

Reflections on the Estonian Rural Parliament 9-11 August 2013

John Hutchison and Vanessa Halhead

Two members of the Management Group for the Scottish Rural Parliament, John Hutchison and Vanessa Halhead¹, visited the 10th Estonian Rural Parliament (Maapäev²)(ERP) held in Saaremaa, organised by the rural community movement Kodukant. Vanessa has been closely involved in the European Rural Movement for over 10 years, but this was John's first visit to a Rural Parliament.

The theme for this Rural Parliament was 'Village Life Year Round'. The event had 390 participants, including 314 representatives from 15 Estonian counties, 26 foreign guests and 50 other guests, performers and volunteers.

The Estonian report of the Rural Parliament can also be viewed, in English, on the Kodukant website at: <http://www.kodukant.ee/index.php?id=104065> Extracts are provided in Appendix 1. A full report of proceedings will be available from Kodukant in October.

The Estonian Rural Parliament process

The Estonian Rural Parliament is held every two years. It is an important part of the work of the Estonian rural movement, Kodukant. The event is attended by the Estonian President, Mr Toomas Hendrik Ilves, and other politicians and civil servants.

"Since 1996, Kodukant (the Estonian national rural community movement) has sponsored Rural Parliaments to bring together village members, organizations, and local and national representatives with the aim to discuss collaboratively and seek for solutions to issues facing rural development. The outcome of the workshops will be presented to local and national authorities, other organizations and to the general public. About 400 village members and representatives, NGO leaders, government representatives, international partners, and experts in the field of rural development are usually expected to attend the Rural Parliament of Estonian Villages." Kodukant 2013

The Rural Parliament comprises both Estonian and European elements.

The international component has become normal in all of the Rural Parliaments now functioning. It enables the national rural movements, European rural networks and representatives from the European Commission to meet and exchange knowledge. It also exposes the host national representatives to the wider European picture in terms of rural development, and international delegates are fully involved in the event.

At the national level, each Rural Parliament comprises a mix of local community networking and profiling, workshop debates on key rural development issues, from the local perspective, and the development of ideas and issues to report to policy makers at local, regional and national levels, and to inform the work of Kodukant during the coming period. This year, there were also discussions to approve Kodukant's own 6 year strategic plan. The event is also a gathering for rural communities across Estonia and a colourful expression of their local activities, culture and produce, with cultural events (music, singing, plays), exhibitions of local produce and meals provided from local food from each region.

¹ John Hutchison is the Chair of the Scottish Rural Parliament Management Group, Vanessa Halhead is the Scottish Rural Parliament Adviser and Co-ordinator of the European Rural Community Association

² Translates as Earth / Country / Rural Day

At the strategic level, during this Rural Parliament there were 2 important outputs for the national governmental level. First was the public announcement from Kodukant to the Parliament and Government of Estonia and to Ministry of Agriculture related to rural development plan 2014-2020. It was read out during the forum on last day and sent to the press. This identified issues and concerns with the plan. The second output is still under completion, processing the results from the reports of 43 'ideas hunting' workshops held in villages around the area. There was also a section focussed on the local authority (county and municipal) plans to develop best practice for Saaremaa County. One outcome was an expression to the government to give better clarity to the responsibilities of each level of governance, local to national.

Programme:

The programme is appended from which the International and National elements can be seen. Vanessa participated in the International programme on day 2 and John the Estonian field visits, with the aid of interpreters.

Observations from the ERP:

- It was interesting that the full title of the event was 'Rural Parliament of Estonian Villages'. In Scotland, this might be considered the 'Meeting of the Scottish Rural Community'.
- The process of garnering ideas and developing best practice was aided by the use of an 'Ideas Chart'. These charts had been prepared and were given to each visiting bus group and one hour at the end of programme of visits was allocated to discussing the projects and developing ideas thereon. The number of ideas was reported back at the final plenary session.
- The first ERP gave tasks to the second ERP and so on. Tasks were carried out between the biennial meetings and reported to the subsequent ERP.
- This ERP was run on a very tight budget, this year with a total cost of 40,000 euro. However, this figure only includes costs on the event itself, not for mobilisation, staffing, participants T&S. Also costs in Estonia are still relatively lower than in Scotland. Participants at both the Estonian and Swedish RPs fund their own T&S, or raise subsidy from within their local home areas. International delegates fund their own participation.
- What has since become the national rural movement, Kodukant, began with an initiative between Estonia and Sweden, in two counties. This was deemed so successful that it rapidly spread to all 19 counties. The first national ERP decided on the establishment of Kodukant as a national movement. The movement has since grown in strength and influence, working with authorities at municipal, county and national level, and having county level organisations in 15 counties. The Rural Parliament is a very important though limited part of the work of the movement. An early decision was to include an international section in every ERP. As we endeavour to establish a RP for Scotland we need to bear in mind that it will take time to evolve and self-shape.
- Strategy development takes place at three levels:
 - What can be done with minimal funding in our own communities;
 - What can be done through co-operation with local authorities;
 - What should be suggested to the state to assist the development of rural communities.
- Estonia has a relatively short experience of community development. During the Soviet period the concept of developing project ideas, working up the project plan and delivering was alien. Similarly, the emergence of community leaders was discouraged. In the immediate post-independence period, substantial assistance from other European countries and the USA was given to help build civil society and non-governmental organisations. The work to develop the rural movement in Estonia is linked to this, and has been carried out subsequently in all other accession and pre-accession states through the PREPARE Programme, of which

Estonia is a member. Comparatively, our rural areas are blessed with a long history of civil society development and associated skills and talent, which is very easy to forget or take for granted.

- Over the years the Kodukant in organising the ERP has encouraged specific attendees, eg. young folk, community leaders, etc. They strive to have a mix of experienced and new attendees. Each county identifies and supports a bus-load of delegates to attend the ERP. Travel and accommodation is funded locally and each delegation brings local food, culture and other offerings to the ERP. Hence bringing a real flavour of the local and cultural richness and variety across the country.

Proposed European Rural Parliament:

One key part of the work taking place in the international seminars were meetings of four major European networks: The European Rural Community Association ERCA, the European Rural Alliance ERA, the PREPARE Partnership for Rural Europe and Forum Synergies. An important outcome from these meetings was the final stages of the merging of ERCA and ERA into one network: the European Rural Community Alliance, which will involve and represent the national rural movements of Europe and other pan-European rural networks, to enable a stronger rural community voice in Brussels, as well as mutual support and learning. An important new initiative from ERCA, ERA and PREPARE is the development of the first European Rural Parliament, to be held in Brussels on November 13, 2013. This is open for applications to attend now, and Scotland will have up to 3 places available. To find out more see: www.europeanruralparliament.com

Gathering observations from the visit to the Estonian and Swedish Rural Parliaments:

Characteristic	Comment and how to embed in the Scottish Rural Parliament
Takes place in a rural area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appears to be a celebration of rural life with local produce and local amenities used to the full. • Food, music and cultural links essential. • Need to offer a mix of accommodation options • Consider the use of venues like schools
Is organised at county level, with national support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In both Estonia and Sweden, each RP is organised at county level, by the county organisation of the rural movement. This is competitive, with counties submitting bids (much like the Olympics) to run the next RP. • This might be a way for the Scottish RP to be progressed in the future.
Organisation for the next RP is through a steering group that is part national and part local	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In Sweden a local project leader (part employed / part voluntary) led the operations on the ground, with the aid of fourteen working groups dealing with different aspects (food, transport, funding, etc.). There was also overall management from one of the staff of the rural movement 'Hela Sverige Ska Leva' HSSL nationally. • In Scotland we should try to involve the local level in the vicinity of the venue in part of the organisation. But for the inaugural RP, it will not be possible to have full local management, until the idea is more fully understood.
Is based on a theme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Much of the Inaugural Scottish RP will be about building the process but broad policy theme/s could be included. In future years the theme could emerge from the inter-RP consultations.
Is driven by the community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The mission of 'Hela Sverige Ska Leva' (HSSL) is to network, support and present a strong voice for the people living in rural Sweden. The membership of HSSL comprises 5,000 village action groups, 100 municipal level and 24 regional networks of village groups, and 40 national NGOs and interest groups. • We need to start to map out our rural movement. The experience of the other countries shows that inclusiveness is critical and that involvement and awareness builds over time. It took Sweden several years to build their 5000 members, but they succeed in attracting around 1000 delegates to each RP.

