

# Volunteering and local democracy in the context of Finlands recent local government reorganisation.

Christell Åström  
Secretary General of the Finnish Rural Policy Committee  
[christell.astrom@tem.fi](mailto:christell.astrom@tem.fi)

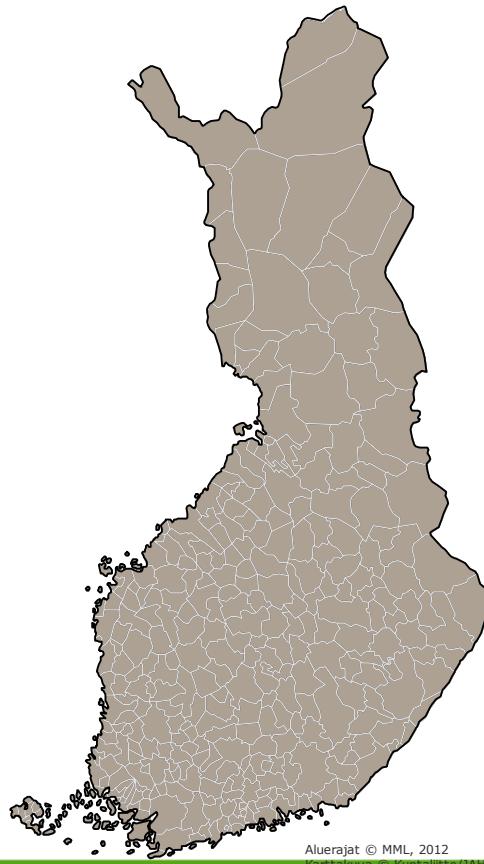


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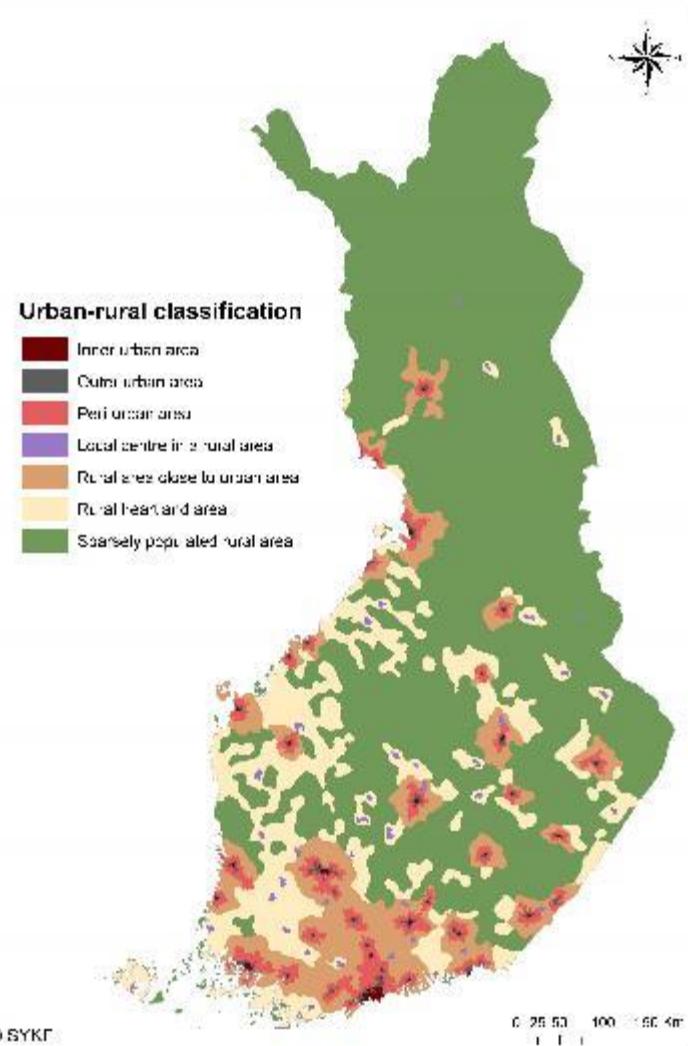
# Local governments in Finland

