



A study on state of the art of cultural
activities on the sparsely populated areas
in Finland

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1. The current culture policy in Finland with reference to the rural areas

What does the Finnish communes need *non-governmental organization* for? This question has been tackled in two large-scale analysis carried out in the spring of 2015, and the results reflect the growing need for cooperation and partnership.

In February-March Central Finland Community Support Association, the Council of Central Finland, HUMAK University of Applied Science and Central Finland Villages Association carried out an online survey for the communes in Central Finland. It examined what kind of co-operation and partnership the communes in Central Finland has got with the nearby NGO's, as well as asked about the potential of collaborates. The results were published in June.

Nationally, the collaboration between the Finnish communes and third sector, in turn, was explained in a survey by the Local and Regional Authorities, Civil Society Policy Advisory Board and the Kane Arena Civil Association. The results of that survey were announced at the Democracy Day seminar in Helsinki 13/10/2015.

Both reports, imply that the communes are welcoming cooperation with associations and organizations. Communes see NGO's as important partners, and recognize the importance of the work of the volunteers and organizations. In Central-Finland cooperation is carried out at present, especially with senior citizens-, residential-, youth-, sports- and village associations, whereas, for example patients' and multicultural organizations are just not listed. In the national survey, in turn, the social and health side rose a significant role in organizations mentioned by the partners in local government.

The communes in central Finland hope for more enhanced cooperation with NGO's in the future. Especially when it comes to service production. Also in the nationwide survey, production of public services emerged as a major issue, but the role of the third sector was seen alongside public services, not to replace them (Yhdistystori 2015.).

1.1 The authorities support for associations in North Karelia

One example of effective collaboration between authorities and NGO's in sparsely populated areas in Finland is the one in North Karelia, a region in eastern Finland. North Karelia's local authorities issued during 2014 the provincial associations a total of 6.7 million euros in the form of various grants and partnership agreements. About a thousand associations received grants. This is shown in the "Municipalities & Society allowances and co-operation in North Karelia 2014"-survey that was carried out by the North Karelia Villages Association. The report is the first comprehensive summary of the local NGO co-operation in North Karelia.

It appeared that there were big differences between different models of local government support. For example, the main general grants were distributed in the cities of Joensuu and Lieksa, and particularly in the social and health organizations the subsidies were significant. In third came Kontiolahti. Among the municipalities that showed the largest supported for the activities in the villages rose Joensuu, Ilomantsi and Kitee.

Finnish Association of Communes aims based on recent publications clearly to activate the communes. Ritva Pihlaja writes in her report, *Kolmas sektori ja julkinen valta (The third sector and the public authorities)*, that the ongoing change in the municipal and service structure have changed the cooperation quickly and this is why the communes do not have a clear picture of how to collaborate with the third sector. The problems are manifested in the projects for example in procurement, methods and operating grants. This would require a systematic and coordinated planning, based on the principles of the definition of co-operation. In 2010, about 30 percent of the communes were following some sort of NGO strategies. All of the communes that were investigated are located in the Finnish countryside (Vuoristo 2015, 59.).

2. Example of good practices

In order to clarify the choice of our examples of good practice, it is pertinent to briefly describe our organization.

The Finnish-Swedish Youth Association was established as a nonpolitical, national youth association in 1906 to advance the interests of the Finnish -Swedish (Swedish speaking people in Finland) youth associations.

Today the main mission is to give the member associations every kind of service;

- Information about youth work
- Service concerning amateur theatre
- Proposals of project activities
- Observe the economic support of government authorities and other important issues valid to activities for the members and young people
- Help the members to restore and keep the buildings of the local associations in shape

Among all the activities, theatre has become the most popular. FSU supports the theatre groups (about 100) with information, plays and copyrights among other things.

FSU wants young people to have a chance to lead active lives, get in contact with youth in other countries and to create knowledge about cooperation between organizations.

The members (district organizations) are:

- Nylands Svenska Ungdomsförbund r.f.NSU - 108 youthassociations
- Svenska Österbottens Ungdomsförbund SÖU r.f.- 106 youthassociations
- Åbolands Ungdomsförbund ÅUF r.f. - 31 youthassociations
- Ålands Ungdomsförbund r.f. ÅUF - 21 youthassociations

Since all district organizations have member organizations that are active in rural areas, it was natural to interview a member association from various district organization.

