





European Rural Parliament National report from Latvia

prepared by

Latvian Rural Forum

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Introduction. Ideas from Latvian rural communities were gathered by the Latvian Rural Forum in the period of 5 month (February to June 2015) by (1) interaction through emails and homepages as well as using social media, (2) in a small scale meetings with LRF member organizations, partners and rural communities and (3) during the 2nd Latvian Rural Communities Parliament. In total the campaign reached 210 people in face-to-face meetings, more than 500 people by e-mails and around 1500 people through social networks, mostly women aged 30-65.

Social Media. Latvian Rural Forum homepages (Ilf.partneribas.lv; laukuforums.lv) and social networks (facebook.com/laukuforums; draugiem.lv/llf; twitter.com/LaukuForums) (left on Picture 1) were used to promote open discussions and to provide brief information on suggested topics for discussion. Information was given in the form of a campaign. Small amounts of new information were regularly provided to make it more friendly for everyday users and to keep track of information over a longer period. The discussions were focused on the need for objective comparison between the countries related to rural development, plus easy accessible factsheets.

Latvian Rural Forum created a monthly information sheet (right on Picture 1) and also the e-mails about actual news where the European Rural Parliament was popularised and people were invited to participate by raising actual questions.





Picture 1

Meetings. There were 4 small-scale meetings with LRF member organizations, partners and rural communities, acting as a core group to identify the topics and







methods, also to find the best approaches for the work in the 2nd Latvian Rural Communities Parliament as well as to phrase the ideas and clarify the messages from the Parliament for the, local and national authorities and the European campaign.





Picture 2. Meetings with LRF member organizations

National Rural Parliament. On 3-5 June 2015, the second Rural Communities Parliament was held in Ligatne, Vidzeme, with the theme "Creation of preconditions for development of small towns and rural areas". Participating were around 210 representatives of rural communities from Latvia as well as policy makers, experts, academics and around 40 foreign representatives form 18 countries.

The event was opened by President of Latvia Andris Bērziņš, who stressed that "The importance of this forum cannot be over-erestimated, as the European Union's vision of national development plans by 2030 suggests that each person will be self-assessing how to proceed, what to learn and to work. It is absolutely clear that in rural areas this self-assessment will be needed for each individual. Events like this with the programme that encourages everyone to find his own place - are very necessary."

Zanda Kalniņa- Lukaševica, the Parliamentary State Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, said,

"This is an event that shows very precisely the linkage between the Latvian Presidency of the Council of the European Union and every inhabitant in Latvian rural areas. For example, a working group on remote work opportunities using internet technology in the rural areas has a direct relationship with one of the priorities of the Latvian Presidency - digital Europe".

The Parliament included three plenary sessions and 18 two-to-three hour working groups to outline the aspirations and concerns of rural people. The Parliament concluded with a *Resolution*, with commitments by communities and policy-makers at local, national and European level to specific actions over the next 2 years, and long-term actions.

The main scope of action in the Parliament related to:

 Consolidating the economic potential of rural areas to strengthen the competitiveness of the EU;







- Improving the quality of life of rural and small town residents, developing active citizenship outside the currently defined development centres;
- Promoting the mobility of citizens, providing access to services.





Picture 3 Working Groups during the Rural Communities Parliament

The resolution passed by the Rural Communities Parliament starts on the next page







The Resolution

The second Latvian Rural Communities Parliament participants recognises that Latvian countryside and small towns are an integral part of Latvia's great, but so far fully untapped, potential that can make a significant impact on for the development, stability and sustainability in our state and across the EU.

There live and work a lot of active educated citizens in the Latvian countryside and small towns. We call for increased lifelong learning opportunities for every member of the community, at all levels promoting public involvement in developing and educational events in order to ensure further development of an open and dynamic education system, reducing social exclusion and segregation risks.

Latvian countryside and small towns are rich in experience and initiatives that are realized by inhabitants and organizations to increase the quality of life and enhancing the attractiveness of the place. This positive experience is necessary to explore, collect, promote and take over, thus facilitating communication and cooperation, which strengthens the sense of belonging and pride in oneself, one's lives and jobs and one's country.

The main industry of Latvian countryside is agriculture, which provides food for Latvian and non-Latvian citizens. Thanks to the rural areas, Latvia is positioned as a "green" country. This potential and experience should be evaluated, the development direction included in national policy planning documents, including the National Development Plan.

