

Evaluation of study visit to Belarus

Evaluation of study visit to Belarus was done by asking all participants to fill in a questionnaire. The questionnaire is shown below in the shaded frame.

Questionnaire for evaluation of study visit to Belarus

Study tour has been organised within a framework of project 'Strengthening Nordic-Baltic-Russia/Belarus partnership in farming for biodiversity' and took place from June 28, 2010 until – July 1, 2010.

Answers to the first six close-ended questions should to be rated from 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest), whereas the next four open-ended questions encourage comments on the overall topic of the study tour. When rating answer in table, please mark one with 'X'.

		1	2	3	4	5	
1.	Your objectives for participating in the study tour were:						1. - not met; 5. - extremely well met.
2.	The relevancy of places visited in relation to study tour objectives was:						1. - not relevant; 5. - highly relevant.
3.	To what extent do you find study tour topics relevant to topics you working with or to your organisation's goals?						1. - not relevant; 5. - highly relevant.
4.	Were you satisfied with your participation in study tour?						1. - fully unsatisfied; 5. - fully satisfied.
5.	How do you rate the logistics and accommodation of the program?						1. – poor; 5. – excellent.
6.	How familiar was Belarus practice and solutions in farming to you prior to your participation in this study tour?						1. - all new; 5. - very familiar.

7. Environmental technologies and solutions in farming seen during study tour; which was most useful experience for you and why?

8. For your point of view - what are issues for the future cooperation between your organisation and EcoDom and/or Minsk Division of International Association of Ecologists? *(or vice versa for Evgeny – IAE and organisations from other countries)*

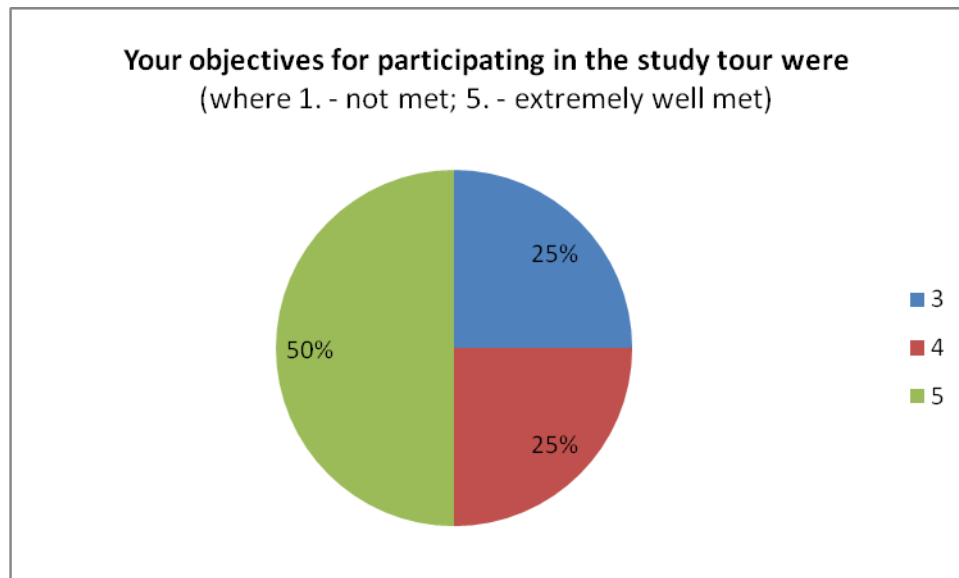
9. Do you consider it useful to continue transferring knowledge and experience between Nordic-Baltic-Belarus countries and to set up NGOs network for further cooperation?

