

T5.2 Case study report (Code FI8A)

## Rural Professions Association (Maaseutuammattiin ry) in North Savo

**DRAFT**  
The report is subject to possible changes due to approval process by the European Commission.

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## Acronyms & Abbreviations

<b>CAP</b>	Common Agricultural Policy
<b>EDR</b>	Economic Dependency Ratio
<b>ELY</b>	ELY centres are regional bodies of the Finnish state administration for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment issues
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>NGO</b>	Non-government organization
<b>PDR</b>	Population Dependency Ratio
<b>UAA</b>	Utilized Agricultural Area
<b>WP</b>	Work Package

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## Introduction

The RURALIZATION project is looking for innovative solutions to common problems which are capable of calibration to local circumstances. The geography of rural areas impacts resources for regeneration and how responses should be designed. Spatial differences across rural space impact regeneration potential (Murtagh et al., 2021). This case study report presents the Rural Professions Association, Maaseutuammattiin ry in Finnish and the name used later in this report, as one of the practices in promoting generation renewal in rural areas. The activities of the Maaseutuammattiin ry are focused in the province of North Savo, Finland.

Maaseutuammattiin ry is a non-governmental organization. The association was established in 2011 to promote the availability of new entrepreneurs and skilled professionals for agriculture and forestry as well as to increase the awareness and networking of the field. To get a better understanding about the regional context of rural entrepreneurship and professions, this report features an outlook to the regional features of the practice. The outlook is based mostly on statistical data about the geographic, demographics, social, economic and the labor and livelihood features of the province of North Savo.

The analysis of this practice in this case study was deepened by the qualitative data collected by interviewing 26 people (12 females, 14 males) in semi-structured in-depth interviews. The interviews, of which 10 face-to-face, 8 by phone and 8 by Microsoft Teams were done between 4th September 2020 and 1<sup>st</sup> April 2021. The Interviewees were farmers and other entrepreneurs in the agricultural and forestry sector, the teachers and educational planners of the educational institutions, a reporter, employees and persons elected to a position of trust of farmers' and forest owners' unions and some specialists who promote the education, livelihood or professions of agricultural and forestry sector at a national level organization. The focus group discussion about this case study was held on the 19<sup>th</sup> of February 2021 with the board and employees of the association of Maaseutuammattiin ry. The preliminary results were discussed in a webinar on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of June 2021.

This case study is one of 30 RURALIZATION WP5.2 case studies. The detailed guidelines for these studies and reports were presented in WP5 Task 5.2 input paper in July 2020 (Sivini, Vitale & Kovach, 2020).

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## Context

### Regional and local features

The Finnish administrative structure has three main levels: the national (state), the regional (provinces) and the local (municipalities). The state takes care of the national administrative tasks. At the local level municipalities are in charge of the actual provision of basic services for their inhabitants. The municipalities have created many common organizations for specific tasks that ask for pooled resources (e.g. special healthcare, rescue operations, vocational education). The municipalities have a right to collect income and real estate taxes and the state provides a special subsidy to finance part of the tasks. Business development, rural/urban development, business consultancy services etc. are not obligatory for the municipalities, but they are actively engaged with these activities (Kuhmonen & Ruuska, 2020). This case study examines the practice that operates mainly in the area of one province with 19 municipalities. North Savo is one of the 16 provinces in Finland.

The province is in the zone of boreal forests. The area of North Savo is covered mostly by forests and inland waters (Figure 1). The total land area is 16,769 km<sup>2</sup> of which 83 % is forests. Inland waters cover 3,596 km<sup>2</sup> (18 %) of the total area of North Savo (LUKE, 2020a). The utilized agricultural area (UAA) of North Savo was 1,487 km<sup>2</sup> in 2020, about 9 % of total land area.

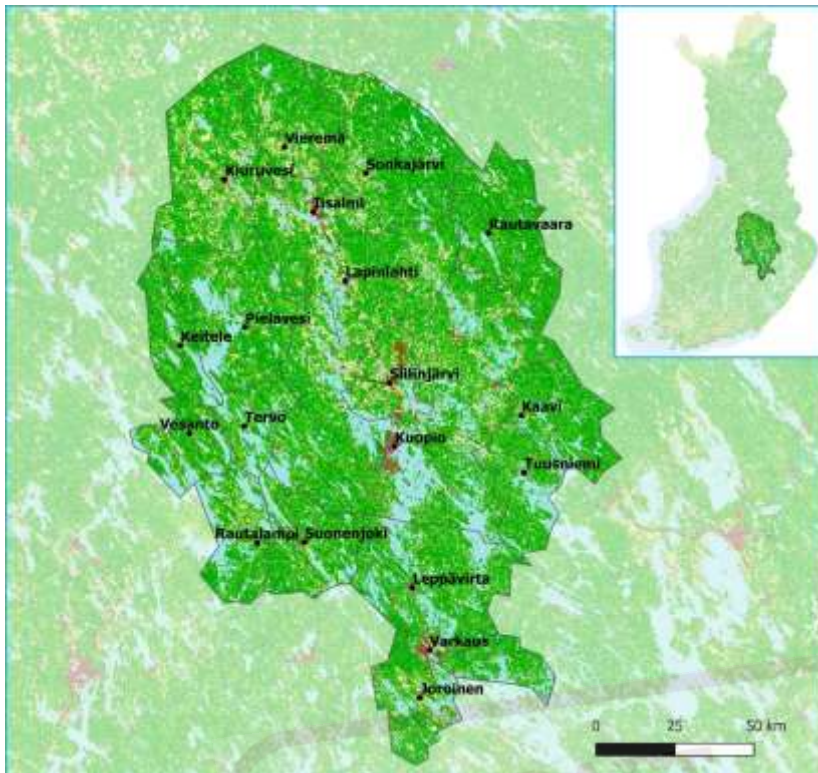


Figure 1. The Corine Land Cover (2018) area of the province of North Savo Finland. Source: Finnish Environment Institute

Conservation areas covered about 60,300 hectares and voluntary based forest conservation areas covered about 5200 hectares in 2019. Nature 2000 areas with 91 sites cover 64,965 hectares, 74 and 15,896 hectares of them are listed under the Habitats Directive (SAC), 10 sites (45,469 ha) listed under both the Habitats and Birds Directives and 7 sites (3,600 ha) under only the Birds Directive.

## Population

The population of the Province of North Savo was 249,0031 in 2019. The population is centered quite strongly around the capital of the province. In Kuopio lives about half of the population. In rural areas lived 38 % of the population in 2019 (Table 1). The population density of North Savo was 14.4 inhabitants/km<sup>2</sup>, lower than in the whole Finland (Statistics Finland, 2021a).

<sup>1</sup> Including the municipality of Joroinen, which was joined to the province of North Savo in 1<sup>st</sup> Jan 2021



Municipality <sup>1</sup>	Population 2019	Population density people/km <sup>2</sup>	Average age, years	Inhabitants	
				in rural areas, %	Foreign background, %
Iisalmi (F)	<b>21 368</b>	28.0	45.6	12.8	2.9
Joroinen <sup>2</sup> (M)	4 767	8.3	48.5	72.1	<b>3.3</b>
Kaavi (M)	2 893	4.3	51.7	98.5	1.8
Keitele (M)	2 202	4.6	52.1	99.1	1.5
Kiuruvesi (M)	7 998	6.0	48.1	<b>99.2</b>	1.3
Kuopio (F)	<b>119 282</b>	<b>36.8</b>	42.4	20.5	<b>4.2</b>
Lapinlahti (M)	9 485	8.6	46.7	98.8	2.0
Leppävirta (M)	9 454	8.3	49.2	91.8	2.2
Pielavesi (M)	4 391	3.8	51.0	98.5	1.9
Rautalampi (M)	3 121	5.8	50.7	98.7	2.8
Rautavaara (M)	1 602	1.4	<b>54.3</b>	<b>99.3</b>	1.2
Siilinjärvi (F)	<b>21 423</b>	<b>53.4</b>	41.8	9.4	1.4
Sonkajärvi (M)	3 897	2.7	50.7	<b>99.3</b>	0.7
Suonenjoki (M)	7 064	9.9	48.8	99.1	2.2
Tervo (M)	1 520	4.4	<b>54.1</b>	97.4	1.8
Tuusniemi (M)	2 477	4.6	53.0	98.4	1.7
Varkaus (F)	20 466	<b>53.1</b>	48.9	5.0	<b>3.0</b>
Vesanto (M)	2 014	4.8	<b>54.9</b>	98.9	1.6
Vieremä (M)	3 579	3.9	46.6	99.1	2.8
<b>North Savo (F)</b>	<b>249 003</b>	<b>14.4</b>	<b>45.1</b>	<b>37.7</b>	<b>3.1</b>
<b>Finland (F)</b>	<b>5 525 292</b>	<b>18.2</b>	<b>43.2</b>	<b>27.0</b>	<b>7.7</b>

Table 1. Key figures of the population of the province of Pohjois-Savo in 2019

The population has decreased 4 % since the year 2000 while in the whole Finland the growth has been 7 %. The number of retiring age population, 65 or more years old people, has grown 45 % in last twenty years while the number of working age people has decreased 12 %. The cohort of retiring age people represents one fourth of the whole population of the province (Figure 2). The average age of the population is 45 years, about two years more

<sup>1</sup> (F)/(M) = Predominance of females / males in population

<sup>2</sup> Joroinen has been in the province of North Savo since 2021

than among all Finnish citizens. The variation of the average age between municipalities is remarkable though from 42 years to 55 years (Table 1).

Although females are the majority of the province population (50.5 %), in 15 out of 19 municipalities the majority of inhabitants are males (Table 1). Only in the four biggest municipalities that do not suffer at all or suffer only slightly from depopulation, the numbers are for females.

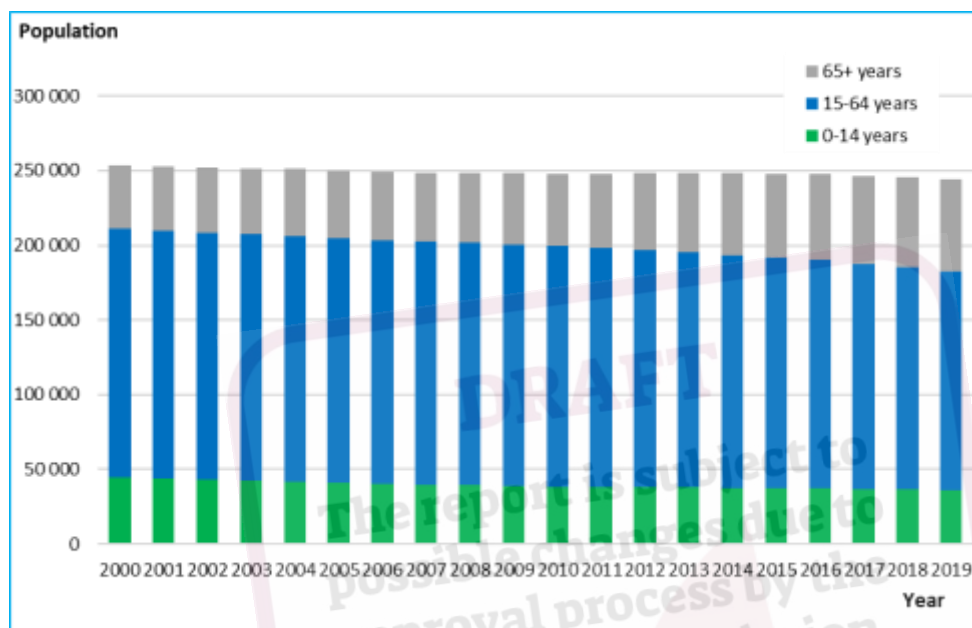


Figure 2. The population of the province of North Savo by age groups, years 2000-2019. Source: derived from Statistics Finland (Population structure).

