hub/what-is-experiential-tourism.html>

Tourism is, although in many cases the ideas are remarkably similar. Perhaps, the idea of tourism expert Anna Timbrook would be very fitting here, which suggests that the goal of experiential travel is not to add to the list of visited landmarks, but to create memories that will stay with you for a lifetime[8].

How is Experiential Tourism different from conventional tourism? And can we identify specific features that clearly distinguish it from mass tourism? G. Birbilaitė and A. Lukštaitienė, in their study, based on A. Vintean's research, have compiled a table summarising the distinctive features of Experiential Tourism. According to the authors, these features are authenticity, participation, individuality, aspiration, surprise, emotions, education, ethnicity, entertainment, and culture[9]. Although it is possible to agree on participation and personalization, emotions, entertainment, and culture are also characteristic of mass or conventional tourism. In this case, it is necessary to acknowledge that the essence of Experiential Tourism lies not in what the tourist sees, but in how they see and experience it. Mass tourism typically focuses on visiting the most popular monuments and landscapes. These elements may be present in Experiential Tourism as well, but Experiential Tourism offers a deeper, more enriching experience aimed at sensing what is often unnoticed in conventional tours. The focus is on the quality of the journey, not the quantity of days spent in a different location. Experiential travel aims to provide an unforgettable and multifaceted experience[10]. In comparison, mass tourism would be like a fast-food restaurant, where people satisfy their immediate, basic need – to eat. On the other hand, Experiential Tourism is like having dinner with friends or at a small restaurant, where the food, the interaction, and the atmosphere create a completely unique experience.

Potential Experiential Tourism products. Are we able to identify its specific features that are clearly distinguishable from mass tourism? Food has been mentioned as an example previously, therefore let's start from it. Gastronomic and culinary tourism is one of the most popular and easily distinguishable forms of Experiential Tourism, as tourists awaken all five of their senses while eating: the sound (of cooking), visuals, smells, and finally the touch and taste. Culinary tourism offers the opportunity to taste and evaluate food products and dishes that have never been tried before, which are typical of the people living in different regions, therefore getting to know the daily lives of local inhabitants and the heritage accumulated over centuries. It is not an experience of luxury dinners, but the enjoyment of food in pursuit

[8] Timbrook Anna, Experiential Travel: Creating Memories, Not Checklists. [interactive] [accessed 2023-10-04]. Link on the internet:<https://expertworldtravel.com/experiential-travel/>

[9] Birbilaitė Gabrielė, Lukšaitienė Audronė. Patirtinio turizmo plėtojimo galimybės Suvalkijos regione. *Verslo aktualijos būsimųjų specialistų požiūriu*, 2021, p. 300.

[10] Experiential tourism: meaning and examples [interactive] [accessed 2024 12 05] Link on the internet: <https://bmtnapoli.com/turismo-esperienziale-significato-ed-esempi/?lang=en>

of new culinary experiences. At the same time, another form of tourism – gastronomic tourism, focuses not on the food itself, but on how, where and when it is eaten. Different people, in distinct parts of the world, have developed diverse ways of eating over the centuries due to geographical and social differences. All this is unique, such experiences are meaningful to the human being, deepening our personal perception of the world[11]. Gastronomic tourism can be passive when tourists just taste the products and dishes of a local producer or watch a chef prepare meals. This allows tourists to satisfy their desire for authenticity[12], as well as gain a deeper understanding of local, ethnic, or national traditions. Along with this, they develop a better understanding of the history, culture, and, of course, the dietary habits of the place or country they are visiting[13].

In addition to gastronomic and culinary tourism, other Experiential Tourism products can be briefly mentioned. **Cultural tourism** has a key place here. Visitors are welcomed to participate in local community events, observe traditional crafts and visit places where the local population usually spends its free time. This way, tourists create an emotional connection to the place they are visiting, rather than just seeing it. **Adventure or nature tourism** can also be distinguished, with hiking, both in the wilderness, e.g. forests, fields, mountains, etc., and urban hikes within towns, villages and along the historic trails of settlements. This experiential nature tourism can be enriched not only by hiking, but also by cycling, as well as by traveling by boats, ships, or other means of water transport. The landscape of the visited area reveals itself in distinct colours and sensations. Sea trips on boats, accompanied by local fishermen, are also a popular tourists' choice. During such trips, tourists can immerse themselves in the role of a fisherman, gaining a better understanding of their daily routine and the challenges they may face. Sometimes, this type of tourism is further divided into light and adventurous activities. The latter can be quite risky to one's health, as they involve activities such as trekking through swamps, exploring caves, and similar activities[14]. Tourists can also be offered **educational tourism**, which, like cultural tourism, allows for a deeper understanding of the traditions of the visited location, but it is even more engaging in terms of activity. This can include food preparation, or the collection of herbs and mushrooms. Volunteering is a good example for educational tourism, it is especially popular among

[11] Experiential tourism: meaning and examples [interactive] [accessed 2024 12 05] Link on the internet: <https://bmtnapoli.com/turismo-esperienziale-significato-ed-esempi/?lang=en>

[12] Voišnis Jadvyga, Baltrūnaitė Danguolė, Jakštienė Danutė. Gastronominio turizmo patirtys Lietuvoje: atvejo analizė. *Aukštųjų mokyklų vaidmuo visuomenėje: iššūkiai, tendencijos ir perspektyvos. Mokslo darbai Nr. 1 (11)*, 2023, p. 266.

[13] Correia Antonia, Seongseop (Sam) Kim, Kozak Metin. Gastronomy experiential traits and their effects on intentions for recommendation: A fuzzy set approach. *International Journal of Tourism Research*, 2019, p. 1.

[14] Žuromskaitė Brigita. XXI a. turizmo rūšių įvairovė ir keliavimo kryptys. In Turizmas. Plėtra, iššūkiai, perspektyvos. Red. Brigita Žuromskaitė. Vilnius, 2016, p. 41.

young people who often choose to study abroad but also aim to learn the language or gain experience in an unfamiliar field. Experiential Tourism also includes **wellness experiences**, where travellers deliberately choose SPA (from Latin *sanitas per aqua*), yoga sessions, or various camps focused on meditation and other practices aimed at calming the body and mind[15]. These are complemented by **pilgrimages**, which can be considered the oldest form of tourism in the world. While for ordinary tourists, traveling marks the beginning or end of a journey, for pilgrims, the journey itself is the most important goal, culminating in a visit to a temple or sacred site at the end of their trip[16]. It is also important to mention **eco-tourism**. It differs from nature tourism in that it focuses more on environmental issues. Ecotourists choose environmentally friendly hotels and catering establishments, travel to areas that are little touched and not polluted by human activities and are active in nature conservation[17]. Experiential Tourism can be associated not only with today's lifestyle and the environment around us, but also with the living knowledge of the past. This is **historical tourism**. Mass tourism is characterized by visits to the most famous historical and cultural sites, but Experiential Tourism is more associated with historical and archaeological routes, which tourists can explore independently. It also includes living history and archaeology events, as well as historical reenactments, which engage visitors much more deeply through the five human senses mentioned above[18].

Another significant concept is "tourism off-the-beaten-track" or "**everyday tourism**" (fr. tourisme de l'ordinaire). This type of tourism involves unconventional attractions compared to popular historical sites, offering authentic experiences not found in classic guidebooks. The commercialization of traditional forms or the perception of their excessive "beautification" has driven the popularity of such attractions. This phenomenon promotes local culture, supports small communities, and preserves traditions. Tourists increasingly seek to understand their travel goals from within, focusing on the

[15] Experiential tourism: meaning and examples [interactive] [accessed 2024 12 05] Link on the internet: <https://bmtnapoli.com/turismo-esperienziale-significato-ed-esempi/?lang=en>; What is experiential tourism? [interactive] [accessed 2024 11 15] Link on the internet: <https://www.tourismexperience.org/resources-hub/what-is-experiential-tourism.html>

[16] Wu Hung-Che, Chang Ya-Yuan, Tsung_Pao Wu. Pilgrimage: What drives pilgrim experiential supportive intentions? Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management. Vol 38, 2019, p. 66.

[17] Žuromskaitė Brigita. XXI a. turizmo rūšių įvairovė ir keliavimo kryptys. In Turizmas. Plėtra, iššūkiai, perspektyvos. Red. Brigita Žuromskaitė. Vilnius, 2016, p. 26.

[18] „Gyvosios archeologijos dienos Kernavėje 2024": festivalis nukels į Viduramžius (renginių programa) examples [interactive] [accessed 2025 01 03] Link on the internet: <https://welovelithuania.com/gyvosios-archeologijos-dienos-kernaveje-2024/> ; Project Austerlitz [interactive] [accessed 2024 12 08] Link on the internet: <https://www.austerlitz.org/cz/>

everyday lives of ordinary residents. This trend is also evident in more extreme cases, such as "poverty tourism," which includes visits to areas like Rio de Janeiro or South Africa[19]. Similar interest arises in tourism at disaster and calamity sites, such as the routes offered in the city of Pripyat since 2000.

A completely different form of tourism is **event tourism**, which includes concerts, exhibitions, fairs, and festivals. It often fosters a sense of belonging to a group, sometimes expressed through specific clothing styles, themed accessories, or gadgets.

Similarly, **sports tourism** is based not only on the sporting events themselves but also on the emotions evoked by the atmosphere surrounding these spectacles and fulfilling the need for belonging.

Culinary tourism focuses on exploring unique flavours and distant cultures. It is not merely an enhancement of the tourist offer but a key component in many cases. For example, trips to wine regions often involve tastings, allowing tourists to engage with local culture through their palate. **Literary and film tourism** revolves around visits to places associated with authors and the characters of their works. It provides a unique way to experience art personally, allowing travellers to immerse themselves in the world of their favourite stories[20].

If we move from theory to practical examples, cases of Experiential Tourism could be as follows:

- participating in pottery workshops in a traditional village,
- learning to cook traditional dishes with a local chef,
- exploring lesser-known natural sites with local guides,
- taking part in traditional religious or cultural ceremonies,
- observing wildlife in a manner that preserves its natural habitat,
- engaging with exhibits by touching artifacts or using tools,
- theatricalization of tourist spaces, such as dressing up, role-playing, or interactive exhibits,
- interactive sightseeing,
- urban games or geocaching,
- events like museum or restaurant nights, enhanced with an atmosphere of unique mystery.

[19] Stasiak A., 2011, Współczesna przestrzeń turystyczna, [in:] M. Durydiwka, K. Duda-Gromada (red.), Przestrzeń turystyczna. Czynniki, różnorodność, zmiany, Faculty of Geography and Regional Studies, University of Warsaw, p. 39–51.

[20] Swarbrooke J., Beard C., Leckie S., Pomfret G. Adventure Tourism. The New Frontier, Butterworth Heinemann, Oxford, 2007.

In conclusion, Experiential Tourism encompasses a variety of different types of tourism, giving meaning to them through unique, personal human experiences and sensations.

Why is Experiential Tourism becoming increasingly popular? Primarily, travellers seek new experiences that mass tourism with its "all-inclusive" philosophy cannot provide. The desire to simply see a tourist attraction is replaced by a wish to gain authentic, immersive experiences that allow for a deeper understanding of the chosen travel destination. At the same time, travellers more often like to plan and organize their own trips, later sharing them on social media. These platforms are seeing a rise in so-called influencers who create content about their travels, such as cycling, kayaking, camping in nature, and more, followed by hundreds of thousands of people. There can be followers that later attempt to replicate such travel styles. Experiential Tourism stimulates the economy, especially small businesses, as independent travellers tend to spend more money on services provided by local residents while searching for authentic experiences[21].

What benefits does Experiential Tourism bring to the tourism sector? Although we live in a country based on different values, the utilitarian or cost-benefit aspect has always been and will always be important. For this reason, it is important to know what benefits experiential tourism brings to the tourism sector in general.

For example, according to 2013 data, the global market for pilgrimage tourism was valued at 3.5 trillion US dollars[22]. This could be one of the more affordable forms of Experiential Tourism, as travellers often walk, stay at church community houses, and driven by religious feelings, focus solely on the walking experience without purchasing unnecessary additional services for the journey. All of this shows that businesses involved in experiential tourism can gain significant financial benefits from

[21] Legault Marie-Josée. The rise of experiential travel. 2016-07. . [interactive] [accessed 2024 12 02] Link on the internet: <https://www.originoutside.com/insights/the-rise-of-experiential-travel> ; Timbrook Anna, Experiential Travel: Creating Memories, Not Checklists. 2023-10-04. [interactive] [accessed 2024 07 25] Link on the internet: <https://expertworldtravel.com/experiential-travel/>; What is Experience Tourism? Everything You Need to Know. [interactive] [accessed 2024 07 25] Link on the internet: <https://tourismcouncilwa.com.au/toolbox/blog/what-experience-tourism-everything-you-need-know> ; Newsom Sean. Is experiential travel the next big trend? 2023-12-19 [interactive] [accessed 2024 06 15] Link on the internet: https://www.nationalgeographic.com/travel/article/is-experiential-travel-the-next-big-trend

[22] Wu Hung-Che, Chang Ya-Yuan, Tsung_Pao Wu. Pilgrimage: What drives pilgrim experiential supportive intentions? Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management. Vol 38, 2019, p. 66.

increased revenues. By offering unique experiences, they can attract a wider audience and encourage return visits[23].

Other potential significant benefits could be the creation of entirely new tourist destinations. For example, in Bulgaria in 2020 it was estimated that two-thirds of all tourists choose leisure trips to this country and exclusively relax only on the Black Sea coast. Meanwhile, Experiential Tourism based on cultural heritage remains on the sidelines, although Bulgaria has ten UNESCO heritage sites and overall ranks third in Europe in terms of the number of historical and cultural monuments. This has been assessed as untapped potential in a country where the tourism sector turnover in 2020 exceeded four billion euros per year[24].

Among other, less obvious but equally important benefits, we can mention greater opportunities for collaboration within local communities, between government institutions and local businesses. By working together, all these stakeholders can create an Experiential Tourism product that benefits all parties[25]. Additionally, Experiential Tourism is often associated with environmentally sustainable solutions and social responsibility. This perspective might be driven by the tourists themselves, who, in search of unique and authentic experiences, are keen to ensure that they can return to this authentic environment in the future—one where there are no cheap and low-quality souvenirs or chain restaurants and services. This means that Experiential Tourism can support local businesses and encourage the preservation of natural resources and cultural heritage.

[23] What is Experience Tourism? Everything You Need to Know. [interactive] [accessed 2024 07 25] Link on the internet: <https://tourismcouncilwa.com.au/toolbox/blog/what-experience-tourism-everything-you-need-know>

[24] Dimitrova Miroslava. Heritage – and Culture Based Experiential Tourism. 2023, p. 8 [interactive] [accessed 2024 09 14] Link on the internet: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/372627292_Experiential_Tourism>

[25] What is Experience Tourism? Everything You Need to Know. [interactive] [accessed 2024 07 25] Link on the internet: <https://tourismcouncilwa.com.au/toolbox/blog/what-experience-tourism-everything-you-need-know>

Tendencies in Lithuania, Poland and abroad

Trends and fashions in the tourism industry are constantly changing, but the main essence of experiential travel always remains the same, which is an immersive authentic experience. Based on this idea and considering the growing popularity of Experiential Tourism, more companies are emerging in the world that specialize only in organizing experiential travel. Companies in mention: Velocity Black, Vivid Travel, Niquesa Travel, Black Tomato[26]. Most of the companies listed here engage in luxury travel, but Experiential Tourism is also accessible to those seeking more affordable travel options. It is important to note that cycling trips, hiking, and camping in the wild are also considered part of Experiential Tourism and are becoming increasingly popular each year. As a result, more state-level financially supported projects are emerging, which promote the development of Experiential Tourism in regional areas and help tourists discover new and often affordable travel destinations. One example is the €24.5 million *"Experience"* project, which was co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund through the "Interreg France-England" program. The goal of the project was to encourage local businesses, organizations, and individuals to offer Experiential Tourism services during the off-season (from October to March), thus boosting the local economy in the participating regions of the United Kingdom and France[27].

