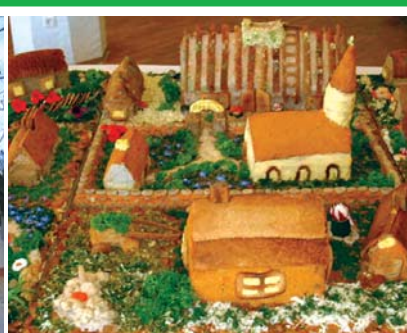
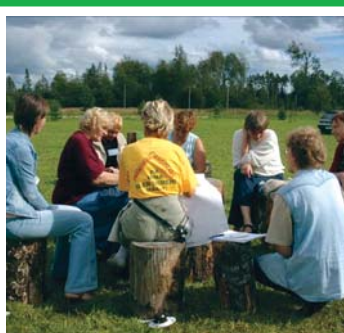


# THE RURAL MOVEMENTS OF EUROPE

**Vanessa Halhead**

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**2005**

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# The Rural Movements of Europe

by Vanessa Halhead

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PREPARE expresses cordial thanks to the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust, Fondation de France and (above all) to Vanessa Halhead for making possible the production of this report. It is most timely to produce it now, as the Europe-wide network of rural movements begins to take shape and gains a collective voice in the debate and the action to create a finer life in the rural areas of Europe.

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[www.preparenetwork.org](http://www.preparenetwork.org)

The activity of the **PREPARE network** is described in Appendix 2.

## 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 managed several large rural development partnerships. She has also worked in rural research, especially in relation to the Nordic countries and Mexico. She is a board member of Forum Synergies and member of the PREPARE Network. She is currently working on the development of a Scottish rural community network and assisting in the development of a European Rural Alliance.

## Comment

*I wish to express our greatest gratitude to Vanessa Halhead for starting the international comparison in the field of rural and village activities. This work has been very rarely done, though it has a great importance. The report educates all parties, and as an external observer, Vanessa has visualised many things which we, in the eye of all the activities, have been unable to see.*

**Eero Uusitalo**

**Chairman of the Village Action Association of Finland**

# Preface

## ***Have a dream***

Imagine that the countryside of the growing European Union is one of the most attractive places to live in. A growing number of young people leave the cities for the rural areas, because they like the balanced way of life - less stressful and deeper, closer to nature and its possibilities and limits that nature offers.

The rural economy is thriving. Sustainable farming practices and new technologies now offer what people really need - and what nature can give. The European villages have become a lively turning point for good ideas, how to produce and consume less - and still gain quality of life. Rural people have improved their contacts and communication, especially with towns and cities. The rural world of Europe is no longer just the 'hinterland' of the cities: it has become a self-confident society of farmers, villagers and communities.

We are almost there. What you will read in this booklet is a European dream. You can contribute to make it real. The European countryside is a treasure of possibilities, not simply a museum or a nature park. True, rural people are struggling hard for a better life. But many have also become aware how strong they can be, when they get involved and organised in planning, decision-making and action.

Get inspired by a growing network of 'burning spirits', of people on farms, in villages, government offices and European institutions. Vanessa Halhead has gathered evidence that rural life is exciting and that we can be optimistic about the future of the European countryside. But don't just stand there! Make contact with the network. Become a member!

Why should we be optimistic? ...because movements move people. It is contagious to meet people from communities and villages who have succeeded in keeping their school in the village or have found investors to modernise their library, their mill or local dairy plant. Networking throughout Europe makes you feel at home in different places, languages and professions.

The European rural movements are building bridges between communities, local authorities, regional and national governments - and the EU. They bring together voluntary action and professional management. They complement, and are slowly renewing, the old farming lobby. They stand for a wider rural society. They build upon partnership between all rural stakeholders.

But there is still much to do. Without a firm engagement of the member states of the EU, without a genuine rural development policy, which enables the most disadvantaged regions and people to reach a decent livelihood, our European dream might turn into a nightmare. We need to mobilise the commitment of people, especially those who left the countryside earlier but still have their roots and families there. The European rural movement must work together with urban civil society, with consumers and tourists, with activists for nature conservation and animal welfare.

The time for quarrelling is over. We need to get our act together. Vanessa's study is just a beginning. Look at the white spots on the maps. The West European rural movements need support. Luckily the new member states provide strong examples. The new neighbour countries in east and south-east Europe are finding their voice. I wish you an exciting discovery of the future of our common rural Europe.

***Hannes Lorenzen, PREPARE network, Adviser in the European Parliament***



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# Introduction

**T**his 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, 18 national rural movements have since been formed in 16 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 Overview section and aspects of the national reports have been updated in March 2005.

The research was undertaken to provide information to interested people, in my own and other countries, on this important movement. In 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 interviews and discussions held with those most closely involved and, where possible, with local academics who had knowledge of the movements.

Each national report was edited and approved by the national rural movement in question, and also by representatives from relevant Ministries.

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:

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

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 levels. 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 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 of the national movement



- key players involved
- organisation, management and funding
- activities
- costs and benefits
- achievements and challenges
- relationships to others
- future plans.

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

- The Polish Rural Forum
- The Swedish Popular Movements Council for Rural Development.

The report also draws on wider connections with the two international support networks:

- The PREPARE Network
- The Nordic Network - Hela Norden ska Leva.

I also attended:

- The PREPARE Gathering in Slovakia in October 2003, with people from 22 countries
- The Estonian Rural Parliament and international meeting
- The General Assembly of the Danish Village Association
- Several meetings of the Nordic Network
- Sessions of the Swedish Rural Parliament over an 8 year period.

This project had its beginnings in 1998 when I first attended 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 1,000 representatives of the 4,000 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. 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 a first step in trying to document the movements and to disseminate this information more widely. Hopefully it will be useful, and will inspire others to continue the work of exploring and developing this important concept.

## Acknowledgements

I offer my warm thanks to all those with whom I have talked and who supported me in the course of the study, including those who received me during my visits to Denmark, Estonia, Finland and Slovakia and the PREPARE Travelling Workshop and Gathering. In particular, I thank the leaders of the national rural movements that I studied - Jytte Aa. Moller and Barbara Diklev in Denmark, Kaja Kaur and Eha Pas in Estonia, Eero Uusitalo and Pietari Jaaskelainen in Finland, Peter Rusnak, Jela Tvrdonova and Janka Meciariova in Slovakia - and all their colleagues. In each country I was welcomed by very many people, from the rural movements and from the local and national authorities, too many to mention each by name. I would, however, like to thank particularly the following people, who helped me to arrange the programme and hosted me in their countries: Hanne Tanvig in Denmark; Tiiu Karu, Merle Adams, Juhan Sargava, Elvi Viia and Sirje Vinnie in Estonia; Iiris Jurvansuu, Torsti Hyrylainen and Risto Matti Niemi in Finland; Vlasta Kornerova in Slovakia. The assistance given by each rural movement was exceptional, and the work would not have been possible without their co-operation. I would also like to thank Prof. Michael Dower for his great support and practical assistance in editing and finalising the publication of the report. The whole project was highly stimulating, and I hope that the reader will gain from this report some sense of the admiration that I feel for the thousands of 'fiery spirits' and volunteers whose idealism and commitment are contributing so much to the well-being of rural communities in Europe.

**Let ALL Europe Live !**

Vanessa Halhead - 2005



# 1. THE RURAL MOVEMENTS OF EUROPE

## AN OVERVIEW

### The overall pattern of the rural movements

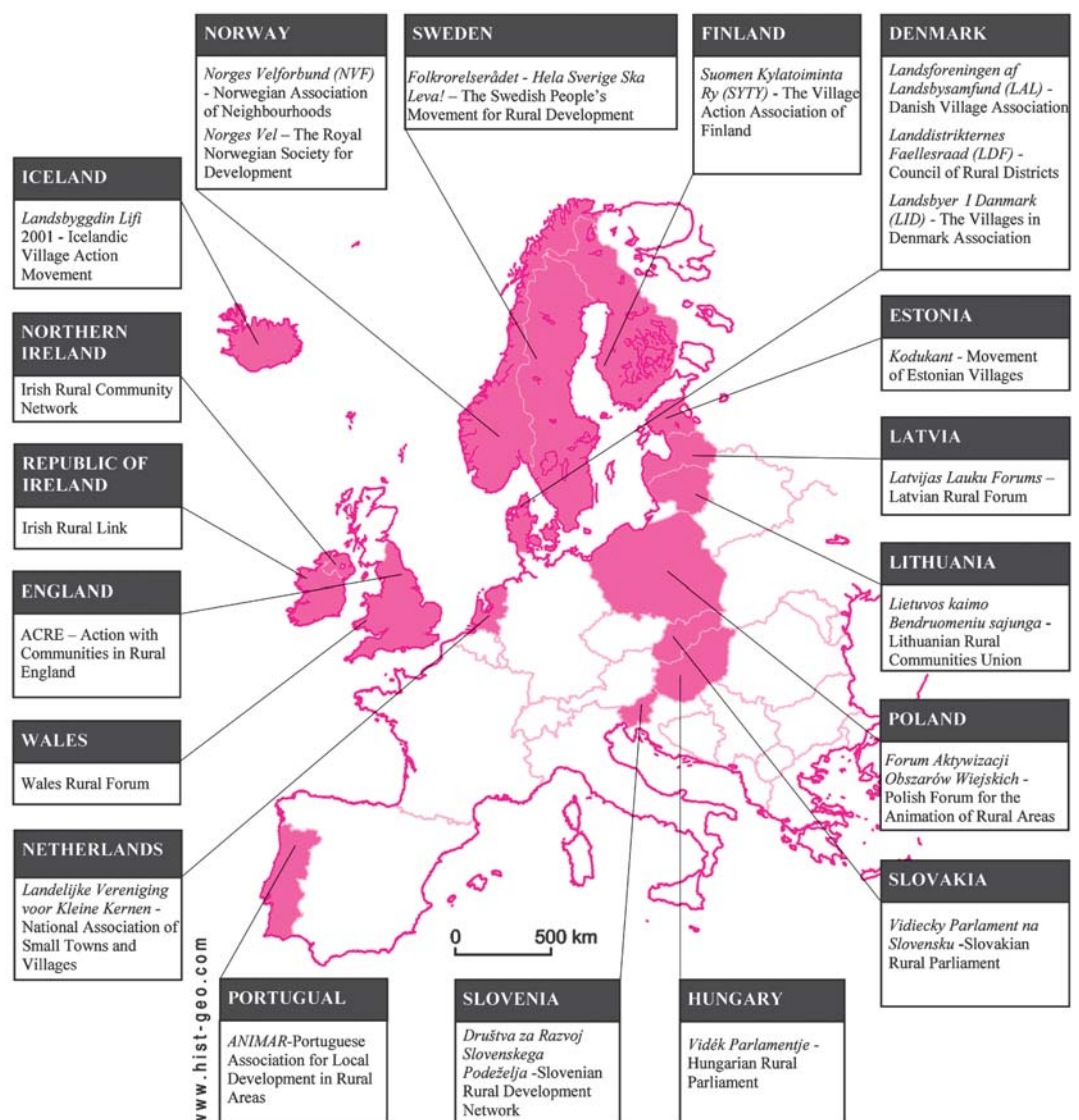
#### Nature and Location of the Movements

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 threats of rural decline, centralising policy, globalisation of markets and European integration, the rural people of 18 European nations 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 decision-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 tens of thousands of rural communities. Because of their high level of organisation, networking and direct relationship with the rural communities, the rural movements represent a very significant new voice on the European stage, and are likely to become key players in the European Union.

#### Where they exist

The map below shows the countries which have recognisable national rural movements, with the names of the movements which are briefly described later in this chapter.





## The History of the Movements

The rural movements, in their present form, began in the 1970s. However, there have been other, much older, social movements in the rural areas of Europe: for example, the Norwegian movements started over 200 years ago.

A brief chronology of the current movements in the Nordic and Eastern European countries shows the following pattern of development. All but Rural Voice England and Rural Forum Scotland still exist. Further details of the different organisations can be found elsewhere in the report:

Each date marks the formation of the relevant body, except where otherwise shown.