- Local authorities have strong self-government, based on local democracy and decision making, and the right to levy taxes. Local authorities are broadly responsible for the provision of basic services to citizens.
- A process of local government restructuring is under way in Finland. It involves a reform of the Act on Municipal structure, social and health care reform, reform of the subsidy system, overall reform of the Local government Act and the mapping out of local government obligations.
- During 2007-2013 there has been 69 municipality mergers. In 2014 there are 320 municipalities, 16 of which are located in Åland islands. Still, more than half of the municipalities have less than 6000 inhabitants.
- The aim is to maintain the Nordic welfare model and to develop the entire country, while respecting unique local characteristics.



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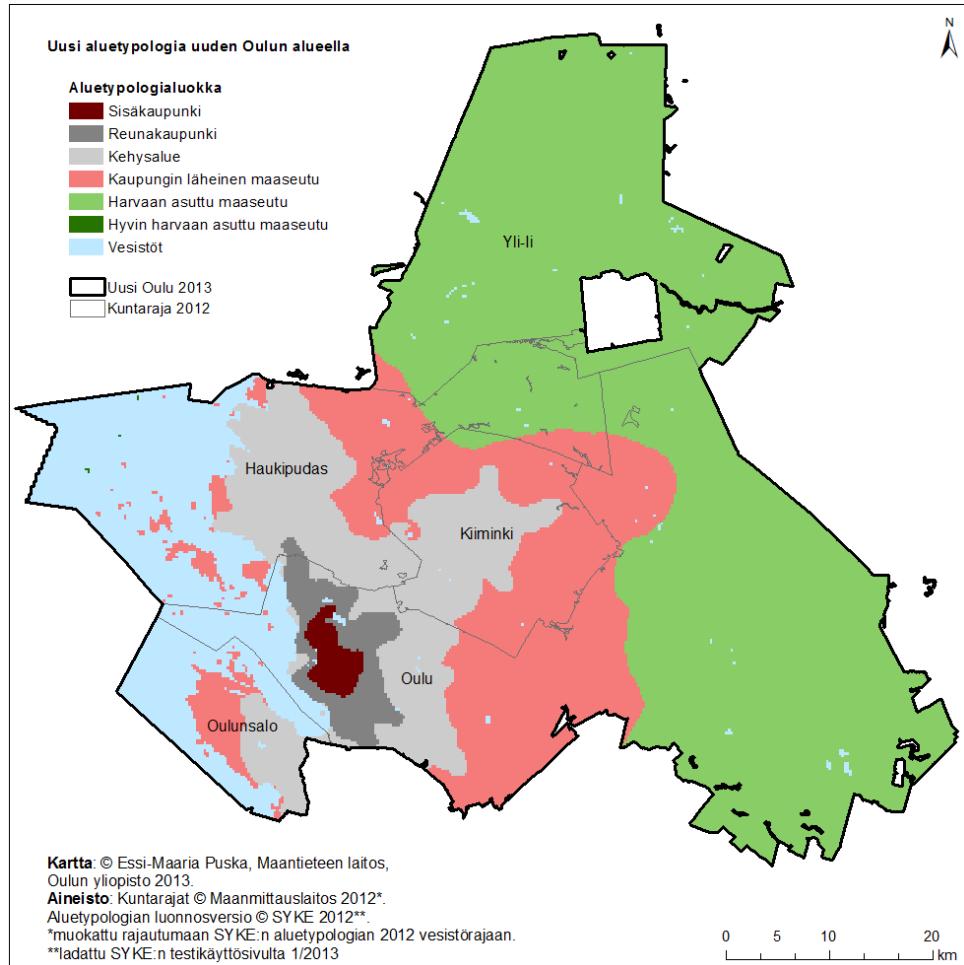
# Challenges



- Population density is 17 inhabitants per square kilometre.
- Approximately 31% of the inhabitants live in rural areas, which cover around 95% of the country.
- An ageing population, culminating in rural areas.
- The migration to cities.
- The challenge is how to keep the rural areas populated, how to keep the local municipalities and communities vital....



