

The Estonian Village Movement

KODUKANT



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May 2004**

THE ESTONIAN VILLAGE MOVEMENT

Introduction

This report on the Estonian Village Movement comprises one of four national case studies. The case studies are part of a wider report on the Rural Movements of Europe. The case study of Estonia was compiled from a study visit, which took place in August 2003. It documents the situation at this time, and much has taken place since then. It does, however, provide a useful insight into the origins, development, structure and activities of the movement. The report was produced, not as an academic analysis, but to provide useful information to those who have a practical interest in the process of rural development and the role and structure of the European rural movements. It is hoped that the report will provide useful information, inspiration and connections.

The report comprises two sections:

The National Context – provides essential information to set the rural movement within the context of the structure and administration of Estonia and its rural areas.

The Estonian Village Movement *Kodukant* – gives a detailed account of the main features of the movement, comprising a factual account of its history, structure, activities, achievements and problems, and a full commentary providing an insight into the character of the movement and the issues raised by it.

The itinerary for the research visit can be found at the end of the report.

Acknowledgements

The two weeks spent in Estonia was action packed. The members of *Kodukant* organised every moment to enable as full a picture of their work as possible. This included travel to many parts of the country, and meetings with many village, regional and national groups and organisations. This was both educational and inspirational, experiencing from the heart of the rural communities the issues they confront and the methods they are using to do this. A great many people provided hospitality, information and support in this process, and it is not possible to mention them all individually. However, on behalf of all of the members of *Kodukant* who assisted with this, I would like to thank particularly the following people:

- Kaja Kaur, the President of *Kodukant*, for her support for this project, and the thoughtful insights she was able to provide on the nature of the rural development challenges in Estonia. Eha Pas, the Manager of *Kodukant*, for her warm hospitality and work in organising the programme and in patiently answering questions during a particularly busy time. Mikk Sarv, founder and first President of *Kodukant*, for his knowledgeable and sensitive interpretation of rural Estonia.
- Tiiu Karu, Merle Adams, Sirje Vinni for hosting me and organising detailed programmes in their regions, enabling an insight into the situation of the rural communities, local authorities and the Regional Associations of *Kodukant*. To Merle goes a special thanks for introducing me to the joys of the traditional Estonian sauna!
- The members of the many village associations in each region visited, for their warm welcome and time spent in explaining their work. Their commitment and creativity in the face of extreme rural problems was an inspiration.
- The staff of the Ministry of Agriculture for providing an overview of rural policy. The staff and politicians of the County Government and Municipalities for interpreting the role of regional and local government and their relationships to the rural communities.
- The many other individuals and organisations who gave time and information and participated in this extensive programme of visits, enabling a very rapid and comprehensive understanding of the rural situation and movement in Estonia.

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Comment

On behalf of Estonian Village Movement Kodukant, I would like to thank you for your thorough report. Though we understand that this report is a “snapshot” at one point in time and the development process is going on in rural areas all the time. But it gives us and others an understanding of the main purpose of the movement (also at the European level). We can see how important is to evaluate Kodukant`s projects and activities, so it will be easier to demonstrate the impact we are having.

Considering the amount of resources (staff, volunteers, money) and the short amount of time Kodukant has done an incredible job at providing services and supporting the local initiatives of villages throughout Estonia. However, some aspects of the organisation need to be reviewed and changed in order to continue to grow and your report gives us an excellent basis for that. It helps us to stress areas that need more attention and to see what we are doing well.

Thank you again for your interest and welcome back to rural Estonia.

Kaja Kaur
President of Kodukant

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ESTONIA National Context

History

Estonia has had a long and turbulent history of occupation, from the 13-20th centuries, including periods of occupation by Germanic, Russian and Swedish powers. A brief period of independence between World Wars I - II ended with first Soviet and then Nazi occupation in 1939 and 1941. In 1944 the Soviets again took over the Baltic States, which remained under Soviet rule until 1991.

On August 19, 1991 Estonia finally declared full independence, and one month later joined the UN. The constitution was approved and the first elections to the National Council (*Riigikogu*) held in 1992. The Estonian currency, the '*Kroon*'¹, was introduced in the same year, the first to be established in Eastern Europe. In 1999, Estonia finalised all its border agreements. In September 2003, Estonians went to the poles and voted a strong 'yes' to joining the EU. Just 12 years after independence, Estonia is well on the way to redressing the imbalance of the last 800 years.

