

ESTONIAN GOOD PRACTICES IN RURAL AREAS IN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT FIELD 2008

SUMMARY

Presented practices are good examples of cooperation in rural areas in the sustainable development field from all over Estonia. Main driving forces of these practices are ensuring the sustainability for economic growth, social development and environmental health in rural areas. There are presented best projects, networks and organisations that are promoting the nature and quality of rural life and ecological lifestyle.

Cooperation is like the glue that is holding rural communities from falling apart. Though, Estonians are quite shy and sometimes not very cooperative, good experiences will spread out and encourage more and more people to follow the same steps. Some of the members of presented projects or organisations told that working alone they would never have enough strength, money, wisdom or experiences to go through the huge work they have done together. Good cooperation is the biggest success factor of the activities for most good practices and different members of networks: entrepreneurs, local people and municipalities. Some of the participants with successful cooperation experience told that readiness for cooperation and trust between members has grown with time. In the beginning it was quite hard to find common motivation to start. Now the trust between members and towards leaders has let the organisation to develop.

Speaking about cooperation some of the project leaders stressed the need for trust between network members. Trusting each other is the crucial starting point for successful cooperation. Sparse population density, someone's bad experience in the past and intertwined relations in rural community are tackling the trust and good cooperation in rural area. Growing together takes time and achieved bonds are extremely fragile. Anyway, trusting each other is growing in the whole society and positive experiences weigh up the negative past.

All of the members of the practices brought up the need for good leaders and enthusiastic team, who can be promoters of rural life. Without these "spark" people would not happen anything in rural areas. One of the practices even brought out the role of intermediation of team leader, different communities with cultural and language barrier need the person who can create the interrelation for cooperation.

Among the practices there were some very good international project examples, in which the goals were fulfilled and achieved even more. Exchange of experiences, transfer of practices and methods, good transnational teamwork are the most valuable results of international cooperation projects. These results are so valuable that are good basis for future projects and cooperation. For example, results of the FEM project proved the viability of good network of project team. After the end of the project, there were elaborated new forms of cooperation: several small cooperation projects between two or three partners, planning of big infrastructure project, links between entrepreneurs who participated in the project (for example the exhibition of Estonian handcrafters in Finland).

Speaking about financing, there can be seen big part of project money in financing of current examples, especially in the activities of NGO sector. Some people in presented organisations even admitted the organisations' great dependency on the project money. One of the NGO leaders said: "One day we understood that writing the projects is like the obsession, you are searching in which fund you can fit in and then writing the project that accomplish with the fund's rules".

Still, the projects that are strengthening cooperation in the local community and develop the local area are essential for the rural catch-up. Cooperation in projects is a good prerequisite for involving the partners of the local community into decision-making on local development and to involve the voice of civil society into decision making process in general. Besides some of the motivators or kick factors of the successful activity there could be very small outcomes of the different projects: well-motivated project team, one inspiring training course, successful meeting of the group or good example from abroad. The main goal of the most transnational projects to exchange experiences and best practices and to benefit from that, has worked very well if we look at the results of the examples of rural area.

Accompanied with the projects another issue raised up – the low investment capability of small organisations and NGOs. The co-financing rates of the projects are sometimes too high, so there is hard to find the money for co-financing the projects with extensive budgets. To develop the organisation the members have to take the loan, which means that someone(s) from the board have to vouch personally for that loan. Personal liability and responsibility for the organisation is something very new in Estonia and predates the unlimited trust and support between members of the organisation. Still, the stress that something might go wrong, stays, as was expressed by the leader of one organisation.

Many examples are promoting the ecological lifestyle and environment. They have felt that in last years more and more people are valuing the ecological products and natural living environment. In this context it is easier to promote and develop something that is already quite popular. "It is easy to swim with the flow", said one of the team members. Therefore, if the whole region is acknowledged as friendly and natural environment for living, it benefits for the local entrepreneurs and regions: people want to come to live here, tourists are valuing the region and entrepreneurs can present their products as environmental friendly and natural. So there can be seen positive impact in larger scale.

Organisations in rural areas are lacking participation in national sector development activities and this may diminish their impact on the political decision making process on state level. Many of the organisations presented in current list stated that they need trainings in lobbying and wish to be more visible. Acting in rural area, far from important state institutions is often excluding local organisations and networks from roundtables and other kind of events, where inclusion of the civic sector is necessary. There were described few good examples how to raise the visibility. For example, one project hired special person for communication management. Regular media communication, sending press-releases, newsletters and information about events ensured very good visibility for the project and the activities of the projects were not forgotten.