- 1772 (re-formed 1974) Norwegian Association of Neighbourhoods *Norges Velforbund*
- 1809 The Royal Norwegian Society for Development *Norges Vel*
- 1970s First village action groups in Finland & Sweden
- 1976 Finnish 'Village Action 76' Programme
- 1976 Danish Village Association *Landsforeningen af Landsbysamfund (LAL)*
- 1976 Netherlands Association of Small Towns & Villages *Landelijke Vereniging voor Kleine Kernen*
- 1980 Rural Voice in England (no longer active)
- 1981 Finnish National Organisation for Village Action > 1997 Village Action Association of Finland *Suomen Kylätoimintayhdistys (SYTY)*
- 1982 Rural Forum Scotland (no longer active)
- 1987 Action with Communities in Rural England (ACRE)
- 1989 Swedish Popular Movements Council for Rural Development *Folkrorelserådet*
- 1989 Trans European Rural Network (TERN) (no longer active)
- 1990 Wales Rural Forum
- 1990 Irish Rural Link
- 1991 Northern Ireland Rural Community Network
- 1992 Estonian movement started ⇨ 1997 *Kodukant*
- 1993 Portuguese Association for Local Development ANIMAR
- 1998 Hungarian Rural Parliament *Vidék Parlamentje*
- 1999 PREPARE partnership formed
- 2000 Slovakian Rural Parliament *Vidiecky Parlament na Slovensku*
- 2001 Icelandic Village Action Movement *Landsbyggðin Líf*
- 2002 Polish Rural Forum *Forum Aktywizacji Obszarów Wiejskich*
- 2002 Lithuanian Rural Communities Union *Lietuvos kaimo Bendruomenių sąjunga*
- 2003 PREPARE Network
- 2003 Slovenian Rural Development Network *Društva za razvoj slovenskega podeželja*
- 2004 Latvian Rural Forum *Latvijas Lauku forums*

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 the one in Finland, in 1976, but developed quite separately. The Norwegian movement is much older, but is not a solely rural movement in that it encompasses communities in all parts of Norway.

The formation of the movements has taken two distinct paths. Those in the Nordic countries have started mainly through mobilisation of communities at local level, and only at a later stage has the national rural forum set up. Those in Eastern Europe, with the exception of Estonia, and in Western Europe have started from the 'top down' with the formation of a forum of national organisations, which in some cases have then established local and regional level structures.



## 1. THE RURAL MOVEMENTS OF EUROPE - AN OVERVIEW

### 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."*<sup>1</sup>

Each movement was established and structured in response to the conditions prevailing nationally. However, while 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 policies
- Decline of agriculture as a major employer
- Decline in the rural economy and services
- Rural depopulation and imbalanced age structures
- Inequalities between regions
- 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 public 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 and Hungary have municipalities at village level, so the movements are focusing attention on developing micro-regional partnerships
- Finland, Sweden and Estonia have no municipalities at 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, and 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 a market-led system. Such trends are also being experienced in many rural areas of Western Europe as the influence of the globalised economy weakens their competitiveness, reduction in public expenditure undermines the welfare state and increasingly centralised administration weakens local democracy.

### Why 'rural'?

The question is often asked - why are the movements 'rural' rather than 'regional'? EU and national policy in all countries is focused on regional development, and 'rural' development has till recently been focused almost wholly on agriculture. It might therefore seem logical for popular movements to focus on regional issues and regional policy.

The reality is one of problems and needs which are essentially rural. In almost all European countries, rural areas are in decline because of changes in agriculture, loss of traditional jobs, urbanisation, centralisation, out-migration and loss of political influence. These forces undermine the sustainability of rural communities in respect of population, economy and services. Regional policy has often failed

<sup>1</sup> Head of the Slovak Rural Development Agency





to address these problems, and in many instances has exacerbated them, for example by focusing job creation on the main towns and thus encouraging further out-migration from the countryside. Such policy responses from the EU and national governments have mobilised a rural reaction.

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 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. That is one reason 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 use 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 contribute to sustainable development
- the importance of rural areas for environment, culture and recreation.

## The Purpose of the Rural Movements

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

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

## Character and Activities

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

<b>Bottom up</b>	Rooted in the 'home place'
	Owned and run by rural civil society and the village people
<b>Supportive</b>	Mobilising, networking and supporting action for local development
<b>Structured</b>	Organised and networked at local, regional, national and international levels
<b>Co-ordinated</b>	Working to a clear, common purpose agreed through strategic planning
<b>Influencing</b>	Undertaking advocacy to shape local, regional, national and EU policy
<b>International</b>	Internationally connected through common networks

These points are explored further in a later part of this chapter.

**Activities** 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.



## 1. THE RURAL MOVEMENTS OF EUROPE - AN OVERVIEW

**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 region 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 (for example in Sweden and Estonia) biennial Rural Parliaments, which bring together the villages and NGOs to provide a rural market-place, to agree rural policy plans and to address the Government directly. In Sweden, the Rural Parliament is attended by over 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 other's events, organise joint projects, receive information and develop common agendas for the EU. There is now active discussion about forming a European Rural Movement.

## Structure

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 action 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 mobilises rural communities to address their own future, 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 forum 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:

<b>National rural forum</b>	A formal network of the main national rural NGOs to co-ordinate action and lobbying on rural development
<b>Village action movement</b>	A national structure for involving and representing villages to link with national NGOs and government
<b>Regional associations</b>	A regional structure for networking rural NGOs and villages and liaising with the regional authorities





<b>Sub-regional associations</b>	Groupings at sub-regional level of villages, NGOs etc. - not necessarily a formal part of the structure
<b>Village associations</b>	Broad-based integrated village associations, with legal status, for co-ordinating planning and action at village level
<b>Rural Parliaments<sup>2</sup></b>	A national gathering of all rural interests - villages, NGOs and authorities. Provides a voice for rural communities and a focus for national strategy making.

## Achievements

*"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 as 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."* <sup>3</sup>

The rural movements have achieved significant successes:

<b>Increasing the rural profile</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>●Developing a strong national profile and support for the most local level</li> </ul>
<b>Building rural community capacity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>●Building significant community organisation and involvement</li> <li>●Increasing confidence, empowerment and energy in rural communities</li> <li>●Developing and training an extensive network of legal village associations</li> <li>●Identifying, developing and training "village leaders"</li> <li>●Training villages to make village development plans</li> <li>●Helping villages to build effective links with the public authorities</li> <li>●Increasing the levels of funding to the local level through project activity</li> <li>●Enabling villages to co-operate and to achieve collective strength</li> <li>●Developing new forms of local action and organisation</li> </ul>
<b>Increasing social capital</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>●Mobilising voluntary action in the communities</li> <li>●Helping to establish and support public-private partnerships</li> <li>●Encouraging local people to be more active in local development</li> <li>●Finding creative solutions to rural development challenges</li> <li>●Establishing new methods of working and new job opportunities</li> <li>●Adding value to the capacity of local and national authorities</li> <li>●Increasing local capacity to deliver local services</li> </ul>
<b>Adding value</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>●Delivering rural development in a very cost-effective way</li> <li>●Increasing the social capital of rural areas</li> <li>●Significantly increasing local expenditure through the village associations</li> </ul>
<b>Improving links between public and civil sectors</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>●Improving cooperation for rural development</li> <li>●Helping Governments to communicate more directly with rural people</li> <li>●Helping Governments to better understand rural strengths and issues</li> </ul>

<sup>2</sup> 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 "Thing" 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.

<sup>3</sup> President of the Finnish Village Action Association.



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### Influencing policy for rural areas

- Developing close links to 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 promoting new rural measures and funding sources
- Promoting integrated rural development
- Helping Governments 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 (in some cases) up to 30 years
- Operating without core funding
- Maintaining the energy and enthusiasm of the hundreds of volunteer
- 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
- Establishing 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

The Finnish Village Action Association of 2003<sup>4</sup> demonstrates the added value of a movement:

- 3,900 village associations and committees
- 2,200 registered village associations
- 40,000 individuals involved (divided equally between men and women)
- 1.6 million volunteer hours per year
- 16 million Euro worth of volunteer time
- 3.2 million Euro independent funding per year
- 31 million Euro public project funding per year
- 8,000 development actions per year
- 2,600 village halls/ community centres
- 1,000 village plans in operation
- over 2.5 million Finns assisted by village development work.

*"It is impossible that any of this would have happened without the organisation of the movement".*

## Challenges

*"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:

<sup>4</sup> The National Village Action Programme 2003 - 2007.



- Funding**
  - 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**
  - All movements, especially in the early years, have had to rely on volunteer labour
  - This has caused fatigue among 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**
  - 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**
  - 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
  - Changes in personnel, due to insecurity of funding, has been problematic for some movements
- External relations**
  - national**
    - 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**
    - Difficulties in influencing the plans of regional authorities and in getting regional authorities to relate to the movements
  - local**
    - 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



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### The individual movements described

#### Nordic Countries

##### Finland

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

**Web-site:** [www.village-action.fi](http://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 4,000 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 its achievements has been to influence the development of rural policy in Finland. It has pressed for a balanced, integrated approach to rural development, including all aspects of village life; and for the strengthening of rural communities, the social economy and local democracy. *See the fuller description in chapter 4.*

##### Sweden

##### **Swedish Popular Movements Council for Rural Development**

**Folkrörelserådet - Hela Sverige Ska Leva! Web-site:** [www.bygde.net](http://www.bygde.net)

The Swedish movement is the largest and most highly developed, and is also the only movement to receive significant Government funding. It arose in the 1980s in response to a campaign, supported by Government, to address the de-population of rural areas in the north of Sweden. The movement has assisted the formation of over 4,000 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, established in 1989. In addition to the village representatives, the Council has 53 national NGOs as members. The Council provides practical support to the local actors and develops programmes for rural development and to influence policy. The biennial Rural Parliament involves over 1,000 village representatives and provides a direct voice to the Government. The movement has a lobbying role and seeks to influence the Government and politicians at 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](http://www.lal.dk)

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

**The Council of Rural Districts - Landdistrikternes Faellesraad (LDF)** [www.landdistrikterne.dk](http://www.landdistrikterne.dk)

The oldest is LAL, established in 1976: it 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. There are no regional structures. LAL has no paid staff and is run by the board members. It focuses on a wide range of projects to support village action, 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. *See the fuller description in chapter 2.*

##### Iceland

##### **The Icelandic Village Action Movement - Landsbyggðin Lifi - "let the rural areas live!"**

**Web-site:** [www.landlif.is](http://www.landlif.is)

In June 2001 *Landsbyggðin 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-sites:** [www.velnett.no](http://www.velnett.no) and [www.norgesvel.no](http://www.norgesvel.no)

There is no umbrella organisation in Norway to unite specifically rural interests. There are two 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 over 6,000 local neighbourhood associations in Norway. Today NVF represents about 1,000,000 people, which makes it the second largest organisation in the country.

*Norges Vel* was founded in 1809. Its mission is to develop viable local communities, in both rural and urban communities. The aim is to create useful human networks that help to facilitate cultural and economic development. Thirty-seven organisations and 1210 individuals are members of the society, in addition to 75 municipalities and companies as supporting members. Activities include local community development, promoting co-operative approaches and international development co-operation.

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

**Web-site - see:** [www.bygde.net](http://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**

**National Association of Small Towns and Villages**

***Landelijke Vereniging voor Kleine Kernen***

**Web-site:** [www.lvkk.nl](http://www.lvkk.nl)

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

### **United Kingdom**

At present three rural movements are active in the UK - Action with Communities in Rural England (ACRE), Wales Rural Forum and the Northern Ireland Rural Community Network. Previously there were two other rural movements: Rural Voice in England and The Scottish Rural Forum, both no longer active. Work is progressing to examine the need for a new rural movement in Scotland.

**Action with Communities in Rural England (ACRE)**

**Web-site:** [www.acre.org.uk](http://www.acre.org.uk)

ACRE is a national charity, established in 1987, whose purpose is to support sustainable rural





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community development. It provides a national platform for its founder members, the 38 Rural Community Councils (one in each county) and for other bodies and individuals who work at local, county, regional and national level to alleviate rural disadvantage in England. The Rural Community Councils work 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 and practical support.

ACRE was a partner in **Rural Voice**, the alliance of rural organisations in England set up in 1980 to influence government policies in favour of rural communities and to encourage rural communities to take action to improve their own lives. The other partner organisations were national networks of farmers, farm-workers, young farmers, rural women, churches and parish councils, plus the Council for the Protection of Rural England. This alliance is no longer active.

### **Wales Rural Forum**

Wales Rural Forum was established in 1990 to strengthen the voice of people active at grassroots 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 promotes 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 to improve the quality of life and to safeguard the future viability of rural communities. Membership includes national, regional and local NGOs and individuals with an interest in rural affairs, and includes many rural interest groups.

### **Northern Ireland Rural Community Network**

**Web-site:** [www.ruralcommunitynetwork.org](http://www.ruralcommunitynetwork.org)

The Rural Community Network is a voluntary organisation established by local community organisations to articulate the voice of rural communities on issues relating to poverty, disadvantage and community development in Northern Ireland. Formed in 1991, it is a membership organisation with over 500 members. The Network is managed by a voluntary committee, made up of 2 community representatives from each of the 6 counties, along with voluntary organisations, statutory bodies and other interested representatives. It is core-funded by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, with the rest of its resources coming from membership fees, charitable trusts and projects.

