SDG 1: NO POVERTY

Amanda Grase, Founder of the association "Labdarības Lapa" [Charity Site]

Amanda has always been helping others, however, the idea about "Charity Site" emerged when Amanda's kids were born. A big amount of toys and other things which quickly became unnecessary appeared. Some of them were given away to relatives and friends, but she had to figure out where the other children's stuff could be utilised. While various options were explored, a certain charity organisation asked people to donate unnecessary items. Amanda chose to be more actively involved in this and asked for the contacts of the particular family because she wanted to know what else would be needed for the family. When the needs were identified, Amanda sent everything that was needed to the family by a courier. The next family appeared soon, following by another one. There was a moment when it became difficult to directly involve friends in providing assistance via direct contacts, therefore a group was created on Facebook in 2014. On the very first day the group got more than 1000 followers and Amanda understood the true importance of a movement where she was involved. Soon after starting the initiative, Amanda was awarded the prize "Pride of Latvia".

Several other members who had proven themselves as trustworthy and motivated volunteers have joined Amanda's team and there are approximately 10 volunteers in the team now. The volume of donations has increased so rapidly that at present "Charity Site" has access to a warehouse for sorting donated items. The possibility of using these premises free of charge is a huge support from people who think along the same lines. "Charity Site" cooperates with other organisations having similar goals, there is also active cooperation with social services. Amanda admits that a large part of the work that "Charity Site" does is there just because of the lack of competence in social services. The families with whom the association works are often misled as to what assistance would be available to them.

"Charity Site" regularly organises "Days of Joy" when children from rural regions are brought to Riga for an excursion, various opportunities in the city are presented, famous people are invited for meetings and they share their life stories and encourage children to strive to attain their goals despite difficulties. Amanda want to create a centre where families could come and receive all the necessary assistance, staring from legal advice and including a psychologist's assistance.

Amanda admits that it is more difficult to break out from the routine for people in rural regions. These people just need minor assistance because simple skills, like writing one's CV, can improve life for many. Although "Charity Site" is often criticised for "providing the fish", Amanda thinks that people who have had "the fishing gear since their childhood" cannot understand the situation when one cannot afford buying shoes or food for his child. Also the question about possibilities and accessibility is among primary issues. While in Riga there are many second hand shops, the situation is quite contrary in rural areas.

The biggest joy for Amanda is that three families who used to ask for assistance from the association and now admit that these couple of physical items were needed to get their lives "moving". Often these families start donating stuff or working as volunteers over time.

Amanda: "Charity is also work and when you have done it for a long time, you would like to receive something in return, or you would be exhausted and break down."

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SDG 2: ZERO HUNGER

Antra Zeiliņa, Head of "Ķiploku Pasaule" [World of Garlic]

"World of Garlic" immediately causes the wish to return there again. In just a couple of minutes after arriving Antra has served the broadest variety of home-made products of which the garlic-raspberry jam, garlic-honey sugar-plums and cold garlic tea seem to be most unusual. The farm has been welcoming visitors for the third year. They have been selling garlic products for seven years. In the beginning Antra did it alone from her home, however now her husband has got fully involved and sometimes the whole family is helping.

Antra's family has always liked garlic. As the crisis hit the family and Antra lost her job, the contribution provided to the family by garlic has considerably changed. For Antra it was clear at once that in future she would work only for herself. All the rest came step by step because when the idea was born they did not even have their own land. Neighbours helped. In the course of studying the market, Antra gained assurance that there would be place for garlic there because at that time it was close to impossible to find Latvian garlic. She decided that she would both grow garlic and also create added value by processing it.

During seven years of operation, "World of Garlic" has created approximately 15 different products and there are ideas about new ones. At present the farm has active operations on 6 hectares of land and 0.5 hectares are used for growing garlic. At "World of Garlic" everything is hand-made. Several people work for a week in order to harvest garlic. This produces high added value which is not always adequately evaluated by the domestic market.

In the beginning Antra has used the financing of the European Funds for repairing the kitchen, however, all the next steps have been funded by the family, or all the company profit is invested in the company. Antra is thankful to the Rural Consultation Office because it has suggested operating in the area of rural tourism and has invited to participate in various trainings. Antra also admits that Jelgava, Ozolnieki and Olaine local governments have contributed their share to the success formula of the company because they have been very accommodating and interested in development of the company.

Antra sees "World of Garlic" as a good example of self-sufficiency and sustainability and says that more support on the state level would be needed for starting such farms. Then we should not be speaking so much about hunger and asking for help in a crisis situation, which is so uncharacteristic of Latvians. "World of Garlic" has been lucky in this respect, however, this growth would not be possible without the starting capital. Now the farm has been providing vegetables to both the family, the business and also bees which are kept there for some time. It is important to mention that the farm would have no chance of being profitable if it was just growing vegetables on this area of land and selling them at the market price without producing added value. Imagination and creativity plays a very important role in small scale farms in Latvia today.

"I usually say that a product group can be created by using any vegetable. Everything is possible, a creative approach is needed. Then it can be a carrot, a pumpkin or anything."

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2 ZERO HUNGER
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SDG 3: GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

Linda Zvaune, neurologist, manages "Dzīvopiedzīvo"

Linda Zvaune is a neurologist that works in Jūrmala. This story starts here, in the hospital where this woman works on a daily basis. As a neurologist, Linda sees people wrecked by terrible mental diseases every day, from alcoholism to burning out syndrome, from psychosomatic illnesses to depression, and every single day she does what she can to cure and help them get out from the hell they live in their minds.