2.1 Fagerö Folkpark/Rangsby uf (Närpes, Ostrobothnia region in Western Finland)

Interview with the associations chairman Christina Enholm



1 The gate to the associations area in Närpes

Rangsby ungdomsförening r.f Fagerö is a youth association in Närpes that is operated voluntarily. They have about 200 members in the association. The most important part of the activities are the log dances that are organized in the summers by the pavilion which is beautifully situated by the sea. They have an average of about 1,200 visitors / dance. The association also arrange large flea markets, and the pavilion can be rented for weddings, family reunions and more. The association is very seasonal with limited operations during the winter months.

A challenge when being active in rural areas is that the distances become longer both in terms of the events visitors and goods to be transported to the site. Then again they think that the feeling of really being part of a community might be stronger in rural areas in comparison to associations in more urban areas. People feel that they are working for themselves and their own community and everyone is committed to 100 percent.

An example of activities that Rangsby uf have had, that have gathered a lot of people in their operating environment are the log dances. They organize 6 dances per summer. These usually attract about 1200 people. They also organize so called archipelago – flea markets that has had an increasing number of visitors in recent years. They usually have about 140 tables with vendors.

Still, they face some difficulties in their organization. As many others, they have difficulties getting the economy rolling. Someone must always find time to apply for grants and so on. Another challenge is the old association house that constantly require some form of renovation.

To further improve their operations, they would need more money. A lot of ideas fall because of financial reasons. They should extend the season to get better economy, this would require that they winter insulate the clubhouse, but they lack funds for renovation. They also need more voluntary workers. New projects are often costly in large associations, for that reason, they need bigger investments and more hands.

2.2 Skärитеatern (Närpes, Ostrobothnia region in Western Finland)

Interview with the associations chairman, Johanna Karhulahti



2 Picture from the associations venue, Brännkull during a play

Skärитеatern was founded in 1993 as an ambulant summer theatre. In 2013, the Association got its own venue, Brännkull that is located by the harbor in Replot. The association has about 25 active adult members and about 40 active children.

The chairman Johanna Karhulahti really like the fact that the association is active in a sparsely populated area. Everyone knows each other and supposedly it is difficult to determine if you hang out as members of the association or just as friends. In sparsely populated areas there is not much activity, so it is quite easy to gather people for various events. People simply seem to have nothing else to do.

One example of activities that Skärитеatern have had, that have gathered a lot of people in their operating environment are the summer theatres that attract the whole neighborhood. People who have moved away from the area will often travel back "home" for these events.

The main challenge that the association faces is the lack of people. There simply is not enough free hands.

The will is there, but there doesn't seem to be enough time to realize their ideas. They think that cooperation is crucial when you work in organizations in rural areas, and they always try to involve as many associations as possible in their projects.

2.3 UF: Kamraterna (Sipoo, Uusimaa region in Southern Finland)

Interview with associations chairman Niklas Lindqvist



3 The association house Träskberga

The association, UF: Kamraterna was founded in 1951 and has about 400 members. The association shall endeavor to organize meaningful activities for their membership in the club house or nearby places. The ordinary business is divided into three sections, "Sports and Exercise", "Leisure and Youth" and "events and functions."

Also in this organization the distances seem to be an issue as the stretches are a bit further out in the rural areas. Then again, they like the fact that associations often seem to have their own house in the more sparsely populated areas. That's rare in urban areas.

Over the past year we UF: Kamraterna have organized movie theatre evenings in the clubhouse. These have attracted up to 40 participants. They applied for a grant to pay for the permissions needed, and the municipality have been helping to get it all to work. Usually they also organize various athletics events and theater trips. Last year they organized about 280 events at the club house.

The greatest challenge here seems to be that it happens so much these days. The competition for the young people's time is hard. Another problem is the clubhouse that constantly requires new renovations. They should now renew the roof and that will cost about 40,000 euros.

Another challenge that the association has in common with many other associations in the sparsely populated areas, are the members that are rarely changed. The ideas are running low and they rarely seem to renew their activities. They would need new enthusiasts to the association. They also lack a functioning division of labor as they have difficulties knowing who is doing the various tasks within the association and things often remain undone.