Using different inclusion techniques, there can be involved different target groups. For example, environmental education centre Ökokratt is using many forms of interactive communication that would attract children and young people to gain their attention to forward the message

The examples of many currently presented organisations show that non-profit organisations have taken local initiative in areas that are badly developed or regulated in the rural areas. In this sense, these organisations are filling the gaps. For example, ecological producing centre in Saaremaa has prepared the instruction materials for ecological handling of the agricultural products, which was needed by the organic food producers, but not elaborated from the state. The network was aware of the situation and had the necessary know-how to produce these materials in best way. Similarly, there was created the entrepreneurship incubation model in TOOLS project to support the start and development of micro and small businesses. These examples are showing the good capacity of such projects and networks to complement the existing practices offered by the state.

Analyses of the best practices that are currently presented led to the following suggestions that are key points for sustainable development of rural areas:

- Acknowledge the good practices and local initiation for the development of rural areas and solving the problems in local level.
- Create the appropriate support system for rural entrepreneurs, take into consideration the needs of different target groups and branches of entrepreneurship
- Support the activities that promotes local culture and traditions, people are strongly bonded with their home place in rural area and want to let the local heritage to live.
- Develop and support the cooperation in every level and between different stakeholders (intersectional and intrasectional cooperation), elaborate the different forms of cooperation
- Support the activities of raising visibility of rural life: role models, promotion of good examples, media overviews and studies
- Promote the benefits of rural life compared with urban life: ecological lifestyle, silence, close to the nature, calmness and health
- Different regions develop differently, that should be considered if implementing different regional policy actions
- Support the development of local infrastructure, especially in regions with high tourism potential
- Integrate the sustainable development education programme to the school curricula, to stress the need for cooperation between economic, social and environmental sector as the driving force for the development of the regions.

CASE STUDIES

Woods Crone Family Park

Main driving force: Enhancement in sustainable tourism development

Goal and targets: Promote natural healthy lifestyle in rural environment. Health tourism.

Network of local entrepreneurs. Sustainable development of rural areas

Time and place of activities: From 1999 until now; South-Estonia, Võru County

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Results, lessons learned, best practices, barriers, constraints

Woods Crone Family Park consists of nine rural settlements in South-Estonia that are making cooperation with each other. Each of them has a specific role, for example there is a bee yard in one farm, others are keeping horses, thirds are having a bakery and fourths are offering the sauna services. Every farm is developing its own speciality, but for marketing and advertising they are using the common brand – Woods Crone Family Park. Together they are organising health holidays separately for men and women and children, giving advises about healthy food, natural medicine and herbs. In last few years the ecological products of the Family Park have been very successful, for example they are offering handmade soaps, sauna honey and other kind of body care products, but also sweets, for example candies made with fir thorns.

Developing the common enterprise started in 1999, when the hostess of the Family Park Irje Karjus had moved to the village and tried to involve others in the area. In the beginning they were quite sceptical, how to turn simple everyday life to entrepreneurship. The idea seemed greasy in two ways; the idea of entrepreneurship was very unusual for rural people and especially to start it in the “middle of nowhere”. The houses needed renovation, many nearby places were out of order, but step by step each member of the network started with its own enterprise with a common goal – to serve the tourists and to offer them the pure nature of rural life. Every member of the network tells now that there had happened nothing without a inspiring leader who pushed the others to the action.

In the beginning it was also hard to find money for investments. Many things in the network have been improved with the money from different projects, later all the profits were invested back. Now the members of the network feel that it has become easier, but still for writing the projects, there is needed a lot of time and money that has to be taken from work with tourists. Anyway, if you have already proved yourself, it is easier to make further steps and get acknowledged.

Health tourism has gained popularity very quickly in Estonia. Last years have raised the popularity of rural life and its benefits compared with urban life. Members of the Family Park have seen many times, how visitors reassess their attitudes towards natural environment, food and even themselves. Tackling stereotypes and changing the way of thinking are the most important results in work of the Family Park.

Greatest success factor is the cooperation between entrepreneurs. Every single entrepreneur can develop his own speciality, but together they can offer more complete and interesting tourism package. Experiences have proved the benefits of cooperation: common marketing

helps to spare money from advertising, larger amount of services is available and survival of both entrepreneurs and their families in marginal rural region is ensured.