One day Linda found herself in an event on healthy lifestyle and physical activities organized by Ķekava's municipality. Linda was used to participating to this kind of events, as a doctor she knows how important physical activities are in maintaining the body in shape and prevent many illnesses. But that day of two years ago, during that event, something different from the usual got her attention striking a chord in her head. The message that was transmitted at that event was surely useful, good and positive for people, but she felt like something was missing. Like many other similar events she had attended, the healthy life model that was suggested was solely focused on physical wellbeing, reach through physical activity, and there was no room for the mind.

And so Linda realized a fundamental message was missing: doing physical activity is important for health, but it is just as important to train the brain! Conducting a healthy lifestyle means training the mind as much as the body. Linda knows that maintaining the mind busy and in shape is paramount to prevent destructive mental pathologies that can't be prevented through sport. So, on that day, Linda felt she had the duty to fill that empty space and to devote it to the care of the mind as a healthy lifestyle to prevent mental diseases. And who better than her could send that message to the people?

And so it was that on April 17th 2016 Linda starts "Dzivopiedzivo", and after a month she fills the empty spot in that same event in Ķekava with her stand: "The physical shape of the brain".

After that little local event Linda realizes that she wanted to organize something bigger, that could reach many more people. Thus, with great strength and willfulness, Linda makes a call to her friends and colleagues and, with their help, this year she managed to put on a stand in one of the most popular festivals in Latvia, the LAMPA festival in Cesis.

"Live your life as an adventure, better safe than sorry!"

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3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

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SDG 4: QUALITY EDUCATION

Alina Karpeļceva, Riga Tech Girls

Alina Karpeļceva is a Latvian girl who's always been animated by a strong passion. Now, many of you are probably thinking: what could this girl's passion possibly be? Maybe dancing? Painting? Or sewing? And how about cooking?!

I'm sorry… you got it wrong. This sweet girl is nothing less than a little tech genius! That's right, Alina is a web developer, unusual job for a woman, but not for her, for her the fact that only few women work in the tech industry is just absurd, a waste of talent. Unfortunately, though, we live in a society where stereotypes that see women confined to certain kind of jobs are still very strong, and this needs to be eradicated. And we can firmly say that this girl is really fighting for this cause. In fact, in 2016, Alina became one of the founders of Riga Tech Girls. This organization is the first community in Latvia dedicated to educating and inspiring girls and women about technology. The idea behind RTG was born in November of 2015, in a tech meeting in Riga, where between the participants there were some women presenting their success stories. In that same event Laurel Freyja, an American woman, found herself hearing some silly comments made by some men that perfectly embodied the stereotypes on women's skills in the IT fields. Maybe, with hindsight, we should thank them, because that was the fuse that lit the desire in that woman to show how wrong they were. And so Latvian women's technological revolution started!

The organization promotes two kinds of events: workshops, where basic coding and IT skills are taught to participants; and meetups, where women that work in the tech industry are invited to tell their success stories, and by sharing their experience they become a source of inspiration for other women.

Today, there are a lot of stories of women that found a job or developed a career in IT thanks to Riga Tech Girls; one of the most inspiring is certainly the one of a doctor that after attending several workshops decided to start her own virtual reality start-up to help autistic children. But this is just of the many stories that make Alina proud, this is the kind of change that motivates her to keep educating lots of women around the country, with the hope that one day women in tech will be the rule, and not the exception.


4 QUALITY EDUCATION
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SDG 5: GENDER EQUALITY

Elīna Kļaviņa, Head of the Association "Tēvi"[Fathers]

The main mission of the association is to take care of returning fathers to the family and child raising which reduces violence against women and improves fathers' health and welfare.

In year 2014 the centre "Dardedze" contacted the head of the media agency "Inspired" Kārlis. At that time Dardedze was implementing a project on groups of fathers envisaging a broad social campaign in mass media. Kārlis liked the idea very much and wanted to support it on long-term basis. The project manager Elīna was employed and has been working only on the projects of the association since then. The first campaign of the team was "To be a father – it is art". Following a successful project implementation the idea of founding an association for supporting families "Fathers" was born. The association is on its way to become a social company because it offers also services for a fee, like groups of fathers and lectures on topics related to children.

The association has completed two studies on the father's role from the anthropological point of view – the first study described how the society views the father's role in the family and the second study was focused on divorced fathers and attracted men in particular. Elīna points out that this is an example that equality is a concept important not only for feminists, but every person.

In the result of the studies anthropologists developed the family cognitive system. The system creates the perception about the image of the family in Latvia – there is a core of the family consisting of the mother and children and there are "free agents", i.e. fathers floating around and some of them help mothers: "I help my wife by taking the child to the kindergarten", or "I help my wife by taking care of the child while she takes shower". This split of roles changes and the role of taking care of children is split equally increasingly often, however, the society still considers that the mother will always be closer to the child.

In Latvia there is the highest mortality rate of new-borns and mothers in Europe – there are studies that it correlates with the fathers' involvement in the process of raising children. If the father does not participate in raising a child, 100% of responsibility rests on the mother and the woman does not have time and energy to take care of herself. If the father is active in the family he helps to take care of the mother's health and wellbeing, moreover, higher father's involvement improves the child's wellbeing and confidence. American studies indicate that participation in the process of delivery and raising a baby improves fathers' health and reduces involvement in crime, as people become more sensitive and understand the baby's wishes.

