



Mentor assisted learning in Latvia: activities, experiences, conclusions

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Background – before project

 no experience exists in Latvia with mentor assisted learning in rural tourism

no professional mentors available

E-learning and distance learning is not a regular practice

Mentor training

- LC participates in writing training materials
- LC selects and trains mentors from own staff (mentor training manual and e-learning portal http://macies.celotajs.lv)



Training portal and discussion forum http://macies.celotajs.lv/



Mentor training conclusions

- 1. Mentoring can be introduced in Latvia observing <u>maximum relevance to</u> the needs of the target audience.
- 2. The <u>e-learning portal</u> is user friendly and efficient, it is a useful tool to support mentoring activities.
- 3. The <u>discussion forum</u> section in the e-learning portal serves as a professional information exchange for rural tourism entrepreneurs. It builds recognition and trust in the portal and attracts users in rural areas to e-environment.
- 4. There is a need for <u>further mentor training to improve professional</u> <u>skills</u>, learn from own practice and experience of best practices in other countries. Improved mentor professionalism will ensure the quality and build recognition of this form of training.

Mentor-assisted training course

Training course "How to start a business" was adapted for mentor assisted training and put online in http://macies.celotajs.lv

The course consists of 7 parts:

- 1. Introduction
- 2. Business legal registration
- 3. Business concept
- 4. Entrepreneurship risks. Business financing. Construction of buildings
- 5. Rural tourism business environment in Latvia
- 6. Business accountancy. Personal income tax. Annual income declaration
- 7. Social security charges. Real estate tax. Nature resource tax. Value added tax. Risk charges.

Advertising mentor-assisted learning testing activity

e-newsletter of the Association

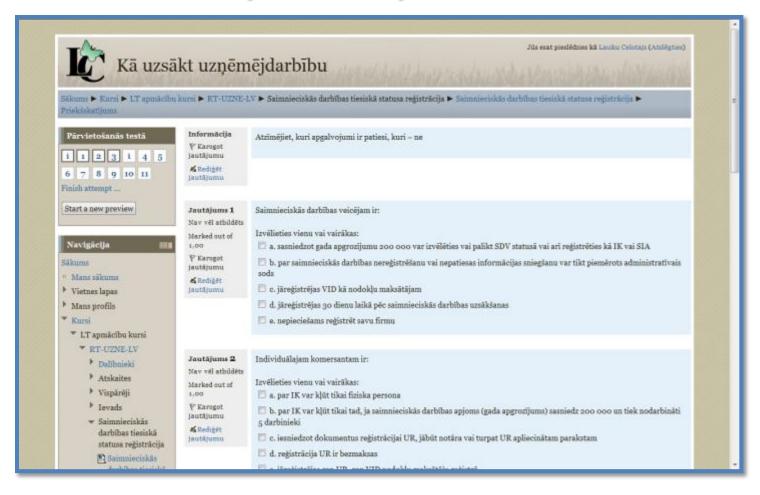
 roundmail to ca 5000 recipients (rural tourism accommodation providers)

 events in rural tourism and training community (seminars, meetings with rural tourism providers)

direct phone calls to recipients in the target audience



Mentor-assisted course run in September 2012 with 102 participants



Testing group dynamics

- Participants start with interest and enthusiasm in the first week.
- 2nd week less activity. Mentors contact participants by e-mail or phone to stimulate further work.
- 3rd week even less activity. Mentors work with participants interested to continue. Participants show less initiative to contact mentors. They read the text, fill in test questions and move to the next chapter without discussing mistakes.
- Irregular activity of course participants caused difficulties in mentor's work. Due to unpredictability, it was difficult to schedule the work and combine with other tasks and duties apart from the testing activity.

Feedback - training assessment summary

ORGANIZATIONAL ASPECT

The number of hours spent on each unit is sufficient. Means of contact with mentor and e-learning platform raised a variety of ratings and opinions. More testing experience is required to draw convincing conclusions.

PEDAGOGY OF TRAINING

Course content, material quality and applicability of training were rated high. Quality of mentors scored high, with some extreme positive or extreme negative assessments. This involves personal communication aspect between student and tutor.

GLOBAL ASSESSMENT OF THE COURSE

Overall satisfaction with the organisation, pedagogy and training content is high. Specific improvements may be required in further testing and training experience.

Role of mentors

- According to student comments, mentor is a person helping in learning process and linking theory with practice while not being directly involved with business consultancy related to the training subject.
- 2. Practical experience in the field is highly important for a good mentor as it ensures the link between theory and practice.
- 3. Students are motivated to continue with the mentor-assisted learning if they trust in the knowledge and experience of the mentor and respect mentor's advice, as well as if they clearly see how learning can help in rural tourism business practice.

Lessons learned

- Mentors had to spend considerable part of their time repeatedly contacting the participants and encouraging to continue.
- Participant feedback and assessment does not provide full picture taking into account the low rate of response (25 out of 102 participants).
- Presence courses have advantages over distance learning because of higher participant motivation, personal communication and exchange. E-learning is relevant form of training in a comparatively small part of the target audience.
- Mentor-assisted learning should be promoted <u>regularly</u> to attract users and motivate their registration for the portal and training course.
- Mentor assisted learning should be offered at specified periods of time, ensuring <u>full mentor availability</u>.

Final conclusions

- Mentor assisted e-learning could be introduced as a general practice in Latvia on preconditions of regular financing, availability of professional mentors, and change of target audience behaviour.
- At the moment, presence training is more intense and provides for better opportunities in the labour market, it enables higher reliably of the quality of training. So far, seminars and study trips have been the most efficient and the most popular forms of training in Latvia. Mentor-assisted learning can be introduced gradually, relying on practical experience and expertise in rural tourism.





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