To conclude, global tourism sector trends are favourable for Experiential Tourism. Next, is a review of a few specific cases in Lithuania, Poland and the world, to highlight typical examples of Experiential Tourism.

There is an incredibly good example of Experiential Tourism which can be found in Japan. During Japanese holidays, people can rent official Japanese clothing, eat regional meals with locals, play traditional games, and engage in various other cultural activities[28]. We can call such activity as a multi-sensory experience, because it refers to creating tourism products that stimulate not only sight and

[26] Timbrook Anna, Experiential Travel: Creating Memories, Not Checklists. 2023-10-04. [interactive] [accessed 2024 11 16] Link on the internet: <https://expertworldtravel.com/experiential-travel/>

[27] What is experiential tourism? [interactive] [accessed 2024 11 15] Link on the internet: <https://www.tourismexperience.org/resources-hub/what-is-experiential-tourism.html>

[28] Trakų rajono turizmo rinkodaros 2022–2026 m. strategija. 2021 m. [interaktyvus] [žiūrėta 2024 12 20] Prieiga per internetą: < https://www.trakai.lt/data/public/uploads/2021/07/traku-turizmo-rinkodaros-strategija_tarpine-ataskaita-003.pdf> p. 19.

hearing but also touch, taste, and smell. It is a holistic approach where travel becomes an opportunity to explore the world fully through the senses.

Similar experiences, but without cultural activities and more focused on nature, can be achieved in the northeast of England, in Northumberland. There, tourists are offered to walk through wild areas with a guide where they can collect plants, mushrooms, herbs and later cook their own food from the collected delicacies. This is how you can choose creative workshops in nature, when tourists are accompanied on a scenic route through the national park by a guide and a professional artist who helps to paint the images, they see[29].

In Poland, the trend of multi-sensory experiences is reflected in the development of initiatives such as craft workshops, local specialty tastings, and thematic tours. Regions like Podhale, Silesia, and Podlasie offer programs that combine immersion in nature with an exploration of local culture and traditions.

An example is vineyard tours in Lower Silesia, where tourists can not only taste wines but also participate in the production process. Another example is ethnographic tours of Podlasie, where participants can learn about the culture of national minorities, sample local dishes, and admire handmade crafts.

There is also a typical and long-term example of Experiential Tourism which is the project "Austerlitz". It was first implemented in 2005, when the 200th anniversary of the Battle of Austerlitz was celebrated in the Czech Republic, in South Moravia. The Battle of Austerlitz is one of the most famous battles in world history, and the word "Austerlitz" for all people at least a little interested in history is associated with the triumph of Emperor Napoleon. In 2005, the main goal of the event was to prepare for the bicentennial commemoration of the Battle of Austerlitz. However, the successfully implemented commemorative project has since become an annual tradition and is currently likely the largest and most numerous annual historical reconstruction event of the Napoleonic era in Europe. The 2024 event brought together more than a thousand participants from different European countries, including Lithuania, who were dressed in the uniforms of soldiers of that time, had muskets, cannons, and horses. Spectators of the event could purchase tickets and watch the battle reconstruction live, and after the event a market was waiting for them where food, mulled wine, and various souvenirs were

[29] Tap in to what visitors really want: An Introduction to Experiential Tourism. [interactive] [accessed 2024 11 15] Link on the internet: <https://www.tourismexperience.org/downloads/English%20content/Resource%20hub/Chapter%201/introduction-to-experiential-tourism-03.pdf>

being sold. Concluding, unlike visiting monuments, such an event involves all five human senses, which is why it is a typical experiential historical tourism event, which has become an annual event from a one-time anniversary event[30].

An example of successful historical reconstruction in Lithuania would be the festival "Days of live archaeology in Kernavė", it was held for the 24th time in 2024, the festival reveals the everyday life of the residents of Lithuania during the Middle Ages. This is also special because the craftsmen involved in the reconstruction at the event are archaeologists who have often encountered relics themselves which were preserved in the ground that remind us of the past, therefore being able to present their replicas for the curious eyes of visitors to examine, touch, and explore. This attraction introduces visitors to the history of the inhabitants of Lithuania – their nutrition, warfare, leatherworking, jewellery, pottery, and other crafts that people who lived in Lithuania and practiced in their daily lives for centuries[31].

A more relaxing Experiential Tourism initiative can be seen in Bulgaria. There is an annual rose picking festival that attracts a lot of tourists to the Rose Valley near the city of Kazanlak in central Bulgaria. The so-called Damask rose (*Rosa damascena*) is the country's national symbol and, along with rose oil, an important export. The festival takes place in mid-May, when tourists can watch the rose picking process and learn not only about their cultivation but also about the production of oil[32].

Although the provided examples are from the spheres of cultural, natural, historical, or educational tourism, most of them can also reveal elements of gastronomic tourism. This once again proves that gastronomic tourism is especially important when providing tourism and hospitality services. The acquaintance with food helps not only to fill up and experience new sensations but also gives the opportunity to become acquainted with the cultural and historical heritage of the visited country. The gastronomic experience can encompass a very wide range of activities – this includes joining cooking courses, collecting books about cooking and restaurant menus, gastronomic experience trips, meetings

[30] Projekt Austerlitz. [interactive] [accessed 2024 12 29] Link on the internet: https://www.austerlitz.org/cz/projekt-austerlitz/

[31] Gyvosios archeologijos dienos Kernavėje 2024“: festivalis nukels į Viduramžius (renginių programa). [interactive] [accessed 2024 12 03] Link on the internet: <https://welovelithuania.com/gyvosios-archeologijos-dienos-kernaveje-2024/>

[32] Dimitrova Miroslava. Heritage – and Culture Based Experiential Tourism. 2023, p. 5 [interactive] [accessed 2024 09 14] Link on the internet: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/372627292_Experiential_Tourism>

with chefs – experts, visiting wine cellars and places of production of spirits[33]. A gastronomic experience can be as simple as visiting a food market. This phenomenon has been observed in the Spanish capital, Madrid, where tourists who are longing for Experiential Tourism specifically seek out for markets that are frequently visited by locals to smell, taste and understand the lifestyle and daily eating habits of people of Madrid. Blanca Garcia Hencke analyses Madrid's food markets as a resource for Experiential Tourism and how this affects tourists arriving via social networks. The author noted that mass tourism has strongly affected the historic centres of cities, and for this reason, more tourists are seeking to get to know less advertised areas of cities. A food market visited by locals naturally becomes an attraction for such visitors, who share their gastronomic experiences on social networks and therefore attract new tourists[34]. This is a common trend that can be acknowledged not only in Madrid, but also in other parts of Europe, including Vilnius. In 2017, when introducing the Vilnius Hall Market as a new tourist route, the head of the tourism agency "Go Vilnius" said: "Culinary tourism is becoming more popular in the world, people are increasingly looking for new experiences. The city market is a favourite tourist destination, inseparable from the city's culture and cuisine[35].

In summary, the trend of multi-sensory experiences is redefining the way we perceive the world during travel. Both globally and in Lithuania and Poland as well, there is growing interest in tourism offerings that engage all the senses, providing deeper and more satisfying experiences.

[33] Voišnis Jadvyga, Baltrūnaitė Danguolė, Jakštienė Danutė. Gastronominio turizmo patirtys Lietuvoje: atvejo analizė. *Aukštųjų mokyklų vaidmuo visuomenėje: iššūkiai, tendencijos ir perspektyvos. Mokslo darbai Nr. 1 (11)*, 2023, p. 266.

[34] Hencke Blanca Garcia. Urban experiential tourism marketing Use of social media as communication tools by the food markets of Madrid. *Journal of Tourism Analysis: Revista de Análisis Turístico. Vol. 25 Issue: 1*, p. 1-8.

[35] Laurinavičienė Beatričė. Turistams Vilniuje pristatys Halės turgų. 2017-11-24. [interactive] [accessed 2024 07 08] Link on the internet: <https://www.vz.lt/laisvalaikis/maistas-ir-gerimai/2017/11/24/turistams-vilniuje-pristatys-hales-turgu>

Experiential Tourism and Its Associated Products in Pagėgiai and Zabłudów Municipalities: Case Analysis

Pagėgiai Municipality is in Western Lithuania, in the ethnographic region of Lithuania Minor. Almost the entire municipality is in the lower Nemunas lowland, which stretches further west to the Curonian Lagoon. Only in the east is the Vilkyškiai hill range raised. The Nemunas meanders along the southern border, leaving lots of old riverbeds, and many tributaries flow into it.

Until the end of the 13th century, this territory belonged to the Scalvian tribe and was its northern part[36]. By the end of the 13th century, when the Teutonic Order gained power in the Eastern Baltic region, the Pagėgiai region became its northern border, from which military campaigns were organized to the Grand Duchy of Lithuania[37]. From the 16th century, the Teutonic Order transformed into the Duchy of Prussia, and in the 18th century, the Pagėgiai region became part of the Kingdom of Prussia[38].

In 1923, after Klaipėda region became a part of the Republic of Lithuania, the diverse, although short-lived, prosperity of the Pagėgiai region began: Pagėgiai was granted city rights, and various state institutions and organizations were rapidly established. In 1939, a town was occupied by Germany, and during World War II, the Soviet prisoner-of-war camp "Oflager-53" was set up there[39]. After World War II, the Soviet period began in Pagėgiai. The town was partially rebuilt, but at the same time it was disappearing, because old urban structure was being destroyed during that time[40]. After Lithuania regained its independence, in 2000, Pagėgiai became the centre of a newly established municipality. The origin of the name of the city of Pagėgiai is clear – it is the name of the Gėgė River with the prefix pa-. Linguists tend to believe that the place name is related to the no longer used word gegis, which means forest[41].

[36] Almonaitis Vytenis, Almonaitienė Junona. Šiaurės Skalva. Keliautojo po Pagėgių kraštą žinynas. Kaunas, 2015, p. 9-11.

[37] Boockmann Hartmut. Vokiečių ordinas. Dvylika jo istorijos skyrių. Vilnius, 2003, p. 125-142.

[38] Clark Christopher. Iron Kingdom: The Rise and Downfall of Prussia, 1600–1947. London, 2007, p. 67-77.

[39] Oflageriai; Pagėgiai. In Mažosios Lietuvos enciklopedija. Trečias tomas. Red. Martynas Purvinas. Vilnius, 2006, p. 322, 369-371.

[40] Purvinas Martynas. Istoriniai miestai Nemuno Žemupyje. In Istoriniai miestai: sena ir šiuolaikiška. Sud. Alfredas Jomantas. Vilnius, 2003, p. 53-58.

[41] Almonaitis Vytenis, Almonaitienė Junona. Šiaurės Skalva. Keliautojo po Pagėgių kraštą žinynas. Kaunas, 2015, p. 76.

The Municipality of Zabłudów, located in the Podlaskie Voivodeship, is an intriguing area on the region's map, characterized by its rich natural, cultural, and historical assets. Situated in the picturesque landscapes of northeastern Poland, the municipality combines a tranquil, rural atmosphere with unique cultural heritage and easy access to the region's greatest natural treasures.

The history of the Municipality of Zabłudów spans several centuries and reflects the rich heritage of Podlasie – a region marked by cultural diversity and significant historical events. Zabłudów has evolved over the centuries as an important agricultural, trade, and religious centre.

The first mentions of Zabłudów date back to the XV century, when the area was part of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. In 1553, King Sigismund II Augustus granted Zabłudów Magdeburg rights (confirmed a century later by King John II Casimir), which significantly contributed to the town's development. At that time, one of the first parish churches was established, and the town became a local trade hub. In the XVII century, Zabłudów came under the administration of the Radziwiłł noble family, which further contributed to its growth. During this period, unique wooden Orthodox churches were built, and the town became a place where various cultures and religions coexisted: Catholics, Orthodox Christians, and Jews. The Jewish community played a crucial role in the development of local trade and crafts.

During the partitions of Poland, Zabłudów fell under Russian rule. Despite difficult circumstances, the residents endeavoured to maintain their local identity. In the 19th century, the town experienced economic decline and lost its municipal rights in 1869.

After regaining independence in 1918, Zabłudów became part of the Second Polish Republic. The town gradually began to rebuild economically, but its history was profoundly marked by World War II. During the German occupation, much of the infrastructure was destroyed, and the local Jewish community was almost entirely annihilated during the Holocaust—a tragic event that forever changed the character of the town.

During the Polish People's Republic (PRL) era, agriculture and small-scale industry developed, while local communities retained many traditions. Today, the Municipality of Zabłudów exemplifies harmonious coexistence among various cultures and traditions. Numerous cultural events are organized to promote local crafts and art. Experience tourism, including participation in workshops related to the region's heritage, has the potential to become a key element in the municipality's development.

There are a considerable number of tourist attractions and various cultural heritage sites in Pagėgiai and Zabłudów municipalities, which are either already established or have the potential to become prominent centres of Experiential Tourism. The Municipality of Zabłudów harmoniously combines natural richness, unique cultural heritage, and a dynamically developing tourism infrastructure. The Municipality of Pagėgiai can offer to the visitors various authentic and unique experiences. This is due to the region's unique history, which stands apart from the rest of Lithuania with its peculiar development, out-standing heritage, and natural environment.

Travel.

Pagėgiai. The uniqueness of the Pagėgiai region is determined by the fact that it is located in the lower Nemunas lowland, which has lots of Nemunas old riverbeds and the raised Vilkyškiai hill range. Such a natural environment shows that for better knowledge of the region, as many diverse cognitive nature trails and other walking or cycling routes are very important, which are an integral part of not only slow, but also experiential tourism, it helps to feel more senses (sight, hearing, touch, smell, taste). Pagėgiai municipality offers to travel along the cognitive nature trail of the **Rambynas Regional Park**. It starts near the Rambynas Regional Park Directorate building and continues for about 1.5 km to the Bitėnai stork colony. In summer, the life of the stork colony can be observed up close. A special monocle is used for this, magnifying the image by 60 times. This is a great educational attraction for kids. There are as many as 11 stops along the entire trail, where you can get acquainted with the flora and fauna, and enjoy magnificent landscape of the Nemunas River and other objects as well[42].

It is also important to mention that Rambynas Regional Park Directorate's administration in the years 2013-2014 set up **four observation towers**. The first tower was built on the Nemunas river curve, near Ragainė, the second one can be accessed by driving along a 9 km gravel road towards Šereiklaukis, while the third one can be found in Koplyčkalnis and the fourth one is in the town of Vilkyškiai. It needs

[42] Bitėnų gandrų kolonija. [interactive] [accessed 2024 09 06] Link on the internet: <https://www.visitpagegiai.lt/produktas-147/ka-pamatyti/bitenu-gandru-kolonija/> Černiauskienė Aušrinė. Tarptautinio turistinio maršruto „Karalienės Luizės žiedas" plėtros ir marketingo planas 2021–2026. Kaunas, 2021, p. 56-5.

to be noted that all those four observation towers are in perhaps the most beautiful places in Rambynas Regional Park[43].

You can get around Pagėgiai Municipality by **riding a bike.** Although there are no new bicycle paths installed in the municipality itself, but the "Nemunas Bicycle Path" passes through its territory to the Jurbarkas and Šilutė districts. It is also important to keep in mind that because of the unsafe situation in the region, the European bicycle path Eurovelo 10 - "Baltic Sea Ring Bicycle Route" and Eurovelo 13 - "Iron Curtain Road" stretching through the Kaliningrad region of the Russian Federation are now non-functional and travellers who choose those mentioned routes are detouring through the Pagėgiai Municipality[44].

