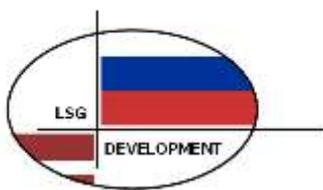




Estonia – Latvia – Russia Cross Border Cooperation Programme within the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument 2007-2013

Project
**«Supporting the local self-government development
to improve the quality of life in rural areas»**
ELRII-269

PRESS-RELEASE OF THE PROJECT



Council of
the Municipalities of
the Leningrad Region



Acronym: LSG Development

Contract Number: ESTLATRUS/3.1./ELRII-269/2012/36

Project Location: Riga City

Start Date: 01.05.2013

Project Duration: 12 months

Grant Amount: 184.104,00 €

Beneficiary: Association "Council of municipalities of the Leningrad Region"

Partner: Latvian Association of Local and Regional Governments

Preconditions

Rural population face the problem of exclusion from decision-making and there is lack of effective communication with government bodies both on municipal and regional level. The situation is actual both for Leningrad region and Latvian municipality with certain differences. This problem significantly affects lives of people living in remote settlements as lots of vital needs remain unsatisfied (and even unknown) by authorities. Additional support is needed for protection in emergency situation (safety), but also daily life could be changed by improvement of quality and increasing the number of social and housing and utility services. This requires the capacity building for a system of representatives of LSG on municipal and regional level (remote settlements elders in Russia). Focus in Russia: Elder institute for rural areas - it exists with informal status, but in order to make it operational institutional conditions should be created and elders should be trained to fulfill the representation function. Focus in Latvia: to improve the municipal policy and LSG practice in rural areas.

Goal and objectives

The project was implemented in order to achieve the goal of improvement of the quality of life in rural areas of the target regions in Russia and Latvia and 4 specific objectives:

1. To increase involvement of rural communities into the regional development processes through social dialog.
2. To improve institutional conditions for local self-government system development in rural areas
3. To arise capacity of rural local self-governments.
4. To develop sustainable cooperation between Latvian and Russian parties

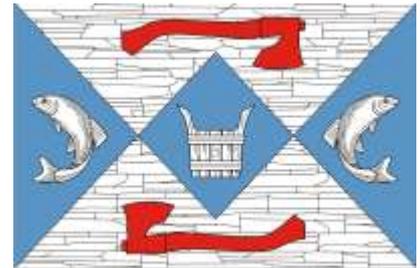
Pilot territories

The following pilot municipalities were selected:

in Russia - Shugozero municipality

Shugozero rural settlement is the one of municipality of Tikhvin District in of the Leningrad region.

The area of the municipality is 979 km².The municipality includes 35 villages with 1293 households.



in Latvia – Gulbene municipality

Gulbene and the surrounding Gulbene municipality are located in North-eastern Latvia within the border of Vidzeme region.

The area of the municipality is 11.898 km², with a population of 29,797 inhabitants (10,015 urban, 19,782 rural population).



Administrations of these municipalities became Associated partners of the project.

Implementation of the project

Improving social dialog

The project started with the kick-off meetings that could be considered as public hearings as they they gathered significant number of people both in Shugozero and Gulbene municipalities. People were informed about the project and agenda of ongoing activities and briefly questioned about actual problems and challenges for the further development of the territories. Received information was used later for preparing questionnaires for the public opinion polls that allowed to collect reliable information about problems and perspectives of development of the pilot territories that became a matter for in-depth analysis.

Two public opinion polls were carried out in July-August 2013 in Shugozero and in August-September 2013 in Gulbene municipality. There were 500 inhabitants involved in each public opinion poll (250 in Shugozero municipality and 250 in Gulbene municipality).

Findings of the public opinion poll in Shugozero included description of services that were not provided properly (mainly), list of duties that have to be fulfilled by elders, key problems for the concrete village and services that could be provided within the village community in the framework of cooperation. It was revealed that one of the most urgent challenges was finding a way of cooperation with seasonal population living in the village. As there are no funds in local budget for provision of the same scope of services as for the local population the deficit of them hampers both categories.