The differences are biggest between the West and East cultures, for example, the Islamic culture where the child is more important for a man and the mother just serves as an "incubator", while in our countries the father serves as a "donor" and a child is closer to the mother. In Nordic countries there is a visible progress in equalising these roles, while in Latvia there is still a prevailing myth regarding the mother's instinct. The special relationship does exist, however, it is hardly related to the instinct, according to Elīna's explanation.

The association "Fathers" operates as a part of the international "Mancare" program by promoting involvement of men and equal distribution of duties within the family. The association also supports couples of the same gender and the possibility of adopting children by them.

Elīna: "There was an age or a personal condition when you know what is correct. After these four years I definitely know that I don't know what is correct."

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SDG 6: CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION

Elīna Kolāte, Pasaules dabas fonds

Elina Kolate is a graduate in Environmental Science at the University of Latvia. Working as a freelancer and thus being able to organize her time as she pleased while also earning a satisfactory salary, she knew that she would only have accepted a full-time job for something that she really felt interested in. So it was, about three years ago, that she received an email from a colleague, who was working at the Hydro-ecology Institute of Latvia, saying that they were looking for a manager of the Baltic Sea and Fresh Water Program. She didn't know this project, but after doing some research she understood that it was just the kind of job for which she would have conceded a change in her working life, and so she accepted the proposal.

The Baltic Sea and Fresh Water Program is part of WWF Latvia, and it works in close cooperation with all the countries bordering the Baltic Sea. One of the biggest problems they are dealing with is the phenomenon of the algal bloom. This is a plague caused by excessive use of fertilizers in agriculture, which stimulates an extreme proliferation of algae, ultimately contaminating the waters and in the worst cases making them toxic for absence of oxygen. Understandably this is a very serious problem, and even though it still hasn't affected the water coming from rivers that 50% of Latvian use for drinking, the peril is that this scenario could be nearer than expected. In fact, this is something that is currently happening in Poland, a neighboring country, which is worrying. Solving this problem is a real challenge because nobody really knows how to do it, the technology is just not advanced enough to face such a threat on a large scale – in other words, better safe than sorry.

Elina's job is to create and share knowledge and awareness about this kind of topics, through constant work on research, spreading of information, and lobbying. People think the ministry that mostly deals with environmental issues is the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development: this is not true. The ministry that has more power and resources in this sector is the Ministry of Agriculture. Unfortunately, though, the dialogue with them is almost non-existent. Apparently, they have no consideration whatsoever about civil society and environmental protection, they still seem to be living in the Soviet era, and they have no intention of working with them. This is the main obstacle in Elina's work towards the protection of fresh water reserves, since changing agricultural practices is the only way to really solve this problem.

"I think that this is the best way to convince politicians, they are not afraid of us, but they are afraid of the fact that people could not vote for them, so if we manage to convince society, then we will manage to also convince them"

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SDG 7: AFFORDIBLE AND CLEAN ENERGY

Līga and Thomas Krugers, Heads of the association "To Smiltene and Latvia"

Upon arriving to the homestead "Lejas Varicēni" it is hard to see that this is just an evening of a business days as the birthday celebration and dancing is going on at a full swing. Līga says that moving to Smiltene district was a simple decision because the family with children wanted to live closer to the nature. Thomas is a power engineer and Līga is a teacher. Soon enough the couple understood that they were not fit to be farmers, however, at the same time it was clear that the farm had to produce added value. The inspiration came after Thomas' visit to Italy where he gained knowledge about the basis of permaculture in the Ecovillage Design Court (EDC). Growing potatoes serves as a clear example. During the first year they both tried to accomplish this by using a plough and their own hands - both Līga and Thomas got spine injuries in the process and promised to themselves that they would never do this again. Now potatoes are grown under straw by using a small share of the effort needed before. Chicken, goats, pigs gradually appeared in the farm and all this together has started forming a logical system.

A lot of help in developing the farm was provided by volunteers from various communities, and gradually the farm has got established as a training place where young people can learn alternative ways of living in the countryside and be self-sustained. A recent training course has been about building hobbit houses. This type of construction consists only of materials found in the vicinity of a farm – beams from a dismantled shed, clay, stone and straw.

Līga reveals that a rocket stove became popular in Latvia thanks to Thomas. In a rocket stove firewood is burnt twice – wood in the beginning followed by flue gas producing so intense heat that ten small logs are enough for heating a house during the whole day. This method causes less emissions and the fact that not many specific skills are needed for building this stove contributes to its popularity. Thomas has been teaching the craft of constructing these stoves in a form of workshops since 2013.

The association "To Smiltene and Latvia" existed before Līga and Thomas joined it, however, over time the organisation has become unneeded, therefore the contribution brought by Līga and Thomas revived it. Thus, involved parties have changed over time and culture and education establishments have been replaced by people who are interested in eco approaches to life.

The most recent achievement of the association is the approved project under the title "Offgrid renewable energy" – during the next two years the association will hold workshops providing an opportunity for residents of regions to master skills for constructing and operating solar collectors, wind turbines, biogas production, water and kinetic generators. Līga is glad to describe that the project will be completed by creating a portal containing all the instructions and video trainings to enable interested persons to find information whenever it is needed.

