

VIDZEME PLANNING REGION

International Newsletter #6

Year 2017





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Educated and skilled people are fundamental to the regional development. Their ability to expand horizons of mind and strive for life-long learning is decisive for success and growth. By giving significant role to learning, we dare to insist, it is possible to move forward in almost every aspect of your life.

As envisaged in our Vision for 2030, Vidzeme region aims to attract talented and active people, meanwhile being a well-connected, internally integrated and safe region, flexible to match challenges, competitive and striving for excellence in areas of smart specialization of the region.

We cannot deny that demographic tendencies affect us, population is aging, and it is necessary to consider this fact to wisely manage processes. But we should rather regard it as an opportunity than a problem. Knowledge-based capital contributes to productivity growth and will be increasingly important not only in the medium term but also in the longer term considering challenges such as competition from emerging economies. Our life-long learning systems should be effective, relevant and accessible for all.

In 2017 Vidzeme Planning Region (VPR) joined Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platform, to participate in the development and active use of an internal knowledge sharing platform where content is being created by the participants themselves. Experiences and discoveries are shared between like-minded people encouraging peers to look at their problems with a fresh mind. Knowledge platforms can solve lots of challenges and questions – whatever they are – conceptual or of very practical nature. Undoubtedly, taking part in such networks is a great opportunity to discover the new trends of EU policy, receive summary reports, get to know other projects and teams and lots of more.

One of the events which was initiated under the platform was the policy learning event on research and innovation and SME competitiveness which was held in October 2017 in Milan, Italy. VPR took an active part in the discussion of how policy improvements can contribute to R&D results implementation and access to innovation by SMEs.

During the discussion it was concluded that being bold and dare to experiment is the upcoming future of regional and national support systems for innovations. How to make policies innovative and well-designed? This is one of the core questions to be answered.

Let's share our knowledge and experience for a better future of our regions!

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Why life-long learning matters

Labour markets are changing due to more efficient and less labour intense production processes in the industries. Efficiency is also a key word within our public sectors, particularly after the recent financial crises resulting in slimmed organizations. At the same time, the demographic change with an aging population calls for recruitment of personnel that can fill gaps when the present workforce reaches retirement age. Life expectancy in the EU is high and growing. It is well known that already today and also in future well-educated work-force will be required and less significance will be payed towards unqualified job-seekers. The availability of lifelong learning in a region is one of the most influential factors in its socioeconomic development.

Life-long learning ON THE AGENDA in THE BALTIC SEA REGION

Seeing both the importance and also weaknesses of the sector, VPR initiated a debate to strengthen and develop purposefully life-long learning in Latvia and other Baltic Sea Region countries. The challenge was adopted knowing nobody has undertaken the flagship initiative in this field yet.

There is sufficient funding to develop life-long learning offer in Europe, but due to the lack of understanding the usefulness of the field, money is not used effectively and there is a noticeable surplus. The situation may arise out of a lack of targeted and unified life-long learning policy implementation.

In November 2016, the Baltic Sea Strategy Forum was held in Stockholm, where the report said: "Migration is not the only important topic – European society is getting older and older and creating challenges for social systems, for employers who want to find employees. And meanwhile, there are threats of workforce flowing away from Europe to dynamic and new urban centres elsewhere in the world."

In June 2017, VPR organized discussion "Connectivity of skills and competences for smart specialization as driving force for sustainable development in Baltic Sea Region", it was part of Baltic Sea Region 8th Strategy Forum in Berlin, gathering together most important players of the field.

The seminar focused on such central themes like life-long learning in the Global Knowledge Economy: skills and competences of the future economies; life-long learning as a driving force for regional development and specialization and life-long learning in the digital age.

Find all the seminar presentations here:



Emerging flagship initiative “BSR SMART LIFE”

A new emerging flagship initiative “BSR SMART LIFE” under the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR) was initiated by VPR. Important stakeholders from different countries gathered together and by sharing their experiences and knowledge agreed on basic principles to expand the concept of life-long learning in Europe.

The concept focuses on the life-long education in the Baltic Sea Region and is closely linked to the concept of smart specialization. Adult education programs should be elaborated in coherence with the needs of labour market of the regional industries and according to the business environment and culture. A common understanding was reached – attention should be directed not only towards education of employees, but also towards education of business managers and human resources managers who are the ones that encourage their employees to develop their skills and competences even further.

BSR SMART LIFE will analyse the situation on life-long learning in Baltic Sea countries (Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Sweden) focusing specifically on labour market needs in the Baltic Sea Region. The obtained data in each country will be an important basis for the larger scale project proposal being possibly financed by EU programmes or other financial instruments.

Project's main message will be not only about quality perspective but also claiming that the offer of life-long learning should be developed to suite the need of person's competencies throughout whole person's life and meanwhile being in line with knowledge economy. The potential target groups of the project will be not only adults who are involved in life-long learning, but also entrepreneurs, educational providers, policy makers and regional and local authorities.

On 22nd of January 2018, VPR organized a roundtable discussion on findings of the analysis of life-long learning and adult education and guiding trends to improve life-long learning education in Baltic Sea Region countries. The content of the meeting was designed to engage the audience – sectors and actors from local, regional and national level – and to stimulate dynamic discussions on the addressed issue. The meeting was organized in cooperation with the Nordic Council of Ministers' Office in Latvia.



