



Regional State of the Art Report for Tartu County (Estonia)

Tartu County Tourism Foundation

visit TARTU

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1. Introduction

Estonia bases its development on the agreed principles of **Sustainable Development Goals**¹. In addition to the 17 global sustainable development goals, Estonia also monitors the viability of the cultural space, which stems from Estonia's national sustainable development strategy Sustainable Estonia 21².

Sustainable principles are also related to the development of tourism. The Long-term Vision 2035 for Estonian Tourism, refers to **tourism as Estonia's business card, increasing the country's international visibility and attractiveness, improving the quality of life of local residents, supporting business relationships, attracting investments, driving economic growth, and increasing both national and regional revenues. In addition, tourism plays a significant role outside major cities in promoting employment and small businesses.** Many of our daily services (catering, cultural events, transport connections, etc.) are of higher quality and more sustainable thanks to the synergy created by the consumption of services by both tourists and local residents.³

Tourism would not exist without Estonia's wonderful nature, culture, and heritage. **The slogan of Estonia's tourism strategy is: Creating value sustainably.** The long-term vision for tourism foresees that **by 2035, Estonian tourism will be more well-known, sustainable, and innovative.** Regarding sustainability, the situation to be achieved by 2035 is as follows:

- We are hospitable and open to guests, already motivating first-time visitors to stay in an environmentally friendly manner;
- We have contributed to the preservation of our natural environment, culture, and heritage;
- Reaching and moving around Estonia is seamlessly comfortable and accessible to all.⁴

According to the Tartu County Development Strategy, **by 2040, the smart, sustainable, and inclusive Tartu County is one of the most prosperous living and business environments in Europe.** Sustainability is one of the values of the development strategy, and tourism plays an important role in the document, supporting the promotion of the region's nature, culture, heritage, and business development.⁵

One of Tartu County's hubs is the city of Tartu, which joined the **Green Destinations program** in 2020 and has since received platinum-level recognition for implementing sustainable principles. Additionally, Tartu is **part of the European Commission's 100 climate-neutral and smart cities.**

The aim of this report is to provide an overview of the current status of sustainable development in Tartu County in the context of tourism. The report gives an overview of the current state of the tourism sector in Tartu County, related strategic documents, strengths and weaknesses of the sector, and offers recommendations for increasing the sustainability of the tourism sector in Tartu County.

¹ UN Sustainable Development Goals: <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

² Sustainable Estonia 21: <https://www.unesco.org/creativity/en/policy-monitoring-platform/sustainable-estonia-21>

³ Long-term Vision 2035 for Estonian Tourism, page 2

⁴ Long-term Vision 2035 for Estonian Tourism, page 3

⁵ Tartu County Development Strategy 2040, page 3

2. Methodology

The main methods used in the preparation of this report are the analysis of various relevant documents, data collection, and their analysis. Based on the collected input, an overview of the current sustainability status of tourism in Tartu County, an analysis of strengths and weaknesses, and proposals for development activities have been prepared in collaboration with stakeholders.

Document analysis – Analysis of various relevant strategies, development documents, studies, and reports to map the current status and development goals of the tourism sector at both the national and regional levels.

Data collection and analysis – Collection and analysis of data related to sustainable tourism to map the current situation of the sector in Tartu County and to prepare relevant development proposals.

Stakeholder involvement – Validation of the sustainability status of tourism in Tartu County and support for the preparation of development activities.

Development proposals – Formulation of appropriate sustainable tourism-supporting and sustainable development activities based on the collected input and analysis.

Key Definitions

Sustainable tourism – Tourism that fully considers its current and future economic, social, and environmental impact, meeting the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment, and host communities.⁶

Policy instrument – A tool or measure used to implement and monitor sustainability in the tourism sector.⁷

Monitoring methodology – Methods and tools used to measure and assess the impacts of tourism, such as evaluating environmental sustainability, socio-economic benefits, and cultural preservation.⁸

⁶ Sustainable tourism: <https://sdgs.un.org/topics/sustainable-tourism>

⁷ Making tourism more sustainable: a guide for policy makers, <https://www.unep.org/resources/report/making-tourism-more-sustainable-guide-policy-makers>

⁸ Indicators of Sustainable Development For Tourism Destinations A Guide Book by UNWTO, <https://www.scribd.com/document/245278165/Indicators-of-Sustainable-Development-for-Tourism-Destinations-A-Guide-Book-by-UNWTO-1-pdf>

