

THE RURAL MOVEMENTS OF EUROPE

Vanessa Halhead
2004

Village Action
Association of
Finland

*Suomen
Kylätoimin-ta ry
(SYTY)*

Swedish
Popular
Movements
Council

*Folkrorelserådet
Hela Sveridge
ska leva*

Norwegian
Association of
Neighbourhoods

*Norges
Velforbund*

Icelandic Village
Action Movement

*Landsbyggdin
Lifi*

Danish Village
Association
*Landsforeningen
af
Landsbysamfund*
Danish Council of
Rural Districts
*Landdistrikternes
Feallesraad*

Action with
Communities in
Rural England
(ACRE)

* * *

Wales Rural
Forum

Slovenian Rural
Development
Network

*Društva za razvoj
slovenskega
podeželja*

Dutch National
Association of
Small Towns and
Villages

*Landelijke
Vereniging voor
Kleine Kernen*

Estonian Village
Movement

Kodukant

Polish Rural
Forum

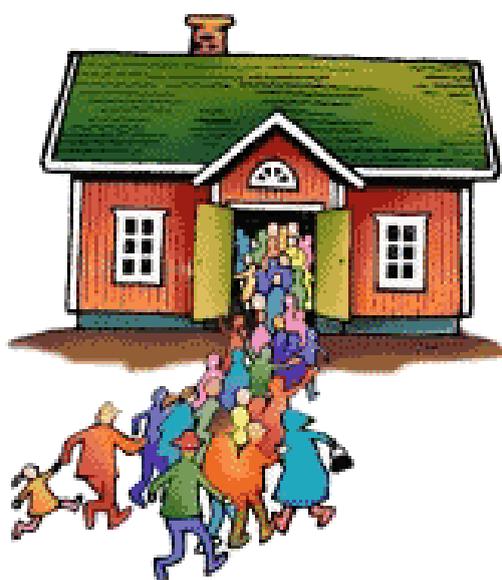
*Forum
Aktywizacji
Obszarów
Wiejskich*

Rural
Parliament of
Slovakia

*Vidiecky
Parlament na
Slovensku*

Hungarian
Rural
Parliament

*Vidék
Parlamentje,*



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Introduction

This report on the Rural Movements in Europe is one of the first to attempt to document this remarkable 'quiet revolution' that is developing in rural Europe. Starting in the 1970s in the north of Scandinavia, national rural movements have since been formed in 12 European countries, and the process of formation is continuing. The movements are rooted in the need to safeguard our rural communities and heritage against the tides of centralisation and urbanisation. They aim to empower the thousands of rural communities in each country to address their own development and to lobby for the policy changes needed to safeguard their future. These are civil movements, uniting the many villages and organisations working for rural development.

The report is the outcome of a research visit, undertaken between August and November 2003, enabled by the award of a Fellowship from the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust.

The research was undertaken to provide information to interested people, in my own and other countries, on this important movement. In the case of Scotland, we wanted this information to inform the possible development of a similar national movement. For this reason, the research has focussed on documenting factual, and hopefully useful, information on the movements, which would assist others to learn from and apply this experience in a practical way. As usual, the 'devil' and the interest are in the detail, and the case studies are presented in this spirit. This is not an academic study, and does not attempt to place this information within theoretical models. The research did not draw on literature, other than the small number of reports and policy documents available in English from the movements themselves and from the Ministries. Most of the information was drawn from the interviews and discussions held with those most closely involved and, where possible, with local academics who had knowledge of the movements.

The report comprises an overview of the national movements at a European scale and the detailed findings of four national case studies. These document the rural movements of:

Estonia	The Estonian Village Movement	<i>Kodukant</i>
Finland	The Village Action Association of Finland	<i>Suomen Kylatoiminta Ry (SYTY)</i>
Slovakia	The Rural Parliament of Slovakia	<i>Vidiecky Parlament na Slovensku (VIPA)</i>
Denmark	The Danish Village Association	<i>Landsforeningen af Landsbysamfund (LAL)</i>
	The Danish Council of Rural Districts	<i>Landdistrikternes Faellesraad (LDF)</i>

The four case studies were compiled from a 2-week research visit to each country. This involved travel to different regions of each country and meetings with many of the key people involved with each movement - at national, regional and local levels¹. The questions asked in each country followed a common format, to enable comparison, and the reports are similarly structured.

In each country I met with:

- The board and management of the movements at national and regional levels
- A sample of the village associations involved with the movement at village and regional levels
- Representatives from the appropriate government Ministries
- Representatives from local and regional government
- Representatives from other related organisations both public and NGO
- Academics who have studied the movement

The key topics investigated were the:

- national and international context
- history of development
- key players involved
- organisation, management and funding
- activities

¹ A full itinerary is listed in the appendix of each report

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- costs and benefits
- achievements and barriers
- relationships to others
- future plans

The report also draws on wider connections with the two networks of rural movements, and personal connections with key people from each of the movements.

In the course of this investigation, I also had the opportunity to meet with:

The Polish Rural Forum

The Swedish Popular Movements Council for Rural Development (HSSL)

Also the 2 international support networks:

- The PREPARE Network
- The Nordic Network – *Hela Norden ska Leva* (HNSL)

I have also attended:

- The PREPARE gathering in Slovakia of all Nordic and East European movements
- The Estonian Rural Parliament and international meeting
- The General Assembly of the Danish Village Association
- Several meetings of the Nordic Network - HNSL
- The Swedish Rural Parliament over a 7 year period

This project had its beginnings in 1998 when first attending the biennial Swedish Rural Parliament. This was an inspirational experience, which revealed the potential for co-operation, empowerment and influence of small rural communities, when they are organised and united. Well over 1000 representatives of the 4000 rural villages involved with the Swedish Village Movement gathered together to tell each other and the rest of the country, including the Prime Minister, about their strengths, issues and ideas, was a powerful force. This started the process of investigation into the rural movements in Europe, their potential for improving the situation for rural areas and possible relevance to other countries. This report is the first step in trying to document the movements and help to disseminate this information more widely. Hopefully it will be found to be useful, and will inspire others to continue the work of exploring and developing this important concept.

Vanessa Halhead
Scotland
May 2004

About the Author

Vanessa Halhead is a sociologist and regional planner. She has worked in the field of rural and community development for 25 years, in Scotland and Europe. She was co-founder and manager of an early 'village movement' in the north of Scotland - *Highlands & Islands Forum* – and has also managed several large rural development partnerships. She has also worked with rural research, especially in relation to the Nordic countries and Mexico. She is a board member of *Forum Synergies*, a European Network for sustainable development, and member of the *PREPARE Network*. She is currently working on the development of a Scottish rural community network

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The Case Studies	The Estonian Village Movement The Village Action Association of Finland The Rural Parliament of Slovakia The Rural Movement of Denmark	Separate report “ “ “

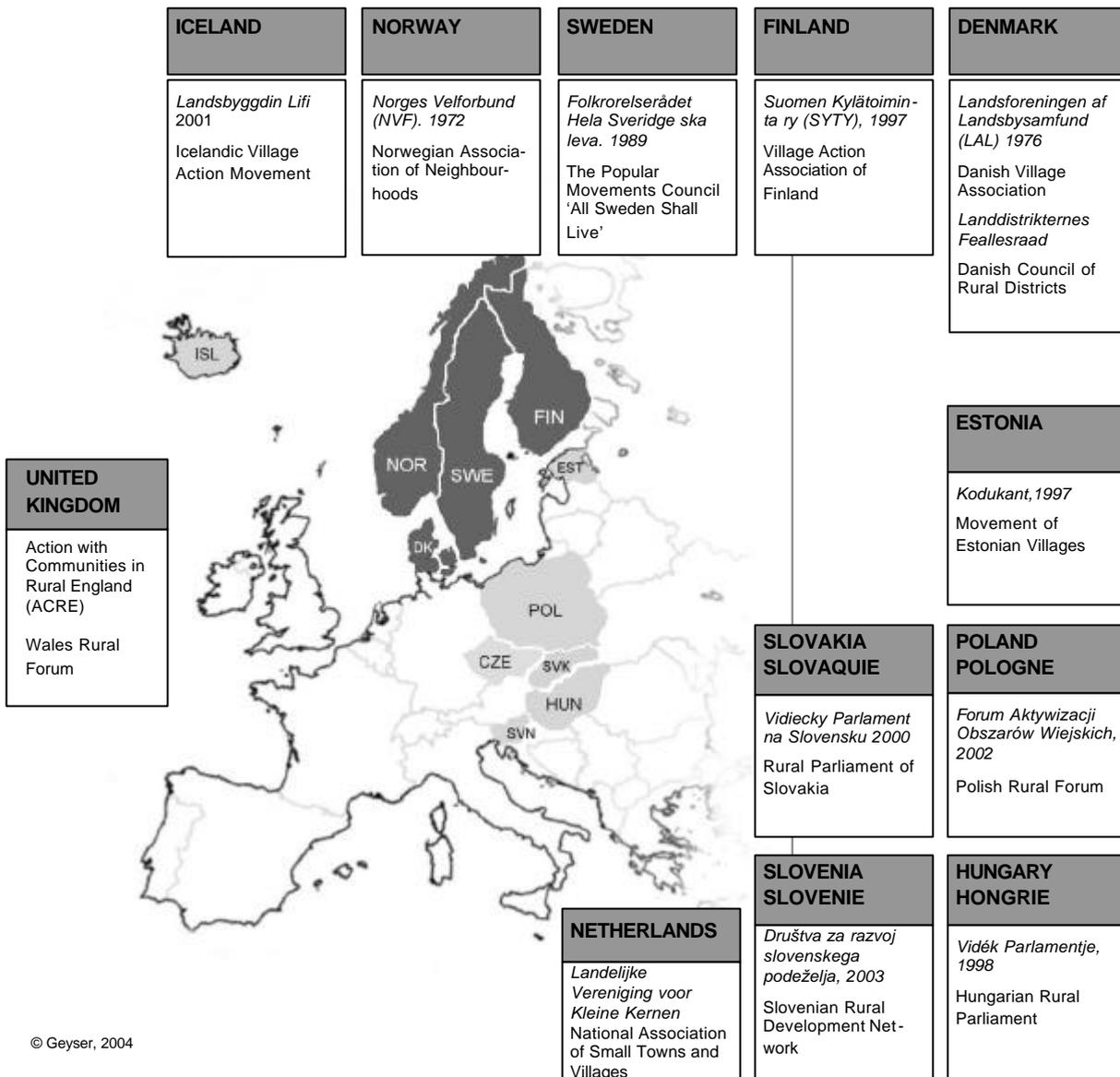
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The Rural Movements of Europe - an Overview

