



## EUSBSR PA Tourism Steering Group Meeting

Thursday 18/04/2024 9.30 AM CET - 16.00 PM CET

Hotel Neiburgs

JAUNIELA 25/27 LV1050, RIGA

### MEETING MINUTES

#### **PARTICIPANTS:**

1. Estonia - Ms Ede Teinbas, Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications
2. Finland - Ms Hanna-Mari Kuhmonen, Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment
3. Latvia - Ms Inese Sirava, Investment and Development Agency of Latvia
4. Latvia - Ms Linda Ziediņa-Ērgle, Investment and Development Agency of Latvia
5. Latvia - Ms Inguna Zigure, Investment and Development Agency of Latvia
6. Lithuania - Ms Lidija Bajarūnienė, The Ministry of Economics and Innovation
7. Poland - Mr Karol Biedrzycki, Ministry of Sport and Tourism
8. Sweden - Ms Anna Haag, Ministry of Enterprise and Innovation (online)
9. European Commission, DG REGIO - Ms Blagovestka Riiser
10. PAC Tourism / PTB - Ms Magda Leszczyna-Rzucidło
11. PAC Tourism / Council of Oulu Region - Ms Anna-Maija Toivonen
12. PAC Tourism / Council of Oulu Region - Ms Hanna Honkamäkilä (online)
13. Baltic Sea Strategy Point, Hamburg Office / Ms Marlene Riedel (online)
14. Interreg Baltic Sea Region Managing Authority / Joint Secretariat / Ms Elena Kolosova
15. Interreg Baltic Sea Region Managing Authority / Joint Secretariat / Ms Rasma Rozenberga

#### **1. Welcome by Latvian Presidency**

The Latvian Presidency warmly welcomed all participants, expressing appreciation for their attendance and commitment to the continued development of tourism within the Baltic Sea region. The introduction highlighted Latvia's role in promoting sustainable tourism and fostering strong cross-border partnerships.

#### **2. Presentation and Adoption of the Meeting's Agenda**

The agenda, carefully prepared to cover key topics relevant to the meeting's objectives, was formally presented to the participants. Each agenda item was briefly outlined to provide clarity on the intended focus and ensure alignment with the meeting's goals. Following a thorough review, no amendments were proposed. The agenda was unanimously approved by all attendees,

### 3. Summary of PA Tourism Activities January - March 2024

The Policy Area Coordinators (PACs) provided an in-depth summary of activities carried out since the last Steering Group meeting. Highlights included active participation in the EUSBSR National Coordinators and PACs meeting in Hamburg, where critical discussions on updating the Action Plan and cohesion policy took place. PACs also collaborated extensively with project applicants for the Interreg Baltic Sea Region (BSR) 3rd call, offering consultations, facilitating partnerships, and guiding project development.

Noteworthy achievements included the successful organisation of a Cycling Tourism webinar in March 2024, supporting two Interreg projects (Bike Across the Baltic Interreg BSR and Baltic Biking UPGRADE BBU from the Interreg SBP), with strong participation from regional stakeholders. Additionally, PACs established synergies with the Interreg Europe ICTr project, laying the groundwork for joint events in spring and autumn 2024. Members of the Steering Group expressed their gratitude for the PACs' dedication and acknowledged the positive impact of these activities on regional tourism development.

### 4. Report 2023 to Interreg & BSP

PACs presented the comprehensive 2023 reports prepared for Interreg BSR and the Baltic Strategy Point. These reports, submitted in January 2024, detailed key activities, achievements, and financial management over the past year. The reports were positively received by SG members, with the Latvian Presidency commending the PACs for their thorough and timely submissions. The Interreg BSR report's approval in February 2024 facilitated the prompt disbursement of funds to lead PACs and project partners, reflecting effective coordination and strong project management.

### 5. PA Tourism Post 2024

The discussion focused on the future of PA Tourism beyond 2024. Participants explored potential strategies, priority areas, and ways to adapt to evolving tourism trends. Topics included the integration of sustainability practices, digital transformation, and enhancing regional cooperation. Members shared insights on how PA Tourism can continue to add value, especially in addressing emerging challenges such as climate change, changing travel behaviours, and economic fluctuations.

### 6. News from Each BSR Country and DG Regio

- **Finland:** The Finnish representative - Hanna-Mari Kuhmonen, highlighted labour shortages as a key issue in the tourism sector, alongside efforts to promote sustainable tourism practices. Initiatives to attract skilled workers and improve the sector's resilience were discussed.