### **Scotland**

There is currently no rural movement in Scotland, but work is underway to form a 'Scottish Rural Community Network'.

From 1982 to 1999, **Rural Forum Scotland** worked as the Scottish rural movement, linked through TERN and with other rural movements in Europe. It was a forum of most of the significant rural organisations in Scotland, who wished to work together to develop rural support mechanisms, to provide a network for rural areas and to promote rural policy.

### **Ireland**

#### **Irish Rural Link (IRL)**

**Web-site:** [www.irishrurallink.ie](http://www.irishrurallink.ie)

Irish Rural Link was founded in 1991 as a non-profit organisation, to represent rural community groups and associations at a national and international level. Membership comprises individuals, community groups, NGOs, statutory and corporate agencies. The group has grown significantly, and now directly represents over 200 community groups with a combined membership of 20,000. It aims to build rural capacity, to represent the interests of rural communities, and to influence policy at local, regional, national and EU levels. It is currently focusing on a number of distinct areas of concern including rural services, social inclusion, rural development and transport.





## **Portugal**

### **Portuguese Association for Local Development *ANIMAR***

**Web-site:** [www.animar-dl.pt](http://www.animar-dl.pt)

ANIMAR was established in 1993, as a response to the Trans European Rural Network (TERN). ANIMAR works to promote equal opportunities and to improve the life quality of the people. It does this by networking the actions of institutions, groups and individuals, in the interests of local development. It has 12 directors and 5 staff, and a membership of about 70 national and regional associations and 100 individuals. ANIMAR undertakes a variety of actions to build local capacity and develop rural policy, and has participated in many EU Programmes. Since 1994, it has organised a national biennial 'Fair and Assembly of Local Development' called *MANIFesta*. This enables the many local groups and organisations working for local development to meet, promote their work and develop policies to communicate to Government.

### ***Trans European Rural Network (TERN)***

Following the second European Commission Anti-Poverty Programme 'Poverty 2' (1986-89), 13 projects concerned with rural development wanted to share their experiences and methodologies. This led to the formation, in 1989 (formalised in 1991), of the Trans European Rural Network (TERN). Initial financial assistance was provided by the EU Commissioner for Agriculture. TERN's priorities were the development of a strong rural network for peripheral rural areas, establishing relations with and formulating joint recommendations to European institutions and other policy makers. It organised conferences and participated in research and other EU projects. It also co-operated with the European Rural University. It has not been active since 1997.

## **Central and Eastern Europe**

### **Estonia**

#### **The Estonian Village Movement - *Kodukant***

**Web-site:** [www.kodukant.ee](http://www.kodukant.ee)

Kodukant was the first movement established 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 or 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: it has 1 national and 15 regional co-ordinators, but relies mainly 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. *See the fuller description in chapter 3.*

### **Hungary**

#### **The Hungarian Rural Parliament - *Vidék Parlamentje***

**Web-site:** [www.falunet.adatpark.hu](http://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 disparity in living conditions between urban and rural areas following independence, and the need for a strong voice to support the rural communities. The organisation has about 500 members, comprising rural NGOs and groups. It is not a village movement as in Estonia, but rather a forum for rural organisations. It has one part-time administrator, and work is carried out through topic-based working groups. Activities include local and national rural gatherings, training, and lobbying the Government. The organisation is also giving support to the development of movements in Eastern Europe, and to European networking.



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### **Latvia**

#### **Latvian Rural Forum - *Latvijas Lauku Forums***

**Web-site:** [www.partneribas.lv](http://www.partneribas.lv)

The Latvian Rural Forum was formally established in December 2004, following a process of discussion which was jointly initiated by PREPARE and the Latvian Ministry of Agriculture. The aims of the Forum are to encourage sustainable development of rural areas; to strengthen the development of civil society in rural areas; to represent the rural people at national and international level; and to co-operate with government and others. Membership is open to all organisations who are committed to uniting rural inhabitants, businesses or local administrations for the sake of encouraging local development.

### **Lithuania**

#### **The Lithuanian Rural Communities Union - *Lietuvos Koimo Bendruomeniu Sajunga***

The Lithuanian Rural Communities Union is an independent union of active rural communities, with over 350 communities as members. It was founded in 2002, with the aim of uniting the rural communities of all regions of Lithuania and representing their interests. The Union co-ordinates and implements the tasks given by its members. Members take an active role in the network, through which they can share experiences, receive training and work for the development of rural communities. The mission of the Union is to ensure that Lithuanian rural areas are attractive and safe, with good infrastructure, viable agriculture, forestry, fishery and other sectors, healthy environment and well-managed landscape. The Union has representatives on several organisations and committees relevant to rural areas.

### **Poland**

#### **The Polish Forum for the Animation of Rural Areas**

##### ***Forum Aktywizacji Obszarów Wiejskich***

**Website:** [www.faow.org.pl](http://www.faow.org.pl)

The Polish Rural Forum was started in February 2002. The Forum is based on the cooperation 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 to 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 at the European level.

### **Slovakia**

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

**Web-site:** [www.vipa.sk](http://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 focused on supporting the formation of partnerships at micro-regional level, and has initiated a network of 48 Communication and Information Centres. These form the grassroots 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. *See the fuller description in chapter 5.*

### **Slovenia**

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

**Web-site:** [www.drustvo-podezelje.si](http://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.

### **PREPARE - Partnership for Rural Europe**

**Web-site:** [www.PREPAREnetwork.org](http://www.PREPAREnetwork.org)

The PREPARE partnership was set up in 1999, with the aim to strengthen civil society and to promote multi-national exchange in rural development, with a particular focus on what were then the 10 pre-accession countries of central and eastern Europe. The Programme has been active in facilitating the development of the more recent rural movements in central and eastern Europe, and this remains a key aspect of its work, together with multi-national exchange between the different movements. The partners now comprise two pan-European organisations - Forum Synergies, and ECO-VAST - and the national rural movements of Sweden, Finland, Estonia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, Hungary and Slovenia. In 2003, the partners established the PREPARE Network, as a forum for exchange between people throughout Europe who are involved in rural development. *See Appendix 2 for more detail.*



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### Main findings from a detailed study of four rural movements

#### Introduction

This section provides a summary of the main findings from a study of four of the European rural movements - Denmark, Estonia, Finland and Slovakia. The four case studies were compiled from a 2-week research visit to each country undertaken between August and November 2003 (*see Itinerary in Annex 1*). This involved travel to different regions of each country and meetings with many of the key people involved with each movement, or with government, at national, regional and local levels. The questions asked in each country followed a common format, to enable comparison.

The reports on each country appear as chapters 2 to 5 of this document. The rest of the present chapter provides a brief commentary on the main findings of the study, by reference to:

- The national context
- The rural movements
- The issues raised
- Prospects for the future

#### 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 join the EU. Despite the historical differences, there are many similarities between the four countries, and their rural areas face many of the same challenges.

All four countries are similar in scale, relatively small in an international context. Estonia, Slovakia and Denmark each have a land area of about 45,000km<sup>2</sup>: Finland is larger at 338,000km<sup>2</sup>. Finland, Slovakia and Denmark each have a population of about 5 million: Estonia is smaller, at 1.4 million.

There are big economic disparities between the Nordic and newly independent eastern European countries. The differences are particularly marked in the rural communities, which are generally very poor in the eastern European countries. In all the countries, there is a disparity in the relative wealth of rural and urban areas: with some exceptions, wealth and employment are concentrated in the towns. In all the countries, the trends of agricultural decline and rural-to-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.

All countries have public administration at national, regional or county, and local levels. All have '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 the 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 focus for non-statutory partnerships. In all the countries, administrative reforms have led to the loss of traditional units of local government, with a consequent loss of local identity and empowerment.

Civil society is well developed in the Nordic countries. In eastern Europe, the creation of civil society has been a major target for foreign aid since independence, and many NGOs have been formed,



trained and networked through this process. In all the 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. In all the countries, rural policy has been much influenced by the requirements of the EU, as expressed in the CAP and Structural Funds or (in Estonia and Slovakia) the pre-accession instruments. 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, relations with the EU have prompted structural adjustment, such as the formation of regional self-governments, the creation of partnerships, inclusion of the civic and private sectors etc. This is most apparent in the new member states: but also in Finland, where the EU's LEADER programme has prompted the creation of Local Action Groups throughout the country, and the EU regional policy was one factor behind the formation of regional associations in the Village Action Association. The influence of EU funding has been less marked in Denmark.

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

	Denmark	Estonia	Finland	Slovakia
<b><u>Vital Statistics:</u></b>				
<b>Land area</b>	43,094 km <sup>2</sup>	45,226 km <sup>2</sup>	338,100 km <sup>2</sup>	49,035 km <sup>2</sup>
<b>Rural areas</b>	?	?	98%	87%
<b>Total population</b>	5.3 million	1.4 million	5.2 million	5.4 million
<b>Population density</b>	121/km <sup>2</sup>	32/km <sup>2</sup>	17/km <sup>2</sup>	109/km <sup>2</sup>
<b>Rural population</b>	30%	33%	55%	43%
<b>GDP</b>	144 billion Euro	5.3 billion Euro	110 billion Euro	3.6 billion Euro
<b>Gross National Income per head of population</b>	25,056 Euro	3,425 Euro	19,447 Euro	3,267 Euro
<b><u>Administration:</u></b>				
<b>Parliament</b>	179 members	101 members	200 members	150 members
<b>Ministries</b>	17	12	13	19
<b>State regional authorities</b>	14	15	19 + 12 provinces	79 districts various regional
<b>Local regional authorities</b>	14	none	19	8
<b>Municipalities</b>	271	247	450	2878
<b>Micro-regional partnerships</b>	12 LAGs		58 LAGs covering whole country	224 micro-regions
<b>Villages</b>	various associations	400 + Village Associations	3935 Village Associations	2740 rural village Municipalities

**Denmark** is one of the longest established nations in Europe and has been a member of the EU since 1973. The enlightenment and democratic movement of the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century produced in 1849 the first constitution, to which the birth of the welfare state and strong social value system can be traced. Denmark 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. It is historically very rural, the 'farmers' country', in which farmers had a central role in development of the nation. Large landowners gave way to smaller units and agricultural co-operatives in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Agriculture is still economically important, but not in number of jobs; and rural job losses have been high.

**Estonia** has been independent since 1991, and entered the EU in 2004. It has a long rural tradition, with strong community values and rural culture. The village is traditionally the 'heart' of the Estonian culture. The transition from 'command' to 'market' economy had a major impact on the rural areas,



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with high unemployment and rural-to-urban migration. Estonia has rich agricultural land and a tradition of high productivity, which in the Soviet period supported most of the population: but 75% of agricultural jobs have been lost since then, and land reform has left many non-viable units, leading to severe rural depression. Local municipalities have many functions but limited resources.

**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. 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 entered the EU in 2004. The transition from 'command' to 'market' economy had a major impact on the rural areas, and all rural trends are negative, including high rural unemployment and out-migration. Agriculture in many areas has not survived the transition from collective to independent farms, producing extreme rural problems. Slovakia has many rich farming areas, but also extensive marginal mountain areas. Eight large administrative Regions were established in 2002 in response to the EU. All Slovak villages have statutory municipalities in their own right, but these have few resources.

### The Rural Movements

The case studies focus on the following national rural movements:

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

The four case studies span the history of the rural movements, including the two 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 focused on similar objectives. Both were mobilised through the work of committed individuals, and focused on support to the villages. Estonia was the first of the newly independent States to recognise the value of the rural movements, and started a movement with support from Sweden and Finland, hence following their model of a true 'village action movement'. Slovakia was one of the first of the movements to be mobilised through the work of the PREPARE programme: this is reflected in the greater concentration on the formation of a rural forum or partnership at a national level.

The four movements have the following main elements :

	<b>Denmark</b>	<b>Estonia</b>	<b>Finland</b>	<b>Slovakia</b>
National "rural forum"	X	X	X	X
Village action movement	X	X	X	
Regional associations		X	X	X
Sub-regional associations			X	X
Sub-regional associations	X	X	X	
Rural parliament		X	X	X





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

<b>Bottom up</b>	Rooted in the 'home place' Owned and run by village people
<b>Supportive</b>	Mobilising, networking and supporting action for local development
<b>Structured</b>	Organised and networked at local, regional, national and international levels
<b>Co-ordinated</b>	Working with a clear common purpose achieved by strategic planning
<b>Influencing</b>	Undertaking advocacy to shape local, regional, national, EU policy
<b>International</b>	Internationally connected through a common network.

