



Ministry of Environmental
Protection and Regional
Development
Republic of Latvia



Daugavpils
City Council



**COUNCIL OF EUROPE
EUROPEAN LANDSCAPE CONVENTION**

**TWENTIETH COUNCIL OF EUROPE MEETING
OF THE WORKSHOPS FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION
OF THE EUROPEAN LANDSCAPE CONVENTION**

***Council of Europe Landscape Award Forum
of National Selections
5th Session 2016-2017***

**Daugavpils, Latvia
20-21 June 2018
*Study visit, 19 June 2018***

STUDY VISIT

Latgales tematiskie ciemi – krāsains dzīpars kamolā
Latgale theme villages - a colorful woolen yarn in a ball

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Head of Administration of Latgale Planning Region

There are several theme villages in Latgale region: ancient craft workers, sauna specialists, vegetable growers, beekeepers and also homemade wine makers. This is the model of Latgale theme villages. Within the framework of the Latvian-Lithuanian cross-border co-operation programme, several inhabitants of local municipalities of Latgale region and Lithuania have participated in a theme village project (*Village Heritage*) aimed at helping to promote a business idea for each village in the border regions, in order to generate work and income, and for the people to be known abroad for their products and services. The theme villages have now become a unique tourism product.

Neils Balgalis: “The idea of the project came from Latgale Planning Region. This project was created with Lithuanian citizens. Next, our role as consultants was to bring the idea to life, to generate interest. I must say that it has grown, developed and maybe changed from the original idea, but it seems to be going in the right direction.

The concept of the project is very simple. Theme villages are like a colourful fragment of Latgalian quilt, sewn with various colourful woollen pieces, which bring together a variety of small but colourful objects. Together we are beautiful, but if we are separated – then each of us is just a small, single-coloured woollen yarn. We have to understand that each of us is a specific, single-colour woollen yarn, different from each other, and yet together we are interesting not only to ourselves, but also to the world. What is so interesting about it? We want to live in the countryside, we want to earn from what we are doing, we want to grow and we want people to visit us, to see how we live: we have lots of stories to tell.”

Each theme village is unique with its colour range, diversity of offers and quality. During the theme village fair you can experience the real atmosphere of a traditional market. One person is talking to an acquaintance or trying to find out how the clay pots are made, while others try to haggle about a price. Traders cannot complain about the buyers’ lack of interest.

Lidija Gavare: “Today I can say that trade is quite successful, thanks to the organisers and managers of this project. People are beginning to be more conscious of their health and the environment, and so start to buy organic and ecological vegetables, and we are happy about this.”

Buyer 1: “I bought a very good raspberry wine and a very good black currant wine. I understand that it can only be obtained in Latgale, isn’t that so? And my friend has bought a very good ...”

Buyer 2: “Little children need warmth, winter is coming. They say that this will be a cold winter, so it is necessary to buy warm blankets, woven on, what was it called, looms? They said it is better to take a wider one as it slides less...”

Buyer 1: “The strength, tenacity, which they always have... And we also bought onions that taste like real onions, as the farmer said, and cucumbers that taste like cucumbers. The farmer says we cannot buy it in Riga.”

Neils Balgalis: “We have villages with very different themes, strong themes. We have theme villages with a lot of people and we have a one-person theme village. But I feel they are growing... Could you think of, for example, planting a new oak tree in the Future Oak Village? It is something new and more will be created. Because we are trying to understand, to identify, the most interesting things we can offer others, to the world, and that could be interesting for them as well.”

Zane Praņevska: “Here is my grandmother’s home. I grew up here, my whole childhood was spent here. I see how the villages are dying. Kaži is one of these villages where just a couple of houses are left. And now I see people coming here – they see this nature, see its beauty, and see us who are still here, being productive. I am proud and I will definitely continue promoting our Kaži village through this idea of the Future Oak Village.”

Kaži village, which is located in Sutri parish of Līvāni municipality, is now more recognisable thanks to the Future Oak avenue where everyone commemorates an important event in his life by planting an oak, be it a wedding, the anniversary of the wedding, the birth of a child, or other. Here in the village they also provide a possibility to organise wedding celebration which honour Latgalian traditions – songs, dances and honorary gates.

Zane Praņevska at a tree planting: “Why the Future Oak Village? Because, you see, all these little oak trees, where the wooden supports are bigger than the oaks, are very small: they will grow larger in the future, with large roots, and many acorns. All these oaks were planted in beautiful moments of one’s life –weddings, baptisms, beautiful anniversaries. Most of all, we are loved by newlyweds, so I welcome you both here

today. I am very happy that you will leave your traces in this country, this oak will grow up here, we will take care of it, maybe you will come back to plant another oak tree for a baptism, it could be such a beautiful event. So, come, let's get started."

Zane Praņevska has for some time grown seedlings as a hobby and is now willing to develop the business idea of the Future Oak Village. She hopes to create a museum of the Oak Village in the old barn and also to develop tourism offers during the winter. The inhabitants of the Kaži village say that without the theme village project they wouldn't have been able to realise this idea.

Zane Praņevska: "Our first thought is to create the Oak Museum. We have an old house which was left by godparents, so we will write a project. It is the first thing we want to do here. And there are so many other ideas. We want to make winter attractions for children. We don't have such a place nearby, so we want to organise snow tubing. We hope that after two years we will be able to invite guests during the winter too, and not only in the summer."