Throughout this extraordinary history, the independent spirit of Estonia was kept alive, and re-emerged in the 20th Century. The Estonians credit much of this tenacity of national identity to the rural communities, who maintained the traditions, language and culture of the country. The rural communities were also key players in what was termed 'the singing revolution' when numerous cultural events stimulated the collective spirit to fight for independence in 1991.

"When we told Moscow that we wanted to be independent, but this had no result, we wondered what we would do next. Then we saw the Berlin wall collapse and other states fought for their independence. When we had no more resources left to deal with Moscow, we sat and thought what to do. We called on

our rural communities, over 4000 people gathered and we asked them what we should do. In the vote, 100 were against independence and 4000 for it. Moscow was shocked and afraid that all republics of the Soviet Union would do the same. This was all because we have un-written laws which we follow every day in our villages.

President of Estonia, Arnold Rüütel 2003²

Structure

Estonia is a very small country by European standards. It has a total land area of 45,227 km² and a population of 1.36mill, a density of 33/km². 33% of the population is classified as rural, a figure which has decreased significantly since independence. 40% of people live in the capital city, Tallinn.

Whilst still poor by EU standards, with the average monthly salary only £190, the Estonian economy is one of the fastest growing in Eastern Europe. GDP³ is 5.3 bill. Euro.⁴ Unemployment is 10%. Since independence, the economy has been supported by foreign aid and investment.

Economic activity includes: services (36%), industry (21%), retail/ wholesale trade (17%), transport & communication (14%), construction (6%), agriculture, forestry & fishing (6%). The main exports (2002) are machinery and equipment (24.8%), wood and wood products (15.1%), textiles (12.1%), agricultural products (8.3%), metals and metal products (7.7%).

ICT use has developed rapidly, and is now ahead of most EU countries. 43% of the population are Internet users, 33% of homes have a computer, all schools are connected to the Internet and there are 500 public access points. 61% of people have mobile phones, and the country is covered by a digital network, with broadband. The Government is a world pioneer in paperless cabinet meetings and e-government, all papers are published on the Internet, e-voting starts in 2005.

² Excerpt from the speech delivered by the President to the Estonian Rural Parliament, August 2003

³ Worldbank 2002 figures

⁴ At the time of writing 1 Euro = 15.6 Estonian Kroon (EEK)

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Administration

Estonia is a presidential republic. The administration is composed of State administration at national and regional (county) levels, and of local self-government (Municipalities).

President	elected by parliament
Parliament	101 seats / Cabinet 15 Lead by the Prime Minister
Ministries	12 Ministries ⁵
Regional Government	15 counties each with: State County Government County Associations of Municipalities
Local Government	42 town and 205 rural Municipalities

The administrative structure, at the time of writing, is under review. This is focussed principally on the county level. One of the driving forces behind the review is entry into the EU, and meeting their requirements for a strong regional level.

National Government

Estonia is a presidential republic. The President is elected by the people for a 6-year term, the current President, Arnold Rüütel, was a key figure in the fight for independence. The Parliament consists of 101 members, elected every 4 years. The Prime Minister is also elected every 4 years, by the Parliament. Since 2003, 6 political parties are represented in the Parliament, lead by the Centre Party and Res Publica Party.

Regional Government

The regional level of government is based on the 15 Estonian Counties. The authorities at this level comprise:

⁵ Agriculture, Culture, Defence, Economic Affairs, Education, Environment, Finance, Foreign Affairs, Internal Affairs, Justice, Social Affairs, Transport & Communications,

The County Government

The County Government is a regional office of Central Government, broadly based on the Scandinavian model. The structure and remit of the County Government is the same throughout Estonia, and is set by the Government. The organisation is lead by the County Governor, who is appointed by the Government, but must be ratified by the County Association of Municipalities. Functions include:

- Oversight of delivery of Government policy at county level.
- Oversight of Municipalities and service delivery
- Responsibilities for larger services
- Production of the County Plan

The county level has changed in character since independence. The initial county level structure was set up to be part of local government, elected by the community. This was changed in 1994, and the County Government became part of Central Government. At the same time, a county level Association of Municipalities was established in every county, to provide for co-ordination between Municipalities and a local voice to work with the County Government.