Pagėgiai Municipality has a big potential in water tourism entertainment area, as it can also be an excellent part of Experiential Tourism, helping to see picturesque areas from a different angle and to feel the speed of travel and the sensations that water transport provided several centuries ago, when neither modern road infrastructure nor railway transport was developed yet. The Pagėgiai region Tourism Information Center offers a memorable and informative experience – **a boat trip** along the Nemunas River route from Rambynas Hill to Panemunė. While travelling in such way, tourists can not only enjoy the views of the Nemunas Delta surroundings but also listen to the guide's stories about the sacred stone of Rambynas Hill, the farmer Švarcas from the village of Bardėnai, the historical past of the Pagėgiai region, the lifestyle of the Prussian Lithuanians and many other fascinating things[45].

In the same Rambynas Regional Park's territory it is possible to visit the legendary **Witch's fir**. It is a spruce which is 34 meters height and one of the most extraordinary trees in Lithuania because its trunk branches into 13 more trunks. Maybe all those legends about this spruce are because it looks like an inverted broomstick. According to one of the legends, where the spruce is growing, witches used to

[43] Černiauskienė Aušrinė. Tarptautinio turistinio maršruto „Karalienės Luizės žiedas" plėtros ir marketingo planas 2021–2026. Kaunas, 2021, p. 58.

[44] Baltic Sea Cycle Route. [interactive] [accessed 2024 09 07] Link on the internet: <https://en.eurovelo.com/ev10>; Iron Curtain Trail. [interactive] [accessed 2024 09 07] Link on the internet: <https://en.eurovelo.com/ev13> Černiauskienė Aušrinė. Tarptautinio turistinio maršruto „Karalienės Luizės žiedas" plėtros ir marketingo planas 2021–2026. Kaunas, 2021, p. 18-20.

[45] Atrask mažąją Lietuvą 1 d. [interactive] [accessed 2024 09 07] Link on the internet: <https://www.gruda.lt/keliones-po-lietuva/atrask-mazaja-lietuva?fbclid=IwZXh0bgNhZW0CMTEAAR200Fr9Jw489Uqx-ll2ew0ehl5_IYOTCAgpNxz6wEBJjCE3FXRd4Xe-ql0_aem_CUJUaukvU6E2w4FRQkJmOQ>; Ekskursija „Cit, raganos miega", plaukimas laivu ir kulinarinis paveldas! [interactive] [accessed 2024 09 07] Link on the internet: <https://www.autrega.lt/keliones-grupems/ekskursija-cit-raganos-miega-plaukimas-laivu-ir-kulinarinis-paveldas/>

stick their broomsticks into the ground and go after young men. When one of the young witches fell in love with a man and did not come back, her broom turned green. The Witch's fir is not just a monument where tourists can take pictures, it also used as a place for Midsummer celebration, where on a magical night of Midsummer rituals are being performed involving herbal infusions and water that gains special powers during the night. In 2017, the Witch's fir was chosen as the Tree of the Year in Lithuania[46].

Another interesting fact that is peculiar about the nature of the region is **annual floods**, which is of course an inconvenience to the locals, but it attracts Lithuanian travellers from other parts of the country as well as from the countries abroad, just to admire the meadows flooded by this nature's element.

The municipality of **Zabłudów** lies near the Narew River Valley, an area of exceptional natural beauty. Rich in flora and fauna, with vast meadows and forests, it offers an ideal setting for nature tourism, including kayaking, hiking, and birdwatching. The region provides serene and tranquil spaces, making it attractive to those seeking respite from the bustle of urban life.

Tourist attractions with distinctive features are located in two regions: the northern area, which includes the forested lands of the **Knyszyn Forest** and largely forms the buffer zone of the Knyszyn Forest Landscape Park, and the southern area, situated in close proximity to the Narew River and forming part of the Protected Landscape Area of the Narew Valley. The appeal of these areas supports the development of recreational housing. Hiking is facilitated by designated trails and cycling routes. Several tourist trails pass through the municipality:

- **Narew Valley Trail**: Ciełuszki – Kaniuki – Ryboły; this route is part of the Podlaskie Stork Trail.
- "**Edge of the Knyszyn Forest**" Walking Trail: Białystok – Bobrowniki, 60 km in length, of which 17 km runs through the municipality (Kuriany – Płoskie – Kamionka – Słomianka – Żednia).
- "**Orthodox Churches Trail**" Coach Route: Białystok – Zwierki – Zabłudów – Bielsk Podlaski – Hajnówka. Within the Municipality of Zabłudów, this route passes through the villages of Zwierki, Ryboły, and Pawły, as well as the town of Zabłudów. The route leads through charming villages and towns near Białystok and the Białowieża Forest, showcasing

[46] Raganų eglė. [interactive] [accessed 2024 09 06] Link on the internet: <https://www.visitpagegiai.lt/produktas-147/ka-pamatyti/raganu-egle/>

the culture of Orthodox believers. Along the way, visitors encounter historic wooden Orthodox churches, chapels, and votive crosses.

- "**Cycle Route of Suburban Residences**".

There are two legally protected areas of special natural and landscape values in the municipality: Protected Landscape Area 'Narew Valley' and the buffer zone of Professor Witold Slawinski's Knyszyn Forest Landscape Park.

Experience

Experiential tourism is closely linked to events, as they usually combine different experiences and senses. The most valuable and interesting events are those that are unique and distinctive, as they provide visitors with a completely new experience.

Pagėgiai. The annual Christmas **"Goose Market"** in Pagėgiai can be good example, its traditionally held on the second Saturday of December. This is not just the only goose market in Lithuania, but also an officially recognized event, that in 2016 received the National Heritage Certificate from the Ministry of Agriculture of the Republic of Lithuania. The event is relevant in many aspects: it highlights the uniqueness of the border region, where trade across the border has always been significant, and it also brings attention to the interwar history of the Pagėgiai region, as Lithuania was a major exporter of geese during that time, with Germany being the primary trade partner. During the "Goose Market" event, visitors experience various sensations and gain experiences, because in addition to the market, various games and lotteries are held here that attract the audience, music is played, and dancers dance. It is important to note that during the festival, people communicate using the Šyšioniškiai dialect, visitors are also offered to taste dishes and drinks that are named using dialect words[47].

[47] Šeštadienį Pagėgiuose šurmuliuos „Kalėdinis žąsų turgus Mažojoje Lietuvoje" 2023-12-13. [interactive] [accessed 2024 09 07] Link on the internet: <https://www.tauragesradijas.lt/naujiena/sestadieni-pagegiuose-surmuliuos-kaledinis-zasu-turgus-mazojoje-lietuvoje-2413>; Pagėgiuose šurmuliavo „Kalėdinis Žąsų turgus Mažojoje Lietuvoje" 2016-12-19 [interactive] [accessed 2024 09 07] Link on the internet: <https://www.silaineskrastas.lt/laisvalaikis/be-kategorijos/pagegiuose-surmuliavo-kaledinis-zasu-turgus-mazojoje-lietuvoje/>; Žąsų turgus: sunkiausia svėrė daugiau nei 6 kilogramus. 2021-12-20 [interactive] [accessed 2024 09 07] Link on the internet: <https://www.manoukis.lt/naujienos/renginiai/zasu-turgus-sunkiausia-svere-daugiau-nei-6-kilogramus>; Šeštadienį Pagėgiuose šurmuliuos kalėdinis žąsų turgus. 2023-12-15 20 [interactive] [accessed 2024 09 07] Link on the internet: <https://taurageszinios.lt/naujienos/kultura/2023/12/sestadieni-pagegiuose-surmuliuos-kaledinis-zasu-turgus-20074>

The success of the Goose Market initiative is demonstrated by the fact that in 2023 on December 15 the "Goose Museum" opened in Pagėgiai. In the museum tourists can see an exhibition dedicated exclusively to geese and hear interesting stories about them[48].

Another, important event that is being held in Pagėgiai region, which is a great example of Experiential Tourism – **Midsummer day (Joninės)**. On June 23, 2024, the events of the 140th anniversary of the Midsummer celebration "Rambynas. Midsummer in Lithuania Minor" took place. Thus, on the hill of Rambynas for the first time, a Lithuanian song was sang almost a century and a half ago, when during the national revival, where the festival was organized by Martynas Jankus and Vydūnas (Vilhelmas Storosta), who are the most prominent figures in the national movement of Lithuania Minor at the end of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century. At that time, when celebrating Midsummer on the hill of Rambynas, newer models of celebrating Midsummer were created: with choir concerts, declamations, and performances. This tradition, which have changed a bit over time, continue today. During Midsummer on Rambynas Hill, choirs and vocal ensembles sing, and actors perform. You can feel the old pagan spirit through the ancient rituals, burning bonfires, traditional dances, and floating flower wreaths down the river. A visitor can take the experience home as a souvenir by purchasing the products of herbalists and craftsmen[49].

One more important Experiential Tourism centre in the Pagėgiai region is the **Martynas Jankus Museum**, which was established in the rebuilt printing house in late 19th century of Lithuania Minor. The patriarch of Lithuania Minor, printer Martynas Jankus (1858–1946) worked and later lived there. The museums exposition allows tourists to deepen their knowledge of the history of the book of Lithuania Minor, to get acquainted with the work of printers, the tools that they were using, and get to know personally the publicist and signatory of the Tilsit Act, Martynas Jankus. One of the more interesting and breathtaking exhibits is the posthumous mask of Martynas Jankus made from bronze, which is kept in the museum. Visitors from all over Lithuania, but also from abroad, are as well delighted by the open-air painting garden, which immortalizes the heritage of Lithuania Minor. The plein-airs held

[48] Pagėgių savivaldybės kultūros centro Žąsų muziejus. [interactive] [accessed 2024 12 23] Link on the internet: <https://www.visitpagegiai.lt/produktas-147/ka-pamatyti/pagegiu-savivaldybes-kulturos-centro-zasu-muziejus/>

[49] Mikšienė Aksavera. M.Jankus ir Joninių šventės ant Rambyno kalno. [interactive] [accessed 2024 12 23] Link on the internet: [interactive] [accessed 2025 01 10] Link on the internet: <https://silaine.lt/silaine/m-jankus-ir-joniniu-sventes-ant-rambyno-kalno/> Černiauskienė Aušrinė. Tarptautinio turistinio maršruto „Karalienės Luizės žiedas“ plėtros ir marketingo planas 2021–2026. Kaunas, 2021, p. 56.

in this garden of paintings regularly add to the collection of paintings already in the garden, that way bringing together the works of artists from different generations[50]. In addition to excellent exhibitions and the Lithuania Minor Painting Gallery, the Martynas Jankus Museum also organizes the now traditional **"Museum Nights",** during which various free events are held – exhibitions, lectures, educations, concerts and performances. This initiative is unique in that the events and their program begin at an unusual time for a museum, during non-working hours. For example, in 2024, "Museum Nights" at the Martynas Jankus Museum began its program at 7 pm, therefore inviting people to spend time after a day's work in a culturally enriching environment[51].

Most of the events and tourist attractions mentioned before are a part of a project **"Vėtrungiai road"**. This is the second certified national cultural route in Lithuania, encouraging people to discover and get to know Lithuania Minor. The main goal of this cultural route is for as many residents of Lithuanian as possible to discover the Lithuania Minor region as a unique maritime area rich in coastal culture. The project is being developed in 7 municipalities of the ethnographic Lithuania Minor region, including Pagėgiai Municipality. A total of 110 tourist attractions have been marked, of which 21 are in Pagėgiai Municipality. On the website, tourists can not only choose the tourist attractions themselves but also create an individual route combining the places they want to see, which fully corresponds to the ideas of Experiential Tourism. It should be noted that the valuable feature of this initiative is that it is networked, connecting cultural heritage sites through meaningful links across different municipalities. Therefore, by visiting the Pagėgiai Municipality, tourists can sense the connection between the places they visit and the heritage sites in neighbouring municipalities as well, which allows them to better understand the cultural and historical context and, through that, gain new experiences. The annual project also has its own festival, which in 2024 was called "Traveling Vėtrungė: Faith, Legends and Book Giants". During this festival, the heritage of Lithuania Minor was brought to life through professional art events. In 2024, the festival had three events, the first of which was held on June 21 in Bitėnai, next to the Martynas Jankus Museum. While the Klaipėda Chamber Orchestra was playing, the event

[50] Almonaitis Vytenis, Almonaitienė Junona. Šiaurės Skalva. Keliautojo po Pagėgių kraštą žinynas. Kaunas, 2015, p. 62-66; Martyno Jankaus muziejus, Mažosios Lietuvos paveikslų sodas. [interactive] [accessed 2024 09 07] Link on the internet: <https://www.visitpagegiai.lt/produktas-147/ka-pamatyti/martyno-jankaus-muziejus-mazosios-lietuvos-paveikslu-sodas/>; Černiauskienė Aušrinė. Tarptautinio turistinio maršruto „Karalienės Luizės žiedas“ plėtros ir marketingo planas 2021–2026. Kaunas, 2021, p. 61.

[51] Tarptautinė muziejų naktis Martyno Jankaus muziejuje 2022 m. gegužės mėn. [interactive] [accessed 2024 09 09] Link on the internet: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IMgwGyXHcOA; Martyno Jankaus muziejaus tradiciniai renginiai. [interactive] [accessed 2024 09 09] Link on the internet: https://www.pagegiai.lt/kultura/tradiciniai-renginiai/martyno-jankaus-muziejus/

participants heard the history of this region, felt the spirit and importance of the most prominent creators of Lithuania Minor, who have laid their eternal rest here, not only for the region of Lithuania Minor, but also for the whole of Lithuania: Vydūnas, Martynas Jankus and Kristijonas Donelaitis[52].

The municipality of **Zabłudów** is characterized by an abundance of various cultural institutions and organizations of local communities that organize widely unique events and provides authentic experiences for tourists and locals. **Museum of Material Culture „Baćkauszczyna”**, which name derives from the colloquial term baćka – meaning "father" holds various exhibitions. The exhibits housed in this museum originate from nearby villages (Ryboły, Ciełuszki, Wojszki, Pawły) and reflect their local heritage. The museum was established in 2009 in the building of a former school. The initiators of this unique project were Father Grzegorz Sosna, the Orthodox parish priest in Ryboły; Lidia Martyniuk, the director of the local cultural centre; and Antonina Troc-Sosna, the matuszka (wife of the Orthodox priest). Antonina emphasizes the uniqueness of this parish museum within the Podlasie region and is deeply involved in meticulously documenting each exhibit, including its origins and donors.

The museum has amassed a rich collection of items once used daily, which are now slowly fading into obscurity. In the various rooms of the former school, visitors can see millstones, utensils, farming tools, and household equipment such as butter churns, chests, and cheese presses. The collection also includes items from the kitchen, bedroom, and farmer's workshop, as well as devices for producing moonshine. Each room is thematically arranged to tell the story of the local community.

The museum's unique atmosphere is shaped by the personality of Antonina Troc-Sosna, who passionately introduces visitors to the culture and history of the region. It is also worth mentioning Father Grzegorz Sosna, who not only co-founded the museum but is also a renowned author of bibliographies on Orthodoxy and the region's history.

