

UrbanLinks 2 Landscape

Situation Report: Kuldīga District Municipality

- The Region
- Policies
- Stakeholders
- Good Practice



1. KULDIGA DISTRICT MUNICIPALITY

Kuldiga district is located in Courland region, in the western part of Latvia with a population of approximately 24 200 (territory: 1756 km²). It consists of 14 administrative divisions: Kuldiga town and 13 rural districts around it. Kuldiga town is the administrative centre of Kuldiga district.

Kuldiga is one of the most charming and magical towns in Latvia with preserved medieval appearance and charm. The historical centre of Kuldiga received the European Heritage Label in 2008 and was included in the UNESCO World Heritage Latvian Tentative List in 2011. This status is a step in Kuldiga's way to the UNESCO World Heritage list.

The main branches according to the turnover are: trade, wood-processing, agriculture and forestry. The main branches according to the number of employees: trade, wood-processing.

2. REGIONAL POLICIES AND RELATED ACTIVITIES TO BE COVERED/ADDRESSED BY UL2L

Within the project UL2L Kuldiga District Municipality will elaborate a case study on river banks and a regional action plan in close cooperation with stakeholder groups as well as project partners. Outlines of the case study are as follows:

- Historical uses of the Venta river and river banks and ecological effects: background materials.
- Research and development of former industrial territories (brownfields), revitalization and new possibilities.
- New uses: ecosystem services, recreation, ecotourism, biological resources.
- 3D modelling of water level as well as landscape dynamics for monitoring of floods, biotopes and historical urban landscape.
- Methodology: how to achieve coexistence of biodiversity, historical urban landscape, economic activities, recreation and flood retention.
- Preparation of high quality visual and marketing materials.

The regional action plan would focus on the development of Kuldiga historical centre and adjoining territory of Venta valley, including data base and monitoring system:

- data collection;
- analysis, modelling;
- management;
- monitoring;
- society's involvement, feedback.

The above mentioned activities of Kuldīga District Municipality fit in the framework of Latvian multi-fund Operational Programme "Growth and Employment 2014-2020" (OP) which aims at achieving national development priorities along with the "Europe 2020" objectives. 14.1% of the OP allocation will be spent on the measures dedicated to environment, sustainable use of natural resources and adaptation to climate change. Investment priorities include protection and restoration of biodiversity and promotion of ecosystem services, also by using „Natura 2000” network and green infrastructure, protection and development of natural and culture heritage also to increase tourism and actions to improve the urban environment, to revitalise cities, brownfield sites and conversion areas.

One of the main tools in the implementation of the OP is integrated development programmes of the municipalities. Enhanced support in the framework of the OP to develop and to implement new projects within the OP and within these programmes is a key aim of the envisaged improvements, also by discussing the terms of reference for future thematic calls and other initiatives.

The themes to be addressed by UL2L are of huge thematic relevance and a source of inspiration for new projects. The exchange of experiences will be inspirational not only for Kuldīga, but also for many other municipalities with similar natural and cultural resources.

The Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development of the Republic of Latvia is very supportive that Kuldīga has taken the initiative to represent Latvian municipalities in the UL2L project and to ensure that the interregional learning will contribute to the OP's aims of growth and employment. Kuldīga District Municipality will act as a pioneering municipality representing other final beneficiaries as it has some of the challenges and resources listed in the OP within its territory, e.g. river banks, areas of high biodiversity and in particular the NATURA 2000 area.

It will be ensured, by communication with the entire group of beneficiaries in Latvia, that knowledge gains, policy recommendations and guidelines resulting from the interregional exchange will improve governance and inspire new measures and project applications supported by the OP.

2. REGIONAL STAKEHOLDER GROUP

Kuldīga District Municipality is determined to use opportunities for local development, especially for the development of brownfields and nature areas, given by the OP actively and in dialog and collaboration with the private sector, NGO's and local initiatives. The active participation of the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development of the Republic of Latvia that manages the OP will further help to improve projects and measures. Municipality experts as well as other spatial planning experts will provide all information needed by the group to act accordingly. They will also assist the stakeholders in evaluating the outcomes of the interregional learning and identify options for transfer of best practices identified so far to the local territory.