Līga: "We want people to be aware that the resources needed for leading happy life in the countryside are available. You can live with what you have in a unique environment and appreciate this. "

Thomas: "We arrange a workshop for free and participants learn how they can manage with 3 cubic metres instead of 10 during winter, there are no CO2 emissions in the environment and three times more trees can be maintained in the forest. It is simple, and there are three good things, and this is what we want to show to people. Instead of going to Ireland to earn money of returning in 7 years with an empty account as it was upon leaving."

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SDG 8: DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH

Līga Efeja, Coordinator of the Design Factory

It does not take long to find the Design Factory (DF) in the premises of the Faculty of Architecture of Riga Technical University. It is a cosy kitchen room open to visitors. Līga explains: "A kitchen is a very important component as it encourages people to be people." DF provides a platform for cooperation of students, researchers and companies. This may be referred to as an innovation centre because it provides access to a great variety of tools, ranging from screwdrivers to a unique 3D scanner. Līga points out that the factor of the physical place is particularly important because the university should not rely only upon the theory, there should be an opportunity to test in practice what is working and what is not. The DF idea was based on the vision of creating such a place where such tests can be carried out without unneeded bureaucracy, in pleasant environment, so that people are prepared to openly share their ideas.

The beginning was not easy, in particular, due to the necessity to prove competences in a completely new approach to product development. The range of operations of the DF is very broad, it is not easy to define it accurately because the statement "we do everything" may sound impossible or not serious. Līga admits that funding is not always simple because this is the work with a high added value and in Latvia there is a lack of partners able to pay. The University provides access to knowledgeable people and testing laboratories and the DF focuses on solutions which are not simple and which cannot be solved by anybody else at present. Various programs are offered, starting from pre-incubation support programs up to the accelerator; from summer schools to 8 different climate innovation programs. The DF has learned to use the design thinking and prototyping in any field and product, including even virtual solutions.

The DF serves as an example of integrating sustainability in the daily operations of a company and in cooperation with stakeholders. On the basement floor there is an open workshop which is accessible to any student, meaning that anybody may come and solve his or her problem, which is very important for improving entrepreneurship and understanding that a lot can be learned. The same trust and freedom of action is provided to the permanent DT team which currently consists of 12 young professionals. Daily operations of the DF often result in students meeting their future employers. Mentors from relevant industries are attracted in the business program (and also other programs). Methods focused on the design thinking and help finding one's own solution are employed. More than 1000 students participated in projects via the DF during the last year.

Līga points out that the DF is an important concept for Latvia because it promotes cooperation, use of synergies and also commitment and daring, which people are sometimes lacking. Close cooperation with partner companies is important because it broadens the market by bringing new production methods there. One of examples – the DF helped SIA Brain Games by providing prizes for table game tournaments, and for creating them it was necessary to test a completely new plastic moulding method in Latvia. After it was mastered, the method becomes available. Other examples include water treatment equipment where the UV light is used and which do not produce emissions; sensors for sports clothing allowing tracing and improving performance at golf; sledges and gloves for Latvian sledgers; reconstruction of a wooden totem of the Stone Age for the Latvian National Museum of History, and there is a vast range of other such examples.

Līga: "What else can we offer if this is not knowledge and added value."

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SDG 9: INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Emīls Lukjanskis, Zinoo Science Center

Emils Lukjanskis is about to turn 24, and he is manager director of one of the most known science centers in Latvia: Zinoo. His story begins in Cesis, a charming town just below two hours from Riga where Emils was born and raised, and where he started his university course in journalism. In his hometown, he also started to actively participate to the community's social life by sitting in the Youth Council. Things for Emils begun to change when one day, participating to the municipality council as he usually did to represent the interests of Cesis' youth, he found himself in a heated discussion with a local entrepreneur: Paul Irbins. Some days after, Emils received a phone call: his fervid discussant had a proposal for him, he asked Emils to join Zinoo's team and work for him. Paul Irbins is an entrepreneur, a science lover that in 2011 founded Zino Science Center in Cesis. Apparently, the willfulness and the intelligence of that young man had remained impressed in Paul's mind, and so he thought that Emils could just be what his organization needed. Emils was surprised by this proposal, but he didn't think twice and he accepted the challenge.

This is how his work and life experience in Zinoo Science Center begun. When he started this job he was in his second year of journalism, but soon he realized that he wanted to focus all his capabilities on his new job, and so he left the studies to later become director of the organization.

Paul had made the right choice to trust in that young man, and he did the same with many others like him, he trusts young people: "you know, we commit mistakes all the time, but we have great curiosity and creativity, which can really make a difference" says Emils. Today, the organization counts about 40 employees, with an average age of about 29.

What kindled Emils' passion for this job, bringing him to such a prestigious position at the age of 23, was the mission pursued by this organization: to foster the interest for science in children.

Thus, through bizarre interactive exhibitions in four centers across the country, and workshops constantly organized in schools, Zinoo Science Center every year dives more than 30000 children in the world of science, with the hope to shape lots of little scientists that in a near future would use science to bring Latvia towards a path of sustainable development.

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9 INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE

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SDG 10: REDUCE INEQUALITIES

Madara Makare, promoter of the project HOPP

Madara says that everything started by coincidence. Both partners were long-term cycling enthusiasts and active creators of freakbikes. In 2010 the first tricycles were produced in a usual garage and they participated in the competition "Brigāde" aimed at social and culture projects. During the project the focus was changed completely from freakbikes to tricycles intended for people with movement disorders or anybody else for whom cycling on a bicycle is not comfortable. Madara did not have much information about the situation in Latvia, however, it was clear that this type of product was needed. In order to understand the demand and specifics better, Madara got acquainted with the NGO sector organisations engages in supporting people with movement disorders. The contacts led to another grant, which helped to buy equipment, to lease premises for production facilities and office premises in the incubator.