Read more about SMARTLIFE here: 

Knowledge platforms

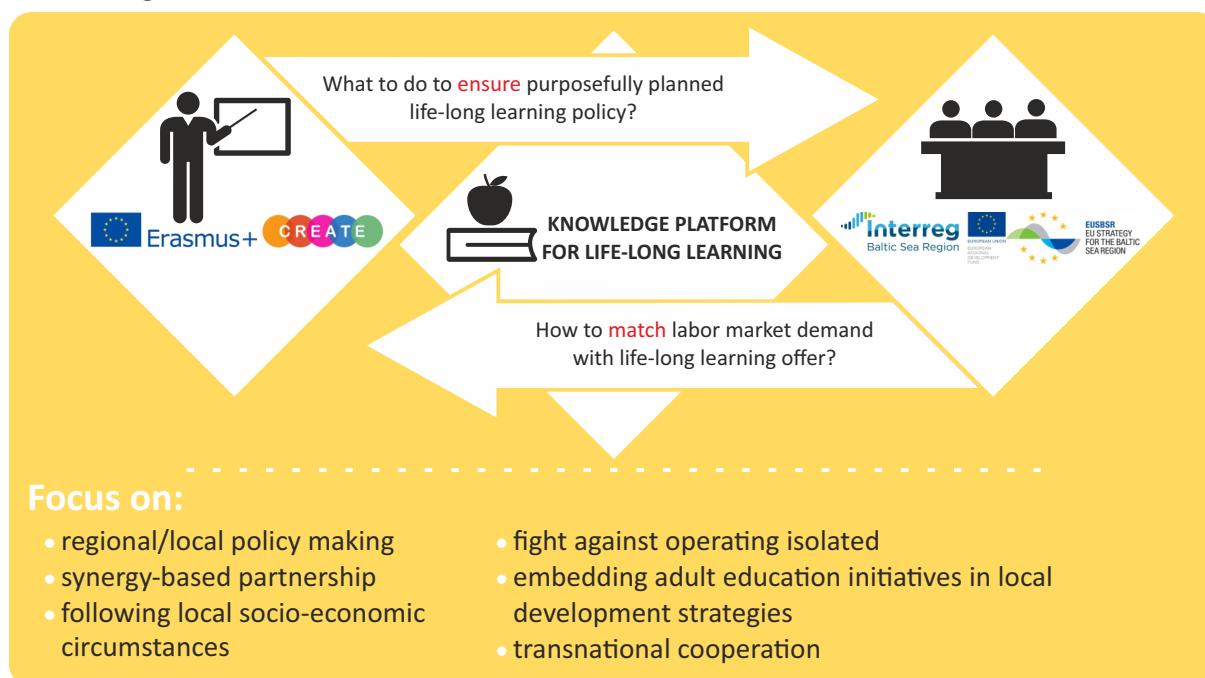
Knowledge platforms allow us to share relevant and experience-based information and provide its accessibility any time when there is a need to make the right decisions. Collaboration and reused knowledge is a good guaranty towards success. For sure, know-how knowledge is still appreciated.

Grasping the value, VPR is planning to form two knowledge platforms in the field of education, both interconnected and interactive to ensure free access for any stakeholder related to the field of life-long learning.

By purposefully using the best available resources to develop life-long learning in the Baltic Sea Region, we are on the way to build a common SMART LIFE knowledge platform. While developing the platform, we will also take over the best experience from the project CREATE to receive wider context and dimension of life-long learning with extended partnership in Europe.

In addition, BSR Smart Life has a great potential to use attracted seed money to come up with flagship initiative and develop knowledge platform with a number of thematic working groups gathering stakeholders in a multilevel governance perspective. The platform will be a great source to learn good practices and keep structured dialogs in the field of adult learning.

Recently VPR has started to implement also the project **CREATE (Erasmus+)** to attract resources (both financial as well as knowledge and contacts) and expertise for solving life-long learning problems. CREATE is a truly collaborative partnership pooling together the complementary expertise of participating organisations to realize synergies between different fields of adult education and local/regional policy making. One of the project's aim is to create an online multilanguage toolbox to help users in identifying opportunities for enhanced local strategies of socio-economic development that are capitalising on the potential of Adult Education while maximising the effective and efficient use of Structural Funds.



Find out more about the project CREATE here:



BUSINESS AND INNOVATION

Innovation drives economic growth in the region

VPR implements a number of Interreg Europe and Interreg Baltic Sea Region programme projects aimed at increasing the role of innovation in the region's economy.

Innovation is a source for growth and a tool for addressing economic challenges like out-migration, concentration of people in the capital city Riga and other urban areas, shrinkage of the local market and lack of workforce in companies.

The main national priorities, directions of action and measures aimed at industrial development, financial support to companies and promotion of innovation are included in the National Industrial Policy Guidelines for 2014–2020 and several other policy documents. The regions and municipalities in Latvia have limited opportunities to influence the innovation policy and implement an innovation support program regionally. The VPR is ready to play a key role in mobilising the responsible authorities, local governments, entrepreneurs, business support organizations and R&D institutions to foster innovation development in Vidzeme area. The first steps have already been taken by participating in the discussion and exchange of views with the Ministry of Economics, Investment and Development Agency of Latvia (LIAA), Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development, researchers, enterprises and local authorities in order to find the best ways of cooperation and take the measures to support innovation in concrete actions.

The **RATIO** project is developing concrete proposals for improving innovation policy in the region and providing support for innovative enterprises.

Through interregional learning or regional development policies, the identification of good practices and the exchange of experience the RATIO project will foster the region's innovation culture by promoting innovative ecosystems in which regional and local authorities, innovation partners and researchers can work together in developing the Action plan to achieve the necessary changes in innovation policy and innovation delivery in the region. Not only Vidzeme Region is taking over the good experience of partners. We have a reason to be proud of the Latvian high added value and healthy food cluster that has attracted the interest of several project partners and can be passed on to partner countries.



Find out more about the project here:



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BUSINESS AND INNOVATION

Support for smart specialisation areas – an essential precondition for growth and competitiveness

One of the most critical challenges for innovation and growth is the transfer and commercialisation of knowledge and inventions by integrating them into the business environment. The use of research results in the areas of smart specialisation at regional and national level is particularly important, as it is essential to focus on those fields defined as priorities and perspectives, based on past research and strategy for the development of these areas.

