



Finnish Rural Policy in a Nutshell



Finnish countryside

Finland is a sparsely populated country with rural characteristics. The rural areas are diversified, and the countryside does not fit a single clear-cut definition. The features of landscape and ways of livelihood considerably vary, even in small areas.

In 2013, Finland completed a new urban-rural classification, which is based on spatial data sets. The classification identifies 7

different regional classes: that is, inner urban area, outer urban area, peri-urban area, local centres in rural areas, rural areas close to urban areas, rural heartland areas and sparsely populated rural areas. One municipality may consist of several different types of areas. The rural area types cover 95 percent of Finland and are home to 1.66 million inhabitants (31 percent of the population).



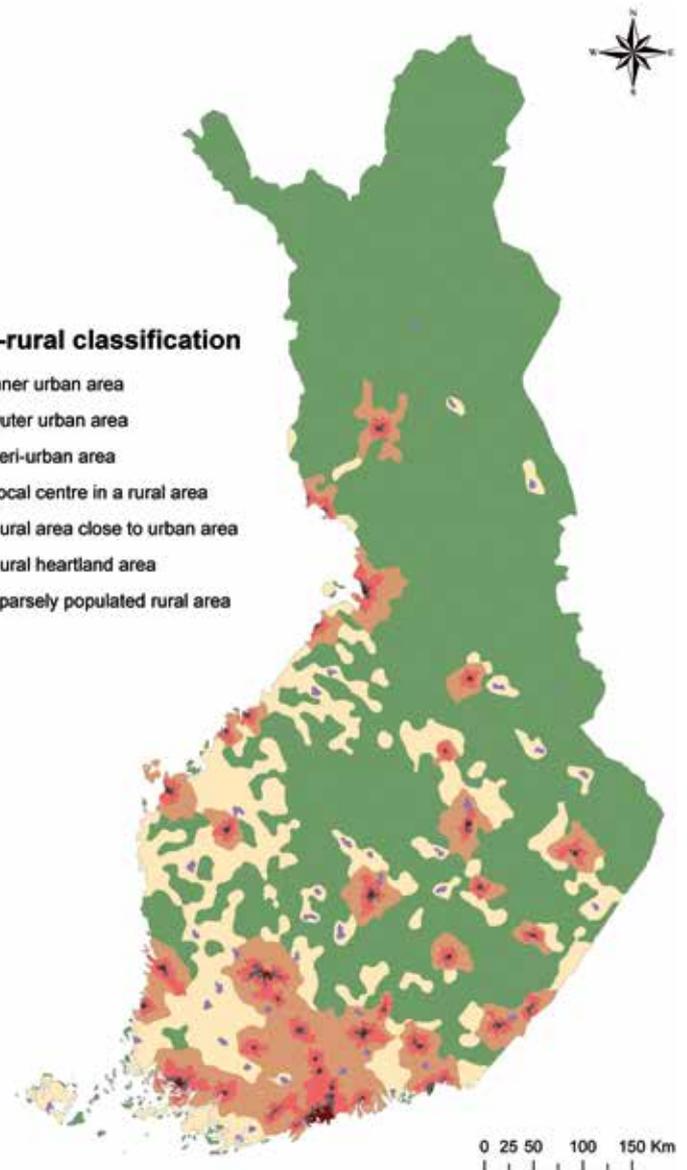
Area of Finland and its relative proportion (2006) as well as population and relative proportion (2012) by region (SYKE, Finnish Environmental Institute).

Regional class	Area (km ²)	Area (%)	Population	Population (%)
Inner urban area	614	0,2	1 700 781	31,5
Outer urban area	1 882	0,6	1 421 982	26,5
Peri-urban area	12 063	4	585 831	11
Local centres in rural areas	644	0,2	327 074	6
Rural areas close to urban areas	32 956	10,8	396 334	7
Rural heartland areas	48 438	15,9	624 971	12
Sparsely populated rural areas	207 615	68,3	308 097	6

Urban-rural classification

- Inner urban area
- Outer urban area
- Peri-urban area
- Local centre in a rural area
- Rural area close to urban area
- Rural heartland area
- Sparsely populated rural area

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Inter-regional relationships have changed rapidly over the last decades against the background of telecommunication and communications development, increased

mobility of people and goods, as well as land use changes, among others. As a result, the rural-urban boundary has become blurred. The city and the countryside have become a continuum.

Finnish rural policy

In a country with vast rural areas, a systematic rural policy is needed. In Finland, rural policy consists of national rural policy linked to regional policy and EU co-funded rural development.

During each Government's term of office, regional policy is outlined with the national regional development targets. Policy measures separately target rural areas, the archipelago, and cities. Funding for rural policy primarily comes from the State budget's allowance for rural development.

EU co-funded rural development is a part of the EU's common agricultural policy. It is based on the programming period drawn up in the rural development programme, which is carried out at the national, regional, and local level. Interregional and international projects are also possible. The frameworks of the development programme are defined in EU regulations. Most of funding directed to rural development is channelled through EU co-funded rural development.

Successful rural policy requires that the actors involved commit themselves to common goals and cooperate with each other. Parallelism of sectoral policies is needed at all levels of activity for rural development. Rural proofing is a practical tool with which a rural perspective can be mainstreamed for preparation and decision-making by different sectors.





Rural Policy Committee

Rural policy in Finland is characterised by a network-like approach, where rural areas are developed at different levels in cooperation among public, private and the third sector. At the national level, the central actor preparing and implementing rural policy is the Rural Policy Committee YTR, which is the horizontal cooperation body appointed by the Government. The Government sets the tasks, members, and term of office to YTR. Its membership includes representatives of different ministries, regional government, R&D organisations, as well as organisations and associations. Emphasis is placed on the governance perspective. A large number of actors are involved in the different forms of work of YTR.