Yes ____; No ____; Comments:

10. Please give any additional comments not covered in the above questions:

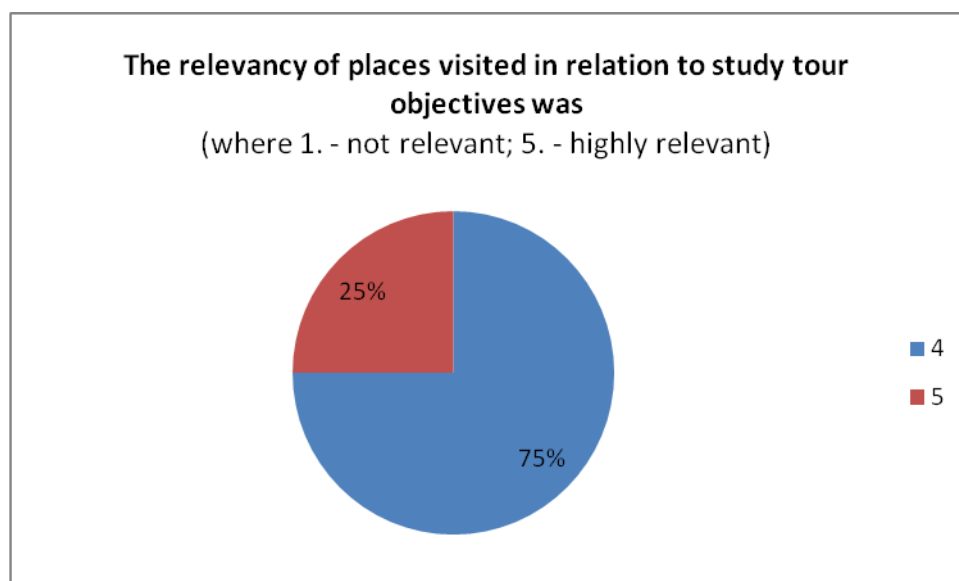
The participants' ratings are depicted in the following charts. In case there are no values indicated for certain ratings (e.g. 1 – lowest, 2 – second lowest, etc.), this means that there were no such values chosen by the participants.

Question 1



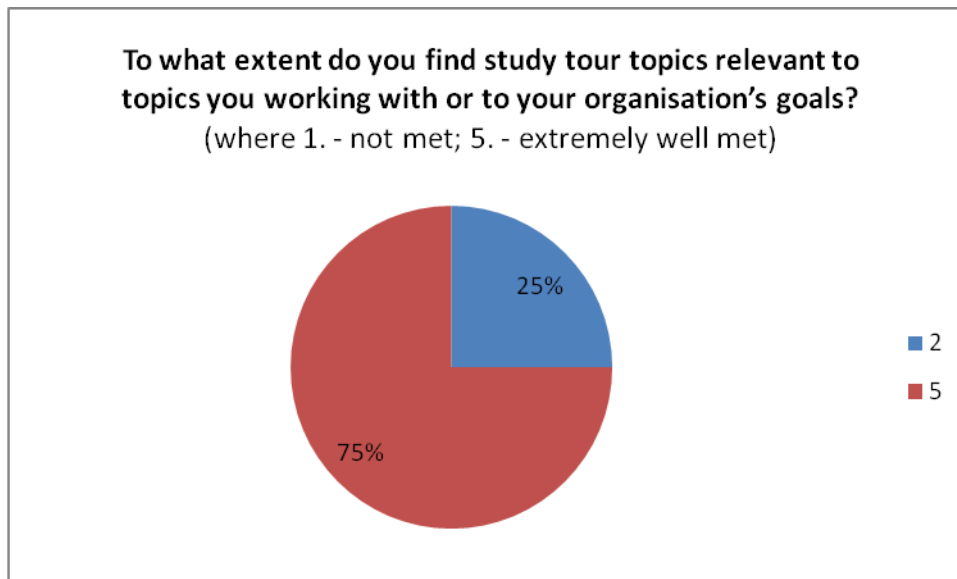
All of the respondents expressed high level of positivity regarding the degree of meeting overall objectives for his/her participation in the study tour as their feedback was categorised as reflecting either highest, second highest or moderate ratings.