And in many ways the network of Family Park have developed the rural life. Entrepreneurs of the network are active members of the local rural community, organising different activities that are supporting the development of local area. In the total urbanisation process, they have proved the possible ways to “survive” in rural area, to have a job and income, place for their children to grow up and life in natural environment.

Environmental Education Centre Ökokratt

Main driving force: Environmental consequences of rural development efforts

Goal and targets: Environmental education. Raise awareness about ecological use of nature and protection of environment in cooperation with municipalities, schools and educational networks in local area. Organise thematic activities for children and young people. Sustainable development of rural areas

Time and place of activities: From 1999 until now, North-Estonia, Harju County

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Results, lessons learned, best practices, barriers, constraints

Ökokratt was established with the goal to raise people’s awareness about environmental problems and to promote ecological lifestyle. After some time, the organisation’s main activities became addressed to the children in local places, because the experiences showed that children could easily influence the environmental behaviour of their parents, relatives, teachers and other adults. Probably the reaction of mother-father or aunt-uncle will be completely different, if the remark about their behaviour is coming from five or ten years old boy or girl and this kind of remark is going to be remembered for a long time.

In the beginning there was a lack of awareness about environmental issues in general. People’s mindsets were concentrated on consumption rather than saving the nature. Like one of the organisation leaders said: “It all seemed so far away, some bull fight of greenies”. Knowledge that the environment is everywhere and how the elements of environment are intertwined has come with time. Now many people are using the ecological lifestyle and in this sense it has become trendy, that is even seen in work with children.

Ökokratt has organised many activities for children and young people connected with environmental issues: holiday camp in nature, essay contest, noise conference, photo contest, eco(logical) dance festival and so on. In cooperation with teachers and activity leaders there has been conducted environmental projects in schools. The slogan of Ökokratt says: Enlighten yourself!, which means that everybody has to notice the current environmental situation and know how to make things better. Logo of Ökokratt consists of an electric bulb where inside lays the fir tree, it symbolises the fragile nature and all that is alive in it and has to be protected. Besides visual side there are used conversation workshops, posters, interactive forums for exchange of information and raising the knowledge. The partners and support organisations for Ökokratt activities are

Environmental Investment Centre, State Forest Management Centre, State Nature Conservation Centre and Estonian Energy.

Since 2003 Ökokratt is also hosting a project named Environmental Tent. The project's aim is to raise the environmental awareness of the people and to spread sustainable life-style and way of thinking. The tent is presented in various fairs and outdoor events all over Estonia. The main focus is on environment, there are offered interesting and educating activities to different target groups: games, plays, handicraft possibilities, opportunities to test your knowledge in quizzes, listen to lectures and presentations. This event allows companies to present their environmental friendly products or services. There is an opportunity to get acquainted with hobby associations and in case of interest also to join them. Under the same name – Environmental Tent, there is also environmental broadcast in radio every week.

As the organisation's functioning depends on the project money, there exists a strong need for experienced and competent project managers. The circle of people with valuable knowledge is small, so sometimes it is haltering the organisation's activities. On the other side, it is positive, that members of the organisation are learning with children and new leaders can grow out from new generation. The great value is the participation of local people in the organisation's activities. Teachers and activity leaders both in schools and in community are ready to work with the programmes that Ökokratt offers.

The most important result for the organisation is the exciting the interest of children and young people towards environmental issues. To do that, you need highly motivated team members. The synergy between actors and accompanied partners has created good results. If the children get the knowledge about environmental problems and possible solutions already in their early age, there is a hope, that it will make them more responsible and caring in their adulthood. As well, children are very interested in extra activities parallel with school curricula or hobby activities outside the school. The activities help the children to spend their free time in useful way.

Seto Handicraft Assembly

Main driving force: Empowerment of local rural communities, their cultural diversity and traditions

Goal and targets: Promote the traditions of Seto handicraft and culture. Develop entrepreneurship in rural areas to support the viability of old handicraft traditions. Sustainable development of rural areas

Time and place of activities: From 2006 until now; South-Estonia, Põlva County, Võru County

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Results, lessons learned, best practices, barriers, constraints

Setomaa is located in south-east part of Estonia, near the Russian border and is historically in complicated situation due to its location in the borderline between Estonia and Russia. Local people have always admired their local culture and traditions and tried to hold them in live. Seto Handicraft Assembly allies entrepreneurs, NGOs and individuals who are

making handicraft in Setomaa. There are about 40 members in the organisation who are all from different parts of Setomaa. The organisation have created a database of handcrafters, created common foreign marketing output for entrepreneurs, co-ordinates the cooperation between handcrafters, tourism entrepreneurs, museum and other partners who are contributing to the preparations of the brand mark for Setomaa. The organisation promotes and supports the entrepreneurship using local resources for sustainable development and support of local culture.