What are they?

The rural movements that have developed in Europe over the last 30 years represent an organised approach to providing a network and voice for rural areas, their people and the many organisations working for rural development. Faced with many years of rural decline, centralising policy, globalisation of markets and European integration, the rural people of the Nordic and Eastern European countries have organised themselves to raise the challenge of a new rural Europe. They work at village, regional, national and international levels, to make sure that the voice of the rural people is heard at every level of decisions making. They also work together to build the capacity, confidence and achievements of the local actors in creating a better future for Europe's many thousands of rural communities. Because of their high level of organisation, networking and direct relationship with the rural communities, the rural movements represent a potentially very significant new voice on the European stage. and are likely to become key players in the EU.

Where do they exist?



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When were they established?

The rural movements, in the present form, began in the 1970s. There have however been other, much older, social movements in rural areas in many parts of rural Europe, for instance the Norwegian movement dates back 200 years.

A brief chronology of the current movements in the Nordic and Eastern European countries shows the following pattern of development. Further details of the different organisations can be found elsewhere in the report:

1970s – first village action groups formed in Finland & Sweden
1976 – Finnish ‘Village Action 76’ Programme
1976 – Danish movement *Landsforeningen af Landsbysamfund* (LAL) formed
1979 – The Dutch Association of Small Towns & Villages *Landelijke Vereniging voor Kleine Kernen*
1981 – Finnish movement formed – 1997 *Suomen Kylätoimintayhdistys* (SYTY) formed
1989 – Swedish The Popular Movements Council for Rural Development *Folkrorelserådet* formed
1992 – Estonian movement started – 1997 *Kodukant* formed
1998 – Hungarian Rural Parliament *Vidék Parlamentje* formed
1999 – PREPARE Programme started
2000 – Slovakian Rural Parliament *Vidiecky Parlament na Slovensku* formed
2001 – Icelandic movement *Landsbyggðin Lifi* formed
2002 – Polish Rural Forum *Forum Aktywizacji Obszarów Wiejskich* formed
2003 – Slovenian Rural Development Network *Društva za razvoj slovenskega podeželja* formed
2003 – Czech Republic – initial meetings held
2003 – The PREPARE Network formed
Rural movements have also been formed in Britain, with individual organisations in England – Action with Communities in Rural England (ACRE) (1987), Scotland – Rural Forum Scotland (1986-1999) and Wales – The Wales Rural Forum (1990).

The Nordic movements were the earliest to form. They do not represent one model, but have developed from 3 independent sources. Those in Finland, Sweden, Iceland and Estonia stem from the Finnish model. The Danish movement arose at the same time as Finland, in 1976, but developed quite separately. The Norwegian movement is much older, but is not a true rural movement in that it encompasses ‘neighbourhoods’ in all parts of Norway. The formation of the movements has taken two distinct paths, Those in the Nordic countries have started mainly through the mobilisation of the most local communities, and only at a later stage has the national rural forum set up. Those in Eastern Europe, with the exception of Estonia, have started from the ‘top down’ with the formation of a forum of national organisations, which in some cases (eg. Slovakia) have then started to establish local and regional level structures.

Why were they needed?

“Rural areas are so big, with so many players, that we now realise we need support from each other. It is important to have the support of the local people and civic society behind you. The strength of the Rural Parliament is their wide support within the rural community. It is difficult for the government to ignore this”.²

Each movement was established and structured in response to the conditions prevailing nationally. However, whilst there are national differences, the fundamental reasons for their establishment are very similar across all of the countries. This was a response to the rapidly changing circumstances in rural areas, in the Nordic countries since the 1960-70s, and in Eastern Europe since independence in the early 1990s. The main reasons cited include:

- Increasing urbanisation, centralisation and globalisation, also reflected in national policy
- Decline of agriculture as a major employer

² Head of the Slovak Rural Development Agency

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- Decline in the rural economy and services
- Rural depopulation and imbalanced age structure
- Regional inequalities
- Remoteness and isolation of many rural communities
- The need for a stronger political voice for rural communities
- Lack of a rural focus in policy and in the structure of administration
- The effects of entry into the EU

The movements have also responded to perceived gaps in the administration:

- In Sweden and Denmark village mobilisation was partly a response to the amalgamation of municipalities in the 1970s and the loss of power to the parish level.
- Slovakia has village municipalities and is focussing attention on developing micro-regional partnerships.
- Finland, Sweden and Estonia have no municipalities at the village level, so are mobilising villages to participate in the planning and delivery process
- All are focussing on creating broad partnerships to work with the authorities at each level of administration.
- All are seeking to strengthen social capital to compensate for the reduction in public resources.

The trends identified above are no less important for Europe's rural areas now than they were, and are continuing to drive people out of the rural areas. The 1970s saw very high levels of rural out-migration in many of the Nordic countries, this trend has slowed but not stopped. In Eastern Europe, the 1990s produced a similar significant decline in the fortunes of the rural areas, following the move from a communist to market-led system. Such trends are also being experienced in many rural areas of Western Europe as the influence of the globalised economy is weakening their competitiveness, reduction in public expenditure is undermining the welfare state and increasingly centralised administration is weakening local democracy.

Why rural?

The question is often asked – why rural rather than regional? EU and national policy in all countries is focused on regional development, with 'rural' development being closely linked to agriculture.

In all of the countries, rural areas are in decline from agricultural change, loss of traditional employment, urbanisation, centralisation, out-migration and loss of political influence. These are essentially rural problems, underpinning the sustainability of rural communities in respect of population, economy and services. The lack of adequate policy responses from the EU and national governments has mobilised a rural reaction. Such problems can also be experienced within regions, with increasing centralisation of employment into the main towns. Regional policy is not always successful in addressing this, and in many instances has exacerbated it.

Whilst rural and urban areas today are closely inter-linked and may experience many of the same issues, the contexts and nature of the issues are of different in character, and often require different solutions. Rural areas also differ in type, - peripheral, peri-urban etc. There may be greater similarities between similar types of rural areas in different regions or countries than between different types of rural and urban areas within the same region or country. Which is why the rural movements find the national and trans-national links so valuable.

In Finland, for example, the justification for having a distinct, integrated rural policy is based on the:

- special needs of sparsely populated areas
- national benefit from better utilisation of the production factors of rural areas
- national cost of migration and the consequent need to balance centralising forces
- need to broaden the sectoral view of rural development
- implementation of equal rights for rural people
- the potential of rural areas to address sustainable development
- importance of rural areas for environment, culture and recreation

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What is their purpose?

The experience of the different movements reveals the following functions as most important in defining their role:

1. mobilising, networking and supporting action for local development at the most local level
2. providing co-ordination and focus on the development of the village and rural areas
3. co-ordinating the activities and lobbying of the many rural development organisations
4. providing a 'market place' for rural communities to raise the rural profile
5. linking local issues and actions to the policies and funding of authorities at local, regional and national levels
6. building a European rural network to strengthen the position of rural areas in the EU

What are their characteristics?

