

SUCCESS STORY – A STORY ABOUT THE SMALL-SCALE PROJECT

Mental and Sustainable Mindscapes – raising awareness & competences of benefits of intersecting mental wellbeing and environmentally friendly tourism in the SB region

Ecological club "Žvejonė" (PP2)

The Mental and Sustainable Mindscapes project showed that wellbeing and sustainability do not have to be separate tourism themes. The same landscape can support mental restoration, local livelihoods and care for nature.

People are increasingly looking for travel that helps them slow down, recover from stress and reconnect with nature. Yet many small tourism operators do not have a clear framework for combining wellbeing, environmental responsibility and an attractive visitor experience. We wanted to make this emerging field easier to understand and more practical for the South Baltic region.

Partners from Poland and Lithuania explored this question through beekeeping, birdwatching, vineyards, coastal landscapes and slow, nature-based experiences. Their work turned an emerging idea into practical knowledge, learning content and a shared direction for tourism operators across the South Baltic region.

The environmental side was essential. A restorative experience depends on healthy landscapes, biodiversity and responsible use of local resources. Our task was to show that mental wellbeing can be supported through nature without turning fragile places into mass-tourism products.

Poland and Lithuania share a Baltic coastal character, but each partner brought different experience. PUMA contributed coordination and expertise in sustainable mobility and vineyard-based tourism. Žvejonė brought environmental knowledge and a strong interest in apitherapy. Northern Kashubia contributed destination-management experience, birdwatching and mindfulness activities. Together, these perspectives created a richer and more transferable approach than any partner could have developed alone.

We combined analysis with field experience. The partnership reviewed needs, gaps and good practices; engaged tourism businesses, public institutions and local organisations; developed learning content; and worked on common evaluation and certification principles. Study visits allowed us to test the concept against real places and real operators rather than discussing it only in meeting rooms.

The meetings in Poland added another dimension. The kick-off took place on 26-27 November 2024 at Hotel Skipper in Rewa. The Lithuanian delegation travelled with the owner of Medaus klėtelė, who presented Lithuanian bee tourism, and a representative of the Administration of Lithuania Minor Protected Areas. Adam Czaja, oenologist and owner of Winnica Mitumi and its spa, presented enotourism as a pathway to mental wellbeing and sustainable local ecosystems. The programme also included a study visit to the Beka Nature Reserve.

During the partner meeting in Lithuania, we visited the 'Medaus klėtelė' beekeeping farm in Plateliai. We learned about bees, bee products and their cultural and ecological value, tasted local products and experienced an apitherapy session in a hut above beehives. We also visited 'Memelio vynos' in Priekulė and discussed enotherapy. These experiences made the link between local knowledge, calm sensory activities and sustainable rural tourism very concrete.

The third project partner meeting took place at Winnica Mitumi in Nowe Polaszki, Poland. The meeting gave partners an opportunity to explore how vineyards and enotourism can be combined with mental wellbeing, mindful experiences and environmentally responsible tourism. The Lithuanian delegation included two representatives of the Ecological Club "Žvejonių" and one representative of the Administration of Lithuania Minor Protected Areas. Meeting in a real tourism setting helped the partners connect the project's research and certification criteria with the practical needs of local operators. It also strengthened cross-border cooperation and contributed to the development of vineyard-based wellbeing tourism as one of the three key MindScape models.

The study "Analysis of the Present Situation in the Field of Mental and Sustainable Tourism in the South Baltic Region: Needs, Benefits, Deficiencies and Best Practices" was prepared in 2025 by Prof. Dr. Habil. Ramūnas Povilanskas from the Ecological Club "Žvejonių". It explored three promising tourism models – apitherapy, birdwatching and vineyard-based wellbeing tourism – and examined how they could support mental restoration, local livelihoods and nature conservation. Drawing on practical examples from the South Baltic region and beyond, the study also highlighted the importance of visitor safety, trained hosts, environmental responsibility and credible quality standards. Its findings provided an important knowledge base for the project's learning materials, online self-evaluation tool and MindScape certification programme.

After using the online self-evaluation tool and demonstrating compliance with the MindScape standards, three Lithuanian operators received certificates at Model Site level: Basakojė (individual activity), Medaus klėtelė and Torest MB. Their certificates recognise calm, safe and respectful visitor experiences in natural surroundings, together with a commitment to mental wellbeing, connection with nature, sustainability and local values. The certificates are valid until March 2028, giving the project a visible legacy beyond its formal end date.

Tourist Association "Northern Kashubia" Local Tourist Organisation (PP3)

We are very satisfied with and proud of the outcomes of the MindScape project. We believe it is a practical and much-needed initiative that genuinely strengthens tourism entrepreneurs while setting the right direction for the development of the tourism sector, based on quality, sustainability, and creating unique visitor experiences. The project has provided participants with practical tools that help them stand out in a competitive market and better respond to the expectations of today's customers.

We believe that the project has successfully developed a valuable and well-designed certification programme. We also highly appreciate the educational materials and tutorial videos, which provide meaningful support for entrepreneurs implementing the programme. Another significant strength of the project was the opportunity for partners to meet, exchange experiences, inspire one another, and learn from good practices. This international cooperation demonstrated the value of collaboration and knowledge sharing.

At the same time, we believe the project has now reached a new stage of development. Certified businesses increasingly express the need for continued support beyond the certification process itself. They are looking for ongoing guidance, opportunities to further develop their knowledge and skills, stronger networking within the certified community, and initiatives that increase the visibility and recognition of the MindScape certification among customers and within the tourism industry.

In our opinion, the next step should be to continue developing the project by building an active community of certified businesses, organising networking events, promoting the certification jointly, and continuously improving the programme. This would allow MindScape to become not only a recognised quality certification but also a strong network of tourism entrepreneurs committed to developing innovative, responsible and sustainable tourism.