Kuldiga District Municipality has drafted a list of stakeholders and organized the first meeting for them, still there might be some changes in the process of implementing the project activities. Here is a short description of the main groups of stakeholders.

Kuldiga District Municipality

Kuldiga Development Agency. The aim of the agency is to ensure development planning, management of preparation and implementation of the investment projects of Kuldiga District Municipality, attraction of EU and other funding as well as promote development of entrepreneurship in Kuldiga District.

Construction Department. The Construction department is responsible for controlling construction processes in the administrative territory of Kuldiga District Municipality, supervising and controlling environmental management, balanced development and ensuring protection of cultural-historical values.

Restoration Department. The task of the Restoration Department is to ensure preservation of authenticity of the cultural-historical heritage of the old town of Kuldiga for next generations by doing conservation and restoration work and consulting inhabitants.

Kuldiga District Museum. The museum is responsible for collecting, maintaining and promoting tangible and intangible cultural values as well as promoting the usage of these values in order to educate and develop the society.

Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development of the Republic of Latvia

Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development of the Republic of Latvia is responsible for implementing policy in three areas – environment protection, regional development as well as information and communication technologies. In the area of environmental protection, the Ministry deals with the establishment of prerequisites and conditions for nature conservation, clean environment and ensures that natural resources are used effectively and in sustainable manner. In the area of regional development, the Ministry implements and evaluates regional policy at state level, provides methodological guidelines and supervises the territorial development planning process, as well as ensures the development and supervision of local governments with overall goal to achieve well-balanced and sustainable development of the country. Implementation and coordination of the e-Governance is another broad policy area of the Ministry. It includes establishment of one-stop principle for provision of state and local government services and implementation of modern and effective information and communication technologies in the public sector.

The State Environmental Service of the Republic of Latvia

The State Environmental Service (SES) is a state institution under supervision of the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development of the Republic of Latvia. The goal of SES is to ensure the compliance of implementation of legislation framework in the area of the environment and natural resources protection, and control on radiation and nuclear safety. In Kuldiga District the policy of state environmental protection is carried out by Liepāja Regional Environmental Board.

Kurzeme Planning Region

Kurzeme Planning Region is under supervision of the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development of the Republic of Latvia. It provides development planning and coordination of Kurzeme Planning Region as well as cooperation among municipalities and other state administration bodies. Main tasks are:

- plan and coordinate socioeconomic development in Kurzeme region,
- set development priorities and identify investment projects,
- represent regional interests at national and international level,
- promote municipal cooperation,
- monitor and improve public transport,
- provide information on possibilities of EU Structural funds.

The Latvian National Commission for UNESCO

The Commission is a derived legal person of public rights under the supervision of the Cabinet. The functions of the Latvian National Commission for UNESCO are to strengthen sustainable development in the field of education, science, culture, communication and information, contribute to the implementation of democratic values and to the eradication of poverty. The Latvian National Commission for UNESCO represents State interests at UNESCO and the inter-governmental and international organisations associated with it and co-operates with other responsible State authorities. Additionally the Latvian National Commission for UNESCO formulates and approves action plans for implementing UNESCO programmes in Latvia. UNESCO's main activities in Latvia: protecting cultural, natural, intangible and documentary heritage; develop an innovative network for cooperation, ensure qualitative access to education and respect inclusive and sustainable values in education.

National Cultural Heritage Administration

The National Cultural Heritage Administration is under supervision of the Minister of Culture. It implements the state policy and control regarding cultural monuments protection as well as gathers information about cultural heritage, investigates it and carries out record keeping of monuments. In Kuldīga there is a regional department of the National Cultural Heritage Administration, which knows and manages the general situation in the cultural heritage protection area in Kurzeme Planning Region.

