



Study Trip to Lithuania and Latvia



- National and international Forest policy
- March 11-21, 2019

❖ STUDY TRIP - DAY 1 (2019-03-11), compiled by Mikas Arlauskas

The study trip to the Baltic States began with Lithuania, at Vytautas Magnus University, The Academy of Agriculture, in Akademija. Both the students who arrived earlier to explore the city of Kaunas and students who arrived on the first they, with the help of our trusted bus driver – Vytautas, they reached the university grounds where they successfully settled in and met the locally famous „Dormitory Babushkas“.

After settling in, we departed to the city of Kaunas where we began our tour of the oldtown and center of the once temporary capital. We began our tour by seeing the place, where once stood the „golden toilet“– the building which was a perfect example of corruption relating to politics, and with the course in a way. Our first stop was Kaunas castle, where we learned the history of the castle and the city itself and how it started as a trading center. Our next stop was Kaunas priest seminary and the St. George’s church beside it. The Students learned about the troubles the seminary faced during the invasions of other countries and how these religious buildings served other functions, if they were not destroyed. St. George’s church was a good example, showing how Lithuanian cross smiths incorporated Pagan symbolica in their crosses, since Lithuania was the last country in Europe that accepted Christianity, and that some Pagan religion communities existed to this day. From there we moved on to the Kaunas town square, where we saw the town hall and the memorial sculptures for Ladislas Starevich, a famous stop-motion animator. Close by we stopped in front of the monument of Maironis, who was an educator and a famous poet, despite Lithuanian poets being disliked by the Soviet Union and being oppressed to extinguish the spread Lithuanian culture.

Later on we went toward the main square, where we stopped in front of the town hall and got to see an unearthed wax furnace which was used in the 15th century to mainly produce molds for cannons and church bells and in lesser quantities – candles. Our next sight to see was the Church of the Assumption of the Holy Virgin Mary or the Church of Vytautas the Great, by the river Nemunas. We learned about the legends of how the church was built by the Grand Duke Vytautas, and found out how high would the water level would rise during spring, before the hydro-electric dam was built. Shortly after we stopped by the river – Nemunas, the largest river in Lithuania, which begins in Belarus and flows into the Baltic Sea, furthermore we found out that the river Nemunas once separated the Prussian Empire and the Tsar Russia and were surprised to learn how the difficulties in the use of different callendars made the crossing of this border take 11 days to cross. From the river Nemunas we walked to the main street of oldtown – Vilnius street and headed towards the center of the city, on our way in a distance we passed Kaunas cathedral and the tomb monument of Maironis beside it, later on we reached Kaunas Blessed Virgin Sacrament Church that was used as a cinema, during the Soviet occupation and from there we entered the district, considered as the center of Kaunas city. Entering the main street of the center of Kaunas city – Laisvės alėja (Freedom avenue), we saw the old Lithuanian prezidency building which was used during the time the capital of Lithuania – Vilnius, was occupied by Poland, and later on stopped to see the central post office building. This building was famous as being one of the first modern-national architecture style buildings in the post World War 1 era and one of the first buildings in Kaunas, equipped with both running water and electricity, compared to the rest of the city houses in that time.

We ended our guided trip in front of the Kaunas city musical theater and while admiring it we learned that the square in front of it was where a young man, named Romas Kalanta protested against the Soviet regime in Lithuania by self-immolation. Kalanta's death provoked the largest post-war riots in Lithuania and became a symbol of the Lithuanian resistance throughout the 1970s and 1980s. We ended the day by having dinner in a restaurant called „Višta puode“ meaning “Chicken in the pot”.

Memories day 1

(2019-03-12)



❖ STUDY TRIP - DAY 2 (2019-03-12), completed by Indre Surgataite

Tuesday, we spent the whole day in Vytautas Magnus university Agriculture Academy where we were welcomed very warmly. It was the first day when we got introduction about forestry education and forest policy in Lithuania. And in the evening, we had a very nice dinner organized by the Dean of the Forest Science and Ecology faculty.