Working for the well-being of Latvian development and for all its citizens, the participants in the Latvian Rural Communities Parliament invite **the Latvian society, decision-makers and implementers to**:

- Foster a climate in which local leaders emerge and develop
- Ensure meaningful public involvement in development planning and implementation;
- Delegate a greater share of decision-making rights to local and regional level, thereby ensuring their compatibility with the local context and needs, and increasing ownership of the implementation of the decisions;
- Promote greater state administration confidence in both the NGO sector and in society as a whole, showing interest in and support for their initiatives, reducing formalities by simplifying bureaucratic processes and recognizing the role of the human factor;
- Create financial instruments for solving rural communities' priority questions, that would allow to flexibly respond to the diverse and place-based community needs.
- Support NGOs to engage in economic activities, thus ensuring their continuous operation and diversifying their incomes to be invested in the local community development and social equality;







- Implement activities to increase initiative by citizens' in rural areas, through both face-to-face meetings as well as social networks and other IT resources;
- Use non-formal education methods to raise the public and local community capacity and networking;
- Promote young people's understanding of modern economic life of rural areas and employment opportunities, and raise the prestige of vocational education;
- Use the coefficient of distance for development of different initiatives in order to decrease regional differences and the risk of economic, social and participatory exclusion.

On the European scale, the Latvian Rural Communities invite all concerned to:

- Strengthen the sense of belonging and pride in one's life and job, emphasising the common challenges, the importance of mutual enrichment and progress towards the common objectives;
- Promote the exchange of experiences in Europe, contributing to the development of creative expressions in various everyday areas.

Action to promote sustainable development of rural communities.

On the basis of collected information, expressed opinions and proposals of working groups, the participants in the Second Latvian Communities Parliament are in favour of 11 actions within next two years, in order to promote sustainable development of rural communities.

European level is marked grey!

1. COOPERATION AND COLLABORATION TO REACH COMMON GOALS

- 1.1. Give the function to promote the development of civil society to local municipalities, in order to facilitate the social, economic and civic activity in rural areas and small towns and to create the opportunity to efficiently invest public resources for strengthening civil society in a legitimate way.
- 1.2. **Promote the delegation of functions of local municipalities to NGOs**, so that NGOs can use the opportunity to implement the delegated local government functions more actively, using their own local resources, skills and knowledge to servee the interests of local residents and to involve inhabitants in social and economic activities, especially those who are exposed to different social risks
- 1.3. Focus on **unique community resource assessment and continuous development**; support collective sharing of technologies and resources; support introduction of various hybrid management models that develop public-private partnerships, in order to establish social innovation at local government level providing better public services and local attractiveness







- 1.4. **Create a national NGO Fund** with provided funds for local initiatives (including from companies with share capital, quotas of Members of Parliament), ensuring low administrative burdens and including decentralised programmes, ensuring the possibility to include the priorities of the region or community in order to promote the site ownership, participation and independent (not influenced, bottom-up) results of the supported activities
- 1.5. Promote initiatives for experience exchange and inter-community, plus inter-organizational and inter-level cooperation projects, in order to bring together resources and experiences of different sectors. Ensure more efficient implementation of the LEADER approach by creating synergies with other funding instruments in the Latvian rural area and small towns. Give higher ranking to projects supported by public funding that are implemented in partnership, such as between local government, NGOs and entrepreneur, in order to stimulate such cooperation.

2. EQUAL ACCESS TO SERVICES

Provide support for **innovative and effective solutions** for implementing and increasing **access to services**, in order to improve accessibility of services regardless of the location in the development centres or areas remote from those centres.

3. APPROPRIATE USE OF RESOURCES

Develop a plan for appropriate use of EU funds, in order to promote effective use of local, national and EU-linked resources, which is based on long-term investment in territorial development and human capacity and quality of life in Latvian rural area.

4. POSITIVE IMAGE OF RURAL AREAS AND TOWNS

- 4.1. Intensify media activities to inform on civil initiatives, especially at the national level, in order to build a common understanding of sustainable territorial development and to promote Latvian rural area and small towns as the value in their diversity, as well as to promote positive examples of development and promotion of rural image. Active residents in rural areas and small towns need to promote rural development initiatives, which create a positive, compelling and contemporary image of rural communities and small towns.
- 4.2. **Develop diverse place marketing campaigns**, such as organising competitions, festivals and other modern initiatives for different society groups, in order to build confidence, especially among young people and young families, that it is possible and stylish to live in rural areas.

5. EFFICIENT, SAFE AND USER-FRIENDLY E-OPPORTUNITIES

5.1. Ensure continuous web coating and related infrastructure maintenance in Latvia, regardless of the population in the territory, in order to take full advantage of e-environment opportunities by information and communication technologies, in order to develop an offer of e-services, e-culture, e-participation, e-health and other similar e-opportunities and promote their active use. Activate the dissemination of information







on e-opportunities, promote e-opportunities training program, create motivation for participation for people of all ages, with a special emphasis on <u>disadvantaged groups</u> primarily in areas outside the development centres. **Provide professional** development for staff involved in e-services, and develop a unified and secure, user-friendly and convenient data storage, processing, communications and electronic signing systems in active collaboration between e-service providers, in order to ensure fully use of the e-opportunities.

