



volunteering cities+ quarterly reports

Quarterly Network Report 1

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Introduction

This is the first quarterly report of the second wave network “Volunteering Cities +”. For that reason it is more extensive in order to give a comprehensive view of the Improved Good Practice, of the partner cities and of the working methodology. The following reports will be shorter and reporting only the progress made.

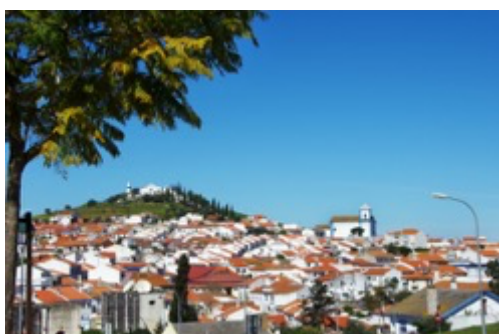
In the first wave we were able to transfer, rather successfully, the Good Practice of Athienou to 7 partner cities in very different countries:

Portugal – Arcos de Valdevez (North)
Spain – Altea (Alicante)
Italy – Capizzi (Sicily)
Croatia – Pregrada (Krapina-Zagorje)
Poland – Radlin (Silesia)
Germany – Altena (Märkischen Kreis)
Ireland – Athy (Kiladare)

This second wave allowed to focus the transfer in very small towns, between 5 and 12 thousand inhabitants. It is a challenge to identify the challenges faced by rather small towns to implement a more participative and social volunteering based Governance Model.

The new “Mosaic” of partner below.

Portugal - Aljustrel (Alentejo)



Greece – Agia (Larissa)



Slovakia – Banska Stiavnica (Banska Bystrica)



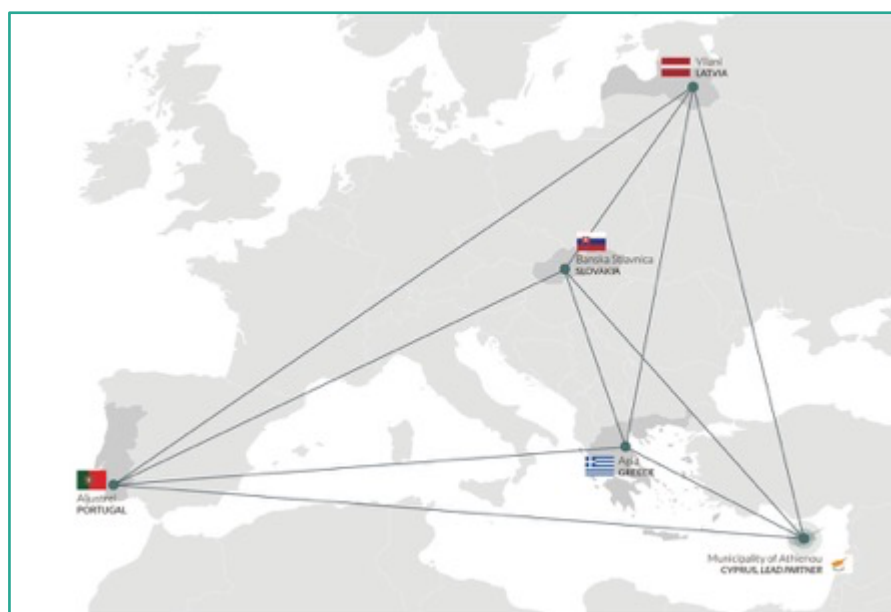
Lettland – Vilani (Rezekne)



One of the important tools to be used is the Guide to support the transfer produced in the first wave network and the intensive Exchange with the respective partner cities.

Objective of this Report is to expose the challenges, opportunities and learnings faced by the cities of the network until this moment.

1. The Volunteering Cities+ Network



1.1 Municipality of Aljustrel

It is a municipality situated in the heart of Alentejo, in southern Portugal, with 458 Km² surface and 9234 inhabitants. It integrates four parishes and has a privileged geographical position between the airports of Portela (Lisbon) and Faro, each accessible within 1,5 hours' drive.



