

## RESOLUTION OF SECOND LATVIAN RURAL COMMUNITIES PARLIAMENT

Held on 3-5 July 2015 in Līgatne, under the Latvian Presidency of the Council of the EU, the second Latvian Rural Communities Parliament gathered rural civil society representatives, political leaders and policy implementers in order to identify concrete actions for the next two years aimed at promoting sustainability of Latvian rural areas and small communities.

Main areas of action:

- Consolidation of economic potential of rural areas in order to strengthen EU competitiveness;
- Improved quality of life of rural and small town residents by developing active citizenship outside the currently defined development centres;
- Promotion of citizens' mobility and their access to services.

The second Latvian Rural Communities Parliament was assisted by more than 250 activists, among them:

- Representatives of rural areas and small towns in Latvia;
- Members, employees and supporters from national, regional and local level non-governmental organizations;
- Representatives of the Saeima (Parliament of Latvia), the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development, the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Culture and other state institutions;
- Professors, Assistant Professors, doctoral students, lecturers and students from the University of Latvia, the Riga Technical University, the Latvia University of Agriculture, the Liepaja University, the Ventspils University College, the Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences and the Latvian State Institute of Agrarian Economics;
- Leaders of Latvian municipalities, Planning and Development department representatives, education, youth and lifelong learning coordinators, employees of schools, recreation centres, libraries and social services, and other government representatives;
- 50 other participants from 20 different countries.

The participants of the second Latvian Rural Communities Parliament recognized that Latvian rural areas and small towns make up an integral part of the country. However, its potential, fully unexploited up until now, could have a significant impact on the development, stability and sustainability of Latvia and other EU countries.

It is important that all citizens of Latvian rural areas and small towns have access to dynamic learning environment and lifelong learning opportunities, thus reducing the risks of social exclusion and segregation and promoting the community's involvement in educational and development activities.

The initiatives of Latvian rural areas and small towns undertaken by the inhabitants and organisations increase the quality of life and enhance the attractiveness of the area. These positive experiences gained through their involvement need to be explored, gathered, promoted and taken over, thus facilitating communication and cooperation and strengthening the sense of pride and belonging and the positive aspect that it has to ones lives, jobs and the entire country.

The main industry of the Latvian countryside is agriculture, which provides food for the inhabitants of Latvia. Thanks to rural areas, Latvia can position itself as a "green" country, the potential and experience of which needs to be acknowledged and included in the national policy planning documents, such as the National Development Plan.

Working for the development and every citizen of Latvia, the participants of the second Latvian Rural Communities Parliament **invite the Latvian society, decision-makers and implementers:**

- to foster a climate in which local leaders emerge and develop;
- to ensure meaningful public involvement in development planning and implementation;
- to delegate more of the decision-making rights to local and regional levels, thereby ensuring a greater compatibility with the local context and the needs and increasing co-responsibility regarding the implementation of decisions;
- to promote greater s' confidence in both NGOs an the society, thus showing interest for and support to their initiatives, simplifying bureaucratic processes and recognizing the importance of the human factor;
- to create financial instruments aimed at addressing rural communities priority questions, thus allowing to respond more flexibly to the diverse local needs of the community;
- to support NGOs and encourage them to take part in economic activities, thus ensuring a continuous operation and diversifying their source of the income to be invested in the local community development and social equality;
- to implement activities aimed at increasing citizen initiatives in rural areas, through face-to-face meetings, social networks and other IT resources;
- to use non-formal education methods in order to increase the capacity of the society and the local community and to promote networking;
- to promote young people's understanding of modern economic life of rural areas and employment opportunities, and to raise the prestige of vocational education;
- to 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 a European level, the participants of the second Latvian Rural Communities Parliament invite to:

- to strengthen the sense of belonging and pride in one's life and job thereby emphasizing common challenges, the importance of mutual enrichment and progress towards the common objectives;
- to promote exchange of experience in Europe, thus developing creative expressions in various areas.

Based on the collected information, opinions and proposals of the Parliament working groups, the members of the second Latvian Rural Communities Parliament agreed on 11 courses of action for the next two years, aimed at promoting sustainable development of rural communities.