The Municipal Centre for Cultural Animation in Zabłudów (MOAK) offers a wide range of activities for children, youth, and adults at various skill levels. These include yarn workshops, creative workshops for children, clay modelling, art classes – held both in the studio and outdoors, sculpting workshops – led by a student of sculptor Włodzimierz Naumiuk from Kaniuki, who established the "School of Sculpture" in 1996. MOAK also provides mental math courses for children, piano lessons and chess classes. In addition to its educational offerings, MOAK hosts four music ensembles: Folwarczanki, Reczańka (Belarusian: little river), Barwianka, and Rosy. These groups preserve Polish

[52] „Vėtrungių ir Kafijos dienos 2024“. [interactive] [accessed 2024 09 07] Link on the internet: <https://welovelithuania.com/vetrungiu-ir-kafijos-dienos-2024/>; Festivalis „Keliaujanti vėtrungė: tikėjimas, legendos ir knygų milžinai“ [interactive] [accessed 2024 09 08] Link on the internet: <Vėtrungių kelias>

and East Borderland cultural traditions. Their repertoires consist of folk songs, and the members perform in traditional costumes. The ensembles participate in various competitions, festivals, local events, and even international trips for integration and cultural exchange.

Since 2009, MOAK has published Zabłudów i Okolice (Zabłudów and Surroundings), initially as a monthly and, since 2022, as a bimonthly magazine. The publication aims to promote and inform residents about government activities and socio-cultural initiatives. Additionally, MOAK releases other thematic publications, ranging from folk and sacred poetry to works on art and the history of the Zabłudów area.

The Municipal Centre for Cultural Animation in Zabłudów hosts a department dedicated to digitizing and sharing collections related to the municipality. This project provides access to invaluable materials, forming a treasure trove of knowledge about Zabłudów's history. The archive is created in collaboration with various institutions and individuals who contribute photographs, negatives, documents, chronicles, audio recordings, and video footage. The archive's website grants access to all interested parties and highlights the profiles of individuals connected to the Municipality of Zabłudów. The materials made available relate to cultural events, national and religious ceremonies, architecture, education, and many other aspects of the residents' lives.

The Municipal Public Library in Zabłudów is an independent cultural institution managed by the local government. There are three libraries operating within the Municipality of Zabłudów: the Municipal Public Library in Zabłudów and two branches located in Rafałówka and Ryboły. The library's mission is to provide access to and lend the latest library collections. It organizes library lessons, activities, and games for young children. The library actively participates in events such as Zabłudów's Birthday celebrations and harvest festivals (dożynki), and collaborates with other libraries in the district, the Municipal Office, the Podlaskie Library (Książnica Podlaska), schools in Zabłudów, the Municipal Centre for Cultural Animation in Zabłudów (MOAK), the editor of the regional newspaper Zabłudów i okolice, and many other institutions and individuals. provides access to its online catalogue and digital library through its website. It also participates in projects such as:

- "Digital Talking Book Player Lending Service for Blind and Visually Impaired People" – implemented by the Henryk Ruszczyc Association for Helping Disabled People "Larix,"
- "Shelf of Emotions" – the library received funding to purchase psychoeducational, relaxation, and motivational books for children,
- "Good Morning with the Library!" – a series of author meetings.

Volunteer Fire Brigades (OSP) play a crucial role in many local communities, such as the Municipality of Zabłudów, not only by providing fire safety but also by fostering community integration and promoting the region's cultural heritage. In the context of experience tourism, OSP activities offer a unique foundation for developing attractions that provide authentic and engaging experiences.

OSP can organize workshops on safety, first aid, and the use of firefighting equipment. Tourists, especially families with children, can learn basic rescue principles or try their hand at simulated firefighting actions. Such experiences combine education with excitement, directly involving participants. Additionally, many OSP units possess historic firefighting equipment, which can be showcased in historical demonstrations or interactive performances. Scenarios might include simulations of past firefighting actions, presentations on the evolution of fire extinguishing techniques, or historical reenactments tied to local events. Fire stations often house unique artifacts, such as antique fire engines, uniforms, and documents. Allowing tourists to view and interact with this equipment provides an appealing option for those interested in technology, history, and local culture. OSP can also organize themed events such as open days, firefighting competitions, or regional festivals. These events, enriched with local music, cuisine, and handicrafts, attract tourists seeking authentic experiences.

Collaboration with other entities, such as agritourism farms, museums, or environmental organizations, can create comprehensive tourism offerings. For example, firefighting workshops could be part of a broader educational and recreational program that includes exploring local traditions and nature.

The Municipality of Zabłudów is home to numerous farms and agritourism establishments. Farm owners offer opportunities to connect with nature and animals, including activities like milking cows, goat therapy, participation in simple farm tasks, and other services. The village of **Cieluszki** stands out in the arts, with a resident photographer and musician, as well as a skilled carpenter who creates architectural details based on traditional patterns. His works include eye-catching shutters, intricately carved window headers and sills, wind braces, corner decorations, and unique house facades. In the village of **Laszki**, there is a ranch made famous by the television program "Farmers. Podlasie". The ranch provides a sanctuary for animals, offering them love and care. It is home to animals rescued from difficult conditions or abandonment, including cows, goats, sheep, rabbits, chickens, and more. The owner actively shares the ranch’s daily life through a YouTube channel and Facebook account.

Meanwhile, in the village of **Ostrówki**, another farm features fallow deer, Ardennes horses, donkeys, sheep, and even a llama, offering visitors a chance to experience the charm of rural life and its diverse animals.

Solniki 44 Cultural Habitat is a unique place on the map of Polish cultural life, combining theatrical production, artistic education, and the presentation of diverse forms of art. Established in 2016 by members of the Grupa Coincidentia theatre group, the centre is situated in the picturesque surroundings of the Knyszyn Forest, within the Green Lungs of Poland, near Białystok. This location not only fosters a connection with nature but also highlights the distinctive character of the centre, which operates at the intersection of art, ecology, and local traditions.

The centre features a professional theatre stage with a capacity for approximately one hundred spectators, making it an ideal venue for intimate performances and experimental theatre. Solniki 44 also hosts international artistic events, such as the LasFest and LasKids festivals, attracting creators and audiences from Poland and abroad. The centre offers a wide range of activities, including art workshops, laboratory projects, theatrical performances, as well as debates and meetings with artists, fostering the exchange of ideas and creative development.

Thanks to its independence, Solniki 44 can undertake bold and innovative projects that transcend the boundaries of traditional theatre forms. Since its inception, the centre has gained recognition as a hub supporting young creators and as a space for artistic experimentation and the development of international cultural relationships. Surrounded by wild nature and in harmony with the local environment, Solniki 44 provides a unique platform that bridges tradition and modernity, and art with reflection on the contemporary world.

Taste.

Experiential Tourism is closely related to Gastronomic Tourism. To be part of the authentic experiences, a tourist must implement them through as many different senses as possible: sight, hearing, touch, taste and smell. If first three senses are quite common in tourist attractions, then taste and smell are already related to tasting a specific food, which, when combined with other senses, further enriches the experience.

Pagėgiai. An example of gastronomic tourism in municipality of Pagėgiai could be the annual Christmas **"Goose Market"**, that was mentioned before. In addition to various fun activities, the taste and smell are also important here, which is reflected in the name. Not to mention the geese and other

food sold at the market, festival visitors can taste "tija" – tea, "kafija" – coffee, and a special traditional black soup – "švarczupė" which is a traditional soup of Lithuanians from Lithuania Minor that is made from coagulated goose blood[53]. In this way, through the sound of the Šišioniškis dialect, they can better identify with the atmosphere of the Pagėgiai region in the first half of the 20th century.

One of the interesting places to experience the peculiarities of Gastronomic Tourism in the Pagėgiai region is the **Mociškės folwark** (tourist homestead), which can be found in the village of Mociškės, in the Vilkyškės eldership. There, tasting sessions of traditional dishes of Lithuania Minor are held, during which you anyone can taste šiupinys (hodgepodge**)**, "vofeliai" (waffles), "kuchenai" (pies, usually strudel), drink traditional "tija" (tea) and "kafija" (coffee). Tasting session there are organized and priced according to the distribution of social classes of the late 19th century - early 20th century. If someone wants to experience the traditional lunch of farmers of Lithuania Minor, they can choose the traditional šiupinys (hodgepodge) of this region, which was previously called "schuppnis"[54]. It used to be made from various cereals complimenting it with beans, peas, sometimes potatoes, fried vegetables and meat[55]. Kristijonas Donelaitis (1714–1780) wrote about this dish several centuries ago in his poem "Metai" (Years): "We, lithuanians from Lithuania Minor, eat borscht and šiupinys (hodgepodge) deliciously / With tastefully cooked bacon, we praise it…"[56] If you want to feel like a regional official, you will be served schnitzel (traditionally prepared beaten pork or veal), which is more luxurious than šiupinys (hodgepodge). But if you are curious about what the landlords' experience at the table was like, it is worth choosing "Dvarininko pono pietūs" (Luncheon of the Landlord), where the main course will be made of the game meat. In addition, the folwark hosts tasting sessions of various types of honey where you can learn about their differences and make wax candles and natural products from bee products as well[57].

When it comes to **the Municipality of Zabłudów** it is a home to numerous farms and agritourism establishments which are closely related to culinary tourism. These farms specialize in raising dairy

[53] Žąsų turgus: sunkiausia svėrė daugiau nei 6 kilogramus. 2021-12-20 [interactive] [accessed 2024 09 07] Link on the internet: <https://www.manoukis.lt/naujienos/renginiai/zasu-turgus-sunkiausia-svere-daugiau-nei-6-kilogramus>

[54] Laužikas Rimvydas. Mažosios Lietuvos saldumynų istorijos. In: Klaipėdos krašto konditerijos atradimai. Kepiniai. Klaipėda, 2022, p. 13.

[55] Edukacijos. [interactive] [accessed 2024 09 15] Link on the internet: <https://mociskiupalivarkas.lt/edukacijos/>

[56] Mažosios Lietuvos šiupiniai. [interactive] [accessed 2024 09 15] Link on the internet: <https://www.silaineskrastas.lt/gyvenimas/mazosios-lietuvos-siupiniai/>

[57] Edukacijos. [interactive] [accessed 2024 09 15] Link on the internet: <https://mociskiupalivarkas.lt/edukacijos/>

goats and sheep, producing excellent products such as milk, yogurts, aged cheeses, rennet cheeses, and cottage cheese. Also, some farms provide authentic experiences such as harvesting crops, cooking traditional dishes, and learning traditional crafts. For children and families, these activities offer an educational form of entertainment, meanwhile for adults they provide an opportunity to relax and immerse themselves in the local way of life.

The Municipality of Zabłudów offers approximately 20 establishments providing accommodation and agritourism services, as well as facilities for hosting events such as weddings, family gatherings, or corporate parties. Visitors can enjoy traditional local dishes prepared with products sourced from nearby farms and gardens. Guests also can participate in the preparation of these meals. Regardless of the season, visitors can engage in numerous sensory experiences, including gathering forest fruits, cycling and hiking, participating in bonfires, mushroom picking, using saunas, or enjoying garden jacuzzis. In winter, attractions such as sleigh rides or sledding are available. Additionally, interaction with animals, including feeding them, adds to the unique appeal of the area.

In the Municipality of Zabłudów, **17 Rural Women's Associations (Koła Gospodyń Wiejskich, KGW)** are actively operating. These organizations bring together engaged rural residents, primarily women, who preserve tradition, culture, and local heritage. KGWs focus on the comprehensive development of rural areas and the promotion of folk culture, particularly local and regional traditions. Due to their unique character, KGWs are excellent partners in creating tourist attractions that appeal to individuals seeking unique experiences and deep immersion in local life. KGWs can become a cornerstone of experience tourism through their diverse activities. Therefore, they could organize themed activities like culinary or herbal workshops.

Run your fingers through time

There are many places to visit in **Pagėgiai Municipality**, and most of them are somehow related to the history of this region, therefore it can help us to better understand and feel what we see, touch or taste. The first nomads may have appeared in this region in the late Paleolithic, and in the Mesolithic, we are aware that there were inhabitants already because near Šereiklaukis hillfort their campsite was discovered. In the first centuries of our era, a separate ethnic area was formed on both sides of the Nemunas at the mouths of the Jūra and Šešupė rivers: the Skalvian tribe, which belonged to the Balt tribe group, was formed there. It so happened that the Skalvians, like other Balts, had not only settlements, but also **hillforts**, there were eight of them in Pagėgiai Municipality: one in Birštoniškės, Kreivėnai, and two of each in Opstainiai, Šereiklaukis, Vartūliškės hillforts and of course Rambynas. All

of them we can recognise as potential Experiential Tourism sources[58]. Not all of them are well-maintained and easily accessible to visitors, but the website https://piliakalniai.lt/rajonai/40 provides the coordinates of all of them, so anyone can visit them if they wish[59]. Although Rambynas Hill is the most famous, the most important can be considered Šereiklaukis I hillfort, where the Skalvian castle Šereika stood. It was named after its castle's owner, mentioned in 1276, who died shortly after in a fight with the Order[60].

After the Teutonic Order occupied those lands, no tourist attractions commemorating its activities have survived on this side of Nemunas, as it was a sparsely populated area, however, relics testifying to the times of the Prussian Duchy, and later the kingdom, can be found in more than one town, village or manor in Pagėgiai Municipality. One of the oldest is the town of Vilkyškiai, located on the crest of its ridge. It was first mentioned in 1539–1540, around 1554 the first church was built, and in 1556 the first tavern opened. In the 17th century, Vilkyškiai already had clear signs of a town, and at that time the main street network was formed, which has essentially survived to this day. Therefore, even today, walking around the town, you can feel the spirit of the times of the Prussian Duchy. Among the various old buildings that have survived, the **Vilkyškiai Evangelical Lutheran Church** can be distinguished. Although this it is not a 16th century building, but already the third church in town of Vilkyškiai, its location has remained essentially unchanged. The current church with a 45 m height tower was built in 1895–1896 after the demolition of the old church and wooden bell tower. There are also many ecclesiastical heritage sites worth visiting in other towns and villages of Pagėgiai Municipality[61].

For example, the **Plaškiai** panorama is dominated by the visually attractive Evangelical Lutheran church, built at the end of the 19th century. This building, which features elements of historicist architecture, combines Neo-Romanesque and Neo-Gothic styles, with an ornate facade. Unfortunately, the building was abandoned during the Soviet era, because it suffered significant damage in 1944[62].

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[58] Birbilaitė Gabrielė, Lukšaitienė Audronė. Patirtinio turizmo plėtojimo galimybės Suvalkijos regione. *Verslo aktualijos būsimųjų specialistų požiūriu*, 2021, p. 305.

[59] Lietuvos piliakalniai. [interactive] [accessed 2024 11 21] Link on the internet: <https://piliakalniai.lt/rajonai/40>

[60] Almonaitis Vytenis, Almonaitienė Junona. Šiaurės Skalva. Keliautojo po Pagėgių kraštą žinynas. Kaunas, 2015, p. 12-17.

[61] Almonaitis Vytenis, Almonaitienė Junona. Šiaurės Skalva. Keliautojo po Pagėgių kraštą žinynas. Kaunas, 2015, p. 177-198; Purvinas Martynas. Istoriniai miestai Nemuno Žemupyje. In Istoriniai miestai: sena ir šiuolaikiška. Sud. Alfredas Jomantas. Vilnius, 2003, p. 39.

[62] Almonaitis Vytenis, Almonaitienė Junona. Šiaurės Skalva. Keliautojo po Pagėgių kraštą žinynas. Kaunas, 2015, p. 123-127; Purvinas Martynas. Istoriniai miestai Nemuno Žemupyje. In Istoriniai miestai: sena ir šiuolaikiška. Sud.