To improve cooperation within the innovation environment, to tie the challenges and opportunities of smart specialisation with regional support policy instruments, promote the private sector's interest in investing in research and development, as well as in commercialisation of research results, the VPR, together with partners from Spain, Ireland, Portugal, Lithuania, Finland, Italy and France, has launched the Interreg Europe 2014–2020 programme project "[Policies and Measures to Support Local and Regional Innovation Ecosystems \(ecoRIS3\)](#)".

The project partners jointly are implementing various knowledge sharing activities – study visits, workshops, seminars and other events. The plans for 2018 include the hosting of project partners in Vidzeme to present the existing Latvian innovation ecosystem support tools, the cooperation of science and research centres with the business environment, showing it through good practice examples. Study visit will focus on the role of civil society in the innovation ecosystem, so both selected good practice examples and other organisations that will be presented to guests will represent this sector.



GOOD PRACTICES

In the year 2017, there have been two significant experience exchange visits in Portugal and later in Ireland where VPR participated to demonstrate good practices and provide insights to other partners on how the research and science institutions work together with entrepreneurs in Vidzeme region.

GOOD PRACTICE

RaPaPro – Creative Partnership Programme -

programme for students and teachers of vocational secondary education institutions who, by attracting collaborators, can contribute to the public and learn more about the creative industries by gaining experience outside the usual learning environment. In 2014, the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Latvia addressed vocational cultural education institutions throughout Latvia with an invitation to carry out the creative partnerships programme RaPaPro. Schools had to open their doors to the public, look for partners amongst businesses and within the social sphere, which also included the neighbouring schools and residents. It meant cooperating in such ways to be able to learn from each other's experience, do things together, do them better, solve problems and unleash the potential of creativity.

BUSINESS AND INNOVATION

GOOD PRACTICE

Latvian high added value and healthy food cluster -

as networking, innovation development and internationalisation platform that involves stakeholders from Vidzeme and Riga Planning Regions. Cluster fosters the development and market uptake of new products, promotes knowledge and technology transfer among cluster members, allows development and implementation of new projects as well as helps SME's to internationalise their activities and find business partnerships abroad.

GOOD PRACTICE

Institute of Agricultural Resources and Economics Priekuli Research Centre -

demonstrates long-term cooperation with the producer of grain cereal mixtures – SIA “Felici”. Based on collaboration, new products with scientifically proven quality information can be introduced to the market.

GOOD PRACTICE

Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences (ViA) Knowledge and Technology Centre (KTC) -

offers multiple interconnected services for SMEs and promotes cooperation between students, entrepreneurs and organisations. Usage of laboratories in synergy with the ViA Smart Labs process allows companies to utilise Resources and Infrastructure Industry (RII) resources and involve students in the process. The core objective is the provision of accessibility of university infrastructure via cooperation services to partners for carrying out training, applied research or testing.



Interreg Europe programme 2014-2020 project "Policies & Measures to Support Local & Regional Innovation Ecosystems" financed by the European Regional Development Fund.



This article reflects the author's views only and the Interreg Europe programme authorities are not liable for any use that may be made of the information contained therein.

Additional information about the project:



BUSINESS AND INNOVATION

Eco-innovations and IT: a good symbiosis to create sustainable solutions

Sustainability is a phenomenon, where business, ecology and society collaborate and interact. At the moment, eco-innovations have received a great amount of attention in European countries being an effective solution to reach sustainable development in business sector. Eco-innovation refers to a wide range of innovation in overall – it includes new processes, new products and services, new skills and moreover a positive impact on the environment. Besides “being green and environmentally friendly” it also allows to be efficient and optimize processes to be competitive reducing costs – this is stated by **SUPER** project.

There are few countries where eco-innovations have direct support and even fewer countries where eco-innovations are supported in specific industry sectors. It must be concluded that the problem is not at all to be found there, more important is to find a focus how to develop eco-innovations, what kind of tools to use.

VPR has found a good symbiosis between eco-innovations and IT solutions regarding the fact that IT is one of the smart specializations in the region. There are already good regional examples where IT solutions being proportionate to the outcome let to improve the work of the company.

GOOD PRACTICE

Eco-innovations in waste management

"ZAAO" LTD offers high quality waste management services in North Vidzeme region including waste collection, sorting, transportation, recycling and disposal in an environmentally friendly way. The company itself has set up an appropriate and efficient system that is considered to be a good example of eco-innovation. The system has been developed for five years – it has saved resources, and at the same time, the services are made more convenient for customers, for example by sending reminders that waste will be dispatched next day.

IT solutions were used to create a system that allows employees to respond instantly to the needs of the client.

The company also has digital fuel accounting and other similar systems based on IT solutions and adapted to the specifics of the company. A company spokesman admits that relatively much has been invested in the training of drivers who mostly work with new solutions every day.

This is a good example of how a company based on its own needs has developed new solutions, which can be considered eco-innovative and meanwhile could be introduced in the market as a separate product. IT solutions should be developed based on real problems of real entrepreneurs allowing them to be customized for other clients as well.

The very basics here is the knowledge. When you know what can be done and who can help you, the only unknown is – when to start!



Interreg Europe 2014–2020 programme project SUPER (Supporting eco-innovations towards international markets) is aimed to improve the implementation of regional development policies and programmes, in particular, programmes for Investment for Growth and Jobs and, where relevant, ETC programmes, that support the delivery of innovation by actors of regional innovation chains in the areas of "smart specialization" and innovation opportunity.

Find out more about SUPER project here:

BUSINESS AND INNOVATION

Inspiration to improve the exploitation of research and innovation infrastructures by the business sector

To improve the accessibility and exploitation of local Research and Innovation infrastructure (RII) assets by SMEs, VPR together with partners from 7 countries jointly implements Interreg Europe 2014–2020 programme project **INNO INFRA SHARE**. RIIs have the potential to serve as enablers of competitiveness and growth for local SMEs and foreign users, so partners have joined forces to work together to unleash this potential to add market-driven dimension to the research and technological one, by networking and promoting collaboration opportunities at regional and international level and by addressing national and regional RIIs relevant policy instruments.

