Title of the Story: Kihnu - unique and authentic

Destination Name: (include any state, province, or region)

Pärnu County
Country: Estonia

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Nomination Category: (Please check the boxes that indicate the focus of your story)

- Localizing the destination supply chain
- Decarbonizing the destination supply chain
- Culture & Communities
- Environment & Climate
- Nature & Ecotourism
- Tourism Reset & Recovery

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Address each aspect of your good practice story in the different sections being specific, including relevant quantitative and qualitative information.

Issues faced
Considering the specifics of Estonia, the viability of the Kihnu cultural space as a separate goal is both inevitable and justified. The main challenge was to ensure the viability of the Kihnu culture and the growth of community well-being by creating experiential consumption of traditional culture as a more modern form of ethnic identity for a larger consumer population over a longer period of time, without losing the community way of life and changing local characteristics.

From the point of view of the survival of Kihnu traditional culture and the viability of the cultural space, a significant obstacle is a small community, the lack of jobs, the lack of labor force, and, as a result, the growing emigration. For economic reasons, it is difficult to attract Kihnu people with higher education back to the island. The tourism industry is developing rapidly, but its seasonality is a big problem.

Not all locals understand the value of traditional culture, so the traditional way of life is disappearing. Handicraft skills are declining, and few farm animals are kept, fishing as a livelihood is declining, fishing nets are no longer repaired, traditional Kihnu weddings are rarely held, runic songs are not sung, the number of speakers of the Kihnu language is declining. Due to the lack of young people, there is often no one to whom to pass on old craft skills, so the skills of old masters can be lost. There is a danger of going down the path of easier resistance, which will lead to the commercialization of handicrafts; for example, cheaper materials and semi-synthetic yarns and sloppy work methods will be used. The old folk song is receding from everyday use.

Instead of nature and cultural tourists, the island is visited by too large an aimless mass of tourists. In addition, some of Kihnu’s weaknesses stem from its insularity, including its winter dependence on transport options.

Kihnu culture as a way of living has evolved over the centuries from the mutual shaping of man and nature, in which one participates with symbols, beliefs, and linguistic constructions. Territorial closure, scarcity of resources, and remoteness from the mainland have not facilitated migration or the creation of heritage narratives influenced by the external environment related to consumer culture. The survival of identity (cultural cohesion) has always been ensured through the transmission of values, traditions, patterns of behavior, and lifestyle elements from one generation to the next. This is also the case in today’s consumer culture context, where globalization has created a lot of unified and monotone cultures with
the aim of generating income. As values are relative and context-dependent, it is necessary to perceive the social background around them in order to understand them. The biggest challenge has been to create an experience-based consumption of traditional culture as a more modern form of ethnic identity without changing the community way of life for a much larger consumer population. The aim is to create a solid system for mediating the Kihnu culture, to experience authentic local life and nuances. The precondition for the survival of cultural space is that the benefits of the goals are enjoyed by the vast majority of the community, and all members of society participate in the creation of benefits in an affordable way and also partake in the creation/production in a fair process. A cohesive society contains enough creativity and innovation, which also creates enough motivation for the younger generation to realize themselves in Kihnu. From the point of view of the sustainability of Kihnu culture, the awareness and wide availability of Kihnu culture both in Estonia and its spread outside Estonia are also important. The main mechanisms for achieving the goals here are the social inclusion of the community, public-private sector cooperation, and a strong civil society. A good example is a development of the concept of the cultural elements and cultural values of Kihnu and the more effective integration of heritage culture into the service economy through intangible consumption without losing its local character.

**Methods, Steps, and Tools Applied**

The cultural identity of Kihnu, in which culture organizes and orients itself through certain values, is a set that is acquired through a communal way of life from the ground up. The best way to maintain the viability of a cultural system and set is through social cohesion, the ability of cultural memory to link past experience to the future, and the ability of culture to innovate, through which key issues in the world are understood. In order to protect, preserve and revive the Kihnu cultural space, the Kihnu Cultural Space Foundation (KCSF) was established in 2018. Foundation KCSF cooperates with Kihnu municipality subdivisions (Museum, school, community center) and other Kihnu cultural development organizations (Kihnu Cultural Institute Foundation, Kihnu Marine Society, etc.). At the same time, the foundation is an intermediary between the enthusiasts from outside of Kihnu (journalists, filmmakers, students, etc.) and the community.

