

## AquaVIP success story #2

# Aquaculture Competence Centre in Klaipėda a launch pad for businesses and prospective careers

Experiments with fish and shrimp, students from Lithuania and abroad, visits from interested businesses – **Aquaculture Competence Centre in Klaipėda** is an important platform for education and research, helping to transform the potential of the field into a success story for the whole of Western Lithuania.

The joint efforts of Klaipėda University (KU) and Klaipėda Science and Technology Park (KSTP) gave the Centre, established in 2018, an added push in 2020 with the involvement in the "Aqua VIP" project, and ambitious plans for the future are also in place, as shared by **Dr. Nerijus Nika**, Head of the Laboratory of Fisheries and Aquaculture of Klaipėda University.



KLAIPĖDA SCIENCE  
AND TECHNOLOGY PARK



### How would you describe the importance of this Centre for the development of modern aquaculture?

*The importance of aquaculture is highlighted in both the Klaipėda City and Klaipėda Region strategies. The focus on this area is based on the growing realization that aquaculture is a much needed and promising industry, bringing high quality and nutritional value products to our tables, creating jobs and being inseparable from the need to sustainably use natural resources, protect natural ecosystems.*

*The Centre and its team of representatives from KU and KSTP act as intermediaries, as a meeting point for businesses interested in science and aquaculture, or those already established in the field, to find the services they need, the answers to their questions, and the experts to join them in their activities.*



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## Why is it important specifically to the University?

*The **Aquaculture Competence Centre** is inseparable from our research and studies, which aim to ensure the passing on of not just theoretical knowledge but also practical skills. It also builds closer links with other players in the innovation ecosystem, which is essential for a modern university.*



## What are the elements that make up this Centre of Competence?

*The Centre includes an experimental shrimp farming facility at the Business Incubator on the Klaipėda University campus, as well as the facility at Kopgalis, where rainbow trout and Nile tilapia are currently being grown. We have the most experience with these two species of coldwater and warmwater fish, but we also have experience with RAS systems for growing pike-perch, European perch and carp.*

*The infrastructure complex, together with a team of competent professionals, is a truly valuable resource. The various experiments carried out here help to identify problems that are relevant not only to science but also to business. Without such infrastructure, we might not even be aware of some of the issues that can become serious challenges or even obstacles for aquaculture businesses. So, through research and experimentation, we have the opportunity to address a wide range of technology optimization challenges and to advise business based not only on theory, but also on the primary results of our own research, which adds significant value.*



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## Are the eyes of young aquaculturists sparkling? How is their training going?

*We all understand that competences and the people who master them are integrally linked, and that business success is impossible without them. The industry is changing, becoming more modern and dictating a high demand for specialists. However, we still have a lot of work to do to convince young people that it makes sense to invest their time and effort here and that they will have opportunities to grow.*



*At the Centre, we also work with students using the format of the "Aqua VIP" project and the dimension of internationality – for example, last year we organized a summer school in Klaipėda, which offered a very rich program in physical locations and virtual tours.*



*We can confidently say that our infrastructure and accumulated knowledge enable us to prepare our professionals to work in companies in a very solid and well-rounded way. The business can entrust such colleagues with tasks that require significant responsibility and skills right from the start, because they are already familiar with the technology, can solve emerging problems, and are not intimidated by the equipment and the scale of the processes. Such people come to the job with aquaculture engineer-level competences.*



*Moreover, the Centre can also offer "niche" education, concentrated courses that respond to the specific needs of certain companies – I believe that this area of activity will be as important as student training in the future, because businesses that want to remain competitive will have to invest in knowledge and its improvement.*



## Which are some of the most important experiments carried out at the Centre of Competence?

*The direction of our experiments is dictated not only by the objectives of our projects, but also by business. I would single out the so-called shrimp tower project, where we tested a uniquely designed tank that allows us to optimize the process and solve a whole range of different challenges; we have also tested fish feeds for manufacturers, experimented with trout farming using geothermal water for the process, and more recently, we have carried out a shrimp farming demonstration cycle for potential investors.*

*The opportunity to test conceptual business models, to evaluate the need for investment, to get the initial assessment and advice needed for a successful launch – not every emerging enterprise has the internal resources to do all these things, and the Centre for Aquaculture Competence is an important supporter in these situations.*

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What are some of the directions in which the Centre's activities will be developed in the near future?

*We have quite ambitious expansion plans. As part of the project, KU plans to install a demonstrational **aquaponics** system this year, which will be integrated into our laboratory in Kopgalis. The experimental system for growing plants, shrimp and fish in a confined space will be of great value both for the various research activities and for broadening the competences of our young professionals.*

*The second direction concerns **geothermal energy** and the possibility of artificially preparing seawater for the production of aquaculture products using sustainable natural resources that lie in the depths of Western Lithuania. We are planning to carry out several experiments in this field.*

*Since the Centre's establishment, our team has received dozens of requests for consulting, and it is not only companies specializing in aquaculture or with plans connected to aquaculture that regularly visit us – the port and other industries want to see the processes up close and have questions, too, and recognize additional business niches or synergies here. Consultancy activities will continue to be a key focus, alongside the drive to develop and commercialize innovative aquaculture solutions.*



Images courtesy – Andrius Kundrotas

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