The first year of the project was focused on analysis and mapping of local RIIs, experience exchange and learning among partners and their stakeholders and identification of several good practice examples on sharing RIIs in each region. 20 selected good practices are the core asset of the project.

VPR has created an e-booklet showcasing each selected good practice example that can provide potential for learning and transfer of experience and inspire or guide other EU regions in designing and implementing strategies for improving the exploitation of RIIs for the benefit of the business sector, in addition to the research community. We hope that you will find these examples inspirational!

Click here to see the e-booklet



**INNO INFRA
SHARE**
Interreg Europe



Find out more about the project partnership and activities: 

BUSINESS AND INNOVATION

VPR will develop regional business sector by implementing new support tools for smart specialisation

VPR in cooperation with partners from Poland, Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania, Finland, Germany and Denmark has launched the Interreg Baltic Sea Region Programme 2014–2020 project "**Strengthening smart specialisation by fostering transnational cooperation (GoSmart BSR)**".

The main expected result of the project is the development of a functioning and sustainable transnational innovation brokerage system, which will support SMEs to increase the capacity of implementing smart specialisation strategies. Each partner region will select an *Innovation broker* to take part in an intensive training program aimed at building competences and skills for the sector. *Innovation broker* in Vidzeme will work to ensure the link among the needs of enterprises, the resources of research institutes and the influence of policy-making institutions not only in regional and national level, but also across the Baltic Sea Region. At the same time, sectoral representatives will jointly implement common activities for the development of SMEs by studying examples of good practice in different countries, exchanging knowledge and experience, and gaining contacts.

It is increasingly emphasized that high value-added products and services must be created to achieve business excellence, considering the benefits of the region and the potential of innovation. In the long term, niche products, highly skilled workforce and innovative technological solutions are the optimal scenario that every business needs to aim to increase its competitiveness. It is planned that the developed brokerage system will allow entrepreneurs to gain access to knowledge that is not yet shared by competent organizations abroad and in our region. The system will also serve as a valuable database for building new relationships and directing the development of the company to a whole new, cross-border level.



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GoSmart BSR

The project GoSmart BSR implemented by VPR in cooperation with partners from Finland, Denmark, Germany, Poland, Lithuania and Estonia within the framework of Interreg Baltic Sea Region (BSR) programme 2014 – 2020, with the support of European Regional Development Fund. Project's goal is to increase capacity of innovation actors (innovation intermediaries, authorities, research institutions, enterprises) to apply smart specialisation approach.

The official webpage www.gosmartbsr.eu is coming soon but meanwhile find out more about the project GoSmart BSR here:



BUSINESS AND INNOVATION

Towards smart, sustainable and inclusive growth of the bioeconomy

Rural Baltic Sea Region (BSR) areas have abundant natural resources, but have challenges to reach their full bioeconomy potential due to limited human capital and the lack of agglomeration economies. Therefore, to boost the growth of the bioeconomy sector, VPR in cooperation with partners from Finland, Norway, Poland, Latvia and Estonia has launched the Interreg BSR Programme 2014–2020 project “**Rural RDI milieus in transition towards smart Bioeconomy Clusters and Innovation Ecosystems (RDI2CluB)**”.

The goal of the project is to support smart, sustainable and inclusive growth of the bioeconomy in rural areas of the BSR. Project RDI2CluB aims to help innovation actors apply EU smart specialisation approaches to their specific field and region.

The transnational partnership and network of the project plan to support new business development in rural areas and to improve innovation management by developing regional bioeconomy ecosystems and by creating open virtual bio-business hub (OVBH). OVBH will work as a link among R&D industry, universities, business sector, public authorities and other bioeconomy actors to ensure the knowledge, resource and infrastructure sharing as well as collaborating in regional, national and transnational level. OVBH will provide services such as transferring the knowledge of Norwegian research institutes into practical activities of Vidzeme entrepreneurs or providing Latvian institutes with access to the facilities of Finnish universities, or making Estonian public authorities able to attract experts from Poland. Furthermore, it can work as an interface to access data on natural resources and socioecological environment. Interaction on the platform can spark ideas with business potential and support the transition to smart and sustainable bioeconomy.

The transnational networks, strengthened by the RDI2CluB outputs, enable SMEs to explore their market potential in different countries of BSR. With the transnational innovation ecosystem, the SMEs have more opportunities to find new partners, clients and customers and to develop their bioeconomy products and services for new markets.

To demonstrate the importance of the bioeconomy development in rural areas of BSR, in November 2017 project RDI2CluB received EUSBSR Flagship status. Flagships demonstrate the progress of the EU Strategy and may serve as pilot examples for the desired action in a given field. This status will help to highlight the rural development issues and to promote the potential of smart specialisation in bioeconomy in rural areas.



The project RDI2CluB implemented by VPR in cooperation with Institute for Environmental Solutions within the framework of Interreg Baltic Sea Region (BSR) programme 2014 - 2020, with European Regional Development Fund and Norwegian national funding. Project's goal is to enhance growth opportunities based on an increased capacity of innovation actors to apply smart specialisation approach.

Additional information about the project:

BUSINESS AND INNOVATION

Best practice sharing for improving support to tourism SMEs and their competitiveness

On April 2017 VPR welcomed partners from other European countries to study the best practices in the management of tourism destinations in Vidzeme region.

Partners learned about the national and regional policy instruments designed to facilitate the competitiveness and export capacity of SMEs in tourism sector, as well as visited several companies that pay special attention to cooperation to strengthen the common destination. Project partners recognized Gauja National Park tourism cluster “**Enter Gauja**” as a valuable example of Vidzeme region tourism destination management. They had a chance to visit and explore various regional and local business cooperation forms that ensure public-private partnerships and promote business competitiveness growth in the region. They met with other local project stakeholders – entrepreneurs, representatives of local governments, tourism strategy makers – to share experiences and discuss possible transfer of good practices. Creating favourable conditions for tourism SMEs means to encourage the territories to organize themselves as a tourism destination, to strengthen the identity of the territory and to ensure a cohesion between the various tourist offers in the area.

