

Forum Synergies Scholarship 2019

Experience report



Profile & Motivation

I was born in 1987 in a small town called Barreiro in Portugal. In 2010, I graduated in Philosophy (the University of Coimbra - Letters Faculty) and in 2017 I completed my master degree in Artistic Education (The University of Lisboa - Fine Arts Faculty). During this process, I was working in pedagogic projects and cultural events where I was implementing activities with children, youngsters and old people that promoted a Creative and Active Citizenship.

From 2013 till 2017, I developed a community project in Museum Casal de Monte Redondo (Portugal), where we organized an *Eco cultural Festival Museum Festum* with the local community and tried through the event give a new live (Participatory Cultural Programmation) to the museum that was abandoned before.



In 2018, I was invited to do my PhD degree in Social Museology at Lusófona University with a scholarship. For my family and friends, finally, I was having an opportunity that in future can offer me some financial stability, because in my country working for education and culture is a constant struggle. But for me, something was missing, I was feeling that my path was another.

I needed to be inspired and get out of my comfort zone. So in 2018, I decided to leave everything in Portugal and visit Latvia for some mouths to refresh myself.

Latvia is a special country and very different from Portugal. Its history reveals to us the deep impact of the Second War and the Soviet Union in the countries that were

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directly affected by both of them. And there happened something that I wasn't expected.

I fall in love in Latgale. This region on eastern Latvia offers me the possibility to start again and to turn my utopic dreams, in reality. There I (re)found myself, meet my mate and redefine my purpose of life. Starting a new chapter in my life with a deep inner call to embrace again the simplicity of being alive and begin my journey of a sustainable lifestyle! Stop struggling and running and to restart to live again the present moment respecting nature and being connected with Her.



The Latvian Forest hugged me like home and gave me the strength to start seeking the alternative way of living.

Backing to Portugal, I was more inspired and motivated to restart my life. So I proceed developing educational activities through the Philosophy and Artistic Education for children and youngsters, but after Latvia, my work started to be more connected with the sustainability action and environmental pedagogy, and I really

understood that I should go deep in the experience to live a sustainable life.

In Portugal, I lived between the capital city (Lisbon) and a countryside region in Leiria, but going to Latvia made me realise that I needed to study more about Permaculture and be active in its experimentation. All my life, I felt that I was more a theoretical researcher than a practical one, and the year 2019 challenged me to change my life, it was not enough working so hard for my careers like a freelancer educator and cultural management. I was really tired of assuming so many and different projects in only one year and all the time feeling that I was not growing anything in concrete.



Meeting my mate, Edgars, in Latvia it was also an important moment in this metamorphosis. Because he gave me the possibility to dream about growing a

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familiar eco-project. We understand that we share this will of creating our own eco-farm project, where we can join permaculture, arts and support local development.

Dreams always need some time to turn into reality, and in our case, we need to get involved and look for inspiration. So, I started my research about eco-communities and also families that create their own projects. And in Latgale, I found the Obelisk Farm and Family and it was obvious that I should meet them. Their work with the amazing herb Hemp (educative promotion, cultivate and health products) and their philosophy about family microeconomy inspired me a lot.

When they post on facebook that they were looking for a trainee with the Forum Synergies Program, my heart pulled of happiness and I realise that Cosmo was giving me the right signal and the opportunity to start our project, step by step. First being inspired and connected with other eco-farm projects, for after being able to start our own.



Description & Assessment



Obelisk Farm story began when a young family moved from London to the Latvian countryside with just a handful of seeds and a big dream. This hemp farm offers us the possibility to get inspired with a sustainable lifestyle and to understand how Hemp is a super herb on our planet.

Like seeds, their project is growing since 2015, they opened in their home the Hemp School, the Hemp Shop and in 2019 the Hemp Museum (the first one

in Latvia).

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Their land has 2.5-hectare and they build step by step their organic farm nestled in the eastern part of Latvia, Latgalē region – at Obeliškās village. When I arrived at their place I felt such good energy, because it isn't only about a project structure, it is about family unity.

My training there started at 12 and finish on the 26th of July. When I knew about Plan Work, I understood that this opportunity was

perfect. Two weeks to live with them and get involved in their project.

We had a lot to share because Andris is Latvian and Debora is Portuguese. So a lot of our talks were also about our culture contrasts and how both cultures have something to offer to each other.

Latgale is a region in Latvia special, in the first impression we can say that it isn't so developed and sometimes we feel a bit isolated from the



rest of the world, but if we go deeper into this question, we realise that is an open space for sustainability.