Žukai Evangelical Lutheran church, that was built in years 1906-1907, is preserved a lot better. It is an impressive church that is a combination of neo-Gothic and modernist architecture. It is unique because of the tower that is turned at a 90-degree angle and oriented to the sides by pediments[63]. Pagėgiai region can boast not only sacred buildings. For example, the most valuable cultural monument in **Piktupėnai** is the old school. Although both Piktupėnai themselves and the parish school that operated there are mentioned as early as the 16th century, the current school building is undoubtedly later, built around the end of the 18th century. The walls of the school commemorate historical personalities. Interesting fact, in 1807, during the Tilsit Peace Negotiations, King Frederick III of Prussia and his wife Queen Louise resided there for several weeks. It is possible that two linden trees of Queen Louise still stand near the old school building from when she visited[64].

It is important to mention that **Pagėgiai** become the biggest town in its region not until the end of 19th century. Pagėgiai rapid expansion was caused by the construction of the railway and the highway leading from Tilsit to Klaipėda. Thanks to this, many modernist architectural buildings there were built. It can be said that Pagėgiai, after Kaunas, is the second city in Lithuania where in a defined area during the interwar period so many modern architectural buildings designed by professional and qualified architects were built. An example can be that in 1937, as many as 39 new houses were built in Pagėgiai. Therefore, the central part of Pagėgiai can be viewed as an architectural exposition of that period[65].

In the Pagėgiai region there are many unexploited historical objects, which, when combined into thematic routes and linked to cognitive gastronomic services, could create new Experiential Tourism products. An example – **unique railway stations** that are very specific for Klaipėda region, something you could not find anywhere else in Lithuania. The European tracks (1435 mm) railway in the Klaipėda region began operating in 1875. It was the Tilsit-Klaipėda (Tilsit-Memel) railway section. In the year 1902, the construction of the railway section from Pagėgiai (Pogegen) to Lauksargiai (Laugszargen) was completed. Six station complexes were built on the latter route, which have survived to this day in some

Alfredas Jomantas. Vilnius, 2003, p. 42; Purvinas Martynas. Mažosios Lietuvos etnografiniai kaimai. Trakai, 2011, p. 138-146; Purvinas Martynas. Mažosios Lietuvos panemuniais ir pamariais. II knyga. Trakai, 2017, p. 389-410.

[63] Almonaitis Vytenis, Almonaitienė Junona. Šiaurės Skalva. Keliautojo po Pagėgių kraštą žinynas. Kaunas, 2015, p. 199-213; Purvinas Martynas. Mažosios Lietuvos etnografiniai kaimai. Trakai, 2011, p. 138-146.

[64] Almonaitis Vytenis, Almonaitienė Junona. Šiaurės Skalva. Keliautojo po Pagėgių kraštą žinynas. Kaunas, 2015, p. 93-98; Purvinas Martynas. Istoriniai miestai Nemuno Žemupyje. In Istoriniai miestai: sena ir šiuolaikiška. Sud. Alfredas Jomantas. Vilnius, 2003, p. 39.

[65] Almonaitis Vytenis, Almonaitienė Junona. Šiaurės Skalva. Keliautojo po Pagėgių kraštą žinynas. Kaunas, 2015, p. 76-89; Purvinas Martynas. Istoriniai miestai Nemuno Žemupyje. In Istoriniai miestai: sena ir šiuolaikiška. Sud. Alfredas Jomantas. Vilnius, 2003, p. 37-58.

parts fully, in others in fragments. According to the design of a model small railway station building prepared by the Prussian construction officer, architect, Professor Emil Hoffmann (1845–1901), the Griežpelkiai, Geniai (formerly Cullmen-Jennen) and Gudai stations were built. The Lauksargiai, Kamščiai (formerly Kampspowilken) stations and Pavilkiai stations also survived. It should be highlighted that E. Hoffmann prepared several exemplary small station projects, created functional and aesthetically attractive buildings with features of neo-Gothic and neo-Renaissance styles. Now, the pink brick buildings of this style distinguish the Pagėgiai region in the entire Lithuanian context and therefore can become an attractive tourist attraction[66].

One more yet not used topic regarding tourists' routes would be manors in Pagėgiai Municipality. There are said to be 128 known manors, but only 62 are localised. The development of the architecture of the manors of Lithuania Minor differed significantly from the manors that belonged to the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in the past, therefore they are unique heritage objects on the Lithuanian scale. Since many of the manors are abandonment and research that has been done about them is little, the actualization of this topic through events for tourists can help preserve them, as they are a valuable cultural heritage of the Pagėgiai region[67].

In the west from Pagėgiai a shocking Experiential Tourism object can be discovered that commemorates the turbulent history of the region in the 20th century – the prisoner of war camp "Oflag-53". It was established by fascist Germany as a branch of the Buchenwald concentration camp for Soviet soldiers in 1941. Throughout one year, about 10,000 people died there due to starvation, cold and various diseases. In 1977, a memorial was set up there, which was renovated in 2005. Such an object is a typical example of Dark Tourism. Although it was not expected from tourists to find interest in places of mass murder, Dark Tourism as a phenomenon acquired such a name at the end of the 20th century and there are many objects like it in the world. An analogy for Oflag-53, that is well known and associated with Dark Tourism is a concentration camp of Auschwitz in Poland[68].

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[66] Purvinas Martynas. Mažosios Lietuvos etnografiniai kaimai. Trakai, 2011, p. 117; Prūsijai – 500. Istorinio kraštovaizdžio likučiai Klaipėdos krašte. Prūsijos geležinkelio ruožo Pagėgiai – Lauksargiai palikimas. 2025 m. kalendorius. [interactive] [accessed 2024 09 15] Link on the internet: https://www.archeologijoscentras.lt/sites/default/files/Kalendorius%202025.pdf

[67] Meškauskienė Regina ir kt. Šilutės ir Pagėgių krašto dvarai. Klaipėda, 2010; Purvinas Martynas. Lietuvos dvarų sodybų atlasas II. Pagėgių savivaldybė. Vilnius, 2014.

[68] Biran Avital and Poria Yaniv. Reconceptualising dark tourism. In: Contemporary Tourist Experience. Concepts and Consequences. Edited by Richard Sharpley, Philip R. Stone. New York, 2012, p. 59-70.

Zabłudów as well stands out for its rich history and cultural heritage. The urban layout of the town has preserved elements of historical architecture, offering a valuable example of the coexistence of municipal and residential complexes. What is valuable as well is the rural layout of the village Ryboły, as a 16th-century land survey settlement. Historical sites in the municipality, including wooden and masonry Orthodox churches and a Catholic church, are a testament to the region's cultural diversity. Traditional religious ceremonies, local festivals, and handicrafts also hold great potential as tourist attractions, appealing to those interested in history and local folklore. The municipality is also home to a historic manor park, originally part of an estate built in the mid-16th century. Over time, the manor underwent numerous transformations, and in the second half of the 19th century, the estate was redesigned into a landscaped park. Although the buildings were destroyed during World War II, a municipal park was later established on the site. In the park near the Zabłudów market square stands the Monument to the Heroes of Zabłudów Land, commemorating those who fought for the freedom of the homeland. Additionally, in the 1960s, a monument was erected in the town square to honour those who died between 1941 and 1945. In 2003, a wooden sculpture of Saints Peter and Paul was also placed there.

There is a big variety of Religious Sites in Zabłudów. The Orthodox churches, chapels, and Catholic churches in the area offer opportunities for developing religious tourism and organizing events such as pilgrimages and spiritual gatherings. These sites attract both believers and enthusiasts of sacred architecture. A unique feature of the municipality is its diverse range of cemeteries, including Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Jewish, Calvinist, Swedish, epidemic, and war cemeteries from World War I and II.

Get to know

Get to know historical figures from the **Pagėgiai region,** who inspired not one but many generations to work and create. We can start from an introduction with Lithuania Minor pantheon – **Bitėnai cemetery**, which can be found at the foot of the hill of Rambynas. This cemetery is the eternal resting place of Vydūnas, Martynas Jankus, Valteris – Kristupas Banaitis, Jonas Vanagaitis, and other famous people who have served Lithuania well. The cemetery is decorated with metal gates, and on its upper part are engraved Vydūnas' words "A beam of light is the essence of infinite light". Vilhelmas Storosta who went by **Vydūnas** (1868–1853), was a Lithuanian philosopher, writer, and cultural and public figure of Lithuania Minor. In 1888, he graduated from the Ragainė Teachers' Seminary. During the years 1888–1892, he taught in Kintai, and in 1892–1912 in Tilsit. Vydūnas by free listening right studied philosophy, sociology, history of religion, literature and art, English, French at the universities of Greifswald, Halle, Leipzig, and Berlin. In 1895, he founded the Tilsit Lithuanian Cantors' Society and

led it until 1935. In Tilsit and other parts of East Prussia, he organized Lithuanian plays, concerts, and song festivals. During his studies, Vydūnas became close to the Theosophical Society of Germany. In 1902, he founded a branch of it in Tilsit and led it. He published and edited four magazines and wrote over 60 books—fiction (plays of various genres, librettos, novellas), philosophical and historiographical tractates, Lithuanian language textbooks, and memoirs. Vydūnas' historical works stand out as some of the most significant, original, and relevant in the historiography of East Prussia and Lithuania Minor of that time. In the Bitėnai cemetery, a man who is referred to as the patriarch of Lithuania Minor, **Martynas Jankus** (1858–1946), is also buried. He was an active political and public figure, a publisher of Lithuanian press, a publicist, and one of the leaders of the Lithuanian national movement, as well as a signatory of the Tilsit Act (1918). Martynas Jankus fought against the Germanization of the Lithuanians of Lithuania Minor and propagated the idea of uniting Greater and Lithuania Minor. He owned printing presses in Ragainė, Tilsit, Klaipėda, Šilutė, and Bitėnai. His presses printed around 400 books and 27 periodicals in Lithuanian and German. These publications had a significant impact on the lives of the public and promoted the development of national ideas[69].

Another famous figure is a writer **Johanesas Bobrovskis (Johannes Bobrowski)** (1917-1965). He was born in Tilsit, but he used to spend his summers at his grandparents' in Vilkyškiai and Mociškiai. Writer's prose depicts the relations between Germans and other nations in Eastern Europe, is rich in Lithuanian motifs, East Prussian landscapes, and his poems contain quotes from Lithuanian folk songs. Therefore, there is no coincidence that the J. Bobrovskis Memorial Museum has been working in the Vilkyškiai Evangelical Lutheran Parish House since 2013. The writer's memorial items, manuscripts, musical instruments, and furniture from his time of studying in Berlin are exhibited there. It is interesting that in his work, Vilkyškiai and other places in the region can be recognized, because they have become the space of action. Because of that, while reading J. Bobrovskis' works, one can wander around Vilkyškiai, Bitėnai and guess where one or another tavern mentioned in his novel used to be located[70].

Another famous XX century poet was born in Pagėgiai. It is **Algimantas Mackus** (1932-1964). He spent first seven years of his life there in Pagėgiai, but during the year 1939 he, together with his family, had to move immediately further to Lithuania and later in 1944 to Germany and after that they moved to the United States. Although he, as a young adult, grew up away from Lithuania, his hometown always had a special place for him: he used to sign his name as Algimantas Pagėgis, which goes to show

[69] Almonaitis Vytenis, Almonaitienė Junona. Šiaurės Skalva. Keliautojo po Pagėgių kraštą žinynas. Kaunas, 2015, p. 57-64.

[70] Savukynas Bronys. Johannes Bobrowski. [interactive] [accessed 2024 09 21] Link on the internet: https://www.vle.lt/straipsnis/johannes-bobrowski/

the importance of his roots. The poet died in a car accident in Chicago at the age of 32. In 2008, Pagėgiai Gymnasium was named after him, and the school museum has valuable exhibits related to the writer's life and work: manuscripts, typescript, and original photographs[71].

It is worth mentioning another famous figure, who, although wasn't born and raised in Pagėgiai region but left a mark of itself still visible till this day. This is **Queen Louise of Prussia**. In 2021, a Queen Louise tourist route was prepared with described tourist attractions, based on which a similar route has been operating in Germany since the year 2013. The main goal of the route is to introduce travellers to the places of Lithuania Minor that commemorate one of the most prominent women in Europe - Queen Louise of Prussia. Queen Louise, the wife of Frederick William III, who ruled Prussia from 1797 to 1840, left a bright mark on the history of Lithuania Minor. During the wars with Napoleon, the royal family was forced to flee from Berlin to Königsberg. One of the most important events in the history of Prussia and Queen Louise's reign happened on July 6, 1807, when the meeting of the Queen and Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte took place in Tilsit. It is known that before and after the meeting, the Queen stayed in the village of Piktupėnai, where the linden tree bearing her name still grows, and the old school building is still there, where the Queen spent a few days. The bridge named after her, leading from Panemunė to Tilsit (Sovetska), also commemorates Queen Louise. This is another impressive tourist attraction, which was completed in 1907. The opening date of the bridge coincided with the centenary of Queen Louise of Prussia's visit to Tilsit, which is why the bridge got her name. The connection of the two regions of East Prussia by the bridge stimulated the economic and cultural growth of the region. During the World War II, it was blown up and later rebuilt. The length of the bridge is 416 meters. The third place where you can learn something more about queen's life is in Vilkyškiai, where an interactive exhibition called "History Incubator" is open[72].

When it comes to the **Municipality Zabłudów** , there are more than half of a dozen fascinating figures who have contributed to the development of culture, science, and social life of the town. These include: **Franciszek Karpiński** – an Enlightenment-era poet and author of well-known religious works such as "Kiedy ranne wstają zorze" (When Morning Dawns Arise) and "Bóg się rodzi" (God Is Born). His writings had a significant impact on Polish literature of the time. He was chosen as the patron of the

[71] Satkauskytė Dalia. Algimantas Mackus. [interactive] [accessed 2024 09 21] Link on the internet: https://www.vle.lt/straipsnis/algimantas-mackus/

[72] Černiauskienė Aušrinė. Tarptautinio turistinio maršruto „Karalienės Luizės žiedas" plėtros ir marketingo planas 2021–2026. Kaunas.

Primary School in Zabłudów due to his life and work in the area, as well as the potential to promote Zabłudów through his name.

Kazimierz Ostaszewski is a another notable person – a social and economic activist committed to the development of agriculture and industry in the Podlasie region. His initiatives contributed to the modernization of the region in the 19th century.

Several other famous artists, writers and activists to mention:

Szewach Gober – a figure associated with the history of the Jewish community in Zabłudów. His life and activities reflect the experiences of many residents of the area before World War II.

Antoni Maksimowicz – a teacher and social activist who worked for many years to advance education and culture in the Municipality of Zabłudów. His dedication to the local community left a lasting impression on its residents.

Włodzimierz Naumiuk – a folk artist renowned for his sculptural and painting works, inspired by the traditions and history of Podlasie. His creations are appreciated both in Poland and abroad.

Father Józef Krysiewicz – a clergyman who served in parishes in the Municipality of Zabłudów. His pastoral and social work had a significant impact on the religious and cultural life of the local community.

Jan Leończuk – a poet, prose writer, and translator connected to Podlasie. His literary works, rooted in the realities of the region, have contributed to the promotion of Podlasie's culture and traditions in Polish literature.

Experiential Tourism strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats in Pagėgiai and Zabłudów Municipalities analysis (SWOT)

The SWOT analysis of Experiential Tourism for the Pagėgiai and Zabłudów municipalities was developed based on global and national trends in Experiential Tourism as well as the area's local tourism potential. The SWOT analysis is a strategic analysis tool that was used to explore the possibilities of developing Experiential Tourism in the Pagėgiai and Zabłudów municipalities.

