



Miks Muizarajs,
Saldus Protection
Society



MIKS MUIZARAJŠ is a young citizen of Saldus, a Latvian town that has a little more than 12000 inhabitants. Like many others at the age of 20, notwithstanding the attachment to his land and to his family, and despite the fact that he had a job in the television sector, one day Miks decided to get out of his tranquil and routine life and to leave for a new adventure. His journey starts in Ethiopia – this country would teach him a lot, here he would learn a very important lesson: “it’s better to give something to society instead of just taking”. Working for the University of Addis Abeba he discovers the world of international cooperation, and he understands that this will be his path. It was then that he decided to leave once more, this time to the USA, to study international development in New York. After graduating, for years Miks continued to travel, putting his knowledge at the service of some of the poorest countries in the world, like Ecuador and Timor Leste. The day came, after all his travelling, when Miks felt the need to stop: something was telling him that it was time to do something for his country. So, in 2016, his long journey around the world came to an end; Miks went home and his return to Saldus marked the beginning of a new story.

It just so happened that as soon as he got back, Miks started taking part in public consultation organized by local activists about the opening of a new facility of hazardous waste disposal just 600 meters from the town. It was a Wednesday, and at noon in that meeting there were more than 300 people, all well informed and determined to denounce the gravity of such an initiative for the environmental and sanitary safeguard of the community. Miks remembers that day very well, he was looking at that angry crowd, united and determined to fight for a common good, and was struck by such strength. In that moment he understood that that strength could be used for a purpose if channelled well. Thus, at the end of that meeting, Miks proposed to transform that single initiative into a real and permanent organization, and this is how Saldus Protection Society was founded. This organization was born to fight against the opening of a polluting industrial facility, but unfortunately it is all too well known how hard it is to win such a battle when a small community has to face a colossal corporation and the local and national institutions that protect it.

In fact, unluckily, the facility is still open, running and polluting – despite the fact that a court case is still ongoing - but this partial defeat hasn’t stopped SPS. Today, this organization fosters with great commitment the active and constructive participation of the community in the decision making process of the local governmental institution, and thanks to this it has become more and more difficult for the municipality to make controversial decisions against the interest of the community.

With its ups and downs, the rising of SPS in the political debate has certainly brought turbulence to this little town, ready to fight with force for its rights. For Miks this is just the beginning of another journey, a journey towards the sustainable development of Saldus’ region for the interests of the whole society.