2.4 Vänö Vänner: (Kimitoön, Archipelago Sea in the Southwest Finland region)

Interview with the associations chairman Mikaela Venberg



4 Image from the scenic archipelago in Vänö

This association was registered back in 1997, and they have nearly 300 members. The business is highly seasonal, and they arrange log dances and children's daycare during the summer months. Even here, there are complaints of the distances being very long which may hamper operations. Logistics simply are costlier and harder out there in the boonies. Still, the chairman Mikaela Venberg is convinced that people in associations in rural areas are more concerned about their associations and are willing to help whenever possible.

Also in Vänö, the log dances gather a lot of people. The association is a large one and most of the people in the area has some connection to it. That's probably why their events gather so much locals.

As the island mixes summer visitors and people living on the island all year, the main difficulty lies in communication between these two parties. People who only live on the island during the summer months, look at things with different eyes than the islanders who live year round on the island. Everything tends, however, be solved without major conflicts.

To improve the operation Venberg would like new visions for the association as it seems that the ideas are running low and they suffer from lack of enthusiasts.

In recent years Vänö Vänner have had volunteers during the summertime. These have been coming from Romania among other countries through the organization CIMO's project: European Voluntary Service (EVS). They also have via the project sent several of their own members abroad to volunteer.

3. Risks & challenges faced by voluntary culture associations in Finnish rural areas

Associations have long been aware of the fact that expanding the funding base is essential, but it has been proven very difficult in practice. Efforts to increase revenues of service production and from the organizations activities and finding new sources of funding has proven to be very challenging especially in rural areas. In addition, there is a risk that the organizations in such situations are considered to be engaged in business activities. Producing services with project funding is seen as too short-lived, temporary, and a lot of extra emitting means to work. From the perspective of rural municipalities and the government, non-profit activities and the demarcation of business is not so much a question of tax or competition law but, above all, a socio-political question. The reform of the wage subsidy is threatening several service delivery organizations and in that regard, the effects can be a very far-reaching from the perspective of the residents.

According to a report by The Ministry of Employment, the employment opportunities that are offered by the third sector plays a significant role in supporting the elderly living at home (home, janitor, food service, cleaners, etc.), support for school children and families in everyday life, as well as environmental issues and waste disposal. It should be noted that the

decrease in service organizations have left a significant resource gap in the care of the elderly, training and youth action social services, and municipal environmental services. It is reported that, for example, the effect of the social and health-oriented EU competition law is greater than the municipalities own laws of legislation (Pihlaja 2010, 64.).

Another significant risk when it comes to NGO's in the Finnish rural areas is the fact that the population is constantly moving toward urban municipalities. The so-called urbanization has continued steadily since the 80s (www.findikaattori.fi/sv/56). At the same time, I believe that NGO's play an important role in the attempt to retain the sparsely populated villages. The Association helps to create that feeling of really belonging to a community.

Something that seems to be a recurring challenge among organizations in the boonies is to get away from the same old routines and get some kind of innovation in the activities. If you are active in a sparsely populated area, it is rare to get outside influences, and several of the associations that we interviewed was actually talking about the risk of getting stuck in the same old rails.

Several of the people we spoke to during the interviews wanted to see simpler models when it comes to applying for grants, or instruction for how to apply. People who are active in voluntary culture associations has day jobs and seldom have time for a lot of extra paperwork. Another typical problem is the division of labor within the organizations. In several cases, there is not the structural framework for how the economy should be managed, but most are made entirely without funding. Besides e.g. repair of the association house which often remains undone because of lack of money.

4. Recommendations how to improve providing cultural activities by voluntary culture associations in Finland

- Simpler models of seeking grants and contributions
- Education in seeking grants and contributions
- Manage the economy through a purchased service on commission
- Greater collaboration provides greater contributions
- Benchmarking
- Open the doors to the public for a certain time during the year, for example, to attract new members (NGO festival).
- Cooperate also with urban associations to attract their "audience"
- Do volunteer exchange both nationally and internationally to gain new insights and influences
- Make certain that there are benefits for association members within the community
- Package the operation for various potential sponsors
- Focus also on small details regarding the association external - Branding

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