3. Territorial context

3.1. Description of Tartu County



Photo: Visit Tartu/Jane East

Tartu County is located on the border of East and South Estonia, between Lake Peipus and Lake Võrtsjärv, bordering Jõgeva County to the north, Viljandi County to the west, and Põlva and Valga Counties to the south. **Tartu County consists of eight municipalities: one city (Tartu city) and seven rural municipalities: Elva, Kambja, Kastre, Luunja, Nõo, Peipsiääre, and Tartu.**

Tartu County has an area of 3,349 square kilometers. As of January 1, 2025, **Tartu County has a population of 162,734, with 98,257 living in the county's hub, Tartu city.** Tartu County is the second most populous county in Estonia, and unlike many other regions in Estonia, **its population is gradually growing.** The heart of Tartu County is the city of Tartu, which has a history of over 1,000 years. In 1224, the first bishop of Tartu (Episcopus Tarbatensis in Latin) was appointed, and in 2030, it will be 1,000 years since the first written mention of the city of Tartu.

Tartu County is naturally diverse and beautiful. Just over one-tenth of the county's territory is covered by protected areas. Tartu County is characterized by top-level educational institutions, a green and safe living environment, world-class cultural life, active communities, and diverse entrepreneurship, making it an attractive place both in Estonia and internationally.⁹ In 2024, the city of Tartu, together with the county and South Estonia, held the title of **European Capital of Culture.**

3.2 Most Relevant Data on Tourism Activity at the Regional Level

According to Statistics Estonia, **in 2024, nearly 1.86 million foreign tourists and approximately 1.76 million domestic tourists visited Estonian accommodation establishments.** Compared to 2023, the **number of foreign tourists increased by 11%**, while the number of domestic tourists remained at the same level. Compared to 2019, the pre-crisis record year, there were over 200,000 more domestic tourists in accommodation establishments, while there were nearly 400,000 fewer foreign tourists. Therefore, it can be said that the **tourism sector is still recovering.**

⁹ Tartu County Development Strategy 2040, page 1

Of the **foreign tourists** who visited Estonia, **70% stayed in Tallinn**. **6% of foreign tourists reached Tartu, and 8% visited South Estonia**. The Tartu County Tourism Foundation, in cooperation with the South Estonia Tourism Cluster, is working towards the goal that **in the future, 10% of foreign tourists visiting Estonia will reach Tartu and 15% will visit South Estonia**.

Source: Statistics Estonia

According to Statistics Estonia, **in 2024, the number of overnight stays in South Estonia was 925,040, which is 2.4% more than the previous year**. The number of tourists visiting South Estonia was 530,254, of which 378,294 were domestic tourists and 151,951 were foreign tourists. While the share of domestic tourists remained the same compared to the previous year, **the number of foreign tourists increased by nearly 20% in 2024**.

The number of overnight stays in Tartu city was 424,510, and while the number of domestic tourists saw a slight decline, the share of foreign tourists grew by 17%. The increase in the number of foreign tourists in South Estonia was significant in almost every county: in Valga County, it was 25.5%, in Võru County 20.5%, in Tartu County (outside of Tartu) 11.8%, and in Jõgeva County 2.1%.

The main tourism-related challenge for Tartu County and South Estonia after the European Capital of Culture year is maintaining and strengthening the region's attractiveness, so that tourists' interest and desire to visit South Estonia remains high.

3.3. Regional Tourism Ecosystem (Main Stakeholders)

The development of Tartu County is driven by the **Association of Municipalities of Tartu County**, which is responsible for the implementation of the county's development strategy. The promotion of tourism in Tartu County is managed by the **Tartu County Tourism Foundation**, established in 1999 through cooperation between the **City of Tartu and Association of Municipalities of Tartu County**. Since 2021, the **South Estonia Tourism Cluster** has been operating under the Tartu County Tourism Foundation, bringing together regional tourism developers and providing support, training, and joint activities for the entire region's tourism sector.

In Tartu County a large part of tourism-related services, such as accommodation and catering businesses, as well as tourism companies, are mostly managed by the **private sector**. Museums and cultural, sports, and development institutions are public, municipal, and/or private organizations. In Tartu County **community organizations** also play an important role in the culture, sports, and tourism activities and development.

