

Thematic interim output:

Good Practice Transferred: Molėtai

March, 2015

Background

The transfer process of the Diet for a Green Planet concept has been on-going during the course of this project. There have been several bilateral and transnational meetings and based on those, interim reports have been made to continuously follow and "measure" the process.

This thematic interim output report serves to summarize the progress in each receiving city. This version of the report brings up Molėtai in Lithuania.

The account brings up the following aspects:

- Short description of the process
- Project results
- Future challenges

Short description of the process

As Molėtai is promoted as a healthy and nature-friendly place, the most positive experience from the project was to go abroad and get confirmed that this is the right track for the town. Seeing concrete examples of how to work in this direction has been important for the Molėtai participants. "Seeing once is better than listening seven times", was the project coordinator's comment.

At the Södertälje transnational conference in May 2014 the participating dieticians could try practical cooking according to the Diet for a Green Planet concept in Södertälje kitchens, which was a great experience for them. Later, in January 2015, the cooks from the municipal canteens prepared a lunch for a local conference in Molėtai, together with three visiting municipal chefs from Södertälje. This has been described as revolutionary for the Lithuanian kitchen staff, as they usually do not take any decisions and have a feeling of being invisible.

The leading politicians have been questioning the project, and the support was weak until nearly the end of the project. Molėtai participates in many EU funded projects, but the "hard projects" are preferred - they focus on constructions which are easy to see and measure. Nevertheless, the vice mayor participated the whole day in the last Diet for a Green Planet conference and exchange meeting. The shift in consciousness about the importance of eating habits and the canteens' work, that was shown then, was an opening for further steps.



A successful local conference opened up interest

All menu decisions are taken by dieticians and approved by the state control organization. This gives no freedom to deviate from the detailed state regulations, and the municipalities are not authorised to develop their own diet policies. This implied that no real diet policy work was possible in Molėtai, although this was stipulated in the Diet for a Green Planet project plan. Nevertheless, this situation led to a very interesting initiative which should be highlighted in Molėtai's work.

At the local Diet for a Green Planet conference in January 2015, which was combined with a bilateral exchange for kitchen staff, the state food control institution was invited to participate and discuss how the Diet for a Green Planet concept could influence the Lithuanian regulations. The representatives for the control institution were very pleased to be invited to a dialogue - this had never happened before. They usually only come for controlling activities. So instead of a municipal diet policy, the Local Support Group in Molėtai created a recommendation about how the Diet for a Green Planet concept could influence the state regulation system.

The biggest interest and most positive attitudes for the project were shown from schools and kindergarten staff, and not from the parents. The gymnasium has been the most active as they are used to participating in projects. They already belonged to "Healthy Schools Movement in Europe" so this project fitted into what they were already doing. Kindergartens are very strictly controlled so they have kept a lower profile. At the end, after the conference in January, when pupils from the gymnasium were engaged to help with translation, the parents finally started to show some interest. In general, this local conference with both theoretical presentations and the practical work of preparing and tasting the Diet for a Green Planet lunch, was a great success and a breakthrough to create new levels of interest. The medical doctors of the municipality complained afterwards that they had not been invited.

"The handbook would be different if we could redo it"

Understanding the concept was not complicated, but changing habits and going from understanding to doing is very difficult. When elaborating the handbook, schools and kindergartens were involved, and some even arranged competitions. This created a lot of interest and the project team now says that they would compose the handbook differently, with more in depth explanations of the concept, if they could redo it. They wanted to avoid preaching too much, so they made it very simple with only a short introduction and then the recipes organized in a seasonal structure.

The Ecological Farming Association liked the concept but stepped aside. Both the association itself and its selling cooperative are very small. They were disappointed because the kindergartens and the schools buy food through the public procurement process and they cannot compete with the price, nor handle the procurement procedures.



Financial difficulties for a small partner

Molėtai in Lithuania was the smallest partner, and their financial systems and regulations did not function well with the project rules. They would have needed a sum of money in advance to be able to start moving and also more frequent disbursements, as they did not have cash flow to pay for project costs beforehand.

Additionally, according to the State Budget law and due to a limited financial capacity, Molėtai have rules which prohibit them from paying for travel expenses for people not directly employed in the city administration. This created difficulties in sending the right people to the overseas project meetings and conferences. Partly this was solved by Södertälje paying for some of their participants, e.g. dieticians and headmasters from schools.

Project results

- Verifying a healthy profile as the right way: The project has verified that supporting a healthy and environmentally friendly way of living is the right way to profile the Molėtai municipality. The project has offered practical examples from other countries, and also concepts and arguments for continuing on this track.
- A modern approach for eating habits: the Diet for a Green Planet concept has offered a modern approach for changing eating habits. By creating a Local Support Group an open discussion about this topic has started.
- A desire to act practically: the exchange activities have created a desire to act and take initial steps towards a change. For example, measuring food waste is now implemented in the Molėtai gymnasium, at the primary school and in one kindergarten. A garbage separation system has been installed in the Molėtai gymnasium to be able to recycle paper, plastics, glass and organic material. Photos of healthy foodstuffs and glass containers with different kinds of legumes are now exposed in the canteen.
- Competence improvement for dieticians, kitchen staff, health experts and head masters is one project result, and decisions have been taken to e.g. use the food pyramid and to stop using juices and syrups in kindergartens.
- Better self-esteem: personal development for project participants has been achieved. E.g. kitchen staff has got more self-esteem and recognition as important actors in the public food services.
- Better intercultural understanding and dialogue has been created. We are all human beings living on the same planet.
- A Diet for a Green Planet handbook with local recipes in a seasonal structure, has been published in Lithuanian.
- Involvement of state food controlling institution: one of the most remarkable and interesting results is that the state food controlling institution (State Public Health Centre) has been involved and directly invited to a dialogue at the local conference in January 2015.



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- A written recommendation has been elaborated. It includes recommendations to the State Public Health Centre on how legislation and regulations could be changed to let the Diet for a Green Planet concept influence the policies. The document has been elaborated instead of a municipal diet policy as it is not up to municipalities to have their own diet policies. But this document also includes recommendations on how the local level can contribute, and it will be presented to the municipal health committee.

Future challenges for Molétai

- To continue struggling for the change of eating habits. This is much easier in big cities, but in rural areas people stick to their eating traditions.
- To involve the whole population in this intention, not only the young. Even the ageing population should be taken in consideration.
- To secure a continuing competence development for schools' and kindergartens' canteens' staff.
- To motivate more actors than the Molétai gymnasium to participate in possible future Erasmus projects.
- Each municipality, community or organization needs to elaborate their own model and policy on how to implement healthy and environmentally friendly operations in all sectors of human and social life. This is a challenge for the whole region.
- When the new government is installed after the local elections in March 2015 the Local Support Group will invite the new politicians to have a round-table discussion about what is needed to create an environmentally friendly region – one of the components should be healthy diets, having in mind the concept of Diet for a Green Planet.



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