These characteristics are described in the next few paragraphs.

### **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."*<sup>5</sup>

The village movements are strongly rooted in the notion of the 'village'. This is symbolised by the choice of Kodukant - 'home place' - as the name 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, each village still has a 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, said that the spirit of Estonia's villages had 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."*<sup>6</sup>

### **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. It is run with great energy and enthusiasm, by many hundreds of rural people. It is also clearly respected by national and local government.

*"The idea of the Village Association builds on the human tendency to support the local 'ribe' and to feel allegiance to something that they themselves own and have created."*<sup>7</sup>

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 each village to become its own development agency. In Denmark, the national bodies work closely with and for the villages: but they have not focused on building village associations in the same way, and they lack the structure to engage local people 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.

<sup>5</sup> Village Leader of Jani Village, Estonia.

<sup>6</sup> Arnold Rüütel, President of the Estonian Republic, 2003.

<sup>7</sup> Village leader, Estonia.



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The formally constituted village associations, promoted initially by Finland, have proved to be an effective model for enabling rural development. However, they take time to mobilise. After 30 years, Finland and Sweden each have about 4,000 such associations: after 10 years, Estonia has about 400. Research shows that the associations tend to evolve as they move forward and grow in confidence and capacity. This process may include a 'first phase' of working with cultural, social and environmental projects, a 'second phase' of taking on aspects of local service delivery, and a 'third phase' of undertaking business creation and economic development. As the achievements of the active villages become known, so more villages follow suit.

### 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. LAL in Denmark lacks a regional structure, so it tries to do this work from a national level. Producing and disseminating 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, such as newsletters, websites, information days and training. In Slovakia, a network of local communication centres has been created, as 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."*<sup>8</sup>

### 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 formed 'village associations' at village, regional and national levels. Denmark is unusual in that it actually comprises three national organisations - two focussed on village support and the third as 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 village<sup>9</sup> 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 effectively across the country, and also to connect to the decision-making process at each level. This is a simple, logical and effective way both to connect civil society and to link it to the government system. It reduces the complexity that is inherent in community groups and NGOs, and helps them to co-operate more efficiently at the three levels, in that:

- 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 associations, which are seen as essential in supporting local action, provide a link between the village associations and the 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.

<sup>8</sup> The Finnish National Organisation for Village Action 1995.

<sup>9</sup> The word 'village' is used to describe local communities within a geographical area, these may be scattered settlements, as well as true villages.



*"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."*<sup>10</sup>

### **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, the focus on strategic planning is less clear. 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 plans. At regional level, the regional associations consult the village associations and plans in the process of producing regional village plans. These are 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 government's 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."*<sup>11</sup>

### **Influencing Policy**

An increasingly important role for the movements is advocacy to shape local, regional, national and 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 the movements is to ensure that policies reflects the changing circumstances of rural areas, and their diverse character and needs, and are not related only to agriculture. This is a skilled job, requiring experience, knowledge, connections and credibility. However, it is a critical role in helping to establish the aim of integrated rural policy, and is a 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."*<sup>12</sup>

### **Internationally Connected**

Trans-national links are an important feature of all the movements. They are linked through two key networks - the Nordic Network and the PREPARE Network. The latter was also the vehicle for supporting the development of 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 Movement, to provide a formal platform through which to address the wider needs of rural areas in an EU context.

<sup>10</sup> Eero Uusitalo - Chairman of the Village Action Association of Finland - pers. com.

<sup>11</sup> 'All the Power of a Small Village' - Finnish National Village Action Programme 2003-7.

<sup>12</sup> Kodukant village workshop report.



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### 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 raising the profile of rural areas within the wider society, and in increasing the confidence and pride of rural communities by giving them a voice and supporting the rural local heritage. A key part of this process is the creation of formal structures through which small and scattered rural communities can address their own development in a more integrated and effective way, and can 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 4,000 village associations. The success of their efforts has inspired others to follow this path, notably Sweden and Estonia. The newer movements too 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 also provide 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 bringing 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' or 'participative' 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 role in building local confidence, pride, relationships, capacity and integration. This is building on the long-established traditions of co-operation in villages, which are found in 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 reduced public resources and services is recognised in all countries, and is an incentive for government support to civil society. Very many rural communities have been adversely affected by loss of rural population, weakening of local democracy and the welfare state, and the transition to a monetary economy. The village action movement provides inspiration and motivation to build the social capital, so as to make rural communities more sustainable. 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 of local service delivery. At a further stage of development, it has 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."*<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup> 'Local Level Democracy in a Historical Perspective in Sweden' Ulla Herlitz. University of Gothenburg, 2001.





## 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 collective 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."*<sup>14</sup>

## Influencing Development of Policy

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, the Village Association has succeeded in directly influencing the government's Rural Policy Programme. This process is still developing in Slovakia, where a Programme for Slovak Rural Areas is produced every two years. There is dissatisfaction in all four movements about the responsiveness of governments. 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, currently driven by the PREPARE Network, and before it by the Trans European Rural 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 led to a strong focus on lobbying in Brussels for the development of a more integrated rural development policy. The potential for the formation of a European Rural Movement is under current discussion.

## 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' i.e. from the rural communities themselves, or from the 'top down' i.e. 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. By contrast, the more recently formed movements in parts of eastern Europe have started with a forum of larger organisations. This difference reflects the national priorities, maturity and process of establishment.

The Finnish and Swedish movements evolved over a long period of time, and were originally inspired by the efforts of individual villages to mobilise their own resources in the face of rural decline. Mobilisation of the villages was the first priority, and the formation of regional and national associations came at a later stage. The Danish movement also began at village level, and much later formed a national rural forum, but under a separate organisation and without a regional structure. 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. Slovakia is more representative of the movements inspired through the PREPARE programme, of which the priority has been 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

<sup>14</sup> Jela Tvrdonova, Head of the Slovak Rural Development Agency.



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establish structures at regional and micro-regional levels: but this is a longer process, and there are still concerns as to its lack of 'roots' at local level.

It is clear, from looking at the different movements, that both elements of the structure - rural forum, and village action movement - are needed. The movements are essentially about the well-being of rural communities. If the rural communities are not directly involved, the most critical voice is missing. Whilst many national NGOs have local representatives, these are often focussed on single issues, and the organisations are often run by professional people who may be 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 which are essential for rural development. Rural communities operating in isolation are in a very weak position, whereas 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." <sup>15</sup>*

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 approaches 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 two 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.

### 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 specific national context. 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. The experience suggests that it is wise to work with the existing structures that are meaningful locally; to avoid the creation of overlapping structures which confuse the process; and to identify, and fill, critical gaps in the existing structures.

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<sup>15</sup> Village leader - Estonia.





What is clear is that each movement must define its values, and base its planning and structure on these values. For instance, the organisational structure may reflect a high value placed upon participation, democracy, empowerment and ownership, rather than on control and hierarchy.

### The Problem of Resources

Availability of resources is a significant issue for the movements, though they have not let this dictate their structure. As all movements rely on voluntary action, they must rationalise their role and activities to use such action 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 need for sustainable financial support is a major concern of all the 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 appear 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 to be seen to be neutral is critical. Also it has been found that government funding may be politically influenced, and may be cut if the movement upsets the Ministry or if the government changes.

### Local 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 raising the profile of rural areas 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 movements and their member organisations is important, but potentially sensitive. The focus of the movements is on partnership, which has implications for both structure and working practices. Working through member organisations, rather than over them, was viewed as very important. For example, the Slovakia Rural Parliament uses its member NGOs to do the administration for the 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 which enable different organisations and sectors to work together, at different levels, without giving up their own autonomy. In Finland and Estonia, this is clearly expressed through the organisational autonomy of all regional and village associations. In Slovakia, some concern was expressed that the movement may be 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. In Finland, Sweden, Estonia and Slovakia, complex democratic processes for planning and decision-making have been developed to address this.

*"If you share power, you get it: if you keep power, you lose it."*



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### **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 the countries, mobilisation has been led 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 national movement in Sweden, and to a lesser extent that in Finland, have put much effort - often supported by their own governments - into helping the creation of movements in central and eastern Europe. This has both initiated and speeded up the process of formation and brought some synchrony to it. Since 1999, the PREPARE partnership has taken up the task of mobilising and networking the national movements. This has been focussed on building partnerships between civic, public, private and political actors and linking to the EU, and has resulted in the formation of organisational partnership structures in four countries to date: work is continuing in other countries. 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. PREPARE now plays a key role in mobilising the established rural movements to undertake 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.

### **The Role of Individuals**

Each movement has relied on a few key individuals for its existence. These were often the initial motivators and catalysts<sup>16</sup>: 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. In all movements, the huge commitment and input of individual volunteer time and personal resources, at local and national levels, has been crucial to success, especially in the early years. Finland and Denmark provide very clear examples 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 the responsibilities.

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 catalysts, offering 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 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 have 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. Such problems can blunt the momentum of the

<sup>16</sup> Notably Professor Hautemaki and Eero Uusitalo in Finland, Mikk Sarv in Estonia, Carsten Abild in Denmark, Frida Vala Ásbjörnsdóttir in Iceland.



work. Measures can be taken to anticipate and diffuse such difficulties, based on clear democratic and organisational structures and a focus on roles rather than personalities.

### **The Role of Government**

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. Finland is a notable exception to this, in that the Chairman of the Village Association is also the Secretary of the government's Rural Policy Committee. In recent years, the importance of the movements is increasingly recognised by governments, as shown (for example) by the attendance of the Head of State at the Estonian and Swedish Rural Parliaments. In Sweden, the government has supported the Popular Movements Council by provision of funding, manpower and practical help. But all the 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 such funding.

### **Prospects for the Future**

The future of the rural movements in Europe holds great potential. As the trends of rural decline continue in much 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, in addition to that from 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 Movement', which is 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. For this reason, 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 national Ministries.

The nature of the relationship between the rural movements and governments requires careful thought. 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 (where necessary) in an adversarial way is critical to the effective presentation of the needs of civil society. This is an area in which skills development could be usefully delivered through the networks.

Networking among the rural movements will enable them to increase the speed of their development, and to perfect the structures and processes that 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, and this similarity will only increase as the EU expands. 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. They clearly cannot continue to rely on volunteer labour to the extent that they currently do. The true value of this activity should receive greater recognition from governments. Recent statistics provided by the Finnish Village Action Association prove conclusively the extent of the contribution to society made by the rural movements. This should be documented in all countries and used to justify a call for greater support from public funds. The movements themselves will also need to



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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? The rural movements are focused on this central issue. If a rural revival is desired, then governments must work with rural people to develop the most effective solutions, building on their local knowledge of the rural areas. The rural movements can be the channel for this co-operation.

Government is, by definition, remote from the rural communities. It cannot have the detailed knowledge needed to serve the needs of those communities, in a relevant and sustainable way. 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.

### Post Script

On January 17, 2005, 48 representatives from 16 national rural movements and 4 European rural networks gathered in Stockholm. They agreed, in principle, to the formation of a European rural movement, based on the national rural movements. The main purpose of the proposed movement would be to:

- Help rural people to realise their quality of life
- Encourage exchange of experience, ideas and understanding between countries and people
- Influence decision makers especially at European and national level
- Build confidence and empowerment through participative democracy

This started a process leading to the formation of a European rural movement. This will, in the future, have the potential to provide a strong voice from the rural communities of Europe, to raise the profile of the rural agenda and to influence policy to support the quality of that rural life.

***This is just the beginning.***



*The first joint meeting of the European Rural Movements, Stockholm January 2005*



## 2. THE RURAL MOVEMENTS IN DENMARK



### National Context

**The nation** Denmark lies at the ancient heart of Scandinavia, and its history has been closely intertwined with that of the other Scandinavian countries. A long established independent nation, it has the oldest monarchy in Europe. In the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, a flourishing movement of ideas and populist culture led to a strong democratic movement. The Danish constitution and the birth of the Danish value system, civil society and the welfare state can be traced back to this period. During this period of the Danish 'enlightenment', the writings and teachings of N.F.S Grundtvig were a moving force in the popular consciousness of the Danish people. This helped to establish the very particular Danish culture and political orientation, which still holds immense power today. After World War II, the welfare state was established, and is still one of the most comprehensive in Europe. Denmark joined the European Community in 1973, but remains outside the Euro-zone.

Denmark has a land area of 43,094 km<sup>2</sup> (excluding the Faeroes and Greenland) and a population of 5.3 million. It is the most densely populated of the four countries studied, at 121 people per km<sup>2</sup>. It is a fertile country, and most of the land outside the towns is under cultivation. The Danish economy is strong, with a GDP<sup>1</sup> of 144 billion Euro<sup>2</sup>. The working population is 2.6 million, with 5% employed in agriculture, 25% in manufacturing and 70% in services. Unemployment stands at 4.8%, only half the EU average.