The role of various **higher education institutions** and the **Tartu Vocational College (VOCO)** should not be underestimated, as they attract students, researchers, and teaching staff from different countries, as well as sectoral top events. In addition, higher education institutions and Tartu Vocational College (VOCO) are both strategic partners in research and in development activities.

3.4. Current Sustainable Tourism Planning Tools

The Long-term Vision 2035 for Estonian Tourism, has the slogan **Creating value sustainably**. The long-term vision for tourism sees **Estonia's tourism becoming more well-known, sustainable, and innovative by 2035**. According to the strategy, by 2035, the following situation should be achieved:

Tourism4SDG

- We are **hospitable and open** to guests, and have already clearly motivated first-time visitors to engage in environmentally friendly stays with us;
- We have contributed to the **preservation of our natural environment, culture, and heritage**;
- **Reaching Estonia and moving around within it is effortlessly convenient and accessible to all.**¹⁰

When developing tools for sustainable tourism, it is important to consider **trends that influence the sector's development**. According to the Long-term Vision 2035 for Estonian Tourism, the following trends are shaping tourism:

- **Desire to travel and virtual travel:** People will continue to travel as it is inherent to human nature, including virtual travel.
- **Concentration of tourism destinations:** A large portion of travelers focus on a few popular destinations worldwide, while domestic travel is increasing.
- **Carrying capacity of destinations:** Climate change requires adherence to sustainability principles and goals. Sustainability targets must consider the carrying capacity of destinations. At the same time, awareness of nature conservation is increasing, and travel shame may arise.
- **Growth of niche tourism and authenticity:** Lesser-known destinations are becoming more popular, influenced by influencers and spokespersons, as tourists seek authentic experiences, and exceptional hospitality can provide significant value.
- **Interest-based and unexpected travel reasons:** Travel goals are becoming more diverse, including wellness tourism and altruistic travel, reflecting the preferences of a new generation of travelers.
- **Trend of slow and flexible travel:** There is a growing desire to combine travel and lifestyle, preferring longer and more relaxed experiences.
- **Growth of quiet and exclusive tourism:** Luxury tourism and offering tranquility are becoming niche destination opportunities.
- **Growth of regenerative tourism:** There is an increase in travel aimed at the active restoration of destinations and communities, creating a positive impact.¹¹

At the regional level, tourism development is supported by the **South Estonia Tourism Development Strategy 2025-2030**, which aims to position the region as a rich, hospitable, and sustainable tourism destination offering experiences for every visitor, regardless of travel purpose or season. The South Estonia Tourism Strategy's development directions support balanced and sustainable sector development and strengthen South Estonia's reputation as an attractive tourism region, both in Estonia and internationally.¹²

At the county level, one of the most important documents influencing the tourism sector is the **Tartu County Development Strategy 2040**, with sustainability being one of its core values. One of the actions in the county development strategy includes the promotion of sustainable tourism and marketing Tartu County as a sustainable tourism destination, including participation in international green destination competitions (Green Destinations).¹³

According to the **Tartu City Development Plan for 2025-2035**, Tartu's most important competitive advantage in the context of tourism is its diverse and high-level cultural and sports life. In addition, Tartu has set the goal of valuing different natural ecosystems, balancing the needs of humans, nature, and climate. Activities

¹⁰ The Long-term Vision 2035 for Estonian Tourism, Page 3

¹¹ The Long-term Vision 2035 for Estonian Tourism, page 7

¹² South Estonia Tourism Development Strategy 2025-2030, page 5

¹³ Tartu County Development Strategy 2040, page 11

that help mitigate climate change and reduce the environmental impact of human activity are crucial for protecting Tartu's values and maintaining its way of life.¹⁴

Sustainability-related goals are reflected in **Tartu City Energy and Climate Action Plan “Tartu Energy 2030”**, which states that one of the greatest values of Tartu City is its clean, human-friendly, and natural living environment. Human-induced climate change is one of the greatest hazards to the living environment and current living arrangement of Tartu. Mitigating climate change and decreasing the consequences of the environmental impact caused by humans is one of the most important activities for preserving Tartu's values and retaining the current living environment.¹⁵

From Tartu city's perspective, the key tool in moving towards sustainability goals is the **Green Destinations program** report. Tartu city joined the Green Destinations program in 2020 and has since been awarded platinum-level recognition for the implementation of sustainable principles. In addition, Tartu city is part of the **European Commission's 100 climate-neutral and smart cities** list.

