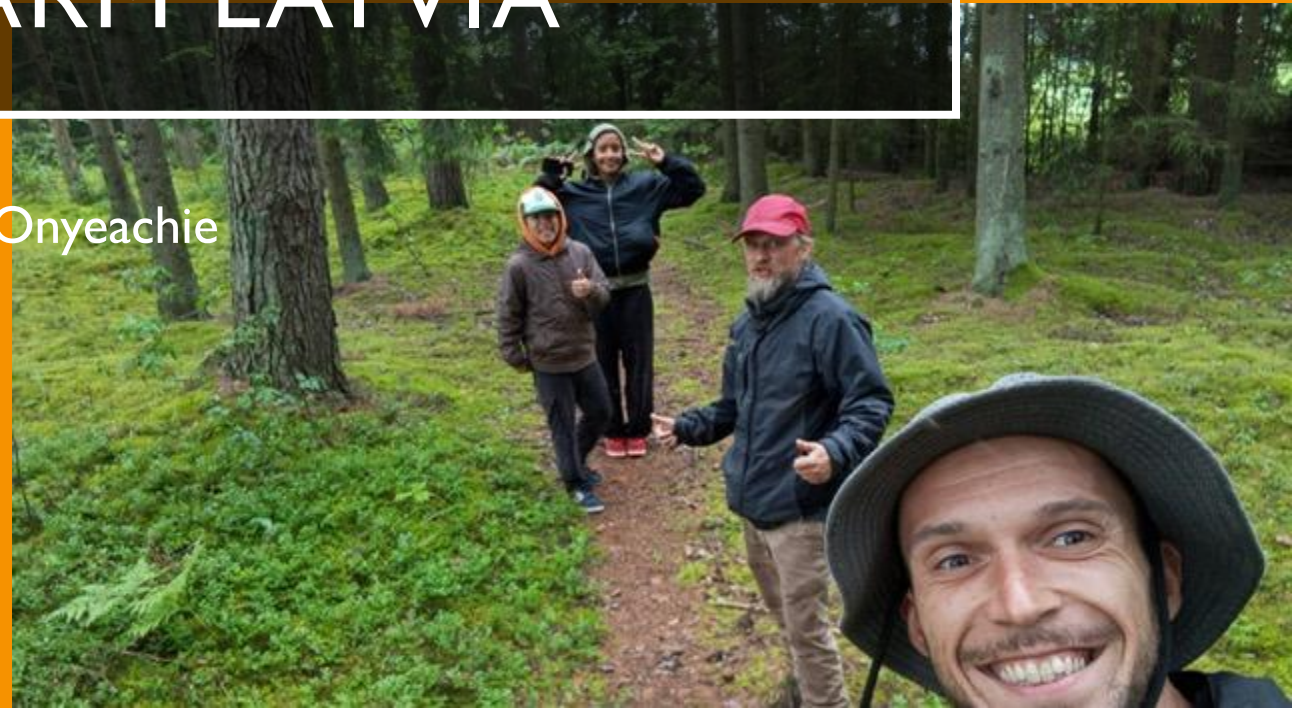




SYNERGIES PROGRAMME OBELISK FARM LATVIA

Antonia Onyeachie



A LITTLE ABOUT ME

Background, why I wanted to partake My name is Antonia and I'm a dual heritage Latvian, living in the UK. This opportunity was brought to me by my mother, who had met Andris and Débora at one of the many markets they partakes in. My mother thought this programme would be very well suited for me as their main themes of sustainability and ethical small businesses align with my interests.

I'd describe myself as someone who is passionate about restoring structures of sustainability and ethical practices, to try combat our global climate crisis and our crisis of social and economic instability. Being an artists, many areas I explore are the interconnection of humans and nature. How reconnecting to our natural roots can teach us ancient wisdom of how to exists in peace and harmony. Another, being using my own cultures to research how these ideologies were applied, this was where I researched Latvian folk history. This was eye opening as it feels so far from how, my idea of, Latvian society live today. So, when I got presented with an opportunity, to gain a more one on one/hands on experience, there was no doubt that I would reframe from applying.