The natural increase of population has been negative and the declining development seems to be speeding up. The intermunicipal net migration has been negative too, apart from the years 2013-2014 (Figure 3). On the contrary, the international migration has been positive but not strong enough to balance the total population decline (Statistics Finland, 2020c).

Between the years 2000 and 2019 the number of urban populations has increased 6 % while the number of people living in rural areas has decreased 17 %. The depopulation has been strongest in remote rural areas. Only the city of Kuopio (+10 %), and the neighboring municipality Siilinjärvi (+9 %) have increased population during the last 20-years period (Figure 4).

D5.2 30 CASE STUDIES ON RURAL NEW COMERS, NEW ENTRANTS TO FARMING AND SUCCESSORS

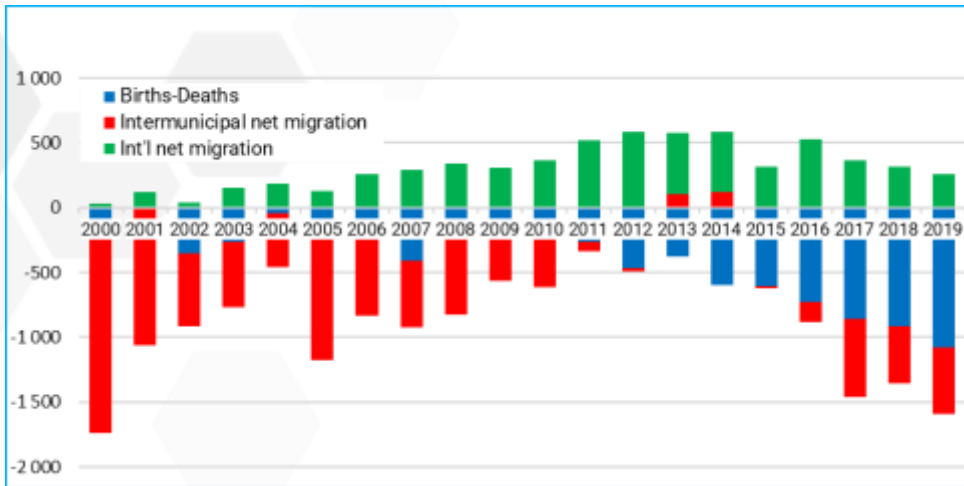


Figure 3. The migration and natural change of population in the province of Northern Savo, years 2000-2019.

Source: derived from Statistics Finland

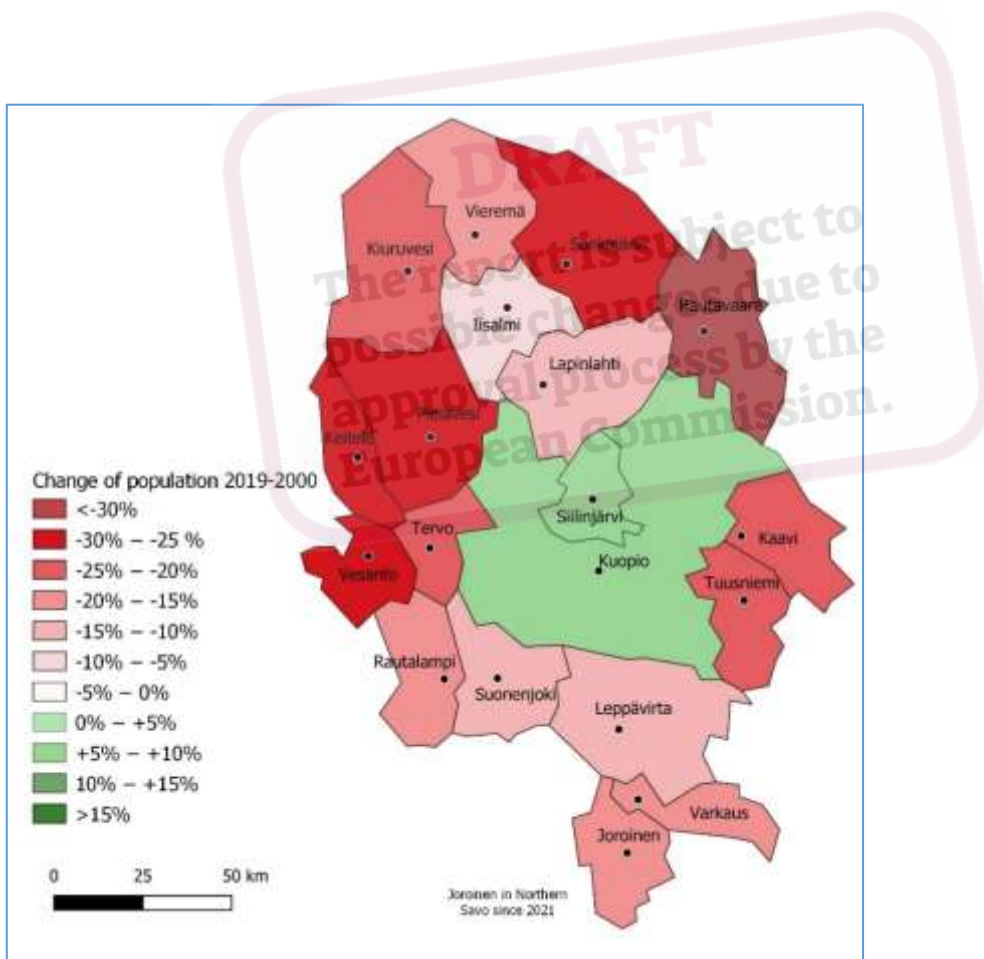


Figure 4. Change of population between 2019 and 2000 by the municipalities of the province of North Savo.

Source: derived from Statistics Finland

## Education

The education level in population of the province of North Savo is about the same than on average in Finland. The share of people with tertiary level education is not quite that high than among average citizens of Finland. On the other hand, in many practical rural jobs and for entrepreneurs the tertiary level education is not that necessary and guarantee of success as it may be for some more urban professions. The education with tertiary level qualification is more common among females than males, like it is at national level too (Table 2). The education level is not equal between the municipalities. In the smaller municipalities that have suffered from the depopulation the share of people with tertiary level education is notably smaller than in bigger municipalities (Figure 5).

Persons aged 15 or over		Kuopio	North Savo province	Finland
		Without upper secondary qualification	Total	22 %
	Males	23 %	27 %	28 %
	Females	20 %	24 %	25 %
With at least upper secondary qualification	Total	79 %	75 %	74 %
	Males	77 %	73 %	73 %
	Females	80 %	76 %	75 %
With tertiary level qualification	Total	34 %	29 %	32 %
	Males	29 %	24 %	28 %
	Females	39 %	33 %	36 %

**Table 2. Population aged 15 or over by level of education in 2019**

Source: derived from Statistics Finland

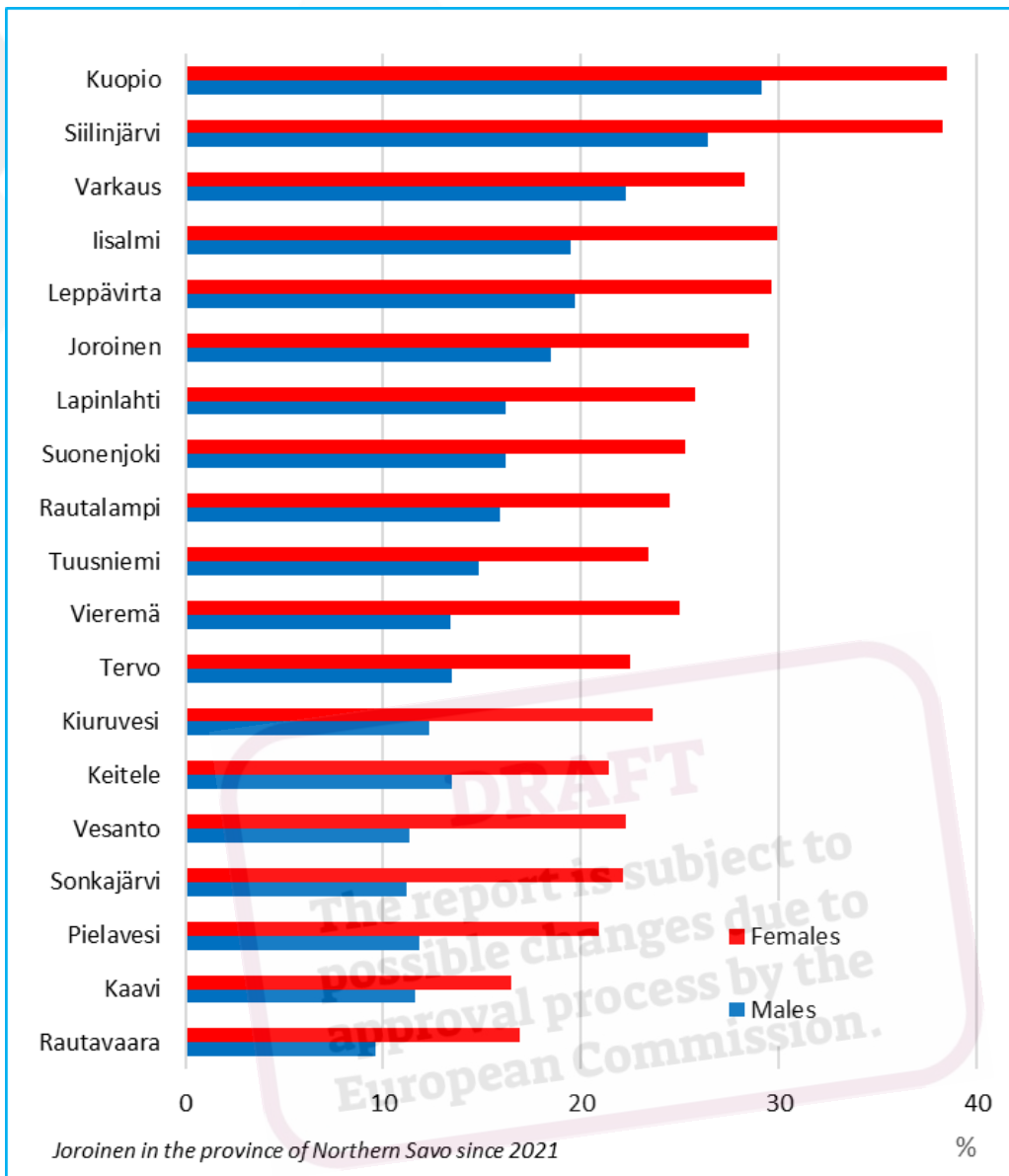


Figure 5. Population aged 15 or over with education of tertiary level qualification, Municipalities of North Savo, year 2019.

Source: derived from Statistics Finland

## Enterprises and Labor

The labor force of the province of North Savo was 110,670 people, 4 % of the total labor force of Finland and 44 % of the population of the province in 2018. The number of employed was 98,538 people which is equal to 40 % of the population and 66 % of the working age (15-64 years) population. Due to decreasing and ageing population, the labor force of

the province has decreased 1 % in last ten-year period. The PDR<sup>1</sup> has gone slightly upwards to 64.9 in 2018 (Figure 6). The unemployment rate was 11 % in 2018, which is about one percentage unit higher than national average. The EDR<sup>2</sup> improved by the lower unemployment rate compared with couple of previous years (Figure 7). Because of the demographic challenges, these indicators show still worse figures than national figures of Finland.