Since 2006 Seto Handicraft Assembly has created the advising system for local textile handicraft and architecture. The main reason for creation of appropriate advising system is to reanimate the old traditions that have been vanished with time. For example the national clothes have lost their importance as everyday clothes and are used in special events (as for example national song festivals) nowadays. Therefore, the preparation of national clothes has downsized and sometimes even forgotten by the handcrafters. But the old things have had been worn out, so who can make new ones? How to make new things so, that these are carrying the respect to the old? How to go on and carry the skills on to the future? These questions need to be answered and the organisation offers possibilities for that. Another part of advising system is the renovation of old houses in sense of traditions. Consultancy in architecture, natural materials and evaluation of the state of old houses is offered to preserve the old facilities for living and to save the traditional rural villages.

Seto Handicraft Assembly has organised different activities: cooperation between handcrafters, common visits to the national fairs as well as to the events abroad to introduce the local culture and products, training courses, practical study days (tsõõriklaud) for learning to prepare a certain piece of the local product.

The organisation's development has been very fast and now the leaders stress the need for more sustained and balanced growth. Implementation of projects takes time and energy, in cooperation you need to find an agreement between different needs of the partners. Sometimes the project leaders have felt a lack of support from national managing authorities, especially in questions related with project reporting and accounting.

The main success factor has been in cooperation on every level. Besides cooperation between members of the organisation, there has been many links with other entrepreneurs, local governors, museums, culture promoters and so on. At the same time, local people have had the possibility to make things that they like and therefore to support the development of the region, create more jobs and to preserve the desirable living environment in marginal rural area.

Terra Maritima – Land by the Sea

Main driving force: Enhancement in sustainable tourism development

Goal and targets: Develop the tourism area in western Estonia in cooperation with municipalities, entrepreneurs and local people. Promote untouched and diverse nature in local area. Nature tourism. Sustainable development of rural areas

Time and place of activities: From 2005 until now; West-Estonia, Pärnu County, Lääne County, Islands

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Results, lessons learned, best practices, barriers, constraints

Activities of the organisation started in 2005, common tourism development plan was adopted in 2004 accompanied with active people from six parishes from western part of Estonia: Lihula, Hanila, Ridala, Martna, Koonga and Varbla and over 40 tourism entrepreneurs with different fields of activities.

Terra Maritima is the tourism development network with different stakeholders as municipalities, entrepreneurs, NGOs and local people in West-Estonia and Islands. Common tourism development consists of the developing unified product in the district and diversification of the product portfolio, common marketing of the district both on internal and external markets and optimisation of the effects, accompanying tourism. In 2004 partners of Terra Maritima compiled a common tourism development plan, which states that the area should become a unified tourism space, where visitors can find preserved clean nature and heritage landscapes, well-developed tourism entrepreneurship and good living environment for the local people. On the other hand, the network is planning to keep under control the possible threats of exceeding the environment's tolerance limit to avoid the overuse of nature.

Financing its activities the network has got money from different sources. The partners of the network (municipalities) are covering the organisation's regular costs. Project money (European Structural Funds, INTERREG programmes) have been used for development of the region: development plan, nature guides and other printed materials, direction marks, courses for local tourism entrepreneurs, participation in internal and external tourism fairs.

Cooperation between different partners has been successful. Every local municipality does not have enough resources (money, competence and people) to develop the area alone. Bigger tourism centres like Pärnu and Haapsalu are in better position, but to ensure the balanced development of the whole region, it is good to make cooperation. It is not enough if only a tourism specialist in municipality is making efforts; the leaders of the organisation have stressed the necessity of participation of local people, who had been involved from the beginning into the process of strategic planning and now serving the tourists. It is their living environment and they have a right to say a word in issues of their home place.