After looking at Obelisks web page, I was for sure that this was the place to sign up to. Obelisks values of family business and slow production, highlighted their true morals of focusing on the people and the process opposed to only the speed and revenue, unlike most capitalistic businesses. Linking back to my personal insights in Latvian society, I thought partaking would give me an opportunity to see a different side, countryside vs city communities, within Latvia.

A few more details, I garden as a hobby and am focused on exploring how to be self reliant, to see ways to regain power and choices over life, removing reliance on exploitative companies. I believe knowing how to harness and utilize the earths power is essential in our world.

VISITING LOCALS IN/NEAR VARAKLANI



After my first market with Obelisk, we were invited to a local, who Andris knew had built some of his house using hempcreat. This was a more casual encounter. He showed us around his garden, where I was very impressed with his gardening skills. A seasoned expert! He also had a couple self-sowed hemp plants just growing dotted around his garden. It was an opportunity to find out about his passions

one which was obviously gardening, and another was making spirits like vodka. Which we tried and it was rather good – another example of being self reliant/resourceful and removing the attachment of relying on mass companies to keep you living/going.





Here is a picture of us visiting Obelisks' neighbour, who we would visit frequently to just sit and talk with. She is Russian, so there was a slight language barrier, but regardless we were able to communicate. The kitten, above image, we adopted during our stay as the neighbour had many cats living at her house. This was a special addition to our obelisk family.

It was nice to engage and talk with the locals, as the relationships with the people around you in your community are essential to feel like your home is part of creating a greater good for your community.

TEA PROCESS



Obelisk tea is made from the leaves of the hemp plant. Before, hemp buds were allowed to be included in the tea, but Europe changed the laws, meaning only leaves are allowed to be used. We collected about 1kg and after drying, decreased to 720g. During harvesting, focus was on removing new leaves that was undamaged (not eaten or secreted on). They were then weighed and layed on drying racks in a drying room, that Andris had made. There he showed us how to clean the shelves, how to evenly spread our collecting's and to place an air dehumidifier in there to speed up the process of water leaving the hemp leaves. The tea took about 10 days to dry.





Drying room



**Drying racks with our
collected leafs**

PAPER MAKING



Hemp paper has been around for centuries and centuries. The oldest recorded body of writing was written on hemp paper. For the paper, we were taught, that its is the outwards stringy stem fiber. That was blended in a ration of aprox 800ml of water to a decent handful of thinly cut up hemp fiber. Then the mixture was poured into a tub and diluted with more water. A sieve frame was what was used to collect and settle the pulp. We made several batches of hemp paper which I have started to use for creating art e.g., painting drawing, making sketchbook.





A5 hemp
paper I
made

Process:

Gather pulp, use plastic screen to push water out, peel any sides off, flip and tap out onto plastic sheet, unpeel edges, absorb water with cloth, flip onto another plastic sheet, flip and pee; of plastic sheet on top.

Then hang on a line to dry.

