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NOTICE LEADER
The Best Leader Projects of the Estonian Rural Development Plan 2007-2013 in 2011

For the first time in Estonia, the Rural Economy Research Centre in cooperation with the Estonian Ministry of Agriculture and Estonian Agricultural Registers and Information Board (ARIB) organized a competition called “Notice Leader” in 2011.

The aim of the competition is to introduce and give recognition to the best projects that have received support from the Leader measure of the Estonian Rural Development Plan 2007-2013 (RDP) and to the entrepreneurs, NGOs and local administrations that implemented these projects. The Projects were evaluated in five categories: the Best Agricultural Project, the Best Rural Enterprise Project, the Best Environmental Project, the Best Youth Project and the Best Cooperation Project. Anyone was allowed to nominate their projects.

A total of 64 projects from 21 Leader Local Action Group areas were nominated in the competition “Notice Leader”.

This brochure provides you with a brief overview of the four finalists in each category.

The Leader support programme, established already in 1991, is one of the most successful initiatives of the European Commission. At present the Leader measure in Estonia is implemented within the framework of the Estonian Rural Development Plan 2007-2013. There are 26 Local Action Groups (LAGs) in Estonia, covering 99% of the entire Estonian rural area. As of June 2011, the ARIB has approved more than 3,200 projects worth 31.8 million euros in total.

The aims of the RDP Leader measure are to promote local initiatives, to contribute to the enhanced competitiveness of agriculture and forestry, to improve the quality of life in rural areas, to diversify economical activities and to empower the local level through Leader Local Action Groups.
The prize for the best project of “Notice Leader” was made by Ermo Lood’s smithy in Lääne-Viru county.
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Nominees for the Best Agricultural Project

Project title:
Reconstruction of the Ida-Viru county Farmers’ Union building in Jõhvi

Beneficiary:
MTÜ Ida-Virumaa Talupidajate Liit (NGO Ida-Viru county Farmers’ Union), the LAG North-East Coast Partnership area

Location:
Rakvere 27, Rakvere 27, the town of Jõhvi, Ida-Viru county

Project period: July 2009 - November 2010

Support amount from the RDP Leader measure: 129 421 EUR

The Farmers’ Union is definitely interested in new visitors and renters - there is plenty of room!

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Photograph by: Krista Kõiv
Lots of Light and Happy Colours

Reconstruction of the Ida-Viru county Farmers’ Union building in Jõhvi - MTÜ Ida-Virumaa Talupidajate Liit

The building situated at 27 Rakvere St. was formerly used by the Border Guard but since 1994 it houses the Agricultural Board and the county’s Farmers’ Union. Living in someone else’s building does not feel like home: there is always a wish to organize your life according to your own needs. That is why the Farmers’ Union started the proceedings to acquire the ownership of the building in 2002 and the whole process did not even take 5 (!) years.

It was clear from the beginning that the house needs some renovation and some extra space. The Ida-Viru county Farmers’ Union has over 200 members. Various events, such as information days, trainings or meetings are frequently held here. The old training-class seated only a score of people. Also, there was not enough space and uncomfortable conditions for the advisers who worked there.

The new owner’s first question was whether it is worth to start renovating the building. Maybe they should build a new one, farther from the road? While the plot of land under the building was quite small a decision was made to renovate the existing building. It was also decided not to carry out merely cosmetic exterior and roof works but to renovate the entire building. The building design documentation was approved by the local administration in 2008 and a building permit was issued in early 2009, after which an application for Leader support (including construction supervision) was submitted. The Union contracted a loan in order to start the construction process and paid back the loan after received support under the Leader measure. Thus, the project did not pose a big pressure onto the Union’s budget. They did not have to raise the membership fee or cut down on activities.

Only four walls and window openings were retained during the reconstruction – no roof, no floor. The residents of the house worked in a rental building in the town of Jõhvi and observed the course of construction works with anticipation. In November 2010 they moved into the newly renovated building.

The farmers and producers who came to the opening party in January 2011 were really surprised to see the results. There was more space while the electric and heating bills were cut in half. The best alteration was the big and well-lighted hall that had plenty of room for the seventy party guests (and even enough space for dancing). The ground plan of the first floor did not change much but its functions did. Now there are a kitchen, a dining room, a shower and reception rooms. All the little details make the entire building very cozy. Well-lighted balcony is even suitable for sunbathing. A window in the office wall allows keeping an eye on the front door so guests can immediately be welcomed when they arrive. And there are more colourful and cozy office spaces than the owners need for themselves.

So some rooms have been rented out to the Estonian Private Forest Centre and negotiations are being held with some other organisations. Farmers have the habit of visiting this building so it would be very comfortable for them to be able to get their business done with several relevant organisations under the same roof, too.

The hall is very attractive for other event organisers too, despite the fact that the rental option has not been officially made public yet. The Farmers’ Union is definitely interested in new visitors and renters - there is a plenty of room! And also, the entrance to the town of Jõhvi is decorated with a beautiful and well-conditioned building. It is a landmark which helps to head ahead.

Main project activities: Complete the reconstruction of the building; the building was partly demolished (however, the external structure was maintained) to the first floor level; the building was re-built into a two-storied building; utility lines (electricity, water supply, sewerage and heating systems) were replaced; interior works was carried out; greenery and parking-spaces were organised.
Nominees for the Best Agricultural Project

Project title: Purchase of a potato and vegetable washing line
Beneficiary: OÜ Nõmme Köögivili (Ltd Nõmme Vegetables), the LAG Jõgevamaa Cooperation Chamber area
Location: Nõmme village, Kasėpää municipality, Jõgeva county
Project period: Spring 2010
Support amount from the RDP Leader measure: 4 415 EUR

It is a really good machine - like a miracle!

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Crunchy Cucumber Machine!

Purchase of a potato and vegetable washing-line - OÜ Nõmme Köögivili

It all started when there was a submergence of cucumbers... The Anijagos have grown cucumbers in their greenhouse for 22 years already. But the extraordinary good harvest reduced the market prices and selling fresh cucumbers on the market did not pay off. As the family did not want to throw their produce away they put pickled all their cucumbers. However, there were far too many pickles for only their own family so starting to sell them on the market. The customers tried their pickles, approved and asked for more. That is how the family pickles business was established. They bought special barrels and a cooling device, established a small manufacturing building and a cellar.

But washing the cucumbers to be pickled is not the easiest job in the world. Ice-cold water makes hands stiff and sore. And some cucumbers are as muddy as potatoes: you can wash it as hard as you can but it is still covered with mud! So they came up with an idea to purchase a machine that could do this hard work but nobody knew what kind of a machine it should be. They found a suitable machine on the Internet but the price was too high - almost 11 000 euros.

The family had no real belief of receiving support from the Leader measure but they still went through the paperwork and wrote a business plan. And last summer they had the money to finally purchase this “miracle machine”!

While it took their family (three persons) an hour to wash 150 kg of cucumber manually, the machine washes even 1500 kg cucumbers per hour. It has another bonus feature also: it can be operated only by one person. The machine cleans even the dirtiest vegetables. “It is a really good machine - like a miracle! Before we had to spend the beautiful summer washing cucumbers. Now we can do other useful things,” says Mrs. Anijago.

The washing line has the capacity to wash much more than their own cucumbers. It created an opportunity to start cooperation: now they buy cucumbers for reasonable price from the neighbouring households and people have a place to bring their extra cucumbers. And pickling creates added value. Products are sold to wholesalers and to various catering businesses.

Machine-washed cucumbers have high quality - they are really crunchy. The colder the washing and conserving water is the better the pickles. The machine also washes potatoes and other vegetables, too: for the whole neighbourhood, if necessary!