After visiting tourism destinations in Vidzeme region, the project partners acknowledged competencies and skill level of tourism guides, highlighting the important role of Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences in education of young tourism professionals.



The Interreg Europe 2014–2020 programme project **Destination SMEs** ensures that the best practices from partner regions are shared to be included in the local Action Plans to improve public policies dedicated to support the tourism SMEs and their competitiveness.



More information about the project and activities here: [▶](#)

BUSINESS AND INNOVATION

VPR helps to strengthen the export capacity of wood and furniture companies in the Baltic states

Wood and forest resources are ones of the essential resources for economic growth in Vidzeme region and Latvia. As this natural wealth makes up a significant share in the overall economy, educational institutions successfully operates in Vidzeme offering professional and modern training programs that prepare and provide the labour force to industry's enterprises. One of the identified areas of smart specialization in the Vidzeme is high value-added wood products, therefore, since spring 2017 VPR, in cooperation with the Võru County Vocational Training Centre (Tsenter), has launched the Interreg Estonia – Latvia 2014–2020 programme project "**Innovation and export of wood and furniture in Võru County and Vidzeme Planning Region**".

Project partners jointly strengthen cross-border cooperation in the wood processing and furniture sector between entrepreneurs from both regions to develop an innovation-rich industry and promote export opportunities in the field. The project includes activities aimed at improving the exchange of knowledge and experience between both partner regions and raising awareness among entrepreneurs to create demanded products and services in the sector. The project pays particular attention to the importance of design and innovation in product development.

To understand the woodworking business environment and evaluate trends and opportunities, the project partners conducted a study that helps entrepreneurs and students from both regions to develop a business model and products with the aim to enter the export market successfully, to understand potential customers and their needs. Additionally, jointly by partners, a unique wooden industry hackathon was organised, where Latvian and Estonian woodworking, design, business and marketing specialists united to create new product prototypes. In the 48-hour working marathon, industry professionals and students proved themselves as successful in wood product and furniture prototype production.



Interreg
Estonia-Latvia
European Regional Development Fund



EUROPEAN UNION

Interreg Estonia-Latvia cross border cooperation programme 2014 - 2020 (<https://estlat.eu/en/estlat-results/wood-and-furniture.html>) project "Wood and Furniture" is financed by the European Regional Development Fund.

This article reflects the views of the author. The managing authority of the programme is not liable for how this information may be used.

Additional information about the project:



CLUSTER DEVELOPMENT

Latvian high added value and healthy food cluster – striving for excellence and cross-sectoral collaboration in 2017

The 2017 has been a busy year for the Latvian high added value and healthy food cluster (LFC). It was marked by the entry of several new members (companies and research institutions), advancement of the LFC strategy, continued work to improve the management excellence and services of the cluster and focus on the cross-sectoral collaboration.

LFC development has always been driven by its active core members and international cooperation projects and activities, implemented by the LFC or VPR. 2017 has been no exception – the internationalization and cross-sectoral collaboration activities and projects with partner organizations from other EU countries were at the forefront of LFC development last year. The main project focused activities in 2017 were implementation and finishing of the COSME 2014–2020 programme project: “**5FOREXCELLENCE (Five for Cross-industry Value Chain Excellence)**”, implementation of BSR Innovation express project: “**Cross-sectoral collaboration for efficient and sustainable food value chains in Baltic Sea Region (Pack &Food Baltic)**”, LFC entry in two new consortiums to develop project applications for H2020 calls, and a promising start of the Interreg BSR 2014–2020 programme flagship project: [“Rural RDI milieus in transition towards smart bio economy clusters and innovation ecosystems \(RDI2CluB\)”](#) where LFC is an associated partner. The benefits from gained new experience, knowledge, expertise and extended cooperation network through these projects will carry on in 2018 and well beyond!

Find out more about the Latvian high added value and healthy food cluster here:



International cluster conference “Cooperation for cluster excellence, innovation and competitiveness”

In 2017 LFC management team and members participated in several learning and experience exchange events that directly promoted the improvement of the LFC strategy. LFC members went on study visits to top-performing cluster organizations in Austria and Denmark (Business Upper Austria – Upper Austria Business Agency and Food Network in Denmark), participated in an intensive 5-day training course on cluster management excellence, provided by the international team of experts from the European Foundation for Cluster Excellence, in Tallinn, Estonia, and received an important consultancy service and strategic recommendations from internationally renowned expert in organic food and export, Mr. Erkki Pöytäniemi (Kurmakka – Organic Food OY, Finland).

CLUSTER DEVELOPMENT

A definite highlight of the year was the international conference “Cooperation for cluster excellence, innovation and competitiveness” (May 24, 2017 in Riga, Latvia), that was organized by the VPR, together with 5FOREXCELLENCE consortium partners and Ministry of Economics of Latvia and Interreg Europe project “Clusters3”. The conference was a landmark event, as it was the first cluster focused conference of such scale and international presence in Latvia. 80 participants, and key-note speakers from the Baltic states, Austria, Sweden, Germany and Spain made this a truly important and successful event that we are very proud of! The core theme of the conference was the development, role and impact of clusters and cross-industrial collaboration on competitiveness of companies and their innovation capacities in the context of RIS3. During the event participants had the possibility to exchange opinions about cluster development in various areas and different countries, to share experiences, acquire new contacts and to take part in Peer Review exercise to help shape the future for cluster policy in Latvia.