Within the SWOT analysis, the different categories of factors were defined as:

- Strengths – these are internal factors: characteristics of the municipality and largely dependent on it (understood as the entire community and all internal stakeholders), everything that constitutes a competitive advantage, asset, or benefit, driving the development of Experiential Tourism in Pagėgiai and Zabłudów.
- Weaknesses – these are internal factors: characteristics of the municipality and largely dependent on it (understood as the entire community and all internal stakeholders), everything that constitutes a competitive weakness, drawback, or internal barrier to the development of experiential tourism in Pagėgiai and Zabłudów.
- Opportunities – these are external factors over which the municipality (understood as the community) has no direct influence or where this influence is very limited, everything that creates an opportunity for favourable changes in the development of experiential tourism in Pagėgiai and Zabłudów.
- Threats – these are external factors over which the municipality (understood as the community) has no direct influence or where this influence is very limited, everything that poses a risk of unfavourable changes in the development of experiential tourism in Pagėgiai and Zabłudów.

SWOT analysis (case of Pagėgiai)

Strengths

- Rambynas Regional Park and its natural and cultural heritage sites. The park is characterized by the landscape of the Nemunas Valley with the famous Rambynas Hill, the Ragainė Bend, the confluence of the Sea and the Nemunas. The park contains the Bitėnai Cemetery, which is unique in Lithuania known as the Pantheon of Lithuania Minor.
- Midsummer celebration on Rambynas Hill. This celebration is a 140-year-old tradition in one of the most visually pleasing places in Lithuania. The origins of the event can trace to such personalities as Martynas Jankus and Vydūnas (Vilhelmas Storosta).
- The Nemunas River route Rambynas Hill – Panemunė, which is a very attractive water tourism destination.
- Forgotten unique Lithuania Minor heritage, which has no analogies in other parts of Lithuania. Pagėgiai region region belonged to the Teutonic Order from the XIV to the beginning of the XX century, and later to the Duchy and Kingdom of Prussia. Therefore, historical development of the region was different from the rest of Lithuania, reflections of it we can still see in the architecture of churches, train stations, or residential buildings that have survived till this day.
- Modernistic Pagėgiai architecture. Pagėgiai is the second city in Lithuania after Kaunas, where so many modern architectural structures were built in a defined area in the 1930s and 1940s. The importance and uniqueness of this can be attested to by the fact that the mentioned Kaunas architecture is included in the UNESCO World Heritage List.
- The annual Christmas "Goose Market", the only goose market in Lithuania. This event received the National Heritage Certificate from the Ministry of Agriculture of the Republic of Lithuania in the year 2016.
- Pagėgiai region gastronomic heritage, which is notable for its uniqueness comparing to the rest of Lithuania, dishes and drinks showcasing the culture and cuisine of Lithuania Minor.

Weaknesses

- Long distances to densely populated Lithuanian cities. There is 88 km between Pagėgiai and Klaipėda, and 150 km between Pagėgiai and Kaunas. This indicates that Pagėgiai region is not easily accessible to residents of large cities who could contribute to the growth of local tourism.
- Long distances to international airports. From Kaunas airport there is a 160 km distance and from Palanga airport – 117 km distance, this shows that Pagėgiai is not easily accessible destination for tourists coming from abroad.
- Short warm tourist season. Some activities for tourists (cycling, water transportation) depend on weather conditions. There are no tourist routes exclusively adapted to the cold season.
- There is no developed network of bicycle paths in the territory of the municipality. The lower Nemunas region has a comfortable terrain for cycling and traveling longer distances by bicycle. Cycling is an important part of experiential or slow tourism, therefore a developed infrastructure of paths together with campsites could attract more tourists traveling to the Lithuanian seaside.
- Insufficient maintenance and emergency condition of historical buildings. A large part of historical buildings of national importance and interest to tourists, such as the Plaškiai Church or the stations of the Pagėgiai - Lauksargiai railway section, are not included in the register of cultural heritage and are not subject to protection. Some of them are rapidly disappearing.
- Undeveloped infrastructure near the spots of tourist attractions. Lack of places of dining, markets, places of entertainment and such.
- There are not enough places of rest, it lacks variety therefore, it may not meet the needs of every tourist.
- Lack of tourist attraction in the context of the region. Pagėgiai Municipality, compared to other municipalities in Klaipėda region, is not as popular among tourists, as most travellers focus on trips closer to the Curonian Lagoon and the sea in general. Since these places are also part of the heritage of Lithuania Minor, Pagėgiai often remains unrecognised.
- Modern technological solutions are not being used sufficiently. The lack of mobile applications and virtual reality products do not help to attract younger tourists.
- No professional marketing team, low use of social networks severely limits Pagėgiai ability to attract more tourists choosing Experiential Tourism.

Opportunities

- The growing popularity of Experiential and Slow Tourism. Nowadays, tourists are increasingly seeking peace and closeness to nature and trying to avoid places of mass tourism. At the same time, new technological solutions make it easier to plan trips on their own. Pagėgiai can become a great place for tourists who are looking for authentic and peaceful places to relax.
- Promotion of organized tours and travel within the Pagėgiai Municipality area.
- Usage of EU support funds dedicating it to promotions of tourism initiatives.
- Renovation and conservation of abandoned historical buildings and their complexes for tourism needs.
- Development of a network of bicycle paths, along with campsites and rental points, can attract more tourists choosing Experiential Tourism.
- Gastronomic Tourism popularization in Pagėgiai Municipality. Gastronomic Tourism is an important Experiential Tourism branch, and Pagėgiai Municipality has favourable opportunities to develop this area, as the region is characterized by the historical Lithuania Minor cuisine, which distinguishes it from the rest of Lithuania.
- Collaboration with neighbouring border region countries. Creation of international projects together with Poland and other neighbouring countries could encourage tourism sector's development in Pagėgiai Municipality.
- Applying technology in the tourism sector. The use of mobile apps, virtual guides, geocaching can attract more tourists, including younger population.

Threats

- Big amounts of tourist could negatively affect nature and infrastructure. Qualitative and quantitative decline of tourism resources.
- Competition with neighbouring regions. Relatively nearby popular resorts and tourist destinations such as Nida, Palanga, Ventės ragas may distract some tourists.
- Ecological environment's decline in the region and hanging meteorological conditions could negatively affect tourist flows.

- A possible decline in tourist flows due to an economic or financial crisis, a new pandemic, and similar factors.
- Geopolitical situation. Geopolitical disturbance related to nearby neighbouring countries.
- Declining number of residents living in the municipality may lead to a shortage of competent workers in the tourism sector.
- Financial instability. The lack of permanent sources of funding for the development of tourism infrastructure can hinder tourism development.

SWOT analysis (case of Zabłudów)

Strengths

- Natural and cultural wealth. The proximity of the Knyszyn Forest, one of Poland's largest forests, and the unique Narew River Valley, often called the "Polish Amazon," provides ideal conditions for the development of nature tourism. These areas offer various activities such as hiking, kayaking, and wildlife observation. Additionally, the rich cultural heritage, including wooden Orthodox churches, multicultural cemeteries, and memorial sites, attracts tourists interested in the history and culture of the region.
- Multicultural heritage. The history of coexistence among Poles, Belarusians, Jews, and Lithuanians in the region is a significant asset. Wooden Orthodox churches, traces of the Jewish community, Belarusian folk ensembles, and traditional Podlasie architecture appeal to those seeking authentic experiences. The opportunity to participate in local festivals, such as Orthodox religious ceremonies, further enriches the tourism offerings.
- Local gastronomy. Regional products such as honey, cheese, potato cake (babka ziemniaczana), and potato sausage (kiszka ziemniaczana) form an excellent foundation for culinary tourism. Local farms offer cooking workshops, tastings, and the opportunity to purchase these products, aligning with the slow food trend and tourism centred on authentic flavours.
- Agritourism infrastructure. The agritourism farms in the municipality offer not only accommodations but also the chance to participate in the daily life of residents, such as harvesting crops, feeding animals, and cooking meals. This is an attractive option for families with children and individuals seeking a respite from urban life.
- Proximity to Białystok. Zabłudów's proximity to the Podlasie capital makes it easily accessible for tourists from the city. This also facilitates transportation for visitors from more distant areas.
- Community engagement. The local community, including Rural Women's Associations (Koła Gospodyń Wiejskich), plays an active role in promoting traditions and culture. Organizing craft workshops, culinary events, and festivals could become a key component in building an experiential tourism offering.
- Educational and cultural potential. The Municipality of Zabłudów possesses numerous resources that can be utilized for educational initiatives focused on nature, culture, and history. Organizing

workshops for children and youth on ecosystems of the Narew Valley or the history of multiculturalism could become a vital element of the tourism offer.

Weaknesses

- Limited tourism infrastructure. The lack of sufficient marked hiking and cycling trails, as well as tourist information points, restricts exploration opportunities. Investments in infrastructure could significantly improve access to attractions.
- Insufficient accommodation options. While there are agritourism farms, the municipality lacks a diverse range of accommodations such as glamping, hotels, or modern holiday cottages, which could limit its appeal to more demanding tourists.
- Low regional recognition. Zabłudów is less well-known compared to other tourist regions in Podlasie, such as Białowieża, Augustów, or Suwałki. The absence of a cohesive marketing strategy and promotion in social media hinders awareness of its attractions.
- Seasonality of attractions. Many tourist activities, such as kayaking or hiking, depend on weather and seasonal conditions. The winter season offers fewer options, leading to reduced tourist traffic.
- Limited technological resources. The absence of mobile apps, multimedia guides, or AR/VR technologies reduces the appeal of the tourism offer, especially among younger visitors who prefer interactive experiences.
- Lack of experience in organizing major events. Despite the region's potential for hosting festivals and other events, the municipality lacks experience in such initiatives. Gaining knowledge and collaborating with professional organizers is necessary.
- Low investment in promotion. The absence of professional marketing campaigns, particularly on social media, limits Zabłudów's visibility compared to other regions in Podlasie. Building a promotional strategy and collaborating with influencers is essential.
- Weak integration with other tourism regions. Collaboration with neighbouring municipalities and regions could create joint thematic routes, such as a multicultural or culinary trail. The lack of such initiatives limits growth potential.
- Logistical constraints. Many attractions lack nearby dining options and rest areas. Expanding infrastructure would enhance convenience for tourists.

- Incomplete collaboration among stakeholders. Local entrepreneurs, social organizations, and local authorities often operate independently, limiting opportunities for effective tourism development in the region.

Opportunities

- Growing trend of slow and wellness tourism. Modern tourists increasingly seek tranquillity, relaxation, and closeness to nature. Zabłudów, with its rich natural resources, could become an ideal destination for those preferring to unwind away from urban noise.
- Rising popularity of local products. The trend toward authentic local food and handicrafts provides an opportunity to promote products such as honey, cheese, and regional dishes. Culinary events could become a significant promotional tool for the region.
- EU funding. Access to funding for infrastructure development, tourist trails, digitization of tourism offerings, and cultural events could significantly accelerate the region's growth.
- Cross-border partnerships. Collaboration with Lithuania and other neighbouring regions could lead to international projects, such as joint multicultural routes or events promoting shared heritage.
- Environmental education. Organizing workshops and tours promoting nature conservation and sustainable development could attract tourists interested in ecology.
- Technological advancements. Introducing mobile apps, AR/VR guides, and geocaching could increase the region's appeal, especially for younger generations.

Threats

- Environmental degradation, Excessive tourist traffic, inappropriate behaviour by visitors, or lack of proper regulations could harm the sensitive ecosystems of the Knyszyn Forest and the Narew Valley.
- Competition from more recognized regions. More popular destinations like Białowieża could draw tourists away, making it harder for Zabłudów to establish its brand.
- Climate change. Extreme weather events such as droughts, floods, or strong winds could impact the accessibility and safety of attractions.

- Lack of long-term commitment from local stakeholders. If residents and local organizations are not engaged in tourism projects, their development may be hindered.
- Threat of overcommercialisation. Excessive standardization of the tourism offer could deter visitors seeking authentic experiences.
- Changing tourism trends. As new trends emerge, the ability to quickly adapt offerings will require flexibility and financial resources.
- Risk of pandemics and global crises. Events like pandemics, armed conflicts, or economic challenges could limit tourist traffic. Building a flexible offer suited to such scenarios is necessary.
- Financing challenges. The lack of stable funding sources for developing tourism infrastructure could constrain ambitious investment plans.

Concept and proposals for the development of Experiential Tourism

According to Experiential Tourism analysis and considering the latest trends in Lithuania, Poland and abroad, it can be stated that Pagėgiai and Zabłudów municipalities have the potential to create new Experiential Tourism products, as well as to develop existing ones. The SWOT analysis performed showed that there are untapped Experiential Tourism resources in the territory of Pagėgiai and Zabłudów municipalities, which, after assessing the weaknesses and threats, can be properly used. Considering the results of the analysis, it is proposed to carry out simple Experiential Tourism products, examples of which are presented in this section. The selected examples reflect the potential and opportunities for developing products in Pagėgiai and Zabłudów municipalities. Given existing needs and opportunities, they can be modified.

Examples that are suggested are not hard to accomplish and don't need lots of resources. Successfully carrying out presented product examples or creating new simple Experiential Tourism products according to the presented concept will provide experience and knowledge that will allow choosing proven ideas and means of their implementation and will also encourage undertaking more complex projects. During the preparation of the study, the cooperation between partners from Poland and Lithuania occurred. This partnership led to the conclusion that the implementation of the so-called simple Experiential Tourism products may take three years. During the mentioned period, it is possible to cooperate with partners from Poland and jointly implement some of the chosen products.

After three years of gaining experience and identifying the best-performing ideas, the created products can be combined to create new complex and integrated Experiential Tourism products. The main coordinator of this process should be Pagėgiai and Zabłudów municipalities, which would organize the creation and implementation of products with the participation of educational and cultural institutions, private companies, associations developing cultural activities, artists, specialists and partners from Poland or Lithuania.

Use of existing resources

Pagėgiai and Zabłudów municipalities are full of breathtaking landscapes, those nature sites already have some kind of infrastructure: trails, observation towers, information stands. In Pagėgiai region, there are plenty of authentic cultural heritage objects, which are different from similar objects in the rest of Lithuania because Pagėgiai was a part of Prussian state for a long time. And when it comes to Zabłudów, it stands out because of its rich nature, cultural, religious heritage sites. Therefore, when creating simple Experiential Tourism products existing infrastructure and objects can be used, which would allow to save recourses. This method guarantees effective usage of existing resources.

Competence development

Although product development may sometimes require the involvement of experts with a narrow specialization, local communities can initiate ideas and their implementation. Various craft workshops, tastings, and educations should involve community members in organizing activities or offering their own services.

Increasing demand

To create and accomplish uncomplicated but original products which would attract tourists who seek for Experiential Tourism consciously. Successful and attractive products would be advertised through recommendations and social media sites, therefore attracting new tourists. Successfully replicating this model would help to more accurately identify tourist preferences and expectations and would also create demand that would become very important in the future development of complex products.

Sustainable development and resource conservation

Slow Tourism is getting more and more popular in the world and this tendency contributes to the sustainable development of the tourism sector and the preservation of resources for future generations. The development of Experiential Tourism in Pagėgiai and Zabłudów municipalities would be in line with these trends and would protect sensitive natural and heritage sites from the threat of extinction.

The basis for the emergence of complex tourism products

Creating simple and uncomplicated tourism products would give experience to the local community and considering the tourist experience, the infrastructure of the tourist attractions could be improved. All this can become a good basis for creating more complex products. For example, a historical reconstruction event could become an annual festival, and a food tasting combined with a lecture on dishes specific to Lithuania Minor and to Poland, as well as a folk music event could become an annual market with a concert and educational events. The strategy of creating simple tourism products and then trying to combine them is effective and relatively risk-free. At the same time, it helps to slowly accumulate experience, and the necessary competencies needed to implement larger projects.