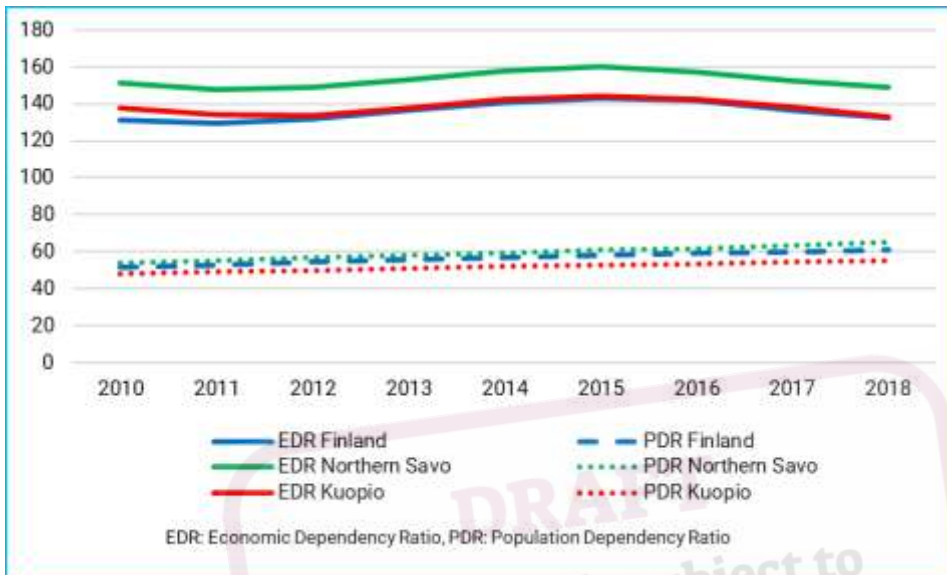


Figure 65. Economic and Population Dependency Ratios 2010-2018.

Source: derived from Statistics Finland.

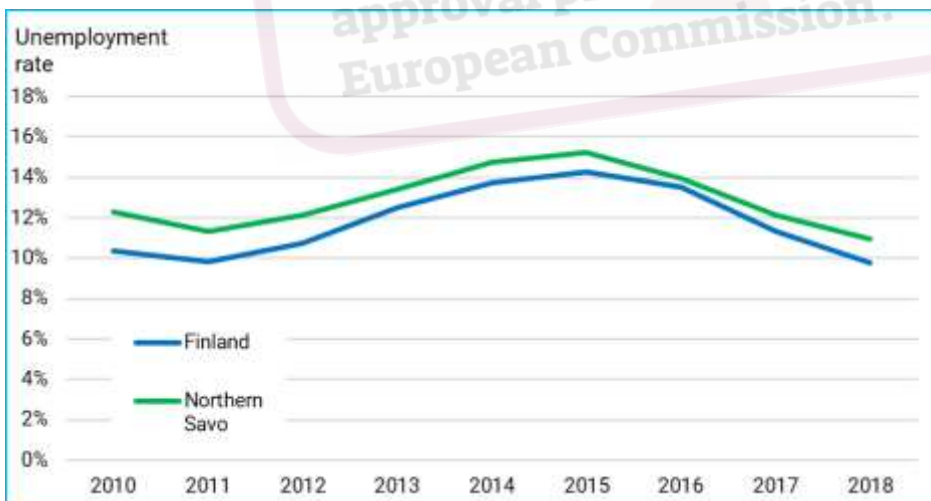


Figure 7. Unemployment rate in North Savo and Finland 2010-2018.

Source: derived from Statistics Finland.

<sup>1</sup> Population dependency ratio is calculated as the total number of persons age 0-14 and the number of persons aged 65 and older divided by the number of persons aged 15-64. The figure obtained is multiplied by one hundred.

<sup>2</sup> Economic dependency ratio gives the numbers of persons unemployed or outside the labor force per one employed persons.

In North Savo, about 5.7 % of the employed labor force of North Savo worked in the agriculture, forestry and fishing professions in 2018. It is a double to national average (Table 3)<sup>1</sup>. However, the significance of the primary sector as an employer, either by entrepreneurship or by paid employment varies between municipalities. In three municipalities, the share of primary sector jobs is over 20 % and over 10 % in 13 out of 19 municipalities (Figure 8).

	North Savo province	Finland
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	5.7 %	2.7 %
Industry	12.9 %	13.6 %
Private and public services, administration	81.4 %	83.7 %

**Table 32. Labor force by industry in 2018.**

Source: derived from Statistics Finland (Population, Employment).

Agriculture and forestry have a great significance for the economy of the province. In the agricultural business sector, North Savo is known from the strong dairy and beef cluster. There is a big dairy in Lapinlahti too. The forest industry is very important too. The wood-products industries and the pulp and paper industries summed to 1.2 billion euro in 2019 (Regional council of Northern Savo, 2020). Industrial roundwood removals from the forests were about 6.5 million m<sup>3</sup> in 2019 (LUKE Natural Resources Finland, 2021).

The machinery and energy technology industry is the most significant industrial sector of the province. The main cluster of the machinery industry is in the northern part of the province (Regional Council of Northern Savo, 2017). One of the leading companies of that cluster is PONSSE, a famous forest machine manufacturer. Nowadays it is an exchange-listed company but the headquarters and the factory of the company are still in Vieremä North Savo where the company was originally founded. PONSSE is one of the members of Maaseutuammattiin ry.

The province of North Savo had 16,901 establishments of enterprises in 2019. Those enterprises employed 3.4 staff-years on average, while average in Finland it was 3.8 staff years per enterprise. The biggest employers by staff-years are in the capital of the province, Kuopio (4.1) and in three industrialized region Varkaus (4.6), Iisalmi (3.9), Vieremä (3.8) while in

<sup>1</sup> Division by industries derived from Employment Statistics of Finland (TOL 2008). Industry includes B. Mining and quarrying, C. Manufacturing, D. Electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning supply.

small municipalities of Tervo and Vesanto the enterprises employed about one staff-years per enterprise on average. About 59 % of the establishments and 72 % of the employees of the enterprises are in the three main municipalities, Kuopio, Iisalmi and Varkaus (Statistics Finland, 2020b). The population and the economic and administrative activities are highly centralized to those cities and very nearby municipalities.

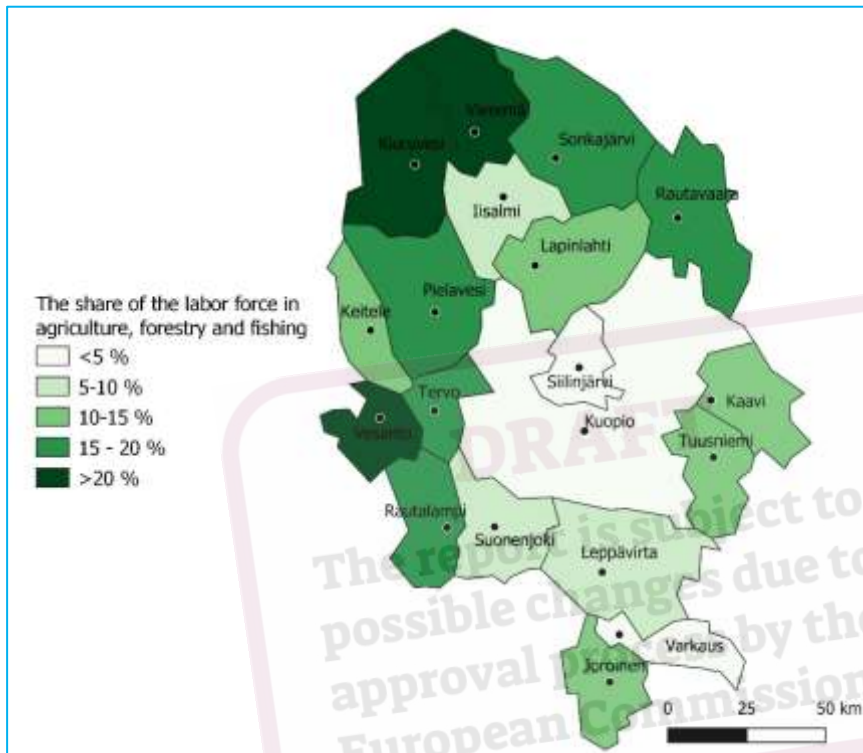


Figure 8. The share of the labor force in agriculture, forestry and fishing in North Savo and Finland 2018. Source: derived from Statistics Finland.

## Agriculture and forestry

Farming is a vital part of livelihoods of North Savo. The province is known as strong milk and beef producing area. Only the dairy farms of the neighboring province, North Ostrobothnia produce more milk than the farms in North Savo. Forestry actions are very important for Finnish farm economy, especially in central and eastern Finland. So it is North Savo too. In the years 2018 and 2019 the forestry income has been over one third of the average farm income (agriculture + forestry) in North Savo (Statistics Finland, 2021b).



About 7 % of the Finnish farms but 14 % of Finnish dairy farms and 14 % of national total 2.3 billion liter milk and 14 % of beef production are produced in North Savo (LUKE, 2020). The number of dairy farms has been halved there during the last ten years but the milk production has increased about 4 % because of the strong investments and development actions (LUKE, 2020).

The number of the animal husbandry farms has decreased faster than the number of other farms. The share of animal husbandry farms has fallen from 53 % in 2010 to 42 % in 2020. Still, it is more than in the whole Finland, where only one fourth of the farms have farmed animals in 2020. North Savo is known as a province of berry growing too, 14 % of the outdoor horticulture farms of Finland are there. The share of other type of more undefined plant production farms has increased (LUKE, 2020b). In fact it is the only type farms that have increased recent years (Figure 9). Some of them have moved perhaps towards more passive and not that productive use probably because of the agricultural profitability and market reasons and by the agricultural policy incentives.