You can find presentations from the International cluster conference here: 



Find out more about the 5FOREXCELLENCE project here: 

Energy efficiency is a term that is mentioned daily on the global and national scale, as well as at the level of local municipalities and individuals. Energy efficiency is defined as the use of energy in an efficient way. Unfortunately, public and private action is not sufficiently active, so that we could say that we are taking every opportunity in saving resources and increasing motivation to live in a more energy-efficient way. 2017 was a significant year with the start of the Energy Management in Vidzeme and with the new projects of VPR aimed at increasing energy efficiency and use of renewable energy resources, thus reaching the EU goal by 2050 of reduced greenhouse gas emissions by 80-95 % below 1990 levels. VPR currently builds up its own experience on energy management by accumulating and exchanging knowledge at all levels, from European Union (EU) level policy makers, local decision makers, public building managers, suppliers of technological solutions to the energy consumers or, in other words, end-users.

VPR joins Urban Agenda Partnership on Energy Transition and makes its voice heard at EU level

To raise awareness at EU level about energy efficiency and its importance, since autumn 2017 VPR represents interests of Vidzeme internationally in the Urban Agenda Partnership on Energy Transition. Energy Transition is a long-term structural change in energy systems to develop smart integrated solutions, secure, affordable and climate-friendly energy system and to reach a city's energy demand in the most carbon- and cost-efficient way. VPR in cooperation with partners from other EU countries highlights common priorities for the transition from fossil to local renewable energy sources and works on the development of an Orientation Paper. Orientation Paper will require concrete actions to improve EU regulations, identifying the current situation of energy use and the effectiveness of existing EU policies in the field of renewable energy.

For more information:



Local stakeholder role in long-term energy planning process

To engage local stakeholders in the long-term energy planning process, to increase capacity and to help them to become "energy forerunners", the project **PANEL 2050 (Partnership for New Energy Leadership 2050)** creates durable and replicable sustainable energy networks. The relevant stakeholders collaborate to create local energy visions, strategies and action plans for the transition towards low carbon communities in 2050. In 2017, VPR involved 18 out of 26 municipalities and Vidzeme Regional Hospital in workshops aimed at increasing knowledge of effective energy management. Moreover, in the framework of the **PANEL 2050 a CEESEN network (the Central and Eastern Europe (CEA) Sustainable Energy Network)** was developed. CEESEN is a broad network of governmental and research organisations and individuals, as well as NGOs and businesses with deep knowledge and experience on the relevant topics – energy policy, stakeholder engagement and funding. CEESEN network is a place where all members can meet future partners, look for funding opportunities, participate and create trainings in the field of their interest. Membership in the network is free of charge.

Join the low-carbon community in Central and Eastern Europe:



ENERGY EFFICIENCY



In October 2017, the first CEESEN conference took place in Prague with 200 participants from 11 countries. SIA Ekodoma, as a professional and opinion leader in the energy sector in one of the CEA countries, together with VPR presented the experience of Latvia regarding the Energy Efficiency Service Agreement (EPC) and the success story of implementing energy efficiency measures in multi-apartment buildings in Latvia.



This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 696173. Disclaimer: The sole responsibility for the content of this material lies with the authors. It does not necessarily represent the views of the European Union, and neither EASME nor the European Commission are responsible for any use of this material.

For more information:

Financing Toolbox for public building managers to increase energy efficiency

Knowledge of financial support opportunities as well as available technology solutions in the market plays a crucial role for building managers to make decisions on energy efficiency investments in buildings. VPR in the **EFFECT4buildings (Effective Financing Tools for Implementing Energy Efficiency in Buildings)** project in collaboration with public building managers develops financial tools and methods that could help to improve profitability, facilitate the financing of energy investments and reduce risks.

The main problem that is being solved by the EFFECT4buildings project is insufficient market dialogue. There are too often situations that technology solutions don't meet the needs of public building managers, including the need for financial solutions. Public building managers need better knowledge on existing solutions, their profitability and how to get the highest benefit possible. EFFECT4buildings enhances the market dialogue between companies which are providing technological solutions and public building managers to achieve a better and more efficient use of technology, as well as provides comprehensive decision-making support toolbox with a set of financial instruments. EFFECT4buildings is a part of the implementation of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR), being a flagship project under the policy area Energy and the horizontal action Climate. Flagship projects demonstrate the progress of the EUSBSR especially well and serve as pilot examples for the desired change.



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EFFECT4buildings

EFFECT4buildings is implemented with the support from the EU funding Programme Interreg Baltic Sea Region (European Regional Development Fund) and Norwegian national funding. The aim of the project is to improve the capacity of public building managers in the Baltic Sea Region by providing them a comprehensive decision-making support toolbox with a set of financial instruments to unlock the investments and lower the risks of implementing energy efficiency measures in buildings owned by public stakeholders.

For more information:

ENERGY EFFICIENCY

The importance of understanding technology to achieve energy efficiency goals

The project **LowTEMP (Low Temperature District Heating for the Baltic Sea Region)** focuses on the importance of technology in increasing energy efficiency. Low-temperature heating system is a fourth-generation technology whose effectiveness is based on reducing the water temperature from 100° C – 120° C to 35° C – 55° C, thus saving energy, reducing heat losses and CO₂ emissions. Even though technology has developed, there are obstacles to its implementation. Most often, this is a lack of knowledge or a fear of making a long-term decision. VPR in the LowTEMP addresses municipal representatives responsible for urban and energy issues, heat suppliers, planners, engineers, energy agencies, and provides them with knowledge on technical, organisational and financial strategies to implement low temperature district heating. LowTEMP raises awareness not only of the low temperature technologies, but also of the need for regular data collection, analysis and ability to make smart choices for the best low temperature technological solutions on the road to sustainable development.



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LowTEMP is implemented with the support from the EU funding Programme Interreg Baltic Sea Region (European Regional Development Fund and European Neighbourhood Instrument). The partners from nine Baltic Sea region countries work together to make the district heating supply more sustainable by integrating low temperature district heating solutions.

For more information:



Educating the end user is fundamental for implementing energy efficiency policies

Interreg Estonia – Latvia 2014–2020 programme project **Smart Energy Community (SEC)** aims to raise awareness among the general public of the daily use of energy and the ways of saving energy.