¹⁴ Tartu City Development Plan for 2025-2035: <https://www.tartu.ee/et/arengukava>

¹⁵ Tartu City Energy and Climate Action Plan “Tartu Energy 2030”, page 3

4. Policy instrument characterization and its specific needs of improvement

4.1. Tartu County Development Strategy 2040

In Estonia, the responsibility for creating and implementing regional development plans lies with the Associations of Municipalities and/or regional development centers. The Tartu County Development Strategy 2040, developed under the leadership of the Association of Municipalities of Tartu County, envisions that **by 2040, Tartu County will be a smart, sustainable, and inclusive region, one of the highest well-being areas for both living and entrepreneurship in Europe.**¹⁶

The county development strategy also analyzes the trends in the local government level development documents. **In the context of the living environment, local government development plans place great importance on creating high-quality living environments and places that are nature-oriented, safe, have a good reputation, and offer sufficient recreational areas and opportunities. Additionally, the development plans of the local governments in Tartu County place significant emphasis on the Emajõgi River in terms of living environment, tourism, and recreational opportunities.**

The county development strategy includes the following actions related to tourism, including sustainable tourism development:

- Promoting cultural tourism based on local heritage and distinct stories, and the cluster-based development of cultural routes.
- Marketing Tartu County as an active leisure destination.
- Developing sustainable tourism and marketing Tartu County as a sustainable tourism destination, including participation in international green destination competitions (Green Destinations).
- Developing recreational areas that integrate tourism businesses and a good living environment.
- Planning and implementing tourism development activities in county and regional cooperation.
- Creating and marketing joint brands for Tartu County's products and services.
- Promoting Tartu County as a place to live and a tourism destination (culture, heritage, events, attractions, recreational areas, etc.) and developing a cross-sectoral marketing concept.
- The development of the business environment (including tourism) is supported by previously agreed activities and instruments in Tartu County and the region. For example, a South Estonia cooperation agreement has been signed, one of the objectives of which is the formation and development of the South Estonia Tourism Cluster.

The Tartu County development strategy follows global sustainable development goals. The sustainable development of tourism is particularly linked to the following goals:



Goal-related action: Develop recreational areas integrating tourism businesses and a good living environment.

¹⁶ Tartu County Development Strategy 2040, page 3



Goal-related action: Develop and implement sustainable tourism promotion policies by 2030 to create jobs and promote local culture and products.

The newly completed **South Estonia Tourism Development Strategy 2025-2030** aims to **transform the region into an experience-rich, hospitable, and sustainable tourism destination that offers experiences for every visitor, regardless of the purpose or season of their visit.** According to the vision of the South Estonia Tourism Strategy, **by 2030, South Estonia will be a well-functioning kaleidoscope in harmony with its unique communities and nature—a place of well-being created together by both big and small contributors.**¹⁷ The strategy focuses on four guiding principles: sustainability, hospitality, innovation, and cooperation.¹⁸ The strategy sets clear and comprehensive development directions that **support balanced and sustainable growth and strengthen the reputation of South Estonia as an attractive tourism region, both within Estonia and internationally.**