**Main project activities:** A potato and vegetable washing line that is mainly used for washing cucumbers and other vegetables upon need was purchased
Nominees for the Best Agricultural Project

Project title: Purchase of apiculture devices
Beneficiary: OÜ Taali Mesila (Ltd Taali’s apiary), the LAG Partners area
Location: Tartu road 21, Roela village, Lääne-Viru county
Project period: Year 2010
Support amount from the RDP Leader measure: 857 EUR

This device does what was promised!

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Ecological Honey is Not to Waste

Purchase of apiculture devices - OÜ Taali Mesila

Ecological honey sold in ecological stores across Estonia comes from the forests of Alutaguse. Honeybees gather pollen from the pure nature (the western corner of the forest of Alutaguse). Honeybees live all their summers on “duty assignments”: all bee groups combined take a 70 km tour around the forest. The honey produced by bees is gathered from beehives and packaged in jars in the Taali’s apiary.

Apiculture is a matter of generations - it is passed on from father to son. It’s not just the knowledge that is inherited but also the devices because honey production needs very specific equipment. Even now beekeepers use devices that are made over 40 years ago. When you use and fix the devices by yourself - then they are usable for many generations. What is good for the grandfather is good for the grandchildren, too.

However, everything gets old - for example, how many times can you patch a pair of old pants? The time spent on repairs is also an investment, especially since summers are precious as gold for beekeepers. In the beekeeping business everything depends on the weather so apiarists must make the most out of a beautiful summer day - their winter income will depend on that. That’s why they cannot lose this precious time for fixing their devices. Hence, the Taalis constantly have an eye on specialist catalogues in order to see what’s new in the market. The honey-kitchen is gradually filling up with equipment and modern devices made of stainless metal.

They found their beeswax melter/honey-separator also from a catalogue. It caught their attention because it helped solve a big problem. Namely, they lost up to 10% of honey during the separation of capping wax. People may think a tenth is a small amount, but if you take into account their total annual production volume (5-6 tons) it means that about 500 kg of expensive ecological honey will be fed to bees instead of selling it.

The sales pitch in the catalogue seemed to be unbelievable - is it really possible to have such a brilliantly simple device that would solve their problem? Buying equipment from abroad is risky, especially when it is unique in their home country and there is nobody to consult with. The device for making honey blends, for example, turned out to be not what they hoped for. Apparently they would not have had the courage to take the risk to buy the new device without the Leader’s help. But the Leader support increased the family’s willingness to give it a try and see if the producer’s praise of its device was grounded.

This risk paid off: the device fulfils its sales promise. Wax surfaces during the warming of the mixture of wax and honey while protecting the honey from overheating - it’s simple and effective. Now people can buy and consume around 10% more of quality and high-in-demand honey from an Estonian ecological trademark.

Main project activities: The purchased beeswax melter/honey separator separates quality commercial honey from capping-wax
Nominees for the Best Agricultural Project

Project title:
Purchase of a mobile sheep yard

Beneficiary:
OÜ Rehekivi, the LAG Partners area

Location:
Puka village, Vinni municipality, Lääne-Viru county

Project period: Year 2010

Support amount from the RDP
Leader measure: 2 882 EUR

The sheep chase has ended!

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Photograph by: Erik Lööper
There is a myth that farmers, especially small-scale farmers do not have anything to do with the Leader programme. It’s not true! Leader gladly supports agricultural projects, too. The financers are especially happy with applications where small things can move mountains.

The eco-sheep breeding has been carried out on the lands of OÜ Rehekivi in the Vinni municipality for more than ten years. The owners, veterinarians who also help other livestock breeders, know very well how troublesome and time-consuming sheep management can be. Sheep do not respond to calling, instead, they only struggle and storm around every time they need to be weighed or treated, helped to lamb or have any other procedures.

In order to sort and separate sheep the family used to have wooden fences which were so heavy that they had to be carried to the pasture one by one. And a big part of the day was wasted on chasing the frightened animals. The family had looked at the light-weight mobile yards produced in New-Zealand and brought to Estonia by a group of Saaremaa’s men before but due to the high price it had remained an unattainable dream. But now the sheep chase has ended thanks to the received support from the Leader measure.

40-meters long module yard is like a LEGO - it can be turned into whichever shape currently needed. You just set the yard around the flock, gradually closing it down and direct the animals by groups or one-by-one to corridors or gathering spaces. Sheep stand calmly throughout the process, resembling passengers in an airport waiting area in front of passport control, and move step-by-step as the queue is moving. No panic and no stress, only a little boredom must be swallowed during the waiting process. As ecological sheep must grow in a stress-free environment a little boredom won’t do them any harm.

The eco-farmers themselves have less stress and more useful time for working, too. The mobile yard is so light that one person can handle it, even a child. In order to take the whole contraption to the paddock you need to fold it together, attach wheels to it, brace the lump and hook it behind your car. It can be used on any kind of terrain or soil. In summertime, the mobile yard closure is used more on the paddock whereas in winter it will be shaped into long line of lambing boxes where each lamb has its own “apartment”.

The usage of such mobile yards has gradually been expanded in Estonia. Besides sheep it can also be used by beef breeders. But still, the price... But that’s why we have the Leader measure - in order to make the life easier.

Main project activities: Purchase of a mobile sheep yard
Nominees for the Best Rural Enterprise Project

Project title: Marketing activities of Delicious South-Estonia - an involving marketing plan

Beneficiary: MTÜ Maitsev Lõuna-Eesti (NGO Delicious South-Estonia), the LAG Tartu Development Association area

Location: Shopping centre “Lõunakeskus”, Tartu

Project period: September 2010 - September 2011

Support amount from the RDP Leader measure: 5 971 EUR

A breeding ground for small-scale producers!

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Delicious South-Estonia

Marketing activities of Delicious South-Estonia - an involving marketing plan - MTÜ Maitsev Lõuna-Eest

Small-sized producers have limited opportunities for finding access to larger markets when operating alone. Despite the fact that their products may have high quality big supermarket chains are not interested in selling their goods. Their volumes are so small that supermarkets do not even think about giving them a chance. Other factors that hinder a deal with larger chains may also include the price, package, storage life or an unknown brand name. Estonian consumers are looking for and demanding local quality farm products and there are many producers that meet these criteria but there is no link connecting these consumers and producers. Four Leader LAGs in South-Estonia established the MTÜ Maitsev Lõuna-Eesti (NGO Delicious South-Estonia) in order to join the forces of local small-sized producers. It aims to market the products of small-scale producers and to provide them with various sales channels. The NGO soon reached an agreement with Lõunakeskus, a large shopping centre in Tartu. The farmers’ market was opened there in August 2010. The indoor sales stands are opened all year round and outdoor stands sell seasonal products.

More than 60 South-Estonian producers are selling their products in this farmers’ market. The first ones who found their way to the farm market were the Liivimaa beef cattle, Otepää Oskar’s and Estonian ecological meat products, Nopri dairy products, Taarapõllu farm’s juices and berry chips, Järveotsa quail-farm’s quail eggs, Tamme horticultural farm’s herbs, Põhjala farm’s sea-buckthorn products, Rähni farm’s rabbit meat and other delicacies. The distinctive feature of products sold in the farmers’ market is that the sellers always know where and how their products were grown. And they also receive direct feedback on their products from clients. Visitors can enjoy product presentations and sampling or taste dishes made on the spot, such as baked bread, waffles and ginger breads. People can also order goods delivered to their homes online.

Using local ingredients is the main precondition for getting a sales spot on the market. “It must come from an Estonian farm or a small entrepreneur that we know,” says Merle Vall, the Executive Director of the NGO.

In addition to creating a channel of distribution and common marketing activities, producers are also attracted the option of participating in the network where they can exchange best practices and information and learn from each other. The farmers’ market acts as a breeding ground for small-sized entrepreneurs. Product development, product presentation and enhancing the marketing capacity of producers are all important assets of the network.

