

Erasmus+ KA2 project STORIE

Development of capacities of rural businesses to design and promote sustainable tourism products based on intangible cultural heritage

Intellectual Output 1: STORIE Learning Programme

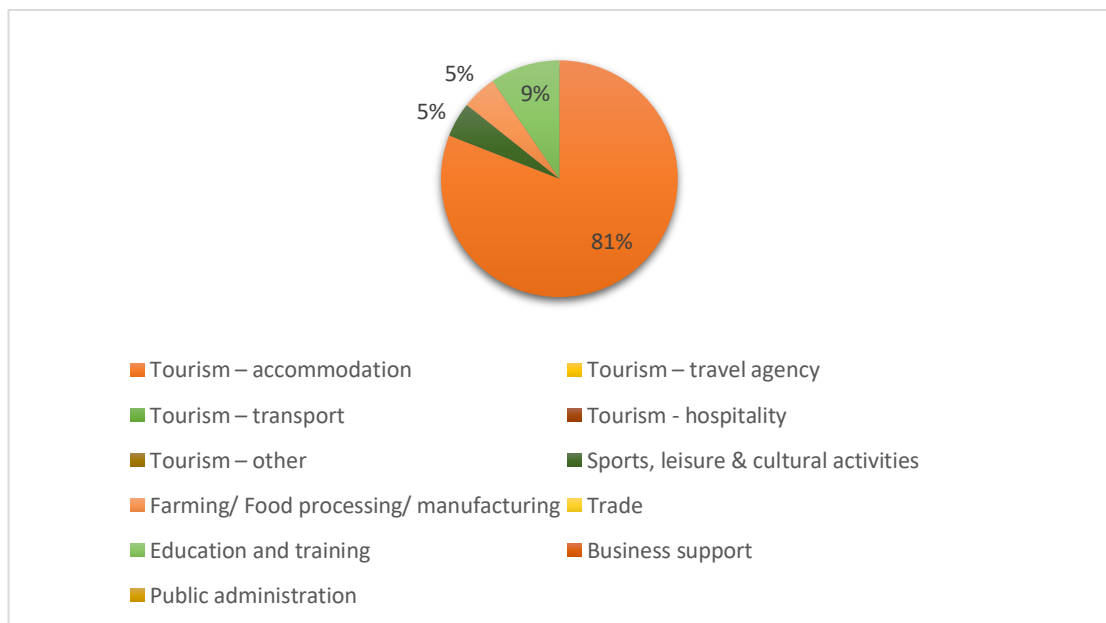
Activity 1: Skills needs and learning outcomes

Country report

## QUESTIONNAIRE SURVEY

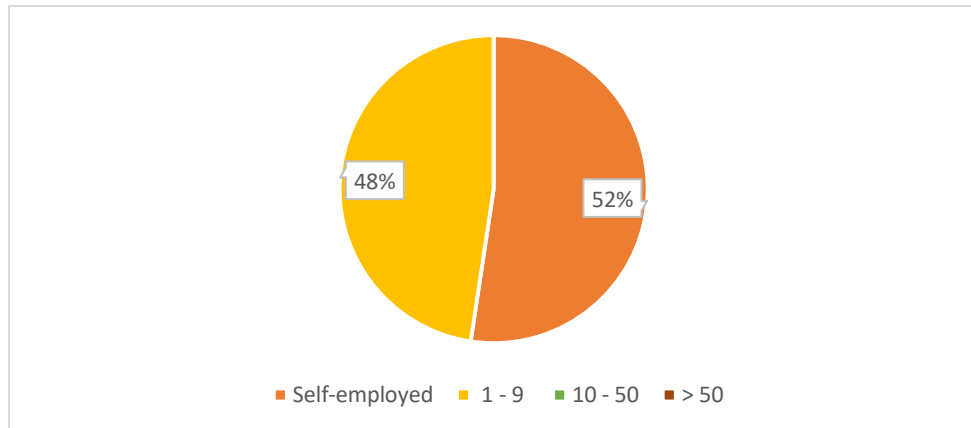
The implementation of Erasmus+ STORIE project activities involved us drawing up a survey for small rural companies working in tourism sector. We aimed to find out the attitudes and experience of rural entrepreneurs in the area of marketing and cultural heritage, and their skills and competences, that need to be developed. A questionnaire was conducted in Lithuanian language offline and we received 21 answers from the residents of Lithuania.

