



Inga Krivcova
Head of the
"VeloRonis"
(Cycling seal)



Inga starts her story by saying that she had discovered winter swimming on a hot day when she decided to go by bicycle to the sea to swim before going to work. She had continued swimming many more mornings. Two colleagues joined her. This was exciting and the active ladies from Liepāja continued swimming also in autumn and winter.

In winter a colleague contacted Raitis Gultnieks who is an experienced promoter of winter swimming in Latvia. He helped to find various associations and communities in Latvia engaged in "seal" matters. The World Championships were held in Jūrmala that winter and all the three decided to participate. The ladies contacted the Sports Department of the local government and inquired about possible support to participants from Liepāja, however, this idea was perceived as a kind of joke.

There were just three of them during the first four years. Afterwards, people showed interest in "seal" events in Liepāja. They approached the Sports Department again asking for support to the idea of the "Winter Day". After the "Winter Day" people suggested organising the Latvian Championships. Although the idea was initially perceived as a joke, in a year's time the first stage of the championships was held in Liepāja. The company of "seals" in Liepāja started growing. They do not only swim together, they also ride bicycles. Inga with her colleagues founded their own association "VeloRonis". Within a couple of years following establishment, there are 70-80 people in the community of Sunday swimmers and minimum

<http://veloronis.lv/>

"We don't impose any restrictions upon anybody, however, everybody should take care of oneself."

– INGA

40 of them are official members. This summer it was decided to start the bicycle season jointly with similar associations in order not to have to divide participants among different activities. In the result, there were 160 participants and various activities.

Various people come for winter swimming, often these are families. All together they form a unique group of people with similar views, they support and motivate each other. Inga says that improvement of health serves as the motivation for many of them: parents report that children get ill much less, seniors report about various health improvements related to blood vessels, spine and bladder. This is also a rare opportunity of socialising for many.

Liepāja local government deserves a lot of thanks for their success story, as it regularly holds competitions for the NGO sector. In the result of the last competition, "VeloRonis" managed to get a trailer and later rebuilt

it into a portable sauna. Private companies were found and are helping by providing materials for improving the infrastructure for winter swimming in Liepāja.

The association intends to attract medicine experts in future in order to study their activities in depth. It is also planned to involve a sauna expert during trainings in the next season and this person will not only supervise the sauna, but will also share recommendations regarding health maintenance. The co-funding project won by the association will allow covering swimming lessons in the Olympic Centre for 20 young "seals".

Sustainable development means movement for Inga, as this involves growth. It is also important to involve different generations. Inga identifies building the infrastructure as the basis for promoting development. According to her view, community initiatives present the key for improving environment conditions, and she refers to the fact that "VeloRonis" members leave behind clean and nice environment at the places of their activities. It is most important that "VeloRonis" has become self-sustainable after several years of activities and is operating also without regular attraction of external resources. Accordingly, Inga points out that the sustainability goal is dissemination of this message and helping others to start similar initiatives.

