



 Leeds
Community
Foundation

 EUROPEAN
COMMUNITY
FOUNDATION
INITIATIVE

Latvia Study Visit - Reflections
17- 22 September 2018

Introduction

13 participants from 10 countries across Europe joined the 2018 Study Visit to Latvia. Bringing a range of expertise and knowledge from different Community Foundations and support organisations, the experience enabled participants to learn more about the Latvian Community Foundation movement, local culture and share best practice with their peers.

Over the following pages I will share some insights into the Latvian movement, key highlights and my reflections from the Study Visit experience.

Kirsty McKinnon
Leeds Community Foundation



Headlines

- 2018 celebrates 100 years since Latvia became an independent state
- Demographic of resident – 62% of the population is Latvian with the next biggest demographic being Russian at 25.2%
- Average monthly salary is 961 EUR before tax
- Lack of available housing means rental prices are high in major cities
- Unemployment rate is decreasing and currently at 7.7%
- Decreasing population – over the next 10-15 year it is projected that 0.5m people will move
- Sense of pride regarding heritage and local traditions, approximately 40,000 people take part in the Latvia Song & Dance Festival each July

“Borders are open, information about life in other EU states is available and everyone is doing it. So, off our young people go to England or Ireland or Germany.”

Aleksandr Rube, journalist

“One Latvian spends an average 69,24 EUR per year on sweets, but donates just 4,77 EUR.” Civic Alliance, Latvia

Among the Baltic States, Latvia is the only country in which community philanthropy has taken root, and which can reflect on 15 years of achievement in this realm.

Philanthropy is still very much in its infancy with many Latvians feeling economically unstable. Those who give, donate small amounts so it can be hard to fund long term projects that demonstrate high impact.

Giving Circles and local fundraising events are popular with individual donors and generate a significant amount of the Community Foundation’s donations.

Challenges

- Public profile – lack of donor and public understanding of the role of Community Foundations
- Public perception - charitable organisation should be run by volunteers and have no paid staff
- Changes to tax regulations - until this year companies could receive up to 85% discount on profit tax for donations. A new tax policy reform reduced the available discount meaning charitable donations might not be as tax effective for donors
- Lack of strong NGOs - meaning there is less competition for Foundations to fundraise but not enough NGOs to deliver frontline services
- Local culture - it is customary to avoid conflict and discussing personal issues, making it difficult to conduct an analysis into local need that can be articulated to local donors

The Study Visit focussed on 2 Community Foundations, providing visits and more insight into their inner workings, local needs and motivations.

1. Valmiera Region Community Foundation – Overview

Background and Team Structure

- Foundation established in June 2005
- 4 staff including Executive Director, Fundraising/ Communications Manager, Finance Manager and Youth Coordinator
- 9 Board members consisting of local people with the Executive Director being the only and main signatory
- Utilise EVS Volunteers to assist with events, promotion and have a strong group of Youth Bank volunteers
- Core funding is covered by international and national funding bodies

Fund Development

- 93,246 EUR in endowment
- On average corporates give bigger donations of around 400 EUR/ individuals give smaller amounts of around 70 EUR

Grant-making

- Open call for applications takes place once to twice a year
- Funding decisions made by Donor Club

Events and Activities

- Charity Ball – annual community fundraising event raises approximately 4,000 EUR
- Launched Lab of Youth Ideas in 2007 (i.e. Youth Bank) for young people to learn about philanthropy. They have hosted several fundraising activities to raise funds for small social activities
- Kupa Karte (Together Card) – looking to launch this later this year with aim of raising 20,000 EUR per year. The card encourages businesses to offer discounts to the public to raise awareness of the Foundation and offer proceeds of sales to support the work of the Foundation

Foundation Challenges

- Lack of strong NGOs
- Raising income to support core costs
- Core income currently generated from single funder
- Limited capacity and resource to implement local needs analysis
- Cultural customs can make it difficult to establish and maintain donor relationships
- Number of municipalities across the different areas

2. Alūksne and Ape Region Community Foundation - Overview

Background and Team Structure

- Foundation established in April 2005
- In its first year it attracted 50 private individuals and legal entities to become supporters of their work
- Led by a voluntary team – currently doesn't have resources for paid staff
- Utilise EVS Volunteers with other Latvian Foundation to assist with events and promotion

Fund Development

- Small donations are raised through community events

Grant-Making

- Most NGOs and projects are awarded grants of 200-500 EUR
- Grants are usually directed to specific projects which have specific fundraising campaigns (i.e. emergency medical fund for local families, renovation of heritage sites, cultural exhibitions, clean up programmes for river banks or art materials)

Events and Activities

- Host monthly quiz/ game night in Ape to raise funds for the Community Foundation. Local community actively engaged with around 100 people attending each event
- Real Life Tours is a new fundraising initiative that will look to officially launch in the coming months to generate income for the Foundation

Foundation Challenges

- Lack of strong NGOs
- Ran entirely by local volunteers
- High level of poverty across the region so even though local people are actively engaged it is difficult to find and secure high level donations

Valmiera - Funded Project

Ķoņu hill

Near the Estonian border, Ķoņu hill was historically known as a Latvian pagan holy site. Over the past 5 years, thanks to support from the Valmiera Region Community Foundation, a new stage, dance floor and other improvements have been made to the site.

