

Rural youth camps: Building bridges between Estonian, Finnish and Russian youngsters; creating ways for European LEADER groups to cooperate with Russian third sector

LEADER
Sepra

Partners in cooperation

Finland: Leader SEpra, Länsi-Saimaa and Pohjois-Kymen Kasvu

Estonia: Pärnu Bay Partnership (Lead partner) and Kodukant Läänemaa

Russia: Olonets District LIG (Local Initiative Group)



Drawing homes, Russia, August 2012

Background

- SEpra LAG's manager acted as a consultant in the Helsinki University ENPI Ladoga Initiative project aiming to strengthen local initiatives on sustainable economic growth and to explore how LEADER could be applied in Russia.
- As a result, three pilot Local Initiative Groups (LIGs) were established working on the basis of local development plans. Tripartite boards were formed and 30 mini-projects were implemented.
- During the Estonian Leader Award Ceremony in July 2011 - where SEpra and Ladoga coordinators were invited - the Estonian NRN and LAGs raised the interesting possibility to build bridges from Estonia to Russia through Finland.
- The priority topic identified for cooperation activities was 'rural youth', which is a priority for all countries (*challenges and future hopes are very much alike no matter where young people live*) and which easily applies to cooperation activities because they are suitable for activities with different countries, cultures and actors.
- As a conclusion it was decided that a TN project would be written and three Rural Youth Camps for children between 11 and 13 years old were organised in summer 2012, Estonians being the project lead partners.



Canoeing in Estonia, June 2012

Why did we cooperate

- **Geographical proximity** and strong common historical and cultural backgrounds with Russia.
- **Strong presence of the Russian culture in Estonian and Finnish territories** because of immigrants or local residents with Russian background.
- Presence in the Russian Karelia region of '**Local Initiative Groups**' interested in cooperating with European LEADER LAGs.

Steps taken and activities during the project

1. Cooperation contract signing and a start-up meeting - January 2012 in Helsinki, Finland.
2. Organisation of meetings with youth associations to plan and agree on the youth camps - January-February 2012.
3. Information campaign, open call for applications, selection of the young participants and preparation of the participants for the camps - March-May 2012.
4. The camps: 20-25 June 2012 in Estonia; 2-8 July 2012 in Finland; and 27 July-2 August 2012 in Russia.
5. Monitoring group meetings in Finland - 15 April 2012 and Estonia - 28 June 2012.
6. Weekend camp for youth and culture organisations in Finland - 5-7 October 2012.
7. Reporting of the results of the camps, meetings and planning ahead - November-December 2012.
8. Meeting in Finland for analysing the results and planning future activities - 22 January 2013.
9. Project reporting and payment claims - March-April 2013.

The final beneficiaries were:

- A. Young people 11-13 years old and their families
- B. Youth and culture organisations in the areas
- C. Partner LAGs in respective countries

Lessons on TNC

Getting to know partners before the actual project implementation is very recommendable.

-> by doing this, many differences in administration (e.g. visa procedures, legislation linked to children, TN-project application times for LEADER funding) or cultures (linguistic skills of beneficiaries, civil society practices, methods and tools for communication etc.) can be taken account of in planning the schedule and activities.

If several languages are spoken in partner countries, it is wise to verify that all participants understand alike the spoken and written facts in English.

-> best is to ensure that at least one representative of the partner teams speaks English fluently and has experience in TN cooperation.

To succeed requires the commitment of the local communities already at the planning phase.

-> to operate according to the bottom-up LEADER approach, at least some of the representatives of local beneficiaries should be involved from the planning phase. Thus they feel the ownership and are active in the implementation phase.

Achievements

- Young people and their families were able to realise that youngsters cope in different cultures even with limited language skills and this gave them self-confidence.
- Youngsters and youth organisations were able to share their positive experience locally and in the social media and hence could lessen prejudice and distrust that sometimes exists against linguistic and cultural minorities.
- LAGs in Estonia and Finland learned how to build and implement a transnational cooperation project with a country outside the EU and the Russian LIG learned about EU-funded LEADER cooperation projects.



Young people and blind trust, Finland, June 2012