Public opinion poll in Gulbene municipality was aimed at identification the most urgent problems that Gulbene municipality inhabitants face in their daily lives and to find possible solutions to this problem in order to improve the quality of life in local government. Majority respondents (45%) answered that the greatest problem in the municipality is availability of medical care, 33% interviewees mentioned road safety, 28% respondents - road cleaning in winter. 250 questionnaires were completed, thus showing a high level of activity and interest in development the quality of life in local government.

Focus groups were another option to collect comprehensive and actual information from the population regarding concrete ways of activating rural life. Initial focus groups were held in Gulbene and Shugozero right after the public opinion polls. Outcomes of the focus groups formed the ground for further researches conducted by the end of the project.

Another set of public opinion polls and focus groups was implemented in Shugozero and Gulbene municipality during last 3 months of the project implementation. They revealed the impact of the project on the people's lives. A year is not enough to see obvious changes but more important is to see demand for changes and ability to perform them among the population.

Education

Forum on local self-government development was carried out 28-29 August in the framework of the International Exhibition "Agrorus" that drew over 100 participants including 20 members of the Latvian delegation (mainly heads of municipalities as decision makers). First day was devoted to presentation of Latvian municipalities and discussion of the practice of administration of rural development (in the format of the round table). Plenary session was devoted to sustainable development of the rural territories. Second day was spent in the rural settlement of the Leningrad region in order to demonstrate to participants the practice of rural administration



Comprehensive, relevant, profound and extensive training set (8 training modules, 2 days each) was carried out in pilot regions in both countries – in Russia and in Latvia (4 training modules each).

The theme and agenda of trainings was developed on the basis of requests from elders and consultations with the specialists of local authorities of the pilot municipalities. Associate (North-West Management Institute) participated in the development of the courses in the Russian side of the project.

Trainings were carried out by highly qualified trainers - practitioners in the sphere of entrepreneurship or managing rural territory.

Educational program in Latvia was focused on good governance principles, quality of access to public services, dissemination of best experience and legislative aspects, municipal policy and finance, as well as administrative territorial reform in Latvia. The trainings were carried out in Gulbene municipality (Latvia) on 5-6 September, 19-20 September, 3-4 October and 4-5 December.

Educational program in Russia covered the issues of consumer cooperation, self-employment through rural tourism development, farming, and municipal system of alerting in emergency situations. The trainings programme was delivered considering the aspects of working with population, supporting the initiatives groups, fundraising and reporting skills, role of NGOs and public services, municipal policy and municipal finance. The trainings were carried out in Shuozero municipality 9-10 August, 3-4 October, 24-25 October, 28-29 November.

Additional training which summarized all the information presented before was carried out 28-29 April in Pushkin town that allowed drew attention of more apticipants form other rural settlements of the Leningrad region that could be considered as a dissimination activitiy also.



tour to Latvia was organized for 20 Russian participants (elders, heads of municipalities, NGOs).

The study

It was combined with the Conference of best practice of local self-government development that was organized in order to show how local government operates in the EU as a demonstration of the methodologies presented during the trainings. First day of the conference was devoted to presentations of Russian and Latvian municipalities and was held in Gulbene (65 participants) and during the second day in Riga LALRG's experts presented Latvian system of municipal governance (39 participants).



During the Conference protocols between 8 Russian and 8 Latvian municipalities were signed as listed below:

- Pārgauja municipality- Priozersk District
- Madona municipality- Krasnozernoe settlement
- Skrunda municipality- Kuzmolovskoe settlement городское поселение
- Daugavpils municipality - Lodeinopolskoe settlement
- Balvi municipality- Dubrovskoe settlment
- Rundāle municipality- Ropshinskoe settlement
- Amata municipality - Shugozerskoe settlement
- Ape municipality - Putilovske settlement



Capacitating rural elders

One of the most important parts of the project was equipping the rural elders of Shugozero with system of alerting of population in case of emergencies. For this purpose the following devices were purchased:

System „Rupor” that consists of computer and transmitting audio systeme, installed in the building of Shugozero Administration It could be activated by reponsible specialist who chooses type of threat and the system will automatically contact rural elders or their deputies in all 35 villages of the settlement.