At the present time, a further re-organisation of the county level is again under debate, as the current model of County Government is not considered to be working well. The lack of political economic power at county level is a real problem. *"The Association of Municipalities has no power and the County Government can make plans, but has no resources to implement them, and is therefore weak"*⁶. A further administrative reform is due at the end of 2004. Whilst there are different opinions from the different political parties as to the outcome, there is a strong view to give more power to the Association of Municipalities – as it was prior to 1994.

"We do not have a systematic approach to regional policy and there is no effective regional planning. We want to reform local government to be strong partners in State Government. The main aim of the administrative reform is to promote the

⁶ County Governor of Saaremaa

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development of the counties, and we are proposing to re-introduce County Councils as a local representative body. The counties need an independent budget to finance local development. Their main task will be to secure balanced development for the whole county. Their functions will include: development/ employment services/ EU information/ tourism/ transport/ training/ health services/ consumer protection/ special care/ museums/ sport/ school network/ infrastructure. We need to improve public services and co-ordinate better. We need to increase democracy and make division of functions more clear.⁷

County Associations of Municipalities

Each county has an Association of Municipalities, involving all Municipalities in the county. By law, 50% + 1 of the Municipalities in the county must be members to make the Association legal.

Its functions are to:

- represent the Municipalities
- enable Municipality co-operation at county and national levels
- enable Municipalities to play a role in the development of policy and legislation
- negotiate the budget for Municipalities with the Government
- co-ordinate joint activities between the Municipalities
- Co-operation and links to the County Government

The Associations also co-operate with other counties, for instance in writing EU applications.

Other types of Municipality groupings/ organisations exist, focussed on specific aims – eg. coastal.

At national level, there are 3 national associations of Municipalities:

- National Union of Associations of Municipalities
- Association of Town Municipalities
- The Association of Rural Municipalities (in existence since 1940s)

⁷ Ministry of the Interior, speech to Estonian Rural Parliament, August 2003

Local Government

Municipalities

The Municipality is the most local level of government, often based on the former parish boundaries. There are 247 in total, 205 of them rural. These operate on a very limited geographical scale, the average population being 1000 and the smallest only 50 (urban Municipalities are larger). They are therefore important for local democracy in rural areas.

Municipalities have the task of local service delivery, including local level schools, health, infrastructure, transport, community facilities, social welfare etc. In addition to this they have strategic planning responsibilities and produce Municipal Plans, linked to the County Plans, within a framework set by Government. Municipalities also provide registration functions, including land. Municipalities employ many staff at local level, including teachers. They are therefore very important to the local economy.

Each Municipality must prepare a 10-year plan for the community. This includes a full land use plan and a development and service plan. They are required to follow the County Plan, and to incorporate any national legislation. The role of the Plan is to control and develop life in the community. All applications for building and new uses must comply with the Plan and zoning is used to allocate land use. Agriculture and forestry is not under the control of the Municipality – this is controlled by the State through the County Government. The Plan must be open to community consultation, which is advertised in the press at local and national levels.

Funding is derived from:

- 56% of income tax collected within the Municipality⁸
- 100% of land tax collected at the discretion of the Municipality

⁸ Tax structure:

Income tax	26% of taxable income
Social tax	33% of income – paid by employer
Land tax	Accrues 100% to local government
Value Added tax	18%
Gambling tax	Used to fund social projects
Excise tax	Fuel/ alcohol/ tobacco/ car

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- other taxes may be levied – eg. resource tax (eg. from mining enterprises)
- State funding – allocated in respect of the particular needs of each Municipality
- sale of land/ property
- project funding
- loans

Legislation governs the amount of public funding per head to Municipalities.

The Municipalities are hard pressed to deliver all of the services they are charged with delivering, with limited staff and budget. They therefore need and usually appreciate the assistance of the village associations and *Kodukant*, 'The Estonian Association of Villages'⁹ in addressing the development of the local communities. The structure of the Municipalities is also under constant

discussion, and many people feel that they are too small to be effective and economically viable. However, there is very strong local pressure to retain the current scale and when the Government attempted to reduce the number of Municipalities in 2000, this met with strong resistance.