The answers to the first question show the sectors, in which respondents are working. More than 80% of the respondents (17 answers) work in accommodation sector, 1 respondent works with sports, leisure & cultural activities, 1 respondent is a farmer who deals with food processing and manufacturing, 2 of the respondents are working with education and training.



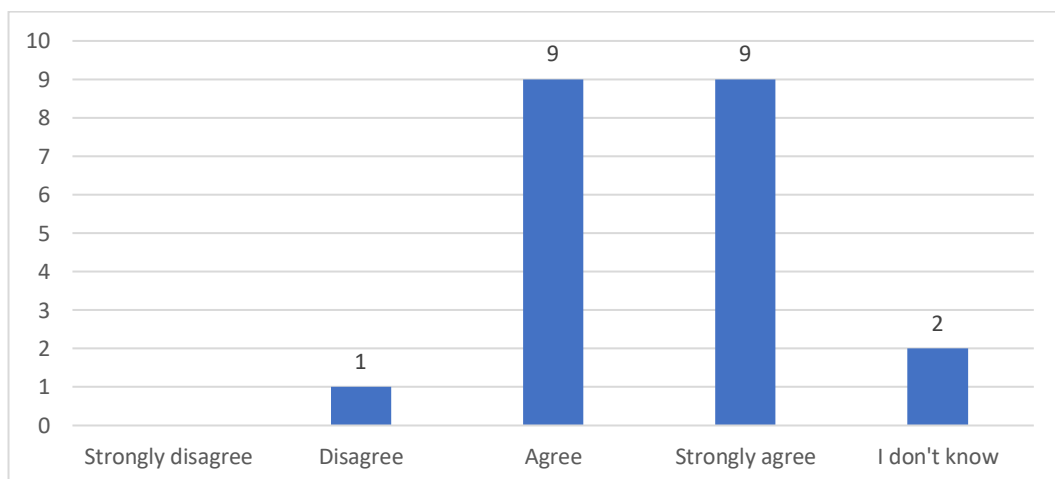
**1 Fig.** Sectors of the respondents (%)

The second question aimed to find out how many people work in respondent's organization. More than a half replied, that they are self-employed (11 responses). 10 respondents answered, that in their company work from 1 to 9 employees.



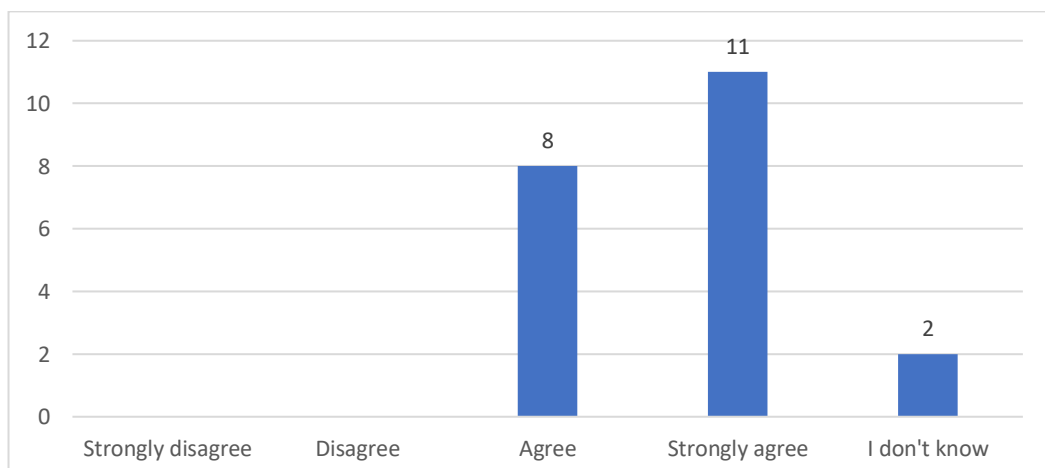
**2 Fig.** Numbers of employees working in the organization (%)

Another question was to find out the respondents' opinions with certain statements. With first statement *“There is a growing number of travellers seeking unique, authentic experiences, which creates business opportunities in rural tourism”* agreed 18 respondents (9 agree and 9 strongly agree), 1 disagreed and 2 chose “I don't know”.