Constraints for actions have been coming from difficulties of regulations. NGO that is acting in public interests cannot get money from each fund. Also, the co-financing rates are sometimes too high for a non-profit organisation. Internal constraints are mainly connected with infrastructure: bad condition of local roads, lack of recreational infrastructure and lack of people educated in tourism service field. In the beginning it was the problem of too big expectations from some tourism entrepreneurs, who hoped from the new organisation to "solve all their problems". Now when they have gone through common strategic planning process, they have understood their role in the organisation: to support the development of the whole region, so there would be space for nature and also for sustainable, environment friendly entrepreneurship.

Re-Use Centre

Main driving force: Waste management systems in the rural areas – waste prevention and minimization, reuse and recycling and environmentally sound disposal facilities

Goal and targets: Struggle with environmental degradation and overconsumption. Social enterprise that collects, fixes and re-sells used goods thereby financing environmental education. In addition to promoting sustainable lifestyle, re-use centres aids fire victims, child support centres and low-income families. Sustainable development of rural areas

Time and place of activities: From 2004 until now; whole Estonia

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Results, lessons learned, best practices, barriers, constraints

First re-use centres in Estonia were created in the Interreg IIIA project “New life” in cooperation with Finnish re-use organisations and women’s unions. The aim of the project was to promote the waste recycling possibilities, change people’s consumption habits. For example there were organised a contest for innovative ideas “New life for the old things” and arranged some re-use training courses in Estonia and Finland. The formation of re-use centre in Tallinn is one of the outcomes of the project. The organisation was established by three Estonian NGOs, including Good Deed Foundation, Estonian Fund for Nature and Caritas. First re-use centre was created in 2004. Later on, the same concept was followed and re-use centres opened in some other regions in Estonia. Re-use centres are located in the biggest towns in Estonia and also some places in rural areas.

Re-use centres have opened several shops, where they sell collected and fixed furniture, clothes, toys, books and tableware. On Saturdays there are organised open air shops for those who want to sell or buy old things. Collected things have to be clean and in good condition that these can be reused. The main problem is that sometimes there are brought things in rather bad condition, broken or dirty, people sometimes think that somebody may need them, but the basic rule of re-use centre is that they do not collect broken or dirty stuff.

The other branch of the activities of re-use centres are the charity donations and supporting the environmental education for children and adults. For example there have been the projects named “Green classroom” and renovated and opened The Textile Centre, where children and adults can make new thing from old. Educational activities have been held also in kindergartens, excursions, fairs and open air festivals. In cooperation with other charity organisations, there is offered support for the families with many children, fire victims and low-income families.

Voluntary work is the big part in re-use centre activities. Volunteers are working in shops, they are collecting, sorting and fixing the goods and assist the customers. They can have the feeling of making some good deed and to support the good practice for environment. For example, there are working about 70 volunteers in Tallinn Re-Use Centre at the time.

The main idea of re-use centres is to change people’s consumption habits. We as consumers are making choices every day, but how much do we think about the influences to our choices like advertisements and marketing tricks? If we can actualize our needs more and acknowledge the meaning of our lifestyle, it has huge influence to the environment. Re-use centres promote the sustainable lifestyle: to avoid over-consumption, be aware of the

influence of our choices, re-use things and help to recycle things that are not needed any more. The example of re-use centre has proved, that the democratic, self-budgeting model is possible to achieve. They are able to earn their own money to invest it to the environmental education practices for young people.

Ecological producing in Saaremaa (Saare Mahe)

Main driving force: Measures taken to diversify agricultural production systems including development of new markets for value-added agricultural production

Goal and targets: Popularise ecological agricultural producing. Promote the ecological food and lifestyle. Give added value to agricultural products and find new markets for these products. Sustainable development of rural areas. Ecological food restaurant opened in Saaremaa that is appeared to be the first one in Estonia.

Time and place of activities: From 2006 until now: West-Estonia, Saaremaa Island

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Results, lessons learned, best practices, barriers, constraints

Ecological agricultural producing was used in Saaremaa already 15 years, when in 2006 the group of local farmers established an organisation of Saare Mahe (NGO). The organisation was needed because of more stable development of local agricultural environment. Since, the producers of Saaremaa were one of the best in Estonia, but missed the output for common marketing of their products. At the same time, they needed for stronger promotion of Saaremaa traditional heritage that is quite unique not only because of its isolated location, but also because of traditions.

For present day, the organisation has about 40 members. There are over 140 ecological producers in Saaremaa, but the manager of the organisation says that this is not the target to involve all the producers as members of the organisation, so far there are only active and motivated members in the network.