Thanks to preceding experience and educational background, Madara knows business management quite well, hoever, the social function and the revelation that her skills can improve the living conditions for others without involving charity was something new. Madara emphasises: "charity is not my format", because, like company operations on the basis of grants, it is not sustainable. Therefore she refers to social entrepreneurship as "sustainable charity".

After almost eight years, the social company HOPP has produced approximately 140 various tricycles causing huge impact upon people rehabilitation and promotion of their independence. Madara has become an eager supporter of social entrepreneurship, as this is an opportunity to create an organism which is autonomous and stands outside the usual. It seems very important to her that the company management can take independent resolutions regarding use of available financing, which does no happen often in the non-governmental sector.

The target audience of HOPP products is very specific (and usually it is not able to pay, therefore a third party is involved), this is a luxury product in Latvia and the market is slow in responding to innovations. In the history of HOPP one of such innovations was prototyping and testing of the fifth wheel for wheelchairs. Sometimes reproaches are addressed to the company that its business is based on making profit by collecting money from persons with movement disorders, while actual results are not considered. The more the company HOPP earns in an ethic manner, the bigger its capacity to support the target audience and the society as a whole.

Madara considers that the biggest part of social services are local. Even if they can be replicated in higher volumes, there are a lot of details where adjustments are needed, the target audience being the main one. The prevailing culture of beggars is among the matters of adjustment in Latvia. For people with movement disorders this culture causes additional difficulties of seeing their value in the society. At the same time, they are inspired by the fact that during difficult times Latvians are able to come together, to share and help each other.

Speaking about sustainability, Madara thinks that these terms have become slightly vague nowadays and are often excessively used. Sustainability is about doing and not complaining. This is where HOPP tricycles help their owners – to participate in daily life, to spend quality time with the family, to get to places which are not accessible by a wheelchair. Each such story reminds Madara why it is worth doing what HOPP does.

Madara Makare: "The life always brings its own adjustments, therefore one should be flexible enough."

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10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES
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SDG 11: SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES

Kaspars Spunde,, Čiekurkalns Neighborhood Development Society

Kaspars Spunde is one of the almost 8000 citizens of Ciekurkalns, one of the most historical of the 58 districts of Riga. Walking through its streets and parks with Kaspars, one immediately gets the impression that he is well-known around the place, people at every corner say hello or share a smile, and you can definitely feel a sense of community. But Ciekurkalns hasn't always been like this. No more than three years ago Kaspars was just like any other citizen of the neighbourhood, going about his daily life, taking his children to school, and living in it without any particular tie to his fellow neighbors that goes beyond customary politeness and good manners. But one day things changed for him, and with that the whole life of this to-be community was affected and changed as well. Everything started about three years ago at an intersection, which ironically turned out to be an important crossroads for the people of Ciekurkalns. This was a very dangerous intersection, difficult to cross both for pedestrians and for cars. Accidents happened almost every other day, so that at one point, Kaspars decided to start a petition to push the municipality to do something about it and make it safer for the inhabitants. The answer he received was shocking: the gravity of the accidents just was not bad enough, there had been no casualties yet, the municipality was going to do nothing. Did that mean that they would have to wait for somebody to die to make the intersection safer? Wait for the worst to happen before changing things? No, Kaspars couldn't accept this, and so he decided to take action and on June 12th 2015 he founded "Ciekurkalns Neighborhood Development Society".

Initially the new-born NGO was formed only by Kaspars and two friends of his; today more than fifty people actively participate in the forum, and about forty people are members of the organization, all residents of the neighborhood. This is not common in Latvia, people initially thought they were paid and doing this for personal gain, only later did they realize that all the members do it voluntarily. They do it because they want a better community for their kids. It's an attitude. Elderly people are the ones that struggle the most to understand Kaspars' effort; he told us how an old lady once told him during one of the many events: "What a good mayor we have!".

Their major source of funding comes from partnerships and sponsorships with entrepreneurs and hand-craftsmen. For instance, this is how they financed the construction of the famous "Latvian swing". This huge swing, placed right in front of the infamous intersection, not only serves as a place for people to meet and have fun, but most importantly represents a useful tool for the whole community: according to an old Latvian tradition in fact, having a good swing during the Easter holiday assures you a summer free of mosquito bites!

Speaking of the intersection, what happened with the issue that got all of this started? Unfortunately, that problem is yet to be solved, but six months ago the municipality promised to build a roundabout to replace the crossing within a year – Kaspars and his fellow citizens are carefully following the execution of this promise.

"Don't worry about what Ciekurkalns can do for you, but instead, think about what you can do for Ciekurkalns!"

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SDG 12: RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION

Krišjānis Liepa, RepairCafe Rīga

Krišjānis Liepa is a cheerful 26 years old young man. Born in Bauska, a little town near Riga, like many youngsters after high school he didn't really know what he would do in his life. The only thing that he thought about when he was 18 and had to choose his course of studies was to be successful and earn money. So, he enrolled in the prestigious Riga Stockholm School of Economics. During these years of study Kris was immerged in the mainstream world of economics, the one where they teach you that profit is the engine of every other thing and that producing and consuming more and more is key to economic growth. But while his fellow schoolmates were beginning to feel as part of a prestigious élite that would one day have earned a lot of money, for Kris this starts to be a minor factor, a rejection towards those kind of values slowly grows in him, and even more so towards that kind of economic thinking. Kris started to ask himself some questions: what is the environmental impact of that economic model? Is it really right that only a small élite of people benefit from economic growth? Is this economic structure actually the only one possible?