Development of cross-border cooperation between Poland and Lithuania

Suggestions included ways to develop cross-border cooperation with Lithuania and Poland, particularly with the Municipality of Pagėgiai and Zabłudów. This included youth exchanges, school partnerships, joint tourism packages, post-sale services (e.g., online meetings, exchange of souvenirs, generating ideas for new EU projects), and others. The proposals focused on linking the product with the tourism offerings and resources of Pagėgiai and Zabłudów.

Examples of uncomplicated tourism products in Pagėgiai and Zabłudów municipalities

In this paragraph, uncomplicated tourism products are presented, which could be applied in Pagėgiai and Zabłudów municipalities. To each municipality, ten products are suggested, which are created in consideration of existing tourism resources and opportunities. Through cross-border cooperation, the tourism products provided could be combined.

I. Suggestions of tourism products in Pagėgiai municipality

1. Survival workshop for children and youth – the art of surviving in the forest

Survival nature workshop – an event that lasts for a whole day, introducing its participants to survival skills. Through practical activities, children and teenagers learn how to cope with emerging challenges in the forest environment, develop teamwork, creative thinking, and ingenuity.

Event plan

1. Welcome speech and introduction of participants to survival in the wild
   The meeting begins with a short introduction by experienced instructors. Participants learn what survival in the wild is, its basic principles, and how to prepare for emergency situations.

2. Temporary shelter installation
   Under the guidance of instructors, children and teenagers learn to build shelters using materials found in the forest, such as branches, leaves. Each group creates its own “camp”. Participants acquire skills such as recognizing safe places to set up shelter, learning to build stable structures and working as a team. They also feel the satisfaction of building everything with their own hands and relying on teamwork.

3. The basis of starting a campfire and cooking food in the forest

   Participants learn how to safely start a fire using a flint and how to cook simple meals over a fire. They also learn fire safety rules and acquire basic skills in outdoor cooking.

4. Learning to orientate in the outdoors

   Instructors demonstrate how to navigate in the forest using a compass, map, and natural landmarks such as the sun or mossy trees. Participants learn to read a map, use a compass, and recognize signs in nature. Discovering new methods of orienteering in nature creates feelings of curiosity and achievement.

5. Finishing the day, sharing gained impressions at the campfire

   At the end of the day, participants gather around a common campfire to share their experiences. Instructors present everyone with commemorative badges and certificates. Participants feel joy and pride in their achievements, as well as in the overall success of the group.

Experience gained by the participants:
- knowledge of starting a fire, building a temporary shelter and cooking food in the wild,
- orientation using a map, compass and signs in nature,
- basic survival skills such as tying knots and gathering food.

Participants' emotions:
- a sense of excitement and adventure while completing survival tasks in nature,
- pride in acquiring new, practical skills,
- strengthening group bonds through shared challenges.

2. Traditional cooking workshop of Lithuania Minor

This culinary workshop is like a history lesson on the everyday life of people of Lithuania Minor. Participants learn about local dishes they may not have heard of, such as “vofeliai” (waffles), “kuchenai” (pies, usually strudel), “schuppnis” (steamed bun), “švarczupė” (black soup). They get acquainted with the strange-sounding drinks “tija” (tea) and “kafija” (coffee). Then

they learn the secrets of their production. The workshop can be dedicated to making one or several dishes.

Event plan

1. Introduction to cuisine of Lithuania Minor
   The class is led by local culinary experts and practitioners who will tell you about the history and significance of these dishes to Lithuania Minor culture.

2. Examples of premade dishes:
   - "švarczupė" - preparation of soup ingredients, cooking,
   - "schuppnis" - cooking soaked beans and peas, cooking fried vegetables and goose together with the remaining ingredients
   - "waffles" - learning how to prepare dough, baking,
   - "kafija" – preparation and cooking of chicory roots, oak acorns, barley, carrots.

3. Degustation and summary
   Afterwards, participants taste the prepared dishes and take the recipes home as a souvenir, which also serves as a reminder that the same meals can be made in their own kitchen.

Gained skills by participants:
- basics of traditional food preparation,
- basics of traditional beverage preparation,
- knowledge of traditional recipes of the Lithuania Minor region.

Participants' emotions:
- pride in gaining new skills,
- joy in cooking and tasting food that they have made,
- a sense of connection with the regional culture and other participants.

3. Archaeological camp

This camp allows participants to immerse themselves in the profession of archaeologists in a specially prepared simulated research site, where replicas of artifacts characteristic of the region are hidden. Participants learn the secrets of the work of an archaeologist and gain knowledge and understanding of the history of the region.

Event plan

1. Short lecture about archaeology:
   - excavation methods and the role of the archaeologist,
   - presentation of examples of archaeological research in the municipality of Pagėgiai,
   - presentation of archaeological finds characteristic of the region.

2. Practical part – excavation:
   - divide participants into teams,
   - introduce tools (spatulas, metal detectors, measuring devices) and teach them how to use them
   - search for copies of hidden artifacts,
   - identify discovered finds and their significance to the history of the region.

3. Summary:
   - presentation of each team's findings,
   - handling over certificates to the "young archaeologists"
   - group photo of the participants.

Gained skills by the participants:
- knowledge and use of archaeological tools,
- knowledge of artifacts,
- understanding of the research process,
- understanding of the value of archaeological artifacts and objects.

Participants' emotions:
- excitement and ardor in searching and discovering "treasures",
- satisfaction with teamwork,

- pride in independently finding and identifying finds.

4. Algimantas Mackus Poetry Competition

A competition for amateur and professional poets, encouraging the creation of works.

Event plan

1. Preparation:
   - announcement of the competition on websites and in local media,
   - presentation of participants' works,
   - jury deliberations - selection of winners.

2. Grand finale:
   - presentation of Algimantas Mackus' biography,
   - recitation of poems by authors or actors,
   - award ceremony (e.g. diplomas, publication of winners' poems),
   - interaction between participants and organizers over drinks and snacks.

Gained skills by participants:
- development of literary skills and creation of new texts,
- expression of emotions through poetry and actualization of the region.

Emotions of participants:
- satisfaction in creating and presenting their works,
-excitement associated with competition,
- sense of pride in receiving recognition and an award.

5. Vydūnas Healthy Lifestyle Seminar "Health. Youth. Beauty"

The seminar is dedicated to a healthy lifestyle, nutrition, and to getting to know the Vydūnas phenomenon.

Event plan

1. Preparation:
   - announcement of the planned seminar on websites and in local media,
   - invitations to participate in the seminar are sent to scientists, healthy lifestyle experts, and public figures,
   - summaries of future participants' presentations and thoughts about Vydūnas are published online,
   - registration of participants.

2. Presentations:
   - introductory speech and presentation of Vydūnas' biography,
   - presenting presentations,
   - communication between participants, guests and organizers during coffee breaks.

3. Culinary workshop:
   - food preparation based on Vydūnas' advice and recipes,
   - food tasting,
   - discussion and summarization.

Gained skills by participants and guests:
- development of participants' public speaking skills,
- guests of the event gain new knowledge about a healthy lifestyle by listening to presentations,
- event participants gain practical knowledge about preparing healthy food in workshops.

Emotions of participants and guests:
- participants' satisfaction in presenting their ideas,
- guests' satisfaction in gaining new knowledge directly from experts in their fields,
- joy in cooking healthy dishes together and tasting them,
- feeling of connection with the regional culture and other participants and guests.

6. Painting workshop

Outdoor painting workshops, which can take place in different locations: at Rambynas Regional Park or near abandoned churches (Plaškiai), other old buildings reflecting the history of Lithuania Minor. Participants develop their painting skills under the guidance of professional or local artists.

Event plan

1. Introduction:
   - a short lecture on painting techniques and inspiration that can be drawn from the local landscape and historical buildings,
   - examples of choosing a theme and composing drawings.

2. Practical part:
   - painting of selected landscapes and buildings under the supervision of an instructor,
   - individual consultations with artists.

3. Exhibition and summarization:
   - presentation of completed works at an outdoor exhibition,
   - presentation of honorary letters,
   - photo session of participants with their works of art.

Gained skills by participants:
- sketching and painting techniques in an outdoor environment,
- observing the environment and capturing details in works of art,
- using drawing tools,
- creating a painting composition.

Participants' emotions:
- relaxation and peace in a natural environment,
- joy in creating unique works of art,
- satisfaction in capturing the beauty of the local landscape and architecture.

7. Sailing through Nemunas

Sailing through Nemunas River by boat along the route Nemunas and Jūras confluence - Panemunė. On a boat, participants will listen to stories about shipping on the Nemunas River several hundred years ago, admire the surroundings, and take part in an improvised play.

Event plan

1. Welcome speech and introduction of participants to the route: The meeting begins with a brief introduction by experienced instructors. Participants learn about the subtleties of river navigation and listen to safety instructions.

2. Sailing: Under the guidance of instructors, participants sail along the Nemunas River past Rambynas Hill towards Panemunė and listen to stories about the history of navigation on the Nemunas River over the last few hundred years, hear various legends, and admire the surroundings.

3. Improvised play: After listening to the stories, the participants are divided into two teams. Based on the motives of Vladislovas Sirokomlė's book "The Nemunas from its sources to its mouths", one team plays the role of merchants who are transporting grain to sell to Konigsberg, while the other team plays Prussian customs officers[73].

4. End of the day and its summary at the campfire: At the end of the day, the participants moor their boats and gather at a common campfire to share their experiences. The instructors present everyone with commemorative badges and certificates. The participants feel joy and pride in their achievements, as well as in the group's overall victory.

Gained skills by participants:
- knowledge of the landscape through the prism of river boatmen,
- boat navigation on the river, mooring,
- knowledge of the history of shipping on the Nemunas.

[73] Sirokomlė Vladislovas. Nemunas nuo versmių iki žiočių. Vilnius, 2020.

Participants' emotions:

- sense of adventure while playing river boatmen and customs officers,
- pride in acquiring new skills,
- strengthening of group bonds through common challenges.

8. Cycling tour around Lithuania Minor

During the tour, active cycling tourism is combined with exploration of the natural environment and cultural heritage of the region.

Event plan

1. Welcome and introduction of participants to the route
   The meeting begins with an introduction to the guides, who describe the upcoming route and introduce the rules of safe cycling.

2. Route
   Guided by guides, participants travel a short route (about 20-25 km) from Vilkyškės towards Witch's fir and further past the observation towers of the Rambynas Regional Park to the Bitėnai cemetery and Rambynas Hill. For more active tourism, the trip can be extended to Panemunė and the Queen Louise Bridge and end in Pagėgiai (40-45 km). Other route variations can also be created.

3. Local history lesson and treasure hunt
   Participants stop regularly to admire the natural environment, listen to stories at historical sites and take part in a quiz with questions related to the history of the region. They also look for hidden treasures (geocaching).

4. End of the day and its summarization
   At the end of the trip, participants share their impressions at the common dinner table. Everyone shares their discovered treasures. Instructors count the participants' points and present everyone with commemorative badges and certificates.

Gained skills by participants:

- Learning about nature and history while cycling through different objects and answering quiz questions,
- Better understanding of how long journeys took a few hundred years ago when there were no cars, trains, nor airplanes.

Participant emotions:

- A sense of adventure while searching for treasures and discovering unknown natural and historical objects,
- Pride after covering a long distance by bicycle,
- Strengthening group bonds through shared challenges.

9. Lithuania Minor dialect school

Educational lesson aimed at introducing participants to the Lithuanian dialect and teaching its basics.

Event plan

1. Greetings and preparation:
   - presentation of the Lithuania Minor dialect and its history.

2. Lesson:
   - viewing media of people speaking the dialect,
   - learning dialect words,
   - constructing dialogues between participants and a competition for the most beautiful dialogue.

Gained skills by participants:

- new knowledge about dialect of Lithuania Minor,
- basics of practical speaking skills,
- overcoming fear of public speaking.

Emotions of participants:

- Satisfying curiosity through acquiring new knowledge,
- Strengthening group bonds through shared learning,
- Enthusiasm sparked by competition.

10. Historical reconstruction event of the Napoleonic era

The event is dedicated to the anniversary of Peace of Tilsit which was signed in 1807. It will bring together invited participants – historical reconstruction clubs, who will lively convey history through military uniforms, weapons, civilian clothes and household items from the early 19th century, as well as invited actors. The audience of the event will be able to touch and try out the tools and weapons of the reenactors.

Event Plan

1. Introduction to the beginning of the event
   Before the start of the event, an outdoor camp is set up for the participants - a bivouac, where clubs reconstructing the Prussian, French and Russian armies gather. Food is prepared, the marchers organize a market with food, drinks and souvenirs, the participants - soldiers march, and at the same time they communicate with the spectators.

2. Ceremonial opening of the event
   As the event begins, words of welcome are spoken, historians provide an overview and assessment of the Napoleonic era, and the audience is reminded of the further course of the event.

3. The ceremonial part of the event
   Actors playing the heads of state – Napoleon, Alexander I, Queen Louise and Frederick William III – reenact the signing of the peace. The regiments of soldiers accompanying them fire volleys and perform manoeuvres in an open field. The audience of the event takes part in competitions and receives prizes.

4. Experiential part of the event

   Food prepared in a military field kitchen according to recipes from the early XIX century (French onion soup) is distributed to all interested spectators for tasting. After that, spectators can try out soldiers' weapons and household tools. A space is allocated where representatives of the participants tell the spectators about the war of those times and its reconstruction.

   Gained skills by participants:

- experiential learning of history through sight, sound, touch, smell and taste.

   Emotions of participants and spectators:

- aesthetically pleasing view when seeing live uniformed soldiers from historical times,
- adrenaline in hearing commanders' commands, musket and cannon shots,
- joy of learning in touching ancient muskets and tools that until then had only been seen in films,
- satisfaction in eating fragrant food outdoors.

II. Suggestions of tourism products in Zabłudów Municipality

1. "Narew Under Water" – discovering the secrets of the Narew River

The essence of this offer is diving in the Narew River. Participants gather in a friendly atmosphere, welcomed by a team of experienced instructors who guide them step by step into the world of diving. No previous experience is needed – everything necessary is provided: professional equipment, care, and full support.

Event plan

1. Preparation

First, there is a short introduction – how the equipment works, how to breathe underwater, and how to move in fins. It's completely natural, as for many this is their first such adventure. Surrounded by the sound of water and birdsong, the river seems to invite you to discover its hidden world.

2. Diving

A moment later, everyone submerges. The first breaths underwater are full of emotion – it feels like entering a completely different reality. The silence underwater is soothing yet exciting. Every movement seems magical, and the world around appears almost unreal. In the river's current, one can see swaying vegetation, small fish darting among the aquatic grasses, and mysterious formations on the riverbed. It's discovering the Narew from a completely new perspective.

3. Bonfire and Podlasie delicacies

After surfacing, participants are met with a warm blanket and a spot by the bonfire. The second part of the event begins – an evening with regional delicacies. The aroma of Podlasie cuisine fills the air: sausages roasted over the fire, cheese, sourdough bread, and local honey. Everyone shares their impressions – talking about what they saw underwater, exchanging emotions.

Laughter and conversation fill the space, and the river, now calm and quiet, seems to listen to these stories.

The event ends late in the evening when the last embers of the fire die out. Although tired, participants return home with unique memories – a sense that for a moment they were part of something special, something that can only be found here, by the Narew.

Skills acquired by participants:

- basics of diving, including the use of diving equipment,
- ability to move safely underwater,
- observation and identification of the river's fauna and flora.

Participants' emotions:

- excitement related to taking the first breaths underwater,
- awe at the underwater world of the Narew River,
- satisfaction from discovering new skills.

2. Historical trail "Traces of History" – A journey into the past of Podlasie

This day is a unique journey back in time, where every step brings you closer to discovering the history and secrets of the Podlasie region. The "Traces of History" trail leads through key places where modernity meets the heritage of bygone days. Thanks to information boards, reconstructions, and stories, participants can experience what life used to be like and understand the significance of these places for the local culture and history.