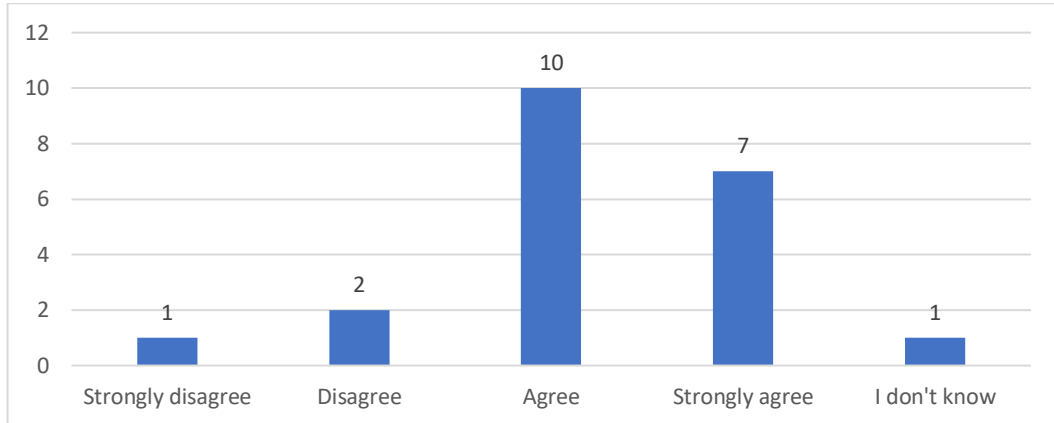
**3 Fig.** Respondents opinions with statement *“There is a growing number of travellers seeking unique, authentic experiences, which creates business opportunities in rural tourism”*

Next statement *“Rural companies need to improve their capacities to design competitive tourism products”* was supported by 19 respondents (11 strongly agreed and 8 agreed), 2 chose “I don't know”.



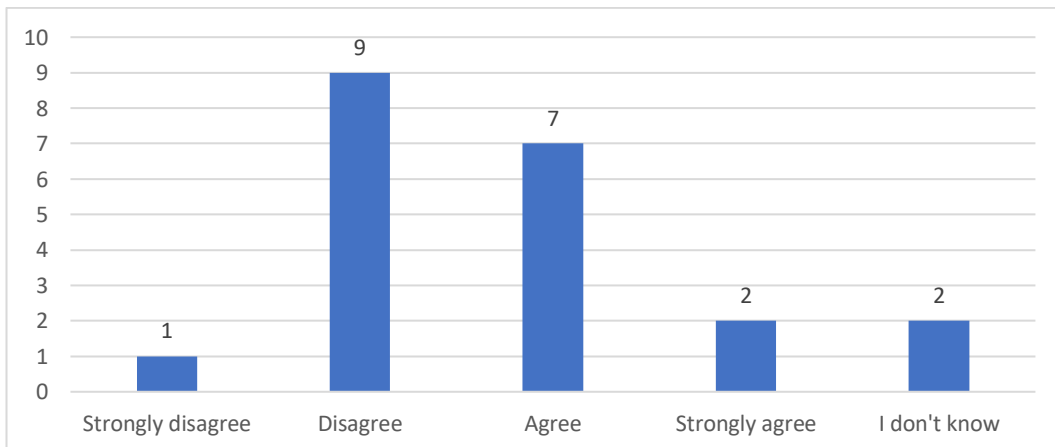
**4 Fig.** Respondents opinions with statement “*Rural companies need to improve their capacities to design competitive tourism products*”

Third statement “*Our region is rich in intangible cultural heritage (stories, legends, songs, dances, rituals, festivities, etc.)*” got positive answers from most of the respondents – 17 agreed (10 agreed and 7 strongly agreed), 1 strongly disagreed, 2 disagreed and only one answered “I don’t know”.