## 1. COOPERATION AND COLLABORATION TO REACH COMMON GOALS

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1.1. **to empower local municipalities to promote civil society development.** The aim is to facilitate social, economic activities and active citizenship in rural areas and small towns and to create the opportunity to efficiently invest public resources in a legitimate way, which are aimed at strengthening civil society;

1.2. **to delegate functions of local municipalities to NGOs** in order to empower them to use the opportunity to implement the delegated local government functions more actively, to use local resources, skills and knowledge of NGOs, to act in 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. To focus on **unique community resource assessment and continuous development**; support given to collective sharing of technologies and resources; support given to the introduction of various hybrid management models aimed at developing public-private partnerships and promoting social innovation at a local government level, thereby providing better public services and improving their attractiveness;

1.4. **To create National NGO Fund** which provides local initiatives with finances, for example, from companies with share capital and quotas provided by the Members of Parliament. The Fund would have low administrative burden and include decentralized programs, ensuring the possibility to focus on the priorities of the region or the community and to promote the sense of belonging, participation and co-responsibility, as well as to achieve bottom up results from the supported initiatives;

1.5. **Promotion of initiatives for exchanging experiences and cooperation on common development projects** (intra-community, inter-community, inter-organizational, inter-territorial) to bring together resources and experiences of different sectors, as well as to ensure more efficient implementation of the LEADER approach by creating synergies with other funding instruments in Latvian rural area and small towns. Giving **higher ranking to projects supported by public funding and implemented in partnerships**, such as local government–NGO, entrepreneur–NGO, with the aim to stimulate more of such cooperation.

## 2. EQUAL ACCESS TO SERVICES

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To support **innovative and effective solutions** and to increase **access to services** regardless the location of residents (development centres or periphery).

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### 3. APPROPRIATE USE OF RESOURCES

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To draw up a plan for appropriate use of EU funds in order to promote effective use of local, national and EU resources aimed at long-term investment in territorial development and increasing human capacity and quality of life in Latvian rural areas.

### 4. POSITIVE IMAGE OF RURAL AREAS AND TOWNS

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4.1. **to intensify media activities**, especially at national level, **to inform on civil initiatives**, to build a common understanding of balanced territorial development in whole country and to underline the value of the diversity of Latvian rural areas and small towns, as well as to promote positive examples of development and 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 the area they live in;

4.2. **to develop diverse territorial marketing campaigns**, such as competitions, festivals and other fashionable initiatives for different target groups, and to strengthen conviction, especially among young people and young families, that life in rural areas is possible and can be an asset.

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

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5.1. **To ensure continuous Internet coverage and related infrastructure maintenance in Latvia** (regardless of resident number per territory) to take full advantage of e-environment opportunities by means of information and communication technologies and to promote its active use and develop offer of e-services, e-culture, e-participation, e-health and other similar opportunities. **To work on dissemination of the information regarding e-opportunities** and promotion of resident training programs in use of e-resources. To build motivation of people of all ages to take advantage of the e-opportunities, with a special emphasis on disadvantaged groups primarily in areas outside the defined development centres. **To provide professional development opportunities for staff in charge of e-services** and **to develop** in active collaboration of e-service providers **common, secure, user-friendly and convenient data storage, processing, communication and electronic signing systems** with the aim to ensure that the e-opportunities are fully exploited.

5.2. Taking into consideration the possibilities offered by Europe and the world, **to expand e-opportunities** by addressing issues related to ensuring diverse linguistic possibilities and contributing to data security in the common data interchange environment ;

5.3. Human health is a fundamental value and it requires **well-functioning e-health services system** and efficient use. This can be done by learning from good practices within the EU, by **educating citizens and health personnel** in use of e-health tools, by

**facilitating secure data exchange and e-health cooperation** between EU medical institutions and health professionals.

## 6. CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL HERITAGE AND DEVELOPMENT

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6.1. To develop **inter-institutional and cross-sectorial cooperation at a local level** by using more efficiently the modern technologies (including the digitized cultural heritage). The aim is to promote awareness, preservation and targeted use of cultural heritage for increasing public benefit, developing the potential of a territory and achieving success in business. To highlight national programs which use complex cross-sectorial approach in supporting cultural policy, as well as to **provide support to schools and camps, which promote traditions and cultural heritage, small community museums** and other advocates for the preservation of cultural heritage;

6.2. In order to preserve, promote and raise awareness of the diversity of the European cultural heritage, the aim is to **organize EU-level events which emphasize cultural heritage of small communities** and to establish programs of conservation of cultural heritage and for exchanging experiences in the EU, by, for example, expanding the available funding for experience exchanges on cultural heritage.