The people of Kihnu think that speaking their language and community spirit have fostered mutual understanding and a sense of belonging, which has made them hold onto and value everything that no one else has. One’s own language is not only a means of communication but a cornerstone of culture, mindset, thinking, and beliefs. It is conscious behavior that cultivates a certain lifestyle. People of Kihnu wear their folk costumes with pride, adhere to folk calendar anniversaries, speak their dialect, follow the cycle of the weekdays in their daily activities, and receive help and support from the phases of the moon as ancient wisdom. Not only the older generation, but the whole youth know their songs and dances. Tiny toddlers of Kihnu dance at parties with their mother or grandmother from a very early age and learn to dance this way. The preservation of dance skills is supported by the fact that Kihnu dance and singing are in the curriculum of Kihnu School, and the popular folklore ensemble Kihnumua
where old and young people dance together is very active. The joint circle dance, which is important for the preservation of Kihnu’s traditional culture, is completely unique in the world. Kihnu wedding customs are a unique cultural event. The wedding can rightly be considered one of the cornerstones of Kihnu's traditional culture, which has helped to preserve traditions, craftsmanship, and joint community events. The ancient cultural phenomenon that has survived to the present day is like a ritual in which customs, dances, songs, and women's handicrafts are performed. The school's curriculum includes Kihnu language lessons, and a number of Kihnu-language publications have been published, such as Aabits (A-B-C Book) and Lugemik (Reader) in Kihnu language, as well as an extensive Kihnu language dictionary, and Kihnu-language news can be listened to on Vikerraadio once a week.

In addition to the existing methods of maintaining the viability of the cultural system and set of Kihnu, purposeful community involvement has helped to broaden the concept of community well-being as well as to mediate more effectively integrating traditional culture into the service economy through intangible consumption. With the support of the community, various opportunities have been created to experience the traditional culture of Kihnu. The most popular of these is the three-day festival Kihnu Sea Party and the Café Day, which has been given the humorous name Kihnu Keretäus (Kihnu Bellyful). However, Kihnu songs and dances are also performed at modern parties, local food is held in great honor, and local handicrafts are appreciated at the fairs. Folklore concerts organized for tourists provide an opportunity to perform, get together and stay vigorous.

A unique new event is a knitting festival, where people get together and teach and learn to knit. After all, a Kihnu woman does not keep her diverse skills secret - she is sure to share them with others. Valuable hardware and real ware are the old women and men of Kihnu, who pass on craft skills to younger generations.

The Kihnu Museum, located in the middle of the island, is the substantial center - the museum contains everything that Kihnu culture consists of handicrafts, the Kihnu language, song, and dance. It is possible to order workshops, where you can learn how to weave ribbons, sew Kihnu calico jackets, make jewelry, weave on looms, knit netting, card wool. The center of the traditional culture of the community is the Metsmaa Traditional Farm, where you can become acquainted with farm architecture, Kihnu animals and agriculture, and participate in workshops related to traditional culture.

For the best experience of the natural environment, bicycles are the preferred way for moving around in a more environmentally friendly way.

In order to increase the efficiency of traffic between Kihnu and the mainland, the renovations of the ports have been completed in cooperation with the Estonian state, which will make it possible to receive and serve considerably more passengers than before. The ferry traffic
through the new ferry has also been renewed, the higher ice-class of which allows for year-round transfers and the capacity of 200 people instead of the current 100 people. Year-round ferry traffic also allows for extending the tourist season.

**Key success factors**

Jointly created long-term goals, effective communication, reassessment of things and situations, a clearly defined vision, jointly developed societal developments, and participation in the creation and consumption of values are key factors in maintaining the viability of Kihnu as a holistic cultural system and set and mediating it in the context of tourism geography. Together, a substantive development plan was drawn up, which, together with relevant metrics, is a key factor in the daily organization of life, with which to maintain the viability of the cultural system also in change-oriented processes.

In tourism geography, the key factors in mediating culture are the environment, time, and in-depth approach, in order to avail experiencing the culture, make sense of it, and give it meaning on one's personal level of consciousness. Conscious cultivation of cultural heritage in Kihnu and collective identity as an experience of living ethnic self-consciousness is an intangible consumption practice that provides experience and emotion. The various events and happenings allowing for the experience of Kihnu's heritage culture, created with the support of the community, help to increase Kihnu tourism as well as the income of local residents, which in turn motivates and encourages the community to recreate its culture more firmly. The inclusion of the Kihnu Cultural Space in the UNESCO list of Masterpieces of Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity in November 2003 and five years later on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity brought significant recognition to the community.