Question 2



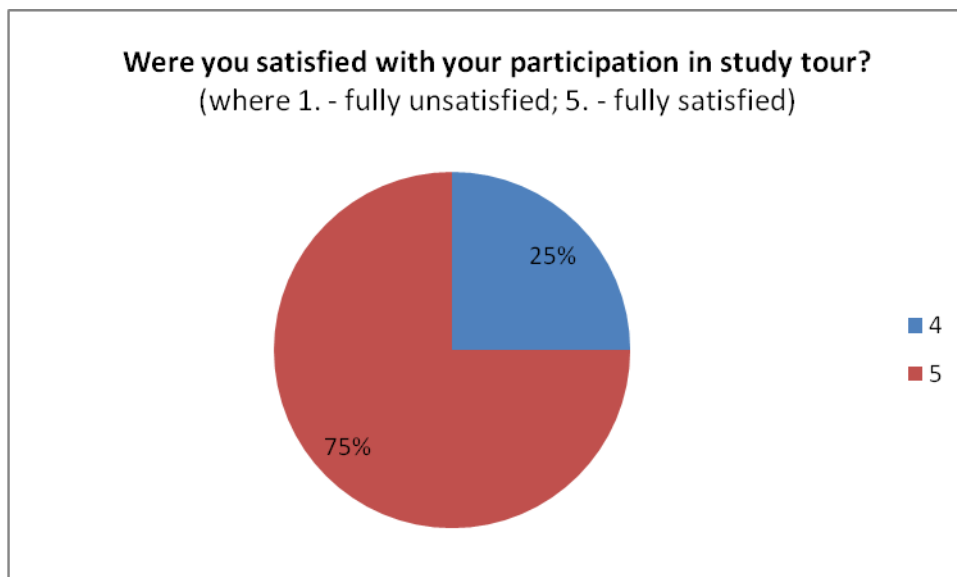
All of the respondents evaluated sites visited as very relevant to study tour objectives as their feedback was categorised as reflecting either highest or second highest ratings.

Question 3



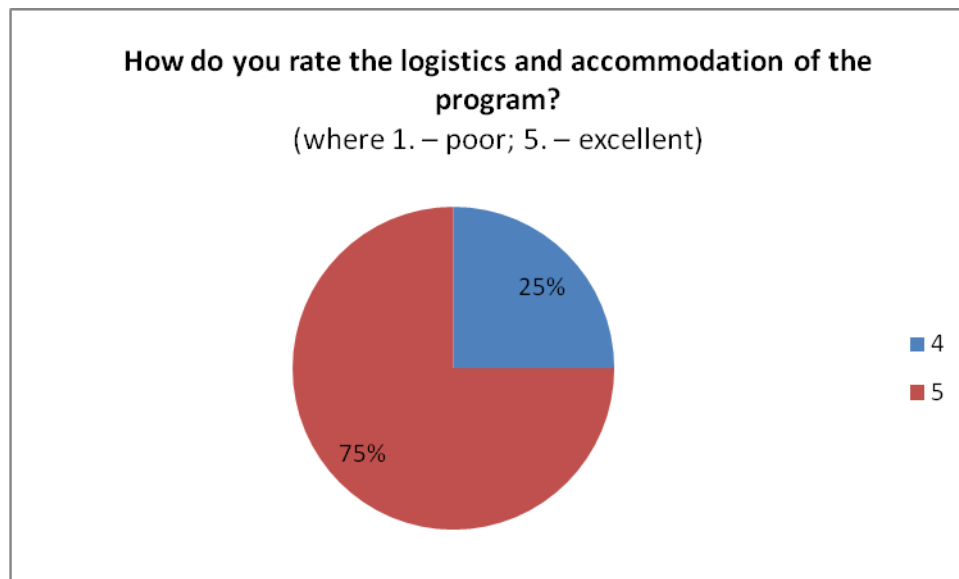
A total of 75% of the respondents evaluated study tour topics as very relevant to topics they work with as their feedback was categorised as reflecting highest ratings. A total of 25% of the respondents evaluated study tour topics as second lowest to topics they work with.

