

Travel Report

Innovative Village Meeting in Latvia 28.-30.9.2011

The purpose of the trip: First meeting of potential partners and a GOPP workshop in order to find the logical framework for the international part of a transnational Leader cooperation project.

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Pictures: Outi Raatikainen and Pirjo Ikäheimonen

Participants:

Arja-Leena Peiponen, Viisari ry/Lead Partner, Finland

Pirjo Ikäheimonen, Jyväskriihi ry, Finland

Rika Nakamura, JAMK University of Applied Sciences, Finland

Outi Raatikainen, Innovative Village Preparatory Project, Finland

Andrew McAlister, North East Region Rural Development Group, GB/Ireland

Jessica Morgan, PLANED, GB/Wales

Gareth Morgan, Wales

Enrique Miana, LAG ADESHO, Espanja

Elza Pukite, Jelgavas Lauku partnerība Lielupe, Latvia

Triin Lääne, Tartumaa Arendusselt, Viro

Vahuur Jaakma, Tartumaa Arendusselt, Viro

Kestutis Eisinas, Joniškių Rajono Partnerystės Vietos Veiklos Grupe, Lietuva

On Wednesday: Rimante Misiuniene, Joniškių Rajono Partnerystės Vietos Veiklos Grupe

On Thursday: Ausra Jokubaite, Joniškių Rajono Partnerystės Vietos Veiklos Grupe



Planning a future project (from left to right): Kestutis Eisinas, Elza Pukite, Ausra Jokubaite, Enrique Miyana, Andrew McAlister, Triin Lääne, Vahuur Jaakma, Jessica Morgan, and Pirjo Ikäheimonen.

Wednesday 29.9.2011

The Finnish delegation arrived to Riga Airport already at 10.30. Elza Pukite from the Leader LAG Lielupe acted as our guide and chauffeur. At first we had a small walk around the centre of Jelgava after which we met the manager of the Leader LAG in her office.

Jelgavas Lauku partnerība Lielupe



Leader LAG Jelgava has a small office in the town hall of Jelgava county. The LAG has two officials, manager Līga Svanberga (picture) and assistant Elza Pukite. We discussed each Leader area and activities.

Līga Svanberga told us that they have no business projects at all. Arja-Leena Peiponen and Pirjo Ikäheimonen told that they have several and that the main reason for that might be the good service: the entrepreneurs get help in every step of building a project.

The Latvian villages have no village action groups like in Finland. That is one reason why there are no village action plans either. Getting those done seems to be one motivation for the Latvians to take part in the Innovative Village project.

Visiting Svete

Elza drove us first to Svete, a village where the Leader LAG Lielupe has invested in the "common grounds" of the village. The land is owned by a private person and rented to NGO that has built a playground, tennis court and volleyball field in the outskirts of the village with a budget of about 20 000€. Two outdoor toilets, a parking lot and a small tractor (another LEADER project) complete the service. The plan for a project to build an outdoor stage has been approved. The place has been in use for about a month.



Mr Uldis Svanbergs has been active in planning and building the place and he told us about the plans. The place is rented to an action group (NGO). With the help of the employment subsidy it employs one "free" worker.

The feedback from the users has been very good. Children's groups may use the place for free but e.g. business groups pay a small sum. Also the tennis court costs about 7,5€/hour. This ensures some income which is used in upkeep.

Visiting Zemgale

Next we visited a service and activity centre in Zemgale. The building is owned by the municipality. Part of the functions are run by the municipality and part by an action group. The manager Herta Elza Salkovska introduced us the place.

For the villagers the centre offers a wide range of services. There are e.g. an Internet point, washing machines, a public sauna, a gym (picture), a library, some health and social services and a filial of a pharmacy. There were also sowing machines and some guidance in using them, happenings, exhibitions etc. Different functions in the house had received funding from various sources incl. Leader funding.



At the back of the house there was a social enterprise producing woodwork and offering tutoring for e.g. students who want to become craftsmen. Main articles are traditional rustic furniture made of oak, and souvenirs. Leader LAG Jelgava had funded a laser cutter. The enterprise could offer more work but at the moment there is no room for more. The picture shows a patented product – if you own a chair like that and it is not made in Latvia, you most probably have an illegal copy!

We were impressed by the place but thought that the whole thing has been done in the wrong order: the roof of the house has leaked for some time and the smell of mold told about the damages. Fixing the roof will be the next investment (the private funding will be collected e.g. from renting the sauna) but before that the mould has infested all the new rooms already rebuilt.

Meeting place Putelkrogs

The Innovative Village preparatory project was invading a whole Putelkrogs Inn except the restaurant part which was open for public from 11 am to 11 pm.

Putelkrogs is privately owned and nicely rebuilt old dairy. It offers a popular restaurant, a meeting/festivity room, sauna departement, and accommodation for about 20 customers. It is situated in the middle of undulating field scenery. There we would be “in the middle of nowhere” with nothing else to do but the project.



The people gathered together during the evening which was spent by getting to know each other.

Thursday 29.9.2011 - Workshop

The work started at 9. The big question for the day was "What is the common objective and work plan of Innovative Village?".

We concentrated on the common, transnational part of the project, although many good ideas produced in the brainstorming that were rejected in the common part may work very well in the local work of some partners.



As a method we used a standardized work shop process called GOPP, Goal Oriented Project Planning, which led us from the jungle of endless problems and a variety of possible activities into a logical framework for the future project. Ms Rika Nakamura, a project planner in JAMK, is a trained facilitator in this method.

The 12 participants of the workshop were active and productive. The basic ideas of the project were the same and the theme was acute for each participant which was a good starting point.

Communication was surprisingly easy despite the fact that the level of English varied. The GOPP method helped as all ideas were both spoken aloud, written down, and mostly also discussed through.



Timetable of the project planning

GOPP is an intensive method. In the afternoon everybody was getting tired. We decided to postpone the last part of the workshop till Friday morning and continue with practical matters. We discussed the timetable of the project planning and decided to have one more common meeting in November, this time in Finland. There is homework for every partner, and a letter of Intent to sign.

Visiting Zalenieki



After the workshop we visited the nearby village Zalenieki. There we went shopping in one of the three village shops, after which we had a look at the manor house which nowadays is a school of agriculture suffering from severe lack of students in agricultural programs but well attended in e.g. accounting, mechanics, logistics and secretary studies. We also visited an old Lutheran church and its enchanting graveyard in use since the 16th C.

In addition we visited a Leader project: a small service centre and a children's playground in a block of flats. The service centre offers a meeting room and e.g. washing machines. It has been working since summer of 2011. Mainly it is used as a meeting place where people can gather to talk, play music or do something else.

Friday 30.9.2011

Unfortunately Enrique Miyana from Spain and Andrew McAlister from UK had to leave early. The rest of the participants sat down at 9.00 to continue the workshop till noon. We managed to boil down the actions and check the logic in our framework. We were happy with the result and willing to continue the work together.

GOPP work shop



The method worked well. It produced a lot of good ideas in a short time but also helped us to sort them out and discuss them together. All participants took actively part in the process despite the fact that for most the whole method was completely new.

The method helped to overcome the language barrier when everything that was said also ended up on the wall in a short form.

Lack of time and strength caused us to leave the risk analysis for later which is a pity. We have to think how to do that before the next meeting in November.

Partners

The participants seemed all to be able to discuss and have fun together, which is a good sign for future cooperation.

The countries and their villages are different but also Leader LAGs are very different: when PLANED has worked (under different names) with rural development in Wales for about 25 years, in Latvia and Lithuania grass root rural development is very new.

