

Linking sustainable agriculture and coastal nature to improve local economies, Väinameri - EE

1. Policy Objective & Theme

- SUSTAINABLE USE OF RESOURCES: Preserving coastal environment (its functioning and integrity) to share space
- SUSTAINABLE USE OF RESOURCES: Sound use of resources and promotion of less resource intensive processes/products
- SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC GROWTH: Balancing economic, social, cultural development whilst enhancing environment
- SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC GROWTH: Improving competitiveness

2. Key Approaches

- Integration
- Participation
- Knowledge-based
- Ecosystems based approach
- Socio-economic

3. Experiences that can be exchanged

Restoration and conservation of semi-natural coastal ecosystems through assisting the local people in developing small-scale economies.

4. Overview of the case

An innovative case in which nature tourism plays its role within a holistic system of initiatives involving conservation of semi-natural coastal landscapes through traditional land management and animal husbandry practices and the revival of traditional handicrafts. The main areas of the project applications are in farming, handicrafts and ecotourism. Also, awareness building and ecological education are of high priority.

5. Context and Objectives

a) Context

The Väinameri ("the sea of straits") area in West Estonia is a semi-enclosed area of about 2,000km² encompassing shallow areas (mostly less than six metres deep) of the Baltic Sea connecting the islands of Saaremaa, Hiiumaa and Vormsi and the Estonian mainland. Väinameri is connected to the Baltic Sea by five straits. Apart from the four major islands, there are a variety of smaller islets which are generally smaller than 100 hectares. The area also has a number of bays and lagoons including Matsalu, Haapsalu, Hullo and Käina. Parts of the area are designated as wetlands of international importance - Matsalu National Park and Silma Nature Reserve - under Ramsar specifications. Väinameri has been designated by Birdlife International as an 'Important Bird Area'. The natural and cultural qualities of rural Estonia, as with other areas in northern Europe, are intimately connected with traditional forms of agriculture. Many wildlife species are ideally adapted to semi-natural unfertilised grasslands in coastal areas used for the grazing of sheep, cattle and horses, making these areas some of the most biodiverse habitats in northern Europe. In the early 1990s, the Väinameri region was chosen by the Helsinki Commission (HELCOM) as one of the most important biological 'multi-function' areas in the Baltic Sea.

b) Objectives

The aim was to restore and maintain the valuable coastal landscape, increase and sustain natural values, increase the attractiveness of the area and to create living conditions for people involved with agriculture in a sparsely populated area. Development of sustainable agriculture, small-scale tourism and a regional production of both agricultural products and handicraft would directly benefit both nature and local residents. Apart from biodiversity and landscape related outcomes, the socio-economic outputs were to create a viable coastal countryside society, to support strong families with multiple livelihoods, to manage naturally fertilised (organic) grasslands, to produce handicrafts using local natural outputs from the managed landscape and giving long-term economic benefits to local people and to increase landscape attractiveness giving rise to nature tourism.

6. Implementation of the ICZM Approach (i.e. management, tools, resources)

a) Management

It was developed and run between 1997 and 2004 by a network of partners in Estonia and Sweden: WWF-Sweden, Research Centre Arhipelaag, Matsalu Nature Reserve, NGA Läänerannik, Estonian Fund for Nature and local handicraft and farmers' societies. The main funding bodies were WWF Sweden and Sida (The Swedish Agency for International Development Cooperation). Local initiatives have since ensured long term financial sustainability of the endeavour.

b) ICZM tools

No over-arching management plan was drawn up. Instead, a number of smaller integrated projects were initiated which linked the ecological systems of the sea and land, matched the interests of different economic sectors, considered the special interests of individual regions, harmonised different management levels and guaranteed the development of local life, taking into account culture and national origin. The key actions included:

Landscape Management:

- Educating and training farmers in landscape management, beef cattle breeding and marketing
- Creating a 'green' meat brand with active marketing of products to high quality restaurants.
- Reviving the Estonian horse by some farmers for equestrian activity on their farms.

Handicrafts:

- Establishing a clear link in principle and practice between traditional handicrafts and local landscapes and in particular on coastal grassland management – a holistic approach.
- Using local products including reed, juniper, osier for kitchen utensils and baskets. The skin and wool of sheep are used to produce clothing and household items.
- Improving sheep breeding leading to improved wool quality.
- Branding, labelling and marketing local handicrafts.
- Launching a tradition of summer and winter handicraft fairs and competitions.

Tourism:

- Tourism built through handicraft and meat initiatives to help build a sense of identity.
- Developing eco-tourism (bird watching, flora and family farm holidays).

Awareness and Outreach:

- Disseminating information, experiences and outcomes to the general public, media and governments at all levels.
- Facilitating information exchange amongst stakeholders through visits and study tours.

7. Cost and resources

No costs are available.

8. Effectiveness (i.e. were the foreseen goals/objectives of the work reached?)

Increasing interest in breeding beef cattle has led to expanded areas for natural grazing leading to improved landscape and biodiversity (more than 2000 ha of well-maintained grasslands); a growing market for local high quality organic meat. All farmers who became involved in the project remained working. Revival of traditional handicrafts using local raw materials has grown from purely tourist markets to resident consumers. The diversification of employment opportunities through development of sustainable tourism activities by farmers. The formation of eco-tourism enterprises e.g. Moonsund Eco offering handicraft, fishing and nature tourism packages. There is now an increased number of visitors and income from local production. Biodiversity has been maintained and restored.

9. Success and Fail factors

The value of developing a holistic programme developing the essential inter-dependencies of landscape, biodiversity and economic development based upon handicrafts, local produce and tourism. The role of biodiversity as a key factor in the process of rural development. Success in mobilising a wide range of local stakeholders leading to increased job opportunities in the long term. Widespread local engagement backed by sustained administrative and political support has led to outcomes that form a solid foundation for the Väinameri area. A full time regional project coordinator, local coordination with delegation and a strong international, national and regional policy context for actions on the ground and sufficient funding.

10. Unforeseen outcomes

Several new enterprises have been established during the project e.g. a cattle breeders society is expanding and organising study-tours for themselves and farmers from neighbourhood areas.

The handicraft and local-product fairs have become a tradition in the island of Hiiumaa. The tourism packages arranged by the project are being used by small enterprises and are regarded as good examples that have encouraged people to expand this business. It has become a study area for other communities interested in similar developments e.g. one group from Latvia, one from Finland and three from Russia. The Estonian government now financially rewards the grazing of semi-natural grassland management.

11. Prepared by

A. H. Pickaver, Coastal & Marine Union (EUCC), The Netherlands

12. Verified by


It has not been possible to verify this case.

13. Sources


- A review of relevant experience in sustainable tourism in the coastal and marine environment (2006) Stevens & associates, Scottish Natural Heritage
- The Väinameri project (undated) Toomas Kokovkin
- The Väinameri Project. Linking rural life and coastal nature (2005) Kokovkin T. Arhipelaag
- The Väinameri Project: Final Technical Report (2004) Ola Jennersten, WWF
- <http://www.arhipelaag.ee/Väinameri>
- <http://www.moonsund.ee> (eco-tourism website in Estonian, German and English)

- <http://www.wwf.se>




Vainameri (37.73 KB) 



Vainameri Project (117.37 KB) 



Vainameri report (9.29 MB) 



Vainameri_final_report (1.12 MB) 