The formal part of the day started by welcoming words by the Vice-Chancellor of the Agriculture Academy Antanas Maziliauskas, and immediately proceeded with the presentation about Vytautas Magnus University Agriculture Academy (VMUAA) and especially about faculty of Forest Science and Ecology. During the presentation by the Vice Dean Remigijus Žalkauskas, we could clearly see that forester speciality is becoming less popular every year. This could be due to many reasons such as forest sector reform or in general to decreasing demographical situation. The following presentation was given by VMUAA ex teacher Marius Kavaliauskas and he went straight to the point. He introduced us with the global forest policy trends and later very smoothly went to Lithuania's forest policy subtleties. He tried to make us think critically and see the situation as it is. Marius also touched topic about private forest owners and I think the most memorable slide about it was just a blank screen, which symbolised lack of policy for private forestry. Before lunch we had one more presentation about game management in Lithuania. Even though, on my opinion, the presentation was the most interesting of the whole day, most of the students seemed to be more attracted by the interior of the classroom. We were given short historical introduction, presented with hunting species and techniques. And after the lecture some students could finally take photos with the deer and have a better look to the "exhibition".

After tasty lunch with new energy we went to listen to three more presentations. One of it was given by the director State Forest Service, Albertas Kasperavičius. This presentation helps better imagine how Lithuania's forest looks like, what functions do the service have. Also, we had a presentation by Benas Bitauskas, formal Euroforester student who works now in the agency as a senior advisor. It was very good to hear from someone who actually works in the system and could explain everything in simple and understandable way. The last presentation that we had was by professor Gintautas Mozgeris about forest management planning in Lithuania. During the presentation it could be seen that student were tired, in the end there were only few questions.

The day ended in student's café with some Lithuanians teachers and formal Euroforester students as well as dean of Forest Science and Ecology faculty. Everyone was happy and communicating, discussing about first days in Lithuania. Only some disappointments were expressed for the warm beer.

Memories day 2

(2019-03-12)



❖ STUDY TRIP - DAY 3 (2019-03-13), completed by Alexandru Flavius Panaite

In the third day of the trip, we visited Vilnius, the capital of Lithuania. In the capital, we had the opportunity to meet 3 important guests. In the first part of the day, we met Ieva Klimašauskė, the Senior Advisor at the Nature Protection and Forest Policy Group at the Ministry of Environment of the Republic of Lithuania. We learn that the forest cover is more than the third of Lithuania, they have 2.2 mil ha of forest. The main species in this country are Pine 33%, spruce 20%, Birch 21%, and some others. Moreover, the state's forest is 50 %, the private forest is 40 % and the state forest reserve for restitution it is 9.4 %. After that, we had the opportunity to meet Danas Augutis, the Head of the Department of Nature Protection, Recreation and Game Management at the State Forest Enterprise. This guest talked about how the reform of the Lithuanian sector changes the scope of activities. He also presented us the aim of reform as to improve sustainability and the quality of the state forest management like the Economy of the scale and more effective processes.

When the lunchtime came, we had been to a Lithuanian restaurant where we tested Cepelinai, a Lithuanian dish that is very different from the traditional Romanian food. The food was not on my taste because it has so much fat inside, and most of my colleagues did not like it. But, it was a nice experience to see and feel what Lithuanian people like to enjoy. Moreover, our lecture continues with another presentation, in this case coming from the Chairman of Forest Owners Association of Lithuania, dr. Algis Guizutis that explained manifold problems that private forest owners are facing in Lithuania.

In the last part of the day, we had a tour in Vilnius, where we saw the most important places. It was a very interesting tour and I can say I really like the architecture and the history of the country. I learned that Vilnius became an important city by the 14th century when it also became the capital of what was at the time Europe's largest country, stretching from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea. Back in that time Vilnius was a very tolerant city because it allowed Muslims, Jewish, Catholics, Orthodox and other religions to live together. But, this is just something of history. In conclusion, the day was very captivating and full of information, but the only thing that was not so good was the weather, but in the end, it didn't matter so much.