It was fantastic to meet Egita, a young person who is now actively involved in running this project. The site is beautiful, peaceful and spiritual. It is the perfect site for people and communities to come together for folk concerts, theatre performances and other cultural activities.

The thing that struck me most was that the space had so much potential but didn't seem to be fully utilised by the local community. It brought it home to me that it is not only financial grants which are important but the practical support Foundations can provide to smaller projects.

By providing expertise in the form of marketing, budget and project planning, amazing projects like Ķoņu hill could reach a wider audience and have the tools to work with their local community to decide on future projects and recruit volunteers to help drive activity.



Naukšēni Secondary school

Naukšēni has been one of the areas to receive the most grants from Valmiera Region Community Foundation since 2006. Awarded grants have enabled the school to purchase materials to produce costumes for their theatre group and provided students with the tools to construct games and furniture for school breakout areas.

We met with students and teachers who kindly provided a tour of the school which has recently been expanded to include a nursery and pre school. The school has also been involved with the Foundation's Youth Bank scheme, which works with students to select tangible projects they can support and actively fundraise for.

It was great to see the confidence and enthusiasm of the students when speaking about the grant funded projects and the way in which these projects offered a light introduction to the world of philanthropy.

Each of these visits reminded me of the importance of sharing our local stories and the need to continually educate our donors and grant recipients of the role of Community Foundations so they can be our advocates and help share our message.



Alūksne and Ape – Fundraising Activity

Real Life Tours

Real Life Tours is a fundraising initiative established by Alūksne and Ape Region Community Foundation to introduce tourists and visitors to interesting locals to learn more about their lifestyles and work. The Foundation are currently trialling this initiative and are hoping to offer paid for visits that will generate income for the Foundation in the coming months.

Our visit was with Harijs Stradiņš, who specialises in making wooden furniture.

It was really interesting to see first hand an initiative they are thinking of implementing. Harijs kindly shared his personal story of struggling with an alcohol addiction before turning his life around. He now has an overwhelming desire to help and respect others through his passion of working with wood and making furniture.

I think this is interesting and innovative fundraising concept and something that could work really in Latvia. It was great to see Alūksne and Ape Region Community Foundation trying and experimenting with new ideas to engage donors and generate new sources of income.



Community Spirit



“Latvia has a special charm, local people are friendly and generous with their time.”

**Viduslatgale Cross-regional
Community Foundation**



“I love the local nature and the Latvian Song & Dance Festival. People shouldn't be dependent on the government and should invest in society with their own energy and ideas. This is why I love Valmiera CF.”

**Valmiera Region Community
Foundation**



“People do little things but with heart.”

**Kanadava Community
Foundation**

Overarching Reflections

The Community Foundation Movement: we are more similar than we are different. We all have the same aim of supporting our local communities and helping local people.

- **Capacity building and support:** Unlike Latvia, Leeds has a strong NGO and community sector and it was interesting to see the juxtaposition of Foundations who deliver frontline services versus organisations who purely give grants. I think there is more Leeds Community Foundation can do to bring projects together to avoid duplication of resources and help organisations to become more sustainable.
- **Transactional Vs Transformational Grant-Maker?:** I think Community Foundations are well positioned and have the potential to be transformational but capacity, resource and funding seem to be a constant barrier. I think there is more scope for Leeds Community Foundation to increase our leadership role in championing the Third Sector.
- **Small can be beautiful:** Latvian Community Foundations are currently distributing much smaller grants than we do in Leeds but are still making positive changes within local areas. I think there is opportunity in Leeds for us to further drive our micro grants programme to encourage more community spirit and empower our future social entrepreneurs.
- **Profile of Community Foundations:** All Foundations seems to have the same issue of communicating their role and the impact they have on local communities. This is where analysis into local need can play an important role and it was interesting to hear other Foundation's views on Vital Signs. I also think there is a greater piece of work that can be done across the different Community Foundation Movements to shout about our combined work and impact in the media.
- **UK Community Foundation's involvement with the European Community Foundation Initiative:** I think it is important that there continues to be collaboration and learning between European and UK Foundations. We promote ourselves as part of a national and global movement and I think it is useful, especially within our conversations with donors and community projects, to have more knowledge about the movement that we can share and also learn from.

Conclusion

Labi!

The slogan “If you like Latvia, Latvia likes you” was included as part of the information pack which was issued prior to the Study Visit. By the end of this experience I definitely liked Latvia!

Ansis and his team at the Valmiera Region Community Foundation were the perfect hosts, offering a warm welcome and an itinerary that offered an honest insight into the Latvian Community Foundation Movement and local culture.

The opportunity to exchange ideas and learn about the different structures of Community Foundations and the landscape of giving across Europe was truly invaluable.

The Study Visit gives you the space to open your mind to another way of working and poses important questions, even if they are left unanswered.

I would highly recommend that Study Visit and would like to give special thanks to Julia, Mihaela, Ansis and everyone else involved in making this a truly wonderful experience.

**“If you like Latvia,
Latvia likes you.”**

Slogan used as part of Latvia
100 Campaign



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