Implementation of National Projects in Finland

**Needs addressed**

During the programming period 2000-2006, when Finland had several Operational Programmes, it was noticed that some projects dealing with certain themes, such as promotion of near-grow and organic food and village tourism, were implemented in several regions. Being these themes of national relevance, these projects would have benefited in terms of achievements from being implemented at national level rather than regionally and locally. This would have also enabled to support projects implemented by networks, that generally operate at national level (and for this reason cannot access funding meant for the implementation of regional/local projects) but whose work is important for the development of rural areas (e.g. adventure/outdoors tourism network).

For these reasons, when planning for the Mainland Finland RDP 2007-2013, national projects were included as one of the project types to be possibly implemented.

**Key elements of the approach**

Mainland Finland RDP offers the possibility to implement national projects, which focus on different sectors of the rural economy of particular importance for all regions in the country. The scope of them is to improve the implementation of the RDP by supporting knowledge sharing, dissemination of good practices among regions and the creation of networks around certain themes relevant for all regions and whose development is facilitated by a national-wide perspective.

The administration of these projects is handled by one regional MA (Häme Centre for Economic Development, Transport, and the Environment). The application procedure for national projects is opened once a year, and it is divided into two rounds. In the first round only project ideas are submitted, and those selected participate to the second step, which implies the submission of full documentation.

The national projects are financed under different measures of the Mainland Finland RDP Axes 1 and 3 (measures 111, 124, 311, 312, 313, 321, 323, 322, and 331). The annual budget for the national projects is decided after the selection of projects to be financed. The funds for the national projects are taken out of the annual EAFRD/national funding that is divided between the regions (and administered by the regional MA).
Objective

Main objectives of national projects are: improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the programme; complement and support regional/local projects; bring together or create sectoral/thematic networks nation-wide; disseminate best practises; collect project ideas; reduce bureaucracy for the applicant and keep the administration of the projects streamlined; main target for 2007-2013 was the implementation of at least 10 national projects.

Main steps and features of the initiative or approach

As the national projects were included for the first time in the RDP, the entire administrative system and procedures for their implementation had to be designed. In order to have a single point of contact for their management, it was decided that only one of the 15 regional MAs, namely the Häme regional Centre for Economic Development, Transport and Environment would be responsible for implementing and monitoring them.

The application process is divided in two steps, with the aim to simplify administrative procedures and improve the quality of projects submitted. The first step consists of submitting project ideas, accompanied by minimal documentation. Project ideas submitted are examined and only those selected participate to the second phase of the application, which implies the submissions of definite project plans, with all needed documentations attached.

The main bodies involved in the selection of national projects are:

- **Working group for national projects**, composed by representatives of regional MAs, national MA and NRN.
- **Monitoring committee** of the Mainland Finland RDP
- **Selection committee for national projects**, composed by representatives of the regional MAs.

The preparation and approval procedure for national project cycle is completed in about two years. The main steps can be summarised as follows:

1. The working group for national projects prepares the call for project, which can be open or specify the themes to be tackled (such as forestry, rural tourism, local food, etc.).
2. The call for project is discussed and approved by the Monitoring Committee of Mainland Finland RDP.
3. The first application round (‘idea application’) is opened in January. Applicants have three months (to March) to submit project ideas.
4. The working group for national projects evaluate the project ideas submitted and select those to participate to the second application round.
5. The selected applicants are informed about the decision of the working group by late spring.
6. The second round of the application procedure is open and applicants have to submit the detailed project application by August of the same year.
7. The regional MA organises training for those selected to participate to the second application round. The scope of the training is to help applicants to transform their project idea into a complete application that fulfils all legal requirements.
8. The working group assesses the projects received against a set of selection criteria, established at the beginning of the programming period. The Ministry of agriculture gives an opinion about all projects received.
Main results and benefits

Five calls for national projects were opened between 2008 and 2012. A total of 420 project ideas were received in the first application round. 51 projects were selected for the second round, 23 of which were financed, going beyond the objective of 10 projects established in the RDP. Total public expenditure for national projects reached 10 million Euro.

Specific themes were established twice, in 2009 (energy, environment, rural business, welfare services, equine business, forestry) and 2010 (agriculture, skill networks, environmental awareness), while the remaining three calls were open.

Funded national projects include:

- “Green care entrepreneurship as a life force in rural areas”, which promoted green care and coordination within the sector, developed green care service models and marketing channels, as well as charted the training needs of green care entrepreneurs around the country.

- “Equestrian advisory”, which improved the advisory services for the equestrian sector.

- “Outdoors Finland”, which aimed at creating a network around adventure/outdoors sports (fishing, hiking, Nordic walking, kayaking, equestrian tourism, cycling) so as to improve the tourism potential and international
Lessons learnt

The definition of the administrative procedures to run national projects, at the beginning of the 2007-2013 programming period, required an important effort, particularly in terms of human resources involved. The decision to nominate one regional MA as responsible for implementing them proved to be the most efficient solution. It allows to better control all steps of the procedures and avoids misunderstanding, being the responsibilities of different bodies involved clearly established.

Dividing the application round into two steps has also proved to be a good decision, both in terms of administrative efficiency and effectiveness of the projects. The two application steps reduced the administrative costs for the applicants, as full documentation is required only in the second round. Applicants can in this way focus on better defining the project scope.

The first step has also produced many interesting project ideas, some of which were not suitable for being implemented as national projects but as local/regional or inter-regional projects and applicants were encouraged to apply for EAFRD support in their region.

Financing coordination projects (nation-wide thematic projects) at the beginning of the programming period and linking them into regional/local projects that build on the national project would improve their results.

Existing networks at national level played an important role in the implementation of national projects. Nevertheless it was noted that an effort from the networks has to be made to improve and renew themselves for the project and throughout it, in order to make the highest advantage of the implementation of the project. It is also important for networks to have a clear leadership, which can operate as ‘engine’ for the project and help the network visibility of rural areas.

- “True tastes” promoted local food and local short supply chains by improving customer knowledge and access to local and near-produced food (web site, village shops, etc.).
- “Faces of organic production”, which improved the marketing and communicating skills of organic farmers.

Since the national projects are larger in size and cover the entire sector/theme around the country, they bring visibility to the issue at stake to the wider public. They are implemented through network structures, which enable to bring together all actors involved in a sector/theme improving communication, cooperation, networking and coordination within them. Rural areas benefited from this national organisation, having the possibility to establish contacts with other areas and share information. Furthermore, financial resources are efficiently used at a larger, umbrella-level project, which support the dissemination of information, operating models and best practices to the entire sector/theme.

Most projects included the organisation of workshops and training for stakeholders; all of them have a website, where all information about the project is shared.

The national projects have been considered successful and they will continue to be implemented in the future programming period.
to reinforce itself.

**Additional sources of information**

National projects in short (in Finnish):


National projects in short (in Finnish):

http://www.maaseutu.fi/fi/index/hankkeet/rahoitusmahdollisuudet/valtakunnallisethankkeet.html

Selected national projects in 2008 (in Finnish):


PPT on national projects (in Finnish) 18-19/04/2013


PPT on national projects (in Finnish) 15/01/2014

http://www.maaseutu.fi/attachments/newfolder_25/2014/valtakunnalliset_hankkeet/valtakunnalliset_hankkeet/6MhDSgryu/Valtakunnalliset_hankkeet15012014_LH_%5BVain_luku%5D.pdf