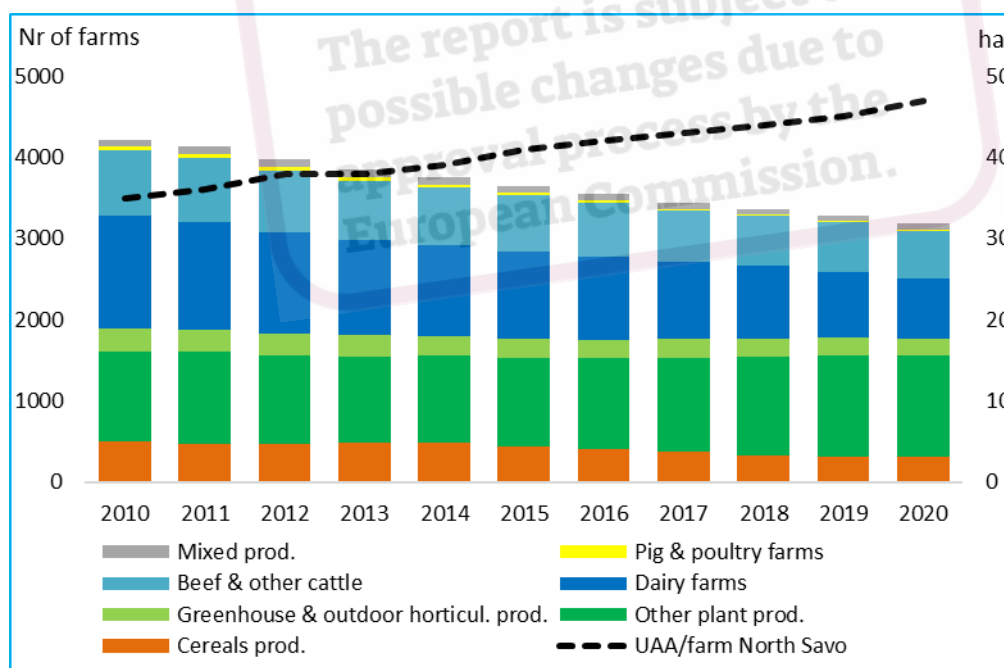


Figure 9. Number of farms and average cultivated area (ha, UAA/farm) in North Savo. Source: LUKE (2020)

The utilized agricultural area (UAA) of North Savo was 147,654 hectares in 2020. It is about 9 % of total land area which is typical for the central and eastern part of Finland where forests

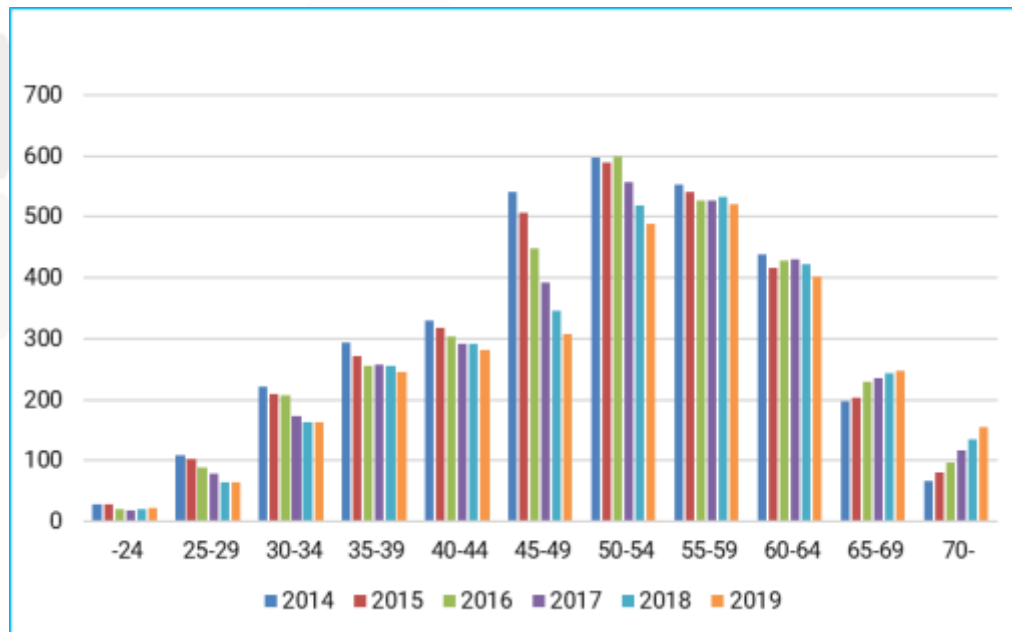
and inland waters cover large areas of the land. There were 3,186 farms in 2020. The number of active farms has been going down but the average size of farms (UUA/farm) has been growing. In recent decade, the average UUA/farm has grown over ten hectares to 47 hectares/farm (Figure 9). It is about three hectares smaller than average Finnish farm size but more than in the neighboring provinces in the east, south and west.

In 2020, there were 362 organic farms, 11 % of all farms and 14 % of UAA of the province of North Savo. The number of organic farms of North Savo has increased 8 % and the area of organic farming 35 % in recent five years (LUKE, 2020; Ruokavirasto, 2020b). The average size of organic farms is 55.6 hectares, about 9 hectares bigger than in all farms (Ruokavirasto, 2020b).

The agricultural production structure with the strong dairy and beef cattle farms of the province are closely connected with use of farmland since about 87 % of the cultivated area (UAA) is for fodder grasslands, feed barley, oats, mixed crops and whole crop cereals. The areas for other crops are significantly smaller. Various nature management fields and fallows cover about 8 % of the UAA.

Private persons own 89 % of the farms in North Savo in 2020. Less common were farming syndicates (7 %), heirs (2 %) and limited companies (2 %). The ownership structure by the legal form has been quite stable for a long time. The share of farming syndicates and limited companies has slightly risen but not significantly.

Males dominate farming in North Savo. Females are the main farmers only in 12 % of the farms. It is typical though that in practice both of the farming couple participate in the daily works. The average age of farmers is 53 years, about the same as the average farmer's age in Finland. About 14 % of the farmers are 65 or more years and only 17 % of the farmers are under 40 years old (Ruokavirasto, 2020a). From the statistics of active farms in EU-terms, i.e. farms that are eligible for EU's income support, we find that the share of farmers at retirement age, persons of 65 or more years old has risen quite sharply in last five-year-period since 2014. A big cohort of farmers has slid to retirement age during the period and perhaps many of them not having a successor (Figure 10).



**Figure 10. Number of farmers on private owned farms by age category in North Savo, years 2014–2019.**  
Source: (LUKE, 2020).

The last CAP-reform gave new incentives to continue farming or even start farming as a new entrant in an older age when age constraints were removed also from Pillar II subsidies. These subsidies, like LFA-subsidy are of great economic significance in Finnish agriculture. The age of 40 is one limit for a starting aid of young farmers and for extra income subsidy of young farmers. In North Savo, their number has decreased by 155 (-24 %) people since 2014, meanwhile the number of farmers 65+ years has increased by 138 persons (+52 %). It is evident that these changes affected partly by agricultural policy too.

Many farms do not have a successor in this region but it does not mean that the farmland of those farms with retired farmers would be abandoned. Other farmers usually rent or buy that land and continue to cultivate. In 2019, 61 % of the farms cultivated rented farmland alongside their own land covering 36 % of the total UAA of North Savo (Ruokavirasto, 2020a). Due to that structural change the ownership or occupancy of arable land has become more concentrated.

One fourth of the farms in North Savo have diversified their enterprises to other line of businesses. In most cases, the other business means producing some services like contracts for machinery works. Different kind of industrial works, e.g. subcontracting or local food or tourist services are typical additional business for the diversified farms too.

The other businesses alongside the farming are quite not that common there than on average in Finnish farms though. Some reason for that may be the higher volume of animal husbandry that usually means full-time work on farming. At national level, 29 % of the farms were these so-called diversified agricultural and horticultural enterprises in 2016 (LUKE, 2016).

## Rural tourism and leisure time visitors

North Savo is part of Lakeland Finland. Basically, the diverse rural landscape and numerous inland waters give good natural opportunities for tourism. On the other hand, the remote location and sparsely populated areas make challenges for the business of rural tourism. Unfortunately there are no statistical data or database that could give very detailed information of the rural tourism there. The tourism in all does not have as big effects on the regional economy as have the primary production and food industry or the industries of the forest and technology or the healthcare and social services (Regional Council of North Savo, 2011).

The Statistics Finland has published some experimental statistics of the capacity<sup>1</sup> of rental cottages by the region that can give some more information about the rural tourism and leisure time visitors. From the various online booking services can be found only a few rural tourism enterprises but that probably indicates more the decentralized marketing challenges than the actual number of such enterprises in North Savo.

According to Aitojamakuja.fi database, in North Savo, there are 73 farms or other enterprises that sell their local food products on the farm or by some other local market site on the production site or near it. Only ten enterprises that serve accommodation for rural tourism can be found through that voluntary based web service (Brahea Centre, 2020). When looking e.g. for the figures of yearly nights spent by type of accommodation establishment, the other establishments than could give some information or rural tourism accommodation. Yearly about 140,000-150,000 yearly accommodation nights were spent in those establishments in North Savo. That is about 17 % of all in that region.

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<sup>1</sup> The statistics on rental cottages include only cottages that are announced on the largest Finnish online market places. Link to the homepage: <http://www.stat.fi/tup/kokeelliset-tilastot/vuokramokkitilasto/index.html>.

At the end of 2019, there were 1031 leisure time rental cottages in North Savo<sup>1</sup>. It is 9 % of all rental cottages in Finland. However, spending the leisure time in one's own rural apartments is popular in North Savo too, since there are about 32,000 free-time residences, about 6 % of all free-time residences of Finland. Most of them are probably only for the owners' own use, not for rental or business purposes (Statistics Finland, 2020a). A big number of those second home residents travel there from the city and town areas and thus enrich the rural economies asking for local services and products. In general in Finland, nine out of ten free-time residences are in rural areas. Urbanization and ageing of the population probably increase the free-time accommodation in rural areas since urban people spend more time in their free-time residences than rural people. 69 % of the owners of the free-time residences have the permanent residence in some other municipality and 38 % further in some other province (Pitkänen & Strandell, 2018).

### The practice context

Many regional features and circumstances support the existence and activities of the NGO like Maaseutuammattiin ry in North Savo. The regional development plan for the years 2018-2021 by the Regional Council of North Savo states that there are six top issues for the development actions that can be used to promote the regeneration of entrepreneurship and competitiveness of the province by the means of science, technological development and know how. These focus sectors are the machinery and energy technology, wood processing, food products, welfare technology, tourism and the cross-sectional issues for all previous ones, water and biorefining.

Thus, the businesses based on forestry and agriculture and the sense of sustainable use of natural resources are very important for the economy and the people of the province of North Savo. The clusters and networks and the culture of collaboration round those businesses seem to be firm there, and they are proud of that. Perhaps it is specific for the culture and behavior of Savonian people with a strong solidarity of the Savonian tribe.

*"We have a strong culture of collaboration... we like to innovate something new too. The position of farming and forestry is strong in this region. Here exist the raw materials."*  
(FI8A/Int.2).

*“Here we have some different kind of hegemony... I mean that we like to cooperate and we can see the common good better than elsewhere... We can see a strong will to develop these things also in regional development plans by the regional council” (F18A/Int.15).*

One of the interviewees outside the region of North Savo has noticed the same thing.

*“That bunch of people has believed in their matter, the fact that it is the nature that rules in North Savo too. When you tend it and play fair game with it, it can bring many good things for you. The forest sector is an important thing there. It is the region of strong milk production too. There are many kinds of business opportunities round rural areas... There are opportunities for that and they have believed in it. They have the industrial operators who are dependent on the raw materials coming from the nature... For some reason they have had the right spirit to have ability to argue for the idea in so many directions. First they used the project funding but after the projects the practice stayed alive, unlike million other projects that are alive only the project time and nobody remembers those afterwards” (F18A/Int.5).*

Some years before the association was founded, the rural developers' network, in this case two educational institutions of agriculture and forestry and the regional farmers' union managed some development projects that laid the foundations for the practice like the association of Maaseutuammattiin ry. Thus, the EU and national funding for the rural development projects actually made it possible to have a stimulus to the practice. The idea and the model for practical operations that were later used in Maaseutuammattiin ry were basically formulated in those projects. Because of those project actions, some active people were brave enough to establish the association and make those practices permanent, not only lasting the project life time.

