



FIELD TRIP 23 MARCH 2017

FLAG Partnerība Laukiem un Jūrai • Partnership for the Land and the Sea FLAG

Introduction



The FLAG, situated in central Latvia close to the capital city of Riga, covers around 75 km of the coastline along the Gulf of Riga. The area also has inland water sources like the Lakes Engure, Kaņieris, Sloka and Valgums.

The coastal area has well-developed sectors in fish processing (14 companies that employ around 800 people) and in tourism (66 enterprises, providing over 200 jobs). Agriculture also plays a key role in the local economy. The unemployment rate of the area is at 4,4% which is below that of the neighbouring regions.

The main challenge in the FLAG area is the **population decrease** which is accompanied by a **reduction of the provision of public services**. The **lack of well-equipped recreational areas**

along the Gulf of Riga also reduces the attractiveness of the area for tourists and residents alike. Partly covering Ķemeri National Park and several other protected areas, another important role of the FLAG is safeguarding and promoting the local biodiversity and cultural heritage.

The FLAG has invited us to the villages of Ragaciems and Engure, where we will visit successful practices of community development and activities to address population decrease.

Ragaciems Village

Ragaciems *sedums* (fishermen huts)

The *sedums* are groups of traditional fishermen boat huts. Traditionally, *sedums* played an important role for community cohesion, providing a gathering place for fishermen and their families to work together. In Ragaciems, the oldest hut dates back to 1920 but because the site was abandoned for decades, many huts had been badly damaged – until recently. Indeed, local fishermen have restored eight of these huts located close to a small harbour and a smokehouse – both for professional use and to host community events, including a Fishermen's Festival.

This is helping to allay fears that these fishing communities could soon die out. In fact, the refurbishment of the boat huts is allowing fishermen to diversify their activities and generate additional income, as well as making the area more attractive to tourists while promoting the local fishing traditions and heritage. The community ownership of this project has revived the site as a social meeting point for the village and while only a small number of professional fishermen are active from this small harbour, they are keeping it alive, physically and socially.

Ragaciems market, a selling point for smoked fish

The Ragaciems market is where the local fishermen and processors sell their produce, especially smoked fish. The fish selling spot demonstrates the crucial role small businesses have for the local economic and social development of the area. While in Western Europe such coastal fish markets can be quite common, they are much less so in post-soviet countries where the heritage of a strongly centralized economy is still very much felt, particularly in rural areas. Yet, the situation is currently changing as local fishermen are keen to diversify their activity with direct sales and by adding value to their product, such as smoking fish. Women are the main drivers behind such marketing activities, providing them with new livelihood opportunities.

Engure Village

Engure fishing port and recreational sailing association

Engure's recreational sailing association, Yacht Club Engure, was established in 2008 to ensure that Baltic sailing traditions are passed onto the younger generations. With the FLAG's support, the association restored the port's administrative building into a local social centre as a place to preserve, develop and keep the traditions of local fishermen, sailors and fish processors alive. The association has also improved the port's infrastructure by building a public pier to attract tourists and for the benefit of the local fishermen and recreational sailors.

They contribute significantly to the community's youth by operating a sailing school. Indeed, the yacht club is one of the few after-school activities offered in the area and plays an important role in ensuring it remains an attractive place to live for young people and families with children. Learning to sail also helps preserve a link to the sea for younger generations all the while boosting their confidence and discipline and demonstrating the various opportunities that the sea can provide beyond fish.

Promoting entrepreneurship among young people in aquaculture and fisheries

As in many countries, the young in Latvia do not always see the development potential of coastal areas. This project, carried out by the National Fisheries Network, aims to motivate young people to start their own business in the fisheries or aquaculture sector. It is implemented in all Latvian FLAG areas and financed by Technical Assistance of the EMFF Operational Programme. It is also intended as a tool for young people to develop their skills and help them become financially stable.

Thanks to the project, young people from coastal areas, aged 18 to 30, receive expert assistance and training to turn their ideas into business projects. They can also take part in a competition organised by the National Fisheries Network recognising the best projects and ideas. To inspire young people and to broaden their horizons, the project also organises field trips for the participants to see how existing business are run.

Equal access of long-term unemployed seniors to the labour market in rural areas

Improving the social well-being of long-term unemployed seniors is a challenge in the Engure region and helping them stay economically active for as long as possible can contribute significantly. However, the decreasing population in Engure's rural areas has been negatively affecting the local labour market with people over 55 finding it particularly difficult to find work.

To tackle this issue, the Engure Municipality carries out a project under the INTERREG Cross-border Cooperation programme "Central Baltic", along with another Latvian municipality and an Estonian municipality which also share this challenge. The project partners have pooled their efforts to create better possibilities for long-term unemployed seniors through training and mentoring, and with special attention to those with lower motivation and self-confidence. A "people-to-people" approach is being used, enabling seniors from all three partner regions to meet and interact, learn from each other's experiences and develop ideas for the future. In Engure, about 100 unemployed seniors received training to acquire the skills and knowledge corresponding needed by the local public and private sectors.



Zemkopības ministrija