Question 4



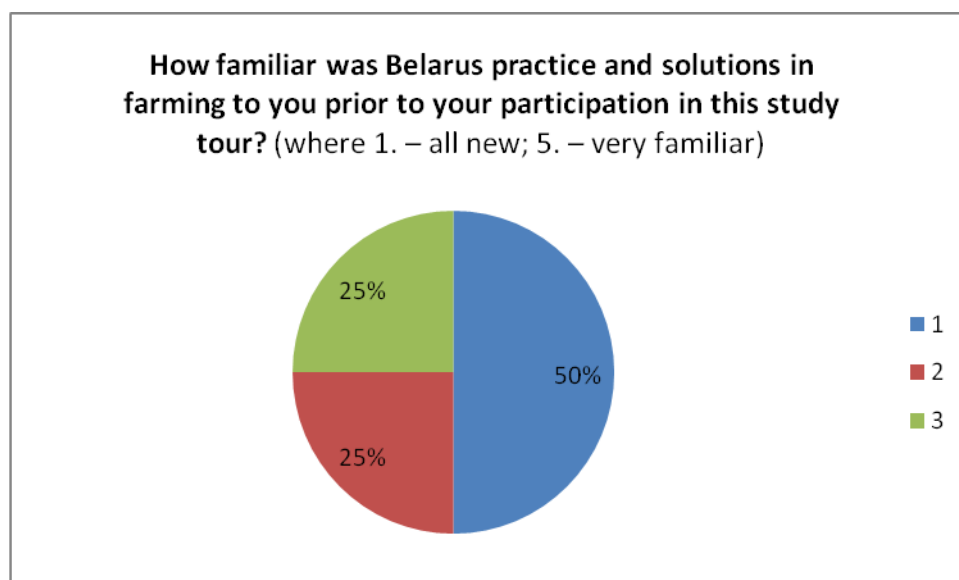
All of the respondents were very satisfied with participation in study tour as their feedback was categorised as reflecting either highest or second highest ratings.

Question 5



All of the respondents expressed high level of positivity regarding the logistics and accommodation of the program as their feedback was categorised as reflecting either highest or second highest ratings.

Question 6



Most of the respondents evaluated their knowledge on Belarus practice and solutions in farming for biodiversity prior to this study tour as rather weak or even as nonexistent.

Question 7

Survey participants were asked – *“Environmental technologies and solutions in farming seen during study tour; which was most useful experience for you and why?”*

The responses given were very positive indicating that demonstrated Belarus solutions in environmental technologies and solutions in farming for biodiversity have provided valuable experience and practical knowledge for participants of study visit. There was a lot of interesting and new information to learn as hosting Belarusian partner-organization is active in construction by using eco-materials as well as in popularization of permaculture idea but these approaches aren't everyday topics for other project partners. Some of key answers and comments are given below:

- I am interested in ecological construction and eco tourism, so these themes were most interesting for me.
- For me most useful experience was to learn about “0” energy houses, understand different environmentally friendly lifestyles.
- Potato under straw, straw-bale and reeds housing: it is a good example of real sustainability and clean natural production with improvement of local rural economy.
- In the short term, the meeting with the organic farm and agro-tourism project (Luchenok) on the 2nd day was the most useful, as it is directly linked to the TRINET project which I am co-coordinating. But the straw bale technology is, I think, possibly more useful in the longer term because it opens up a new way of using straw and hay. Both of these are agricultural ‘waste’ materials for which there is often only low demand in modern farming. If the straw bale building materials are adopted more widely, this will increase demand for straw and hay and so indirectly help extensive farmers.

Question 8

Survey participants were asked – *“For your point of view - what are issues for the future cooperation between your organisation and EcoDom and/or Minsk Division of International Association of Ecologists?”*

Responses given showed high interest of participants of study visit to continue further cooperation with EcoDom and/or Minsk Division of International Association of Ecologists. Further cooperation with Belarusian NGOs at bilateral/multilateral international projects and/or their possible involvement in networks such as TRINET was pointed as way how to make cooperation more effective. Some of key comments are given below:

- Cooperation in reed-roofing with clay, organic agriculture, straw-bale technology transfer.
- As far as TRINET is concerned, future cooperation with both would be of interest in the field of farming, especially farming involving grasslands, and related questions of rural and local community development. Cooperation would be equally interesting in the field of using biomass (such as hay and straw) for new (or renewed) purposes, such as ecological building materials.

