



European Rural Parliament 2015

## National report for Estonia

Prepared by

**Estonian Village Movement *Kodukant***

This report is in two parts :

- a. The national campaign ERP campaign, February to June 2015
- b. Message from the Rural Parliament XI of Estonian villages (Maapaev) held in August 2015

### **A. National campaign**

In January 2015, at the request of the ERP coordinators, Kodukant stated the five most significant themes that we expected to emerge from the ERP campaign in our country (*themes which may have multi-national interest*). These were:

- Employment and entrepreneurship in rural areas (strongly related with young people)
- Need for rural reform (municipality reform + state reform)
- The state of rural services
- Community-based services
- Advocacy in local, regional and state level.

During the period February-June 2015 Kodukant organized 3 bigger meeting related to the 'upward cascade of ideas' requested by the European Rural Parliament coordinators. These meetings were :

#### 26 March 2015 – Forum of Estonian Towns and Rural Municipalities –

Kodukant held a specific seminar „Active Community provide /public/ services in Municipality“, with 33 participants from 22 different organizations and municipalities.

The main themes of this event were :ain themes:

- best practices in community services and public financing of communities
- presentation of research on „The delegation of Public Services to NGOs“
- presentation of research on „Situation of Estonian communities“
- discussion about the co-operation of local communities and authorities.

#### **Main conclusions:**

- **Public financing should be transparent**
- **Active community is the power of strong Municipality**
- **Decision-making on the first (grass-root) level makes local democracy stronger and local people feel themselves participating.**

#### 18 April 2015 – Study-tour seminar for Village Animators.

This seminar took place during a project „Wake up, Villages!“, ana had 22 participants from different communities. The aim was to collect good ideas from different communities. The key themes arising were :

- agreement for financing the communities from local budget

- checking the basic law of municipality - how is reflected village movement
- using reasonable finance model for communities (villages)
- grass-roots level decision-making
- active village animators „round table“ on municipality level
- generation changing of leaders is necessary
- recognizing the leaders in the village
- co-operation between authorities and villages
- rural life is not only agriculture
- the biggest value are local people.

Member of the Board, Anneli Kana, gave to participants an overview about the international co-operation of village movements, including the process of the European Rural Parliament and the European dimension of rural life. After discussion about the necessity of participation in international level, on participant commented, „Now I understand the bigger picture! We are an important part of Europe and our village movement is quite unique!“.

Participants were asked to answer the question: „Which are the **3 top problems in the rural areas?**“ **The answers were:**

- **Low subsidy for agriculture, for local enterprises** - *EU politics*
- **Empty villages, people leaving villages** – *overall problem in EU level*
- **Low level of entrepreneurship** - *Estonian Government should promote entrepreneurship, through information, trainings, subsidy to start-ups etc.*
- **Bad connections: local transport; broadband** – *question of investment*
- **Security** – *local problem as well as international problem*
- **Low Social security (low salary > low pension)** – *small market, differences between EU countries*
- **Image of rural life is not very good.**
- **Over-politicization and bureaucracy.**

7 May 2015 - Kodukant`s Workshop of strategy implementation

his event was mostly for preparing the next (XI) Estonian Rural Parliament.

25 representatives of all member-organisations took part.

Participants discussed the methods of workshops – how to get the inputs for the two big messages (conclusions of the XI Estonian RP): „**Message of Estonian villages to Europe**“ and „**Message of Europe to Estonian villages**“.

The main message of Estonian rural life for European Rural Parliament will be sent after the event, at latest 12 August 2015.

Estonian Rural Parliament have 350 national and 30 international participants and the message will be composed after field visits, idea-hunting visits and workshops during 7.-9.08.2015.

During May 2015, the Estonian National Rural Network asked by survey (prepared by Anneli Kana, Kodukant) its members to express opinions about the main issues of Estonian Rural life and the possible solutions.

The results of this survey are shown in the table below :

Problem	Possible solution
<b>Basic services are centralized and bad local transportation does not make them available (medical centres, postal services, banks, schools, shops)</b>	Better co-operation between local municipalities, entrepreneurs, NGOs. The delegation of public services; Public-private partnership.
<b>Low entrepreneurship; low regional cooperation.</b>	Active networks, information, training, common projects.
<b>Well-trained and active people leaving from countryside; labor force ageing</b>	Better living environment, infrastructure
<b>Lack of initiative and animators</b>	Better living environment, infrastructure

<b>Area potential is unused, insufficient marketing</b>	To find the richness of the local area and change it make "profit"
<b>Difference of life quality between rural and urban areas</b>	Specific regional politics and regional development
<b>Rural economy is too narrow in scope</b>	Encourage the diversification of rural entrepreneurship, different subsidies
<b>Public opinion about rural life and values is low, even rural people themselves don't know about the ideas and possibilities of the Common Agricultural Policy.</b>	Informing about best practices and possibilities.
<b>Estonian farmers get less subsidies than other Europeans</b>	COMMON policy should be COMMON ! Climate in Nordic areas is very different from that in southern countries : the calculation of subsidies should take account of this.