The answers weren't late, and Kris understood that wasn't the world he wanted to be part of.

Nevertheless, after graduating in Business and Administration, Kris didn't abandon economics, but he decided that he would use his knowledge to promote a completely different form of economy: one that is fair and sustainable, where the engine that moves everything is not profit and unrestrained consumption, but recycling, low environmental impact and sharing.

And so it was that Kris, together with some friends, founded Repair Café Riga in August 2017. The main aim of the newborn NGO is to organize events to teach people how to repair and recycle waste and items. It is a place to share and spread knowledge, with the goal of expanding the culture and practice of responsible and sustainable consumption. This idea is successfully spreading and, with the help of Kris and his friends, a community of repair cafés is rapidly growing around Latvia.

"Some events have been organized with neighborhood associations, this means that there has been a lot of participation by senior citizens and pensioners. We realized that elderly people are a precious source of technical knowledge and repairing skills; they grew up in the Soviet Union, not in the throwaway culture like us young generations. I really think that creating a space where distant generations meet and share their knowledge gives an added value to our work"


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SDG 13: CLIMATE ACTION

Artūrs Jansons, Head of Homo ecos (he:)

Artūrs says that homo ecos was created by expanding an idea. Many years ago Artūrs and his friends went to Estonia and saw a box with paper bags for collecting garbage in the nature placed at a petrol station. With the help of Latvija Valsts Meži [Latvian State Forests] this idea has been implemented at Statoil petrol stations also in Latvia. This idea was the beginning of the association "Dabas draugiem.lv" [Friends of Nature]. The association started working on several projects, the team expanded, a volunteer movement participate and after some time the European Volunteer Work initiative was also attracted to the project. Five years passed since foundation of the association and only then institutions in Latvia providing public financing for such activities started perceiving homo ecos seriously – Artūrs is thankful that during this period the association could operate by using private resources of the founders of the association. Artūrs concludes that the success stories of homo ecos are the result of the effort of their wonderful team.

The association tries to focus on the people's daily actions. Although the association is an advisor to legislators in advisory groups, the focus on the change of people's habits in the daily life is most important. The cooperation proposed to organisers of the youth song festival in 2012 that would reduce the volume of produced waste seemed hopeful, however, the organisers changed their minds and expressed the wish "to postpone it for the next event". The same excuse was used every time, including the festival in 2018 where cheese slices for participants were packed in plastic bags and water was only supplied in plastic bottles.

While a person is subject to an image dictating how one should look and what items one should buy, it is necessary to work with the mind-set that helps to filter that. Artūrs refers to the visit to Salacgrīva secondary school as a good example – thanks to installing water filters accessible to everybody in the school, students are now carrying their own reusable bottles.

People are consuming what they are told to consume and change of habits does not happen overnight. The global focus on environment issues has increased considerably – in the 1990-ies nobody in Latvia knew about waste sorting and now 40% of people do it on daily basis. Ten years ago there were only few cyclists in Riga, now the number of cyclists has multiplied both in winter and summer. Some changes happen also in the legislation and the emission restrictions applicable to cars, as well as recyclability of their parts can be referred to as an example.

Artūrs is happy to say that the direct work with consumers and the target audience provides immediate feedback, which helps to continuously improve their own work. He admits that, when we speak about changing habits, the Latvian values are often overshadowed by stereotype thinking and the inability to look at a process from another perspective. The agriculture sector is a good example in this regard, because it causes pollution, however, at the same time it is emphasised everywhere that Latvia is a very "green" country. The same applies to forestry. The only positive cultural feature is attitude to food waste, in particular, bread.

At present homo ecos is active almost only in the virtual environment because they are facing unexpected difficulties in a large-scale project, in the result of which all the costs need to be cut.

Artūrs: "Our contribution to IAM 13 consists of changes via changes in the consumer behaviour. This is a long and thankless way, still somebody needs to do this and, while somebody is working on important stuff by changing laws, somebody else will go to schools to speak about it."

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13 CLIMATE ACTION
homo ecos
homo ecos
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SDG 14: LIFE BELOW WATER

Anda Ikauniece, Director of the Latvian Institute of Aquatic Ecology, leading researcher

Half-way to Bolderāja, on the very coast of the Daugava there is modern looking two-storeyed building equipped with a laboratory, and this is the place where minimum 45 employees of the Latvian Institute of Aquatic Ecology (LHEI) work. The Director of the Institute Anda, for whom this has been the only place of work for more than 25 years, agreed to provide more information about the activities of the Institute. Anda refers to this building as one of the most important achievements because good infrastructure is the basis for science, like it is with many other achievements. There is a reason why Anda finds it difficult to view herself individually within the context of the institution because she has been working in the Latvian Institute of Aquatic Ecology since the very first day of its establishment.