Apart from the system itself the following items were purchased:

1. 35 loud speakers, so that elders or their deputies after receiving the signal form the system could inform the population and instruct them on futher actions
2. 35 mobile phones in order to provide 24/7 availability of elders or their deputies

<p>УДОСТОВЕРЕНИЕ № _____</p> <p>Действительно с « _____ » _____ 20__ г.</p> <p><i>Смирнова Наталья Геннадьевна</i> (фамилия, имя, отчество)</p> <p>является старостой <i>деревень Самара,</i> <i>Макарьино, Селище, Олешково</i> (наименование территории)</p> <p>Глава муниципального образования Шугозерского сельского поселения Тихвинского муниципального района Ленинградской области _____ МП (подпись)</p>	 <p>Продлено до _____</p> <p>Продлено до _____</p>
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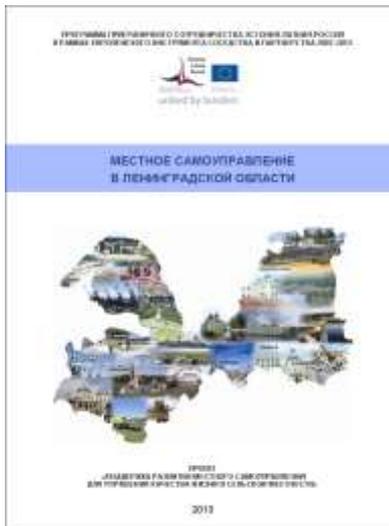
Researches

One of the key outcomes of the project ensuring its sustainability is conducting the researches on actual topics of developing local self-government.

As the result of particular scope of activity the following publications were published and now available both in paper and electronic versions at the project's web-pages:

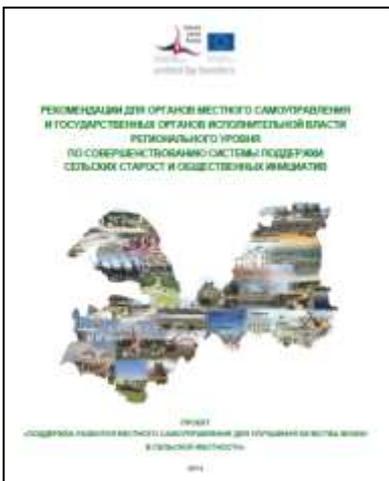
http://lenobl.ru/local_government/asociaciya/international_project

http://www.lps.lv/Projekti/LSG_Development/



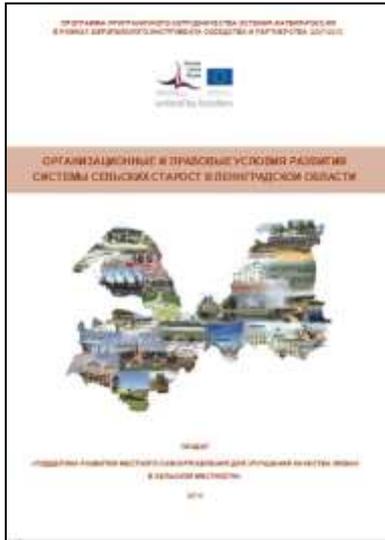
Local self-government

Particular publication is considered to be unique for the Leningrad region. It contains information about cooperation of local self-government bodies and regional legislative and executive authorities. Also loads of statistic data on settlements of the Leningrad region is presented in the book as well as the data covering various areas (budget, small and medium business, education, health, agriculture etc.). Results of implementation of municipal programmes are also analysed. This information is highly evaluated by researches, civil servants.



Recommendations for bodies of local self-government and state executive authorities of regional level on improving the system of support of rural elders and community initiatives

Particular publication provides analyses of the outcomes of public opinion poll, SWOT-analyses of rural settlements on the example of Tikhvin district, comprehensive description of challenges of development of Shugozero settlement, recommendations on capacity building in rural territories, priority directions of financial support of development in rural areas.