**Administration** Denmark is a constitutional monarchy. Government is organised through elected politicians on three levels - national, county and municipality. The main elements of administration are:

Monarch	Queen Margrethe II
Parliament	179 seats, including 2 for the Faroes and 2 for Greenland
Ministries	17, with related Directorates and Agencies
State Regional Government	14 State Counties
Regional local Government	13 County Councils (Amt) and 1 Regional Council
Local Government	271 Municipalities (Commune)
Home rule	The Faeroes and Greenland each has home-rule arrangements, including local government legislation.

The Danish system is based on subsidiarity. There is a long tradition of local government autonomy, and Denmark has one of the most highly decentralised systems in Europe. Most regional and local level responsibilities are devolved to regional and local government, each having their own areas of competence. There are no significant State regional authorities. As a consequence, local government in Denmark is a very strong player, with 57% of all public expenditure channelled through the County Councils and Municipalities. Denmark has the highest rates of tax in the world, and a strong welfare state.

The 1970 administrative reform reduced the number of counties from 25 to 14 and the number of municipalities from 1,388 to 275 (reduced further to 271 in 2003)<sup>3</sup>. This changed a system that had existed for many centuries, based on parishes, boroughs and the old counties, related to the church structure. It also laid the foundation for the transfer of responsibilities from the State to regional and local levels.

**State regional authorities** There are 14 State regional authorities, each with an office and Prefect, appointed by the Government. These have limited functions and are responsible for certain judicial, legal and supervisory functions.

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<sup>1</sup> Worldbank 2002 figures.

<sup>2</sup> At the time of writing 1 Euro = 7.4 Danish Kroner (DKK).

<sup>3</sup> Copenhagen and Frederiksberg are both regional and local authorities.





## 2. THE RURAL MOVEMENT IN DENMARK

**County councils** There are 13 locally elected County Councils and 1 Regional Council. Counties range in population from 44,000 to 637,000. The County Councils are responsible for regional level policy; planning of major land uses; and service delivery in secondary education, hospitals, social welfare, environmental quality and protection, major roads, transport and infrastructure. All County Councils are instructed by Government to develop a Rural Districts Policy, and to produce regional and rural development strategies for the EU funds, for which they are the main administrators. Some County Councils also establish strategic partnerships for regional development.

In Denmark, taxation takes place at 3 levels - national, county and municipal. County expenditure is financed through income tax, property tax, property value tax, Government grants and interest. In 2001, income tax accounted for 80.5% of County Council income, Government grants 9% and property taxes 10%. There is a system for equalisation of funds between the different counties and municipalities.

**Danish association of county councils** The County Councils are linked and supported through the Danish Association of County Councils. The Association acts as a go-between for the Government and the County Councils, negotiating on their behalf and undertaking bargaining with and on behalf of the 160,000 Council employees.

**Municipalities** The Municipalities are very important in the Danish system. The current Municipalities were formed in 1970. There are currently 271<sup>4</sup> Municipalities, which vary in size, from 2,266 to 499,148 inhabitants, with an average of 19,452<sup>5</sup>. Municipalities employ more than 50% of the public sector workforce and together with the Counties, 70%.

Municipalities are the most local level of decision-making. Their duties include local land use planning and service delivery: primary schools, care for children and the elderly, housing, public facilities and utilities, roads and transport, emergency services, environmental measures, some aspects of social welfare and unemployment schemes. They are also asked, on a voluntary basis, to set up a Rural Districts Policy. Some Municipalities form Village Councils to enable closer working links with the villages, and to assist them in implementing the Rural Districts Policy.

Municipalities are funded through direct and indirect taxes, investment income, grants and loans. The main source of income (56%) is through taxation, including a share of income tax. Normally both Municipalities and County Councils are free to set their own tax rate, and this is decided on an annual basis. But the Government has recently capped taxation, causing problems for the local authorities. Municipalities can also raise land tax (set at 1%), property tax, company tax, church tax etc.

### The Situation in Rural Areas

Denmark has, throughout history, been an essentially rural country. Nearly all people have close connections to the countryside. Farmers have been more important for the development of the nation than in many other EU countries; this was the 'farmers' country'. The Farmers Party, now the Liberal Party, has been one of the most powerful in Danish politics. This is the reason for the synonymous relationship between 'rural' and 'agricultural' in the minds of most Danes.

In the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, the demise of large landowners and the growth of agricultural co-operatives marked a big change in rural society. Private farms co-operated on many aspects of production, and also started the first wave of industrialisation, based on processing farm produce. This developed into large industries, and many of these co-operatives still operate today. Farmers became quite rich.

<sup>4</sup> In 2003, the 5 Municipalities on the Island of Bornholm decided to amalgamate, reducing the number of Municipalities from 275 to 271.

<sup>5</sup> 'Municipalities and Counties in Denmark' - Ministry of Health and Interior, 2002.



However, in recent years much of this has changed, with the decline of agriculture as an employer and the trends of rural-urban migration that have affected most other European countries. In the 1960-70s, farm amalgamation led to a loss of jobs in farming. But, in contrast to other EU countries, many of the unemployed farmers and farm workers stayed in their villages, rather than moving to the cities. The reason they were able to do this was the strength of the welfare state provision: this is another reason why rural issues have remained somewhat 'invisible'.

This then produced an interesting trend in which city-based industries moved production units out to the rural areas, to take advantage of the cheap labour in the villages. The Government provided incentives for them to do this. The rural people proved to be a good, skilled and reliable workforce. For this reason, there was virtually no rural unemployment, and rural areas have continued to retain economic viability until recently. However, since the end of the 1980s, many of these rural industrial units have closed down as the companies out-sourced labour in cheaper parts of the world. For the first time, there was unemployment in rural areas (around 7%) and people started leaving for the towns, or commuting.

Farming and forestry dominate land use in the rural areas. Cultivated areas account for 62% of the total land area, forest for 12% and less favoured areas 4%. Farm production is characterised by increasing specialisation and ever-larger units. From 1975 to 1998 the number of holdings fell by 55%, from 134,245 to 59,761. Of these, 57% are part-time units.

Farm amalgamation has been extensive, resulting in buildings being used for other purposes and attracting many non-farmers to the rural areas. Only about 25% of people living in rural areas are involved in farming or farm-related jobs. Commuting is extensive, especially in the parts of Denmark with larger urban areas, leading to an increasing trend of 'suburbanisation' of many rural areas.

The 1970 reform of local government was also very influential in the evolution of the rural areas. At this time, the historical traditions of the rural areas were broken. As 1,388 parish-based Municipalities gave way to 275 much larger units, so the local rural communities lost much of their power and autonomy. They lost also the geographical identity with the parish, which had been central to their lives for several centuries.

More recent changes in the rural employment structure, and impending reforms of local government, taxation and the welfare state, threaten to further undermine rural communities. Until recently, there was a strongly held Government view that there were no peripheral areas in Denmark, and thus no need for a special rural policy. However, in 2003, for the first time, reports revealed signs of marginalisation in some rural areas. This significant finding has opened the door to a new approach to rural policy.

**The village** The Danish village has its roots in the old feudal village system and in the rural co-operative movement of the late 19<sup>th</sup> to early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The village in Denmark is not a formal unit, but is the local focus for the community and its activities. Danish villagers have a long tradition of organising themselves in associations, which mainly work on a voluntary basis. Under the pre-1970 administrative system, the parish was the most local level of government, giving considerable delegated powers to local people. Since 1970, the villages have had to learn to work with the more distant Municipalities.

Danish villages are facing most of the problems apparent across much of rural Europe. These relate to the disappearance of jobs and local facilities. Two issues of current importance are closures of shops and primary schools, which are being fought by local people and by the village movement. The problems of rural areas are identified by the Government as loss of young people, high average age, lack of tertiary education facilities, necessity to commute to work, fewer primary sector jobs, high costs of farm establishment<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>6</sup> LEADER+ Programme for Denmark - 2000-2006.



## 2. THE RURAL MOVEMENT IN DENMARK

Co-operation between the village and the Municipality is vital to the health of the rural communities. A study undertaken by the Danish Village Association in 2001-2<sup>7</sup> found that co-operation between Municipalities and villages varied significantly across the country, but that interest in co-operation is increasing. It was noted by the Association of County Councils that there is no formal framework at County or Municipal levels to help the many small community voices to gain strength, and to work together.

### Civil Society

To understanding how Denmark works, one must focus on the thinking inherited from the Danish 'enlightenment' and N.F.S Grundtvig. This has been an essential influence on the Danish approach, and marks it out from other countries. The thinking of Grundtvig is woven into much of the current system and many of the civil organisations, which are still strong in Denmark today. The key foundation stones to have arisen from this include:

- The values of the educational system
- The folk high schools and study circles
- The co-operative movement
- The formation of many civil associations.

**The education system** Danish educational philosophy is based on the concept of self-motivated learning rather than didactic teaching. Qualifications are seen as less important than the act of learning itself and the motivation to do so. The Danes are proud of this model.

**The Folk high schools** Started in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century by Grundtvig, to educate people about democracy, the Folk High Schools have been the foundation for Danish civil society. They are based on a clearly articulated philosophy of local association:

*"We have learned that if we want to do something, we have to come together."*

The Folk High Schools are an internationally famous model of popular education. They have no relationship to the formal educational system, but provide the opportunity for people of any age to come together to learn and discuss any issue of their choice. They also act as meeting places where politicians can talk to a wider forum. They exist in most rural areas and are funded by the Municipalities. There is no standard format: each school is different.

**Free Schools** When a local school closes, communities often set up their own 'free school'. The right to establish free schools was established in Denmark many years ago. This relates to the right of free congregation, which has played a big role in Danish democratic thinking. This was initially focused on catering for minority interests, ethnic and religious groups, but a free school can be set up for any purpose. If this happens, the Municipality is obliged to fund the school. The school also has to raise some of the funds. from parents and local businesses, often through the donation of materials and labour.

*"On one point all Danish Governments have upheld a Grundtvigian tradition by respecting spiritual freedom in cultural as well as religious matters. The prevailing view has been to respect every minority, and to support it financially in cultural matters. Schools of all types are given State grants, and the Folk High Schools have been strongly supported." <sup>8</sup>*

**Study Circles** Study Circles have been an equally important foundation of civil society, especially in the villages. They started in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century through 'enlightenment associations', which promoted groups to come together to discuss and study any topic they wished. Study Circles are used to both learn about different topics and to discuss topical issues. In this way they have been the sparks for the formation of new groups and organisations to tackle issues in the community. Through raising awareness and creating a political lobby, Study Circles have been credited as being influential in some major decisions taken by the Government, for example in relation to renewable energy.

<sup>7</sup> 'Lokalrad / landsbyrad' - Landsforeningen af Landsbysamfund, 2003.

<sup>8</sup> 'N.F.S. Grundtvig', Kaj Thaning, 1972.



**Local associations** There is a long tradition of very local civil associations within the villages, also inspired by the work of Grundtvig, which turned villages into centres of cultural activity and learning. On average, there are 5 to 10 associations in every village: they include local energy associations, free schools, co-operative shop associations, school boards and clubs related to sports, youth, adult education, scouts, hunting, or local history.

**Village associations** Some villages bring these many groups together in a Village or Citizens Association (Borgerforeninger). These are non-party political and have a wide range of functions. They are established to take care of external relations with the authorities, and are also involved in stimulating local activities.

**Village councils** In many Municipalities, Village Councils or Committees have been established, either by the villages themselves or by the Municipality, in order to help the villages to link to the Municipality and also to gain strength through co-operation. These typically consist of two representatives from each village in the Municipality.

**Volunteering** The Danes have a traditional system of volunteering, as in the other Nordic countries. The saying is:

*"If you really want something to happen in the village, you have to do it yourself."*

People will turn out to do village tasks and also to construct buildings. The Municipality will often match labour with funding.

### **Funding Sources for Rural Areas**

It is noticeably difficult for NGOs and local groups to obtain public funding for their activities. As a result, many rely on volunteer labour and have no core funding. It was noted that, under the current Government, many previous sources of funding have been removed, causing very real problems within rural communities. The following are some of the main funding sources open to the rural communities and NGOs.

**Rural areas fund** Established in 1994, and run by the Ministry of Interior, this is the most accessible source of money for rural communities. The fund has 20 million DKK (2.6 million Euro) each year. The purpose of the fund is to stimulate village activity. It is open to NGO's, public and private applicants; and provides small grants for locally initiated projects, such as culture, leisure, attracting incomers, local branding, business start-ups.