- 5.2. Being aware of the global opportunities offered by Europe and the world, **expand e-opportunities** by creating the possibility to use a variety of languages as well as contributing to security of the data in the data exchange.
- 5.3. Human health is a fundamental value; it requires **establishment of an efficient e-health services system** and the meaningful use of it by learning from good practices in Europe, **educating citizens and medical personnel** for e-Health tools, **facilitating secure data exchange and cooperation in e-health between** medical institutions and professionals from **EU member states**.

6. CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL RICHNESS AND DEVELOPMENT

- 6.1. Develop inter-institutional and cross-sectorial cooperation in a complex offer at the local level by more efficient use of modern technology, including digitized cultural heritage in order to promote awareness, preservation and targeted use of cultural heritage for raising the public benefit, the potential of the place and achieve success in business. Increase complex cross-sectorial approach in national programs that support cultural policy, and provide support for schools of tradition, camps focused on cultural heritage, small community museums and other forms of cultural heritage promotion.
- 6.2. In order to preserve, promote and to raise awareness of a diverse European cultural heritage, **organize an EU-level events that emphasizes cultural heritage of the small communities**. Establish a program of conservation of cultural heritage and exchange experiences in EU, by expanding the funding available for experience exchanges in a field of cultural heritage.

7. EDUCATION ACCESSIBILITY AND ITS ROLE IN SOCIAL COHESION AND EQUALITY

In order to emphasize the role of lifelong learning in early identification, mitigation and prevention of a risk of social exclusion.

- 7.1. Include the promise to provide compulsory education in pre-school and elementary school stage as close to the child / family's place of residences as possible in programmatic documents.
- 7.2. Raise the question of lifelong learning opportunities for people of all ages, consolidating and making the best use of existing resources.







- 7.3. Use rural schools and other local public infrastructure and intellectual resources to promote employment, diverse social services and civic participation.
- 7.4. **Review the indicators for determining the quality of education** in order to support implementation of inclusive and innovative education approaches.
- 7.5. In the allocation of funding and other support to education, **consider community socio-economic indicators and geographical situation**, in order to contribute development of legal capacity and human capital.

8. EDUCATED AND COMPETITIVE SOCIETY

- 8.1. Ensure **investment in the development of online education** in order to support the improvement of the quality of education and enhancing the international competitiveness of education to promote the European Union's competitiveness in the global education market and the economy.
- 8.2. In order to ensure the preservation of the European values and human solidarity, develop lifelong learning policy and the implementation of activities that contribute cooperation of various social and age groups.
- 8.3. Create united **co-ordinated lifelong process in every Latvian municipality** by **using local resources**, also using the existing schools and teachers with the potential of multifunctional lifelong learning centre, and by **providing lifelong learning coordinators in all municipalities** to work with various social groups to involve them in education, to provide training facilities and to support continuous public education process and the competitiveness of the Latvian economy.

9. EMPLOYMENT OF RURAL PEOPLE

- 9.1. Support the **diversification of employment opportunities**, including supporting and **promoting teleworking** (working outside the employer's premises using ICT) in order to attract residents to rural areas.
- 9.2. Promote business cooperation to **develop mentoring and consulting services** and to support **the creation of common working spaces in rural areas**, in order to promote entrepreneurship and strengthening of social capital.
- 9.3. In order to enhance society's competitiveness in the labour market, **develop education** (including life-long learning programs) **that promotes entrepreneurship and the development of employment**
- 9.4. Review the European Union's initiative "Youth Guarantee" to promote effective methods for solving the challenge of youth unemployment. It should focus on actual creating of jobs and youth employment.

10. LOCAL OFFER FOR PRODUCERS AND CONSUMERS







- 10.1. **Improve local and regional brand support systems**, as well as create partnerships between local organisations, municipalities and producers and organisations uniting them, in order to increase sales of local products and services. Include local products in shaping tourism offer and place identity.
- 10.2. Create opportunities and support for local products outlets by local governments, as well as promote local products through the opportunities of information technology in order to promote local products, rise availability and sales and to strengthen local identity.
- 10.3. Build a supportive legislation for diverse local product realization and development of short supply chains in order to improve the capacity of producers and craftsmen and to provide more opportunities for the public to buy local products, while raising public awareness.

11. POPULATED ENERGY-INDEPENDENT RURAL AREA

In order to increase usage of renewable energy for rural areas (particularly for small farms), to become economically independent as well as to broaden public involvement, it is necessary to:

- 11.1. Promote positive examples of existing alternative energy use cases. Distribute the local positive experience at national level in order to support for establishing small-scale self-consumption alternative energy systems.
- 11.2. Include citizen participation as an essential and determed (measurable) indicator in a public consultation related to the environmental impact assessment.
- 11.3. **Develop academic recommendations** for different types of farms for an efficient energy use
- 11.4. Provide priority for small farms from investments of European Fund support which creates production of alternative energy or saving (energy) resources.