The Kihnu Cultural Space Foundation, the creation of which provided opportunities to apply for funding through the European Union structural funds for the development of objects and international cooperation, helped to address the problem of recent years. The targeted and clear development plans of the Kihnu Cultural Space Foundation supported the setting of state priorities in supporting the Kihnu Cultural Space.

**Lessons learned**

The scarcity of resources and the need to increase prosperity are some of the biggest challenges in every field. In a rising economy, this leads not only to a slowdown in welfare growth but also to difficult social side effects. However, low capacity for material well-being can lead to the degradation of the cultural environment. At the same time, the people of Kihnu have always dreamed of working on their home island. Therefore, it was especially important to specifically contribute to the development of the concept of well-being and the creation and consumption of so-called intangible services. It was also an important area for cooperation between the media, the third sector, and the state. Social inclusion, action plan, and communication are effective activities in developing the concept of well-being. The
phased development plan, awareness of strengths and weaknesses, and mapping of management capabilities helped to visualize longer-term goals and enhance the integration of heritage culture in the creation of intangible consumption services. The gradual creation of success experiences through new services and external recognition gave the community the confidence to move towards the set goals because the processes of the cultural space aimed at positive growth also support the achievement of all other goals.

Results, achievements, and recognitions
The result is the Kihnu Cultural Space Foundation, established in 2018 to protect, preserve and revitalize the Kihnu Cultural Space. Foundation KCSF cooperates with Kihnu municipality subdivisions (Museum, school, community center) and other Kihnu cultural development organizations (Kihnu Cultural Institute Foundation, Kihnu Marine Society, etc.). In 2020, the Kihnu Cultural Space Foundation was recognized as the non-governmental organization of the year by Pärnu County for preserving, restoring, and developing spiritual and material tradition in the most authentic form possible (https://parnumaa.ee/uudised/parnumaa-tegijad/?fbclid=IwAR3w0PFvMitkBE5S5DIWj43MxoSWmwPk4R7KCahaVjyQN3b35GuGU8fh9E).

A systematic and phased development plan has been created for the preservation, restoration, and development of spiritual and material traditions with the involvement of the community (http://www.kultuuriruum.ee/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/KKR-arengukava-2019-2025.pdf).

The number of visits to Kihnu has increased, which in turn has been input in compiling the tourism development plan of Kihnu municipality (https://kihnukovtp.ee/documents/5492060/13386004/lisa1.pdf/d92f05cd-6597-4e92-bfa2-a8a0472ae787).

In 2018, a study - EVALUATION OF KIHNU TOURIST AND SOCIAL EFFICIENCY was commissioned, which was input in integrating a more efficient heritage culture into the service economy through intangible consumption (https://kihnukovtp.ee/documents/5492060/13386004/Kihnu+-+Turistliku+koormustaluvuse+uuring.pdf/e4e09c72-1609-4644-a880-24d27263f363).

Additional references
Articles on the sustainability of Kihnu culture:

https://dea.digar.ee/cgi-bin/dea?a=d&d=kihnuleht20191101.2.7


Coverage of Kihnu culture in foreign media:
https://theculturetrip.com/europe/estonia/articles/6-traditions-unique-to-the-kihnu-where-women-rule/


https://hearitfromlocals.com/2020/03/03/kihnu-island-estonia/

https://www.documentarytube.com/articles/kihnu-in-estonia-is-the-only-island-in-the-world-where-women-have-absolute-power


https://www.researchgate.net/publication/330489507_Altered_ontologies_of_the_seascape_Local_knowledge_environmental_change_and_conservation_in_Kihnu_Estonia

News about the arrival of a new ferry between Kihnu and the mainland:

Kihnu Cultural Institute - systematic strengthening of the influence of Kihnu culture and language; scientific research of Kihnu culture and editing of Kihnu-related publications, teaching aids, radio, and television programs: http://www.kihnuinstituut.ee/index.php

Youtube:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3q5rO_ijlN0
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aY5PuVjxAM4