The Countryside of Possibilities

– Rural Policy Programme 2014-2020

Rural Policy Programme is the operational programme of YTR. It sets out the objectives and measures for rural development. The time span of the overall programme is longer than the government term and is consistent with the EU programming period. Overall programme measures flesh out government rural policies, and these are implemented by a wide group of actors.

The overall programme is implemented in the context of resources in accordance with state budgetary framework decisions and government finances. It is not a financing programme; rather, it seeks to affect the operations of different sectors so that the countryside would be better taken into account. Some of the objectives can be met through the EU co-funded Rural Development Programme and EU Structural Funds Programme. Implementation of the programme and achievement of its goals will be monitored and evaluated during the programming period and measures will be specified as needed.

The strategic approach of the Rural Policy Programme consists of a place-based policy, which recognizes the diversity of places and takes into account the starting points and needs of places.



Vision of the countryside 2020: Prosperous countryside making good use of its resources

The countryside forms an inseparable part of the national prosperity and society. The countryside is a good living environment that supports entrepreneurship and creativity. The material, social, cultural and ecological basis of the countryside is important for all of Finland.

Statement of purpose

A smooth everyday life in the countryside is based on experience of inclusion and well-functioning services produced by public, private, and third sector. The development of livelihoods aims at effectively making use of the diverse resources of the countryside and in accordance with principles of sustainable development. In the countryside, the aim is for sustainable growth, well-being, and competitiveness by combining know-how, research data, technology, and social innovations. The keys to success are the willingness and readiness to change, which require the willingness to take initiative based on know-how and learning. The changing operating environment creates challenges and opportunities. With the tools for the rural development, local conditions are taken into account and suitable solutions are constructed for them. Well-being of the countryside is realised, and the countryside development is based increasingly on the information, know-how and activity of people and enterprises operating there. In the implementation of rural policy, cooperation by policy actors, developers, researchers and public officers as well as civil society is increasingly close.



Themes and measures

The overall programme has five main themes, for which 63 concrete measures have been drawn up. The key actors responsible for the implementation of the measures are defined for each of the measures. The themes are cross-sectoral, and the implementation of the measures requires the cooperation of the actors at different levels.

The overall programme and the themes and measures promoting its implementation, as well as the strategic intent, by the year 2020 are structured as follows:

- 1) Participation and local democracy:
The goal for the year 2020 is that local democracy works well, civil society is active and, when local development is strong, cooperation of actors of civil society and municipalities flourishes. Rural inhabitants and communities participate in and affect the development of society and that of local environment, as well as decision-making, in diverse manners.
- 2) Housing and services:
The goal for the year 2020 is that housing and living is versatile in the countryside. High-quality services enable well-being, housing, and entrepreneurship in the countryside. Services are produced from the starting points of residents to strengthen their participation in their communities and as members of society while taking into account their different population and age groups.
- 3) Infrastructure and land use:
The goal for the year 2020 is that infrastructure in the countryside is in the condition required for smooth living and entrepreneurship. Roads, rail lines, and airports serve the needs of users, and transport connections function well in different parts of Finland. In rural areas, alternative means are employed to replace traditional public transport. Fast data networks are available at a reasonable price for everyone. Land use is planned in a participatory manner, and the needs of the rural areas are recognised.
- 4) Livelihoods and expertise:
The goal for the year 2020 is that the number of companies located in the countryside and their competitiveness have grown, business skills of entrepreneurs have strengthened, and boldness for new investments has increased. Companies operating in the countryside receive a skilled labour force, and rural jobs and workers meet. Multi-disciplinary training is available, and research, development and training services are accessible.
- 5) Ecosystem services:
The goal for the year 2020 is that, in rural business operations, biodiversity is safeguarded and ecosystem services are utilized in a sustainable manner. Decentralised production and use of renewable energy production have increased, and they have increasing significance as sources of livelihood in the countryside. Well-managed natural and cultural environments as well as landscapes of the countryside increase the attractiveness of rural area as a living environment and as a tourist destination.

Thematic networks and national rural research and development projects

In the implementation of the overall programme, the main approach is thematic networks which contribute to the realisation of goals and measures. In support of the realisation of each overall programme theme, a network whose coordination activity is partially funded by YTR has been assembled. In addition, horizontal networks have been created for the development of sparsely populated rural areas and to bring along both the Swedish as well as Saami-language actors. The programme implementation is organized jointly with those involved with the network. In addition to networks, YTR is also funding other rural research and development projects which promote the implementation of the programme.

Rural policy network's policy strategy for international cooperation 2014–2020

The linking of Finnish rural policy network to international networks is a natural and a value-added dimension in rural development. The overall programme includes a policy strategy for international cooperation of the rural policy network. It aims at systematic international cooperation. The strategy defines the strategic goals for international action and practical measures for the rural policy network.

The vision for international cooperation in rural policy for the year 2020 is the following:

The Finnish rural policy network influences as an active and competent actor in international rural policy. The viability of the rural areas is strengthened by local, regional, national, as well as international measures. In activities, emphasis is placed on place-based policy, partnership among different actors, and multi-level governance.

The starting point in international cooperation is added-value reciprocity and contribution to achievement of objectives of the rural development. The means for this include promotion of cooperation and networking at different levels and arenas and the exchange of good practices and expertise with international partners, as well as the creation of the conditions for carrying out international projects. The increase of awareness and deepening of understanding of global rural issues and about different countries' practices are of paramount importance.





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