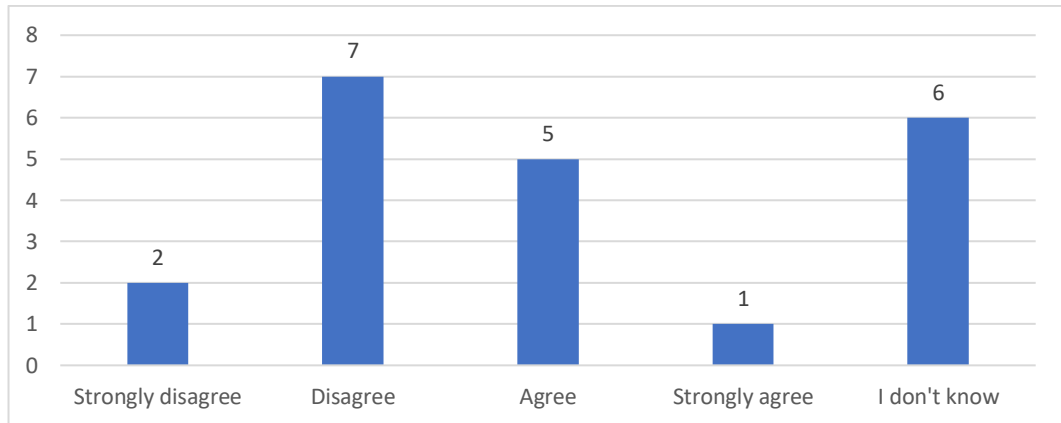
**5 Fig.** Respondents opinions with statement “*Our region is rich in intangible cultural heritage (stories, legends, songs, dances, rituals, festivities, etc.)*”

Next statement “*Intangible cultural heritage is well integrated in tourism products in our region*” brought different opinions. 10 respondents disagreed (1 of them strongly disagreed), 9 agreed (2 of them strongly agreed) and 2 said “I don’t know”.



**6 Fig.** Respondents opinions with the statement “*Intangible cultural heritage is well integrated in tourism products in our region*”

The last statement “*Rural companies in our region cooperate in design and promotion of their products*” showed different opinions. Even 6 respondents chose “I don’t know”, 9 disagreed (2 of them strongly disagreed), 6 agreed (1 of them strongly agreed).

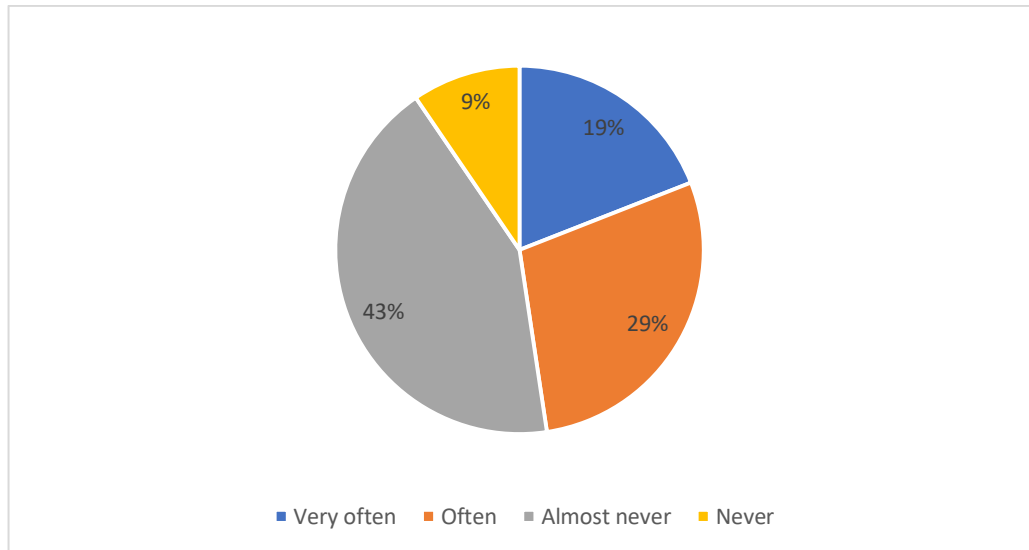


**7 Fig.** Respondents opinions with the statement *“Rural companies in our region cooperate in design and promotion of their products”*

The fifth was the open question and it aimed to find out how many of the respondents have ever used intangible cultural heritage in the design or promotion of products/ services. We got 14 negative and 7 positive answers. Those seven was asked to describe the products, that they have designed:

- “Meteorite Rain Park”- it is an active entertainment in fresh air. It was created by using natural resources from the surroundings.
- In my work I use and promote traditions of the Samogitian heritage. My education is about the culinary heritage of this region.
- Near my homestead there is “Devil's Stone” – I promote it as an attraction to my quests. Also, we have local festivals (Run, run little horse; Spring Celebration; Midsummer Day). A lot of people from all the country are coming to these festivals and they are looking for the place to stay. Then I offer my accommodation services.
- I constantly arrange public evenings about ethno-architecture for the people (my homestead is a cultural heritage and I, as an architect introduce the heritage through the story of our family).
- We are organizing tasting evenings to our quests. It is a part of our family business and it is one of my biggest sources of the income.
- Black ceramic craft goes from generation to generation in our family. I still work with this craft and organize educations about it and also, I sell my production to people as well.
- My homestead is near the National park. And organizing the excursions are the most attractive service in my business.

The sixth question was aimed to realize how often our respondents cooperate with other companies. 4 respondents said that they cooperate very often, 6 - often, 9 replied, that almost never cooperate and 2 stated - never.



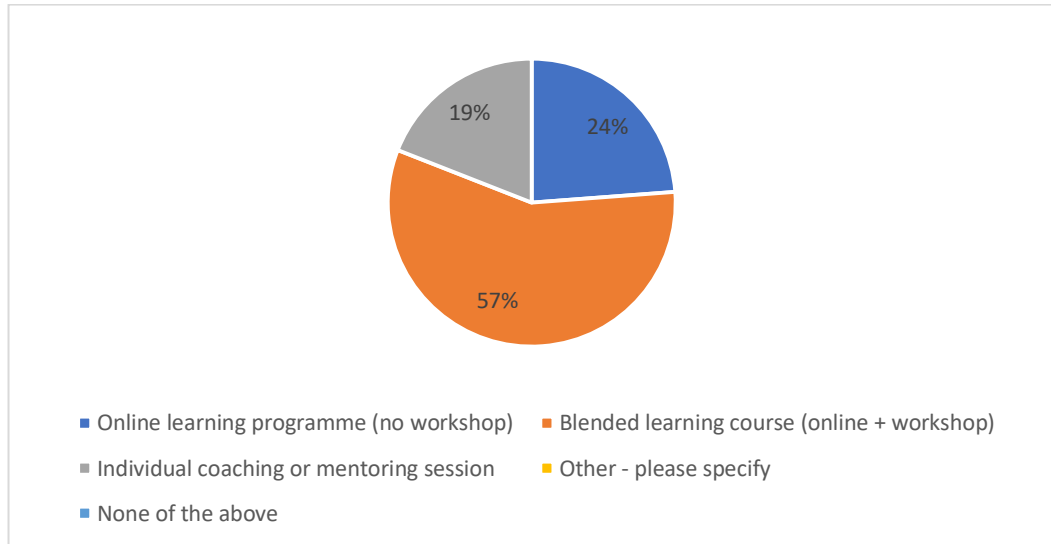
8 Fig. Answers to the question “Do you cooperate with any other companies/ organizations in your region in design or promotion of tourism products/services?” (%)

In order to find out in which areas respondents would like to extend their knowledge we gave 12 concepts with three different options “We know about it”, “We have used it in our work” and “We’d like to learn more about it”.

1. "**Marketing Strategy**" 4 respondents knew about it, 3 respondents had used it in their business, and 14 respondents want to learn more about it.
2. "**Consumer Behavior**" 2 respondents knew about it, 4 respondents used it in their business, while 15 respondents want to learn more about it.
3. "**Market Segmentation**" 2 respondents knew about it, 4 respondents used it in their business, while 15 respondents want to learn more about it.
4. "**Marketing Mix**" 2 respondents knew about it, 3 respondents used it in their business, and 16 respondents want to learn more about it.
5. "**Tourism Product Design and Management**" 3 respondents knew about it, 6 respondents used it in their business, while 12 respondents would like to learn more about it.
6. "**Creativity Techniques**" 2 respondents knew about it, 8 respondents used it in their business, while 11 respondents want to learn more about it.
7. "**Intangible Cultural Heritage in Tourism**" 4 respondents knew about it, 2 respondents used it in their business, while 15 respondents want to learn more about it.
8. "**Cooperation Techniques**" 3 respondents knew about it, 5 respondents used it in their business, while 13 respondents want to learn more about it.
9. "**Pricing Strategies and Approaches**" 3 respondents knew about it, 4 respondents used it in their business, while 14 respondents want to learn more about it.
10. "**E-Marketing and Social Media**" 2 respondents knew about it, 4 respondents used it in their business, while 15 respondents want to learn more about it.
11. "**Marketing Budget**" 2 respondent knew about it, 4 respondents used it in their business, while 15 respondents want to learn more about it.
12. Other 5 respondents chose “**Other**” and noticed:
  - Creation of the homestead image and the market positioning of the homestead;
  - Working with social networks;
  - Reduction of the seasonality;
  - Practical activities;
  - Maintenance, quality, creation of quality product.