Memories day 3

(2019-03-13)



❖ **STUDY TRIP - DAY 4 (2019-03-14), completed by Alexandru Flavius Panaite**

During this day we travelled from Kaunas to the Dzūkija National Park of Lithuania. In this trip we had the chance to meet the Head of the Nature Division at the National Park administration, dr. Mindaugas Lapele. At the beginning of the day, we had a presentation about the park in the visitor centre. During the presentation we found that administration here covers two national protected areas, Dzūkija and Cepkeliai. Dzūkija National Park was designated in 1991 in the region of Varėna. Its aim is to protect the landscape, the old villages, historical and cultural monuments, and the forests of south-eastern Lithuania. The park's territory is 55 thousand hectares, 85 percent of which is covered by woods. The pine stands make up 90% of the forest land. The park contains 12 historical, 25 archaeological, 10 architectural and 35 art monuments.

Pinewoods dominate in the Dzūkija National Park. There can also be found mushrooms and berries. The forest has been a source of extra income for the local people from a long time ago. In the park can be found a rich birdlife, including a number of rare species of birds. Another important thing, in the national park is the fact that 30% of the forest is owned by forest owners.

After the presentation we had an outdoor discussion about local Lithuanian traditions and about how they used wood for different tools and in their everyday life. We have also seen how Pine forest is managed from an observation tower. During the tour, we had the opportunity to learn from the local people and we met an old woman that invited us into her house where we had a glimpse into the real traditional household of Lithuanian countryside.

When the lunchtime came, we went in the Marcinkonys Visitor Center. There, it was also a museum where we could see different objects used in the past by Lithuanian people, like clothes, candles, and tools used in agriculture. Moreover, in the top part of the museum, there was a place where you can see different types of mushrooms and insects that can be found in the forest. Dr. Mindaugas Lapele concluded the meeting by giving us good information about biodiversity. From his presentation and the way he answered to our questions we could see that he has a lot of experience in the area.

The basketball game in the afternoon was a very nice experience and we were actually happy when the host team, the Lithuanians won. After the game we celebrated in the dormitory. However, the funniest part of the day was after the game, before getting back to the dormitory. That is when Joshua went missing and we all started to look for him. After a while, they found out that he had taken a taxi and he was already back in the dormitory. We had a lot of fun joking about this for the rest of the trip.

Memories day 4

(2019-03-14)



❖ STUDY TRIP - DAY 5 (2019-03-15) completed by Goia Alexandru Mihai

My first day as a “Leader of the Day”, the daily schedule consisted in two major activities. The first one, visit to “Bauwerk Boen” factory in Lithuania, was composed from a guided tour of the facility that offered us a glimpse in to the parquet production process (we saw the entire technological process, from round timber to finished products) and a presentation held by the CEO of the company that offered a view upon the company`s history, economical situation (employee, turnover, their factories around the world). Nevertheless, the visit and presentation offered a good platform for a constructive discussion with a lot of good questions raised by my colleagues. Among the curiosities about the parquet production process (technicalities) which mainly constructed the discussion, the topic of forest certification was brought up as well.

What is more, for lunch we had the chance to taste again a piece of the wonderful Lithuanian cuisine. On our way from the parquet factory to the meeting with the second speaker of the day, we stopped in the beautiful city of Trakai and had lunch in a nice and cozy restaurant that is with Karaims specific. The venue was recommended to us by Česlovas Auryla, the forest owner that hosted us for the second part of the day. Due to practical matters our menu was established prior to our arrival. Moreover, the owner of the restaurant (member of the Karaitic ethnic minority) offered a warm welcome and served us the delicious and well-known Kibinai, which is a traditional pastry filled with mutton and onion.

The second scheduled activity was visiting a Lithuanian private forest owner named Česlovas Auryla. We visited his forest, the total area that he owns is around 80 ha of forest. What is more, is good to mention that the owner had a strong background in forestry, he was a forester by education (graduated two faculties) and worked at one of the former state forest enterprises for approx. 30 years. He decided to leave the state enterprise and to go in the private sector opening his own company because he got tired of the working environment and was disappointed because his extra services (projects for EU funds for the state enterprise) that he was providing while working in his free time were not payed. Moreover, “owners’ type” made the day more interesting, all the knowledges that he possesses were clearly reflected in his well-managed forest. A down side of the afternoon was the weather, it was cold and rainy and due to this and that the forest owner didn`t spoked in English some people lost focus and get bored.