Latvia is a country with few inhabitants (approximately 1,919,968 people) and a lot of people need to leave the country to work in another. Recently, a lot of young people are coming back to live in rural areas with a new perspective and alternatives to living in the Latvian countryside.

That is an amazing phenomenon and give a lot of hope for the rising of the Latvian Culture.

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In my opinion, Latvian Culture has a lot to offer, because it is very connected with Mother Nature. Their folk culture is very rich in pagan symbols and they can give us essential lessons about the natural cycles and inspire us to care more about them.

The opportunity to live for 2 weeks in Obelisk Farm made me realise how is so special to live in the countryside. How simple things, start to be so important. The first week, I helped more in the garden and I had the chance to understand the daily work of the family. We needed to organize and prepare the wood for winter, to take care of the garden taking the fruit and vegetables that were ready and to prepare tasting meals with real organic taste. I tried the best potatoes ever.

We joked about calling this week of “Agro Fitness week”. This modality is good for body and mind. You need to focus on what you are doing, your worries don’t come to your mind and your body feels the work, so you will have a good night of sleep. So this kind of work is also a good therapy for those that have a stressful life. After one week, you are able to understand that life is not only about money and bills.

I was so excited that I spoke with Edgars about the beginning of my experience. Talking about the energy that I was sharing and the tools that they offered me.



He works in Local Radio “*Latvijas Radio Latgales studija*” and he decided to make the invitation to Andris to come in the radio studio to talk about the “Building Hemp Course” that was in their agenda to start on the 28th of July.

Work in a team for me, it is fundamental. And this interview gave me the feeling that we could start a relationship of giving and receiving to each other.

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In the first week, I understood that this training wasn't only training, but also the beginning of a friendship. Their family touched my heart and immediately the wish to be connected to their family grows day by day. I was worried to move to Latgale because sometimes you feel a bit isolated from the world, but with them close this decision it will be easier for me in future.

When the weekend arrived (very quickly, because time this week flew) I participated in one local event with them. It was so cool because I learned a bit more about their products, Tea, Oil, Energetic snacks and understand how they do the hemp paper. In this event, people were able to do their own hemp paper and it was amazing to contact with people. We receive a lot of good vibes and curiosity. I understood that people are there are really open for eco alternatives.

The second week started with a big aim. It was the last week, but the week for I understand all their work with the Hemp. Step by step, how they grow and they transform hemp to create their tasty and healthy products.

First of all, they talked to me about the prejudice that exists with the Hemp Culture and the usual confusion with Cannabis Culture. The difference between CBD and THC substances, how Hemp it is a powerful herb not only for health but also as a product for textile production, construction because its fibre is very strong. I knew some stuff about Hemp, but it was there that I started to be a fan from Hemp. It is wonderful to know that Hemp can be a substitute for many products that we use and are polluting the planet.

During both weeks, they received a lot of visits and I was impressed with their way to inform local people about this important issue. Their work is very special and important for local awareness about ecology and sustainable behaviours. They can offer so much hope in the future. I'm totally grateful for this opportunity.

I'm an educator and see how Gabriela and Fredis want always to help in all the process was the confirmation that an environmental pedagogy is important for children's development. They are so smart, so responsible, so happy and so conscious about the sustainability action.

To finish this part of my report, I choose the most important pictures from this week. Where it is possible to understand how they transform the hemp into delicious

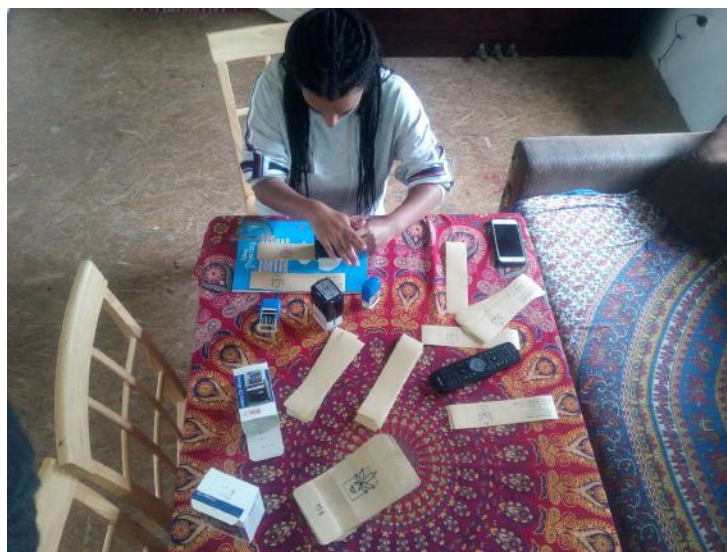
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products and how they work. Their homemade products are full of love. All the family help in the process and that is amazing and gave me so much inspiration.