**County councils** The County Councils tend to support projects with a regional rather than local perspective. Their funding is normally limited and is not targeted specifically at rural projects. Some County Councils use rural development funding to finance the administration of Article 33, LEADER and Objective 2 programmes. County Councils do not generally provide funding to NGOs.

**Municipalities** Most Municipalities provide some funding for the activities of local groups, but this funding is very limited.

**Rural development pilot programme** This 1-year pilot was organised by the Ministry for Urban Development in 2001, as a contribution to rural development. The programme comprised a sustainable village programme and a small towns programme. The total fund was 5 million DKK (672,000 Euro). The pilot is currently being evaluated.

**EU funds** The two main EU programmes supporting rural development are the Rural Development Programme, Article 33; and the LEADER+ Programme. Other programmes, including the Structural and Community Funds, are used in rural areas. The Structural Funds are not very important in Denmark, because there are no Objective 1 areas. However, Objective 2 covers some areas in Jutland and the islands, and there are some Objective 3 areas.



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Article 33 is the only measure in the Rural Development Programme that relates to rural development rather than agriculture. It has a total budget for 2000-6 of 101 million Euro, about 10% of the total programme budget. The main purpose of the Article 33 measures is to limit migration from the rural districts through the creation of alternative or supplementary jobs, and of an attractive environment for business and living. Each County Council makes its own annual plan for the measure, and plays the lead role in its delivery.

There is a current lack of public co-financing for EU programmes. National co-funding is not generally available outside the normal responsibilities of the Ministry of Agriculture. As a result, these programmes are not being fully utilised. This situation is in part considered to be the result of the lack of Government focus on rural areas. The difficulty of obtaining the national co-funding for Article 33 is seriously limiting its application.

**LEADER+ programme** The Danish LEADER+ programme has been referred to as an 'appendix' to the Structural Funds. It is a very small programme with 12 areas, covering 12% of the rural population, and focused on the northern and southern fringes of the country. It is not therefore considered to make a significant contribution to rural development. It also lacks public co-financing sources. The LEADER Network Unit and the regional administrative units are funded by the EC and Government, but all project funding is local.

### Rural Policy

*"There is no rural development policy as such in Denmark. The EU programmes constitute the main rural development policy, without which rural development issues would not have been put into focus."*<sup>9</sup>

The lack of focus on rural policy in Denmark is a result of the high population density, lack of peripheral areas, the welfare state and the resistance to seeing one part of the country as different from the rest, or acknowledging any special problems in the rural areas. This also explains the low level of LEADER Programme activity and the lack of Objective 1 areas. However, a recent report on regional growth has identified, for the first time, that there are problems of peripherality in Denmark. It is generally felt that a more strategic approach to rural and regional development policy is needed.

There is a lack of coherence between the responsibilities of the different Ministries regarding rural areas. For the last 10 years, the Ministry of Interior has had responsibility for co-ordinating rural development. However, very little emphasis is given to this role, with only two people working on rural development in the Ministry. The Ministry of Agriculture has most of the funds. Other Ministries also play some role in rural development, especially in relation to regional development and the environment.

An Advisory Committee on Rural Policy was established by the Ministry of Interior in the 1990s. The membership comprises the three rural associations - LAL, LDF and LID (which are described later in this chapter) and six representatives from the main political parties, appointed by the Ministry for having shown interest in rural issues. A new cross-Ministry committee on rural development has also recently been formed, chaired by the Ministry of Agriculture. This is primarily focused on the use of the EU agricultural funds. Some feel that this has the potential to become a future rural policy committee, as in Finland.

The other key players in rural policy are:

- Danish Association of County Councils, related to regional policy and co-ordination of regional government

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<sup>9</sup> Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries.





- Danish Association of Municipalities, related to local government policy and co-ordination
- National Park Boards, piloting sustainable rural development
- County Councils, related to regional and rural policy, regional planning and administration of rural development programmes
- Municipalities, related to local and rural policy, local planning and land use
- 12 LEADER LAGs, focussed on rural development
- Danish Centre for Rural Research and Development - established in 2000 as a five-year pilot to provide a data and research focus for rural issues
- The 4 Farmers Unions, which have strong national power
- 3 national rural and village associations, which are described in the second half of this chapter.

County Councils and Municipalities are requested by the Ministry of Interior to produce Rural Districts Policies. These Policies vary greatly in size and quality. All County Councils have an indicative framework for activity under Article 33, and must also produce a strategy for this to receive funding. Some integrate these with their physical planning policy, which must be renewed every 4 years. The Ministry has no current figures on how many local authorities have undertaken such rural plans. The 1999 evaluation showed that Municipalities with a larger town had responded positively, whereas most rural Municipalities saw themselves as all rural and did not perceive the need. It was also commented that because there is no clear definition of rural policy at national level, there is lack of focus and emphasis at regional level. However, there is a general feeling that changes in EU policy, especially the CAP, will make a difference to the present picture. There are already signs of changing perspectives, including a shift in the position of the traditionally powerful farmers unions.

*"Something exciting is about to happen in Denmark."*<sup>10</sup>

The Danish Village Association and the Council of Rural Districts have identified the main issues to be tackled in rural development as:

- horizontal integration - how to bring sectoral policy together?
- vertical integration - at what level should decisions be taken?

They have also agreed that there should be a special Ministry of Rural Development, to address the issues in an integrated way; and a State rural policy, with clearly defined goals spanning all rural issues and involving all Ministries. The Council of Rural Districts is working to develop a basis for such a policy. This is supported by the agricultural members of the Council, to help in addressing the perceived needs of rural areas, namely the changes in emphasis of the CAP, the isolation of farmers in rural districts and the proposed reform of local government leading to greater centralisation.

## The Rural Movement of Denmark

The rural movement of Denmark comprises 3 organisations:

LAL	The Danish Village Association - <i>Landsforeningen af Landsbysamfund</i>
LID	The Villages in Denmark Association - <i>Landsbyer i Danmark</i>
LDF	The Council of Rural Districts - <i>Landdistrikternes Fællesraad</i>

This report documents the work of LAL and LDF.

**History** In the 1970s, a tide of urban settlers in the countryside sought to re-establish the rural way of life and traditional values. They undertook the task of mobilising the rural communities and helping to articulate their needs and values. They were reacting against urban values, rural decline, agricultural policy, industrialisation and administrative centralisation, and were promoting the goals of well-being, quality of life and community values.

<sup>10</sup> Jytta Aa. Moeller, Chair of the Danish Village Association and Vice-Chair of the Council of Rural Districts - pers. com.



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This new network of urban incomers, promoting the values of a rural lifestyle, began to fill the vacuum left by rationalised agricultural co-operatives. It was out of this group that the village movement was started. They recognised that agriculture alone would not sustain rural life, and that there was a need to accommodate a new development model, relevant to the post-industrial age, at the same time respecting the values, culture, advantages and scale of rural areas. This movement was linked to environmentalism, combining scientific rationalisation of the need to protect the environment with local links to environmental values.

**The Danish Village Association (LAL)** was established in 1976, with the aim:

*"to support the work being done to re-establish, preserve and further develop village communities and the environment and culture they represent" and "to support the efforts to provide the citizens with local influence, local responsibility and local possibilities of co-operation."*

This was one of the first village movements to be set up in Europe. It paralleled the development of the movement in Finland, but was independent from it.

The movement began with a small group of people who were motivated to do something for the rural areas. The driving force was Carsten Abild, who travelled around Denmark talking to rural people. On the basis of this, he decided that any movement must come from the rural communities, because of the understanding of local people about rural society and how to work with it.

The 1970 amalgamation of the Municipalities, from 1,300 to 273, led to many local 'protest' associations being formed. LAL became an important co-ordinator for this new movement. Its mission was 'new life to the villages'.

The first General Assembly of LAL was held in February 1978. However, two weeks before this, the founder told the press that the organisation had reached its goal as the Government had set up a committee to investigate rural issues. This prompted a rebellion in LAL, which finally led to a split in the movement. This was the start of **The Villages in Denmark Association (LID)**. LID, under the leadership of Carsten Abild, has worked ever since with the same goals as LAL, but with a much smaller group.

The members of both LAL and LID were mostly urban migrants into the countryside rather than farmers. In 1982-3, LAL and LID approached the agricultural organisations to see what could be done about this. This led to the setting up of KLL, the Committee for Villages and Rural Districts, comprising the agricultural organisations and other interested parties, enabling different interest groups to talk to each other.

In 1994, the Ministry of Interior set up a Rural Districts Group, in which LAL and LID were represented, along with five politicians. At the same time, the Ministry gave funding to develop projects in rural areas - the Rural Areas Fund. The Rural Districts Group was involved in the decisions on the allocation of funds. The Group met three times a year, plus one conference, to which people from all of the projects were invited to discuss rural issues.

In 1995, the President of LAL asked the Ministry for funding, as it was difficult to run the organisation without paid staff. The Ministry responded that they could not fund LAL, as it was too small, but if they gathered others together they would consider funding a wider group. This led to the formation, in 1997, of a new structure, **The Council of Rural Districts (LDF)**, composed of the Presidents of LAL and LID, plus 7 other organisations, and mainly funded by the Ministry of the Interior.

In this way it came about that three separate, but closely inter-linked and sometimes competing, organisations are involved in the Danish rural movement.



In 2001 the **Danish Centre for Rural Research and Development (CFUL)** was established, for a 5-year pilot period with Government funding, to undertake research and dissemination of data on rural development. The President of LDF chairs the board of CFUL, politically appointed by the Ministries involved.

### **The Danish Village Association - Landsforeningen af Landsbysamfund (LAL)**

*"The objective of the Danish Village Association is popular enlightenment for the benefit of the local communities, the villages and the rural areas, and guarding their interests to maintain and develop the environment and the culture they represent, and to support others working towards the same goal."*



#### **Structure**

LAL is a national association of village organisations, with no regional branch structure. Its main elements are the membership, the board and the staff.

**Membership** The membership of LAL is divided into those who do, and those who do not, have votes at the general assembly. The voting members include 400 Village associations and 100 Individuals. The non-voting members include 16 Municipalities, 3 businesses and about 100 magazine subscribers.

**Board** The Board comprises 7 elected members, including the President. In addition, there are 2 substitute board members, a treasurer and accountant. The board is elected on a 2-year rolling cycle, with substitute members elected every year. Each member organisation has 3 votes, individuals have 1 vote. The Board elects the President and office bearers. 27 members were present at the 2003 AGM, the majority representing village associations.

**Staff** The organisation employs no paid staff, but has one appointed Editor. All work is done on a voluntary basis, except in relation to particular funded projects, or commissioned consultancy services. The work that can be undertaken therefore depends on the available time, people and skills. Most of the day-to-day work is undertaken by the Editor and President. Some specific project work is undertaken by individual Board members.

#### **Funding**

The annual expenditure is about 200,000 DKK (27,000 Euro), excluding the cost of special projects. This is raised through membership fees and the national lottery. The lottery funding is an annual payment, awarded to LAL as 'a national organisation for common well-being, active in more than 8 counties' (the basic requirement for lottery funding). Project funding is raised to implement specific aspects of the work programme.



*Jytte Aa. Møller,  
President of LAL 2003*

Membership fees are deemed to be very important, both for independence of funding and for ensuring 'ownership' by the members. LAL regard this as a fundamental issue in the autonomy of the organisation. Membership fees are currently set at:

- Village associations 525 DKK (70.5 Euro)
- Individuals 200 DKK (27 Euro)
- Newsletter 50 DKK (20 Euro)
- Municipalities contributions vary

Project funds are raised additionally, as required.

#### **Activities**

The work programme of LAL is prioritised as follows:

1. Supporting members' local needs for help: schools, shops, water, transport etc.
2. Information service: newsletter, website, response to questions, e-mail service etc.
3. Response to political issues at national level: advocacy, publicity, consultation



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4. Representation on Committees, including LDF
5. International co-operation: Nordic and EU.

These activities are briefly described below.

**Supporting members' local needs** LAL is reactive to issues raised by villages. There is no formalised, strategic process of village planning, as in Estonia and Finland. Members and other rural communities are able to raise issues directly with the Association, through individual contacts, the newsletter, the annual conference, village week etc.

LAL also offers a facilitated process, in the form of **regional meetings**, through which communities can debate and raise local issues. LAL personnel contact villages periodically to sound out local needs and to offer a regional meeting. LAL will attend, facilitate and present information to the meeting, if the local group set it up and invite a wide range of local people and organisations, including public bodies and local politicians within a 30 km range. LAL also offers facilitated visioning workshops to assist with local planning.