Memories day 5

(2019-03-15)



❖ **STUDY TRIP - DAY 6 (2019-03-16) completed by Goia Alexandru Mihai**

16th of March was my second day of duty. This day was our last day in Lithuania. The scheduled activities begun quite early in the morning, we departed from Kaunas around 7:40. The last objective to see in Lithuania was the regional office of the State Forest Enterprise in Birzai, close to the Latvian border. There we had as our main speaker the head of the State Forest enterprise office, he offered us a full presentation covering their main activities (daily duties and challenges), and the Lithuanian forestry in general. The presentation was full of information and it offered a proper base for the good discussion that ignited early on. Nevertheless, some of the topics that were touched by the questions are forest certification, policy and legislation in the Lithuanian forestry, forest infrastructure and logistics. The guest was very well prepared, he answered all our question in a professional way. We found a little bit difficult that he did not know to speak English and Vilis has to translate for us all the presentation. But after all, every minute spent there was worth. After the presentation we were supposed to go outdoors in the forest to visit some of the forest sites. For example, we were supposed to see in the forest the tallest Birch from Lithuania, one of which the regional office was very proud of but, due to the bad weather from the past days the visit was cancelled. Instead of the field visit in the forest we were offered the option to attend a guided tour of a local brewery from Birzai that owned the restaurant where we were supposed to have lunch. The tour was awesome, it was nice to get out a little bit from our daily topics that were related to forest and hear something else. The guided tour ended with a beer tasting event while we had lunch, the tasting consisted in six different types of beer. After finishing lunch and the beers we took the road and headed to our second targeted country, Latvia. In addition, our destination in Latvia, the Hostel where we were hosted, was relatively close. We spent approximately one and a half hour in the bus.

Memories day 6

(2019-03-16)



❖ STUDY TRIP - DAY 7 (2019-03-18), completed by Alexandru Saracila

This day started with the first stop at the Forest Faculty and Forestry Education in Latvia, more precisely in the town Jelgava. There we met the Vice-Dean of the Faculty, Mg.silv. Solveiga Luguza, who had for us an introduction in the forestry sector of Latvia. The informations that were presented covered topics like: general informations about the forest in Latvia, the forest sector, forest and society and the history of the Forestry Faculty. According to the informations that were presented we saw that the public opinion about foresters is not in the best shape. Like in more countries, the foresters are seen like monsters who are cutting the forest and a lot of convincing work is done to change this bad thinking. Also, we were quite curious where the students that are graduating manage to get a job, giving the fact that Latvia is a small country and there are not so many jobs in the forest sector. The answer was quite vague, and the vice-dean said that usually the students manage to find a place to work. One interesting fact was the percentage of females that are in the forest sector. This seem to be quite a topic these days, and the vice-dean wanted to show us the fact that more and more females are coming in the forest sector. I found it a very nice thing that everyone despite the gender can find the forestry as an interesting way of earning money and why not a way of life, but I do not think that it was so necessary to show us this difference.

The next activity was meeting Grigorijs Rozentals, the chairman of the board of the co-operative Mežsaimnieks. This is one of the three co-operatives from Latvia, and it has been born in 2012, beeing the oldest of it. Talking over on the subject of private forest owners and how things work, we fount out that this co-operative had a huge development in only 6 years of existence. Starting from 2012 with a turnover of 12 thousand euros, they ended up to have in 2018 around 6.5 million euros turnover. Grigorijs explained to us that this was possible by a good advertisement and a good way of managing the peoples' forests and a fair way. Despite managing the trade of round wood, they also manage to have in the seson of 2017/2018, around 500 hectares of soil preparation, the same area beeing planted. Also they are a big client in seedling purchases (over 1 million) and a 500 hectars area of tending of young stands. On the other hand, they are still young and in search of improving themselves, a very important thing in the way of success in my presonal point of view.

Next and the last activity for today was meeting Andris Rimicans, the head of information center in the State Research Forest Management Agency. We had an overview of the Forest Research Station and than we end up in the field by visiting few experimental plots in the forests near Jelgava. Talking about the research station, he presented the main specific aims of it:

- Provide plots for forest science research projects;
- Set up & maintain long term scientific objects;
- Set up & maintain environment and forest monitoring objects;
- Student practice and further education support and assistance in forest education branch.