# New municipalities are often large and consists of different area types (for example City of Oulu)



The questions raised during the ongoing local government reorganisation

- How to ensure that the areas are developed equally?
- How to ensure that the people in rural areas are equally heard in democracy issues?
- How to ensure that the people in rural areas also receive local service?

# The Challenge of local democracy

- The provisions afforded by the The Local Government Act have not been utilised to their full potential. Compared to other Nordic countries, the Finnish law is especially empowering.
- Despite of this, practices associated with local democracy and direct citizen involvement are quite low in Finnish municipalities.
- In the ongoing reform of the Local Government Act local democracy citizen participation and inclusion is strongly emphasized.
  - With increasing size of municipalities and the fall in number of elected representatives, those in decision-making positions are fewer, they have more power and responsibility than before.
  - The thought of the representative democracy system taking care of everything and everyone is crumbling when municipalities are growing larger.
  - Not only a legislative issue but also one of attitudes.  
**The changing of attitudes is the greatest challenge.**



# Voluntary work in rural areas

- Finland is the promised land for non-governmental organisations and associations. Strong tradition of voluntary work (talkoot)
- For many associations the most important task is to increase a sense of community in a region in the form of voluntary work.
  - It can be helping elderly people in their homes, arranging village festivals, providing some service for villages, building broadband ...
- In a welfare state the responsibility for municipalities to organise and create services is important.
- It is essential, especially in times of strained economic situations, to underline the difference between organisations providing some municipal service and getting paid for it and the more traditional voluntary work. **We need both of them.**



# The Village Action Association of Finland - working both on national and local level

- The Village Action Association of Finland promotes and develops village action and locally initiated rural development on the national level. The Association is an umbrella organisation for regional and local actors in rural development.
- There are more than 3000 village associations and 56 LAG's functioning all around the country.
- An example of voluntary work and the benefits changed into euros: 3100 registered village associations x 10 pers./association x approxim. 100 h /person = **3,1 million of voluntary workhours** + 900 village committees x 5 pers./committee x approxim. 100 hours/person = **0,45 million of voluntary workhours**. Furthermore voluntary work done in villageprojects is estimated to **1,0 million** of voluntary workhours.

In all; voluntary work in village action:

$$3,1 + 0,45 + 1,0 = 4,55 \text{ million voluntary workhours}$$

In euros: 4,55 million h x 10€ = **45,5 million €**



# Finnish LEADER - method for local democracy

- In Finland, Leader local action groups (LAGs) develop rural areas by funding local rural development projects and supporting local enterprises.
- Finnish Leader action groups are registered non-governmental associations (NGOs)
- Municipalities, associations and local rural residents must be equally represented in the decision-making boards of the associations.
- There are 56 LAGs in Finland, covering the whole country.
- Total public funding for the LAGs over the years 2007-2013 amounted to €252.72 million, varying between €2.5 million and €6.8 million per LAG.
- Leader groups can be seen as developers in a **broad aspect**. They are representing local democracy in rural areas and through them is canalized a significant amount of voluntary work.



# What is the Rural Policy Committee?

- Rural policy in Finland is characterised by a network-like approach, where rural areas are developed at different levels in cooperation among public, private and the third sector.
- At the national level, the central actor preparing and implementing rural policy is the Rural Policy Committee YTR, which is the horizontal cooperation body appointed by the Government.
- YTR has 36 members and alternates of the Committee from 30 organisations, 6th term 2013–2015.
- Secretary General and Secretariat (20 members)
- The Government sets the tasks, members, and term of office to YTR. Its membership includes representatives of different ministries, regional government, R&D organisations, as well as organisations and associations. Emphasis is placed on the governance perspective.