Is more than the biennial gathering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The RP is a two year process of involvement, in which the event is the climax. We need to understand more about the mechanism through which one RP passes tasks to the next and how progress is monitored in the intervening period.
Has a clear link with local government.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In both Sweden and Estonia (and in other countries with rural movements) the early stages of their rural movements were characterised by some concerns from the local authorities. But this rapidly diminished once it became apparent that the rural movement and village action groups supported and worked in partnership with local authorities. This may take time in Scotland, but should not cause concern. We need to look at how best to get local authority buy in for the inaugural event. At the outset, Estonia took each local authority in turn (from the designated area) to Sweden to see how the movement worked there.
Has a clear link with national government.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The advertising call for the Swedish RP in May 2104 is, "Let's come together in a creative process to develop political positions and requirements aiming at the European and national elections!". National politicians, Ministers and even Presidents, as well as civil servants are present at each RP and policy changes are heralded or unveiled at these events.
Has a clear link with a European movement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indications are that European colleagues would be keen to participate and that there are substantial benefits to the host nation in this. Costs are funded by the delegates, unless they have a key role as a speaker etc. The focus on European policy, which has a major impact on rural areas, is also an important element of the national RPs, including representation from the European Commission and Parliament. We already have strong links with ERCA, who have supported Scotland through the early stages of developing our Rural Parliament.
Field visits to local communities are an integral part of the RPs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In Estonia and Sweden an important part of the programme is the visits to local communities, to enable understanding of their work and issues. These visits are often combined with all-day workshops on key issues. This really roots the RP in the local communities, and enables broader understanding of their situation.
Has a range of issue based workshops	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It should be fairly straightforward to set up a process to allow the issues to emerge through the mobilisation process. In future years, once the rural movement has been defined, this process will be easier.
Travel to the RP is by bus from each county	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Each county sponsors a bus load of people to attend the ERP. En route they stop at interesting communities to see how things are done in other areas. The same busses are used for travel within the RP events and venues. This has the advantage of building local team spirit, of local areas choosing their own delegates, networking between areas and lowering travel costs.
Open microphone sessions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Delegate participation essential at all events. We need to be creative in finding many ways to enable this.
Village of the year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Both Estonian and Swedish RPs feature the village of the year awards, this time presented by the President of Estonia. This is a valued competition providing a context for identifying best practice in local development.

Appendix 1: Estonian report of the Rural Parliament – extract from website

<http://www.kodukant.ee/index.php?id=104065>

Local promoters over Estonia met on 9.-11. August in Saaremaa, Mändjala. X Estonian Rural Parliament (RP) or village parliament called this time "Village life- year-round". The event had 390 participants, including 314 representatives from 15 counties, 26 foreign guests and 50 guests, performers, volunteers.

At the opening ceremony welcomed the participants Estonian president Mr Toomas Hendrik Ilves, Village of the Year announced by the President of Estonian parliament Ms Ene Ergma. By the name of international delegation had a speech Valdis Kudiņš from Latvian Rural Forum. During 3 days visited participants Saaremaa`s communities, having idea-hunting trips to 34 villages; prepared the Village Movement Kodukant new strategy for 2014-2020; having nice dinner „Flavors of Counties“, reviewed the exhibition of badges of village elders; lent „books“ from the Living library; participated in forum "Administrative management through community support". On the closing ceremony announced the next place of XI RP- it will be organized in Järva County, in the „heart“ of Estonia.

International conference „The new CAP- what can we CAPture for rural development“

Already before the X Estonian RP was announced, that there are coming foreign guests from 13 countries. Among them were the „old actors“ (Sweden, birthplace of RP, Finland), newcomers (Latvia, the first RP in June 2013), as well as RP planners (Germany, Scotland) and others. Conference was opened by greetings from the Chairman of Kodukant, Tõnu Leitsmaa, and the member of the board, Anneli Kana, gave an overview of the main projects of Kodukant 2011-2013. ([click here to see the presentation](#))

Keynote speech at the conference held the European Commission representative Kerstin Rosenow (Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural development). Presentation focused on options for the programming period 2014-2020, highlighting the planning principles of Common Agricultural Policy. ([click here to see the presentation](#))

Presentation followed by a discussion between various examples from different countries and preparations for the implementation of the Rural Development Plans. The conference was moderated by Hannes Lorenzen and Oliver Emmes from European Parliament. Closing session noted that the decline in the amount of money, the recession and the strengthening pressure on the governments of the farmers and agricultural producers in the 2014-2020 period shows serious signs of danger. The broader rural development objective is not so much the direct payments as a strong community, and a comprehensive rural development. How this can be achieved? Who stands up for us? Looking for answers to these questions was the theme of second day, 10th of August, international workshop day.