Main project activities: A marketing plan and visual identity for the MTÜ Maitsev Lõuna-Eesti were developed; introductory videos of the NGO members will be shot; the Delicious South-Estonia trademark will be registered; the home-page is still under construction
Nominees for the Best Rural Enterprise Project

Project title: Development of bio-compost production
Beneficiary: Matogard OÜ, the LAG Green Riverland Partnership area
Location: Randivälja village, Tori municipality, Pärnu county
Project period: August 2010 - March 2011
Support amount from the RDP Leader measure: 34 596 EUR

You can be sure that our soil contains only useful components for plants!

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A Horse Sitting on a Potty

Development of bio-compost production - OÜ Matogard

A product with a horse sitting on a potty on the package is made in a former hay barn and newly renovated production building in the Tori municipality. It is plant soil mix which is made of horse manure compost - manure that comes from the horses of the Tori horse breeding farm.

Mart Ruumet, the former director of the Tori gardening farm, has been dealing with planting soils for 25 years. The planting soils business was established in order to fulfil the needs of flower shops. For now, OÜ Matogard produces about 200 tons of varied selection of planting soil per year.

The key word of Matogard’s planting soils is top quality. They use modern technology and science-based product development.

It all starts from the composting process. The manure of the Tori horses combined with bedding is piled into 50-meters long columns. A machine is driving on the top of the column, mixing the compost when necessary. The temperature and humidity of the compost are being measured separately. The high temperature achieved during the composting process is maintained for weeks in order to exterminate several harmful organisms and weed seeds. But there is more. Horse manure is definitely a valued fertilizer in gardening. But planting soils must not contain any diseases, vermin or manure-worms because these normally usually useful organisms eat the roots of plants grown in pots. OÜ Matogard uses steam technology in order to sterilize compost. This technology is used in many countries but there are no records of it being used elsewhere in Estonia. The whole compost that is being packaged or used in making planting soils is processed with hot steam thus ensuring that the soil contains only useful components for plants. Useful microbiology is regenerated after the processed compost has been cooled off.

The company has its own laboratory set because there was a need for it. Oftentimes they had to wait for analysis results for 3-4 weeks from the National Soil Laboratory. But a business can not wait for that long, especially when dealing with product development. Now they have the necessary devices for determining the amount of nutrients in, acidity of soil and other required indicators. A similar laboratory set was unique even throughout the Baltic States.

Mart Ruumet adds: “This laboratory is like insurance. We take a soil test, analyse and deposit it. If a claim arises we can immediately check the series and analyses results and show to the customer: we have quality products.”

Without the Leader measure these investments would have never be made. An entrepreneur who wants to avoid excessive risks can not contract too much loans but disposable funds are used for expanding production. This is the only method for reducing cost price and enhancing competitiveness.

Our clients are satisfied with the result. Matogard also produces soil conforming to the requirements for eco-producers. Now there is a fan-club of the horse sitting on a potty, a loyal customer base. Even people abroad have taken an interest in our quality soil mixes. Thanks to the new technology we have an ongoing export to the other Baltic States and negotiations are being held with other countries as well.

Main project activities: A steam boiler, thermo-treatment unit for compost, set for determining the physical-chemical qualities of compost, packaging device for BigBag bags, and pallet shaper were purchased directly from the producer
Project title: Attractions of the Vudila playland
Beneficiary: OÜ Vudila, the LAG Jõgevamaa Cooperation Chamber area
Location: Kaiavere village, Tabivere municipality, Jõgeva county
Project period: Year 2010
Support amount from the RDP Leader measure: 61 527 EUR

The best compliment we can get - when evening falls, parents drag their crying children who are reluctant to leave out of the playland!

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Photograph by: Gitta Veber
Nine Hectares of Pure Joy

Attractions of the Vudila playland - OÜ Vudila

An Internationally known quail farm ended its operations in Kaiavere in 1991. The beautiful protected lake-shore grew over. The deteriorating buildings had one owner after another until 2006 when two young families bought them. An action plan was developed quickly: children need to play!

Today, Vudila is the biggest children playland in Estonia. Nine hectares are filled with various activities and ways to have fun for any age and any need. Visitors can find moto trails, a climbing tower, waterbikes and land-trampolines, games house, sheep, goats and horses, observation platform and water-football - you name it! There are also indoor play-houses where children can rest or have a birthday party, a children’s theatre and a Christmasland in winter. The playland also has well-organised catering, parking, toilets and showers. Nearly twenty instructors keep their eyes on all attractions so that young visitors could feel safe while playing.

While this undertaking has also provided a lot of fun to its owners, the main goal is to entertain the customers. They had around 22,000 visitors in the summer of 2010 and the owners project at least the same figure for this year. The Christmasland, opened in December, offered fun to more than 2,000 children. All children from Estonian orphanages have a free pass to the playland. Kajar Lember, the Managing Director and one of Vudila’s owners, said with a smile: “The best compliment we can get - when evening falls, parents drag their crying children who are reluctant to leave out of the playland!”

Most of Vudila’s attractions are there because of the support received from the Leader measure. Owners say that the most important aspect was the flexibility of the support measure. Leader has helped with many crucial things. For example, it helped Vudila to buy pool cleaning devices and an electrical generator. The whole undertaking would have been extremely difficult without the Leader measure support.

Vudila is an ongoing project. The owners are planning a huge water slide, nature trail and park of funny monuments, places to have a picnic and to purchase more animals for the petting zoo. For the enterprise itself it means more investments. The next priority is to establish the most enjoyable outdoor water attraction.

It should also be noted that the Tabivere municipality and the Environmental Board have always had fast and accurate procedures so that no action plans of Vudila have been hindered by bureaucracy.

Vudila has close cooperation with the Elistvere Animal Park and the Palamuse Parish School Museum. Joint marketing efforts contribute to attracting the interest of foreign visitors and prolong the visitors’ stay in the area, even for several days.

Main project activities: The following attractions were purchased: trampoline/obstacle-trail, small trampolines, swings, a slide, sand-box and playground for toddlers, Sky-jump bungee-trampoline, children’s trampoline, children’s electrical cars, water-boats, 3 waterwheels, 4 paddle boats, micro-pool with a slide; 18 mini-golf trails were built; landscaping was finished; the project documentation of water attractions was prepared.
Nominees for the Best Rural Enterprise Project

Project title: Romantic Coastline

Beneficiary: MTÜ Pärnu Lahe Partnerluskogu (NGO Pärnu Bay Partnership), the LAG Pärnu Bay Partnership area

Location: the LAG Pärnu Bay Partnership area

Project period: June 2009 - end of 2011

Support amount from the RDP Leader measure: 111 244 EUR

No one will hand you the recipe for romance - you have to find it yourself!

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There are hundreds of Recipes for Romance

Romantic Coastline - MTÜ Pärnu Lahe Partnerluskogu

In Spring 2008, representatives of the LAG Pärnu Bay Partnership met in the Ojako Tourism and Training Centre in Pärnu county. By the way, the venue was not chosen by chance. The hostess of top accommodation enterprise of the area is known for her high standards for the local food offered to guests: strawberries, for example, must be picked from the same village no more than an hour before serving! The same rules apply to fish, cucumbers and other fresh products. For now, Ojako has become the “most wanted” tourism enterprise in the area - can you guess why?

But the representatives of the municipalities did not gather to Ojako for the strawberries but to discuss how to encourage local entrepreneurs and local people to be more active in the area. How to convince them that their daily activities are valuable, there is a need for that, and they can sell their services and products. The area near the bay of Pärnu is historically related to coastal villages of fishermen. But there is not much fish anymore and fishing is a vanishing trade. But the romance related to traditional lifestyle and the scenic nature has remained.

That is how the idea of Romantic Coastline trademark was born. Today, around 100 enterprises have grouped under the pine tree logo thanks to ten member municipalities of the NGO Pärnu Bay Partnership and the support from the Leader measure. The Romantic Coastline involves nearly 250km of coastline that covers six municipalities situated by the sea, from Varbla to Iklär, stopping by the island of Kihnu and romantic trails in four inland municipalities, connecting the services offered also with cultural, historical and nature values.