The movements differ in character according to their stage of development, however the following characteristics are common to them all:

Bottom up	owned and run by rural civil society and the village people
Connected	linked at all levels – internally and externally
Structured	organised and networked at local, regional, national and international levels
Informed	well-connected with good information dissemination
Co-ordinated	working to a clear, common purpose agreed through strategic planning
Supportive	mobilising, networking and supporting action for local development
Influencing	undertaking advocacy to shape local, regional, national, EU policy

What do they do?

The various national movements are structured differently according to their stage of development and national context. The following activities describe the longer established, fully-fledged village action movements, such as those in Finland, Sweden and Estonia. The more recently formed movements tend to be initially stronger at the national, regional and international levels of activity.

At village level:

The movements arising from the Finnish model are rooted in the idea of the village as the 'homeplace'. They promote the formation of broad-based, legally registered, village associations, which link the many local groups and work with the authorities. They are supported to develop village plans and to undertake local development. Initially, they fight for local services and set up local heritage and social projects. As they mature in experience, they also deliver services, start economic enterprises and form partnerships

At regional level:

The movements have formed independent, but linked, regional associations in each administrative region of the country. The regional associations draw their membership from the village associations and other local NGOs. Each has a development worker. They support villages with training, advice and contacts. They also develop regional plans, which draw on the village plans, liaise and work in partnership with the regional authorities and link their regional plans to statutory regional plans.

At national level:

The national associations are composed of representatives from the regional village associations and national rural NGOs. Their role is to link the local and regional associations, develop a national strategic plan based on the regional and village plans, and to work in partnership with the Government to promote rural development. They organise national gatherings including the biennial Rural Parliament, which brings together the villages and NGOs to provide a rural market-place, agree rural policy plans and address the Government directly. In Sweden this involves over

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1000 village representatives. The influence of the national process is most advanced in Finland, where the National Village Programme feeds directly into the national Rural Policy Programme.

At international level:

The rural movements are networked internationally through the Nordic Network (HNSL) and the PREPARE Network. Through these, they share in each-others events, organise joint projects, receive information and develop common agendas for the EU. There is now active consideration of a European Rural Parliament.

How are they structured?

The movements are varyingly composed of a combination of the 'bottom-up' *village action movement* and the more 'top-down' *rural forum* of national organisations.

A 'village movement' is an organisational expression of local village action for rural development. It is a way of bringing together the people actively involved at the most local level of rural society, and supporting their efforts at regional and national levels. It is mobilising rural communities to address their own futures, to influence local and national policy and to build local, national and trans-national rural networks.

The 'rural forum' is a mechanism for providing a co-ordinated response to the needs of rural development, on the part of the many organisations that, individually, represent aspects of the wider rural sector. The key roles of a rural form are to develop a co-operative and integrated approach, and to work with government to address rural issues.

The structure of the movements varies, but comprises some or all of the following elements:

National 'rural forum'	A formal network of the main national rural NGOs to co-ordinate action and lobbying on rural development
Village action movement	A national structure for involving and representing villages to link with national NGOs and government
Regional associations	A regional structure for networking rural NGOs and villages and linking to the regional authorities
Sub-regional associations	Groupings at sub-regional level of villages/ NGOs/ etc. possibly not a formal part of the structure
Village associations	Broad-based integrated village associations, with legal status, for co-ordinating planning and action at village level.
Rural Parliaments³	A national gathering of all rural interests – villages, NGOs and authorities. Provides a voice for rural communities and a focus for national strategy making.

³ The term 'Rural Parliament' was first used by the Swedish village movement to describe their biennial rural gathering. This links to the ancient Nordic concept of the 'parliament' – or '*Ting*' which was based on the principle of participatory democracy.

NB. The term 'Rural Parliament' also used as the name for the whole rural movement in Slovakia and Hungary.

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What have they achieved?

“The national Village Action Association is now regarded as an established body and is accepted as a key player in the rural scene. It is seen a vehicle that works. There has been more action at every level, more trust and confidence in our own possibilities – people now know that they can influence their own development.”⁴

The rural movements have achieved significant successes:

- Increasing the rural profile** ▪ Developing a strong national profile and support for the most local level
- Building rural community capacity** ▪ Building significant community organisation and involvement
▪ Increasing confidence, empowerment and energy in rural communities
▪ Developing and training an extensive network of legal village associations
▪ Identification, development and training of ‘village leaders’
▪ Training villages to make village development plans
▪ Helping villages to build effective links with the public authorities
▪ Increasing the levels of funding to the local level through project activity
▪ Enabling villages to co-operate and achieve collective strength
▪ Developing new forms of local action and organisation
- Increasing social capital** ▪ Mobilising voluntary action in the communities
▪ Help to establish and support public-private partnerships
▪ Encouraging local people to be more active in local development
▪ Finding creative solutions to rural development challenges
▪ Establishing new methods of working and employment opportunities
▪ Adding value to the capacity of local and national authorities
▪ Increasing local capacity to deliver local services
- Adding value** ▪ Delivering rural development in a very cost effective way
▪ Increasing the social capital of rural areas
▪ Significantly increasing local expenditure through the village associations
- Improving links between public and civil sectors** ▪ Improving co-operation for rural development.
▪ Helping Government to communicate more directly with rural people
▪ Helping Government to better understand rural strengths and issues
- Influencing policy for rural areas** ▪ Developing close links to the Government Ministries
▪ Gaining membership of key rural committees and organisations
▪ Strengthening the position of the villages to influence rural policy
▪ Successfully influencing national, regional and local policy
▪ Successfully promoted new rural measures and funding sources
▪ Promoting integrated rural development
▪ Helped Government to view rural development more holistically
- Building and sustaining the movements** ▪ Developing strong local, regional, national and international frameworks
▪ Establishing a strong profile for the movement at all levels
▪ Sustaining the movements for up to 30 years
▪ Operating without core funding
▪ Maintaining the energy and enthusiasm of the hundreds of volunteers
▪ Developing strategic planning at local, regional and national levels
▪ Implementing many projects locally, nationally and internationally
- Developing an international network** ▪ Developing effective networks at a European level
▪ Established the position of the movements internationally
▪ Supporting other countries to develop rural movements
▪ Contributing to the European lobby for rural development
▪ Effectively mobilising EU funds

⁴ President of the Finnish Village Action Association

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The Finnish Village Action Association for 2003⁵ demonstrates the added value:

- 3900 village associations and committees
- 2200 registered village associations
- 40,000 individuals involved (divided equally between men and women)
- 1.6 mill. volunteer hours per year
- 16 mill euro worth of volunteer time
- 3.2 mill euro independent funding per year
- 31 mill euro public project funding per year
- 8000 development measures per year
- 2600 village halls/ community centres
- 1000 village plans in effect
- over 2.5 mill. Finns assisted by village development work.

“It is impossible that any of this would have happened without the organisation of the movement”.

What barriers have they encountered?

“The village movement is very fragile in its growth phase. Those who don’t want it to grow will easily attack you”

The movements have encountered difficulties in establishing themselves, though these are much less significant than the achievements. The principal issues identified were:

- | | |
|----------------------------|--|
| Funding | <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Funding for the core work has proved very difficult to obtain for most movements.▪ Over reliance on short-term project funds has created tensions between the demands of delivering projects and servicing the wider needs of the organisation.▪ Lack of funding has necessitated large amounts of volunteer work▪ Government funding potentially compromises the neutrality of the movements |
| Volunteer inputs | <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ All movements, especially in the early years, have had to rely on volunteer labour▪ This has caused fatigue in the key personnel and may be unsustainable▪ A reduction in willingness to undertake volunteer labour has been noticed in more affluent villages and among the younger age group▪ A tendency for the best volunteers to move to paid employment elsewhere |
| Internal relations | <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Some competition and lack of clarity about the roles of the member organisations▪ A fear of the movements subsuming their member organisations in the eyes of Government and others▪ Some competition for funding with member organisations |
| Personnel | <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Personality issues, rivalries and dominance have been a feature of all movements▪ Over-reliance on a few key individuals and lack of delegation are problems▪ Changing personnel, due to insecurity of funding, has been problematic for some |
| External relations: | |
| National | <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ An initial lack of interest and understanding from Government and initial resistance from some Government Ministries▪ Co-operation and communication with the Ministries has proved difficult to achieve▪ Difficulties in undertaking effective lobbying and influencing political parties |
| Regional | <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Difficulties in influencing the plans of regional authorities and in getting regional authorities to relate to the movements. |
| Local | <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Initial resistance to the movement and village associations from other local groups and municipalities▪ Existing organisations and local politicians fear loss of power▪ Lack of capacity and personnel to maintain connections with the villages |

⁵ The National Village Action Programme 2003 - 2007

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The Rural Movements of Europe – National Summaries⁶

Scandinavia

Finland

The Village Action Association of Finland - *Suomen Kylatoiminta Ry (SYTY)*

Web-site: www.village-action.fi

The Finnish movement was the first 'village action movement'. It began in the 1970s as a response to rural decline and depopulation. The current organisation, *Suomen Kylatoiminta Ry (SYTY)*, the Village Action Association of Finland, was formed in 1997. Its main activities focus on strategic village planning and policy development, advocacy and lobbying, support to village and regional associations, projects and services for inhabitants, international co-operation. SYTY mobilises and supports almost 4000 Village Associations and has formed Regional Associations in each of the 19 administrative regions. It develops strategic plans, including the National Village Programme, which feeds directly into the national Rural Policy Programme. It also implements a wider range of projects to support rural development and it supports the developing movements in Eastern Europe. One of the achievements of SYTY and village action is to influence the development of rural policy in Finland. This has focussed on articulating the need for a balanced, integrated approach to rural development, including all aspects of village life, and stressing the strengthening of rural communities and the social economy and building local democracy.