*“If I remember it right, it was the year 2004 or 2005 ... they began to worry about the thing that how could they introduce the education of agriculture to the youth...and then we started to book some projects between the years 2005 and 2011 that were used to promote not only the agricultural but also the forestry education” (F18A/Int.15).*

The well-working regional cooperative network of agricultural and forestry operators and the common regional will of other stakeholders too to ensure the operating possibilities for these lines of businesses were significant for the foundation of Maaseutuammattiin ry, no doubt. Still, in this case the significance of one person has been remarkable too. Most of the interviewees mentioned the name of Karl-Erik Hasa as a main promoter of building that kind

of practice to North Savo. He worked in a forestry educational institution. In that position, he could see the decreasing attraction to the education and professions of agriculture and forestry and what kind of negative effects that that may cause for the education and businesses of those sectors and the economy of that region.

*“I would say that it personifies to Hasan Kalle [nickname]. Karl-Erik Hasa has come up with his ideas and by his efforts and energy he has built the network and the confidence to many directions”(FI8A/Int.14).*

Thus for farmers the forestry issues and forest professions are naturally near their personal interests. It appears to be important to the member organizations of the association that both of the sectors, agriculture and forestry are equally represented in all actions. The two employees of Maaseutuammattiin ry can share their expertise to both sides. The executive director of the association has a tertiary level education in forestry and the other employee in agriculture.

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The report is subject to possible changes due to approval process by the European Commission.

## Origin of the practice

The educational institutions of agriculture and forestry and the Union of farmers and forest owners had noticed in the 1990s and in the early 2000s that the attraction to the education of these professions had decreased strongly. By the technical development and the structural changes in forest industry and in politics had changed to public opinion for the future of the forest sector. In last two decades, the structural change had been strong in agriculture too. In addition to that, the vast majority of farmers were very suspicious of Finland's accession to the EU in 1995. That changed the agricultural policy system totally in Finland. Many farmers believed that it will be the end for the Finnish agriculture which in turn led to the recession of farm investments and successions for years (Silvasti, 2010).

Perhaps the first steps towards the Maaseutuammattiin ry were taken in those discussions about the future education of farming and forestry. The trend of the decreasing number of students in agriculture and forestry was noticeable at national level but those regional operators in North Savo started to discuss the concrete actions that should be done to turn the development positive again. They became concerned, naturally about their own future as the educational institution, but also the fact that there would be scarcity of skilled persons and employees in these line of businesses in all in the future. Even if the structure and techniques of these businesses had developed and decreased the number of jobs in production, they saw the possibility of a good future of those professions and the need for labor in the future.

*"It was the concern about the skilled people and employees in these rural professions in the future. There were the questions: where do they come from? How can they find their ways to these educations and jobs? So, we were looking for help in showing that these rural professions are really one choice among others both to youth and adults"* (FI8A/Int.4).

A couple of publicly funded development projects in North Savo did the preliminary work for inventing the practices that have been applied later on in the operations of Maaseutuammattiin ry. In those projects during five years, the youth was introduced to the possibilities of rural areas, to rural professions and entrepreneurship in rural areas.

At first there was a project called "Nuori ja lupaava maaseudulle" (Countryside calls young and promising people) from 2006 to 2008 that introduced the youth and the secondary



school teachers to rural professions and entrepreneurship. That was made mainly by the organized visits to farms and other rural enterprises.

After that came another project called “Maaseutu opettaa” (The countryside teaches) from 2008 to 2010. That project created new modes of cooperation and training between schools, educational institutions of natural resources and enterprises in those line of businesses. The good practices created by that project were collected into a printed booklet (4H, 2021).

During those projects, they reached about 15,000 young people and their teachers who could update their impression and knowledge about the countryside, about the jobs and entrepreneurship in rural areas to present days. For the creation of new cooperation models the project had collaboration with seven secondary school round the province of North Savo (Maaseutuammattiin ry, 2021a).

As one result of these projects the number of applicants for the education of natural resources developed positive. These good results and the positive feedback encouraged the key operators to go further. Before the latter project ended, the steering group started to discuss the next step. They agreed that they must go on and after all the Maaseutuammattiin ry was established in August 2011. The operational area was decided to have only in the province of North Savo due to predictable economic and human resources and for the approved collaboration networks.

*“We considered many sides of it, if we established a limited company or whether we tried to set these practices under some other organization, 4H, for instance. We considered many alternatives like foundations and others. Then we drew a conclusion that an independent association could be the best for this” (FI8A/Int.1).*

The first couple of months after the establishment of the association were time to build the structures and plans for the actions but already in 2012 they had over 1,000 participants in their events. Between the years 2012 and 2013 the association had human resources as an outsourcing part-time service from regional 4H office. The executive manager, as the first actual employee of the association began her work at the beginning of 2014.

## Actors involved

The core of innovating and implementing the actions of Maaseutuammattiin ry is the employees and the management team. The association has only two hired employees, thus the activities are much based on collaboration with the member organizations and the network of other stakeholders. Also the members the association's management team and the board are actively involved in practical operations.

The regional educational institutions of farming and forestry and natural resources had a big role when innovating and establishing Maaseutuammattiin ry. They had and still have a clear incentive to promote the education possibilities for the professions based on natural resources to teenagers who are just planning their future and further education after the secondary school.

The vocational schools, Savon ammattiopisto and Ylä-Savon ammattiopisto as well the Savonia University of Applied Sciences and the University of eastern Finland have a membership of the Maaseutuammattiin ry. Through those mainly publicly funded institutions and their membership fees, Maaseutuammattiin ry gets part of its basic funding from public sources. A few employees of those educational organizations give their working time for the administrative tasks of the Maaseutuammattiin association by the board membership and for the operative tasks through their specialists' role during the school visits.

*"We have the economic input to it and one person for the administration and for the cooperation regarding the events. We have agreed that we are the partners when needed in all these actions"* (FI8A/Int.4).

Naturally these educational institutions have connections to regional enterprises. That is part of their networking and communication with enterprises. Mutually, Maaseutuammattiin ry, when organizing the school visits and marketing the education for rural professions, helps the educational institutes to have connections to secondary schools and to potential future students.

The union of farmers and forest owners is an important partner to Maaseutuammattiin ry through their local farmers' associations and associations of private forest owners. These associations as well as the regional union of farmers have connections to local enterprises. The farm visits, the logging site visits and other forest site visits are made possible through

those connections. The farmers that were interviewed in this study, did not expect to have any personal benefit or gain if they have their farm as a visiting place for students. It is more like work for common good for the better future of rural professions.

*"I do not have any benefit straight to myself. Still, it is nice to tell about my career to others if it somehow helps even one young person" (FI8A/Int.10).*

*"I don't think that I gain directly from it. Well, always when you meet people and talk to them, it is possible to gain something in longer run. I don't know if someone comes after fifteen years saying that she/he visited my farm and had nice memories from it. Some positive things like that is possible to get. It is difficult to guess if it happens. It is the work for common good in a community" (FI8A/Int.12).*

On the other hand, by this cooperation, the farmers' union and their local associations and rural entrepreneurs are able to some extent to outsource the school and consumer contacts to Maaseutuammattiin ry. They think that they should do this kind of promotion work anyway but now they have Maaseutuammattiin ry and always one or two employees with it who are specialized in organizing the events and communication with schools, and other educational institutions and with media and consumers. The regional union of the farmers was one of founder members of Maaseutuammattiin ry and the local farmers' associations and thus in a way the local farmers are members too.

*"It is the job that we should do anyway but due to this practice we get committed people to these actions. Those, who can use more time for that than the voluntary persons in a position of trust to organize school visits, make the promotion material and to make the positive communication" (FI8A/Int.2).*

*"We don't have too much resources in the regional union or in local associations to organize the school visits or tasks like that. If we did it by ourselves, it should be done on a voluntary basis. When they do it, they can have the salary for that. I think it is a reasonable practice that we don't have to hold the consumer relations any more only by the work parties" (FI8A/Int.12).*

*"Our [local] association is quite big though...and we have some economic resources for these kind of actions. We thought that we do not have to do everything by ourselves. Therefore we are better to be involved in this to get local actions and publicity without doing it by ourselves. Otherwise there is a risk that nobody does it" (FI8A/Int.16).*

*“we recognized the problem that the associations of forest owners cannot take enough the youth into account. This was quite a cost-effective way to handle that problem” (F18A/Int.23).*

The other member organizations and enterprises are as important partners for organizing the visits. There are smaller and bigger enterprises and companies both in agricultural and forestry sectors, banks, some municipalities and associations like 4H. For the economy of Maaseutuammattiin ry, these member organizations are of big value because the bigger enterprise, the bigger membership fee they have. The incentives for the membership are partly the same as for farmers; the common good for the rural industries, a concern of the future labor shortage and the lack of entrepreneurs own time for promotion work.

*“I have always spoken for this business but the labor shortage is the problem. So, we must be active for the common good...Many enterprise want to be involved in that [the membership] so that they don't have to use their own time for that work” (F18A/Int.6).*

*“I have tried to use my time for that [promotion work] too but I have to work so hard and spend my time for my actual work on my enterprise, where I get my income that there are not hours enough in my twenty-four hours” (F18A/Int.7).*

In 2020, the association had 54 members of whom 51 were enterprises and various other type organizations and three people were members as a personal status. The farmers are members through the membership of local farmers' associations that pay a certain part of their membership fee income from farmers to Maaseutuammattiin ry.

The main type of actions for this association is to give youth and their teachers the practical experiences and information about the rural professions and entrepreneurship and about the ways how one can educate and train oneself to those jobs. Naturally the schools are important knots of that network. Maaseutuammattiin ry wants to contact each secondary school in the province of North Savo to get in touch with every student during their classes 7 to 9 to tell them about the rural jobs and education. For the schools, the services are made as easy to reach as possible.

*“They have always wanted to respond to our requests...they never say “no way”... it is rather so that they try to organize and implement the ideas we possibly invented” (F18A/Int. 17).*

*“Because I have a long history with Maaseutuammattiin ry, so it has become familiar to me. The threshold of contacting the executive manager and discuss with her about using their help in my subject by the study trips or some other way, is quite low” (F18A/Int.23).*

Since the PR and communication to public are part of the operative actions of the association, the relations to regional and local media area important. In North Savo, there is one regional broadcasting station that is favorable for rural issues and willing to broadcast radio programs from the public events of rural issues. The relations to the regional office of the national broadcast company and to regional bigger newspaper are apparently good too.

Maaseutuammattiin ry has cooperation with a couple of national level organizations. They work partly with the same issues as Maaseutuammattiin ry but mainly at national level while and the collaboration has probably helped to develop new ideas, material and tools for regional operations. Also one national public organization of the forest sector, Finnish Forest Centre is closely involved in Maaseutuammattiin ry by their regional office in North Savo. The other two important public regional partners are the Regional Council of North Savo and the ELY Centre (Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment). The Regional Council is responsible for the general development of the province and for the regional land use plan. Thus it has a role in the development or rural livelihoods too. The ELY Centre is tasked with promoting regional competitiveness, well-being and sustainable development. Among other things, it is the administrative office that control the use of EU-funding in its region, like the funding of the projects of Maaseutuammattiin ry.

*“Then in early days, when Maaseutuammattiin ry was founded, I have the impression that I told them the way of working in national networks to get the idea of networking and to recognize the various networks when organizing courses for teachers or for other operations...About two years ago we had a joint project. We tried to create the regional networks of the same kind” (FI8A/Int.11).*

Contacts and cooperation with municipal administrations and officers are probably increasing in the future. Some of the interviewees mentioned that the municipalities are the resource that could be used more. Especially the smaller municipalities with a bigger share of primary sector jobs or enterprises could probably be responsive to the cooperation but it shouldn't be too problematic in any municipality of that province since the Regional Council is mentioned having a positive attitude to the goals activities of Maaseutuammattiin ry.