The biggest problem is to find the finances for the development of the organisation. For example, the organisation has taken a loan and somebody from the board had to vouch personally for that loan. Personal liability and responsibility for the organisation is something very new in Estonia and predicates the unlimited trust and support between members of the organisation. Still, the stress that something might go wrong, stays, as was told by the leader of the organisation. There is the strong need for the liability fund for NGOs in Estonia to support the loan taking and diminish the risks.

Readiness for cooperation and trust between members has grown with time. In the beginning it was quite hard to find common motivation to start. Now the trust between members and towards leaders has let the organisation to develop. Still sometimes there is a lack of common input, because of farmers' strong concentration to their own enterprise.

The leaders of the organisation think that the results of the organisation's two years work are enormous. Even there had been done far more than was expected. The main aim of the organisation is to support the local ecological production and the value of rural life. The organisation has opened a restaurant Saaremaa Organic Kitchen in Kuressaare that is the

first organic food restaurant in Estonia. Another branch of activities is connected with adding the extra value to the agricultural products, for example in products list there are jams and juices from berries and fruits, handmade soaps, spices, different foods made from lamb and beef etc. New receipts and products are the important part of product development. There are prepared the instruction materials for ecological handling of the agricultural products, which is the first time for elaboration this kind of material in Estonia. These materials are publicly available in the website.

All the members of the organisation have worked with great passion to develop the ecological way of thinking and to support it with local products. The members have not only been working for their own benefit, but for the extension of ecological and environment friendly way of thinking in society. The viability of rural life depends on the people who are living in countryside. Therefore it is important to find the people who are motivated to do something for the development of local communities.

Along the Borderline (Piiri Peal)

Main driving force: Empowerment of local rural communities, their cultural diversity and traditions

Goal and targets: Promote the culture and traditions of Russian old-believers in the area of Lake Peipus. Develop the area's potentiality for tourism. Support the creation of businesses in the area. Support the extension of local traditions among young people. Encourage the openness and tolerance towards other cultures in society; develop cooperation between different regions in Estonia. Sustainable development of rural areas

Time and place of activities: From 2004 until now. East-Estonia, Tartu County, Jõgeva County, Ida-Viru County

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Results, lessons learned, best practices, barriers, constraints

NGO Piiri Peal was established to preserve the culture of old-believers in Lake Peipus region. Fulfilling this target the organisation has written many projects and main results are connected with project activities. Over 500 people have got trainings in entrepreneurship, handicraft, introduction of elements in local culture etc. Together with local community there are renovated local facilities, organised study trips to Sankt Petersburg and Novgorod to exchange experiences with Russian tourism and culture development centres. Local people have participated in renovation of old buildings, in the development of old-believers museum in Varnja, together there has been written projects for the development of local area. There is established a local handicraft association – Lukaruka, bought sewing machines and other handicraft equipment. After several years of work, the NGO has got a good position in Estonia and the respect towards non-Estonian community has grown.

Different projects have had different experiences. Lessons are learned in cooperation, motivation practices, common development and inclusion. The community consists of people with diverse cultural background, which makes cooperation quite complicated. Because of the language barrier many people from the local population does not follow the Estonian information channels and therefore it is difficult for them to know about the regulations or actions in Estonia.

Most serious problem is the aging population in the area; young people are going away to the towns and come back only in summertime for vacation. Absence of young people diminishes the future perspectives and makes traditions inherit to the next generation impossible.

Many projects had needed longer implementation period of time as the local community is quite closed for the outsiders and new ideas. For example, selling the houses or real estate to the outsiders is very rare in this area and most aspects of life depend on the old traditions. Most projects have been carried out with the help of local key persons who are explaining the benefits of the project and cooperation to the others in local area.

The development of tourism sector needs also time and change of attitudes. Local people are not used to present their activities or traditional heritage and even more, to ask money for that. Although Russian people are very hostile and cooperative, breaking the old conservatism and cultural barriers need time and positive influence from the good examples. Still, the local people are very interested in development their area with help of organisations and persons who can act as intermediaries between local community and Estonian publicity. Writing the projects for local development, exchanging the information, visiting other areas in Estonia, supporting the local activities, presenting good examples of local life are the possibilities to integrate and achieve closer connections between different cultures.