Sweden

Swedish National People's Movement for Rural Development
Folkrörelserådet - Hela Sverige Ska Leva!

Web-site: www.bygde.net

The Swedish movement is the largest and most highly developed, it is also the only movement to receive significant Government funding. It arose in the 1980s in response to the de-population of rural areas in the north of Sweden, mobilised through a Government supported campaign. The movement has assisted the formation of over 4000 village associations, with 100,000 people directly involved. Local and regional groupings of village associations have been formed, and the movement is co-ordinated and supported by the national association *Folkrörelserådet*, the Popular Movements Council (PMC), established in 1989. In addition to the village representatives, the PMC has 53 national NGOs as members of its Council. The PMC provides practical support to the local actors and develops programmes for rural development and to influence policy. The biennial Rural Parliament involves over 1000 village representatives and provides a direct voice to the Government. The movement has a lobbying role and seeks to influence the Government and politicians on every level.

Denmark

The Danish rural movement is different in many ways to the others and comprises 3 organisations:

The Danish Village Association – *Landsforeningen af Landsbysamfund (LAL)* www.lal.dk

The Villages in Denmark Association – *Landsbyer I Danmark (LID)*

The Council of Rural Districts – *Landdistrikternes Faellesraad (LDF)* www.landdistrikterne.dk

The oldest is LAL, which was established in 1976, and is the 'village movement'. LDF was formed in 1997, and is the 'rural forum' for the many rural NGOs. The three organisations together tackle the work of the individual organisations in other countries. The form of the organisations and method of working are also different, with no regional structures. LAL has no paid staff and is run by the board members, it focuses its activities on a wide range of projects to support village action,

⁶ This information has also been published by Geyser (2004) in 'Rural Development in Europe – European Networks of Association'

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and lobbying the government on behalf of rural communities. LDF is a relatively well funded strategic body, working closely with the government to provide a focus on the diverse interests of rural development.

Iceland

The Icelandic Village Action Movement - *Landsbyggðin Lifi* - “let the rural areas live!”

Web-site: fas@simnet.is

In June 2001 *Landsbyggden lifi* was founded as an umbrella organisation for rural people, inspired and supported by the Finnish and Swedish movements. The movement was founded by one woman, who has mobilised rural communities across the country. The aim is to establish village action groups in each of the 110 municipality areas, focussed on the co-operation of rural inhabitants. To date about 19 local groups have been set up.

Norway

The Norwegian Association of Neighbourhoods - *Norges Velforbund (NVF)*

The Royal Norwegian Society for Development – *Norges Vel*

Web-site: www.velnett.no and www.norgesvel.no

There is no umbrella organisation in Norway to unite specifically rural development interests. There are 2 similar organisations working with local communities: *Norges Velforbund* and *Norges Vel*. *Norges Velforbund* is part of the Nordic network of rural movements, but is in fact a national union of neighbourhood associations, supporting the activities of the inhabitants of both villages and towns. It is by far the oldest movement, the first organisation being established in 1772. The present organisation was formed in 1974 as an interest and service organisation for the 6-7000 local neighbourhood associations in Norway. Today NVF represents approximately 1,000,000 people, which makes it the second largest organisation in the country.

The Nordic Network – Hela Norden ska Leva (HNSL)

Web-site - see: www.bygde.net

The Nordic movements are networked through HNSL, enabling information sharing, joint project planning and mutual support within the Nordic countries.

Western Europe

Netherlands

Dutch National Association of Small Towns and Villages

Landelijke Vereniging voor Kleine Kernen

Web-site - www.lvkk.nl

The Dutch National Association of Small Towns and Villages was established in 1979. Its objectives are to be a vital networking organisation, to contribute to the wellbeing of villages and their surroundings and act upon national and European policy. The National organisation has 10-12 members and every province has their own Provincial Association of Small Towns and Villages. Most of the small towns and villages are members of the Provincial organisation. It works at village, provincial and national levels to identify issues, exchange information, knowledge and experience, and to take part in national debates and projects.

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United Kingdom

At present two rural movements are active in the UK: The Wales Rural Forum and Action with Communities in Rural England (ACRE). Previously there were two other rural movements: Rural Voice in England and The Scottish Rural Forum, both now closed. Work is progressing to examine the need for a new rural movement in Scotland.

Wales Rural Forum

Wales Rural Forum (WRF) was established in 1990 to strengthen the voice of people active at grass roots and community level and to improve the flow of ideas between them and the policy makers with responsibility for all aspects of rural life. The Forum encourages integration across all sectors and sustainable development. It seeks to complement and strengthen the efforts of individuals, voluntary and community groups, national organisations, local authorities, academic institutions and government agencies in their work of improving the quality of life and safeguarding the future viability of rural communities. Membership includes national, regional and local NGOs and individual with an interest in rural affairs, and includes many rural interest groups.

Action with Communities in Rural England (ACRE)

Web-site: www.acre.org.uk

ACRE is a national charity whose purpose is to support sustainable rural community development. It provides a national platform for its founder member Rural Community Councils, other bodies and individuals who work at local, county, regional and national level to alleviate rural disadvantage in England. There are 38 Rural Community Councils based in each county of England, working to improve the lives of people who live in rural areas, by responding to the key issues in their county. ACRE provides a wide range of services to its members, in support of community development, communications, research, policy development, practical support.

Central and Eastern Europe

Estonia

The Estonian Village Movement - *Kodukant*

Web-site: www.kodukant.ee

Kodukant was the first movement to establish in Eastern Europe, in response to the crisis in agriculture and rural depopulation following independence. The work began in 1992, through a joint project with Sweden to form a village movement based on the Finnish/ Swedish model. Kodukant was established as a legally registered organisation in 1997. It has mobilised 15 regional associations and many village associations. This has created an impressive level of commitment and activity in the rural communities and a high profile with Government. Kodukant is funded entirely through projects, including 1 national and 15 regional co-ordinators, and relies on volunteer labour. Planning takes place at village, regional and national levels, shaping the work and providing a basis for lobbying. A biennial Rural Parliament creates a platform for raising the rural profile. Kodukant is an active partner in building rural movements in Eastern Europe.

Hungary

The Hungarian Rural Parliament - *Vidék Parlamentje*

Web-site: www.falunet.adatpark.hu

The Hungarian Rural Parliament was established in 1998, to promote dialogue and co-operation in rural Hungary. Its formation was motivated by the increasing gap in the living conditions of urban and rural areas following independence, and the need for a strong voice to support the rural

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communities. The organisation has about 500 members, comprising rural NGOs and groups. It is not a village movement as Estonia, but provides a forum for rural organisations. It has 1 part-time administrator and work is carried out through topic based working groups. Activities include local and national rural gatherings and training and lobbying the Government. The organisation is also giving support to the development of movements in Eastern Europe and European networking.

Slovakia

The Rural Parliament of Slovakia - *Vidiecky Parlament na Slovensku (VIPA)*

Web-site: www.vipa.sk

The Rural Parliament of Slovakia was established in 2000, to promote the development of rural areas. It was motivated by the lack of co-ordination between the many organisations and groups working with rural development. The national organisation is now well established, and has made significant progress on setting up regional associations, to date in 4 of the 8 administrative regions of Slovakia. There are no village associations, due to the structure of municipalities at village level. Instead the movement has concentrated on supporting the formation partnerships at micro-regional level, and has initiated a network of 48 Communication and Information Centres. These form the grass-roots of the movement. Establishing this structure has absorbed the energy of the movement in its first 3 years. Attention is now turning to working to influence government policy on rural areas.

Poland

The Polish Forum for the Animation of Rural Areas - *Forum Aktywizacji Obszarów Wiejskich*

The Polish Rural Forum was started in February 2002. The Forum is based on the co-operation of 50 rural development organisations from all over Poland, who have signed a Declaration of Co-operation. The initiators of the Forum are mainly non-governmental organisations working at national and local level. Its objectives are to build a civil dialogue and create a national platform of organisations to support sustainable rural development. It seeks to have an impact on the creation of rural policies in Poland and on the European level.