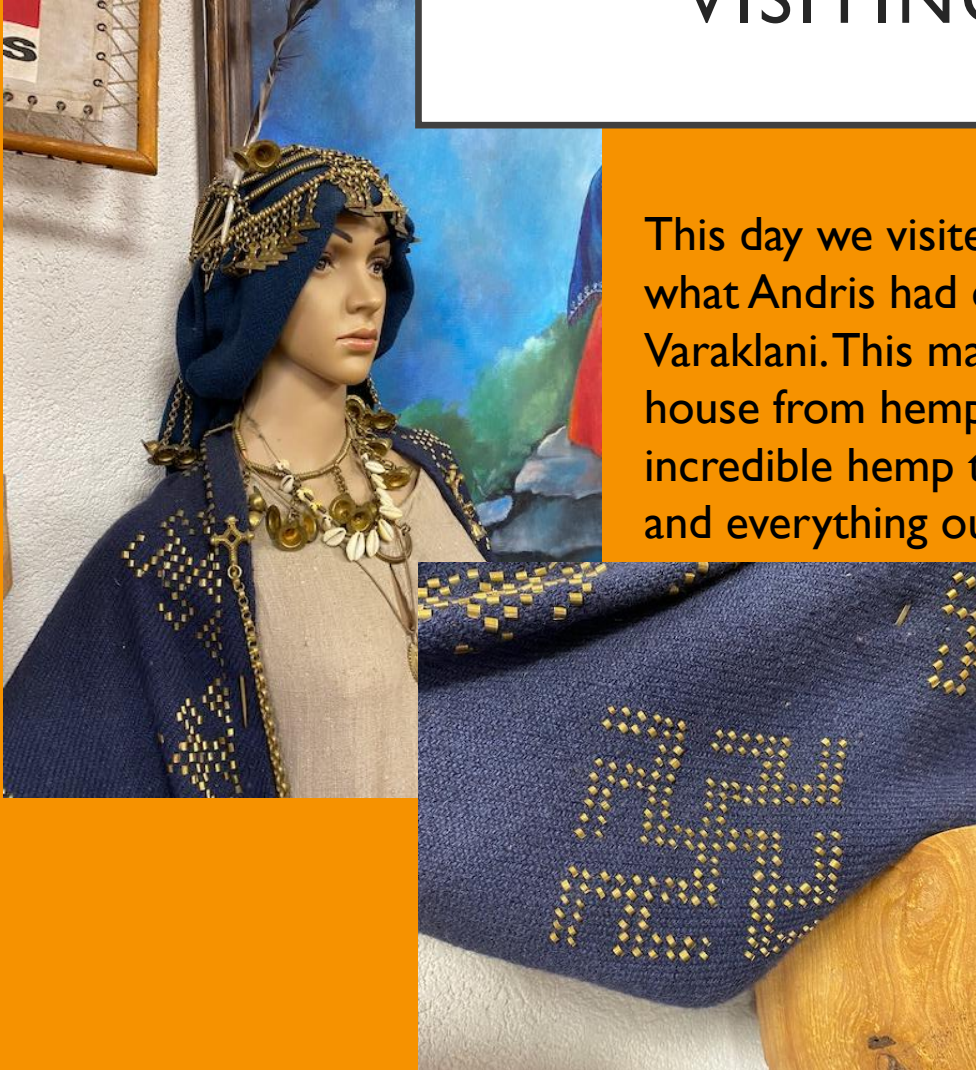
Francisco and I explored with other possible uses of hemp paper, we successfully created a prototype of a lamp shade – which we shaped prior to drying, to hold the shape.



VISITING LOCAL BUSINESSES

This day we visited a man Andris knew, who was inspired by what Andris had done with the hemp insulation in his house in Varaklani. This man had taken on a challenge to build his whole house from hemp creat – apon arrival, I was taken back by how incredible hemp truly is. That you can make almost anything and everything out of such a simple plant, often overlooked.

It was insightful trip as this was an example of hemp being used for bettering a project, next to a different business (his business being horses and latgalian/Latvian history)





Given an opportunity to try archery at his different business location. Got insight into what he is passionate about – which is always nice and teaching!

We received gifted mugs



Grabbing lunch afterwards



Group pic 😊



This day, we met Jolanta, who is a local goat farmer. She showed us around her farm and gave us details on how she came to farming goats.

She gave us a little masterclass in making goats cheese + tasting some of her products. What makes her craft a little different than most is that she uses quince juice to make the goats milk curdle. She also told us that Obelisk had inspired her to create a business that allows people to come and see how they work/function



Her business was another different approach/example of having a business and a family at the same time. Completely different to Obelisks way of operating but nonetheless very insightful into how other businesses work.



LEARNING ABOUT 'HOW TO' HEMPCRETE



This day, our focus was on hempcrete. Andris showed us how to make the crete. Here I learnt, the different ingredients used, ratios used, and the consistency needed to achieve optimal results. This was a labor-intensive day – the hardest part being mixing the limestone, water and hemp chips.



After visiting the local, who was making a house out of this process – my already established respect increased so much more because it was a difficult process lol. Also made me think about how important it is to have a small community e.g., family, to help out.





To the left, you can see us two removing the initial hemp wall, that we were replacing. This part must have been the easiest, but in retrospect all good things come to us with more difficulty.

To the right and below, is Francisco and I's finished results!! I think we did a superb job.