The economy of the Municipality is based on:

- Agriculture, that has been given an impulse with the construction of the big Alqueva dam, is now focused on the production of cereals, irrigated and non-irrigated, olives as well as livestock breeding.
- A big mining company (1000 jobs) and several micro or small industrial companies in the following fields: metallurgy, explosives production, pipes production, carpentry, bakery, pastry and graphics. Moreover, commerce and Tourism are also economic activities of the region.

Social context and policy

The Municipality of Aljustrel has several NGOs and other social non profit organisation promoting volunteering within the context of the Social Network (Portuguese Programme established in each Municipality). In this Programme there is a Local Commission integrating all relevant local actors (public and private) headed, normally, by the Social Department of the city. This Commission has the role of discussing the social needs of the territory and to try to propose solutions that are put in practice by the different members of the network.



Expectations in relation to the Transfer of the Good Practice



Increase the participation of citizens in the definition of public policies



To foster more Intergenerational activities



To increase young people involvement in volunteering



To mobilize companies to collaborate in finding solutions for the depopulation through their citizenship



To raise the range of entrepreneurial activities as a tool to face the migration of young people

1.2 Municipality of Agia



It is a Municipality located in eastern Thessaly that covers a surface area of 668,26 km² with a population of 11.470 inhabitants.



The main sector is Agriculture, sector with most of the population as farmers. It includes the production of apples (30% of the total Greek apple production, about 100.000 tones), olives and extra virgin olive oil, chestnuts, cherries and kiwis. There are 4 agriculture cooperatives operating in Agia.



With a substantial heritage and a long coast line the region is also rather strong in Tourism.

Social context and policy

The financial crisis led to a significant decrease of income to most of the citizens and to unemployment increasing poverty and social exclusion. The most affected vulnerable groups were women, youngsters, and families with very low income. The Municipality designed a local social policy to promote social cohesion and elimination of poverty and social exclusion implemented through EU and central Government funded projects. These projects, mentioned below, aim to improve the living conditions of people in need and prevent other kind of social problems.

- Promoted by the independent department of social protection:

Social grocery store

It fulfills essential needs of socially and financially vulnerable persons and families, through providing free products and primary necessities like food and clothing. The beneficiaries are: greek citizens and foreigners who are permanent inhabitants of Agia.



Community center

Promoted by the municipal public enterprise “iraklidis” since 2018 and it is funded through the ESF (2014-2020) aiming to support citizens affected by the economic crisis, namely unemployed women and young people that need new skills and qualifications to raise employability.



Other services/structures involving volunteering are:

The Day Nursery accommodating 40 infants and toddlers and the Community open protection center for elderly people with 500 members.



Expectations in relation to the Transfer of the Good Practice



Create new opportunities and new practices to increase the involvement of companies in the solutions for the challenges of the city

1.3 Municipality of Banska Stiavnica



Town in the mountainous area in the Central Slovakia with rich mining history (silver, gold), UNESCO World Heritage Site (1993) with 10.000 inhabitants.



The main challenges faced by the town are related with depopulation (young people leaving the town) and a consequent ageing population related with the lack of qualified jobs, of enough healthcare services and facilities and of reasonable housing.

Tourism is the main economic activity that brings also problems related with car parking, waste management and low qualified jobs.

Social context and policy

In the Municipality of Banská Štiavnica most of the social services are provided by the Municipality such as: home care service, two day centres for active elderly people and financial support to citizens and children that in difficult financial situation. There are others social services working in Banská Štiavnica including senior homes, Slovak Red Cross, Slovak Union of the Physically Disabled, Slovak Union of the Blind and the Purbblind etc.

Expectations in relation to the Transfer of the Good Practice



Raising awareness about volunteerism among citizens



Young people and local stakeholders activation in volunteerism



More frequent Intergeneration interactions



Improvement of local social policies



Improvement of participation process on local social policies



Implementation of good practice from Lead Partner adapted to Banská Štiavnica

1.4 Vilani union administration of Rezekne municipality



The Territory of Vilani union includes Vilani town and following parishes: Deksares, Sokolki and Vilani covering 2809.12 km² with 29 913 inhabitants from which 59 % Latvians, 35,4 % Russians and 5,6 % Belarussians, Polish and Roma. Vilani town covers 5Km² and has 2 793 inhabitants.