Slovenia

Slovenian Rural Development Network - *Društva za razvoj slovenskega podeželja*

Web-site: www.drustvo-podezelje.si

Established in October 2002, through the work of the PREPARE Programme, the Network's main concern is to inform and educate its members and the interested public, so that the well-being of rural people can be effectively pursued. It acts as a meeting point and a focus for co-ordination and support to integrated development and practical rural projects, and represents the interests of its members at national and international levels. Members of the Network are individuals and organisations who are involved, at different levels, in rural development in Slovenia.

The PREPARE Network

www.PREPAREnetwork.org

The PREPARE Network has arisen from the PREPARE Programme, set up in 1999 to strengthen civil society and to promote multi-national exchange in rural development in the 10 Pre-Accession countries. The Programme has been active in facilitating the development of the more recent rural movements in Eastern Europe. The PREPARE Network formed in 2003 as a forum for exchange on rural development and supports the development and networking of rural movements.

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The Case Studies An Overview of the Main Findings

Introduction

This section provides a summary of the main findings from a study of four of the European rural movements: Estonia, Finland, Slovakia and Denmark.

The four case studies were compiled from a 2-week research visit to each country undertaken between August and November 2003. (*See Itinerary in the Appendices of each report*) This involved travel to different regions of each country and meetings with many of the key people involved with each movement, and with government - at national, regional and local levels. The questions asked in each country followed a common format, to enable comparison.

The full reports for each country are documented in a common template and comprise 2 sections:

1. The National Context – provides information to assist people from other countries to understand some of the essential features of each country, within which the rural movements are operating. Each country context has been structured in the same way and comprises information on: the national history, structure, administration, rural context and rural policy.

2. The Rural Movement – provides a detailed account of the main features of each movement, comprising a factual account of its history, structure, activities, achievements and problems, and a full commentary providing an insight into the character of the movement and the issues raised by it. Some short case studies are provided to give a flavour of some of the key organisations.

The following section provides a brief commentary on the main findings of the study in relation to:

- The national context
- The rural movements
- The issues raised

The National Context

The character of each movement reflects and responds to the national context in which it operates, including the system of administration and the national culture. The rural movements in the Nordic and Eastern European countries reflect different histories, though these are increasingly converging as the new Member States become partners in the EU. Despite the historical differences, there are many similarities between the 4 countries, and their rural areas face many of the same challenges.

All 4 countries are similar in scale and relatively small in an international context. Estonia, Slovakia and Denmark have a similar land area of approx. 45,000km², Finland is larger at 338,000km². Finland, Slovakia and Denmark have a population of around 5 mill. Estonia is smaller at 1.4 mill.

There are big economic disparities between the Nordic and newly independent Eastern European countries. The differences are particularly marked in the rural areas, where the position of the rural areas in the Eastern European countries is generally very poor. In all countries there is a disparity in the relative wealth of rural v. urban areas and, with some exceptions, wealth and employment are concentrating in the urban areas. In all countries the trends of agricultural decline and rural-urban migration are strong, especially in the Eastern European countries.

It is difficult to make effective comparisons of rurality from the data available. A range of measures is used, for different purposes, to define rurality in each country, none easily comparable. Finland is the most rural in terms of all the statistics available, but all are very rural in an EU context.

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In terms of administration, all countries have public administration at national, regional/ county and local levels. All have local 'Municipalities' at a very local level, in Slovakia at village level. These carry many of the functions of service delivery and planning. There is a constant debate in all countries about the best way to organise the regional level, with a range of structures existing with both State and local functions. In Finland and Slovakia the sub-regional level is emerging as an important level for non-statutory partnerships. Administrative reforms have led to the loss of traditional units of local government in all countries, and a consequent impact on local identity and empowerment.

Civil society is well developed in the Nordic countries, especially in Denmark. In Eastern Europe this has been a major target for foreign aid since independence, and many NGOs have been formed, trained and networked through this process. In all countries the village is a very important unit, with many local associations. Funding sources to support NGOs are scarce in all countries.

Integrated rural policy is poorly developed in all but Finland, which has a highly developed rural policy framework. Rural policy has been substantially influenced by the EU in all countries, in response to the requirements of the CAP and Structural Funds. Some say that rural policy would not be an issue without the EU, but that this also causes a disproportionate focus on the role of agriculture.

In all countries, there has been some structural adjustment in relation to the EU. This has motivated the formation of regional self-governments and regional capacity/ partnerships/ local plans/ inclusion of the civic and private sectors etc. This is most apparent in the new Member States, also in Finland where the development of LAGs has been important, and the formation of regional associations in Finnish Village Action Association was in part a response to EU regional policy. In Finland, Estonia and Slovakia EU funding has been important in shaping rural development, but not in Denmark.

The following table gives an impression of the differences between the 4 countries:

	Estonia	Finland	Slovakia	Denmark
Vital Statistics:				
Land area	45,226km ²	338,100km ²	49,035km ²	43,094km ²
Rural areas	?	98%	87%	?
Total population	1.4mill	5.2 mill	5.4 mill	5.3 mill
Population density	32/km ²	17/km ²	109/km ²	121/km ²
Rural population	33%	55%	43%	30%
GDP	5.3 bill. Euro	110 bill. Euro	3.6 bill. Euro	144 bill. Euro
Gross National Income /PC	3425 Euro	19447 Euro	3267 Euro	25056 Euro

Administration:				
Parliament	101 members	200 members	150 members	179 members
Ministries	12	13	19	17
State regional authorities	15	19 + 12 provinces	79 Districts various regional	14
Local regional authorities	none	19	8	14
Municipalities	247	450	2878	271
Micro-regional partnerships		58 LAGs covering whole country	224 micro- regions	12 LAGs various other
Villages	400+ Village Associations	3935 Village Associations	2740 rural village Municipalities	various associations

Estonia has been independent since 1991, and enters the EU in 2004. It has a long rural tradition, strong community values and rural culture. The village is traditionally the 'heart' of the Estonian culture. Extreme effects have been felt in the rural areas from the transition from 'command' to 'market' economy, with high unemployment and rural-urban migration. Local Municipalities have

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many functions but poor resources. It has rich agricultural land and a tradition of high productivity, which in the Soviet period supported most of the population. 75% of agricultural jobs have been lost since then, and land reform left many non-viable units, leading to severe rural depression.

Finland has been an independent State since 1917, and joined the EU in 1995. It has a very strong economy, in which forestry and ICT play a major role. Municipalities are relatively small, traditional and strong, and the whole country is covered by a network of 58 Local Action Groups (LAGs). It is a very rural country by international standards, with large peripheral, northern areas, and extensive forests and lakes. Since the 1960s agricultural decline and migration have seriously undermined many rural areas, instigating the formation of the first 'village action movement'.

Slovakia has been independent since 1993, and enters the EU in 2004. Extreme effects have been felt in the rural areas from the transition from 'command' to 'market' economy, and all rural trends are negative, rural unemployment and out-migration are high. 8 large administrative Regions were established in 2002 in response to the EU. All Slovak villages are statutory Municipalities in their own right, but have few resources. Slovakia has many rich farming areas, but also extensive marginal mountain areas. Agriculture in many areas has not survived the transition from collective to independent farms, producing extreme rural problems.

Denmark is one of the longest established nations in Europe and has been a member of the EU since 1973. The mid-C19 enlightenment and democratic movement produced the first constitution in 1849 to which the birth of the welfare state and strong social value system can be traced. It has a strong economy and welfare state and the highest taxes in the world, with only recent signs of political movement to a more market led approach. It has a very devolved administration with strong Municipalities. Denmark is historically very rural, the 'farmers country', in which farmers have been centrally important for development of the nation. Large landowners gave way to smaller units and agricultural co-ops in the early C20. Agriculture is still economically important, but not for employment and rural job losses have been high.

The Rural Movements

The case studies focus on the following national rural movements:

Estonia	The Estonian Village Movement	<i>Kodukant</i>
Finland	The Village Action Association of Finland	<i>Suomen Kylatoiminta Ry (SYTY)</i>
Slovakia	The Rural Parliament of Slovakia	<i>Vidiecky Parlament na Slovensku (VIPA)</i>
Denmark	The Danish Village Association	<i>Landsforeningen af Landsbysamfund (LAL)</i>
	The Danish Council of Rural Districts	<i>Landdistrikternes Faellesraad (LDF)</i>

The four case studies span the whole history of the rural movements, including the 2 oldest, Finland and Denmark, the first in Eastern Europe, Estonia, and one of the most recent, Slovakia. The work of building a rural movement began in Finland and Denmark in the early 1970s, but quite independently. The two have taken different paths in their development and structure, but are focussed on similar objectives. Both were mobilised through the work of committed individuals, and focussed on support to the villages. Estonia was the first of the newly independent States to recognise the value of the rural movements, and started with support from Sweden and Finland, hence following a similar model – all are true 'village action movements'. Slovakia was one of the first of the movements to be mobilised through the work of the PREPARE⁷ Programme. This is reflected in the greater concentration on the formation of a rural forum or partnership at a national level.