TOOLS – New strategies and tools for development of business environment in marginal rural areas

Main driving force: Measures to improve and develop infrastructure, to enhance distribution to markets, to enhance productivity and incomes in rural area

Goal and targets: Improve regional development policies and instruments by developing innovative tools for supporting entrepreneurship and maximising sustainable use of nature resources and human potential in marginal rural areas via inter-regional cooperation. Project partners were from Finland, Estonia and Italy. Sustainable development of rural areas

Time and place of activities: 2005-2007; South-Estonia, Põlva County

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Results, lessons learned, best practices, barriers, constraints

The focus of the project was to stimulate rural entrepreneurship by creating, testing and developing innovative strategies and tools for supporting micro and small businesses, especially for less competitive persons as young people, women and unemployed persons. Starting points for the activities were as follows: limits of the business environment (distance from centres, markets, low density area, limited local market), agriculturally oriented local economic structure, lower business activity and rather high structural employment in the region. Project had four partners in Estonia: Põlva County Development Centre, Rāpina Business Incubation Centre, Põlva Town Government and Põlva Municipality Government.

The project has created a combined model—extended support services based on the needs of a start-up entrepreneur. In comparison with traditional incubation services (consulting, physical environment), there is offered various additional support services: business training program, support for product development and marketing as well as opportunities to develop foreign contacts. The key principle is focusing on the participants' needs—support offered by the center should meet the needs of the start-up entrepreneurs (including rural operators). Centres started offering set of services to the entrepreneurs: trainings, consulting, support for product development and marketing and office spaces. The main principle was to “incubate” the entrepreneur and to “grow” it up. There was necessary to follow certain rules: consulting is a continuous process, which means that “diagnosis” and “treatment” must be organised in one place, activities have to be based on entrepreneur's needs and phase of business activity and no area of business cannot be excluded. Formations of new enterprises (18 new enterprises were formed), creation of new jobs (33 new jobs were created) and product development are the direct results of the project. Other types of results created the framework for the sustainability in the future. Role models and positive drive from the group members, social contacts, and growth of self-confidence and status of entrepreneurs are the results that are hard to measure, but form the social capital that is important for having success in rural area. After one year of the project, the connections between people who participated in the project have remained active, the created enterprises are still working, in this sense the project has created sustainability for the local development.

Project leaders learned how to build up an effective support system. The most valuable was the transfer of the experiences and methods of entrepreneurship support system between project partners. Some of this knowledge had been written to the book published at the end of the project, but some of it, is still waiting for implementation in future projects, it is like tacit knowledge. For project promotion were used: project's website (regularly updated), presentations, press-releases, media articles and promotional materials.

Talking about the constraints, the project leader imagined, if she would have possibility to start over, what could be made differently. One of the lessons that was learned, was the entrepreneurs' need for advising services in much longer period of time. Differences in phase of development and branch of activity of entrepreneurs caused difficulties in planning common trainings and seminars, but on the other hand helped to form the network, where more experienced entrepreneurs gave advises to the less-experienced ones and one could find a partner for cooperation in other business area.

EcoFood Network

Main driving force: Measures to achieve food security and sustainable agriculture, promotion of organic farming, improved access for producers to local markets

Goal and targets: Promote the ecological food consumption. Develop the farmers' cooperation in ecological producing, technology and common marketing activities. Make cooperation between farmers for common branding, marketing and promoting the ecological products. Sustainable development of rural areas

Time and place of activities: From 2005 until now; South-Estonia, Võru County.

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Results, lessons learned, best practices, barriers, constraints

The idea of ecologic food network came up in spring 2006, when farmers from Võru region participated in project financed by British Embassy in Tallinn. There was one training course, where Scottish experts talked about ecological food production, “art design food”, marketing, networking and cooperation. Many of the listeners got excited and decided to form a network of ecological producers in South-Estonia.

For two years the network acted only informally. The farmers collected their products and sold them in fairs and markets under common name and introduction of their home region. Later on, network created the possibility to buy their goods via internet. Customers sent their orders with e-mails and goods from different farmers were delivered to their home in one package. Finally, at the end of 2008 Ecological Food Network in South-Estonia was officially registered and the main aim is to unify the farmers who want to develop the cooperation in ecological producing, technology and common marketing activities. The network consists of 15 members of farmers and food handling enterprises. Members of the network have got regular trainings in handling the food products, product development, packaging and other kind of necessary topics. The “food circle” as they call the virtual selling system is still working, now there are almost 200 customers in nearby towns, 50-60 of them are loyal customers.