¹⁷ South Estonia Tourism Development Strategy 2025-2030, page 21

¹⁸ South Estonia Tourism Development Strategy 2025-2030, page 19

5. SWOT analysis

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • City of Tartu as a strong municipality, attraction centre • Universities reputation and youth vibe • International flight connection with Helsinki • Good transport connections with capital • Proximity to Riga • Unique and untouched natural environment • Diverse and high-quality cultural life and infrastructure • Practical experience as a European Capital of Culture • Good tourism infrastructure • High-quality tourism services • Shared interest in the development of the sector • Friendly and well-spoken local population with good English language skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited flight connections • Poor transport connections with Riga • Distance from the capital • Limited internal transport connections (public transport) in the region • Low international recognition of the region • The region is not uniformly covered with high-quality tourism services • There is no clear vision or set priorities for sustainable tourism development at the county level • Low interest and capacity among local governments to invest in the development of the tourism sector • Increase in tourism service prices due to the overall rise in the cost of living • Availability of sectoral statistics, especially by region
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunity to use the European Capital of Culture experience to support long-term development • Various local and international support programs and projects • Growing interest in culturally unique and distinctive places • Increasing interest in previously undiscovered locations – the desire to avoid tourist crowds • Growing interest in destinations with special and untouched nature • Diverse and unique tourism infrastructure • Tourism services that highlight the distinctive characteristics and uniqueness of the region • Presence of several higher education institutions and Tartu Vocational College (VOCO) in the region • Pleasant climate during the summer months compared to overheated Europe 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Political instability at the local level • Low awareness of sustainable tourism principles • Lack of interest and motivation for developing sustainable tourism principles • Proximity to Russia • Risk of the expansion of the war in Ukraine • Local residents' reluctance to support tourism development • Negative impact of tourism on sensitive natural environments • Effects of climate change (variable weather, occasional drinking water shortages in some areas)

- | | |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training and supporting local entrepreneurs in applying for various green labels and certifications • Expanding the Green Destinations program practice from Tartu city level to the county level | |
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6. Challenges to be addressed with the support of the project

The sustainable tourism development in Tartu County faces several **key challenges**.

- There are **limited transport connections**, with only one regular flight route and poor transport links to Riga.
- The region's **distance from both the capital city of Tallinn and Riga**, combined with its **proximity to Russia**, further complicates accessibility.
- Additionally, **Tartu County lacks international recognition**, and the **tourism services** available in the area **are not consistently high quality or evenly distributed**.
- One significant issue is the **absence of a clear vision for sustainable tourism development at the county level**. Local governments have not come together to align their goals and efforts, and there is limited interest and capacity among local authorities to contribute to tourism development.

The setting of sustainable tourism goals and the planning of activities in Tartu County will be based on the recently completed **South Estonia Tourism Development Strategy 2025-2030**, which focuses on four key principles – sustainability, hospitality, smartness, and collaboration.¹⁹

Sustainability means adapting the tourism sector to the principles of sustainable development. It is a travel experience that reduces the negative impact of tourism on the environment and the community. The broader implementation of sustainability is supported by making it convenient for both visitors and tourism businesses. Sustainability is also supported by the region's good connectivity with key target markets, optimal tourism routes, and easy access to tourism information. Therefore, it is important to invest in improving the accessibility of South Estonia's tourist attractions and services to different societal groups.

Hospitality is an important aspect that influences visitor satisfaction, the reputation of the destination, and helps build a strong tourism product. The tourism cluster focuses on agreeing on good hosting practices and developing hospitality through training.

Smartness involves technology and innovation, as well as using new business models to improve the tourism experience and make it more sustainable. Innovative tourism products help reduce the seasonality of tourism. The focus of the cluster's smartness development includes digital marketing, piloting innovative solutions, and collaborating with educational and research institutions.

Collaboration is the central principle of the strategy, which brings together all regional stakeholders to achieve common goals. Developing tourism in collaboration with various levels (state, other DMOs, local governments, businesses, educational and research institutions, communities, etc.) allows the creation of strong and year-round tourism services, increasing the region's visibility and enhancing the sector's competitiveness.²⁰

According to the South Estonia Tourism Development Strategy, **by 2030, South Estonia will be a well-functioning kaleidoscope in harmony with its unique communities and nature, a place of well-being created together by both large and small actors**. South Estonia will be internationally known as a sustainable and accessible tourist destination, highly valuing responsible tourism services. The development of the sector here will be balanced, offering value to both the community and tourism businesses. In South Estonia, experiential vacation opportunities will be combined with cooperation, knowledge exchange, and remote work solutions to create memorable and diverse experiences for visitors.²¹

¹⁹ South Estonia Tourism Development Strategy 2025-2030, page 19

²⁰ South Estonia Tourism Development Strategy 2025-2030, page 19

²¹ South Estonia Tourism Development Strategy 2025-2030, page 21

The key directions of the South Estonia Tourism Development Strategy are:

DIRECTION	GOAL
Tourism Development	South Estonia's tourism cooperation is open and inclusive, ambitious with a long-term vision, inspiring and supportive, strongly valued, and full of opportunities for all stakeholders.
Cultural Tourism	South Estonia is a recognized cultural tourism destination, with vibrant communities skillfully showcasing its rich heritage and authentic traditions.
Food Tourism	South Estonia offers diverse food experiences based on local ingredients and regional traditions.
Business Tourism	South Estonia is internationally known as a top-tier business tourism destination, with a 25% increase in business clients and conference visitors.
Adventure and Health Tourism	South Estonia is a world-class adventure, sports, and health tourism destination, where active and health-friendly options invite visitors to return to the region repeatedly.
Nature Tourism	South Estonia is an attractive nature tourism destination, offering unique experiences and convenient access year-round to visitors with various nature interests.