The movements visited are composed accordingly:

⁷ Pre-Accession Partnerships for Rural Europe

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	Estonia	Finland	Slovakia	Denmark
National 'rural forum'	X	X	X	X
Village action movement	X	X		X
Regional associations	X	X	X	
Sub-regional associations		X	X	
Village associations	X	X		X
Rural parliament	X	X	X	

The most important characteristics of the movements are that they are:

- Bottom up** rooted in the village and owned and run by village people
- Supportive** mobilising, networking and supporting action for local development
- Structured** organised and networked at local, regional, national and international levels
- Co-ordinated** working with a clear common purpose achieved by strategic planning
- Influencing** undertaking advocacy to shape local, regional, national, EU policy
- International** internationally connected through a common network

Rooted in the 'home place'

*"The home place is important to people – we need to know where we came from and our history, to know where we are going."*⁸

The village movements are strongly rooted in the notion of the 'village' or 'home place' – *Kodukant* – the name chosen for the Movement of Estonian Villages. The village is closely connected to historical, cultural and social roots. It goes back into the earliest history of the countries and has, at different times, been a local administrative unit. In Slovakia the village is still the local authority, the result of a popular reaction against the Soviet imposition of a larger administrative unit, which removed the historical autonomy of the village. The traditional connections between people and place are strongly respected in all of the movements. This applies not only to the village level, but also to the parish and county levels.

The President of Estonia, speaking at the Estonian Rural Parliament in August 2003, referred to the spirit of Estonia's villages having kept alive the Estonian national identity and culture during many centuries of occupation. *"The heart of Estonian culture and economy has been a village. It started to flourish again when Estonians mastered their state and land again. Like in a real heart our most precious principles and values were fixed there"*.⁹

Owned and run by village people

By the same tradition, the village movement is of the rural communities. It embodies the spirit and values of the villages and is driven by a passion to retain rural life and traditions. It is a voice and market place for rural people and a uniting force for the many dispersed rural communities. Most importantly it is 'bottom up', owned by the rural people and a source of great pride to them and is run with great energy and enthusiasm, by many hundreds of rural people. It is also clearly respected by national and local government.

This particularly describes the Estonian and Finnish movements, which have concentrated on the mobilisation of many village action groups, and the formation of legally constituted 'village associations' – enabling the village to become its own development agency. Whilst Denmark work closely with and for the villages, they have not focussed on building village associations in the same way, and lack the local structure to engage them as fully in driving the work of the movement. Slovakia has concentrated on building a strong national partnership at this stage in its development, and will take several years to build the kind of local network seen in Finland, Sweden and Estonia

⁸ Village Leader of Jani Village, Estonia

⁹ Arnold Rüütel, President of the Estonian Republic, 2003

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The formally constituted village associations, promoted initially by Finland, have been found to be an effective model for enabling rural development. But they take time to mobilise. After 30 years Finland and Sweden have 4000 each, after 10 years Estonia has 400. They have been found, through research, to evolve as they move forward and grow in confidence and capacity. This is described as the 'first generation' of working with cultural, social and environmental projects, the 'second generation' of taking on aspects of local service delivery, and the 'third generation' of undertaking business creation and economic development. As the achievements of the active villages become known, so more villages follow suit.

"The idea of the Village Association builds on the human tendency to support the local 'tribe' and to feel allegiance to something that they themselves own and have created".¹⁰

Supportive of local development

The movements undertake a wide range of activities in support of rural communities. These focus on building the capacity of the villages to become organised, to plan their priorities, to raise and manage funds, to undertake projects, and to link with other villages and organisations. Most of this work is carried out by the regional associations, whose staff and boards are trained by the national associations. Denmark lacks a regional structure, so attempts to do this from a national level. Production and dissemination of good information is an essential pillar in this support and network service. Each country has a range of information tools by which it achieves this: newsletters, websites, information days and training. In Slovakia a network of local Communication Centres has been established, which are the focus for the support and information services.

"We are not willing to regard economic values as more important than the quality of life. We don't believe in development through centralised structures for decision-making and services. Instead we believe that people should control their own lives."¹¹

Organised and connected at different levels

The four movements are structured differently. Finland and Estonia are very similar, based on the model of the 'village action movement' – they have promoted the formation of 'village associations' at village, regional and national levels. Denmark is unusual in that it actually comprises three national organisations (only 2 of which were studied), two focussed on village support and the third being a 'rural forum' or partnership of key rural NGOs. Slovakia began with a national rural forum, and has worked to form regional associations (so far in 4 of the 8 regions of Slovakia), and local Communication Centres (so far in 38 areas). It also works with the independently established Micro-Regions. The focus on the village¹² as the fundamental unit of rural society is strong in all but Slovakia, where the statutory Municipalities are formed at village level. In all cases the organisations are civil societies or NGOs. They are essentially composed of village associations, and NGOs at local, regional and national levels. They aim to work in partnership with the relevant statutory bodies.

A key feature is the structuring of the movements at each administratively significant level – village, regional and national. This is particularly evident in Finland and Estonia where independent associations are formed at each level, but are connected through the umbrella of the movement. This enables the movement to operate more effectively across the country, and also to connect to the decision-making process at each level. This is simple, logical and effective way to both connect civic society and to link it to the governmental system. It reduces the complexity that is inherent in community groups and NGOs, and helps them to co-operate more efficiently.

¹⁰ Village leader, Estonia

¹¹ The Finnish National Organisation for Village Action 1995

¹² The work 'village' is used to describe local communities within a geographical area, these may be scattered settlements, as well as true villages.

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- The village associations provide an umbrella, under which all local groups can co-operate, plan and take action, and link to the municipalities.
- The regional village associations, which are seen as essential in supporting local action, link both the village associations, regional rural NGOs, and work with the regional authorities.
- The national association provides the forum for the regional associations and the national rural NGOs to combine their work and experience and to talk to the government.

“The national association was formed in order to integrate sectoral interests, at local and national levels, to strengthen the involvement of village people and to bring their interest groups together. If we wanted to get support for these village groups we needed a body that was fighting for this at national level.”¹³

Working with a common purpose

One of the most impressive things about the established movements is the level of strategic thought that has gone into their organisation. Not only are they structured at each significant level, in Finland and Estonia they also undertake strategic planning at each of these levels. In Slovakia the planning process is undertaken nationally and provides a framework for the regional and local associations, in Denmark strategic planning has less of a clear focus. In Finland and Estonia, the villages have been trained and supported to produce village plans, in consultation with the community. These form the basis for prioritising village action, and are also used by many municipalities in developing their municipal plan. At regional level, the regional associations consult the village associations and plans in the process of producing a regional village plan. This is used to prioritise regional action and to feed into the statutory regional plans. At national level, the regional plans are used to produce the National Village Action Programme, which guides the work of the national association and, in Finland, forms a foundation for the national Rural Policy Programme.

“Village action has organised into local, regional and national activity, and international co-operation is increasing. Each level has its own responsibilities and each is needed to promote village development. This is recognised in the programme, where there are responsibilities for each level.”¹⁴

Influencing policy

An increasingly important role for the movements is advocacy to shape local, regional, national, EU policy. They provide a unique function in opening up the views and needs of small rural communities to the distant policy-makers. The central focus of all movements is to encourage policy to better reflect the changing circumstances of rural areas, and their diverse character and needs, and to reduce the traditional focus on agriculture. This is a skilled job, requiring experience, knowledge, connections and credibility, hence it is one of the later activities to develop. It is however a critical role in helping to establish the aim of integrated rural policy, and is of high priority for all the movements. The Finnish movement is probably the most successful to date in its achievements, though all see the need to strengthen their capacity for advocacy.

“The relationship between the state and the local level is that the state is like a giraffe, looking down from a great height – it does not see the details at local level. So the state needs the villages. It is important to recognise and work with the village identity from the inside”.¹⁵

¹³ Eero Uusitalo – Chairman of the Village Action Association of Finland - pers. com.

¹⁴ ‘All the Power of a Small Village’ – Finnish National Village Action Programme 2003-7

¹⁵ Kodukant village workshop report

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Internationally connected

Trans-national links are an important feature of all the movements. They are linked through two key networks: the Nordic Network (HNSL) and the wider PREPARE Network. The latter was also the vehicle for supporting the development of the new movements in the accession countries. Since the start, the movements have networked and helped each other. This has enabled the rapid transfer of experience and avoidance of mistakes. It has also increased the confidence and status of the movements, both at home and in the EU.

Linked in a common European network, the national village movements are now actively working to influence EU policy for the next programme period, after 2006. They are also currently addressing the possibility of a 'European Rural Parliament', to provide a formal platform through which to address the wider needs of rural areas in a EU context.

The Issues Raised

This section provides some thoughts about issues and lessons raised by the experience of the rural movements. The findings are based mostly on the four case studies of Estonia, Finland, Slovakia and Denmark, plus reference to Sweden. It is not a comprehensive analysis, which would require more in-depth research, but represents some of the main issues raised during the study visits.