International workshop – innovation of democracy

Co-operation partner of Kodukant, the international organization Forum Synergie contributed to the workshop through the initiative to approach democracy innovative tools and methods. Philippe Barret and Mikk Sarv led first the „idea hunting“ through the open space method to find new meanings to the word democracy. Why? Because right now it is the time when for individuals and the organizations representing of civil society is important to make known their thoughts and standing up for themselves. The next step, using the method „world cafe“ was looking for new methods, tools, ideas - how carry out the democracy into practice. Summarizing the workshop results is still ongoing – it takes time because the participants and the organizers are now already thousands of kilometers away from each other.

Appendix 2:

Programme of 2013 Estonian Rural Parliament - "Village life year-round"

Rural Parliament (*Maapäev*) is unique due to the fact that participants from all sectors all over Estonia are brought together to discuss the problems of the countryside. Rural Parliament plays an important role in setting overall strategic directions for Estonian Village Movement *Kodukant* and making links with the membership and government. Since 1996, *Kodukant* has sponsored Rural Parliaments to bring together village members, organizations, and local and national representatives with the aim to discuss collaboratively and seek for solutions to issues facing rural development.

Thursday, 08.08.2013

Arriving at Tallinn, international get-together dinner in restaurant Sesoon at 19.30

Friday, 09.08.2013

International conference

„The new CAP- what can we CAPture for rural development“

11.45 arriving and coffee

12.00 Welcome by chairman of Kodukant, Tõnu Leitsmaa and Anneli Kana, member of the board

12.15 Key note speech: "Opportunities for action and cooperation in rural development" by Kerstin Rosenow – European Commission – DG Agriculture and Rural Development

13.00 lunch, accommodation

14.00 Farming - Food - Entrepreneurship -Employment: How do we shape own rural future? What are potential and limits of LEADER, CLLD, territorial and local development in the new Rural development Programs by Hannes Lorenzen, Oliver Emmes

14.15-15.30 Working groups

15.30-16.00 Synthesis /reports of results from working groups

16.00- 17.00 Coffee and concluding "Fishbowl session"

Common program with national event

18.00 Opening Ceremony in Mändjala

(translation by 2-3 volunteers Estonian-English, 1 volunteer Estonian-Russian)

„Parade“ of delegations to the main stage

Speech - President of Estonian Republic, Mr Toomas Hendrik Ilves

Welcome speech from international delegation – Valdis Kudins, Latvian Rural Forum

Announcement of the Village of the Year – President of the Estonian Parliament, Mrs Ene Ergma

20.00 County tastes – local food from 15 counties

21.30-24.00 Cultural program by Saaremaa`s way

Parallel program of Estonian participants

10.00-14.30 Estonian County delegations arrive at the different municipalities of Saaremaa County, have a tour and lunch together with the local people.

16.30 Arrival at Mändjala camping area- the Venue of RP www.mandjala.ee

Saturday, 10.08.2013

International activities

9.00-13.00 International workshops

In times of crisis: How can local people make democracy work?

Methods of constructive communication, improved cooperation and conflict management

Moderation: Philippe Barret and Mikk Sarv

13.00-14.00 lunch

14.00-17.00 Networking

Fringe meetings (PREPARE, ERA-ERCA, Forum Synergies)

Parallel program of Estonian participants

9.00-16.00

Idea-trips to different Saaremaa`s villages, getting information, best practices, discussion. (ca 40 minigroups)

Activities in Mändjala:

16.00-19.00 – living library

16.00-19.00 – reading corner- the new strategy of Kodukant

16.00- ... exhibition of village elders badges

17.00 sport activities

Common program with national event

18.30 Dinner in Mändjala

20.00 village theatre (in Estonian) or free time **22.00-1.30** Party, social event, dancing etc...

Sunday, 11.08.2013

9.00-12.30 local product fair (food, handicraft etc)

9.00-9.30 presentation of the book "Village leaders- engines of the villages"

10.00-11.30 Forum "Rural reform by communities"- Minister of Regional Affairs, leaders of Rural development

12.00-12.30 Estonian rural policy and development- presentation of strategy 2020

13.00 Closing the RP, presentation of the summaries; announcing the holder of the XI RP.

(at 9.00-14.00 translation by 2-3 volunteers Estonian-English, 1 volunteer Estonian-Russian)

14.00 Bread village and the farewell soup

15.30 transfer to Tallinn (ferry 17.00). Arriving to Tallinn around 19.00