

Mainstreaming of LEADER Approach to Agri-environmental Support in South-West Finland

Petri Kahila and Moa Hedström, Nordregio

Widening the Management of Agri-environmental Schemes

In Finland, maintenance of open and cultivated agricultural landscapes is considered as an essential function of the Rural Development Programme (RDP) 2007-2013. The intention was to search for alternative routes of action, in which the complexities and presence of nature could be considered more seriously. Such environmental protection must integrate new actors into the network of agri-environmental support schemes.

In the RDP, local associations were given the possibility of implementing projects under the Measures 214 Agri-environment payments and 216 Non-productive investments. Local associations may manage multifunctional wetlands, traditional biotopes, and clearing and fencing of valuable traditional biotopes. Applications to implement special measures are delivered to regional agriculture authorities, who request a statement from the local LEADER action group to guarantee that the application is in accordance with the local development plan.

The new approach is expected to develop the interface between the Axes 2 and 3. However, the position of LEADER action groups (LAGs) as making only a statement in the application phase does not really commit LAGs into the process. The reality is that the discussion of initial project ideas is more likely to take place at the local level without direct connection to LAGs. Local associations and as well as regional agricultural and environmental authorities do not possess adequate expertise on LEADER method.



Involvement of Associations is a Challenge

New possibilities to implement the Axis 2 measures can certainly contribute to an improved participatory process at the local level. The ideas of local associations can be matched to and combined with the local development plans of the LEADER action groups. The real problem is not lack of interest from the associations, but more their lack of expertise and guidance capability of the both associations and LAGs.

The implementation of agri-environmental policy in Finland relies heavily on the relation between the agricultural and environmental sectors. Collaborative practices in the LAGs have yet to fully recognise this dimension. Opening up of the agri-environmental schemes during the present programming period has shown how "vertical" policies can be blended within the horizontal network of governance. The challenge is to overcome administrative barriers and to find a common language between administrations and various actors in different levels of governance.

Institutional learning challenges

- Multi-actor management of agri-environmental measures (AEMs)
- Enhancing and widening expertise of AEM
- Developing environmental management in the LEADER groups
- Continuity in agri-environmental management
- Advancing a multi-level governance approach to AEM management

