

Journey of the Latvian Permaculture Association

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Despite the fact that the European Permaculture Teachers Partnership never got accepted by the Latvian National agency, thus leaving Latvia (and Italy) out of the project, Latvian permaculturists have been working since then and are ready to share the common journey now.

There were only 4 PDC holders in Latvia who hardly knew each other in 2011. Arturs Polis was busy with organizing some permaculture related workshops in Ikšķile Transition Initiative which he had co-founded, Gundega Jekabsone was working hard in her organic farm, Guntra Aistara together with Gundega and other active organic farmers organized a series of permaculture workshops on organic farms, and published an academic book chapter on the experience, and Ilze Mezniece was trying hard to bring the ideas of permaculture to subsistence farmers in a very remote country-side region through activities in her farm...

Arturs and Gundega had just returned from their 10 day long PDC course in Sieben Linden, when an invitation came to participate in the prospective EPT project. This was a strong motivator for these people to come together with a clear commitment to work, and this is how the Latvian Permaculture Association was born. Many weeks were invested to prepare and hand in the project application. Of course, it was a big disappointment to learn that Latvia was among the only 2 countries rejected to participate later on... However, the group stayed together, and despite the fact that members were scattered around and discussions happened mainly virtually, there are some good outcomes since then...

In 2012, Gundega and Arturs organized a 2-day workshop for 4-H children called "Think global, plant local!" in a country-side county Džukste. Around 30 primary-school-aged kids learned about gardening, eco-technologies, environmental issues and principles of permaculture. Stories about pedal-operated water pumps were complemented with excursions to Gundega's permaculture garden, where everyone could try to follow a chicken and observe it's needs and yields... At the end of the workshop, some permaculture plant beds were made.

Weeks later, a very similar permaculture workshop educated around 50 4-H kids in the capital city Riga. This time, kids enjoyed building vertical plant beds mulched with straw...

That same year, the Latvian Eco-Health Farm network was involved in a Grundtvig project called "Our Agrobiodiversity", and together with the Latvian Permaculture Association co-organized the 1st public seed swap event in the National Botanical Garden, and a seminar on in-situ conservation in conjunction with the National Gene Bank. Some organic farmers are now also growing heirloom seeds. Just a few days ago another seed swap event gathered dozens of participants and a new idea came to open an all-time available self-service seed swapping point in one of Riga's cafes, owned by a new board member of the Permaculture Association, Sandra Stabinge.

Inspired by the Gruntvig project, One year later Gundega also initiated a project "Let's grow Latvian tomatoes!" in which around 160 4-H members not only tried to grow an old-variety of Latvian tomato, but also learned recipes for cooking. The main task for every child was to collect self-grown seeds and share with 3 other friends. A similar project will happen this year with beans.

And here comes the greatest project... The 1st Permaculture Design Course in Latvia ever! In November, the 1st 4-day long part took place in the marginal Ambeli community where Ilze has worked hard for years to educate locals about permaculture. The course brought together 27 participants from 5 countries, including the course teacher Jan Martin Bang from Norway. We are looking forward to the second 6-day part at the end of April.

In addition to the projects mentioned above, there have been dozens of smaller presentations, a couple of radio-broadcasts and at least a dozen of newspaper and magazine articles where the Latvian Permaculture Association has taken part. A new website www.permakultura.lv was recently launched and the number of members in Latvian Permaculture Association is steadily growing, reaching 20 today. And the group is still motivated and having grand ideas like creating a permaculture demonstration school garden next to the Ikskile Free School, a demonstration center and community garden in an old allotment site in the heart of Riga or even a permaculture design ecovillage...

The Latvian Permaculture Association is very thankful to the European Permaculture Teachers partnership project for the kick that brought the group together!

Arturs Polis

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