No one will hand you the recipe for romance - you have to find it yourself. You can enjoy the beautiful nature, the legends, the friendly people and interesting activities in the area. For example, people can visit Tahkuranna’s signature event, the Pickle Festival. The “hero” of the event is the famous Soviet-era pickle of Tahkuranna. It was even preserved at night because they had to be in the Leningrad market on time. And oh, what stories and legends are related to these times! But do modern people really care about this?

There were 1487 participants from 16 countries at the first festival. It took two and a half hours to sell all the pickles. “If we would have known, we would have taken more pickles with us!” complained the ladies. The festival lasted till the late hours and it will surely become a tradition. Guess how many cucumber plants the ladies of Tahkuranna planted this year?

“There are many small can become big only when they act together. If you want to play in the big league then there is no other option than to cooperate,” say the members of the LAG.

They are sure that what has been done with help of Leader, will not last for five years - it will remain there for decades because people are realizing their joint dreams under the trademark of Romantic Coastline. And thanks to the Leader measure people can see the Leader logos near the bay of Pärnu for many years to come.

Main project activities: Mapping the area; establishing a network; creating a common trademark and visual identity book “Romantic Coastline”; organizing trainings and joint events; publishing the brochure “Holiday on the Romantic Coastline in Pärnu county” and creating a joint website of the area in two languages (in Estonian and English) - HYPERLINK “http://www.rannatee.ee” www.rannatee.ee; acting under and presenting a joint identity in an information stand; participating in various summer events
Nominees for the Best Environmental Project

We have a beautiful and enjoyable river section now!

Project title:
Cleaning the River Mudajõgi in Äksi

Beneficiary:
SA Vooremaa Looduskeskus
(Foundation Vooremaa Nature Reserve),
the LAG Jõgevamaa Cooperation Chamber area

Location:
Äksi village, Tabivere municipality, Tartu county

Project period: Autumn 2009

Support amount from the RDP Leader measure: 18 407 EUR

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Saadjärv, one of the most interesting Estonian lakes, is situated in Vooremaa. Filled with fish and clear water, the lake is enjoyable both above and below the water. Numerous local people and tourists like to have a picnic by and swim in Lake Saadjärv.

The only outflow of the lake is the River Mudajögi which flows by Laeva river to the Great Emajögi river. The mill dam was established on the river decades ago. Lake Saadjärv used to be a lake with a low water level but the dam raised the water level, creating a unique ecological system and designing the surroundings of Lake Saadjärv the way we can see it today.

As the name says, Mudajögi (mud river) is a watercourse which has been gradually narrowed by the flows from the lake. Canebrake started to proliferate so clear water was flowing only as a one meter wide rill at the central part of river.

In addition to that problem, Lake Saadjärv had to fight with another obstacle. Namely the concrete parts of the mill dam regulator were about to collapse and close the river entirely. The consequences would have been irreparable.

Support from the Leader measure helped the Vooremaa Natural Centre to clean the river and to renovate the mill dam regulator. Tensions increased during this process as the temporary decrease of the water level of Lake Saadjärv was a concern to the local people, the Environmental Board and the press. But after cleaning a 400 meter section of the river has ensured the fluent water flow from Lake Saadjärv, bountiful fish reserves and clear water.

The project also has added value. The River Mudajögi is now navigable by small boats for half a kilometre. Now people can enjoy a nice river where you can reach the Lake Saadjärv comfortably by boat or waterwheel. This opportunity is actively in use among both local people and visitors. Äksi as a former parish-centre is quite an important tourist destination and gradually there will be more boats offering a ride on the River Mudajögi.

The project did not eliminate consequences but instead helped to prevent a danger which many people were not even aware of. Hopefully the tourists of the Mudajögi River and Lake Saadjärv will never have to think about the potentially darker future of Lake Saadjärve without Leader support.

Main project activities: Establishing temporary dam for the River Mudajögi; cleaning the River Mudajögi from dreg; dreg grading and repairing the mill dam regulator of the river
Nominees for the Best Environmental Project

Project title:
Designing the belvedere stairs and hiking trails of the Valaste falls

Beneficiary:
MTÜ Kirde-Eesti Puhkerajad (NGO Recreation Trails of North-East Estonia), the LAG Partnership of North-East Coast area

Location:
Valaste village, Kohtla municipality, Ida-Viru county

Project period: June 2009 - March 2011

Support amount from the RDP Leader measure: 20 023 EUR

You can see the sea but can’t reach it!

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Paper Foundation for a Learning Trail

Designing the belvedere stairs and hiking trails of the Valaste falls - MTÜ Kirde-Eesti Puhkerajad

If something nice is established or built, people usually acknowledge it when it is finished. They seldom think about the amount of preparatory work, research and paperwork such processes involve. But still, it all starts on paper.

The highest fall of Estonia is situated in the village of Valaste in Ida-Viru county. The waterfall, starting from the creek of Valaste, falls from the bank to sea. It is believed that this waterfall was made by man. A legend says that in 1800 a man called Jüri Kraav (Jüri Ditch) dug a canal into the ground which was later deepened and broadened. Was the water flowing there before Jüri’s hard work - nobody remembers. The Valaste falls were mentioned in the local weekly newspaper as a wonderful sight already in 1840. An observation platform was established in 1999 so people could enjoy the breath-taking view to the sea, observe and explore the different geological layers and feel the fresh drizzle on their faces that arises from the falls.

People can see the sea, but can’t reach it. Only adrenaline junkies dare to climb down from the cliff, but nobody can come back up again.

The area is maintained by the NGO Recreation Trails of North-East Estonia. Each year a group of mountain climbers come and clean the shore from litter. The shore and the forest would be much cleaner if there would be a stairway to the sea. Also the tourists (30-35 daily bus loads of tourists at the peak time) would have more to see and do than just look at the sea for a moment and then use the toilet and leave.

The planned learning trail would be 1.5 km long. It would go down the stairs and ramp to the sea and would run along the shore and scree in the bank-woods to the bank of Ontika and back from upper bank shore to the parking lot of Valaste. The trail and stairway platform will be full of numerous information stands and boards.

But the area is a protected zone with building restrictions. That is why several examinations have been conducted, the results of which have demanded new ones. All in the name for protecting moss, lichen and other unique nature resources from harmful human behaviour, and in order to make people's stay safe on the bank. Without the support the local government and the NGO could not have done all this and the establishment of the stairways, observation platform and learning trail would still be a distant dream, not a project soon to be started.

There is a close cooperation between the NGO, Kohtla municipality, local entrepreneurs, The State Forest Management Centre and Estonian Ministry of Agriculture thanks to the support of Leader measure. Also the cooperation with Estonian Agricultural Registers and Information Board has been flawless. All beneficiaries agreed that they need to make some effort to invite tourists into the area instead of scaring them away. Fences, barricades and prohibition signs won’t keep anybody away anyway. It is wiser to let people to observe one of the Estonian magnificent natural sight the way that nature would retain its' glory. This learning-hiking trail is also one part of the international European hiking trail which heads from St. Petersburg to Spain.

Main project activities: Designing the belvedere stairs and hiking trails for the Valaste falls' observation platform, including the following studies: Describing the learning trail of Ontika-Valaste and input to compile the construction project; Lichenological expertise on the planned learning trail of the Ontika Landscape protection area; Protected and unique lichen in the area of planned Ontika learning-hiking trail; Lichenological expertise on Ontika Landscape protected area of the part of Valaste falls learning trail and protected and unique lichen in the area of the Ontika hiking trail and the Valaste falls
Nominees for the Best Environmental Project

Small things can grow into bigger ones!

