



Kaspars Spunde,
Ciekurkalns
Neighborhood
Development
Society



KASPARS SPUNDE is one of the almost 8000 citizens of Ciekurkalns, one of the most historical of the 58 districts of Riga. Walking through its streets and parks with Kaspars, one immediately gets the impression that he is well-known around the place, people at every corner say hello or share a smile, and you can definitely feel a sense of community. But Ciekurkalns hasn't always been like this. No more than three years ago Kaspars was just like any other citizen of the neighbourhood, going about his daily life, taking his children to school, and living in it without any particular tie to his fellow neighbors that goes beyond customary politeness and good manners. But one day things changed for him, and with that the whole life of this to-be community was affected and changed as well. Everything started about three years ago at an intersection, which ironically turned out to be an important crossroads for the people of Ciekurkalns. This was a very dangerous intersection, difficult to cross both for pedestrians and for cars. Accidents happened almost every other day, so that at one point, Kaspars decided to start a pe-

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tion to push the municipality to do something about it and make it safer for the inhabitants. The answer he received was shocking: the gravity of the accidents just was not bad enough, there had been no casualties yet, the municipality was going to do nothing. Did that mean that they would have to wait for somebody to die to make the intersection safer? Wait for the worst to happen before changing things? No, Kaspars couldn't accept this, and so he decided to take action and on June 12th 2015 he founded "Ciekurkalns Neighborhood Development Society".

Initially the new-born NGO was formed only by Kaspars and two friends of his; today more than fifty people actively participate in the forum, and about forty people are members of the organization, all residents of the neighborhood. This is not common in Latvia, people initially thought they were paid and doing this for personal gain, only later did they realize that all the members do it voluntarily. They do it because they want a better community for their kids. It's an attitude. Elderly people are the ones that struggle the most to understand Kaspars' effort; he told us how an old lady once told him during one of the many events: "What a good mayor we have!".

Their major source of funding comes from partnerships and sponsorships with entrepreneurs and hand-craftsmen. For instance, this is how they financed the construction of the famous "Latvian swing". This huge swing, placed right in front of the infamous intersection, not only serves as a place for people to meet and have fun, but most importantly represents a useful tool for the whole community: according to an old Latvian tradition in fact, having a good swing during the Easter holiday assures you a summer free of mosquito bites!

Speaking of the intersection, what happened with the issue that got all of this started? Unfortunately, that problem is yet to be solved, but six months ago the municipality promised to build a roundabout to replace the crossing within a year – Kaspars and his fellow citizens are carefully following the execution of this promise.

"Don't worry about what Ciekurkalns can do for you, but instead, think about what you can do for Ciekurkalns!"

- KASPARS SPUNDE