## 7. EDUCATION: ACCESABILITY, SOCIAL COHESION AND EQUALITY

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In order to emphasize the role of lifelong learning in early identification, mitigation and prevention of social exclusion risk, the aim is:

7.1. to implement the promise included in the programming documents to **provide compulsory education at pre-school and elementary school level as close to the child's/ family's residence as possible**;

7.2. to raise the question of lifelong learning opportunities for people of all ages, **consolidating and making the best use of existing resources**;

7.3. **to use rural schools and other local public infrastructures and intellectual resources** to promote employment, diverse social services and civic participation;

7.4. **to review the indicators for determining the quality of education** in order to support implementation of inclusive and innovative education approaches;

7.5. to allocate funding and other support to education, to **consider communities' socio-economic indicators and geographical situation** in order to contribute to the development of human security and human capital.

## 8. EDUCATED AND COMPETITIVE SOCIETY

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8.1. To ensure **investment for the development of online education** in order to contribute to the improvement of the quality of education and to enhance European education institution competitiveness internationally in a fast-changing environment. This could in its turn improve the European Union's competitiveness in the global education market and economy;

8.2. to **develop lifelong learning policy and to implement activities which contribute to the cooperation of various social and age groups** with the aim to ensure the preservation of the European values and solidarity;

8.3. to create united **co-ordinated lifelong learning process in every Latvian municipality** on the basis of **local resources**, by, for example, using the potential of the existing schools, teachers and the centres of competence and lifelong learning, and by **introducing in all municipalities a position of a lifelong learning coordinator** who could work with various social groups, involve them in education, provide training possibilities, and support continuous public education process and competitiveness of the Latvian economy.

## 9. EMPLOYMENT OF RURAL REDISENTS

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### Local, regional and national level

9.1. to support **diversification of employment opportunities**, including support to and **promotion of teleworking** (work outside a traditional office environment using ICT). The aim is to attract residents to rural areas;

9.2. to promote business cooperation, to **develop mentoring and consulting services** and to support **creation of common working spaces in rural areas** in order to promote entrepreneurship and strengthen social capital.

### European level

9.3. to **develop education programs** (including life-long learning programs) **that promote entrepreneurship and develop employment**;

9.4. to review the EU Youth Guarantee initiative with the aim to promote effective methods for addressing youth unemployment challenges. It should focus on creating new jobs and improving youth employment.

## 10. PROMOTION OF LOCALLY MANUFACTURED GOODS AND SERVICES

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10.1. **to improve local and regional brand support systems**, as well as to encourage creation of partnerships among local organizations, municipalities, producers and the organizations uniting them in order to increase sales of local goods and services. To integrate local products in tourism industry and in shaping place identity;

**10.2. to create opportunities for and support to local outlets** by local governments, as well as to promote local good distribution by means of information technologies in order to improve their visibility, accessibility and sales and as well as to strengthen local identity;

**10.3. to build a supportive legislation for diverse local product realization and the development of short supply chains** in order to improve the capacity of producers and craftsmen and to provide more opportunities for public to buy local goods thus raising public awareness.

## **11. POPULATED ENERGY INDEPENDENT RURAL AREA**

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In order to promote economic independence of rural territories, to increase their usage of renewable energy (particularly by small farms) and to become economically independent as well as to broaden public involvement, it is necessary:

**11.1. to promote positive examples of existing use of alternative energy sources.** To share this experience at national level in order to support the establishment of small-scale self-consumption alternative energy systems;

**11.2. to include citizen participation as an essential and determined (measurable) indicator** in a public consultations aimed at performing environmental impact assessments;

**11.3. to develop academic recommendations** on efficient energy use for different types of farms;

**11.4. to give priority to small farms regarding the investment from the European Fund** which creates production of alternative energy or saving (energy) resources.