Unfortunately, there are some factors that are haltering the activities of the network. Conservative ways of thinking, low self-confidence and fear to make mistakes are reflecting the attitudes of rural entrepreneurs. Micro-entrepreneurship is determined by the attitudes carried by its owners, but changing the attitudes is a long-term process and strongly tied with personal experience. Soviet time has formed the negative attitudes towards cooperation that is one reason why creation of cooperative activities takes a lot of time and energy. One of the barriers is also entrepreneurs’ low investment capability. Members of the food network are worrying about badly regulated food handling system and in the future will expect the improvement of laws concerning the producing and handling organic food.

Talking about success factors, there has been good cooperation between farmers, common goals and good will to fulfil them by each member of the network. Positive experiences are giving strength. Respect towards ecological producing creates the positive imago for the whole region. If the region is acknowledged as friendly and natural environment for living, it benefits for the local people as comfortable and natural living place, for tourists who value the quality of natural spaces and also for the local entrepreneurs. In this sense the networking creates positive impact in larger scale.

FEM – Female Entrepreneurs’ Meetings in the Baltic Sea Region

Main driving force: Measures to improve and develop infrastructure, to enhance distribution to markets, to enhance productivity and incomes in rural area

Goal and targets: Create a sustainable structure for the support of women’s entrepreneurship and women’s active participation in labour market in rural areas. Sustainable development of rural areas. Exchange of best practices through transnational cooperation. Project partners were from Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Sweden and Norway, Kaliningrad and Belarus regions were included as follow up partners.

Time and place of activities: 2004-2007, whole Estonia
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Results, lessons learned, best practices, barriers, constraints

The background of the project is coming from the fact that women need more support and encouragement to start with own businesses, especially in rural areas they have to overcome barriers in themselves and among their relatives and business partners to be accepted as equals. Women commonly operate and prefer small businesses in traditional female oriented sectors like agriculture, tourism or handicraft and also raise the social value of entrepreneurship: create jobs for local people, make cooperation in networks and support the quality of natural rural life. Entrepreneurship support system offered by state does not fully cover the needs of women entrepreneurs. Hence, there was a need for more appropriate support system for women.

Creation of the transnational network of resource centres for women, mentorship program for women entrepreneurs, network credit groups, and internationalisation of women's entrepreneurship were the direct results of the project. In Estonia, there were created five regional resource centres, mentor groups and micro credit groups, conducted a survey of female entrepreneurship with 600 respondents and prepared a strategy and action plan for development of female entrepreneurship. Furthermore, we can talk about accumulated results in Estonia. Developing the support structure for women from 'zero ground' meant big success – about 800 women were activated and 100 new enterprises were created. They learned to make cooperation, support each other and to develop towards win-win situation. Good network of national and transnational project teams were formed – commitment, motivation and passion created synergy and good results. Experiences and methods that can be used in future projects. Project had five partners in Estonia: NGO ETNA in Estonia, Estonian Union of Women Entrepreneurs, Estonian Village Movement Kodukant, Kodukant in Võru County and Estonian Regional and Local Development Agency.

Exchange of information in the project was organised in different ways. One of the best practices for the project was the PR-specialist who was hired into the project. Regular media communication, sending press-releases, newsletters and information about events ensured very good visibility for the project. Other forms of communication and presentation of the project were promotion materials, regularly updated website, presentation of entrepreneur of the month and advisor of the month on international website. With time there were created the network of contact persons of different authorities in ministries, agencies and municipalities, who were invited to the project's events and who were kept in track with project activities.

The main constraints of the project were connected with financing. Firstly, as the Estonian lead partner of the project was NGO, there were many problems in finding the co-financing money. Loans from the banks and other sources, personal liability of the members of the NGO were the keywords that characterise the implementation of the project in Estonia but also in some other countries. Re-financing projects are quite complicated for the NGO, if the payments from the fund are postponed because of long bureaucratic procedures or some of the partners being late with reports; it diminishes the organisation's financial liquidity and incur the extra costs for the organisation (loan rates).

In result of the projects women entrepreneurs got more confidence and raised their activity not only in their entrepreneurship, but also in local and regional development. Many of them became elected members of the local municipalities and started with activities to develop the life in their villages or home places. In this sense project raised people's entrepreneurial attitude in general and not only for working in their enterprises, but for attending on the larger stage.