

European Neighbours' Day 2007 in Riga

The European Neighbours' Day is a new project in the Riga City. In 2006 it was realized for the first time only in one district of the city – the Kurzeme District, Agenskalna Street, but in spite of lack of experience it was very successful and inspired other districts of Riga to organize similar festivities. Therefore in January 2007 almost all the executive directorates of the districts of Riga informed the Riga City Council that they would be ready and willing to help with the organization of the European Neighbours Day this year, if they saw initiative and support from the citizens.

The European Neighbours' Day 2007 was celebrated in four Districts of the Riga City: Centra District, Vidzeme District, Kurzeme District and Latgale District. The main organizers of the event were the local authorities – the executive directorates of these districts in cooperation with the Riga City Council, which provided the financial assistance. The European Neighbours' Day 2007 was celebrated on May 26th in Centra District, Vidzeme District and Latgale District, as well as both on May 26 and May 29th in Kurzeme District.

European Neighbours' Day 2007 in the Kurzeme District of Riga

In Kurzeme District, Agenskalna Street of Riga the Neighbours' Day was celebrated already for the second time and, like in 2006, it was celebrated for two days – May 26th and May 29th. The organizers of the event were the inhabitants of Agenskalna Street together with the Executive Directorate of the Kurzeme District.

The first event in the Kurzeme District, Agenskalna Street took place on Saturday, May 26th. At the very morning there was a big activity on Agenskalna Street: the inhabitants cleaned up their houses, pavements and back yards, hanged out the national flags, decorated their fences and displayed exhibitions about the history of their families, their hobby's and talents as well as about the history of the street, children's drawings, paintings and photos from the last year's Neighbours' Day.

The bells of Martin's Church were ringing and the inhabitants were invited to join the march through the Agenskalna Street, accompanied by the brass orchestra "Riga". All day long the inhabitants could look at different exhibitions and get to know more about their neighbours. About lunchtime the inhabitants gathered in the back yard of the Association of Latvian National Culture Societies named after Ita Kozakevica to look at the dance performance of a horse named Sapnis (Dream), who performed figures of polka, lambada and waltz. The children could also go for a ride with the horse as well as learn Kendama, the national Japanese game and look at the Japanese kimono show, performed by Susuma Nakagawa, teacher of Japanese and representative of the Association of Latvian National Culture Societies. There was also a very interesting possibility for children to take part in crayoning on the terrace of the Painter's house which they decorated mainly with dogs, cats, birds, cars, busses and flowers.

The most colourful and attractive event on May 26th was the festive concert in the middle of the day in the backyard of the Association of Latvian National Culture Societies, performed by Uzbek, Moldavian, Greek, Byelorussian, Russian and Latvian ensembles. At the end of the festivity all inhabitants could taste different international and Latvian meals, prepared by the inhabitants themselves as well as make a big drawing together. In the evening people invited their neighbours to their gardens to

have a social party and chat together. The people really enjoyed being together on this day and the different activities they could take part in. Please, find the photos from May 26th in the home page of Agenskalna Street, under the program of festivities <http://agenskalna.iela.ir.lv/programma.html>

The second event of Neighbours' Day in the Kurzeme District, Agenskalna Street took place on the afternoon of **May 29th**. The neighbors from Agenskalna Street gathered in the Agenskalna Gymnasium and enjoyed being together by a cup of tee and a big pretzel in the shape of the street name "A-G-E-N-S-K-A-L-N-A I-E-L-A" that has already become a tradition of this event. They watched the film with scenes from the previous Saturday's event and discussed the course of this event as well as awarded the inhabitants by four nominations: the most interesting fence exhibition, the most pleasant garden, the friendliest house and the most popular dog of the street. There was also a concert performed by the students of Agenskalna Gymnasium and the big balloon that had been fixed above the Agenskalna Gymnasium already on **May 26th** was let to fly free on the evening of **May 29th**.

European Neighbours' Day 2007 in the Latgale District of Riga

The European Neighbours' Day in the Latgale District of Riga City was celebrated on May 26th. As the European Neighbours' Day in the Latgale District was celebrated for the first time, the initiator of the event was the local authority – the Executive Directorate of the Latgale District as well as the Centre for Children and Youth „Daugmale”. They were inviting the inhabitants of the Latgale District, especially the inhabitants of the houses at 121 Maskavas Street, at 35, 37, 39 Jersikas Street and at 1 Maza Kalna Street to gather in the square at Maza Kalna Street.