- **Estonia:** Ede Teinbas from Estonia reported on its adaptation to changing market dynamics, with a focus on strategic foresight and data-driven policymaking. Their collaboration with a consulting firm to shape a long-term tourism vision for 2035 was noted as a significant step forward.
- **Latvia:** Inguna Zigure from Latvia outlined post-pandemic recovery strategies, emphasising the challenges of diversifying its tourism markets due to a decline in Russian visitors. Key infrastructure projects, including Riga Airport's reconstruction and the development of the Rail Baltica station, were highlighted as future growth drivers.
- **Lithuania:** Lidija Bajarūnienė from Lithuania shared progress on its new tourism strategy for 2030, aligning with UN Tourism and EU priorities. They also announced the Pink Soup Festival in Vilnius (June 2024), designed to promote local gastronomy and culinary tourism.
- **Poland:** Karol Biedrzycki from Poland reported continued growth in tourism and introduced its new marketing strategy for 2030. The country reaffirmed its support for the upcoming Baltic Sea Tourism Forum in Gdańsk and emphasised its commitment to regional cooperation and cultural heritage promotion.
- **Sweden:** Anna Hag from Sweden provided updates on tourism growth and plans to host the Global Sustainable Tourism Conference in Stockholm. Their current focus is on enhancing cultural tourism offerings and strengthening sustainable practices.
- **DG REGIO:** Blagovestka Riiser from DG REGIO discussed EU regional development policies, highlighting funding opportunities and upcoming events, including the 5th macroregional strategies event in Brussels. She praised the proactive efforts of PAC coordinators and encouraged greater engagement with EU initiatives like IVY, which offers opportunities for internships and knowledge exchange.

## 7. Baltic Sea Tourism Forum

Detailed plans for the upcoming Baltic Sea Tourism Forum in Oulu in June 2024 were presented, covering thematic areas such as cultural, culinary, cycling, and coastal tourism. Discussions included the forum's structure, country contributions, and expectations from participants. Logistics such as registration, venue arrangements, and scheduling were also addressed to ensure smooth organisation. The forum aims to foster knowledge sharing, best practices, and innovative approaches to tourism development across the region.

## 8. Interreg Baltic Sea Region Programme and Discussion on Interreg Post-2027

Elena Kolosova and Rasma Rozenberga from the Interreg BSR Managing Authority provided an overview of the current programme, highlighting funded projects and future funding opportunities. The discussion extended to the post-2027 framework, focusing on potential changes, challenges, and strategies to enhance cross-border cooperation. Emphasis was placed on building synergies between Interreg projects and other regional initiatives to maximise impact.

## **9. Information on PA Tourism Activities from April 2024 Onwards**

PACs presented updates on planned activities from April 2024 onwards, including new projects, partnerships, and upcoming events. The presentation highlighted efforts to strengthen sustainable tourism, foster regional collaboration, and promote the Baltic Sea as an attractive destination. Discussions focused on the importance of continuous knowledge exchange, capacity building, and innovation in addressing future challenges and opportunities in tourism.

## **10. Discussion on Future of the EUSBSR PA Tourism and the PA TOU Action Plan Update 2025-2026**

A strategic discussion took place on the future direction of PA Tourism and the update of the Action Plan for 2025–2026. Participants exchanged ideas on thematic priorities, such as sustainability, digitalisation, and inclusive tourism. The need for stronger cross-sectoral cooperation, leveraging new technologies, and supporting local communities was emphasised. Input from country representatives and stakeholders will guide the development of a comprehensive Action Plan aligned with the evolving needs of the Baltic Sea region.

## **11. Next Meeting**

Plans for the next Steering Group meeting were discussed. Options include an in-person meeting during the EUSBSR Annual Forum in October or an online meeting in November or December. Additionally, the possibility of an in-person meeting in spring 2025, coinciding with the Polish presidency, was considered.

## **12. Any Other Business**

Participants were invited to raise additional topics or concerns. This open session allowed for the exchange of final remarks, ensuring that all relevant issues were addressed.

## **13. End of the Meeting**

The meeting concluded at 4:00 PM CET. The Latvian Presidency thanked all participants for their active engagement, productive discussions, and valuable contributions, marking the end of a successful and constructive session.