How TRINET and EcoDom/IAE work together concretely, would need to be decided together if both sides are indeed interested in collaborating. But I could imagine that study visits from Belarus to TRINET countries, and from TRINET to Belarus, to exchange ideas and learn from each other and identify the areas where collaboration is most useful, would be a good start. Also, TRINET could try to provide the expertise on agro-tourism which was requested by the Luchenok organic farm.

It could also be the case that contacts can be made (outside the TRINET context) based on IAE's straw building technology and organisations in other countries who are interested in it (it is still a rather uncommon technology in the countries I am most familiar with). Already Nimfea (Hungary) has shown interest in what I reported about the straw-bale houses.

Question 9

Survey participants were asked – *“Do you consider it useful to continue transferring knowledge and experience between Nordic-Baltic-Belarus countries and to set up NGOs network for further cooperation?”*

All of the respondents answered that further transferring of knowledge and experience between Nordic-Baltic-Belarus countries would be useful and setting up NGOs network for further cooperation among these countries would be a good tool how to do that. Some of key comments are given below:

- Naturally it is useful. Always people in different countries find different solutions, which can be useful in other countries.
- It is very useful to continue transferring knowledge and experience, it is a very good way how to get new information and practical examples from others countries.
- NGO network is very important.
- Yes, with condition that there is also a link to the wider TRINET network.

Question 10

At the end survey participants were asked to give any additional comments not covered in the above questions. These comments mostly covered acknowledgements to organizers, hosting organizations and colleagues from other project NGOs.

Some of key comments are given below:

- This was my first visit to Belarus and I was quite positively surprised. I see quite good possibilities for cooperation between different NGOs.
- This Belarus study tour for me was very valuable; I got a lot of new information, saw different new things and met very interesting persons.
- What I would have liked, is more information about agriculture in general in Belarus: what sort of agriculture is dominant, what are the trends, how much grassland is there and how is it used, how many organic and extensive farmers there are and what the main elements of national agricultural policy are (Belarus is not an EU state, so this policy would be interesting

comparison). A meeting with a representative of the ministry or of the national farmers' association (if there is one) would have been a way to do this. I would have liked a visit to a 'mainstream' Belarus farm, preferably one which included livestock and grassland, it would have provided a good baseline against which to judge the organic farms we did visit.

- Co-operation is important for IAE and EcoDom, IAE is interested in know-how /technology transfer and East-West co-operation.

Conclusions from evaluation of survey findings

Overall, the study visit was a great success as the comments and feedback obtained from the evaluation survey showed a positive impact on the participants' understanding on environmental technologies, use of hay and straw possibilities, and practices in maintenance of biodiversity in rural areas. Participating in this study visit was useful to study practical issues in construction by using eco-materials and popularization of permaculture; these approaches were rather new topics for other project partners. Results of the survey also show that participants were satisfied with the content and organization of the program.

It should be noted that study visit participants had rather weak preliminary knowledge on Belarus practices and solutions in farming for biodiversity. Survey showed that even very general information on Belarus, its agricultural practices and rural biodiversity is insufficient in other European countries. Some comments under Question 10 and moderate ratings in Question1 confirm the need for more background information (wider overview) while there is relatively poor knowledge on that country. However, relevancy of places visited and relevancy to topics participants are working with were highly evaluated, suggesting good targeting to the study visit aims on best practice case studies. It has been agreed that overview of organic and conventional agriculture in Belarus need to be included as article in project book (*Organic and conventional agriculture in Belarus: a current state and trends*).

From these results and from the discussions we had during the study visit, conclusion is that the participants were able to gain a lot of new information which can be used in further cooperation or applied in participants' own countries, thus securing good example of knowledge transfer.