Sustainable society starts with each of us. Therefore, VPR in cooperation with the Tartu Regional Energy Agency, Rõuge municipality and Alūksne municipality has brought together knowledge in this project to teach school children and general society the importance and benefits of energy-efficient lifestyles by practical examples and actions. We believe that changing the habits in this part of the community is crucial for the implementation and effectiveness of all energy efficiency policies.



ENERGY EFFICIENCY



In their everyday life and routines, society members rarely think about the importance of energy-saving habits, probably because it seems incomprehensible, confusing, perhaps even uninteresting. It seems that often they have a logical question – what to do with this information on a daily basis? Therefore, the project slogan "The energy is the joy!" is the leading guide for partner activities – to show children, as well as the society in general that evaluation of their habits on a daily basis is useful, and the obtained information can be widely applied to their everyday life.

The key to success in this bilateral partnership and cooperation is transferring one partner's experience and expertise to another partner on how to meaningfully and creatively address school children and society, how to engage in multiple activities related with energy efficiency. For instance, within the framework of project SEC, the teachers from the Vidzeme region schools are actively participating and collaborating with Estonian partners in the elaboration of a new educational methodology. By sharing their unique experience in work with children, they are developing a description of energy efficiency lessons, that could be later integrated into school curriculum in Latvia and Estonia.



Interreg
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Interreg Estonia-Latvia cross border cooperation programme 2014 - 2020 (<http://www.trea.ee/sec/en/>) project "Smart Energy Community" is financed by the European Regional Development Fund.

This article reflects the views of the author. The managing authority of the programme is not liable for how this information may be used.

For more information:

Vidzeme Regional Mobility Investment Plan 2030 will improve a functional access to the TEN-T core network corridors

The Mobility Investment Plan has been prepared in the framework of the Interreg Baltic Sea Region Program 2014-2020 project "**TENTacle – Capitalising on TEN-T core network corridors for prosperity, growth and cohesion**". The Mobility Investment Plan is a transport development planning document for Vidzeme region, which sets the strategic goals and defines strategic vision for the long-term transport development until the year 2030. The goal of the Mobility Investment Plan is to ensure mobility for residents, entrepreneurs and freight carriers in a safe, convenient, reliable, efficient and environmentally friendly way. The Plan will be used for investment planning activities by local municipalities and businesses in Vidzeme area. It will also be referential for national transport authorities, as its recommendations are expected to be integrated in the national transport planning documents. The document will be submitted for adoption by the Development Council of the VPR. A convenient transport system and mobility opportunities are important prerequisites for the economic growth of Vidzeme region, particularly in the areas of smart specialization. Vidzeme is a border region of the European Union and it is a catchment area for TEN-T core network corridors, which are important for passenger and cargo transit flows in the east-west and north-south direction. The document defines the priorities of transport system development and identifies tasks that would improve reachability of Vidzeme by roads and railways, public and freight transport, taking into account needs of pedestrians and cyclists, as well as traffic safety in the region. To achieve the objectives of the Mobility Investment Plan, successful cooperation between the responsible institutions and the parties involved in the operation of the transport system is needed. The Mobility Investment Plan can serve as the basis for other more in-depth development and planning documents on local municipal level to ensure coherence between local and national transport policy documents and the priorities of the region's development. The Mobility Plan was developed in close cooperation with the project partner from Estonia – the town of Valga. The joint development of the Mobility Plan will facilitate closer cooperation between the two neighbouring countries in the area of transport planning.



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Find out more about the TENTacle project here:



TRANSPORT

MAMBA – not only technical mobility project, but socially responsible action!

The MAMBA project aims to promote "people-to-service" and "service-to-people" mobility solutions in rural areas, as well as residents' participation in rural mobility design processes.

In fall of 2017, VPR started to implement the Interreg Baltic Sea Region project in the area of transport on demand. This is a great challenge and possibility to overtake and implement, in many EU countries, already existing transport experience.

A few years ago, the idea about transport on demand was met as a good practice in Austria when our project specialists and Latvian public transport service providers saw this as an appropriate solution which needed only some adjustments to meet the local situation. Idea ripened for a couple of years and now after a more detailed research is ready to be adapted and implemented.

MAMBA project will work to improve accessibility and transport infrastructure in Vidzeme region. A combination of different public transport services will improve accessibility from less populated rural areas and adapt to the needs of the people of the region.

The development of alternative transport services has the potential to provide mobility opportunities for those who are still excluded from traditional public transport network. Providing access to educational institutions, sports activities, health care, recreation facilities and other services can enhance the attractiveness of the area, while encouraging residents to stay in specific areas, promoting entrepreneurship and attraction of investors and facilitating the flow of tourists, thus improving the overall development and competitiveness of the VPR area.

Within the INTERREG Baltic Sea Region Transnational Cooperation Programme 2014–2020 project **MAMBA (Maximised Mobility and Accessibility of Services in Regions Affected by Demographic Change)** it is planned to create local mobility centres and pilot transport on demand in areas of Vidzeme where mobility should be improved.



MAMBA

Find out more about the project here:



SUSTAINABLE AND ATTRACTIVE LIVING ENVIRONMENT

The identity of Vidzeme is closely related to the cultural and natural heritage of the region, including the intangible cultural heritage. This capital should be protected and developed, also fostering its' wise use in tourism, because tourism is an essential part of the Latvian economy and also one of the priority fields for development of Vidzeme Planning Region. The direct contribution of tourism to GDP in Latvia is around 4 %, but the indirect contribution even higher, reaching 9 %. Attraction of tourists and promotion of entrepreneurship is among the priorities of local governments as well, therefore the projects implemented by VPR in the field of tourism are aimed at helping local municipalities and entrepreneurs by ensuring exchange of experience, bringing knowledge and thus improving their services and raising their attractiveness as destinations. At the same time, **the knowledge VPR can share as a partner in cross-border cooperation projects by bringing together researchers and field professionals is also valuable.**

Both culinary and industrial heritage tourism in the recent years have strengthened their position among other tourism experiences and have been brought into national discussion of tourism development as well. In line with that, in 2017 VPR has launched **two new tourism projects** in cooperation with Estonia (in the framework of cross-border cooperation programme Interreg Estonia–Latvia 2014–2020):

- **Livonian Culinary Route** (Design and promotion of tourism product based on Livonian culinary heritage) and
- **Industrial Heritage** (Revival of Industrial Heritage for Tourism Development).