## Style of activities promoted

The aim of Maaseutuammattiin ry is to promote the availability of new entrepreneurs and skilled professionals for agriculture and forestry as well as to increase the awareness and networking of the field. The association introduces children, young people and teachers to agriculture and forestry professions, rural entrepreneurship as well as to the opportunities for the countryside as living, working and business environment.

The association among other things organizes company visits for students and teachers, presents rural professions in schools as well as offering practical professional orientation and summer jobs for teachers and students. The association also maintains a network of marketing and cooperation of the operators of the industry and promotes the image of the agricultural and forestry sectors. They organize various types of public events, meetings, training and advisory sessions and discussion groups. In addition to that, they have publishing and advertisement activities to support their goals and other activities (Maaseutuammattiin ry, 2012; Maaseutuammattiin ry, 2021b).

Perhaps the main and the most important practice are the farm and logging site visits and visits to enterprises in those sectors as a turnkey service for schools. The association has a network of farms and other enterprises who “open their doors” to visits of students and are willing to show what kind of actions and business they do and what kind of people they perhaps would like to hire now and in the future. Because a minority of the youth and their teachers has a natural touch to those professions and enterprises, it has proven to a popular service to those target groups. The visits are real experiences in surroundings outside the classrooms with the authentic sounds and smells and machines and with stories of local entrepreneurs. The aim of these visits is not only to create a nice experience but also give to teachers and to youth up-to-date information of professions, entrepreneurship and work in rural areas.

*“We bring the information to school so that the student counsellors can properly discuss these professions as an alternative with students and not to just say that ‘you’re not likely to be a farmer, don’t think about that branch’. Instead, they can introduce that profession equally among others. They dare to introduce the strengths, good and bad sides of it. The students have chance to get the information outside their family, not just inside. I assume*

*that it is important to have such experiences to all children. I mean, it may be important especially to those children whose home is on the farm surroundings because otherwise they don't dare to tell anybody about their background. Now they can proudly tell that it is a cool thing and one alternative for youth. That is how we operate here.... In addition to that, we have offered summer jobs for youth...So, they have had an opportunity to see what kind of jobs we do on the farms” (FI8A/Int.2).*

In addition to farm visits, the association coordinates the visits to schools by which the farmers and other rural entrepreneurs and the agents for the companies in agricultural and forest industries can meet the teachers and pupils to introduce them to rural professions and possible employers in those industries. In addition to that, the secondary school teachers and their students have possibilities to visit the vocational schools of the region in the sector of natural resources.

In past five years 2016-2020 the association has arranged 239, about 48 per year, events to youth and their teachers. Every year 2,700 – 3,000 students and teachers had an opportunity to familiarize oneself more closely with enterprises, jobs and nature in rural areas or related to the industries of natural resources. The most intensive year so far has been 2014 when the events for schools reached 3,900 people. The association managed to operate surprisingly well in 2020, too, when the COVID-19 changed the world. During the year, they organized 67 events with 3,160 participants. The study visits were mostly in forest or other outside areas for ensuring the safety. Some of the events for schools were made by the development projects managed by the association (Maaseutuammattiin ry, 2020).

*”The courses or visits that handle the nature issues attract the students. Certainly they arrange those ones elsewhere [in other schools] too but we just happen to have an extremely good partner to implement them. Also the funding that we can have through the project Bioeconomy and Creative Entrepreneurship gives us many possibilities to arrange them” (FI8A/Int.21).*

In the latest development project, the association has, for instance, built new and deeper collaborative models with pilot schools. Another project, The Headhunters of Bioeconomy, tried to find new models for recruiting labor to professions of bioeconomy. One project focused on females' role in the forestry sector.

The association is an organizer or one partner in organizing some public events too. In 2017 and 2018, farmers and other rural entrepreneurs had their own yearly gala which gathered 100 to 200 participants. The idea of the gala is to collect the entrepreneurs and their closest stakeholders together in festive settings to improve the communality and to pay positive attention to their valuable work. Another yearly big public event where the association has raised the rural professions visible is the harvest festival in the center of the province capital Kuopio. There are also some smaller and more local events where the association is involved.

The communication is an important part of the activities of Maaseutuammattiin ry. The members of the association must be kept aware of the operations the association has made or is planning to do. Naturally, the association asks for the ideas for actions from member organizations who participate actively in implementation of actions. Success in communication with schools is essential because, even if the association has so much to offer to schools, it still has to make interventions to the daily routines of schools. Some schools are more willing to cooperate, some not that much.

The students are a challenging group for communication. The association has tried to develop the use of social media to reach the youth and arouse their interest to rural professions and studies. The representatives of the association are more optimistic about the success of their social media channels than the teachers. After all, all the interviewees saw the visits in farms and forests the most effective.

*"I think that the study trips are very interesting...our students have been quite enthusiastic after the visits. The visits have been so nice when they have chance to caress the animals or things like that. The virtual show is not the same if I compare it to study trip" (FI8A/Int.17).*

*"If the executive manager of thirty or forty years old decides that they focus all their communication on Instagram, for instance, they are already late two years. Now they should have the Jodel or the Snapchat which is already old too" (FI8A/Int.21).*

## Environmental aspects

The Rural Professions association has not specialized in environmental issues as such but that aspect cannot be ignored in their communication. Both the youth, their teachers and



the other society are interested in the ways how the nature is taken into account in the businesses that use the natural resources on the fields and forests and how the production animals are treated.

During the visits and other events their strategy is just to tell how these issues are taken into account in modern agriculture and forestry. The environmental issues were not highlighted much on interviews and any of the certain environmental aspects did not raise above others. However, the interviewees knew the public discussion and the concern about environmental matters very well but many of them wanted to remind why it is important also to see many other aspects when people utilize the natural resources.

*“I believe that it is positive that the more people visit farms and forest sites or entrepreneurs of this sector. When they discuss these issues they get a wider view on the environmental issues. I hope that it will increase the interest to environmental issues when they consider it comprehensively” (F18A/Int.8).*

*“Sure the environmental aspects are inside the farming and forestry, they are highlighted at the level of enterprises and in working life and all these matters of politics and climate change and biodiversity. Still, I think that they are not that much highlighted in the communication or actions of Maaseutuammattiin ry” (F18A/Int.14).*

*“We have that big project where we develop the studies of bioeconomy in secondary schools and in upper secondary schools in North Savo through the school subjects. We bring the forest, the nature and the whole country side to them. All the environmental matters as well as the needs of industries, climate etc. Naturally, here also the water issues and the research but also the entrepreneurship. Comprehensively, you know” (F18A/Int.15).*

*“The youth is very interested in these climate issues but I can't say if it is just Maaseutuammattiin ry who can point out the issues that good or is it just that they are interesting matters in all” (F18A/Int.18).*

*“Yes, we take them into account. Many times during the visits, we may have these questions, questions of any kind. They get the answers from these professionals ... We don't have that strong emphasis on environmental issues, it is more on other professional issues but it [environmental aspects] is there as one part” (F18A/Int.22).*

Students and their teachers can make observations with their own eyes and they can ask straight from the entrepreneurs about their practices regarding the nature and what they

think about the environmental issues. The teachers that were interviewed to this study considered it good that they, as well as their students can see and hear many sides of the environmental aspects and about the sustainability. The communication of the Maaseutua-mmattiin ry, regarding the environmental issues, was seen open and reliable and teachers were counting on their own expertise of teaching the critical thinking to their students.

*"The environmental issues have come emphatically to every study plan but it depends on the profession how they are taken into account, what are the premises and values" (F18A/Int.4).*

The entrepreneurs that have hosted the study trips or met the student in some other events have not seen any conflicts or problems in environmental issues during the visits either but the pressure coming from the publicity to businesses of natural resources came into discussion in general. Someone sees this as a good chance to bring the message from the solvers of the environmental challenges. Thus these actions may encourage the farmers and forest owners to come out with a positive message of environmental issues.

*"Do you want to be with us round these [environmental] questions to build a future with farming?" (F18A/Int.3).*

*"not in any negative way [discussing the environmental aspects of forestry]... people can understand the significance the forest resources here. For the many people it can be the only livelihood here and the whole property is in it. Nobody wants to ban the forestry" F18A/Int.6*

*"I think they have communicated these matters positively. So that we can find solutions to the climate problem and to carbon capture in the future. So, that this is the only branch that can do it. Also the thing that we are willing to solve this problem" (F18A/Int.10).*

*"Sometimes I think that the biggest mental pressure comes from the environmental and nature issues. We are like sinners. We have to feel guilty everywhere, no matter we do or try our best. We don't spoil the nature but the media gives the impression that we are spoiling it" (F18A/Int.12).*

*"We had the multidisciplinary study module that lasted eight weeks last year. Every student took part of some theme and about 120 students from eighth classes participated in the module of bioeconomy and creative entrepreneurship. The environmental aspects were in focus. The energy production and the environmental friendliness of it and the sustainable development were strongly in focus" (F18A/Int.17).*

## Renewing the gender roles

The practice of Maaseutuammattiin ry renews the gender roles in rural areas and rural professions because the rural professions are presented always systematically as suitable for females as males.

*"It certainly promotes the equality, completely. No matter the family or gender background. Various professions are promoted equally to all" (FI8A/Int.2).*

*"I'm sure that they have wanted to make it clear that the gender is not a threshold matter" (FI8A/Int.10).*

On the other hand, the gender issue was not seen any issue nowadays. The gender balance is better nowadays because there many alternative jobs that suit as well for women as men. Some forestry jobs were mentioned being still quite physical and that was seen as one reason for the male predominance.

*"I have heard that more women have come to forest machine and truck drivers. Still, the for-ester work is the most physical work. No woman has ever asked for that job from us. I haven't seen any change in that yet" (FI8A/Int.7).*

*"I don't see any gender issue here in Finland...When I think, for instance, about the employees of our local association of forest owners, there are so many women. That change has happened already earlier" (FI8A/Int.9).*

*"Maaseutuammattiin ry has worked hard to promote the fact that the forest sector is not meant only for men... They have brought out women who work in forestry so that girls can see it as one alternative... I have heard from many professionals that the situation has changed and earlier there was more predominance of men" (FI8A/Int.22).*

In addition to that, they have had special project to promote the rural professions just to females and the promotion materials, like the website of the association presents many professions by female representatives. The project called "Naisista voimaa metsäalalle" (Women bring strength to forestry) explored the women's attitudes and opinions about the forestry, the jobs and the entrepreneurship of it. The project called for practices that can increase the share of women in the education and jobs of forest based professions (Maaseutuammattiin ry, 2020).

## Innovativeness and replicability

Many organizations promote the rural areas and rural professions in Finland. Still, the practice of Maaseutuammattiin ry is a unique one for some points. In North Savo, they have managed to build a wide network that commits all the relevant actors from primary production in agriculture and forestry to big industrial companies to the systematic and common work for the rural livelihoods. Elsewhere the promotion operations are not that systematic from year to year. They are often based on short-term projects or on the efforts of only couple of operators for some acute reason. Usually, those actions haven't gathered that widely the whole cluster as Maaseutuammattiin has managed to do.

