



2020 TOP 100 GOOD PRACTICE STORY

Title of the Story: Urbancows

Destination Name: *(include any state, province or region)*

Pärnu, Pärnumaa

Country: Estonia

Submitter name: Katrin Alliku

Email address: katrin.alliku@parnu.ee

Position: senior specialist of city development

Nomination Category: *(Please check the boxes that indicate the focus of your story)*

- Culture & Communities
- Environment & Climate
- Nature & Ecotourism
- Islands & Seaside
- Immediate responses in dealing with the COVID -19
- Post COVID -19 recovery
- One of the 17 SDGs* *(if yes, which one)* Click or tap to choose

*The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), also known as the Global Goals, were adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015 as a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity by 2030. The 17 SDGs are integrated—that is, they recognize that action in one area will affect outcomes in others, and that development must balance social, economic and environmental sustainability. What are the Sustainable Development Goals? <https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/sustainable-development-goals.html>

For further information on Tourism for SDGs: <http://tourism4sdgs.org/>

Find detailed instructions for submitting good practices [here](#)



DESCRIBE YOUR GOOD PRACTICE STORY

Address each aspect of your good practice story in the different sections being specific including relevant quantitative and qualitative information.

Issues faced

The central beach of Pärnu city is surrounded by a Natura 2000 protection area from the east and the west. The protection area was established to protect the habitats of valuable, rare and endangered species. It was long discussed that the beach promenade of Pärnu's central beach can no longer accommodate the locals and the tourists, but it was not possible to extend the recreational area to the Natura 2000 protection areas.

The question remained – how could we enable people to appreciate the value of the Natura 2000 area located in the city centre, enjoy the plant and bird species of the 375-hectare area and experience leisure time on a different kind of a beach? Additionally, problems related to the deterioration of the environment of this “forgotten” area arose: the accumulation of litter from land as well as the sea and difficulties with cleaning it up; also the overgrowth of reed due to the deterioration of the coastal hydrological regime caused by the accumulation of sediment.

Methods, steps and tools applied

2011 we started with the restoration of the coastal meadows and the clean-up of the coastal lagoons. We started by clearing 3.2 hectares of scrubland. It was necessary to clear the scrubland as it was unnatural to coastal meadows, providing a suitable habitat for crows who endangered bird species nesting in the meadows. This activity opened up views that neither the locals nor the visitors could have imagined – Pärnu was opened up to the sea view to an extent unseen in recent history.

For the restoration of the hydrological regime, coastal lagoons were cleaned up with special machinery – we lifted up extensive amounts of sediment, aerated the water and removed old concrete pipes from the soil that had been used (in the 1980s) to lead wastewater directly into the sea.

In the summer of 2012, we brought 96 bovine animals to the coastal meadows. Today, we lovingly call them our urban cows. They feed on fresh growing reed. The old lignified reed was removed with machinery.

We also built fences to stop the urban cows from wandering off into the residential areas. In 2012, we initiated the detailed planning of the protected area in order to build wooden walking trails, access roads and bird watching towers on the coastal grazing areas to bring people closer to nature.

The bird watching towers were finished by the summer of 2014.



In 2014, we also organised a clean-up day with the local residents to clear the litter annually carried to shore by the sea.

Key success factors

We entered into a dialogue with the locals right from the start of the project in order to minimise fears and doubts. We informed them of the activities and in cooperation with the University of Tartu Pärnu College conducted a survey on the attitudes towards the activities in the coastal meadows, the introduction of animals into the urban space and the related fears and issues. This survey gave us an input on how to explain the necessity of grazing and mowing to people and how to deal with any arising doubts. For example, people were concerned about the removal of bushland as well as possible water and odour pollution accompanying the introduction of urban cows into the area. These fears were addressed and minimised by the research results and explanations provided by the specialists of the Environmental Board. Good cooperation with our partners was biggest success factor.

Lessons learned

Once the beach had been opened up, the amount of litter cast ashore also caught the eye of the locals and people were eager to clear it. This has now become an annual tradition of citizen initiative.

Arising doubts were that water and odour pollution accompanying with urban cows. It has been proven by fact that grazing is by far the most appropriate and cost-effective means for maintaining such areas. Nitrogen and phosphorus levels have decreased – the organic material produced by the decomposition of vegetation (reed) is more difficult to assimilate by nature than manure (vegetation digested by animals). And actually odour is not a problem. The stocking density on the coastal meadows has been decreased as the meadows have been restored in their beauty and the animals have less to feed on.

Results, achievements and recognitions



We see the possibility of the local residents to enjoy nature near their homes as the most important benefit; children love animals, people and families with children walk on the winding pathways to see the urban cows and converse with them; the hiking trails have found use as outdoor learning spaces by the schools of the city; the quality of seawater as well as the hydrological regime have improved, the plantation is becoming ever more diverse, the diversity of the species in the coastal meadows has improved.

Acknowledgments:

The Estonian Landscape Architects' Union awarded us the title of "Public Space Developer of the Year" in 2016.

The Pärnu Urban Cows project was elected as one of the best European LIFE environmental projects in 2018 (a total of just nine projects were selected from across Europe). We were awarded the acknowledgement for the second place at the EU Green Week's award ceremony in Brussels.

Additional references

We prepared instructions for the restoration of coastal meadows so that other people could learn from our experience and mistakes:

https://cdn.barn.ee/keskkonnaamet.ee/public/linnalehmad/200x230_URBANCOWS_ENG_loplik.pdf

The project website: <https://life.envir.ee/restoration-and-public-access-urban-coastal-meadow-complex-p%C3%A4rnu-town>

and the social media channel we use to communicate with the general public:

<https://www.facebook.com/pages/category/Community/Linnalehmad-ehk-Urbancows-528020503899427/>

video (1:34)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1xHuzJyBylk&t=7s&fbclid=IwAR0KKwkogi7SBIHW1X_TE RmH8KCsCp71iyqNK_aUKZAbw5jF2C2E7qBO1pM

And 2nd video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2gvaeDGygGA&fbclid=IwAR3-dFfr3eisAuEWgJWIMTHXRTzoVvLNCDEdlsTASeqhLRtVkdVJBZst0c>