In Tartu County, the tourism sector's goals focus on the **development and promotion of sustainable tourism, the development of recreational areas, and the improvement of the quality of tourism products and information.**

By 2030, the goal is to develop and implement sustainable tourism promotion policies in Tartu County, enhance the work of networks, increase the destination's attractiveness for investors, event organizers, and visitors, including increasing the number of off-season visitors. Short distances and good accessibility support local cooperation and community unity. Connections with the world and other destinations in Estonia are very good. The region's cultural life, progressiveness, and environmentally friendly solutions create high value-added jobs, making the city and the county an internationally visible and recognized destination. Tourism businesses implement environmentally friendly principles and have relevant certifications or labels. 10% of foreign visitors to Estonia will reach Tartu, and at least 15% will visit South Estonia.²²

Tartu County focuses on developing its cultural and natural wealth and promoting sustainable and responsible tourism. The development of the tourism sector relies on highlighting local heritage, stories, and uniqueness, as well as cooperation. The principles of sustainable tourism are at the heart of the development of tourism destinations, infrastructure, and services. It is also important to raise environmental awareness among businesses and implement hospitality practices.

²² South Estonia Tourism Development Strategy 2025-2030, page 69

Cultural tourism will be promoted through routes, UNESCO cultural heritage, bringing major events, as well as food and film tourism. At the same time, nature tourism and recreational areas are actively developed, offering visitors opportunities to enjoy the region's unique natural values. Both river shipping and the network associated with the Emajõgi river basin, including tourism packages and services, are being developed. Local food heritage and the Tartu County food network connect the tourism sector, local food producers, and providers. Conference tourism and remote working opportunities play a key role in both the city and the county. Good connections with the world support tourism, so their sustainability must be maintained. Various marketing activities and campaigns will be carried out to increase off-season visits. Tourism information is up-to-date, accessible, and easy to find.²³

²³ South Estonia Tourism Development Strategy 2025-2030, page 69

7. Good practices of the territory

In South Estonia, the leading indicators of sustainable tourism are the city of Tartu and the county of Tartu. In Tartu County and the city of Tartu, **climate-friendly businesses are recognized**, and the region is home to one-third of all **Green Museums** in Estonia: the Estonian National Museum (ERM), the University of Tartu Natural History Museum and Botanical Garden, and the University of Tartu Museum. Tartu holds the internationally recognized **Green Destinations Platinum level**, a title held in Estonia only by Lahemaa National Park in addition to Tartu. Furthermore, there are businesses in the region that are recognized with the **Green Key** eco-label.²⁴



All organizations participating in the European Capital of Culture Tartu 2024 program in South Estonia applied the **guidelines for organizing sustainable events**. In addition to the guidelines, practical recommendations and checklists supported the organizers in implementing sustainable principles.²⁵

The **Tartu bike-sharing system** is a public self-service bike rental system for short trips. There are over 750 bikes and 100 bike racks available for use. Two-thirds of the bikes are electric, providing additional power while pedaling. In addition to Tartu city, bike-sharing has expanded to the municipalities of Kambja, Tartu, and Luunja.²⁶



Photo: Mana Kaasik

During the COVID period, the **Car-Free Avenue** initiative was launched, which made the heavily trafficked Vabaduse Boulevard car-free for several weeks, turning it into a cozy area for leisure and various events. The initiative helped reduce traffic load and noise in the city center and connected the city center with the Emajõgi river and Ülejõe district.²⁷



Biodiverse landscaping in cities helps reduce the ecological footprint of urbanization. It is also important for the mental and physical health of city residents and, of course, provides aesthetic pleasure.