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Project title: Establishing recreation places near public lakes
Beneficiary: Paistu municipality, the LAG Mulgimaa Development area
Location: Lake Holstre and the village of Loodi, Paistu municipality, Viljandi county
Project period: Spring 2010
Support amount from the RDP Leader measure: 9,777 EUR
A Little Great Thing

Establishing recreational places near public lakes - Paistu municipality

Lake Holstre, located in Viljandi county, is an attractive sight for many people. The children of the Holstre school and kindergarten use the area for having outdoor classes. The beautiful lakeshore invites local people and also visitors of the Holstre-Polli Sport and Recreational Centre, hikers on the trails of the Loodi national park, participants of summer camps for children and other tourists. After the recreational area was opened in 2010, a wonderful tradition was started: the first Paistu Mulgi public triathlon, the swimming stage of which is now held in Lake Holstre. Also, the Holstre village’s fire of Midsummer Night bonfire was lighted at the fire place of recreational area. The local community has now been enriched by an important and cosy place.

Until Spring 2010 the area was an ordinary “wild” public lakeshore. Then the municipality applied for support from the Leader measure and tidied up the shore-area.

“Actually we don’t have anything that big in here”, modestly notes Ene Saar, the Rural Municipality Mayor. “It is an ordinary small recreational area - nothing much for viewers.” She is right, there is nothing special about garbage bins, toilets or a parking lot. But what if they were not there? Small details lead to perfection.

The Leader measure gives people an opportunity to CARE - to care for the nature, for clean surrounding and milieu values. A difference in people’s behaviour has already been noticed - they don’t pollute the shore so much anymore and they show more respect for themselves and their surroundings. Still, there is a long way to go and it takes time to reach the goal.

Another public lake in the area is the impounded lake, situated in the Loodi Nature Park. This lake already has a recreation area which is an important gathering place for the local community’s people and visitors of the Nature Park. Children of the schools and kindergartens of Viljandi often have trips to the beautiful valley in order to enjoy the nature. The Leader measure also helped to establish a community swing there, entertaining both the young and the old.

Tidying of the lake shore and building a community swing are not separate issues: they are small but important parts of the bigger plan which will make the whole community and village more attractive and pleasant.

Plans for the next few years include cleaning the overgrown lake with the support from the Environmental Investment Centre. The Estonian Road Administration will construct the pavement, install lighting and road advertisements. The goal is to take the most out of existing opportunities such as public funds and support in order to contribute to the public and environment. The Rural Municipality Mayor says: “People in small villages have to act step-by-step, that is forward-looking and important. Small things can grow into bigger ones.”

Main project activities: The lake shore was cleaned; a toilet, garbage bins, a fireplace, shelter, information stands, parking lot, driveway and secure bridge were established; the existing recreation place in Loodi Natural Park got a community swing
Nominees for the Best Environmental Project

Project title:
Establishing and landscaping the bird-watch-tower/clay-house of Kiideva nature centre

Beneficiary:
MTÜ Kalaküla Rohelised,
the LAG Kodukant Läänemaa area

Location:
Kiidewa village, Ridala municipality,
Lääne county

Project period: June 2009 - June 2010
Support amount from the RDP Leader measure: 11 365 EUR

It’s good to have a place to explore nature!

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A Fishing Village Turns into a Bird-Watching Village

Establishing and landscaping the bird-watch-tower/clay-house of the Kiideva nature centre - MTÜ Kalaküla Rohelised

Kiideva village, or Fishing village for local people, is one of the few real fishing villages in Lääne county that has hundreds of years of traditions. The village is still living but there is no fish in the sea and that is the reason why most of the fishermen have left. Although there are 72 houses in the village, only 20 persons live there throughout the year, others are summer-people.

But the people aren’t leaving, not at all. New spheres of activities that keep people in the area are nature tourism and education. Local people are really active in finding funds from different support projects for these spheres - a little bit from here, little bit from there. Voluntary work is also important in making the local area more attractive and comfortable living environment. The location near the bay of Matsalu offers many opportunities for that. The local people have also applied for support from the Leader measure. They have also tidied hiking trails and established boat landings.

The latest biggest construction project has a fancy name - dock building/bird-watching tower.

You can’t find any port terminals in this dock. A small pavilion with clay walls and big windows contains information boards on the bay of Matsalu and the Kalaküla village, closets where people can hold equipment for teaching or fishing and foldstools - and actually there is not much room for anything else. Foldstools were chosen because fishermen then would have room to place the life jackets and other equipment under the roof. The building is for public use (however the doors are locked at night) - it is a good place to hide from the rain. One school excursion used it even for accommodation because their tents were too wet to sleep in. Local people brought some mattresses to cover the floors and children were very excited and happy!

In order to get to the second floor, the bird-watching tower, you must climb up a wooden stairway. From there you can enjoy the beautiful view to the bay of Matsalu and canebrake in the coastal area: a real paradise for bird watchers.

There used to be a small bird-watch-tower in Kiideva before. But Tiiu Tomingas notes: “This is a home for a beaver now and the tower is not stable, more than five persons should not climb up there at a time. The new tower was planned to be as small as the last one - only nine square meters. But somebody brought 8 blocks of concrete from somewhere and they established a platform of 35 square meters. We are very happy!”

Supporting nature education is an important activity in Kiideva. But modern teachers do not know much about the nature, to say nothing of the students. It is good to have a place to explore the nature - for free. There are no donation boxes in Kiideva, not to mention ticket sales - although they have occasionally been criticised for that. They do have bird-song listening mornings and mushroom picking in forests, which is naturally free of charge.

There will be bird-watching lens and binoculars, ice-skates and snowshoes thanks to the Leader support. The NGO has also purchased nature books as they are often too expensive to buy by individuals. It is nice to read such books on the spot and to have projects that make it all possible.

Main project activities: Water-proofing of the bird-watch-tower/clay-house roof; establishing a floor on top of the level framework of the watch-tower roof; establishing two-sided wooden door and five windows; establishing 1.2 m high wooden railing with 23 steps, two platforms and stairway with two-sided banister
Nominees for the Best Youth Project

They only write about the topics that are really interesting for students!

Project title: Publishing the youth newspaper “Skriim” in 2009-2010

Beneficiary: MTÜ Skriim, the LAG Raplamaa Partnership Registered Assembly area

Location: Hagudi village, Rapla county

Project period: Year 2009 - 2010

Support amount from the RDP Leader measure: 11,350 EUR

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Photograph by: Ave Bremse
Our Very Own Newspaper

Publishing the youth newspaper ”Skriim“ - MTÜ Skriim

Of-course there are many newspapers meant for young people. But there is something special about the youth newspaper Skriim that is published once a month as an insert in the Rapla county’s local newspaper - it is not only meant for young people, but it is also issued by young people. It is prepared by the youth from the very front to the back, including illustrations and photographs.

The youth newspaper of Rapla county has a long history. Its’ predecessor, Validool, was first published in 1996. However, the small newspaper subsidiary has economical difficulties as it does not sell any advertisement space and the print-run (around 3000 copies) is quite impressive on the countywide scale, but it is still not enough to earn a reasonable profit. Hence, Leader has supported the NGO Skriim since 2009 - this will help them to retain this wonderful tradition. Leader has also helped to promote the newspaper and activities related to it in county schools and youth centres.

The compilation of the newspaper involves 15–20 young people all over the county. There is active cooperation between eighth/ninth graders and upper secondary school students. Sometimes they also receive articles from students who have already graduated and have enrolled in a university, studying journalism, for example.

The team meets a couple of times per month and communicate through the Internet in the meantime. Such long-distance cooperation makes it possible to involve also exchange students and young people who do voluntary work abroad.

Young people can also choose the topics they are concerned about - the newspaper includes only themes that are really interesting for the youth. But the team is really varied so the paper contains different topics, from sex myths to hitchhiking. The newspaper also contains stories about music, movies and journalistic experiments. For example, there was an experiment on how to survive for a week while not using any emoticons in web communication. It’s definitely a challenge, don’t you think?

The front page always includes a street poll. A very popular column is “Above your head” where young people can send photographs about what they have noticed and which are, well, “above their heads”.