Andris preparing the energetic snacks with hemp



Alice (Debora's sister) preparing the labels for peanut butter with hemp seeds

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Debora preparing the hemp protein



Andris teaching me about my morning task, how to create the package for Hemp Cereal Bars.

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Andris preparing the material for Hemp building course 2019



Preparation for the Hemp Building Course 2019

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Wall preparation for the Hemp Building Course 2019



This year in The Hemp Building Course there was the mission to donate 3 dog houses for Municipal Kneel.

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It is amazing to see how Gabriela and Fredis are happy to live in contact with Nature



The amazing Latvian sky. All the days, I was able to enjoy this natural spectacle.

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For sure, this training helped me to leave my fears and doubts to start my own project with Edgars. When I finished it, I felt my heart full and today the same feeling is planted in it. They gave the courage to proceed, to leave my country and to start my own eco-project in Latvia. It will not be easy, but for sure that it will be an adventure that I will not regret myself in the future. Sometimes, the most difficult is to give the first step and have the confidence that everything will be ok, because of course that it will be some mistakes, but that is the way, the process to grow an idea a turn it real.

Interviews

I decided to interview Edgars because he is native from Latgale region. So to start I will write a short biography about him and after our interview about Sustainability and Local Development in Latgale.

Short Bio

Edgars Provejs, he has 27 years and he has born and lived all his life in Rezekne city (Latvia). That is small (about 25 thousand people) city in eastern part of the country - Latgale region. This is region with deep culture, traditions, own (historical) language and even a bit different mentality (compared to other parts of the Latvia).

he has grown up in Rezekne and since student years he started to look for opportunities around him and taking them as challenges and new experiences. As a result he experimented different occupations, job, hobbies and combinations of them.

At the moment he is working in Rezekne's Academy of Technologies in a project team that work on implementing new study method that is oriented more on real-life problems and creating solutions for local companies that participate in this process.

At the same time he is working in Latvijas Radio 5 (Radio of Latvia nr5) as a producer and moderator for radio show in Latgalian (historical language), that promotes in national level Latgalian language, culture and people from there that are involved in projects that can motivate others. Sharing their collective experiences and inspiring each other.

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Interview

1- How you describe the Latgale region?

Latgale region is one of four historical regions of our country. It is full with lakes and rivers, forests and cities in between. Latgale region was separated from the rest of the country several times during centuries of our history. That lead to more slow economic integration of the region to the level of the rest of the country. But that separation also lead to more strong culture, saved historical language (Latgalian), and close connection with nature through pagan rituals and knowledge about the power of nature that can power fully sustainable life if the way is chosen. A lot of that knowledge is held by older generations (our grandparents) and it tends to disappear if not shared.

2- In your opinion, what is missing there?

People here are missing fresh energy in their daily lives. Also locals are not so open for foreign people because of the legacy of soviet education. Also people would achieve more if they would tend to collaborate and make things happen in synergy. We are not a lot here, it is not so hard to find common interests or goals.

3- What is for you a sustainable project?

It is a philosophy of living more simple, fulfilling your life with things you enjoy, use your skills or knowledge to create things or to educate, grow things you need for existence, buying less and taking care of our planet with small and simple steps. We do not need so much for being happy as we are told.

4- Do you think that local people are open to alternative and ecological projects in your region? Why and in your opinion how people should implement them?

Yes, people start to educate themselves more, thinking more green, going abroad also gives fresh experiences and new perspective on things. Slowly generations are changing and people become more open to the "WORLD" and ready to accept new perspectives in their minds.

Everyone who comes to the moment of the decision have their own answers to "why" and "how". This is a project of life, that you create for yourself and there is no formula that works for everyone.

But I would say, that should be done with full heart of love, curiosity, will to create, share and inspire.

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5- You decided to interview Andris from Obelisk Farm in your radio program, can you give us a resume of that talk show?

People tend to think that there is no work here, no opportunities, no future possible, another place is definitely better, and they go away. Looking for that place. But the (Latvian) true is that the more you see the world - the more you realise what an amazing place it is to live.

Andris with family is an amazing example of how after living abroad, buy a house in Latgale and the idea of living in the countryside becomes not only reality, but also lifestyle, family business, tourism place, a place to educate and inspire. Hemp as a culture itself delivers big part of sustainability. The plant can be used and processed in a lot of different ways. This kind alternative project combined with international family and happy kids gives a lot of charm and inspiration for me that I wanted to share with Latvia.