In Central Finland in 1990's, for instance, the metalworkers of a tractor factory and farmers together started to promote the Finnish agriculture and food production and the Finnish tractor production and Finnish labor. Both the agriculture and the tractor markets were in a recession. They recognized that they are in the same boat, they are bound by fate (Jämsén, 2011). At that time, it was an unprecedented case. Before that, those parties of agricultural entrepreneurs and industrial workers had not been that close to each other, vice versa. The unions of both sides and some active leading people of them were active in building that collaboration and the publicity and the political manifestations round the case. They formed a temporary committee for organizing the promotion work, not an association. That was a fine case but the actions were more like reactive, not that proactive, not concerning the whole business cluster of natural resources comprehensively like the practice of Maaseutuammattiin ry does.

Also, the Union of Farmers and forest owners, some national operators of forestry and industrial operators of agricultural and forestry business have organized campaigns in schools, in discussion and political forums, in media, in public events etc. to promote the education, businesses and jobs of the industries related to rural areas. There are associations like Metsäkoulutus ry (for the education of forestry professions) or Suomen Metsäyhdistys (Finnish Forest Association). Their network does not cover the agricultural sector, only the forest sector. Perhaps it is not even possible at national level like at regional level. The community of North Savo has been innovative to build this comprehensive network and to give the centralized organization responsibility to an association that has a systematic practice to reach the youth in their phase of life when they are thinking about their future education and jobs.

Innovativeness can be seen in their development projects and in practices they get funding to their basic operations. The cooperation e.g. with the regional and local farmers' associations to organize farm visits and to collect the membership fees from farmers is innovative. The gender aspect is seen positive too.

*"They are extremely innovative in getting funding. They always find new viewpoints of it. They have this focus on women's role too"* (FI8A/Int.11).

*"Nowadays it is innovative to take the students out from the school to visit a logging site or a farm. It sure opens the eyes of youth better than trying to tell the same thing in a classroom. It is more innovative than all those vlogs and photo competitions etc."* (FI8A/Int.23).

*"Maaseutuammattiin ry organized a competition where they encouraged the youth to consider the rural future... They wanted the youth to consider what kind of areas the rural areas are in the future, what kind of innovations and things there might be, which kind of livelihoods are possible there. They wanted to catch new, fresh and innovative viewpoints to these issues"* (FI8A/Int.26).

The projects of 'Headhunters of bioeconomy' and 'The possibilities of bioeconomy and creative entrepreneurship' are innovative too. By the headhunter project, they actively encourage people from other jobs to change their career towards farming and forestry professions. They collect experts at the stakeholder groups together and train them 'hunt' possible newcomers. The headhunter model has increased the communication between stakeholders and they have found new ways to implement the apprenticeship training.

*"I believe it brought new ideas and energy because the aim was to help the experts to recognize the possible role as a headhunter alongside her/his regular work"* (FI8A/Int.3).

In the bioeconomy and entrepreneurship project they create a new study module of bioeconomy together with eight pilot schools. In other words, they develop the curriculum that can perhaps later be taken to nationwide use.

So far, the efforts with national operators for spreading the practice in other regions have been without remarkable success. Perhaps the networks and the cooperative operating culture have not been that strong in other regions. In North Savo, the first ideas of practice came from the educational institutions of agriculture and forestry. There are not such institutions any more in every province of Finland.

*“There may be the temperament of Savonians to give possibilities for such practice but they have had some pretty good individuals who have believed in the idea and have had the strength of take it forward...It is possible to replicate the model but it must be adapted to needs of each region. We must accept the fact that there are many kinds of people and various opinions” (F18A/Int.5).*

*“The practice is surely replicable. Of course, there is a need for funding and human resources to plan it. For those purposes the association is a good model... It calls for collaboration, any organization cannot do it by itself. The thing is that it must be done together with and everyone must see the benefits...It calls for a leader who commits to it and wants to bring it further” (F18A/Int.8).*

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The report is subject to possible changes due to approval process by the European Commission.

## Synergies and networking

The practice we examine here is based strongly on networking and good collaboration. The financial and human resources of the association are very limited. They have only two employees and the other one of them works with short-term project funding. The basic operations are made with the funding of membership fees. Thus the member organizations have to be active partners in the daily operations of the association.

On the other hand, the member organizations are willing to pay the membership fees because of the synergy gains they get from the centralized organization of the promotion work. They have basically common goals regarding the future of rural professions and perhaps each of them might do the same operations but separately and without coordination if the association and its employees did not exist. By the association, the membership organizations can take their message to schools and to public.

*“We joined the forces. Before that [the projects] Stora Enso [a forest industrial company], for instance, could take some class to some factory and some group visited the educational institution and we knew nothing about each other’s’ actions, possibly even took the same group... as did Metsäkeskus [Forest Centre, a public operator] and the associations of private forest owners as good as they could in addition to their own main work. By these projects, we noticed that this [coordinating] is a damn good thing” (F1&A/Int.15).*

The member organizations help the association to organize the study trips and other events e.g. by seeking and offering suitable farms, other enterprises and places where rural professions can be introduced to the youth. The member organizations are a good source of up-to-date information about the current situation of each rural sector and business. On the other hand, the association is an information channel from comprehensive schools to its members. It is a part of their anticipatory system if the association has the information about the attitudes and educational and occupational plans of the youth.

It would be a bad thing to the most important target group, secondary schools and their teachers if each organization tried to get in touch with them and offer various events to them. Now the promotion of the rural professions seems not to disturb the school. Vice versa, the schools seem to enjoy the resources they get from the work of association. The holistic approach of the network, from private farms and other small primary sector operators to

big companies covering the large bioeconomy sector is good in an educational point of view. One of the teachers stated it like this:

*“It has raised the significance of bioeconomy to higher level in this school. We have the alternative courses of it and the bioeconomy and the ideas of entrepreneurship have been integrated into curriculum... In this project of bioeconomy we have the forests, waters, agriculture, cattle husbandry and everything. There are many parts in it. ... In this project, we try to make innovations. I mean, new ways to employ and to entrepreneurship that are based on technology or bio something ...or chemistry” (FI8A/Int.20).*

Being part of the network were the core of the promotion tasks is in Maaseutuammattiin ry, has activated the collaboration of stakeholders. Many actions would not have become concrete without the association even if every partner may have a good purpose and a common vision of the rural professions.

*“Everybody says, in general, that the future of the youth is an important thing but still, there are no actions for that. Maaseutuammattiin ry has fulfilled this hole by building the network and by activating the network” (FI8A/Int.2).*

*“It has brought the cooperation to us” (FI8A/Int.5).*

Maaseutuammattiin ry cooperates with a couple of national level organizations too. In forestry sector Finnish forest association and Metsäkoulutus ry (an association for developing the education of the forest sector), for instance, that work partly with the same issues as Maaseutuammattiin ry., operate mainly at the national level from the capital region of Finland doing not that much field work in schools like Maaseutuammattiin ry does. They operate with all the education levels and participating the development of education in forest sector or promoting the forest sector in all to the public with more coordinating type work.

*“Maaseutuammattiin ry has been our partner. During the past four years, we had two collaborative development projects, the other one to strengthen womens’ role in forestry professions and the other one was to start to build regional marketing networks for the forestry education...Maaseutuammattiin ry does a very good job in North Savo. So, we take the information on that practice to other regions too” (FI8A/Int.14).*

In the agricultural sector, concerning the education of farming and food system issues in comprehensive schools and the promotion of agricultural professions in all, the main national level partner in daily operations is likely the Central Union of Farmers and Forest Owners



(MTK), especially the regional and local organization of it. The local associations are important partners for finding the farms for students' visits.

MTK has developed models and materials for consumer relations operations and for the promotion of the Finnish food system as well as for contacting the schools. These models are implemented nationwide by their regional and local associations. The local associations of private forest owners belong to the MTK organization too. MTK has been politically active in developing the education politics better for the farming and forestry livelihoods which serves the goals and operational actions of Maaseutuammattiin ry.

The collaboration with those nationwide operators has helped Maaseutuammattiin ry to develop new ideas, material and tools for regional operations. On the other hand, it has been a good regional partner to those national organizations in taking their tools in practice, giving feedback and ideas and building the regional and local networks to their message too.

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## Policies and institutional supports

The resources for the operative actions of that association are not that big. The basic funding comes basically from the membership organizations. The membership fee is between about 200 € to 3,000 € per year varying by the size and type of an organization. There are a possibility to have personal members, too, but their significance for the funding has been tiny so far. The yearly budget for the basic operations has been about 55,000 – 60,000 € recent years. In addition to that, they have had some project funding both from public and private sources for the development actions of short-term projects.

With the total funding, the association has hired one to two employees (person-years). Thus the full-time personnel resources are quite limited when the goal is to reach every student of the certain cohort and many of their teachers in that province of quite large area and to organize all the visits and events and all the promotion material and communication efforts. The activities of that scale could not be possible without the active collaboration with the committed network of stakeholder operators.

Before the association was established, the public funding for rural development projects helped to test the idea and the basic operative actions for the more permanent practice. The projects before the establishment of the association built the foundations for the practice. They were in an important role when building the stakeholder network. The basic actions of the association are now funded by membership fees and voluntary contribution fees and occasional aid or support from some institution.

However, for the development work of the practice they still use short-term project funding. Apparently the ELY Centre and the local Leader groups have seen those projects reasonable judging from the positive funding decisions. Some of the projects have had a remarkable private funding too, like the project Headhunters of Bioeconomy. By the projects, Maaseutuammattiin ry has been able to diversify its activities and to hire one more employee working with the executive manager. Still, some of the interviewees would like to have more public funding and national efforts to promote rural professions.

*"The members of parliament and ministers don't know what the modern forest work is like. I think that the face-lifting of forestry should be started by the high level, by the ministry of agriculture and forestry to explain by the facts what the forest sector is like...We should have*

*a national project, first to admit that we have a shortage of labor in this sector and then starting to find solutions to that challenge” (FI8A/Int.7).*

*“It would be nice to say that they’ll [the association] manage, but I’m not sure about that. There should be more public funding also to the basic actions because now this is almost like charity work” (FI8A/Int.23).*

The regional association, the only one of its kind in Finland, has still only two employees and the extent of the activities they make wouldn’t be possible without the active members and stakeholder network. The administrative costs of the association cannot be very high, e.g. the board members understand that. The membership organizations participate, to some extent, in the implementation of the activities as part of their regular job.

It is hard to raise any member or stakeholder group above others. Some member organizations have bigger operational role than others. Some member organizations pay a bigger membership fee than others. The fee depends on the size and type of the organization. The regional farmers’ union and the educational institutions of natural resources had a remarkable role during the establishment of the association and still they are very important both for the operative work and for the funding of the association

The concern about the funding of the association came up in several interviews. The members of the association seem to be committed to it so far. The turnover of the members has been quite low but new members are welcome though. New activities and sources of funding must be developed that could perhaps bring safer economic situation for the association. The study with the many interviews did not raise any bigger institutional obstacles to the activities. The interviews at schools left the impression that teachers welcome that cooperation. The curriculum may not be a problem at school level, it can be changed to some extent if seen reasonable.

*“National curriculums support the idea of taking a wider perspective in teaching. If I have understood it right, they speak about phenomenon-based learning at least in primary schools and I assume that in secondary schools too. They try to catch a wider understanding for the issues. When the visits [organized by Maaseutuammattiin ry] fit in curriculums, the system supports the actions” (FI8A/Int.8).*

Nevertheless, some of the interviewees consider it important that the agriculture and forestry issues should be taken stronger both to the supplementary training of teachers and to education of future teachers.

A few comments concerned the placing of vocational education institutions. The assumption or the fact is that the probability of starting the studies of some branch increases if the school is quite near of the home region of the young people.