The whole walking through the forests and every stop at each plot brought up multiple questions regarding not only the main activity but also from fields of policy, management and infrastructure. Andris managed to answer in a very good manner to all our questions and even gave us an insight in the policy topic. He told us that with the upcoming elections and the whole Brexit trouble, they hope to pass a new law that will help them in the parliament. That was a very interesting information and made me think that also all the answers that he gave us until then were honest and transparent; regarding the fact that he told us even this information.

It was a very pleasant first day in Latvia and we think that even if we start to be a little bit tired, there are still good and interesting knowledge to come in the next days.

Memories day 7

(2019-03-18)



❖ STUDY TRIP - DAY 8 (2019-03-19), completed by Alexandru Saracila

Today we were traveling to Riga to meet with three officials from JSC "Latvia's State Forests" headquarter. There we had the opportunity to listen to each of them presenting us different aspects from the company.

In the beginning we got to know some details about the region of the Baltic Sea, enjoying a presentation that entitled as "Baltic states- bigger than they look like". As a matter of fact, due to the informations that were presented, the actual title has a good background. Even if the share of the Baltic States in the EU GDP is negligible 0.6%, at the same time, a good amount (approx. 3, 7%) of the value added of the EU woodworking sector is generated by Baltic. Even if we were in Latvia, I had the surprise that they didn't put Latvia on the first place but they manage to put it in a good spot. What I wanted to say is that, they are in the top 3 strongest exporters (Latvian OSB producer) in the world/EU with the first place taken by Estonia (prefab wooden houses). Beside the OSB production, they are also make a front step when it comes to softwood sawmilling, producers of energy pellet and also plywood producers. The Baltic States may seem not to be a big player in the wood industry, but the statistics showed that the three Baltic states: Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, have a total industry that is 1.5 times that of Germany. The funny part was that the actual speaker had a very interesting negative opinion when he took some questions about forest certification; due to the fact that one of his colleague continue with a talk about the certification.

Secondly, we followed up a presentation of the Manager of Forest Management Planning in Zemgale region, Janis Zitans, a euroforester. Here we listened to some facts about the management that is made in the forests of JSC and some administrative details. Janis talked us through the goals of the company raising some question between the Swedish people in the group when it came to the environmental goals. The main concern and the most debated topic had been the social opinion when it comes to the way of managing the forests. On the other hand, the big surprise for me was the way of managing the other branches of the company. We found out that they are having a production capacity of 9 nurseries that allows LVM to put on the market more than 50 million forest tree plants per year with the target figure of 52 million for the upcoming years. Another interesting topic was also the activity in the field of the forest infrastructure, where they manage to build on an average every year around 361 km. Furthermore, not only the roads are making a big interest in the JSC forests but also the drainage system where annual, in average there are 17, 6 thousand hectares of restored forest drainage systems. As a small review of the presentation, I could say that Latvia's State Forests, JSC, covers all the needed fields of activity when it comes to forestry and it does it in a good and responsible way; to quote their motto: "We create flourishing Latvia".

In the end, we got to meet Inga Spalvėna, the Certification Manager of JSC, also a euroforester. She talked us through a small history of the certifying schemes: FSC and PEFC; to reach at the actual stage of the company where, all the forests that they are managing are doubled certified (in 2002 by the FSC and in 2011 by the PEFC). Inga told us that the certification is one of the tools being used to demonstrate their social, environmental and economic responsibility. But the actual reason behind certification has been the market demand. Unfortunately, we found out that The National Standard has not been approved back in the days and there is expected to be a final draft to be delivered in the spring of this year, 2019 for further analyses. Another major topic has been the challenges that they face this day. The most increasing demands come from the Environmental NGO'S who are putting a lot of pressure to block or even to ban any management activity.

As a conclusion to this day, I could say that the Latvians know how to value their forests, if we talk about the state company. On the other hand, I could say that they are selling far too easy the land of their country in the shadow of the last transaction made with Södra.