These projects contribute to the creation of tourism products that could play a role not only on the Baltic tourism, but also on the international tourism stage and attract tourists from other European countries who are looking for some new experiences in culinary and industrial heritage tourism.

The project **Livonian Culinary Route** aims to tell the Latvian and Estonian culinary history from medieval times until nowadays. The story of Livonian culinary heritage will be used to build the visitors' recognition of local food and knowledge of entrepreneurs how to improve their business performance. Project will focus on locally grown and produced food, promote the usage of locally grown ingredients in food preparation and contribute to the establishment of strong regional co-operation networks between tourism, catering businesses and local food producers. As a result, a new culinary itinerary – "Flavours of Livonia" – will be created, integrating the regional culinary route "Taste Hanseatica" which supplements also "Via Hanseatica" (a former project implemented by VPR). At the end of November 2017, the application process of the entrepreneurs (caterers and food producers) for the participation in the itinerary was finished. Currently, 182 entrepreneurs from Latvia – 110 in Vidzeme, 72 in Kurzeme and Riga – are ready to participate and make a lasting tourism product.

Please look for more information about the project here:



Photo: Klāvs Vasījevskis

SUSTAINABLE AND ATTRACTIVE LIVING ENVIRONMENT



INDUSTRIAL HERITAGE
FOR TOURISM

The project **Industrial Heritage** aims to raise awareness of the industrial heritage value in diversification of tourism offers. In the framework of this project, 26 partnering industrial heritage sites in Latvia and Estonia will be improved with entertaining and educational elements according to the modern visitors' needs and expectations, as well as a joint industrial heritage route will be created that will be promoted in local and foreign target markets.

Please look for more information about the project here:



Bringing in knowledge and exchanging of experience

To achieve the aims of these two projects and to strengthen the capacities of the partners and other stakeholders, regional thematic seminars will be held, master classes or mentoring activities, as well as experience trips will be organized. These activities will give inspiration and new ideas to tourism specialists and entrepreneurs, helping them to improve their service and product quality. To inspire the members of the routes with business success stories and to create close regional co-operation between Latvian and Estonian stakeholders also joint seminars will be held.



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2017 was a fruitful year also for the two other projects related to tourism and sustainable and attractive living environment—HANSA and SWARE.

The **HANSA (Hanseatic Approach to New Sustainable Alliances)** project is a Central Baltic programme project where 11 partners from Sweden, Estonia and Latvia, mostly small Hanseatic cities, are closely collaborating to create and develop new tourism products and putting efforts in making the Hansa a leading brand of the Baltic Sea Region and an active Cultural Route of the Council of Europe. As one of the partners, VPR helps promoting the Hanseatic destinations and all partners together are contributing and sharing knowledge to improve the tourism offers and services of involved cities. In 2017 the work has resulted into great achievements.

Project cities had a chance to show their tourism products to the representatives of their target markets. In three different test trips – active and culinary – 11 test travellers altogether were invited to experience and assess the offer of HANSA cities. The received evaluation helps to improve the tourism offer of the cities and lets the Hanseatic cities provide more targeted and attractive offers to tourists from all over Europe and beyond. In 2018 Familiarization (FAM) trips will be organized to keep promoting project cities and to introduce their tourism products to European media and tour operators.



SUSTAINABLE AND ATTRACTIVE LIVING ENVIRONMENT

In 2017 two of the Latvian project cities – Cēsis and Limbaži – were also honoured as the most excellent European cultural tourism destinations. Cēsis got the winning prize of the national competition of European Destinations of Excellence (EDEN) in Cultural Tourism 2017 with the application "Cēsis – where the past meets the future", and was followed closely by Limbaži who got in the TOP 5 with the application "Hansa city Limbaži". This was one of the first times when Limbaži city positioned its tourism offer under the name of Hansa.



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Central Baltic



Cultural route
of the Council of Europe
Itinéraire culturel
du Conseil de l'Europe



COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Please look for more information about the project here:



Explore
~~HANSA~~

The Interreg Europe project **SWARE (Sustainable heritage management of WAtterway REgions)** brings together 6 partners from 5 countries (Ireland, Italy, Latvia, the Netherlands and Slovakia). The waterway regions involved in SWARE all share unique natural and cultural heritage: protected areas with rich biodiversity and a bunch of enticing historic cities and buildings connected to water. The project strives for achieving a better balance between protection and sustainable exploitation of the valuable natural and cultural resources through improving the development programmes and policies of the partner regions. For the project SWARE 2017 was about knowledge exchange – three knowledge exchange sessions among project partners and stakeholders were organized to Ireland, Italy and the Netherlands. All visits were organized in the form of field sessions as well as group discussions that allowed active interaction and fruitful exchange of ideas. It was acknowledged that the most valuable was the perspective the partners from different countries brought in on the destinations. During the last visit in the Netherlands project stakeholder from Latvia Dr.geogr. Andris Klepers (Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences) gave a lecture on the use of big (open) data for tourism strategic planning. This lecture raised vivid discussions among the delegates, showing the topicality of this theme. The delegates expressed interest in the planned outcome of the research presented by Dr. Klepers – an adjustable template with information of the data that regional and local tourism destinations could use and how they could interpret them.

In 2018 the elaboration of regional action plans is on the agenda of SWARE project where the policy lessons learnt during the knowledge exchange will be incorporated. Different territorial context, but common needs mark out the framework of the action plans based on the policy lessons learnt during the knowledge exchange.



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Please look for more information about the project here:





VIDZEME

THE ONLY WAY IS UP!

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