The Institute was established by merging several research groups, namely, the Sea Biology Group from the Institute of Biology and the Sea Monitoring Group from Hydrometeorology Authority of that time, in order to enable a single authority to focus on the sea environment matters. Anda says that there was a similar structure subordinated to the institute dealing with fish resources, however, they mainly looked at the sea only from the point of view of economy. However, LHEI studies what is happening in the environment, developed trends and makes conclusions about what should be done in order to improve the situation, mainly on the level of the state administration (mostly, the Ministry of Environment Protection and Regional Development, however, sometimes also private entities approach the Institute for advice. Pursuant to the law, the task of performing regular sea monitoring, collecting data and reporting the results has been delegated to the LHEI. Mainly the impact of various dryland processes to the sea is being studied, however, many industries are difficult to be included. Agriculture serves as an example known to everybody, because chemicals used in the industry always find their way to the sea via numerous rivers flowing into Riga Gulf.

The research projects of the Institute are mainly based on studying micro organisms, which means that a study will never been done in drinking water. Anda has always been interested in studying microscopic crustaceans and what is affecting/ controlling their number, as well as the factors determining the composition of species. This is important because these organisms are at the bottom of the feed chain – they serve as food for fish babies, which, in turn, can present an insight to the health of the sea ecosystem to researchers. Similarly to the food chain on the dryland, also in the sea its stages should maintain balance and a single fast change may affect all the other stages.

Anda emphasises that at present an initiative is developed on the level of the Baltic Sea providing for growing of mussels in order to filter water pollution and to produce feed for cattle at the same time in parallel. The impact to the environment caused by the industry is much bigger, therefore it should be proactively regulated by the state. Anda refers to the activities of cleaning the sea-shore that most probably would not be needed if production and collection of packaging was monitored by the state more actively, as well as simple improvements like the deposit system for plastic bottles.

The Institute plans to produce a new strategy document including Sustainable Development goals (IAM). Anda considers that too little is known about IAM and there is too little discussion about this in Latvia, while IAM serves as a leading guideline in most other Baltic Sea Region countries. The "global breathing" should also be felt by participating on international networks and promoting cooperation in order to jointly search for the best solutions.

Anda: "If one looks at the Development Plan until 2020 or Latvia 2030, the sea appears thre just to the very minimum. I am sorry and I want to do something for the common goals because we are a country at the sea."

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SDG 15: LIFE ON LAND

Edgars Felcis, sustainability researcher in Latvian Permaculture Association

The son of an agronomist and owner of a farm in the Latvian countryside, Elgars Felcis, as a child, used to spend his days playing in the fields between trees and animals, sleeping in the barn, and catching fruits from trees when he wanted a snack.

Elgars' story begins in a world where life is viscerally linked to nature, which is thus respected in all its forms. Growing up Elgars starts to travel, he abandons the countryside, and discovers that beyond rural life exists a world in which everything is faster, people work at frenetic rhythms, and food no longer comes from the trees and the fields but is found plasticized and packed in big and luxurious stores. Elgars discovers the industrialized world and he starts observing and studying it with attention.

The urban lifestyle seems to be founded on four fundamental pillars: work as much as you can, produce as much as you can, in order to earn as much as you can, to finally consume as much as you can. In this world nature is totally marginalized, brutalized, and subservient to the necessities of the system. Soon Elgars understands this is not the world he wants to live in, and his deep bond with nature awakens: the devastating environmental and social impact generated by the capitalist economy has to be blocked, fought, and reverted, or in not so long the world he knew as a child would be gone. And so Elgars started his struggle. Showing people that continuing to live to those standards of consuming, producing and polluting, is simply not sustainable for the planet, and that an alternative lifestyle is available becomes his mission.

Elgars starts studying, he sings up to the faculty of Sustainability Science at Wageningen University & Research and tries to learn as much as he can on how human beings can live in a sustainable way. It is at this point in his life that he encounters the word "Permaculture" for the first time. The term comes from the English "permanent agriculture" and "culture".

Permaculture is a method of planning and managing anthropized landscapes in a way that they are able to satisfy the needs of the population, as food, fibers, and energy, while at the same time presenting resilience, richness, and stability of natural ecosystems.

The main objective of this strategy is to allow individuals, families and local communities to enhance their self-sufficiency and self-regulation. Such an approach is based on the awareness that a part of society is ready, willing and capable of changing its behavior, if it believes this to be possible and relevant. This socially and ecologically motivated minority represents the cornerstone for a large-scale change.

This is exactly the strategy that Elgars wants to spread, sustain and realize. Nowadays we have learned about the benefits of the modern lifestyle, but science warns us on the consequences of such a way of living. Ignoring it wouldn't be wise, and it is thus necessary to go beyond it, combining the ancient values with the modern knowledge and possibilities.

After years of living in different countries, working and learning a lot about sustainable development and Permaculture, Elgars has now become a professional in this field, and he is back to his beloved home country, Latvia. Here, in 2016, he becomes the leader of the Latvian Permaculture Association. This is an umbrella organization that embraces and sustains a high number of activists, theorists, and operators of the sector in Latvia since 2011, that contributes to diffuse and popularize Permaculture and a sustainable way of life. Every year, they organize lots of workshops that aim at teaching people how to live sustainably not only theoretically, but also practically.

To sum up, the activities brought about by Elgars and his association are a lot, and they are all different: Perrmaculture is a multidisciplinary approach whose objective is to deal with as many aspects of life as it possibly can. Today, the members of LPA are more than one hundred; the road is still long but hopefully, thanks to Elgars' determination the path to sustainability is closer than it looks.