In addition to the inserts distributed with newspaper Nädaline, copies of the newspaper are also distributed in schools and youth advisory centres. Young people do not think that the paper edition of the newspaper is old fashioned and read it with pleasure.

It is surprising that the newspaper is quite popular among middle-aged and older people who would like to know how young people of today think and speak. Skriim is good at fulfilling this aim because the authors really speak their mind. Young people do not hesitate to say what they think. Liis Ehavere, the Project Manager, sums it up: “I would know much less if I wouldn’t read, compile or edit a youth newspaper.”

Main project activities: Publishing 15 editions four-page youth newspaper “Skriim” from September 2009 to December 2010; presenting the project in five schools/youth-centres of the county; participating in different youth-events
Nominees for the Best Youth Project

Project title:
Lääne county’s young musicians camp “Bändkämp 2010“

Beneficiary:
MTÜ Unistuste Vabrik (NGO Dream Factory), the LAG Kodukant Läänemaa area

Location:
Lihula, Lääne county

Project period: Year 2010

Support amount from the RDP Leader measure: 9 625 EUR

A camp that livens up the young people of Lääne county!

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Three Days to Become a Superstar

Lääne county’s young musicians camp “Bändkämp 2010” - MTÜ Unistuste Vabrik

”It’s just so cool - four days full of great music and chill, new experiences and friends.” That’s how the promoters of the MTÜ Unistuste Vabrik describe their event. It is a creative camp for young people whose desire is to make good music.

The participants of the camp of 2009 could not even expect that three days later they would perform to more than 300 listeners and their songs would collect a lot of viewers on YouTube. But the organizers had it all planned - and it all went according to their plans. Young people formed their own bands and had the task to create a new song with original lyrics and melody.

The open-air concert was preceded by busy days full of workshops and meetings with musicians. The participants were also given information on the background, choices, opportunities and creation of music making and about concerts... and money. Young people heard about other experiences and shared their own, gave some tips and encouraged each other to make their first steps into the unknown and mysterious world of musicians. The whole process was observed and instructed by the organizers and trainers - well-known musicians.

Such a camp was innovative for the whole county, probably also for Estonia. The idea arose from the wish to offer something interesting to young musicians that would give them a boost for further creative development. Why not try to be a musician, play an instrument, make a band and then perform to an audience?

The project was implemented by the help of the Leader programme. Although the highlight of the undertaking was the camp with its 50 participants, the preparatory and organizational work lasted for several months. The first camp was followed by another and currently they are preparing the third one, with Leader support, of course.

The Lihula culture house has been a big contributor by offering rooms for carrying out the workshops and providing the technical support. “We are very proud of our Bändkämp. It really activates young people in our area.” said Tiina Lobja, director of the culture house. Three youth bands are active in the Lihula thanks to the camp. Other areas have also taken the courage to start their careers as musicians. There is an organising team of volunteers who help realise the project.

Bändkämp is becoming a special trademark with its own fan club. Campers who have participated once want to come back the next year. And they are all connected not only because they create music together but because they are from the same area.

One camper said: “I would have never believed that something so great would happen in my home.” But the organizers believe that: “Unless the world will suddenly come to an end the whole event will grow even more powerful.”

Main project activities: Preparing and carrying out a four-day musical camp and concert
Nominees for the Best Youth Project

Project title:
Organizing entrepreneurial trainings for local young people on student and micro companies

Beneficiary:
MTÜ Sõmeru Start, the LAG The Partners area

Location:
Sõmeru, Lääne-Viru county

Project period: August 2009 - July 2010

Support amount from the RDP Leader measure: 3 073 EUR

Practical form of economic studies for active youth!

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Unique One-Year Butterflies

Organizing entrepreneurial trainings for young people on student and micro companies - MTÜ Sõmeru Start

When people hear the name “student company” they think it is just a small sized business where children play the role of “money-makers”. Nothing could be further from the truth! Micro and student companies are practical forms of economics studies for young people who are interested in the sphere. The rules have limited the activity period to one academic year: from September to May.

Compared with “real” companies student companies have a big challenge: their business idea has to be unique. This means that a new student or micro company can not produce anything that has already been produced throughout the history of student companies. Think about it - what if we would have such a requirement for our companies!? The upside is that everyone working in a student company can be a director or manager. This, in turn, means that everyone has to be responsible for a business area and no one can just be an unskilled worker.

So the responsibility level is the same as in “real” companies. Students must collect their own share capital, prepare a business plan, hold negotiations with suppliers and other business partners, establish product development, and start producing, marketing and selling. There are no free lunches, they even have to pay rent and buy the necessary tools and equipment. Even organising and holding meetings and discussions is one part of the business activities. The more active participants have even prepared projects for applying for support.

The Sõmeru municipality of Lääne-Viru county has to involve the youth actively because 928 out of the 3717 inhabitants are young people. As only a few schools of the county provide economics education, youth centres of the municipality wanted to fill this hole by creating student companies. The idea itself is very innovative because student companies normally operate at schools. It then turned out that in order to have activity licence they need to have licensed instructors but there were none in Lääne-Viru county.

So the initial step was to train 25 instructors with the help of the Leader measure. After that, many workshops were held for manufacturing various products in order to get innovative ideas for starting a company. This step resulted in a surprising added value: when the children went home and showed the things they had made in the workshops, their parents also took an interest in participating. That is how different generations started to meet with the youth and practice their craft skills and interesting new techniques.

This initiative gave birth to two micro companies and one student company that manufactured nice products and got lot of praise for that. Näpi’s youth company “PUH” received the honourable award for the best micro company in Estonia.

The challenge of every company, sales, was also overcome successfully. T-shirts with hobbit-like logos designed by young people were extremely popular in the Kristiine shopping centre’s fair in Tallinn. Smart and good-looking bags/travelling pillows became so popular that the Estonian folklore festival Viru Folk ordered 100 pieces of these inventions. In order to not get blisters from such a large order, the young entrepreneurs had to hire subcontractors. Attractive environmentally friendly shopping-bags called MinuKott (MyBag) were also a smashing hit.

Main project activities: Training for instructors of micro and student companies; information days for young people about micro and student companies; workshops for young people who are interested in establishing micro or student companies; participating in business days of micro and student companies and fairs
Nominees for the Best Youth Project

Bring out your zithers!

Project title:
Organizing workshops about making and playing the zither and felting

Beneficiary:
MTÜ Hellad Velled, the LAG Pärnu Bay Partnership area

Location:
Audru, Pärnu county

Project period: Year 2009 - 2011
Support amount from the RDP Leader measure: 5 058 EUR

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Vanemuise Workshop

Organizing workshops on making and playing the zither and felting - MTÜ Hellad Velled

What would you think about such a task? You have a block of fir-tree, a chisel and six days to make a tuneable zither with 7 strings in D-major, like the ones our forefathers have made for centuries. No gluing is allowed. And of course - you’ll have to make a bag for your zither too, for example from felting wool. A big consolation is that you can use the advice and help of Mart, a zither-maker from Leisi, Saaremaa.

This was the task that 12 families from the Audru municipality in Pärnu county were given in the framework of the Leader measure supported project “Creating links between generations”. It was really an undertaking between generations because the participants were mothers-fathers, grandparents and children - from infants to nearly grown-ups. The work was physically quite challenging so every helping hand was needed.

If you have enough money, you can buy a musical instrument but a folk music instrument that is made by your family is definitely more precious. Although the structure of every zither was the same, every zither was still unique because the authors could paint and design their zither’s top and bottom by themselves. So the zither from the Nisu farm (Wheat farm) was decorated with wheat ears while the one from the Kirsi farm (Cherry farm) was painted like cherries.