In response to the key issues raised through these processes, LAL organises **thematic working groups**. Each working group has a contact person, who may be an LAL board member and whose task is to keep informed and to disseminate information if needed. Information that comes in on any theme is channelled to the contact person. Working groups are free to set their own priorities and to develop their own actions, but are asked to consult the board when making decisions on behalf of LAL. There are currently 21 working groups based on the following topics - Local Agenda 21, housing, shops, decentralisation, democracy, energy, employment, fundraising, IT, church, art and culture, municipalities, environment, Nordic and international relations, postal services, schools, health, water, roads and traffic, land management legislation, the elderly.

**Rural week** Rural Week is a national programme, undertaken in different communities across Denmark, and providing a market place for village life and issues. It serves a similar function to the market place at the 'Rural Parliaments' in Sweden and Estonia: but instead of bringing the villagers together, LAL take people to the villages. This has been one of the most important activities of LAL over the last 5 years. Villages run their own activities in a co-ordinated programme, during the period of a week, opening up different aspects of village life and activities, such as housing, energy, culture, open air activities, activities for the young, or information technology.

The event is aimed at the local community, the press, visitors, potential immigrants etc. and the authorities. A key part of the process is to create extensive press coverage, and many press releases are issued at local and national levels. LAL also produces a special newsletter to go with this week. The impact is greater because it is a national effort. The event is used to inform and impress the authorities about the realities of village life, and to provide encouragement for local action. Villages are encouraged to visit each other during this week to find out what others are doing. Some villages have also made a video for distribution. Many villages have been revived by the process and inspired to do more.



*Village Fool of the Year  
winners - 2003*

**Village fool of the year** The 'village fool of the year' competition has been running for 22 years. Nominations are submitted from all over the country, even politicians can qualify. The main criterion is that the person is contributing more than would normally be expected. Applications are judged by the LAL board. In 2003, three village fools were chosen, all chairs of village associations who were active on a wide range of activities. The event gives good press coverage for LAL and for village action.

Two examples of projects that have emerged from locally raised issues are:





**Rotating housing fund** The aim of this project is to bring empty housing in peripheral areas back into the housing stock. The process involves villages in identifying an empty house, assessing its value, restoring and equipping it as a holiday home and employing a local person to look after the house. Once the house is well established, the village then sell it and buy a new house with the money. The project is partly inspired by the Ballyhoura experience in Northern Ireland.

**Youth democracy** A current priority issue for LAL is how to get young people involved in local democracy and to convince adults that the young have something to contribute. In 2003, LAL organised a trans-national seminar in Sweden, "Young people and democracy". Over 50 young people (aged 13 to 23) from 10 countries attended, over a long weekend. This was successful in raising awareness of the issues and increasing the confidence of those who participated.

**Information services** As LAL lacks a central office with staff, its information systems are critical to the running of the organisation, and to maintaining the network of local members and villages. This work therefore receives a high priority. The main elements are:

- **The newsletter, 'Village News'** Since 1991, 6 to 8 editions are produced each year, designed and printed in the villages.
- **Websites** LAL runs two websites. The Association website: [www.lal.dk](http://www.lal.dk), carries information about the organisation, e-mail service and press releases. The other, the Village Net: [www.landsbynett.dk](http://www.landsbynett.dk), contains the database of reports, articles and questions produced throughout the life of Village News.
- **E-mail service** This started in January 2001, and provides information on rural development topics of importance, to anyone who gives their e-mail address. Items covered include letters to the Parliament, Rural Week activities, survey results, proposals for the national land use plan, responses to government consultation, new legislative proposals etc.
- **Press releases** This is a constant activity at national and local levels, documenting most activities of LAL, village issues and responses to national issues, communications with the Government etc. Rural Week (described above) is a major focus for press attention.
- **Help desk** People are encouraged to call in to the Editor with questions, by phone, e-mail or letter. About 10 calls per week are received, including a high number from journalists. Important communications are reported in the newsletter.
- **Information meetings and seminars** LAL both organises and attends a wide range of meetings and events. In particular, it offers to send speakers to locally organised meetings. Regional meetings (as described earlier) are free of charge: for other meetings LAL may request fees, and always asks for travel costs. It also supports panel debates on key issues, organised by local associations.
- **Publications** Several publications have been produced in association with the work of LAL, including research reports. The most recent publication is a collection of village stories, the winners of a competition organised by LAL in 2001 for their 25-year Jubilee celebrations.

**Responses to political issues at national level** Although LAL is nationally known as the local village organisation, it still places a strong emphasis on participation in national affairs. This includes research, consultation, advocacy and involvement in national committees.

**Research** LAL undertakes periodic research on issues of importance to the villages. This research is used to highlight and publicise the situation and needs of the villages at a national level. Two recent studies:

- "Local council - village council", a study of community networks within Municipalities, and the response of Municipalities to the participation of their villages. This was funded by the Ministry of Interior.
- "How to teach participative democracy to the young", a publication on the key principles and processes for involving youth. This was undertaken personally by the LAL Editor, but is closely related to the work of LAL.

**Consultation responses** LAL responds on a regular basis to Government consultations. In 2003





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these included the Structural Commission consultation on local government reform, and the National Land Management Plan.

**Advocacy and lobbying** Advocacy relates to key issues identified by the villages, and is undertaken at national and local levels. Current issues include the reform of local government and the closure of village schools.

**Representation on committees** LAL tries to have a seat on committees that are of relevance to the future of the rural areas. Since the setting up of LDF however, this role has tended to be taken forward through LDF. The President of LAL is also Vice-President of LDF and sits on many committees on behalf of LDF.

**International co-operation** LAL has been active internationally for many years. This includes forging trans-national rural links, attending international events, undertaking trans-national projects and co-operating with European rural networks. Recent examples of trans-national project work include:

- Co-ordination of the Nordic Network of rural movements, *Hela Norden ska Leva!* (The Whole North Shall Live!) [www.bygde.net](http://www.bygde.net)
- Health and the socially excluded in rural areas
- Youth democracy project, involving 10 nationalities, funded within the Nordic countries
- Participation in the European Rural University.

### Achievements

The achievements of LAL may be summarised as:

- Operating since 1976 - one of the first rural movements of its kind in Europe
- Operating without core funding and with a huge amount of voluntary effort
- Implementation of many projects
- Successful international networking
- Strong local profile
- Strong profile with the Government Ministries.

### Challenges

LAL faces the following challenges:

- Lack of core funding and requirement for large amounts of voluntary work
- Over-reliance on a few key individuals and lack of delegation
- Personality clashes with some of the key people in different rural organisations
- Lack of diversity and of width in membership
- The need for concentrated effort to recruit board members
- Lack of a local branch structure making it hard to cover the country effectively
- Reputation as the organisation of 1970s 'good-life' people.

### The Council of Rural Districts - Landdistrikternes Fællesråd (LDF)

*"The Council endeavours to promote the best possible conditions, covering all rural districts of Denmark, in connection with Establishment (services and infrastructure), Industry, Environment (natural and cultural heritage and human welfare)."*



### Structure

The Council of Rural Districts is a politically independent association formed in 1997. It is referred to as the 'umbrella organisation', and grew from an earlier Committee for Villages and Rural Districts (KLL), set up in the 1980s. It covers all rural districts of Denmark.

**Membership** In October 2003, the Council comprised 13 national organisations, all of which contribute to its aims and objectives:

- The Danish Village Association (LAL)



- The Villages in Denmark Association (LID)
- Danish Farmers Associations (3 independent associations)
- Women's Agricultural Association
- Children's Agricultural Association
- The Village Hall Association
- The Parish Council Association
- The ECO Community Association
- Organisation of Independent Craftsmen in Denmark
- Association of co-operative shops
- Association of local retail chains.

Only national associations are allowed to be members. The Council does not have a regional branch structure: this is deemed to be the job of the member organisations, many of whom have regional or local membership structures.

**Board** The board of LDF consists of one person nominated by each member organisation. The office bearers - 1 President and 2 Vice-Presidents - are elected by the full membership.

**Staff** The Council employs 2 full-time staff, an administrator and projects officer. A journalist and book-keeper are contracted. The President and Vice-Presidents are also compensated for parts of their work.

### Funding

At October 2003, the overall annual budget of LDF was about 2 million DKK (270,000 Euro). Funding comes from the following sources:

- |  |                           |
|--|---------------------------|
| ● Grant from Ministry of Interior                | 700,000 DKK (94,000 Euro) |
| ● Members' fees (10,000 -100,000 DKK p.a.) Total | 250,000 DKK (33,500 Euro) |
| ● Private donation (2000-2004)                   | 300,000 DKK (40,300 Euro) |
| ● Landlegatet (Rural Foundation) grant           | 200,000 DKK (26,900 Euro) |
| ● Lottery funding                                | 90,000 DKK (12,000 Euro)  |
| ● Earned income from projects/ consultancy       |                           |

### Activities

The activities of LDF are focused at national level. As an 'umbrella' organisation with a membership of national associations, it links the work of these associations and enables them to have a collective voice on the national stage. Its main activities fall under the categories of networking, information, and advocacy.

**Networking** LDF operates as an intermediary between different levels and players. It works with its members to identify problematic issues (e.g. to do with the effects of legislation), discuss these with the key people and then circulate this information through the network. It also helps local people to understand issues and procedures.

**Information** The LDF website, [www.landdistrikterne.dk](http://www.landdistrikterne.dk), is a key tool for disseminating information. It carries the largest amount of rural information of any Danish website, including important documents from the Government and other sources. LDF also has an international rural districts website and is networking within the EU.

**Advocacy** LDF works with Government Ministries, local authorities and citizens, and is represented in the following organisations:

- Monitoring Committee for the EU Rural District Programme 2000-2006
- Rural District Group of the Ministry of the Interior
- Ministry of Transport's Support Group for public transport funds
- Board of the Danish Centre for Rural Research and Development
- Control Group for the bachelor degree in Rural District Development and Planning
- Project Group for minor technologies in small communities
- European Rural University.



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### Achievements

The main achievements of LDF are:

- It has core funding and staff
- It has many key rural organisations in membership
- It has close links to key Ministries.

### Challenges

LDF has faced the following challenges:

- Initial staffing difficulties and lack of staff time to undertake the scale of work
- Some lack of momentum and clear direction in the early years
- Some competition and lack of clarity about the relative roles of the member organisations.

## Commentary

### Origins of the Rural Movement

The Danish rural movement has evolved over almost 30 years. For most of this time, it had no connection to the parallel rural movements in Finland and the other Nordic countries, but took its own course. Hence it has developed quite different characteristics.

The main motivating forces behind the origins of the Danish rural movement were:

- the long-established cultural traditions stemming from the 19<sup>th</sup> century 'Danish Enlightenment'
- the decline in agricultural employment and the rural population
- the re-organisation of local government in 1970, with loss of local autonomy
- the movement of many educated, urban people into the rural areas in the 1970s and their desire to revive the rural values and communities.

Current motivating factors for the movement include:

- the continuing erosion of rural employment and agriculture and increasing sub-urbanisation of the rural areas
- centralisation of State jobs
- the lack of a co-ordinated rural policy
- changes to the Danish system initiated by the current Government, including reduction in the availability of public funding, negative impacts on the welfare state, further amalgamation of local authorities and reduction in the former capacity of rural communities
- within the EU, the current over-emphasis on agricultural support and the developing focus on rural development
- transnational links to the other Nordic rural movements.

**The Danish enlightenment** The special character of the movement in Denmark derives from the wider national culture, and the rural context from which it grew. These retain the strong influence of Grundtvig and the period of Danish enlightenment. This is evidenced in the whole Danish approach to learning and education, in the style of religion, in the respect for individual and minority interests and cultures, in the particular freedom of spirit, and in the extensive development of civil society, especially in the rural areas.

Grundtvig's activities were mostly focused on the farming population, which comprised the majority in 19<sup>th</sup> century Denmark. He worked to 'educate' the farmers and the rural people in ways that were unique to Denmark at the time. Central to this was the development of the Folk High Schools, the village meeting houses and study circles. This turned the parishes and village halls into centres of cultural activity and learning. In contrast to most other European countries at this time, the cultural centre of Denmark was in the rural, rather than the urban communities. A decisive factor in Danish agriculture was the co-operative movement, which was one of the fruits of the high school movement.

*"This movement, in connection with Grundtvig's liberal thinking and continual striving for freedom, became liberal in form both politically and culturally, in marked contrast to the conservative type of villages found in other countries."* <sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> 'N.F.S. Grundtvig', Kaj Thaning, 1972.



Grundtvig's view, that every individual counts, has made the Danes individualistic and, it is said, anarchistic. This can also be seen in the Danish rural movement - as can the fact that Grundtvig's view of women gave Danish women a more equal place with men from the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

This is the cultural foundation upon which the Danish rural movement of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century was based. In many ways, what Grundtvig achieved in the 19<sup>th</sup> century is what the modern movement is also striving for, but within the context of the current trends of rural-urban migration, centralisation and the EU.