"Going from urban to rural life doesn`t mean going from prosperity to poverty, to the contrary, living in the countryside can be much richer both economically and spiritually."

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SDG 16: PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS

Miks Muižarājs, Saldus Protection Society

Miks Muizarajs is a young citizen of Saldus, a Latvian town that has a little more than 12000 inhabitants. Like many others at the age of 20, notwithstanding the attachment to his land and to his family, and despite the fact that he had a job in the television sector, one day Miks decided to get out of his tranquil and routine life and to leave for a new adventure. His journey starts in Ethiopia – this country would teach him a lot, here he would learn a very important lesson: "it's better to give something to society instead of just taking". Working for the University of Addis Abeba he discovers the world of international cooperation, and he understands that this will be his path. It was then that he decided to leave once more, this time to the USA, to study international development in New York. After graduating, for years Miks continued to travel, putting his knowledge at the service of some of the poorest countries in the world, like Ecuador and Timor Leste. The day came, after all his travelling, when Miks felt the need to stop: something was telling him that it was time to do something for his country. So, in 2016, his long journey around the world came to an end; Miks went home and his return to Saldus marked the beginning of a new story.

It just so happened that as soon as he got back, Miks started taking part in public consultation organized by local activists about the opening of a new facility of hazardous waste disposal just 600 meters from the town. It was a Wednesday, and at noon in that meeting there were more than 300 people, all well informed and determined to denounce the gravity of such an initiative for the environmental and sanitary safeguard of the community. Miks remembers that day very well, he was looking at that angry crowd, united and determined to fight for a common good, and was struck by such strength. In that moment he understood that that strength could be used for a purpose if channelled well. Thus, at the end of that meeting, Miks proposed to transform that single initiative into a real and permanent organization, and this is how Saldus Protection Society was founded. This organization was born to fight against the opening of a polluting industrial facility, but unfortunately it is all too well known how hard it is to win such a battle when a small community has to face a colossal corporation and the local and national institutions that protect it.

In fact, unluckily, the facility is still open, running and polluting – despite the fact that a court case is still ongoing - but this partial defeat hasn't stopped SPS. Today, this organization fosters with great commitment the active and constructive participation of the community in the decision making process of the local governmental institution, and thanks to this it has become more and more difficult for the municipality to make controversial decisions against the interest of the community.

With its ups and downs, the rising of SPS in the political debate has certainly brought turbulence to this little town, ready to fight with force for its rights. For Miks this is just the beginning of another journey, a journey towards the sustainable development of Saldus' region for the interests of the whole society.

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SDG 17: PARTNERSHIP FOR THE GOALS

Ingrīda Strazdiņa, Project Manager of "Zaļā Brīvība" [Green Liberty]

"Green Liberty" (it operated under the name "Zaļā Bibliotēka" [Green Library] in the 1990-ies) is an organisation which has been discussing important environment topics with the Latvian society and legislators for 25 years. "Green Liberty" can be described as the one going counter-stream, the one discussing matters which the society does not feel comfortable about. The topics of the organisation include sustainable development, responsible consumption, environment friendly lifestyle. The main idea is that a human can live in harmony with the environment for as long as somebody does not try to destruct this balance.

Ingrīda Strazdiņa has been working in the organisation for 6 years and is among the managers of the numerous projects of the organisation. The environment topic has always had its special place in Ingrīda's family because her husband has founded the magazine "Vides vēstis" [Environment News] which has started the discussion of the change of the lifestyle and the green alternatives in Latvia. The first projects managed by Ingrīda were focused on fair trade and awareness of the role of exotic fruit in people's daily life, which, of course, included discussions about inhuman work conditions and the destructive impact upon the nature caused by production of fruit. For example, in Europe, which is the biggest global banana consumer (although banana are not grown in Europe) this is an inconvenient topic – it is easier not to think about it and to use the argument that there are people in need of help also in Europe.

Ingrīda has been working on the initiative "Baskets from Ghana" for several years. This started from a project about the solidarity economy four years ago. Ingrīda really liked the idea about baskets, as it combines both a story and an actual activity. Cooperation with a cooperative from Northern Ghana has been successfully implemented for more than two years, although the beginning of cooperation was related to many challenges due to numerous stereotypes. Ingrīda admits that the project "Baskets from Ghana" is becoming increasingly successful – people learn more about Ghana, there are possibilities to support particular individuals and people get encouragement to evaluate their condition and role in the society by applying more criticism. An interesting example is the survey about the ranking of Latvia among 200 countries from the point of view of prosperity carried out in several schools in Latvia. According to the mean answer Latvia was always ranked within the second hundred, although Latvia ranks approximately 45th in reality. According to Ingrīda's experience, this project eliminates people's stereotypes both about Ghana and Africa as a whole and the story of the "White Saviour" is replaced by bilateral reciprocal cooperation.

This project intensified cooperation with Ghana and when the delegation headed by the Ambassador of Ghana (Latvia is represented in the Embassy in Berlin) visited Riga, Ingrīda was the person invited by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to participate in the reception as the representative of the only initiative in Latvia cooperating with Ghana.

"Green Liberty" created good cooperation with journalists both within other projects and also by disseminating the news about the initiative "Baskets from Ghana". This is cooperation very much appreciated by Ingrīda and she looks forward to continuing it also in future, because actual stories and not just facts are what make various unusual topics more understandable and closer to people.

Ingrīda: "Not everything is as white as it is sold to us or presented and described to us"

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