After getting independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, Latvia went through very difficult times because of the collapse of the Soviet economy. After more than 50 years in the Soviet Union, Latvia set out on the road to independent democracy and a social market economy. EU membership in 2004, further enhanced the successful

transition in all the fields. While in the early 1990s, the per capita GDP was below 25% of the EU average, it now reached about 70%.

The main challenges are related with depopulation and consequente ageing of the population, the multiculturality. The migration of young people to bigger cities (national or abroad) is related with the search of job opportunities due to high unemployment and intergenerational disparities. High disbelief in the future and in the capacity to change things.



Social Context and Policy

Close location to the border with Russia (~ 50 km), 240 km to capital city Riga, high unemployment rate (more than 16%), migration of young people to the capital city or other EU countries, depression, as well as the poor knowledge of the Latvian language prevents the part of the population of Rezekne municipality to participate in the community activities and decision making processes of the municipality. It often results in forming different separate socio-demographic groups, sometimes at the expense of social cohesion.

One of the functions of Rezekne Municipality is to reach better involvement of all the citizens in local life in order to improve the social cohesion, to foster intercultural dialogue and mutual understanding.

There are the following actions to improve the social and economic situation in the municipality: a) supporting (by grants) the small beginning businesses in the rural areas; b) improving the rural degraded territories (using EU funding) and making them attractive to local people and tourists so increasing the creation of new small businesses in the territories: f.ex. water tourism center (<http://baka.rezeknesnovads.lv/index.php/parmums>), historical manor (<http://www.luznavasmuiza.lv>) etc.; c) supporting the development of local volunteers groups in each rural territory, etc.



Expectations in relation to the Transfer of the Good Practice



To get experienced administrative staff in increasing participative mechanisms



Capacity raise on how to motivate / work with ULG through Examples of good practice



Foster cooperation with stakeholders through joint activities: crafts, cultural heritage and social



Increase Entrepreneurship to stimulate the exchange of experience and skills between generations



To improve the coordination and evidence of good examples of volunteering initiatives as tools to engage volunteers



To bring SMEs support and good examples on how to develop cooperation on volunteering / citizenship principles in the local community



To raise Youngster capacity to entrepreneurship



Attract volunteers and social investment



2. Learning Exchange activities

2.1 ULG Meetings

All partner cities have organised a first ULG Meeting before the kick-off meeting. This was required to have the opportunity to test the approach, to consolidate the partners network and to be able to clarify in the transnational meeting all doubts and fulfill the needs.

Aljustrel

The town of Aljustrel has already formed the ULG and organised the first meeting. After the kick-off meeting the group is meeting again to prepare the Roadmap.

Agia

The ULG of the Municipality of Agia is formed and based on people who are involved in the community life either because of their position or because of their engagement and their participation. The ULG members represent the vast majority of the social partners and all four community unities: Agia, Melivia, Lakeria and Evrimenes. This is a key aspect for the success of the ULG as the distance between them and their differences in ground morphology and economy affect every local policy and every activity that takes place.

The ULG met for the first time on the 23rd of September for a presentation of the URBACT Programme and of the network. After the kick-off there will be a meeting to discuss and decide about the structure and the role of the MCV and its policies and also discuss and organize in cooperation with the social partners voluntary actions. Moreover, it will be involved in drafting the Roadmap.

Banská Štiavnica

The first ULG meeting in Banská Štiavnica took place on 17 September 2021. The members got chance to learn basic information about OP URBACT, about the Volunteering Cities+ network and its main objectives. They also learned the role of the ULG in the network on local and transnational level. Members also had opportunity to explain their volunteering activities and express their ideas about developing volunteering in Banská Štiavnica.

Vilani

In the first ULG meeting people got the chance to come together and talk about their needs and ideas.

Some collected ideas:

- Cleaning the territory around the oak park in Vilani Workshop
- Second life of a clothing Activity
- Sharing of children's toys between families Christmas tree decoration making (for municipality/elderly house)
- Making of garden of herbs Installation of warm homes/water tanks for stray cats
- Bird cage making workshop in spring.