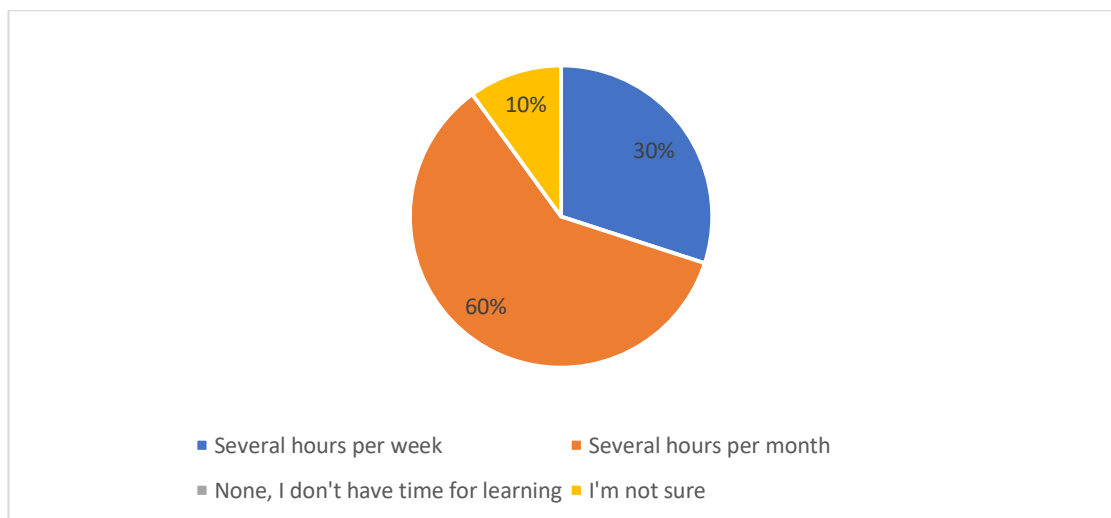
All the statements were chosen more than 10 times with the option “We’d like to learn more about it” so we can assume that these topics are interesting to our respondents and they would like to know more about them.

The answers to the question ‘How would you like any training to be delivered?’ showed the most attractive learning form for the respondents and it was - blended learning course (12), individual coaching or mentoring session was chosen 4 times, 5 respondents chose online learning programme (no workshops).



**9 Fig.** Learning courses form (%)

The question “How much time would you be willing to invest to improve your marketing skills?” was about the time, respondents could appoint for the learning process. 12 respondents stated that they would invest few hours per month to improve marketing skills, 6 replied that would invest several hours per week and 2 was not sure.



**10 Fig.** Respondents would invest time for training (%)

To the question “Do you have any suggestions for the STORIE training programme” we didn’t get any offer. Respondents would like to get more information about the project and the expected results. So, we can assume that in the future we will get some suggestions.

## INTERVIEWS

The implementation of Erasmus+ STORIE project involved interviews which were organized as focus group. On 6<sup>th</sup> of February we invited our target group to conference centre “Siesta”. Despite the fact, that we needed only 10 people to conduct this focus group, 23 people participated in the event. We invited to this event people who already are using an intangible cultural heritage in their business (to make the discussion more interesting) but also, we invited those, who are interesting in this topic to get more opinions and to see everything from different perspectives. All focus group participants were owners of the homesteads. Our focus group were consisted of 7 entrepreneurs, who actively are working with intangible cultural heritage, 3 entrepreneurs shared their interest to start this activity in near future. Other participants don't work with intangible cultural heritage and never thought about it, but are open minded for trying.