HELPING OUT IN MARKETS



Over the course of being at Obelisk, we attended many markets. Some were small local ones and other were larger and further out. One that we attended was a tractor event, where local farmers came to look at possible machinery to invest into, for a more efficient business. Although I agree with that idea to a certain extent, seeing the price of some tractors it would be impossible for a small, sustainable and ethical farm to purchase, without changing their farms

journey to a larger mass-producing business. Which in my opinion is where ethical practices are lost.



Another was a Latvian “picnic party” where the crowd was much different, more hipster and maybe open-minded, based on what they have been exposed to. Attending the markets shone light on how different types of people reacted to hemp.





Final market, group pic 😊

Over the course of being in Latgale, Andris and Freddie taught me how to interact with customers, that by the end I was confident with engaging with customers and strangers. Which for me was a huge step as I'm more introverted than extroverted. This was a personal growth for myself. Accepting that not everyone wants to listen or hear about your products but that is OKAY!

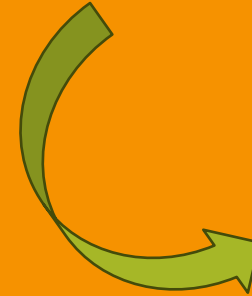
We had many opportunities to go explore and see what others had to offer at the markets. Such a variety of passions and businesses.





BONUS PICS

A visit to the printing company that creates Obelisks product labels



Obelisk Farm
Synergies 25'

LESSONS LEARNT

- Understanding farming – soil health, crop rotation and adjustment to soil/land when growing hemp on it.
- Cycle of farming – taught about seed to harvest, drying, processing – hands on experience of crop sustainability.
- Water management – having a closed loop-like system
- Construction methods – insight into how buildings can be made with minimal carbon footprint, sustainable building materials used to create hempcrete.
- Tradition vs innovation – learnt how old knowledge, e.g., timber frames, combines with modern eco designs.
- Hemp uses in food – seeds to oil, hemp hearts, powder, milk, bread, protein bars, spreads.
- Nutrition and health benefits – understanding nutritional value of hemp (protein, omega etc).
- Small scale production methods used to create items/goods to sell
- Community – importance of teamwork and shared responsibilities.
- Perspectives – gaining insight into non-Western ways of connecting land and material, working with the land, sufficiency and simplicity.
- Adaptability – this process requires patience, effort and unpredictable conditions. This teaches you to be flexible and resilient.
- Curiosity – experimenting with a versatile crop, you are encouraged to experiment with different forms of application.

MEANINGFUL DISCOVERIES

- All that hemp is – before I had basic knowledge on what the plant offers, now after my experience I can say my eyes have been opened by all you are able to create with an incredible plant. It does not just create an alternative options but a cheaper and better possibility; stronger, breathable, fire repelling, durable.
- How important connections, with those surrounding you, are – it's one thing being able to create an amazing business and another creating relationships with the customers. Obelisk does both. I was shown the importance of being able to talk, explain things and answer questions in an inviting manor. This is how you create customers that come back and share words about your work with others.
- Collaborations are essential – being one of the two on the programme I didn't just have my own experience, but I got to witness the experience of others. I came to the farm with minimal prior knowledge, but Francisco was already part of this specific industry. Seeing the exchange of knowledge, between two completely different people, be so meaningful and insightful made me realise that collaboration is not just a option, it is a necessity. It gives the chance to further each other's/broaden knowledge understanding.

FUTURE ACTION PLAN

- Explore my own personal artistic process around eco conscious materials from ethically sourced resources.
- Create work using hemp-based materials like hemp paper, fabric and natural dyes. Also, create sculptures using hempcrete.
- Look further into my fashion practice, attempting to further reject fast fashion. Returning to a perspective of ancestral and regenerative approaches.
- On a further in future point, I'd love to create and build an eco house that uses hempcrete and fibers within the internal and external structures.

Thank you, Obelisk Farm and Synergies, for this experience. Seeds have been planted in me, for the future. I had the best time seeing something completely different to anything I've ever seen. For experiencing an insightful and enriching programme that gave me a greater knowledge of things I am passionate about!