Photo: Mana Kaasik

The "Curated Biodiversity" project is one such initiative, which has brought richer life to the parks and green spaces in Tartu city center, making the city a more pleasant place for plants, insects, animals, and people alike.²⁸

One good example of a well-functioning network based on sustainable principles is the **Onion Road** (Sibulatee). This is a winding destination along the shores of Lake Peipus, home to both Estonians and Russians, and known for its cultural richness. Along the Onion Road, there are various museums and galleries, and visitors can participate in different handicraft workshops and local food preparation classes. In



²⁴ South Estonia Tourism Development Strategy 2025-2030, page 69

²⁵ Guidelines for organising sustainable events: <https://tartu2024.ee/en/guidelines/>

²⁶ Tartu bike share: <https://tartu.ee/en/bike-share>

²⁷ Car-Free Avenue: <https://visittartu.com/2021-green-destinations-top100-tartu-car-free-avenue/>

²⁸ Curated biodiversity: <https://tartu.ee/en/news/biodiversity-growing-tartu-s-city-centre-parks>

addition, one can join folk walks, try to conquer the lake by boat or sail, fish, and explore the area by scooter or sled.²⁹

The goal of the **"Tartumaine Toit"** (Tartu County Food) label is to increase the trust and visibility of local food producers; highlight the uniqueness of local food, its traditions, and innovations; encourage the consumption of local food; and support cooperation between food sector businesses in Tartu County. The label is based on the key principles of the Tartu County food strategy: valuing local raw materials, innovation, collaboration and co-creation, uniqueness, and diversity. The "Tartumaine Toit" label guarantees that the holder values local food from the Tartu region, meets the label's requirements, and operates transparently in line with the label's goals and guiding principles.³⁰



SDG 18 - Viability of Cultural Space

While the UN 2030 Agenda doesn't directly address culture, some cultural principles are highlighted.

Ensuring the viability of Estonia's cultural space is one of the four sustainable development goals in the Estonian Sustainable Development Strategy. This cultural space includes Estonia's natural environment, language, symbols, and cultural heritage. The preservation of the nation relies on cultural mechanisms, such as national-language education, cultural creation, and communication. Cultural products like books, theatre, and film contribute to societal cohesion and continuity.

The goal of **"Viability of Cultural Space"** focuses on ensuring Estonia's sustainability as a nation through culture. Cultural values, principles, and behaviors associated with sustainable development represent social innovation, which can be achieved through culture.³¹

²⁹ The Onion Route: <https://www.sibulatee.ee/en/about-the-onion-route/the-onion-route/>

³⁰ Label "Tartumaine Toit": <https://tas.ee/arendusprojektid/tartumaa-toidupiirkond/tartumaine-toit-margis/>

³¹ Viability of Cultural Space: <https://stat.ee/en/find-statistics/statistics-theme/sustainable-development/18>

8. Conclusions

In South Estonia, the **guiding indicators of sustainable tourism are the city of Tartu and Tartu County**. In Tartu County and the city of Tartu, **climate-friendly businesses are recognized**, there are museums participating in the **Green Museum certification programme**, and several businesses are recognized with the **Green Key** eco-label. In addition, the city of Tartu holds the internationally recognized **Green Destinations Platinum level** for Green Destinations.

Tourism in Tartu and Tartu County is managed by the **Tartu County Tourism Foundation**, which serves as a strategic partner for the regions's municipalities and **the Association of Municipalities of Tartu County and other stakeholders**. To develop tourism in Southern Estonia, the **South Estonia Tourism Cluster** has been launched under the foundation. The region for tourism cluster is covering 5 Southern Estonian counties, all together 20 municipalities. The **South Estonia Tourism Strategy 2025-2030** is launched in 2025. While the development activities in Tartu County's tourism sector are based on the different strategies: **Tartu County Development Strategy 2040** and City of Tartu Development Strategy, both were used for the input for South Estonia Tourism Strategy about Tartu County.

The **main challenge** for sustainable tourism and for tourism in general in Tartu County is the **lack of specific agreements on development goals at the county level**. While there are several tourism-related activities, including sustainable tourism development, in the county's development strategy, the development goals have not been clearly defined. As the Tartu County development Strategy was one of the input documents to gather Tartu County's input for South Estonia Tourism Strategy **it is reasonable to base the efforts on the South Estonia Tourism Development Strategy 2025-2030**, agree on development directions and action plans with local municipalities and other stakeholders, and **make the necessary changes to the Tartu County Development Strategy 2040**.

9. Bibliography

9.1. Documents

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