6- How you see Latgale region in 10 years?

Probably demographic tendencies will proceed with the same vector for the next 10 years. But I believe that more and more creative, alternative and eco-ambitious people will find their place here. More and more alternative projects and communities will appear, that will lead to rural tourism development, Latgale's "Alternative route" for those who do not want to see only the cities. With a change of generation some more ancient knowledge could be lost if not obtained, but at the same time, it will lead to more open society that will allow more alternative solutions and projects come to live. We are waiting... In the process.

7- Why you want to change your lifestyle and be able to create a community farm project?

We humans are social animals, and sometimes we start to act exactly like that. Running, hunting, screaming, surviving, pleasing, (paying), and dying.

This is not the life we were supposed to be. There is more simple and more true way to live this life. Be surrounded by people you love, nature, and most important things you need. But keeping it simple. By collecting these kind of stories (and people) together and creating our own, I believe it is possible to get more strength, motivation and courage to educate people and promote more simple living.

Eco-farm for ourself sustainability, workshops and lectures for education and arts and music for inspiration.

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Lessons learned

For me, this experience gave me a lot of inspiration to start my own project. The courage of Andris and Debora taught me the importance to believe in our dreams and to get committed to the sustainable philosophy as a lifestyle principle and attitude.

During this learning process, they made me realise about the difficulties but also about the good things that live for a project 100% brings to our life. Enjoy the simple things and make them super special.

Learning about Hemp, it was so useful. All my life, I knew that this herb gives us multiple ecological alternatives in its transformation for products. It can promote afforestation in Earth because it can be used as a substitute for a lot of products that wood from forests provide us.

Learning about this, it gave more hope about the future and the alternatives that exist to create a world more sustainable in our days. It is amazing to realise that we have a lot of tools in our hands to transform our vision of progress.



I'm very grateful for this opportunity and for sure that we will keep in touch. They belong to my Latvian Family.

Action Plan



Perhaps, this report looks too much personal and emotional, but I justify it as an existential report. Because the truth is when we talk about ecology and sustainability, we are also talking about personal decisions in Life. Being

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involved in a farm for life is a relationship to grow. My report is about my life story. How I decided to change my life pic. It isn't an easy process, you need to have the courage to fight against a lot of fears that appear in your way. The Obelisk Farm helped me in this process. They gave me the opportunity to believe in the project that I want to develop with Edgars.

We are growing this project in our minds, we decided to create an agenda for 5 years to start this dream.

However, everyone knows that in our days create a plan with 5 years it is scary because lately, things change so fast. But now, we don't care about that, we believe, and we feel that when you really believe, everything is possible, also the impossible.

Edgars is a local and all his life has the dream to inspire local people for new visions about living in Latvia. He always felt that sometimes his culture it is a bit close and has this big will to create a project that promotes local development.

So our idea and plan, it is to create an Eco-Community in Rezekne Novads (Latgale region). It will not be easy, but we love challenges.

In our project, we have **Sustainability** as a principal action value. We want to start with 5 families living together and we will make an equal partnership with the territory. We want **to grow** our food but also to initiate **reforestation process** and **care the territory** (because last years, Latvian is losing their Ancient and natural forest with the wood business, this not only transform the landscape but also transform the wildlife and animal ecosystems). We want to inspire implementing in our community viable **alternatives in Children Education, but also inspire the dialogue between generations**. The community will be an open space for experimentation of **new architecture languages with recycled and eco-materials**. And the main purpose of this adventure is **being close to nature** because we believe that is fundamental for a wealthy life.

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This project will have a three-dimensional vision of ecology: environmental, human and economic.

(i) Environmental, because we want to respect the territory and for that, we want to follow the Permaculture principles of action.

(ii) Human, because we believe that in our days, Human Being needs to be inspired to change the way we are living and support this capitalist system. Why? Because this system is taking from us important rights, like being able to eat good, to have good works, to be sustainable with the planet and to be connected with Mother Nature (relationship fundamental to have wealth). We also want to promote the dialogue between generations and give real appreciation for their acknowledgement about life. This system is creating walls between generations, the idea of progress is feeding an empty space in communication.

(iii) Economic, because if we want to be sustainable we need to create resources and a microeconomy that transform this idea into a viable project. In this sector, we want to develop a network of social entrepreneurship in the region.



Since, I finished the training with Obelisk Farm, we are writing and developing this project. Now, I'm back to Portugal for 4 months to save some money but in January of 2020 I will move and live in Latvia.

*.A project is like a seed,
we need to care and plant it in fertile soil...
and Love will give it the straight to grow.*

Silvgar, 2019