The moderator of the discussion was Linas Zabaliunas (LCTA president). He introduced the concept of the project, defined the purpose of this meeting and allowed participants to present themselves and their intangible cultural activities. Discussion took about 2 hours.

Firstly, we had speakers who are actively working with intangible cultural heritage. They shared their experience and examples how they do that. First speaker, **Rolandas Bortkunas**, adapted the accommodation services to the intangible cultural heritage not vice versa. He thinks, that **cultural uniqueness – your identity is one of the options to show yourself off. It is just important not to do it artificially.** *His intangible cultural heritage activities:* he organizes cultural evenings – presents ethno architecture, tells the story of his family, invites local artist to represent themselves. He builds the community in his region.

Other speaker, **Jurgita Kristupiene**, start working and represent with heritage and only later she suggested the accommodation services to her quests. She thinks, that **if you want to differ from others and be successful, at first you need to do your activity not because you get money for it, but do it, because you love it and you love to see people happy.** *Her intangible cultural heritage activity: culinary heritage and it's tasting for small groups, presenting the tasting in local dialect.*

**Lina Cerniauskiene** started her business with accommodation activities and in order to reduce seasonality she offered for the quest's educational activity. *Her intangible cultural heritage activity: culinary heritage, food tasting for couples and small groups.* She had a fear that the price will be too expensive for the people but she saw **that for good quality people are determined to pay more.**

**Kestutis Seskauskas** as he remembers all his family are engaged in crafts (black ceramics). Black ceramics was the source of living and only later it became activity alongside accommodation. *His intangible cultural heritage activity: educational activities with various crafts.*

**Giedre Rasiukiene** understands that **with one activity you can't get attention from tourists.** *Her intangible cultural heritage activity: saunas and saunas educations but also, she offers for tourists' traditional dances, culinary heritage – baking the traditional “tree cake”.* **The biggest minus is that the cost for few people grows up, that is why no one wants to work with couples or small groups.** However, **the market shows that people are traveling in small groups in these days and providers need to adapt to this trend.**

**Nijole Zubrickiene** doesn't suggest any intangible cultural heritage activities by herself but near her homestead is “Devil's pit”, Regional park and etc. The surrounding is rich with nature, but **the biggest minus is that local guides don't offer services of high quality. A lot of local guides just give general information and don't give any other added value to the tourists, because they lack skills of entrepreneurship.**

**Monika Sadauskaite** claims that she has too little information about intangible cultural heritage. She does hike trips, but she doesn't know how to “wrap” it in attractive way. She understands, that the **presentation of the product is one of the most important need but a lot of services providers don't know the trends and the travellers' habits.** We need **more systemized information about the trends and how they are changing.**

**Lina Noreikaite** is newbie in rural accommodation sector, but she understands that **additional activities are huge additional value**. She could organize educational activities about the rapeseed rye culture, but she doesn't feel strong and would like to know more about the organizing and presenting educational activities. However, she would like to know more about the intangible cultural heritage and she would love to gain that with STORIE learning platform.

**Agne Vaitkuviene** had totally different opinion from others. Everyone was talking that intangible cultural heritage is really important, but she claimed that we can't say that cultural activities are attractive to everyone. **We have to understand, that intangible cultural heritage must be in particular place and time, more important is the specialization of the homestead**. Her homestead is more adapted for the family festivals or business meetings, so she thinks there are no place for cultural activities over there. Her quests **want to rest from everything when they are resting**.

### Overview:

- A few participants of the focus group already successfully integrated intangible cultural heritage to their business, however they agreed that a lot of people don't have enough knowledge how to do that in attractive way. **Participants agreed that entrepreneurs must maintain high standards to stay competitive in the market**. We came up with the conclusion that a lot of entrepreneurs just copying ideas from each other's. Sometimes this tendency scares, but sometimes you need to think positive - that you have to do this activity even better, then your competitors do.

- We asked if the focus group participants cooperate with other companies, if they promote each other and create common products. We saw that in some regions people are used to cooperate more, in some less. In Samogitian National park people are friendly and they are used to help each other. Also, one participant had the opinion, **that people need to cooperate and not to take everything on your own shoulders** "Person cannot be Jack of all the trades. Have the field in which you are really good and give the space for other people to be good in their field". However, people in another region (Aukstaitija) are not used to cooperate and even if you want to do it, it is really hard to find, who would love to do the same.