Developing rural capacity and civil society

The movements play a critical role in promoting rural identity within the wider society and increasing the confidence and pride of rural communities through giving them a voice and supporting the rural local heritage. A key part of this process is building formal structures through which small and scattered rural communities can both address their own development in a more integrated and effective way, and can also network with similar communities to address mutual needs and wider issues. This was the primary goal of the original Finnish movement, to which they have applied themselves with tenacity, building and networking almost 4000 village associations. The success of their efforts has inspired others to follow this path, most notably Sweden and Estonia, but increasingly the newer movements are seeking ways to build local organisational capacity. Village associations have quite explicitly been created to help fill the vacuum left by the loss of traditional local Municipalities and consequent reduction in service provision. They also build on the historical affiliation to place, which is a strength in all rural communities. Coupled with the development of organisational structure, the movements are also providing training to enable the associations to be effective planners and deliverers of rural development. This is a civil system for meeting the needs of rural areas, which the State is unable to meet.

Building participatory democracy

The weakening of local democracy due to administrative centralisation has been very noticeable in the rural areas, especially in Scandinavia, where local democratic traditions have been among the strongest in the world. The rural movements are one force that is working in the opposite direction, not through the formal democratic system, but by mobilising the involvement of local people and transferring their issues, needs and ideas into the formal statutory processes of policy making. The movements have successfully established structures and tools for enabling the participation of rural civil society at each level of administration. This has been referred to in Sweden as 'place-based democracy'.

Increasing social capital

All movements are seeking to increase the participation of civil society in the processes of planning, decision-making and implementation of rural development. Village action plays a critical

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role in building local confidence, pride, relationships, capacity and integration. This is building on the long established traditions of village action, which are part of all rural areas, and providing a new framework and focus for this within the context of modern society. The importance of social capital in supplementing reducing public resources and services is recognised in all countries, and is an incentive for government support. The loss of rural population, the weakening of local democracy and the welfare state and the transition to a monetary economy has affected all rural communities adversely. The village action movement provides inspiration and motivation to build the social capital to ensure rural community sustainability. The many creative ideas and solutions to local problems become common property as part of a collective movement. These can be traded for external funding and translated into contracting local service delivery. At a further stage of development, it have been recorded that villages become their own economic development agents.

“The Village Action Movement is an expression of peoples’ desires to engage in collective values as well as an expression of their ability to find new solutions – to reclaim the initiative. Organised collectively in democratic associations, the people develop and uphold their local communities.”¹⁶

Developing co-operation and synergy

The movements play an important role in creating synergy between villages and between NGOs so that they avoid competition and increase their mutual capacity to meet rural needs. This was noted in Slovakia as a key reason for the establishment of the Rural Parliament:

“A significant development of civil society in the rural areas took place following independence, with many civil groups and organisations being established, at local, regional and national levels. However, there was no mechanism for networking these or for developing a more co-ordinated and strategic approach to rural development.”¹⁷

Promoting policy development

All movements aspire to influence policy at all levels through advocacy and partnership. By linking many rural organisations they provide a useful partner for government. A key tool for achieving this is strategic planning to identify and prioritise issues. Sophisticated systems have been established to produce inter-linked plans at village, regional and national levels, and to create links between these ‘village plans’ and the statutory plans at each level of the statutory system: municipal, region and national. In Finland this has succeeded in directly influencing the national Rural Policy Programme. This process is still developing in Slovakia, where a Programme for Slovak Rural Areas is produced biennially, but it is not well developed in Denmark. To date there is dissatisfaction in all movements about the responsiveness of governments to the work of the movements. Though notable achievements can be seen, these are still considered to be much less than is required to achieve sustainable rural development.

Working with the EU

There is a growing relationship between the rural movement and the EU, driven by the PREPARE Network. This is based on the perceived need for an effective, integrated rural voice in Brussels. The initial mobilisation of the Eastern European movements was motivated by the need to address rural questions in respect of EU accession. The movements have also been conscious of the need to work with EU policy and structures in order to gain the most advantage for rural areas. This partly motivated the establishment of the Finnish regional structure, and has lead to a strong focus on lobbying for the development of a more integrated rural development policy in Brussels. The potential for the formation of a European Rural Parliament, in the style of the Swedish Rural Parliament, is under current discussion.

¹⁶ ‘Local Level Democracy in a Historical Perspective in Sweden’ Ulla Herlitz. University of Gothenburg, 2001

¹⁷ Jela Tvrdonova, Head of the Slovak Rural Development Agency

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Rural forum or village action movement?

The most significant issue about the structure of the movements is the degree to which they are driven from the 'bottom-up' ie. from the rural communities themselves, or from the 'top down' ie. by the larger national organisations. It has been noted that the movements comprise a varying mix of the 'village movement' and the 'rural forum'. Those stemming directly from the Finnish model tend to be the most balanced in structure, and the most driven by the rural communities themselves, with national NGOs acting in a supportive role. Whereas the more recently formed movements in parts of Eastern Europe have started with a forum of larger organisations. This reflects the national priorities, maturity and process of establishment.

The Finnish and Swedish movements evolved over a long timeframe, and were originally inspired by the efforts of individual villages to mobilise their own resources in the face of rural decline. The mobilisation of the villages was the first priority and the formation of regional and national associations came at a much later stage in the process. In Estonia, the process began at the regional level, followed by the establishment of a national association, and over time is supporting the mobilisation of village associations. The Danish movement also began at village level, and much later formed a national rural forum, but under a separate organisation, it did not form a regional structure. Slovakia is more representative of the movements inspired through the PREPARE Programme. It reflects the priority of this Programme, to construct partnerships between civil and public organisations for rural development, in preparation for accession to the EU. Starting from this 'top-down' model, Slovakia has moved on to try to establish structures at regional and micro-regional levels, but this is a longer process, and there are still concerns as to its lack of community 'roots'.

It is clear, from looking at the different movements, that both elements of the structure are needed. The rural movements are essentially about the rural communities. Without their direct involvement the most critical voice is missing. Whilst many national NGOs have local representatives, these are often single issue focussed, and the organisations are often run by professional people who may be more remote from the village level. The logic of the Finnish model is that it places the focus clearly on the integration of all aspects of rural life, **at the village level**. The powerful voice of several thousand small villages speaking through the village movement, as in Finland and Sweden, is hard to ignore. The solidarity of belonging to such a collective effort is very empowering to the rural communities, and this builds the confidence and capacity, essential for rural development. Rural communities operating in isolation are in a very weak position, operating collectively they have great strength – the principal of the trade union movement.

"I have learned that when I believe in something I just have to start it and other people will follow and want to know how to go on. We all need courage and step by step we get braver. To become brave you have to believe in yourself – to do something for others. Then the spark has a flame. When we get together and organise we become brave enough to talk to the authorities. When we become brave enough to talk to the authorities, they start to respect us".¹⁸

Equally, the presence of a strong group of regional and national NGOs, able to work in a co-ordinated way to support rural areas, and to provide strong and unified advocacy to government provides a more effective and efficient context for rural development.

The bottom-up and top-down are inter-dependent and mutually necessary. *Kodukant* in Estonia and *SYTY* in Finland show the '*power of the small village*' when mobilised, organised and connected. *SYTY* shows that the 2 facets are most effective and efficient when linked into one movement. Denmark shows some of the pitfalls of keeping them apart. Slovakia shows the importance of providing a strong link to government, and the difficulties of establishing an effective grass-roots network. These examples pose questions about the most effective process of mobilisation, and whether it is possible to build a village movement from the top down, as in Slovakia, or whether it has to evolve, over a longer period, from the bottom-up, as in Finland.

¹⁸ Village leader - Estonia

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Fit for purpose

The most compelling feature of the rural movements is the logic and simplicity of their structures, providing a clear system for linking the main actors with respect to rural development, and linking civil society to public administration at every level. The most striking is the Finnish model, which is organised at each level of administration – local, regional and national. This enables the movement to address government at each level, and to become an effective partner in policy development.

The structure of the movement and its component parts and partners has been given considerable thought in each country. The influence of the original Finnish and Swedish models can be clearly seen, especially in Estonia, however, each country has its own particular form, related to the differing national contexts. The key issues regarding structure relate to the balance between the local and national interests, relationship to the national structures for administration and the appropriate partners in relation to rural development. Some issues are highlighted:

- working with the existing structures that are meaningful locally
- not creating overlapping structures which confuse the process
- targeting critical gaps in the existing structures

What is clear is that each movement must define its values and base planning and structure on this. For instance, a high value is placed on the organisational structure reflecting participatory, democratic values. It is also seen as important to stress empowerment and ownership rather than control and hierarchy.

Availability of resources is clearly an issue, though most movements have not let this dictate their structure. As all movements rely on voluntary action, they must rationalise their role and activities to use this efficiently. In this respect, there is a question as to the sustainability of the movements in relation to the scale of the task they have taken on.