# Rural Policy Network and Working Methods

**Government**  
Ministerial Group  
on Rural Policy

**Parliament**  
Rural Network  
of the  
Parliament

**Rural Policy Committee (YTR)**  
Members and alternates of YTR  
Secretariat      Secretary-General

**Partners of YTR**  
Island Committee  
Village Action Association of  
Finland  
Association of Rural  
Researchers and Developers  
Network of Rural Professors

**Other programmes to promote  
Rural and regional development**  
EU Programmes  
National regional  
development programmes  
Regional programmes  
Municipal rural programmes  
Village plans

**Working methods of YTR**  
Rural Policy Programme  
Preparation of Government's rural  
policy outlines  
Implementation and follow-up of  
Government and Rural Policy  
Committee programmes  
Theme and work groups  
National rural research  
and development projects  
Rural proofing  
Communication  
Negotiations and seminars

**International  
cooperation**  
EU, OECD, Nordic  
Council of Ministers,  
development cooperation,  
bilateral cooperation  
several international  
organisations

# The Countryside of Possibilities – Rural Policy Programme 2014–2020

- Rural Policy Programme is the operational programme of YTR. It sets out the objectives and measures for rural development.
  - The overall programme is implemented in the context of resources in accordance with state budgetary framework decisions and government finances. It is not a financing programme; rather, it seeks to affect the operations of different sectors so that the countryside would be better taken into account.
  - The strategic approach of the Rural Policy Programme consists of a place-based policy, which recognizes the diversity of places and takes into account the starting points and needs of places.
  - The overall programme has five main themes, for which 63 concrete measures have been drawn up.



# Realizing the 6th Rural Policy programme

- In the implementation of the overall programme, the main approach is thematic networks which contribute to the realisation of goals and measures.
- In support of the realisation of each overall programme theme, a network whose coordination activity is partially funded by YTR has been assembled. Now in the 6<sup>th</sup> term, there are a total of 5 theme networks + 2 horizontal network
  - Housing and services- “Quality of life network”
  - Participation and Local democracy
  - Infrastructure
  - Living and know-how
  - Ecosystem services
- Horizontal networks
  - Sparsely populated rural areas
  - Identity based network
- Forms of work vary: statements, seminars, political influence, publications



# Participation and local democracy - theme

- *The aim is that by 2020 local democracy will function well, there will be an active civic society, cooperation between civic actors and municipalities will be smooth, and local development will be strong. Residents of rural areas and rural communities participate in and make an impact on the development of society and their local environment, as well as on the associated decision-making process, in a multi-faceted way.*
- *11 measures in the programme*
- *The most important right now is to promote the implementation of local democracy and to strengthen the local and national-level cooperation between civic actors and the public sector.*



# Realisation in practice

- A national coordination project concerning local democracy and changing structures of rural areas is under planning.
  - Communicating good examples, initiating discussions among citizenships, training
- Initiating pilot projects; mobile health-care service, combining private-public service.
- Influencing and opening the dialogue with politicians trying to change the legislation that is preventing good and innovative (also cost effective) praxis to be used in rural areas.
- The Rural Policy Committee is emphasizing the local associations important work for keeping the community vital and as a good place to live in.



# Thank you for your attention!



## Further information

- [www.ruralpolicy.fi](http://www.ruralpolicy.fi)
- [www.tem.fi/rural](http://www.tem.fi/rural)
- **Jaana Husu-Kallio**  
Permanent Secretary  
Chair of the Rural Policy Committee
- **Christell Åström**  
Rural Counsellor  
Secretary General of the Rural Policy Committee  
[christell.astrom@tem.fi](mailto:christell.astrom@tem.fi)

# Questions

## Local democracy

- How to develop local democracy and citizen participation on local level?
- How to ensure that people in rural and urban areas are equally heard in democracy issues?

## Local service

- How to ensure that people in rural areas also receive local services?
- How can and how should the local services be financed? (examples from different countries)

## Voluntary work

- How can people be encouraged to do voluntary work?
- What are the most important issues concerning voluntary work in rural areas?