*“The vocational education should not be centralized too much. The education should be easily reached nearby, by decentralized institutions [throughout the country]” (F18A/Int.24).*

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## Impacts and perspectives

The association of Maaseutuammattiin ry is a unique and established operator in the region of North Savo. It has loyal and diverse members that are mainly organizations, smaller and bigger enterprises, NGOs, educational organizations and public organizations. The members represent a wide range of operators inside the cluster of agriculture and forestry and natural resources. The association and the preceding projects and actions before the establishment of the practice have managed to build a good operational network and a culture of collaboration.

*“They were probably some of the most profitable rural projects that have been made, those two or three projects that continued their living because of the foundation of the association” (FI8A/Int.5).*

The partners of that network share a common concern of the youth’s low awareness and interest towards rural jobs and livelihoods. There is already a shortage of labor in some jobs and hard e.g. to find successors or new entrants for farms. Even if the province of North Savo is quite rural, only 5.6 % of the labor work on primary livelihoods and it keeps decreasing. The common awareness about the significance and nature of rural professions is low. Therefore, the association communicates through its employees and leading group and through its network with the schooling system and with the surrounding society telling about the importance and possibilities of rural areas and rural professions. By the vital and committed collaboration, the network has increased the social capital and improved the equality of people and genders in that region. In all, the teachers met by this study, know the association of Maaseutuammattiin ry quite well and appreciate the cooperation with it. Some of the teachers interviewed for this case study, stated it like this:

*“In this case, we have many ways to tie up the entrepreneurship to nature, for instance the businesses like hunting tourism, fishing tourism, whatever. It helps to understand that it is not just farming and forestry but it is more like that it is possible to benefit from the nature as an environment, business environment” (FI8A/Int.20).*

*“It has improved the equality in education, given possibilities to introduce oneself in practice to new possibilities. It has smoothed the differentiation of professions: many young women*

have chosen the education path for traditional masculine type jobs after getting to know them” (FI8A/Int.24).

“One thing that is important, is the availability among the students. They [the association] take a huge number of people of a certain youth cohort to those visits. The youth has a possibility to get the concrete knowledge, not only the information by the mental image or school books” (FI8A/Int.25).

None of the interviewed entrepreneurs questioned the aim and work of the association either. However, the entrepreneurs who are not that closely involved in daily operations of the association, do not follow the operations of it very closely. The activities seem somewhat remote to them and it was hard to them to evaluate the real effects of the activities. On the other hand, this conclusion may indicate that the partial outsourcing of the promotion work has worked like the regional union, for instance, and the local associations of farmers have expected it to work.

The entrepreneurs who participate in the concrete activities of Maaseutuammattiin ry don't expect to get any bigger direct benefits from the actions for themselves either. They see it more like a work for the common good and for the continuity for the rural livelihoods and for the better future. They just see the promotion work important to get to people better awareness of rural areas and rural professions. Some enterprises can also have business benefits by the cooperation with Maaseutuammattiin ry when they find new channels to make themselves better known.

“It is a situation of both [public good] and [benefits me]... I mean when I'm talking everywhere about the forestry, about our company, my face gets the publicity. Therefore, I'm familiar to everyone and I have noticed that those rare people, who decide to study to become a logger, they usually come first to us to ask for a job” (FI8A/Int.7).

While the main target group is the students of secondary schools who are just planning their future and come to the labor market after five to ten years, the measurement of the effectiveness of the activities is challenging. The impacts have to be observed in a long run. The association was founded just ten years ago. There are some signs though that the educational institutions for the professions of natural resources have had more applicants and new students recent years and especially the status of forestry education has grown there.

*“If we think about effectiveness, we should have a reference point... what would be the result without Maaseutuammattiin ry. We get information from many sources but [not the information about] what is the critical factor for man’s decision-making when he/she knows that this is the profession that I’m aiming at. Yet I can say that the volume for this education is so big that it must have affected” (F18A/Int.4).*

Also, the status and awareness of agricultural education and professions have improved among the youth, their teachers and parents. Perhaps the efforts can be seen in the future by a better supply of labor and by new entrants to farming and forestry professions.

*” I have some example case where a couple has at first been as employees on a farm to become a farmer after buying that farm... They had already got the know-how at that point. If we get the young people to study and work in these professions, some of them may be the future entrepreneurs. The number of farms is small and the number of their children is small and all the farms don’t have a successor, even if the other circumstances could be good. We need the population base that comes from somewhere else who can get the responsibility to continue it. We can see those results perhaps after 15-20 years. It is a long path... You have to have some financial capital before starting as an entrepreneur... In a case of a new entrant when buying the farm outside the family, the threshold is higher in comparison with traditional farm succession” (F18A/Int.2).*

One of the main operative activities of Maaseutuammattiin ry is to take students to farms and forests to get concrete experiences of rural life and rural professions. All the interviewees see that to be the strongest and the most interesting experience for the young people concerning the touch of rural professions and rural nature. The virtual tours or communication by the social media are not seen as a way of replacing the visits. However, it is quite a heavy way of doing the work, both financially and because of the need for many working hours per small group with the limited resources of the association. Still, the association has managed to give the visit experience yearly to thousands of young people and their teachers. Many of the interviewees shared the concern of financial issues and the limited personnel resources.

The environmental issues as such are not at the core of the association’s activities. Still, the study trips and discussions with students and their teachers keep the entrepreneurs and the association’s staff aware of current environmental debate and of young people’s environ-

mental attitude regarding farming and forestry. On the other hand, those entrepreneurs have to be ready for transparent actions to convince the target group that their livelihood actions are sustainable and responsible environmentally. Also, the association must remember the reliability of their environmental communication.

The anticipatory work has increased the awareness about the importance of rural livelihoods, about the rural jobs and about the needs of labor, about the attitudes of the youth and the surrounding society towards rural professions. The close cooperation to schools has given to the association a possibility to build curriculums where the issues of rural areas and professions can be taken into consideration in schools better than before.

*"I sometimes think that we have been in the vanguards with these issues. For example, the project of Maaseutu Opettaa [Rural areas teaches you] that was the preceding action for the foundation of the association. In that project, we developed the education of secondary schools and high schools to improve the school cooperation with enterprises and to bring out the issues of rural areas to schools. Then in 2016 or 2017, they brought to curriculums the idea of taking closer contacts from schools to outside operators...Our project folder was with the teacher in the national Agency For Education as an example of a new practice when talking about the theme studies and entrepreneurship education and about the cooperation between schools and society" (FI8A/Int.1).*

The curriculums and students' connections to working life were seen important when students get the information and build their attitudes and career towards rural professions. Many interviewees mentioned that influencing the educational policy should be done at national level even though Maaseutuammattiin ry has been active in those issues in its own region. It has made some actions in the educational policy with national partners too.

Maaseutuammattiin was an active operator when the forest sector built a wide network of operators and a national association Metsäkoulutus ry (Association for Forest education) for promoting the forest education issues. Another national partner to the Maaseutuammattiin ry is Finnish Forest Association. Both those national organizations do to some extent the activities of same kind as Maaseutuammattiin ry, but their main operating area is still the metropolitan area of Helsinki and their regional campaigns are made with some regional associate. In North Savo, the regional associate is Maaseutuammattiin ry.



*"we started to look for the possibilities to establish Metsäkoulutus ry by which the educational institutions and companies and stakeholders together develop cooperation with working life and the curriculums and to marketing and promotion work. Hasan Kalle gave the idea that Maaseutuammattiin ry as a regional operator is a model for that. Now we have Metsäkoulutus ry. The connection came from there [Maaseutuammattiin ry]" (FI8A/Int.14).*

It seems that the forestry operators have a wider, more consistent and united national network for promoting the issues of forest based businesses, education and professions than the agricultural sector. Between agricultural operators there are no such national organizations that collect all relevant actors together for the common promotion actions. The national organization of the Union of Agricultural Producers and Forest owners (MTK) with the regional and local associations is an important partner to Maaseutuammattiin ry. The MTK operates strongly in the education policy too. The food industry or the farm machinery industry, for instance, are not that closely involved or united to common promotion activities as are the organizations forest sector.

*"Together we might get better results. If those bigger companies, every one of them, could invest, say five thousand like the forest education institutions invest 3.5 thousand, we could do a lot. Certainly, they have done a lot with their money in Maaseutuammattiin, and got visibility in their region, but I think, it could be a nationwide system" (FI8A/Int.5).*

The interviewees agreed the need for the activities that are made in Maaseutuammattiin ry for the future of rural areas and rural livelihoods. The task is not easy though with limited resources and for the rural professions and rural areas that are quite unknown matters to the major of urbanized population.

*"These activities have a social impact on people here. I think that the existence of Maaseutuammattiin ry, that here is such an organization, has an impact. It is a value itself that there exists an organization that has decided to promote the rural professions" (FI8A/Int.26).*

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## Annex 1. The list of interviews

Code	Interviewee (Pseudonymy)	Gender	Role	Place and date of the interview	Other information
FI8A/Int.1	Ma	F	b, c, e	Kuopio 04.09.2020	
FI8A/Int.2	Ka	M	a,d,e,g	Kuopio 04.09.2020	
FI8A/Int.3	Ku	F	c, e, g	Kuopio 04.09.2020	
FI8A/Int.4	Pu	M	b,c,e	Teams 15.09.2020	
FI8A/Int.5	Ja	M	e	Saarijärvi 22.9.2020	
FI8A/Int.6	Pi	M	d	telephone 15.9.2020	
FI8A/Int.7	Pa	M	d	telephone 12.10.2020	
FI8A/Int.8	Pa2	F	d,e	Teams 14.10.2020	
FI8A/Int.9	He	F	d	telephone 21.10.2020	
FI8A/Int.10	Ra	F	a,d,e	Teams&telephone 23.10.2020	
FI8A/Int.11	Ka2	F	b	Teams 26.10.2020	
FI8A/Int.12	Tu	M	a,d,g	Teams&telephone 27.10.2020	
FI8A/Int.13	Re	M	e	telephone 28.10.2020	
FI8A/Int.14	Ma2	M	e	telephone 29.10.2020	
FI8A/Int.15	Ha	M	b	Teams 29.10.2020	
FI8A/Int.16	Ti	M	d	Teams&telephone 4.11.2020	
FI8A/Int.17	Ta	M	e	Siilinjärvi 18.11.2020	
FI8A/Int.18	Ko	F	e	Siilinjärvi 18.11.2020	
FI8A/Int.19	La	F	e	Siilinjärvi 18.11.2020	
FI8A/Int.20	Ke	M	e	Siilinjärvi 18.11.2020	

FI8A/Int.21	Nu	M	e	Siilinjärvi 18.11.2020	
FI8A/Int.22	Ra2	F	b	Siilinjärvi 18.11.2020	
FI8A/Int.23	Hu	M	e	Teams 23.11.2020	
FI8A/Int.24	Sy	F	e	Teams 1.4.2021	
FI8A/Int.25	Ko2	F	e	Teams 31.3.2021	
FI8A/Int.26	Sa	F	e	Teams 1.4.2021	

**Role of the respondents:**

- a) rural newcomers, new entrants or successors;
- b) promoters and actors involved in promising practices
- c) key informants on promising practices;
- d) Local entrepreneurs (especially in the main important sectors operating in the context analysed)
- e) Key persons in local communities, social networks or social movements;
- f) Local/regional politicians involved in the definition/implementation of policy measure related to rural newcomers, new entrants or successors;
- g) Responsible persons of local employers' association, farmers organisation and trade unions

Table 4. Interviews

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