- We asked participants opinion, what is the most important thing while creating activity based on intangible cultural heritage. We had the responses that it is very important **to know how to create product, suitable for small groups**. We all want big profits that is why a lot of services providers neglect small groups. We need to understand, that in these days people are travelling in small groups so we need to learn how to make activities for small groups and still make profit from it.

- In focus group we had the opinion that intangible cultural heritage in most cases is free or require really little investments. Even if you will work with small groups you can get great profit, because material for intangible cultural heritage product creation will be really cheap and **most expensive resources will be your time, energy and creativity**.

- We asked if there is anyone who don't use and don't communicate heritage around them. Everyone agreed that this is impossible. For example, if you provide just accommodation services, still **heritage is around you – nature, buildings, stories, traditions, etc**. Usually, if tourist asks about interesting objects around, you give the information for him, sometimes you lead them to that object. You don't communicate it on purpose, but still you use your country heritage as the tourism product.

- All focus group participants agreed that **those, who has cultural basis from the childhood or from previous business, has bigger advantage**.

- To the question what would make an online course of marketing interesting and attractive, participants gave the answer: **Content; we need systemized and useful information in simple words; We do not need much of the theory, the examples of good practice are always more useful; We need more information about cooperation with others services providers, how to present your new activity to the market, what is the trends in tourism sector, what are the interests of the travelers**.



- Participants agreed to the survey results and that they need knowledge about every concept in question 7. They also mentioned, that only the qualitative material will be useful and the bigger advantage would be good learning tool about a few concepts than a poor learning tool about all the concepts.

## CONCLUSION

Focus group was really beneficial because we included more than 10 people. We got great feedback about already existing products. Moreover, we got a lot of opinions, that accommodation services providers are not sure, if they need to start additional activities with intangible cultural heritage. That is why we can assume that our learning platform will help them to decide and to choose the right way and method to be more competitive in the market.

### **The main differences between questionnaire survey and focus group were:**

- To questionnaire survey question 4 statement 5 *“Rural companies in our region cooperate in design and promotion of their products”* opinion divided in two positions. Half of the people think that rural companies cooperate and half think that they don't. During the focus group discussion, we realized that cooperation depends on the regions of our country. That is why a lot of participants of focus group said that they would like to get more information about how to cooperate with others services providers and how to involve them easily.

- In questionnaire survey, question 7 should help us to realize which topics would be the most interesting to learn more about. However, all statements were marked more than 10 times as *“We'd like to learn more about it”*. Focus group participants think that it is more useful to prepare good and interesting learning material on a few topics, but not on all of the topics, which are foreseen. At the end of the discussions together with all the participants we tried to highlight the specific topics, which would be the most useful for rural entrepreneurs in our country. Keeping in mind that a few years ago we were preparing an online tool about e-marketing, we think, that these topics are worth giving them time and attention: "Marketing Strategy", "Consumer Behavior", "E-Marketing and Social Media", "Tourism Product Design and Management", "Intangible Cultural Heritage in Tourism", "Creativity Techniques", "Cooperation Techniques".

### **The results were the same in questionnaire survey and focus group:**

- To questionnaire survey question 4 statement 2 *“Rural companies need to improve their capacities to design competitive tourism products”* everyone on focus group and on questionnaire agreed that service providers need to improve their skills and capacities to be more competitive. The results are showing, that rural tourism service providers understand that they don't know a lot of new marketing strategies and they would love to learn more about it.

- To questionnaire survey question 4 statement 3 *“Our region is rich in intangible cultural heritage (stories, legends, songs, dances, rituals, festivities, etc.)”* everyone agreed that Lithuania is rich with nature and cultural monuments, also festivals and other traditions. However, everyone agreed that a lot of rural accommodation service providers don't know how to use it and how to get the bigger benefit.

- To questionnaire survey question 4 statement 4 *“Intangible cultural heritage is well integrated in tourism products in our region”* most of the focus group and questionnaire respondents disagreed. Focus group participants claimed, that a lot of rural services providers don't keep high quality standards, also most of them don't know how to integrate intangible cultural heritage to their business to get benefit from it.

In conclusion, we can assume that STORIE project learning platform will be beneficial to Lithuanian rural services providers. We already received a great interest from our LCTA members.