The project idea and necessity for the innovative ideas for the volunteering activities was widely spread in the e-mails and social networks of Viļāni union administration, which led to the necessity to organize the next on-line meeting on October 13. It was the first time in Vilani community life when the people could offer the ideas, which were heard, discussed and supported by other community members. The project has limited budget so not all the workshop and discussion ideas can be supported so it was decided to organize the third on-line line meeting for volunteers on October 23 at 7 PM. During the meeting, it will be discussed the exact time table for volunteers' groups activities till December 2022.

2.2 Kick-off Meeting and transnational exchange



The kick-off meeting took place in Athienou on the 28th and 29th September. It was a fundamental meeting since nine of the new partners, very small cities, have been participating in URBACT projects. The Agenda was focused in very interactive activities with the participation of the first wave partners to foster an intensive exchange of experiences and to enable a better understanding of the process. (agenda in Annex)

It is very clear that there are some difficulties in matching the integrated bottom-up participative approach in the rather top-down and silos oriented structures of the Municipalities.

Additionally, there is no experience in working with a Local Action Group acting actively in the policy making and implementation processes. This is one of the biggest difficulties in designing the Roadmaps.

Nevertheless, all towns have set-up the ULGs and the Roadmaps are in the final phase of elaboration and since these are dynamic documents, adjustments will be for sure introduced along the way.

All partner towns are interested in transferring all the four Modules with different degrees of priority what will be expressed in the Roadmap after discussion with ULGs.

In the beginning of the meeting the partners were invited to discuss in groups (world café exercise) the URBACT approach, what brings new and which challenges are associated.



Afterwards, the partners had the opportunity to visit some of the projects associated to the good practice (unfortunately due to COVID restrictions not all are free for visitors like the elderly home).



After these visits it was time for an in-depth discussion associated to the transfer Modules. This Deep Dive counted on the participation of at least one member of the Athienou ULG by each group of discussion. A speed date was also organised enabling to go more in-depth bilaterally.

In the end, the comments were very positive giving an optimistic perspective of which results to expect!



3. Communication Activities

The activities foreseen in the Communication Plan and currently ongoing:

- Update of the visual identity of the network based on the Volunteering Cities visual identity: new logo, colours, map of the network.
- Communication Plan: It was prepared by the Lead Partner with inputs by the Project Partners and the Lead Expert, and was presented at the Kick-off Meeting. The goal of the communication plan is to establish the communication strategy of the network by clearly defining the objectives, the target audiences and the key messages, the tools and the activities to be conducted, the calendar, the budget and the evaluation indicators.
- Communication Kit: Boilerplates of the TN and URBACT. Initial press release published by all partners in their institutional website. A3 poster hung by all partners in their city building. Templates for the TNM agenda and attendance lists.
- Other communication material: Roll-up in English and partners' languages when requested.
- Social media accounts updates: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram (new account)
- Press release by the LP for the Kick-off Meeting.
- New webpage under the URBACT website: All the basic information has been introduced.

Athienou: Article published in the local newspaper (June-August 2021), Meeting with the journalists at regional level (5.10.2021) to inform them about the project.

Aljustrel: Presentation of the project to local partners (7.9.2021).

4. Next Steps

The main task after the kick-off meeting is the preparation of the Transfer Roadmap with the ULG. This is a rather demanding task for small cities that have no URBACT experience and set-up for the first time a ULG group. Online meetings were organised to support this process. However, it was impossible to reach the objective in the right Schedule. The first draft of the Transfer Roadmap was already revised by the LE but the partner cities are in the process of improving and adjusting. The second Transnational Meeting will take place in a short distance from the kick-off, 22nd and 23rd November, exactly to allow a better support to a better planning. A good planning prevents many future problems!

It is intended to promote a Peer Review of the Transfer Roadmaps since this has proved to be a very efficient exchange and learning tool. It is the intention to involve also the first wave partners in the process.

The Lead Partner, Athienou, has already completed the respective Improvement Roadmap using all the learning lessons from the first wave.