

**Project entry for IAPH 2023 Sustainability Awards**

## **Virtual Maritime Museum and Heritage**

**Freeport of Riga Authority Project**

### **Alignment with WPSP Themes**

#### Theme 1: Digitalization

Our project aligns with WPSP's Digitalization theme through our innovative digital application - the virtual museum tour. This novel initiative enhances port management by not only preserving our maritime history but also making it readily accessible to anyone, anytime, and anywhere. By doing so, we've effectively created a digital "Port Information and Training Centre," embodying one of the key potential topics under this theme.

#### Theme 2: Community Building

The project aligns with the Community Building theme as it operates as an "Open Port Initiative" and a "Community and Social Engagement Program." By digitizing and publicizing the museum and significant maritime locations, we've provided a valuable educational resource for the public and maritime students alike. Furthermore, our partnerships with various institutions have promoted transparency, integrity, and stakeholder engagement, key potential topics under this theme.

### **I. Project Background and Vision**

Our journey began within the modest walls of a small museum located within the Freeport of Riga Authority headquarters. This unassuming space held a vast collection of maritime artifacts and literature, tracing back to several centuries of Latvian history. Sadly, its limited access means these treasures lay in obscurity, seen only by our employees and official visitors. It was the recognition of this issue that sparked the inception of the Virtual Maritime Museum project in 2019.

The primary vision of this endeavor was to leverage technology's power to broaden access to our unique maritime heritage. It also aimed to create a potent educational tool and address historical information accessibility issues stemming from the USSR era.

## **II. Phased Execution and Challenges Overcome**

In June 2020, following a thorough and fair public procurement process, we have initiated the project. The first stage, completed in 2021, has resulted in the digitalization of our improvised maritime classroom-turned-museum and the Icebreaker Varma, a marvel of our maritime fleet.

Subsequently, we have expanded our scope to include five lighthouses, symbols of Latvia's seafaring legacy. The digitalization of these lighthouses, including Kolkas and Irbes situated in open waters, has presented a significant challenge due to their remote locations and government restrictions on public access. However, we have succeeded in this task, showcasing our team's determination and problem-solving capabilities.

## **III. Technological and Accessibility Advancements**

A significant aspect of our project is its innovative application of technology. We have incorporated a variety of multimedia enhancements to offer users an immersive and engaging experience. The 3D models of historical objects, panoramic aerial and ground 360 photos, and compatibility with VR devices create a multi-dimensional tour that goes beyond static visuals. Moreover, we've integrated narration throughout the tour, ensuring it is accessible to individuals with sight disabilities, underlining our commitment to inclusivity.

## **IV. Cultural Resurgence and Digital Preservation**

A key achievement of our project is the revival and digital preservation of Latvia's maritime heritage, both tangible and intangible. The virtual museum presents a unique narrative of Latvia's maritime history, marred by the USSR's military utilization of lighthouses and subsequent information censorship. The digital format has allowed us to reintroduce these historic lighthouses to the public, enabling them to appreciate previously unseen facets of our cultural legacy.

Further enriching the cultural experience, we incorporated spoken testimonies from veterans of the maritime industry, highlighting their lived experiences and giving voice to the human aspect of our maritime history. Digitization and publication of historical documents, videos, and photos have resulted in a comprehensive visual chronicle spanning from the 13th Century to the present day.

## **V. Collaborative Partnerships and Expertise**

Throughout this initiative, we have collaborated with esteemed institutions like the University of Latvia, the Museum of the History of Riga and Navigation, and the National Archive of Latvia. These

partnerships have provided us access to rare and invaluable materials and facilitated expert validation of our content. Furthermore, they have enhanced the project's credibility and public perception.

## **VI. Enhancing Maritime Education**

Our project has proven to be an invaluable educational resource. It provides maritime students with a realistic understanding of ship layouts, including details about the bridge, engine room, cabins, galleys, and cargo holds. The interactive elements offer insights into operating various equipment onboard a ship, thus preparing students for practical realities in a safe, accessible, and cost-effective manner.

## **VII. Impact and Reception**

Our project has received substantial recognition and acclaim from the maritime educational sector, notably the Latvian Maritime Academy and Maritime Administration of Latvia. Our robust communication strategy has ensured substantial media coverage, yielding significant engagement across news media, social media, and print platforms. The project's launch has seen numerous mentions in various media channels and record-breaking engagement rates on the Freeport of Riga's Facebook account.

Our web analytics data from August 2021 to May 2023 indicates a strong user engagement with the digital tour, reinforcing its popularity and effectiveness as an informative and educational resource.

Despite our achievements to date, we are not resting on our laurels. We are committed to expanding the digital tour further, including digitalizing more historical materials and incorporating an exhibition from Latvia's first maritime school into the tour.

In conclusion, the Freeport of Riga Virtual Maritime Museum and Heritage Project exemplifies the principles of the Sustainability Awards, demonstrating innovation, accessibility, and a commitment to preserving cultural heritage through sustainable means. We believe our project, driven by the ethos of inclusive knowledge dissemination and historical preservation, makes us worthy contenders for this prestigious award.