The Nature Conservation Agency

The Nature Conservation Agency ensures implementation of unified nature protection policy in Latvia. Main functions of Nature Conservation Agency:

- management of all protected areas in Latvia;
- nature protection planning management and promotion of the plans;
- scientific research management in protected areas;
- carry out the cooperation with local authorities, tourism entrepreneurs, non-governmental organisations and education institutions to promote nature conservation;

- carry out the functions of supervision of „The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora” (CITES) including issuing the permission for importing and exporting protected animal and plant species.
- educate and inform the society about nature conservation.

Protection of the nature reserve “Venta valley” and other specially protected nature territories in Kuldiga is supervised by Kurzeme Regional Administration.

Kuldiga Business Incubator of Investment and Development Agency of Latvia

The Investment and Development Agency of Latvia (LIAA) is a direct administration institution subordinated to the Minister of Economics of the Republic of Latvia. The objective of the Investment and Development Agency of Latvia (LIAA) is to promote business development by facilitating more foreign investment, in parallel increasing the competitiveness of Latvian entrepreneurs in both domestic and foreign markets.

Entrepreneurs and investors

Kuldiga District Municipality has set up a potential list of entrepreneurs and investors who might be interested in the project “UL2L” and plan to invite them to a separate meeting in order to inform about the project activities and understand their readiness to get involved in the project.

Spatial planning and development experts

Kuldiga District Municipality plan to involve experts from these areas:

- water & landscape (foundation “Ūdensaina”);
- landscape architecture;
- urban planning.

Representatives of NGOs

There are several NGOs represented in the project:

- **Kurzemes Tourism Association and Kuldiga Active Recreation Centre** – tourism activities.
- **Local action group “Darīsim paši!”**, which implements a local development strategy guided by society (Leader approach).
- **Foundation “Coordination Centre of Cultural Projects”** – cultural heritage protection.

3. POSSIBLE GOOD PRACTICE EXAMPLES

Kuldiga town promotes and maintains synthesis of cultural heritage and Nature values for future by a set of several complimentary activities. The unique value of the landscape in Kuldiga is signified by intersection of important natural and cultural highlights – the centre of Kuldiga town next to the river Venta is both NATURA 2000 and UNESCO tentative list site.

Main activities: improvement of ecological condition and natural landscape of the river by reducing pollution loads to the river and cleaning of the river stretch located within borders of the town; restoration and highlighting of Kuldiga town's culture and nature landscape on the banks of the river Venta; raising of public awareness and promoting the image of Kuldiga town within the Venta valley as an important heritage site.

Outcomes:

Ecological effects. Improved water quality through implementing projects for new sewerage collection system and limiting the overgrowth of water plants. Cleaned spawning sites, promoted growth of fish population have improved spawning success of lamprey and salmonid in upper stretches of the river.

Visual and culture historical effects. Improved visibility of the river valley and landscape of the widest waterfall in Europe (249 meters) by limitation of overgrowth of water plants and clean and developed infrastructure along the river banks. Renewed and highlighted culture historical landmarks – the old brick bridge, the town garden, restored museum building and renovated streets in the old town of Kuldiga.

Social, educational and economic effects. Well-developed infrastructure for recreation and nature education activities including Blue Flag Beach on the river Venta and reconstructed town garden with open-air cinema. The improvement of living conditions is achieved by connecting both sides of the river to centralised sewerage collected system and reconstruction of the old brick bridge and adjacent streets. Activated and educated inhabitants and raised awareness – involvement of citizens in river clean-up activities, training of the teachers on how to use river as a resource for outdoor environmental education, use of river and its landscape in artistic activities, organizing UNESCO city games/conferences. Improved economic value of the landscape – due to well-maintained environmental and cultural values Kuldiga has become one of the “Top 10” visiting endpoints in Latvia. Additional economic gain is ensured also by enlarged fish spawning. Well-arranged transport and engineering infrastructure help in development of entrepreneurship.