Route outline and selected sites on the trail

1. Market Square in Zabłudów

The information board will present the town's history and its importance over the centuries. It will also show the urban layout, existing since the granting of town rights in the 16th century, as well as archival photos depicting the square with wooden buildings and historical monuments (e.g., the Monument to the Heroes of the Zabłudów Land). Walking around the square, tourists can imagine the bustle of old days, markets, and the everyday life of inhabitants.

2. Former site of the synagogue in Zabłudów

The information board will describe the wooden synagogue destroyed during World War II, one of the oldest in the region, along with archival photos and information about the Jewish community, which played a significant role in the city's life. This allows visitors to reflect on cultural heritage and the tragic fate of the former community.

3. Narew Valley

The board may include information about the natural and settlement history of the river valley. It will depict the life of former inhabitants who used the river's resources – fishing, trade, navigation. This will evoke admiration for the beauty of nature and awareness among tourists that these areas have witnessed the history of thousands of people.

4. Orthodox churches and chapels (e.g., in Ryboły and Zwierki)

The information board will include the significance of wooden sacred architecture, a description of typical elements of Orthodox churches, and their role in the local community. Additionally, archival photos of processions and religious celebrations. This will inspire admiration for the beauty of the architecture and the spiritual heritage of the region among tourists.

5. Manor Park in Zabłudów

The information board may include the history of the former Radziwiłł residence: the manor and its surrounding buildings, the park, and its transformation from a Baroque Garden into a landscape park. Additionally, it may contain information about important figures associated with the manor and significant events, e.g., the November Uprising. Tourists may find themselves imagining life in the manor – from elegant balls to the daily duties of the nobility.

What awaits tourists on the trail:

- discovering history – each information board is a window to the past – photos, maps, and curiosities help to better understand the old way of life in the region,
- interaction with the place – QR codes on the boards provide access to additional content, such as 3D reconstructions of objects or recordings with accounts from local residents,
- moments of reflection – visiting places of remembrance, like the former synagogue, offers an opportunity for contemplation and a deeper look into the region's history.

Additional attractions:

- guided tours – local history enthusiasts will captivate tourists with stories about extraordinary figures and events related to Zabłudów,
- creative workshops – for children and adults – e.g., learning to write with a quill pen, creating models of old buildings,
- tasting local delicacies – at the end of the trail, tourists can sample traditional Podlasie dishes, such as dumplings, tree cake (sękacz), or sourdough bread.

Strolling in the footsteps of history, tourists not only discover forgotten stories but also build a connection with the place and its past. This journey through time gives a sense of participating in something larger that has lasted for centuries. It's an opportunity to experience authentic moments that will remain in one's memory for a long time.

Skills acquired by participants:

- broadening knowledge about the history and culture of Podlasie,
- ability to interpret historical maps and information boards,
- learning about local legends and traditions.

Participants' emotions:

- fascination with uncovering past stories and events,
- a sense of traveling back in time thanks to reconstructions and narratives,
- satisfaction from personal contact with places of historical significance.

3. Narew Herbal Therapy

Narew Herbal Therapy is an event that combines contact with nature, acquiring knowledge about herbs, and relaxation in harmony with the surroundings of the Narew Valley. The program consists of three main elements: a botanical walk, herb preparation workshops and baths with aromatherapy. Each of these activities is designed to provide participants with valuable experiences and introduce them to the world of natural therapy and regeneration.

Event plan

1. Botanical walk

The event begins with a walk in the Narew Valley under the guidance of a local herbalist. Equipped with baskets and scissors, participants learn about various types of herbs such as mint, St. John's wort, yarrow, or thyme. The walk includes:

- learning to identify herbs by smell, appearance, and touch,
- information on their medicinal properties and use in both cooking and natural medicine,
- collecting selected plants for later use.

The walk takes place in a peaceful setting, allowing participants to enjoy the silence of nature while gaining knowledge and gathering materials for the following workshops.

2. Herb preparation workshops

After the walk, participants take part in workshops where they use the collected herbs to create their own products. The workshops include:

- learning how to dry and store herbs,
- preparing blends for teas, scented sachets, bath salts, and herbal oils,
- practical tips on daily use of herbs in home care and health.

Each participant uses the gathered herbs to make products by hand, which they take home as a souvenir. The activities encourage creativity and help participants better understand how to use nature's gifts.

3. Bath and aromatherapy

At the end of the day, participants have the opportunity to enjoy herbal baths in wooden tubs. Aromatic blends prepared during the workshops are added to the hot water, enriching the bath with the relaxing properties of the herbs. Additional elements of this part of the event may include:

- inhalations using essential oils,
- outdoor meditation sessions,

- a relaxation area surrounded by nature.

The baths and aromatherapy allow participants to fully unwind and regenerate both body and mind.

The event concludes with a tasting of herbal infusions and local delicacies such as fresh honey, sourdough bread, and regional baked goods. This is a time to recap the day, share experiences, and calmly finish a day filled with impressions, all in a natural setting.

All materials needed for the workshops and equipment for herbal baths are provided as part of the event. All activities take place in small groups, ensuring an intimate atmosphere and comfort for participants.

Narew Herbal Therapy is an offer aimed at people seeking not only knowledge but also relaxation and contact with nature in one of the most beautiful corners of Podlasie.

Skills acquired by participants:
- recognizing and harvesting local herbs,
- creating infusions, ointments, and herb-based cosmetics,
- aromatherapy and its impact on health and well-being.

Participants' emotions:
- calm and relaxation in contact with nature,
- fascination with the natural healing properties of herbs,
- satisfaction from creating products by hand.

4. Survival Workshops for Children and Youth – the Art of Surviving in the Forest

Survival workshops are a full-day event that introduces participants to the fascinating world of survival skills. Through practical exercises, children and teenagers learn how to cope in a forest environment while developing teamwork, creative thinking, and resourcefulness.

Event plan

1. Welcome and introduction to survival

The meeting begins with a brief introduction by experienced instructors. Participants learn what survival is, its basic principles, and how to prepare for emergency situations.

2. Shelter building

Under the guidance of instructors, children and teenagers learn how to build shelters using materials available in the forest, such as branches, leaves, or rope. Each group builds its own "camp." Participants acquire skills like recognizing safe spots for shelter, constructing stable structures, and working as a team. In addition, they feel the excitement of building something by hand and satisfaction from the team's work.

3. Fire starting and basics of cooking in the forest

Participants learn how to safely start a campfire using a fire striker and how to prepare simple meals over the fire. They discover fire safety rules and the basics of outdoor cooking. Younger participants, in particular, will be thrilled by the first sparks and proud of lighting a fire themselves.

4. Learning to navigate in the field

A guide shows how to move around the forest using a compass, map, and natural indicators such as the sun or moss. Participants learn how to read a map, use a compass, and recognize signs in nature. This sparks curiosity and a sense of accomplishment in discovering navigation methods.

5. End-of-day recap by the campfire

To conclude, participants gather around a shared campfire to share their experiences and receive commemorative certificates. They feel joy in their achievements, group bonding, and a sense of belonging.

Skills acquired by participants:

- fire starting, shelter building, and water sourcing,
- orientation in the field using a map, compass, and natural signs,
- basic survival skills such as knot tying and food gathering.

Participants' emotions:

- excitement and a sense of adventure while performing survival tasks,
- pride in acquiring new, practical skills,
- strengthened group bonds through shared challenges.

5. Traditional Podlasie Cooking Workshop

These culinary workshops are a journey into the heart of Podlasie tradition. Participants discover the secrets of preparing local specialties such as sourdough bread, potato cake, dumplings or tree cake (sękacz). The workshop can focus on one or several dishes.

Event plan

1. Introduction to regional cuisine

The session is led by local home cooks and culinary masters, who discuss the history of these dishes and their significance in Podlasie culture.

2. Examples of dishes prepared:

- sourdough bread – learning how to knead the dough, shape loaves, and bake in an oven,
- potato cake – choosing and grating potatoes, seasoning, and baking,
- dumplings – preparing the dough and traditional fillings (cabbage, meat, mushrooms),
- tree cake (sękacz). – an overview of the technique for baking over an open fire.

3. Tasting and summary

After the workshop, participants taste the prepared dishes and take home the recipes as a souvenir to use in their own kitchens.

Skills acquired by participants:

- basics of traditional cooking,
- hand-kneading dough techniques,
- knowledge of traditional Podlasie recipes.

Participants' emotions:

- pride in acquiring new skills,
- joy from cooking together and tasting the results,
- a sense of connection with the region's culture and with other participants.

6. Archaeological Workshops

These workshops allow participants to step into the role of archaeologists by uncovering buried replicas of artifacts on a specially prepared site. Participants learn the secrets of an archaeologist's work and gain insight into the region's history.

Event plan

1. Short lecture on archaeology:
   - excavation methods and the archaeologist's role,
   - legal conditions and the legalization of searches,
   - presentation of local archaeological finds.

2. Practical part – excavations:
   - dividing participants into teams,
   - distributing tools (trowels, brushes, sieves) and instructions on how to use them,
   - searching for buried artifact replicas,
   - analysing and identifying the found items.

3. Summary:
   - presentation of findings by each team,
   - awarding certificates to the "young archaeologists,"
   - group photo of participants.

Skills acquired by participants:

- using archaeological tools (trowels, brushes, sieves),
- ability to analyse and identify artifacts,
- understanding the excavation process and its historical significance,

- knowledge of what to do upon discovering a potentially valuable artifact.

Participants' emotions:

- excitement from searching for and discovering "treasures,"
- satisfaction from teamwork,
- fulfilment from independently uncovering and analysing finds.

7. Folk Song Karaoke

Group singing of traditional folk songs accompanied by folk bands. Participants have the chance to get acquainted with the musical culture of the Podlasie region.

Event plan

1. Welcome and preparation:
   - introduction by a local folk band,
   - presentation of the songs and their history.

2. Karaoke segment:
   - participant performances with the lyrics displayed on a screen,
   - accompaniment by a musical ensemble,
   - performance by a local band demonstrating professional renditions of the songs.

3. Competition and conclusion:
   - competition for the best karaoke performance with prizes (e.g., regional products),
   - communal singing of one song with all participants.

Skills acquired by participants:

- practicing vocal projection and interpretation of folk songs,
- learning about traditional music and lyrics from Podlasie,
- overcoming stage fright during public performances.

Participants' emotions:

- joy and relaxation during group singing,
- enthusiasm generated by the competition,
- stronger bonds with other participants through shared fun.

8. The Franciszek Karpiński International Poetry Contest

A contest for both amateur and professional poets, encouraging the creation of works inspired by the Podlasie region. The grand finale includes a recital of the award-winning poems.

Event plan

1. Preparations:
   - contest announcement on websites and in local media,
   - submission of works by participants,
   - jury deliberations – selection of winners.
2. Grand finale:
   - presentation of Franciszek Karpiński's biography,
   - recitation of the distinguished poems by the authors or actors,
   - award ceremony (e.g., diplomas, publication of winners' poems),
   - refreshments featuring local specialties and networking.

Skills acquired by participants:

- developing literary skills and working on poetic texts,
- learning the principles of style and rhythm in poetry,
- expressing emotions and describing the region's beauty through poetry.

Participants' emotions:

- fulfilment and satisfaction from creating and presenting their own works,
- excitement related to competition,
- a sense of pride when receiving awards and praise.

9. Painting Workshops

Outdoor painting workshops set in the Knyszyn Forest or the Narew Valley scenery. Participants develop their painting skills under the guidance of local artists.

Event plan

1. Introduction:
   - brief lecture on painting techniques and inspiration drawn from the local landscape,
   - examples of choosing a subject and composing a painting.

2. Practical part:
   - painting chosen landscapes under an instructor's supervision,
   - individual consultations with the artists.

3. Exhibition and summary:
   - presentation of the finished works in an outdoor exhibition,
   - awarding commemorative certificates,
   - photo session of participants with their artwork.

Skills acquired by participants:
- sketching and painting techniques in an outdoor setting,
- observing nature and capturing its details in artistic works,
- using painting tools (brushes, paints),
- building a composition for a painting.

Participants' emotions:
- relaxation and tranquillity in a natural environment,
- joy from creating unique artworks,
- satisfaction from capturing the beauty of the local landscape.

10. “Tracing the Footsteps of Past Residents” – A Quiet Journey Through the Traces of the Past

This tourism product is a walk filled with reflection on the fate of past generations. Participants visit historic cemeteries, burial sites, and monuments to learn about the history of those who have passed on and to contemplate the transience of life.

Plan of the event

1. Introduction and meeting with the guide:
   - brief overview of the region’s historical context,
   - presentation of a map highlighting cemeteries and monuments,
   - explanation of proper conduct and respect in memorial sites.

2. Touring burial sites:
   - visiting the most significant cemeteries (representing various faiths),
   - learning about the histories of the buried individuals and different types of gravestones,
   - opportunity to pay respects at forgotten graves, including lighting a symbolic candle.

3. Visiting monuments and chapels:
   - short stories about historical events and the figures commemorated by the monuments,
   - reflection on the role of remembrance in both social and personal life.

4. Philosophical contemplation of life and death:
   - pause in a peaceful natural setting,
   - conversations and brief relaxation exercises (e.g., simple meditation or short discussion),
   - chance to write down or express one’s thoughts in a symbolic note.

Skills acquired by participants:

- a deeper understanding of the history and traditions of the region’s departed residents,
- ability to take a reflective approach to sites of remembrance,
- development of sensitivity and respect for cultural heritage.

Participants' emotions:

- reflection on impermanence and the fragility of life,
- a sense of calm arising from contemplation and tranquillity,
- gratitude for the opportunity to learn about human destinies and the region's history.

Conclusions

In conclusion, cooperation between the Lithuanian and Polish border regions, in this case the municipalities of Pagėgiai and Zabłudów, is strategically important for the development of both regions. By carrying out activities in the fields of tourism, education, culture, environmental protection and economy, both border municipalities can strengthen social ties, develop tourism and economic potential, and promote European values. One way to do this in practice is to use the currently popular phenomenon of Experiential Tourism.

Having assessed this potential, a feasibility study for Experiential Tourism was prepared for the 2024–2025 project "Sustainable Culture for Sustainable Tourism". The project was funded under the 2021–2027 European Territorial Cooperation Interreg VI-A Lithuania-Poland Cross-Border Programme. The aim of this study was to determine the market and economic viability and development potential of Experiential Tourism in the project area.

Experiential Tourism products can be very diverse, since the main principle defining them is the creation of authentic experiences for the tourist through as many different senses as possible: sight, hearing, touch, taste and smell. Both Pagėgiai and Zabłudów municipalities have a lot of Experiential Tourism resources, which just goes to show a great potential and opportunities. Both municipalities are characterized by impressive landscapes, valuable cultural heritage sites. Adding well-organized cultural institutions and already created gastronomic tourism products to these strengths, there is a great potential to create various tourist routes with different products combined.

Both municipalities have similar weaknesses that hinder the development of the tourism sector. Firstly, it is the lack of tourist infrastructure, which requires significant funds to improve. There is also considerable competition from neighbouring regions. Pagėgiai is located near the Curonian Spit, which attracts significant tourist flows. Meanwhile, Zabłudów is less well-known when comparing to other tourist regions in Podlasie, such as Białowieża, Augustów, or Suwałki. Another weakness of Pagėgiai is the long distance to larger cities and airports. For the reasons mentioned above, the orientation towards Experiential Tourism products, attracting more conscious tourists, and the cooperation of both border municipalities, therefore attracting more European Union support funds, is a promising strategy for developing the tourism sector. Such cooperation also contributes to the sustainable development of border territories, which is why they become exemplary examples of international partnership.

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