The camp was really successful - all the 12 instruments sounded really nice and the melodies were conflating. It may not turn out so well every time. But who will play these instruments? Naturally the makers will. The camp’s programme included learning to play the zither - every day for 1.5 hours. The participants of the workshops were divided by their age and previous experience. It did not matter if somebody had even held the zither before. Everybody learned to play eventually. The divisions were made for the sake of the instructors - so that the teaching process would be easier.

The camp ended with a joint concert but the participants couldn’t hold their zithers in their bags for long even after the project ended: they have played at municipality days, school events and even for foreign guests. The elementary school in Audru municipality uses the zither frequently and nursery school teachers play beautiful lullabies for children on zithers they made themselves.

The materials and instructors were financed by the Leader measure. The Project Manager said that they have applied for support from other sources, too. The advantage of Leader is that all the money comes from one source so applicants don’t have to anxiously wait for replies from different sources. What will happen if one source says “yes” and another one says “no”?

The example of the first camp caught on. A Neighbour sees what you have made and wants to do the same. That’s how the participant limit of the next camp has full and the next 12 zithers will be made soon thanks to the Leader measure support.

Main project activities: Organizing workshop of zither making; making 12 zithers; making bags for these zithers in a felting workshop; organizing a concert as a result of zither-playing workshops for local community
Nominees for the Best Cooperation Project

Photograph by: Ahto Sooaru

Project title:
Onion Road

Beneficiary:
MTÜ Sibulatee (NGO Onion Road),
the LAG Tartu Development Association area

Location:
area near Lake Peipsi, NGOs office in Tartu

Project period:
November 2009 - November 2011

Support amount from the RDP Leader measure: 26 092 EUR

Network of forward-looking entrepreneurs!

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Discovery Trip around the Loft of Estonia

Onion Road - MTÜ Sibulatee

Tallinn is a home to more than one third of Estonia’s population and the city also opens the main marine and air gates to tourists. From the capital city, the area of Lake Peipsi can be considered as the loft of Estonia: far away and a bit mystical place the contents of which remain a secret to most of us.

Nevertheless, this area has a lot to offer, for both the body and soul. Near Lake Peipsi the Estonian peasant culture is combined with the Baltic German manor culture and the Russian Old Believers’ culture. There are many museums, historical structures and vivid culture heritage in the area between Tartu and Kallaste. The route provides visitors with several restaurants and place of accommodation, active recreation providers from kayaking to fife making, and traders with exciting delicacies and handicrafts.

The trouble is that all of these are so small and poorly known even in Estonia (maybe except for the Alatskivi castle), not to mention foreigners.

That is why a group of active entrepreneurs met in 2009 and set up a network called Onion Road. The Onion Road marks the area and tourism companies’ network of the Peipsiveere region. It involves 23 enterprises and sights. The Onion Road also is looking for new members, but in order to become a member, an enterprise must pass a probation period and only then a joint decision as to deeming the enterprise suitable to become the member of Onion Road will be made.

Leader supported four projects that created a brand for joint marketing of the area, designed the routes, started a brainstorming process to come up with new services and learned more about each other. The NGO also established a website, published brochures in six languages and participated in fairs with the aim of presenting the Onion Road to a wider audience.

The main goal of the project is to act together, to market the area and to jointly offer the visitors a pleasant experience (including food). A key factor is the use and appreciation for local produce: cranberries, onions, fish and pickles. The entrepreneurs praise their area: “Our onion dishes are great!”

The members of the network gather once in every two months, discuss the opportunities for development, share best practices and come up with new products. Between these meetings, members have productive online discussions. Study trips to meet other members give a good overview of the products and services offered by others and this allows entrepreneurs to offer more than tourists can expect.

Main project activities: 3 roundtable meetings, 2 training days, one study trip to Lahemaa - were organized in order to develop the route; creation of a joint website for the network (including design, technical solution and translations of texts into 6 languages, video and photo material; creation of a brand/logo for marketing purposes, design and print of a joint publication, participation in fairs.
Nominees for the Best Cooperation Project

Environmentally sustainable thinking and caring about your cultural and historical heritage promotes life in rural areas!

Project title:
Developing a joint marketing and cooperation network

Toetuse saaja:
MTÜ Koostöövõrgustik Ehedad Elamused Lahemaal (NGO Cooperation Network Genuine Experiences in Lahemaa), the LAG Development Centre area

Location:
Ama village, Kadrina municipality, Lääne-Viru county

Project period: February 2010 - February 2011
Support amount from the RDP Leader measure: 12 005 EUR

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Let’s Go to Europe in a Genuine Way

Developing a joint marketing and cooperation network - MTÜ Koostöövõrgustik Ehedad Elamused Lahemaal

The cooperation network Genuine Experiences in Lahemaa involves 14 tourism farms from the municipalities of Vihula, Kadrina and Kuusalu that are situated in or close to the Lahemaa National Park and the Käsmu Maritime Museum.

The joint work started long before Estonia joined the European Union. Entrepreneurs who realized that cooperation is more beneficial than competition started to hold joint meetings. All the network members vary: some have forests, some have the sea, some deal with ostrich breeding, some raise horses. But they all have one thing in common: their environmentally sustainable mindset and caring about their cultural and historical heritage.

All these tourism farms are actually someone’s homes, the owners live there. The services and products offered are genuinely Estonian, starting from food and ending with holiday experiences. Local resources and ecological products are a priority. You can find everything the local forests have to offer: berries, mushrooms and nuts on the table. Bread, sweets, ham and sausages are self-made. Milk, yoghurt, cottage cheese and cheese are made by local ecological producers. Juice and jam are made of berries that are picked from their own gardens. Try and find a juice with artificial ingredients in the farms of the network - you will not! Even the dish-washing and window cleaning detergents are environmentally friendly. Brown sugar is a rule.

Such small and genuine tourism farms were known before, but they lacked visitors, especially foreign ones. Efforts for joint marketing were made but it was too hard for a small family enterprise to catch the attention of Europe.

The NGO applied for support from the Leader measure as soon as they could. Members of the network say it was like throwing a life buoy to someone who is drowning. It was the only opportunity for them to establish joint systematic marketing fast enough. The NGO presented its network at the TourEst fair. They prepared information materials and genuine linen promotional bags and created their own photo bank and website introducing their trademark. And most importantly - Leader gave them a chance to invite partners and journalists for a study-trip into their farms - it was a breakthrough!

For example, Enterprise Estonia (EAS) has very strict requirements for selecting the hosts for the trips of international marketing travel agents. Whereas such destinations used to include only some manors in Lahemaa, these representatives are now taken also to a family of genuine experiences. Lahemaa has become a popular destination among the French, German, Belgium and Italian travel forums. The awareness of such genuine experiences has grown like a snowball and currently it is hard to find a tourist-free day in their tourism farms.

"Leader gave us crucial instruments. It would be a sin if a member of our network was not thankful!" says the owner of the Kuusiku farm. “I must admit, the paperwork was a handful at the beginning. For example we did not know which the required labelling stickers to be used are. But we don’t complain: we learn and adjust to the requirements.” Genuine experience network has plenty of innovative ideas for the future.

Main project activities: Representing the network in the fair TourEst 2010; organizing a two-day training on Internet marketing, training on local food and a two-day study-trip to member farms for the project partners and journalists; presenting the joint website; making 200 linen information bags with the project logo; distributing marketing materials; organizing a meeting for an international cooperation project; starting to prepare the development plan of the cooperation network.
Nominees for the Best Cooperation Project

A place with good aura!

Project title:
Furnishing and developing joint activities in the Pikakannu community centre

Beneficiary:
MTÜ Pikakannu Kooli Areng
(NGO Development of Pikakannu School),
the LAG Võrumaa Partnership Assembly area

Location:
Pikakannu village, Lasva municipality, Võru county

Project period: April 2010 - April 2011

Support amount from the RDP Leader measure: 24 188 EUR

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A Place with Good Aura

Furnishing and developing joint activities in the Pikakannu community centre - MTÜ Pikakannu Kooli Areng

Pikakannu community centre is a building of luck. The building, presumably constructed in 1872, was given to the NGO Pikakannu School Development by the Lasva municipality in 2004. The construction workers that changed the roof of the building were very surprised to find such an old building in such a good condition. The rafters were almost jingling...