At the beginning of the event at 12 a.m. there was a festive speech and a concert of brass orchestra „Auseklitis”. Afterwards the participants of the event could enjoy the performances of European and Oriental Dances and sports as well as participate more actively: paint at extempore plain air painting event „Recognize your street”, model in clay, learn photography, swing and simply get to know many nice people and find like-minded fellows. There was a kids playground as well, where the pixies of „the Lauminas studija” (Pixies' Studio) held a wide games' program for kids and their mums. The inhabitants could look at the most spruced facades of houses around the square at Maza Kalna Street. In the end of the event there was a performance of the Youth Rock group „Mezonigais rieksts” (Wild Nut).

The Neighbours' Day 2007 in the Latgale District was organized by the local authority, but as the willingness of the inhabitants to take part at different events and activities of the district is rising each year there is a real hope for a more active participation of the inhabitants in the organization of Neighbours' Day event the next year.

European Neighbours' Day 2007 in the Centra District of Riga

In 26th May, 2007, the European Neighbours' Day was celebrated in Centra District of Riga, inviting all the inhabitants of the district to common events with dances, attractions, performance of circus artists and different activities for children.

The event was held in the green square on Brivibas Str.124. In the nearest future this place will be transformed as the biggest central square of Riga. Near the

square there is a building site where new residential and office complex is going to be built by Dommo Ltd.

During the European Neighbours' Day it was possible to get introduced with the draft project of the planned square and complex and to meet the leadership of the Centra District of Riga – Executive Director Mr.V.Starostins and Deputy Executive Director J.Vasermanis. They explained the idea of the prospective square and answered all the questions of the attendant neighbours. Neighbours showed deep interest in the new project presented by representatives of Dommo Ltd. There were discussions about the possible cooperation between the citizens and the company.

As the participants acknowledged, the European Neighbours' Day was a great opportunity to spend some time together with the neighbours in social atmosphere, enjoying songs, dances and music together with “Club of Riga Dances” and circus artists. Organizers took care about the food and drinks. During the event people could enjoy pleasant atmosphere, get to know each other closer and discuss topical issues.

European Neighbours' Day 2007 in the Vidzeme District of Riga

The event was held at 26 Nicgales Street on 26th May, 2007.

Before the event organizers made great efforts to attract many people:

- Youth art competition “My Neighbour” was organized and the Executive Directorate received more than 100 drawings;
- Information article “European Neighbours' Day in the Vidzeme District” published in the free newspaper *5 min*;
- Information about the Neighbours' Day in the Newspaper of the Vidzeme District;
- Information about the event in popular internet sites www.notikumi.lv, www.eirozinas.lv, www.atverts.lv;
- The event was advertised by posters in libraries of the Vidzeme District;
- Leaflets were distributed to managers of houses;
- Information sent to the cooperation partners of the Vidzeme District.

The organizers and participant neighbours are happy about the success:

- Many people participated in the art competition titled “My Neighbour” showing their attitude towards their neighbours;
- Successful cooperation with the merchants, craftsmen and also with Riga Food Producing School and Riga Purvciems' Crafts School;
- Qualitative cultural program both for children and adults. Successful performance of “Pippy Longstocking” where Latvian, Latgalian, Russian, Jewish, Spanish, Romanian songs were included;
- Interactive cooperation with the inhabitants of the Vidzeme District;
- Establishing of the new traditions to create friendly urban environment.

The organizers and participants recognize some failures:

- Probably the choice of place was not very successful (although there were power supply, desks and chairs available);
- The event was not very well attended.

Some statements about the event:

- The European Neighbours' Day is the event for all the citizens of the city to let them meet and get to know better their neighbours;
- Such kind of events develop friendly urban environment;
- Craftsmen's fair can easily attract attention of people.

Lessons for the next year:

- It is important to plan the information campaign earlier – in February or March, to attract more people;
- To attract sponsors, to reduce the expenses of the project and to provide more features for the children – helium balloons, creative workshops, pony for riding etc.;
- To choose more visible place for the event where people walk by, for example, near the shopping centre.

Résumé

In 2006 the European Neighbours' Day in Riga was celebrated for the first time in association with the festival of Agenskalna Street. What was the reason for this decision? In practice, European Neighbours' Day promotes social togetherness, creates solidarity among people and teaches to contact with neighbours regardless of their ethnic origin, language or colour of skin. As a capital, Riga is the place where discussions about social solidarity and tolerance are held most often. That is why the European Neighbours' Day in Riga was celebrated on a larger scale this year in four of the Riga's housing estates. Hopefully this exciting project will become a strong tradition and it will expand outside the capital of Latvia as well.