Organizational and legal conditions for development of the system of rural elders in the Leningrad region

Particular publication consists of 2 chapters. The first one is the concept on development of the system of the rural elders that includes review of stages of forming of rural elders system in Russia, best practice examples and legislative frameworks for elders in the Leningrad region. Another chapter accumulates all up-to-date information about legislative frameworks of local self-government in the Leningrad region and also recommendations on improving juridical grounds for further development and proposals on legislative basis for Russian-Latvian municipalities' cooperation.



Handbook for elders

The handbook was developed on the basis on consultation with all the elders of Shugozero. They expressed ideas what information should be presented. It contains information about duties of the administrations of Shugozero municipality and Tikhvin district, instructions in emergencies, address book of all shops, services, cultural centers and other information that could be useful for elders and inhabitants of the villages.



Handbook for manager of administration

The handbook was developed on the basis on consultation with the managers of administrations of Gulbene municipality. It contains information about responsibilities of the administrations as well other information that could be useful in order to improve the quality of life in rural areas of Latvia.



The fundamental principle for local government

Compact overview of fundamental principle for local governments as well as relations between government and local authorities in Latvia.



Recommendations on improving the quality of services provided by local government

Recommendations on capacity building and development of local governments in rural territories, priority directions, budget organization, motivation system for employees.

Conference

Final conference became large-scale, extended and successful event in the framework of the project. It drew Russian and Latvian participants representing regional and municipal levels, mass-media, business, civil society. It was highly evaluated by participants and broadly presented in mass-media sources, including Leningrad region news channel: http://online47.ru/video_clip/32867/

The conference was held in a Rozhdestveno Manor, that previously was owned by Nabokov's family.

It was opened by the head of the administration on Gatchina District, Mr Andrey Ilyin, then the word was passed to Michail Lebedinsky, a Chairman of the Committee on Local Self-Government, Interethnic and Interconfessional Relations of the Leningrad region. Latvian delegation was presented by Mr. Nikolajs Stepanovs, Mayor of Gulbene municipality.

Over 100 participants were informed about achievements, challenges and findings of the project during the presentations of the project coordinators: Mrs. Anna Leontieva and Mrs. Elita Kresse.

Very interesting and informative were the presentations of associated partners. Head of Shugozero municipality Mrs. Raisa Chekenyuk provided detailed information about activities that were undertaken at the territory of Shugozero, what it meant for municipality, what are the plans for further development.

Findings of researches were presented by the experts that were working on it.

Mr. Ivan Makarov told about actual status of the system of supporting rural elders and options for state support. Ms. Nikiforova presented outcomes of analysis of public opinion polls and focus groups. Mr. Pukis presented an overview of ongoing territorial reformation in Latvia in the context of local self-government development.

In the end of the conference another important and delightful event took place: after brief presentations 8 Latvian and Russian municipalities signed Agreement of cooperation that opened new page in cross-border cooperation between Russian and Latvian at municipal level.

The following municipalities signed the Agreements:

- Madona municipality – Priozersk District
- Gulbene municipality – Gatchina District
- Skrunda municipality – Kuzmolovskoe settlement
- Daugavpils municipality – Lodeinopolskoe settlement
- Balvi municipality – Dubrovskoe settlement
- Rundale municipality – Ropshinskoe settlement
- Amata municipality – Shugozerskoe settlement
- Ape municipality – Putilovskoe settlement





According to assignment of the President of the Russian Federation experience of the Leningrad region was recommended for consideration to all the subjects of the Russian Federation. So all the deliverables of the project were disseminated among all Council of municipalities in every subject of the Russian Federation. Majority of the regions supported the system of development of local self-government based on rural elders elaborated in the Leningrad region. More detailed information about comments on presented materials could be found at the project web page: http://lenobl.ru/local_government/asociaciya/international_project

Project manager,
Executive Director of Association
"Council of municipalities of the Leningrad Region"
Alexandra Bondar



Estonia – Latvia – Russia Cross Border Cooperation Programme within the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument 2007-2013 financially supports joint cross border development activities for the improvement of the region's competitiveness by utilising its potential and beneficial location on the crossroads between the EU and Russian Federation. The Programme web-site is www.estlatrus.eu