The MTÜ Pikakannu Kooli Areng (NGO Pikakannu School Development) involves people who care about their home village, want to keep old traditions alive and work with the aim of seeing their children continuing their life’s work in Võru county. The main goal is to retain the operations of the local elementary school. Other goals are related to everything that helps them to promote joint activities across generations. Today they have a theatre club, judo classes, handicraft and music classes, aerobics and workouts in Pikakannu. Various camps and trips are organized in summertime. Parents come together for joint cleaning days in order to tidy up the surroundings of the school and its skiing trails. A bus-stop shelter was also constructed in Pikakannu.

The community centre has a surprising capacity. The newly renovated museum-room presents the history of the Pikakannu school, one of the oldest educational institutions in Võru county. But the museum does not contain only documents and exhibits: an interactive game helps children to check their memory about the museum. Museum classes are held once in every 2 or 3 months, hosting famous people who originally came from Võru county and have moved away. They speak of what they remember from Võru as the spoken heritage should be carried on.

There are also many interesting activities carried out in the community centre, for example making soap and national costumes, weaving cloth, etc. People simply can not get enough of bread-making courses. A sewing room will be set up for the winter. Men can learn some woodwork from masters. Swings and sandbox have been prepared for children and the men promised to make a desk for women, big enough for quilting.

Currently the community centre provides the kindergarten service for 9 children. The centre has a cosy kitchen and rooms for studying, playing and sleeping. They also cooperate with the people from the village of Tsolgo: the Tsolgoans visit the Pikakannu trainings and the Pikakannu people, in turn, participate in Tsolgo’s folk-dance parties.

With the help of Leader, the necessary repair works were carried out in the building, purchased furniture (including for children) and the kitchen was set up. The NGO also purchased smaller items, such as handicraft materials, playing bricks for children and a workout mat. The Lasva municipality helps to pay for the electricity and buy firewood for the centre. Should the NGO receive more supports they plan to refurbish some rooms for accommodating visitors.

The Pikakannu community centre and the entire village have very good aura. It is an example of how active people can cooperate in order to create a stable community where people can live happily without the urge of moving to a bigger city.

Main project activities: Preparation of the construction project of the Pikakannu old schoolhouse; purchase of an overlock sewing machine; renovation of the Pikakannu museum-room and organising a series of events.
Nominees for the Best Cooperation Project

A more unified Viiratsi community!

Project title: Viiratsi village Games 2010
Beneficiary: MTÜ Viiratsi Spordiklubi (NGO Viiratsi Sports Club), the LAG Võrtsjärve Association area
Location: Viiratsi municipality, Viljandi county
Project period: February - December 2010
Support amount from the RDP Leader measure: 6 524 EUR

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Photograph by: Toomas Reede
Greatly Underestimated Sports

Viiratsi village Games 2010 - MTÜ Viiratsi Spordiklubi

The Viiratsi municipality contains 21 villages in Viljandi county. The village life is the way it is - everyone is used to operate alone. But in 2009, villagers invited Anne Freimuth, an experienced trainer and children’s physical education teacher, back to Viiratsi. After talking to a group of local initiators she soon realised that there is a need for some kind of sports activities for the whole community - something that would connect the local people, would be suitable for all age groups and attract the people who have left the area to visit the community more often. One of the priorities is definitely to increase the quality of healthcare and life through various sports activities.

That is how the plan to hold the year-round village games with 12 types of sports activities was realized. The instructions of games were compiled so that all sports fans could join the programme: men, women, children and seniors. The clever competition rules followed the principle that every participant is important and necessary for the village.

The support from the Leader measure helped to purchase all the necessary equipment for these sporting activities - balls, rackets, nets etc. Many other organisations also supported the initiative. For example, IF insurance supported the purchase of medals and prizes. Preparation work was carried out successfully but the organisers were unsure whether enough people will participate. Some people complained - is it reasonable to buy so many sports equipment, to plan so many activities - who will come to the event anyway? However, it all turned out differently than the critics suspected.

The first competition, the ergo-meter rowing, was very successful already with 23 teams. The organisers projected 50 participants for the next event, skiing, but a total of 99 people actually participated! The referees had some troubles with recording the times so local people sorted out the ranking by themselves. The table-tennis competition in the Vana-Võidu gym was a bit smaller undertaking, but 11 teams signed up for the football match that followed. The organisers had to borrow extra goals and teams had to play on smaller courts so that everybody could compete.

Petanque, a new game for many villagers, was so popular that Anne Freimuth will have to organize new competitions because: “Otherwise nobody would let me to live here anymore!” Even the coinciding times with the traditional Võrtsjärve games did not decrease the number of participants.

The Viiratsi community is now definitely more united. Many new contacts within neighbouring villages have been established and young people visit their homes more often to compete for their villages. And they say a local man who never said “no” to alcohol before had to admit that: “I can’t drink today - I have to compete tomorrow.”

Main project activities: Organizing 12 sports activities: ergometer rowing, skiing, table tennis, football, petanque, athletics, cross-country biking, air-gun shooting, triathlon, volleyball, street basketball and combined competitions for the seniors; purchase of sporting-equipment for these sports events that can also be used for the further development of municipality’s sport-life
There are 26 Local Action Groups (LAGs) in Estonia, covering 99% of the rural territory.
Contacts of Estonian Local Action Groups

Borderlands Leader (Piiriveere Liider)  www.piiriveere.ee
Development Center (Arenduskoda)  www.arenduskoda.ee
East-Harju Partnership (Ida-Harju Koostöökoda)  www.idaharju.ee
Green Riverland Partnership (Rohelise Jõemaa Koostöökogu)  www.joemaa.ee
Hiiumaa Cooperation Network (Hiidlaste Koostöökogu)  www.kogu.hiiumaa.ee
Jõgevamaa Cooperation Chamber (Jõgevamaa Koostöökoda)  www.jogeamaa.com
Järva Development Partners (Järva Arengu Partnerid)  www.jap.org.ee
Kodukant Läänemaa  www.kklm.ee
Mulgimaa Development (Mulgimaa Arenduskoda)  www.mulgimaaarenduskoda.ee
Nelja Valla Kogu  www.4kogu.ee
North-Estonian Partnership (Põhja-Harju Koostöökogu)  www.leaderph.eu
PAIK  www.pandivere.eu
Partnership of North-East Coast (Kirderanniku Koostöökogu)  www.kirderannik.ee
Peipsi-Alutaguse Chamber of Cooperation (Peipsi-Alutaguse Koostöökoda)  www.pakmyty.ee
Põlva County Partnership Board (Põlvamaa Partnerluskogu)  www.partnerluskogu.ee
Pärnu Bay Partnership (Pärnu Lahe Partnerluskogu)  www.plp.ee/net
Raplamaa Partnership Registered Association (Raplamaa Partnerluskogu)  www.raplaleader.ee
South-Järvamaa Partnership (Lõuna-Järvamaa Koostöökogu)  www.koostookogu.ee
Tartu Rural Development Association (Tartumaa Arendusselts)  www.tas.ee
The Partners (Partnerid)  www.mtupartnerid.ee
Valga County Partnerships Board (Valgamaa Partnerluskogu)  www.valgaleader.ee
Viru Region Cooperation Council (Virumaa Koostöökogu)  www.viko.ee
Võrtsjärve Association (Võrtsjärve Ühendus)  www.vortsjarveyhendus.ee
Võrumaa Partnership Assembly (Võrumaa Partnerluskogu)  www.voruleader.ee
West-Estonian Islands Partnership (Saarte Koostöökogu)  www.skk.ee
Western-Harju Partnership (Lääne-Harju Koostöökogu)  www.vomentaga.ee