**Agricultural change** Major changes in the agricultural structure of Denmark since World War II have converted the Danish rural population from farmers to an industrial labour force, and increasingly to suburban commuters. The loss of jobs in farming forced the migration of many people out of rural areas and significantly altered the character of the rural communities. Although Denmark was more successful than most countries in introducing new industries into the countryside, this is no longer sufficient to stem the flow to the towns. The famous Danish agricultural co-operatives also declined rapidly in the 1960s.

**Local Government reorganisation** A further catalyst for change came from the massive re-organisation of local administration in 1970. This broke the historical traditions of place by shifting the focus of decision-making from the parish to the district level, and left the rural villages in a relatively weak position for the first time. The same trend was seen in Sweden in the 1970s, and was also a catalyst for the formation of the Swedish village movement.

The 1970 administrative reforms imposed artificial municipal boundaries on to the population, changing the tradition of 8 centuries. The parish council had existed since the Viking age as the local level of government. The Viking democracy was based on the long-boat with its chieftain - a very democratic system in which everyone was involved in decision-making. The old counties were also linked to the parishes: the County, or 'Stift', had a bishop, who had control over the Parish ministers. But in 1970 the government amalgamated several parishes into one Municipality, and reorganised the traditional counties. Popular reaction to these changes helped to fuel the rural movements.

*"You can't just change the thinking of several centuries. The borders between parishes (often streams) were strong cultural borders - you must respect these as the Danes still think in Parish boundaries."*<sup>12</sup>

**A new understanding of 'rurality'** In the 1970s there was an influx of urban residents and returnees to the rural communities. This was motivated in part by the desire to return to the traditional values and life-styles of the rural areas, and in part by the availability of property and housing resulting from the decline in agriculture. This group of educated and articulate 'incomers' became a strong force in the rural debate.

One theory put forward is that this group of people represented.

*"The left-wing, environmentalist, political ideology that predominated in the public sphere during this decade."*<sup>13</sup>

Svendsen, who has studied the publications produced by LAL in its early days, also linked the thinking behind the village movement to Marxism and the 1960s farmers' movement, and compared it in some ways to the trade union movement in industrial society. He suggested that it was based on 3 key inter-related concepts - active citizenship; egalitarianism; and victimisation of rural communities by centralist administrators and the urban population.

The rhetoric of LAL was seen to have a strong influence over rural people. The strong and emotive focus on the 'local community' was in tune with local feelings, and led to a growth in village groups and associations, and to a belief in the 'right' of rural communities to development and public funding to protect the rural way of life.

<sup>12</sup> Researcher at the Danish Centre for Rural Research and Development.

<sup>13</sup> 'The right to development; construction of a non-agriculturalist discourse of rurality in Denmark' Gunnar Svendsen, Journal of Rural Studies, 2003.



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*"The dream of a new rural way of life was literally architect-designed by these young intellectuals, who verbalised their dream in an amazing number of publications."*

Svendsen identifies the way in which this view of rurality became commonly accepted amongst many sectors of Danish society:

*"This was a discourse of rurality that quickly was overtaken by members of the many local citizens' associations in the villages, as well as by social scientists, State bureaucrats and local politicians. This led to non-agricultural formulations of rural identity and practice coming to dominate the rural political debate in the 1980-90s. Village community values were placed against urban materialist / individualist values. These values and concepts set the village movement apart from the post-war agricultural discourse - which was based on productivism, structural change and vertical integration."*

This view is strongly contested by the current leaders of LAL, who maintain the movement is driven by real village issues and people, not by theoretical or academic positions.

### **The Danish Village Association - *Landsforeningen af Landsbysamfund (LAL)***

The Danish Village Association was established in 1976 to:

*"support the work being done to re-establish, preserve and further develop village communities and the environment and culture they represent" and "to support the efforts to provide the citizens with local influence, local responsibility and local possibilities of co-operation."*

This placed the focus strongly on expanding the opportunities for the involvement of rural dwellers in determining their future, and reversing some of the trends of the preceding two decades.

Two key figures were prominent in its initiation and early development - Carsten Abild, the chairman of LAL's first board, and Ole Glahn, the vice-chairman. Carsten, a teacher, in particular played a strong role in leading and articulating the direction of LAL. There was a strong focus on the village as a 'natural' unit closely related to nature, rich in culture and co-operative in its activities. His philosophy was summed up in his article in the first issue of 'Village News':

*"I see the creation of the Village Association as a form of popular movement which builds upon a knowledge that we are not satisfied just by living a materialistic way of life for ourselves. Instead we should focus more on togetherness with others and creating satisfactorily intelligible societies where the individual can thrive."*<sup>14</sup>

The features of LAL today, that strike the visitor, are that it is an organisation with a long established, though not always clear, place in the Danish rural sector. It is strongly supportive of the 'bottom-up' village perspective, but is intent on making this voice heard at the highest level of government. The movement lacks the highly structured nature of those in Finland, Estonia and Slovakia. It is more organic and relaxed in its approach. This may be explained by the fact that LAL, as an organisation, is older than any of the other organisations. Moreover, the whole issue of village action and organisation has a long history dating back to Grundtvig. This was articulated by the Editor of LAL:

*"In Denmark we have a long tradition of local organisation. We are not creating something new, we are fighting for what is already there."*<sup>15</sup>

The more individualistic, and even anarchistic, nature of Danish culture is also probably a factor.

LAL is the main organisation working with the villages in Denmark. LID, the breakaway organisation, does not have such a high profile or extensive membership. LAL reacts to issues raised by villages, but there is no formalised, strategic process of village planning as in Estonia and Finland. Instead LAL has developed a range of ways in which it has 'eyes and ears' into the rural communities. The decision-making on priorities to be tackled seems to come more from the clues picked up by the

<sup>14</sup> 'Landsbyen, 1977, no.1, p.3.

<sup>15</sup> Barbara Diklev, Editor of LAL - pers. com.





active members, than by any clear process of evaluation. It is a more intuitive process. Another characteristic of LAL, which also seems to apply to the other Danish rural organisations, is the extent to which a very small number of committed individuals dominate its activities. This may in part be a result of the relative lack of the formal structures and processes, which have been adopted by the other national movements, partly to prevent such a concentration of power. It may also be connected to the culture of individualism in Denmark, and to the presence of strong and motivated individuals, with a long involvement in the movement. It is particularly noticeable that these people are mostly women.

The organisation has no paid staff. It relies on a huge amount of voluntary time from the key players at national level, and at village level. The most active individuals said that it would not be possible to do this if they also had to earn an income. The difficult issue is how to cover the whole country without any employees. The board of LAL is the main group through which the work is co-ordinated and facilitated. It was said that:

*"The board is working for the whole society, in a democratic way, and with information. Each board member has a job to do. They try to assist the members to develop the culture they represent."*<sup>16</sup>

The organisation does not have as many members as the other national movements, if one includes the membership of their regional structures. LAL draws its membership directly from the village associations. The lack of a regional structure (unlike the other countries) may inhibit LAL from gaining fuller participation across the rural areas. Attendance at the annual conference is very small when compared to the Rural Parliaments in Sweden or Estonia: in 2003, only 27 voting members were present for the AGM. There is also some concern as to the difficulty of attracting board members and young people.

At the AGM, the President observed of the Editor, who has been a member of the board for 13 years: *"Without her there would have been no LAL - she has provided the continuity, the grand old lady. Continuity is important - to have someone who knows everyone. Renewal is also important."* This is a constant dilemma to both keep continuity and renew the organisation.

### **The Council of Rural Districts - *Landdistrikternes Faellesrad (LDF)***

The establishment of LDF, in 1997, was promoted by the Ministry of the Interior and the former President of LAL. The pressure to establish this 'umbrella organisation' came from the fact that the Ministry was only prepared to provide funding for a united 'rural forum' of the main rural organisations. LDF was formed as an umbrella organisation for agricultural organisations and other actors from the Committee (KLL) as well as newcomers. It was seen as advantageous for LAL to retain its village focus, but to have a network organisation through which to gain information, learn of legislative initiatives, funding and political links.

LDF only has national associations as members, and it operates mainly at the national level. The development of LDF has proved problematic in several ways. There has been a lack of clarity as to its essential role and its relationship with its member organisations, especially with LAL. There were some early difficulties with staffing, which contributed to an initial lack of direction. The relationship and differences between the roles and contributions of paid staff and volunteers is also not always understood and is at times problematic. LDF has also experienced problems in the procedures for lobbying and advocacy, and has not always been as successful in this as it would wish.

Each member organisation has a member on the board of LDF. It was said that its board meetings are the only place in Denmark where you can find natural enemies talking to each other. Each organisation pays a minimum of 10,000 DKK (1,350 Euro) per year for membership. This has placed high

<sup>16</sup> Jytte Møller - President of LAL - address to the 2003 annual conference of LAL.



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expectations on the organisation to provide a useful role that the members cannot provide for themselves. To date, some members have experienced frustration as to the level of return they have received. The level of commitment of key individuals to carry out the work was seen as low, there were problems with the management of the budget and a lack of communication with the board members. As ever, personality issues appear to be at the heart of many of these problems. To address these issues, LDF has adopted 'value-based leadership' based on 3 core values - open, responsible and happy in work. The application of these values has made a significant improvement.

### Relationships

**Inter-relations** The most obvious difference to the other national movements is that Denmark lacks the coherence of a single organisational structure. Taken together, the three organisations - LAL, LDF and LID - undertake most of the functions of SYTY in Finland or Kodukant in Estonia, but in a divided way. LAL and LID are operating with the same basic agenda, that is the 'village action movement', and have found it impossible to co-operate effectively over the years. LDF fulfils the role of the 'rural forum'. At first LDF worked directly with local communities: this weakened the voice of the villages in the overall process, to the extent that LAL insisted on continuing to play a major advocacy role at national level, independently of LDF, in order to adequately represent their members.

The existence of these 3 inter-related organisations seems to cause some specific difficulties. There is competition and overlap between them, especially in relation to the policy process. It is seen that there is a need for the organisations to agree upon a delegation of roles. Until recently, attempts to do this have been frustrated by each organisation insisting on its right to define its own role, and a reluctance to trust the others with the critical role of political lobbying.

**Local relations** Historically, LAL has been the village organisation. Its membership and activities focus around the village organisations. It also works closely with the Municipalities, and with the inter-relations between villages and Municipalities. In this sense, it is the closest to the local communities. LDF was set up to work primarily at a national level, and to connect to the local level through the medium of their member organisations. However, in practice this is not proving to be so clear, since LDF is also working with the villages, mainly electronically. LDF has however identified the most appropriate local level at which to work as being the Municipalities, where the formal planning process takes place. Their view is that it is not effective to work at parish or village level, as decisions are taken at other levels. LDF is advocating the formation of topic-based focus groups from villages at the Municipal level. LDF plays an important role via its 2-weekly electronic newsletter and website.

**Relations to Government** The Ministry of Agriculture observed that the rural movements appear to have more influence amongst politicians than they did 5 years ago, as 'hearing partners' and consultees on acts and Ministerial decrees. They recognise LDF as being the only lobby organisation for rural areas. They observed that generally the rural development lobby is not strong and has not persuaded the Government to put significant funding into rural development. The rural development movements are seen to lack focus on economic issues, unlike the agriculture lobby.

The Ministry of the Interior commented that LDF seems to be successful, and that LAL are more visible than LID. They favour retaining the different organisations, in order that one organisation shall not monopolise the debate. These organisations provide the Ministry with an input on which rural matters are important to discuss, and create an interest in rural affairs. They are seen as good at lobbying and raising issues, and their newsletters are important vehicles for raising issues and debate. However, it was foreseen that there are now issues that will create tension between the government and the rural associations - principally the further reform of local government. The rural areas are very concerned that their voices are heard in this debate.

In general, there is a significant level of concern in the rural movements, and elsewhere in rural circles, with the policies of the current Liberal government. At national level the Liberal Party is said



to have been taken over by the 'city lions'. But at County and Municipal levels the Liberal Party still stands for the old values. This has led to conflict between the national and local level politicians. Nationally, rural issues are not high on the agenda.

*"The Government do not see it as a bad thing that rural areas are declining."*

The Government has just launched a new slogan - 'something for something' - you have to work to receive. They have also launched a values debate focussed on the need to change values from the historical social-democratic welfare tradition to more market-oriented values.

LDF is now pressing for the creation of a Ministry of Rural Development and a national rural policy with clearly defined goals, spanning all rural issues and involving all Ministries.