## **B. Message from the eleventh Estonian Rural Parliament (*Maapaev*) August 2015**

### **European Policies Affect Rural Life**

The Estonian Rural Parliament XI was attended by twenty foreign guests from seven countries: Latvia, Lithuania, Finland, Sweden, the Czech Republic, Holland, and Germany.

On the first day of the Rural Parliament, the foreign delegation took a study trip to farmsteads, villages and enterprises in Järva County. The aim of the trip was to take a look at various initiatives, and see how people have made use of national and European Union's project grants. The study trip was organized in collaboration with the Estonian National Rural Network.

On the second day our foreign guests joined – in groups of two and three - nine different idea hunting workshops and collected case studies and best practice on a number of topics: entrepreneurship in the countryside, security in a community, a learning village, rural-urban co-operation. In the second half of the day, there was an international workshop attended also by Estonian representatives, including the advisor on the civil society from the Ministry of the Interior. The participants shared what they had experienced during the day.

**The experience, new ideas and best practice** that the members of the foreign delegation of the Estonian Rural Parliament XI gained, in other words, the 'imprint' that the Estonian village movement has made on them included the following:

- Children are involved in the village activities
- Eastern Europe, i.e. new members should make an effort not to repeat the mistakes that Western Europe, i.e. old EU members, have made in the European Union
- It is good that NGOs are able to use public money to carry out LEADER projects
- Active villages are very good at making use of the professionals living in the region
- The activities of the villages have a great influence on the development of the region
- Innovative voluntary work
- Local people are good at obtaining new ideas from guests when hosting them
- One can feel the spirit of community in the villages
- Small-sized projects are used to engage young people in project work
- Local work makes local products to the local community
- Village centres facilitate social networking
- Operative community kitchens and other community services
- Estonians are proud to belong to different regions, and they are eager to show you around
- Manors and sites of cultural heritage have been taken care of and are in active use
- A lot of good examples to prove that if you have a dream, you shall find ways make it come true.

In the second part of the workshop “**How European Policies Affect Rural Life**“, the participants discussed the problems of rural life at the European level, prioritized them and tried to find solutions.

The participants of the workshop of the Estonian Rural Parliament XI were of the opinion that the biggest current problems are **deruralization and urbanization**.

In order to stop and prevent these processes, the following solutions were offered:

- Digital access, fast connections
- Active village movement
- Attractive rural regions
- Multifunctional work places
- Possibilities and popularization of remote work
- Supported small-sized entrepreneurship
- Support from the public sector to rural population in the form of tax differentiation and cheaper services, e.g. fuel subsidies for transport
- An exam to become a townner to make moving to towns more complicated – this is a so-called creative suggestion.

The second important group of problems are all about **insufficient support to small-sized enterprises**, incl small-sized farms. The problem concerns national levels as well. In order to develop and enhance small-sized entrepreneurship, we should

- support business unions, associations and cooperatives;
- make development plans for small-sized entrepreneurship at national levels, similar to the existing rural development plan, and compare and coordinate them with other EU member states;
- decrease the current bureaucracy.

The third problem appears to be **complicated EU bureaucracy** (policies and theory do not correspond to practical needs) and **centralization** (also at national levels). Centralization could be decreased by strengthening and trusting local associations; in order to decrease the present bureaucracy, the beneficiaries should work in partnership with policy makers.

The fourth problem seems to be **insufficient cooperation** (also between policy makers, executors and beneficiaries). For improving cooperation, it is important to organize common events, training programmes and sharing best practice.

As the fifth set of drawbacks, the participants pointed out **the lack of balance between the funds of European programmes and people**. That means that sometimes the sums of money and the rules to be followed are more important than common sense and people's actual needs. Better analyses of needs and flexibility of programmes may work towards improving the situation.

At the closing ceremony of the Rural Parliament, a member of the foreign delegation, the chairperson of the board of the Swedish village movement and the advisor on the European Economic and Social Committee, Staffan Nilsson made a concluding speech and pointed out the importance of collaborating and contributing to the formation of EU policies. We have to speak up and convey a loud and clear message about our wishes, rights and needs. What serves as a good example is organizing rural parliaments and their growing popularity even outside the EU, in candidate countries. A united European village people's voice will sound on 4 – 6 November in Schärding, Austria, at the second European Rural Parliament. It is through national rural parliaments that we can make our common concerns heard and recognized at the EU level. We are very happy to conclude that the Estonian Rural Parliament XI succeeded in doing so.

At the Rural Parliament XI of Estonian villages on 9 August 2015

Contact:

Anneli Kana

Member of the Board

Estonian Village Movement *Kodukant*