The problem of resources

The need for sustainable financial support is a major concern of all movements. All, except Sweden, are running substantially on volunteer labour, help from member organisations and project funding. The tyranny and unreliability of funding is an issue of great concern. The sources of core-funding for non-governmental organisations appears to be very limited in all countries, forcing a reliance on project funding. This presents a balancing-act between satisfying the needs of the project and of the organisation. It is also time-limited and unsustainable. Whilst government funding is sought by all, the need to maintain independence from government and be seen to be neutral is critical. Also it has been found that government funding may be politically influenced and be cut if the movement upsets the Ministry or if the government changes.

A question of identity

All countries have recognised the importance of working with local identity in building participatory democracy. This means working with people in the local context that gives strongest social cohesion and identity. Traditional historical units are very important – villages, parishes, traditional regions. These may not reflect modern administrative units, which tend to be formed in response to political or economic imperatives. Slovakia is working with traditional pre-communist regions, Estonia, Finland and Sweden with traditional villages. The movements also have a role in promoting local rural identity within the wider society and increasing the confidence and pride of rural communities through their sense of place.

Safeguarding internal relationships

The relationship between the national movement and its member organisations is an important, but potentially sensitive one. The focus of the movements is on partnership, which has implications for both the structure and working practices. Working through member organisations rather than over them was viewed as very important. Slovakia uses existing NGOs to do the administration for the

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movement, rather than establishing a central office. The facilitation of an open process of dialogue and mutual trust between members is critical to success. *'It is important that you can talk together and say things that need to be said'*. In this respect, some member organisations have expressed a fear of the movement subsuming the identity of its members, especially in respect of funding. There are also issues about the relationship of the movements to their members in respect of lobbying.

Equally, the autonomy of regional and local level structures must be fully respected. The role of the movements is to help build mechanisms for enabling different organisations and sectors to work together, at different levels, but not to own them. In Finland and Estonia this is clearly expressed through the organisational autonomy of all regional and village associations. In Slovakia some concern was expressed about the movement claiming too much ownership of the micro-regional structures.

Open and transparent decisions are seen as critical to retaining the trust and enthusiastic involvement of all members and partners. *'If you share power you get it, if you keep it you loose it'*. In Finland, Sweden, Estonia and Slovakia, complex, democratic processes for planning and decision making have been developed to address this. The Finnish process is highly developed, with planning processes at village, regional and national levels, feeding into a National Village Action Programme.

The role of external mobilisation

All the movements are testimony to the importance of mobilisation, both nationally and internationally. In Sweden and Finland the spontaneous growth of village action in the 1970s, was matched by national mobilisation to develop structures and processes through which the villages could work and connect more effectively. This wider co-operation does not arise spontaneously. In all countries mobilisation has taken place, initially by committed individuals, and eventually by a wider forum of interests providing resources to enable the work across the whole country.

Mobilisation and networking internationally has been the most important force in developing the rural movements in Eastern Europe. The PREPARE Programme has been effectively mobilising and networking national movements since 1999. This has resulted in the formation of organisational partnership structures in 4 countries to date, and work is continuing in other countries. This has been focussed on building partnerships between civic, public, private and political actors and linking to the EU. The role of PREPARE has been to network the established movements with the new, and to facilitate a dialogue between key rural actors in each country. The role of Sweden, and to a lesser extent Finland, in mobilising the rural movements has been extensive and, often supported by government, they have been a key player in the development of all of the Eastern European movements to date. This has both initiated and speeded up the process of formation and brought some synchrony to it. The PREPARE Network is now playing a key role mobilising the established rural movements to undertake in advocacy with the EU in relation to rural development.

It is also relevant to note the important role played by international aid organisations in establishing the civil associations and democratic processes in Eastern Europe during the 1990s. This has laid the foundations for the structure of civil organisations, which in turn have become key players in mobilising their national rural movements. These international foundations have also been important in providing the funding for the work of the PREPARE Programme and national projects to initiate the rural movements, as government and EU funding proved more difficult to access.

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The role of individuals

Each movement has relied on a few key individuals for its existence. These were often the initial motivators and catalysts,¹⁹ they may also be the mainstays during hard times. Individuals may be the acceptable face of the movement, in relation to the rural people or government and may determine the success of that relationship. Finland and Denmark are very clear demonstrations of the critical role of individuals, and raise questions as to sustainability in the absence of such individuals. Estonia has taken steps to reduce reliance on individuals and to spread responsibilities.

In all movements, the huge commitment and input of individual volunteer time and personal resources, at local and national levels, has been key to success, especially in the early years, though, as Finland shows, this may be a continuing necessity.

The role of 'experts', intellectuals and incomers in supporting and articulating the movements has been important in all countries. In Finland, the academic community has played a very important role in mobilising and supporting the development of village associations and in articulating the needs of rural communities to government. In many villages it is also apparent that incomers can be catalysis with skills and external connections, alert village leaders have used such people to their advantage.

All movements have also experienced personality problems. This may be more damaging in organisations which lack the clarity of a strong organisational structure, and where individual rivalries can have a significant impact on the direction of the organisation. In each of the movements, from time to time, key individuals had been challenged or alienated. The reasons for this vary, examples given were: people taking on too much responsibility and not sharing power, mismanagement of funds, lack of practical management skills and personality clashes. This detracts from the momentum of the work, and measures may be put in place to anticipate and diffuse such difficulties, based on clear democratic and organisational structures and a focus on roles as distinct from personalities.

The role of Government

The potential role of government relates to providing co-operation in rural policy development and financial support. The response of governments to the development of the rural movements has been variable. In most cases governments have been only marginally involved, often disinterested and sometimes hostile in the early stages. However, there is recognition of the potential importance of the movements, shown by the attendance of the Head of State at the Estonian and Swedish Rural Parliaments. Only in Sweden has the government played a strongly supportive role, through provision of funding, manpower and practical support. In Finland, the close connection to rural policy, through the role of the Chairman, is a notable exception. All movements expressed dissatisfaction with the responsiveness of politicians and Ministries, and the difficulties of successful advocacy. All also expressed their strong concern about the potential for compromising neutrality through receipt of government funding, though all are seeking to gain this.

¹⁹ notably Professor Hautemaki and Eero Uusitalo in Finland, Mikk Sarv in Estonia, Carsten Abild in Denmark, Frida Vala Ásbjörnsdóttir in Iceland

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Future trends

The future of the rural movements in Europe holds great potential. As the trends of rural decline continue in most of Europe, the need for a countervailing force increases. At the same time, the pressure for change in EU and national policies towards rural areas is showing signs of success, and it is likely that there will be moves towards a more integrated approach to rural policy in the future. However this will require continued pressure from rural lobbies, other than the agricultural lobby. The rural movements are now strongly placed to take on this role and, as they build in more countries, have the potential to create a 'European Rural Parliament' - already under discussion.

The role of civil society in rural development is likely to increase as the welfare state decreases. This is also a common trend. Therefore the role of the rural movements in mobilising, organising and networking the greater potential of civil society is of increasing importance to governments. This has already been recognised by some people in the national Ministries.

The nature of the relationship between the movements and government requires careful consideration. All movements have identified the need to become more effective in advocacy. They are seeking to become 'partners' with government, rather than adversaries, however the need to retain independence and the ability to act in an adversarial capacity is critical to performing an effective function in representing the needs of civil society. This is an area in which skills development could be usefully delivered through the networks.

The networking of the rural movements to share experience, provides the possibility for both increasing the speed of their development, and perfecting the structures and processes they employ. Each movement displays strengths and weaknesses, which are a lesson to others. There is no need for each to painfully learn the best solutions, when this can be done through collective effort. The similarities between the rural areas and national contexts of each country are far greater than the differences, this similarity will only increase through wider membership of the EU. It is therefore quite appropriate to adopt similar solutions within different countries.

An outstanding problem for all of the movements lies in resourcing all this effort in a sustainable way. It is clearly not sustainable for them to continue to rely on volunteer labour to the extent that they currently do. The true value of this activity must receive greater recognition from governments. Recent statistics provided by the Finnish Village Action Association prove conclusively the extent of this contribution to society. This requires to be documented in all countries. The movements themselves will also have to develop the most efficient frameworks for maximising the use of scarce resources and targeting action into the most effective channels.

The wider question for European society is – do we accept the inevitability of the further urbanisation of our society and cultures, or do we wish to address this issue seriously and breathe life back into the rural areas? It is this central issue that the rural movements stand for. If the answer to this question is 'yes' then it will be necessary for governments to work with rural people to develop the most effective solutions, building on their local knowledge of the rural areas. This is the approach adopted by the rural movements.

Government is, by definition, remote from the rural communities, and this is an issue in all countries. It cannot have the detailed knowledge needed to build rural communities. It must trust the rural people to do that, by providing the most supportive and appropriate frameworks and policies. This is the great strength of the rural movements - they gather together the rural people and provide a clear forum with which government can work, at all levels. It is a very logical and streamlined model, deserving of recognition and support.