Memories day 8

(2019-03-19)



❖ STUDY TRIP - DAY 9 (2019-03-20), completed by Muhammad Fawad Sharif

The day started with the travelling and we went to the Nature Conservation Agency headquarter in Latvia, Sigulda area. The deputy director told us the role, responsibilities and major functions of the agency while came across the discussion he mentioned about the demographic issues which is also the problem in Lithuania. In Latvia he said that due to less human interaction the dynamics of the ecosystem are disturbed as most of the people are vacating those areas which are close to nature. He also highlighted the importance of protected areas and microreserves as he mentioned almost 2500 sites in Latvia are declared as microreserves. There is a requirement of four months for establishment of microreserves in protected areas and then the status of these microreserves are regularly checked and monitored regarding the population of key species or indicator species. Sometimes the status has been cancelled and border has been changed of those microreserves maybe after the period of five years, while some of the forestry actions are still possible on these microreserves which can be described as selection cut or sanitary cuts. The compensation money is also allocated for the forest owners where the microreserves are usually established but as told by deputy director these European Union subsidies are not enough.

Later one of the representatives from the agency told us about the sign/marks of the protected areas and how to identify and demarcate those protected areas while the nature conservation agency has only 8% of those protected areas. According to them that portion of deadwood should be left on the ground in those protected areas while in actually the private forest owners usually collect for the profit. He also mentioned about that for protection of wildlife they are creating the breeding places for the fish and nest creation for the small eagle and rehabilitation of dunes. According to the representative the forest fire is the major problem especially in the peatlands.

After the lunch we visited the office of forest cooperative “L.V.Mezs”. The Chairman of the Board told us about the history of the cooperative. According to him the cooperative established six years ago with 12 employees out of them six are working in the field while six are working in the office. As he mentioned his cooperative has nature-friendly approach, but he considered this thing as a business rather than a mission. While they are working on unproductive low-quality stands because at this time the prices are high. The cooperative has 160 members and has an area of 6000 hectares and entrance fee is 80 Euro. According to the chairman there is loopholes in the system those who make the legislation, or we can say politician they know nothing about the forestry. He said we have collaboration with other cooperation and companies. He considered it important to be certified as he said there are economic benefits from the roundwood sales. They get 3 euro extra per cubic meter.

They has cooperative certification it means that it is the combine responsibility of all forest owners. Later we visited the birch and spruce site of the young stands the owner also mentioned about that there is an overall increase of the birch proportion after the independence from the Soviet Union.

Memories day 9

(2019-03-20)



❖ **STUDY TRIP - DAY 10 (2019-03-21), completed by Muhammad Fawad Sharif**

In this day we went to the INGKA Group company office. According to the country manager Latvia he told us about that they are certified in all portfolios with FSC and he think like that PEFC is not transparent as FSC. As he briefed us the pressure of non-governmental organizations was the main cause for the establishment of the FSC. The presentation was about the domains of the INGKA group, which is composed of three elements INGKA Centres, IKEA Retail, INGKA Investments. There are five main investment frames which are Business development, Renewable energy, Resource independence (investing in forestry, recycling, and bio-material resources), venture and growth capital, treasury assets. Investing in the forest land management they keep into account the issue of sustainability. Later the forest operational manager told us about that they started with the acquiring the small private forest companies and now they hold the area of 94, 000 hectares. 12 persons are total working in the company out of them 3 persons are responsible for Regeneration till pre-commercial thinning while 3 persons are responsible for final felling. But as replying the question he told us about that they used the LiDAR technology for the volume calculation.

After the lunch we went to the Ministry of the agriculture office Latvia the representative told us about the forest sector in Latvia. 52 percent of Latvia's land territory is the forest at the time in 1925 the forest cover was 27% now it is doubled. The major species are pine, birch and spruce. The country's forest policy was approved in 1998 after the collaborative dialogue and discussion with all the stakeholders and actors. The main objective of the forest sector development policy is sustainable and internationally recognizes forest management, competitive products with high added value, appropriate potential of education and science and skill level of human resources. He highlighted the importance of the ecological aspect of forests.

In the second presentation at the Ministry of Agriculture sciences the managing director from the Latvian Forest Owner's association described the role of PEFC. He regarded the PEFC certification is the better tool to implement the sustainable approach as compared to FSC. They are group certified. They deal with the forest management certification, forest contractor's certification and chain of custody certification. Latvian forest owners association has 360 members and it was established in 2005 and it has also taking some collaborative measures with hunting corporations and other stakeholders in decision making process. The managing director told us about in detail the internal structure, major functions, roles and responsibilities of the LFOA.

Memories day 10

(2019-03-21)