During the Soviet period, although the Municipalities still existed, in rural areas the State and collective farms undertook most of the functions of today's Municipalities, and more. In effect, they looked after all of the needs of their community. So there is a strong tradition of local action, within the framework of State control.



⁹ *Kodukant* is the subject of this report. See the following Chapter for details

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CASE STUDY - County Government

Parnu County Government

Parnu County is situated in the south-west of the country and is the largest of the 15 Estonian counties, its area is 4,807 km² and population 91,627. The population is declining rapidly, as in most parts of Estonia, due to a falling birth rate and out-migration. The county comprises 23 local Municipalities, including 3 towns. Parnu, the county town, has 43,563 inhabitants.

The County is coastal - with 177 islands, 2 inhabited. The land cover comprises 48% native spp. forests (54% of which are State owned), 24% wetland, 21% arable, 7% other land. It is, like most of Estonia, relatively flat, with the highest point being only 77m.

The main sources of economic activity in the rural areas are based on primary resources: agriculture, forestry and timber processing, fishing and fish processing and the peat industry. Tourism is important in the main town.

The County Government, led by the County Governor, has responsibilities relating to overseeing the delivery of central Government policies. The main functions and departments comprise:

- Economic Development - responsible for planning and development
- Land – responsible for implementing the land reform process
- Education and Culture
- Social and Healthcare
- Finance
- Registry
- Internal Audit
- County Secretary

The County Government has a legal obligation to produce a County Plan. However it does not have the powers to implement it. Each county takes a different approach to the implementation of the Plan. This is a fundamental problem in the present system. The Plan is produced in co-operation with all of the Municipalities and, in Parnu County, all Municipalities have signed up to support and implement the County Plan. This gives the authority to the County Government to negotiate with central Government to get funding to implement the Plan.

Their development strategy lists its key aims as to be:

- Internationally competitive
- Socially recreated
- Green and environmentally friendly
- Co-operation minded
- Balanced development

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CASE STUDY – Municipalities

Leisi Municipality

Information provided by the Mayor and staff of Leisi Municipality

Leisi Municipality is situated on the north coast of Saarde island, in the west of Estonia. It has a territory of 350 km² and a population of 2400, a population density of 7/km². There are 54 villages, the largest of which has 350 people. 50 years ago the population was twice the size. The decline has been due to war, emigration, people sent to Siberia during the Soviet period and migration to the towns since independence. In the Soviet time the Municipality was 1 big State farm. They lost 300 agricultural workers after the 1992 agricultural reforms. There has been a loss of educated young people from the area, and there are no good work places for these young people to return to. This is the biggest problem for the area. 25% of the population are retired and most of the professional people now working in the area came 20 years ago during the Soviet period, and are now in the 40-50 age group.

Employment in the Municipality is limited:

The Municipality itself is the biggest employer 130 staff, including teachers.

Timber factory – furniture etc. 110

Bakery 40

Forest workers 20-30

Agriculture & forestry 80 FTE

Tourism is just developing, and is seasonal. Farm tourism is the most usual form of activity.

The Municipality has 13 elected members, and an annual budget of £1 mill. Legislation governs the amount of funding per head to Municipalities. Funding is derived from the following sources:

- 56% of income tax collected within the Municipality goes to the Municipality
- 100% of land tax goes to the Municipality
- other taxes may be levied – eg. resource tax (eg. from mining enterprises)
- State funding – allocated in respect of the particular needs of each Municipality
- sale of land/ property
- project funding

The main functions include looking after roads, schools, health centres and public areas, providing public transport and school buses, running community facilities, village halls, library, kindergarten, elderly care etc., registrar functions, including processing of land reform applications and administering social payments for certain categories (eg. poor, uninsured etc.), and employment of school staff (funded by central Government). The Municipality does not have a direct economic development function, but supports development through access to land and office space.

Each Municipality must prepare a Municipality Plan. This is updated every 5 years, and renewed every 10 years. This includes a full land use plan, and a development and service plan. They are required to follow the County Plan for Saaremaa, and to incorporate any national legislation. The role of the Plan is to guide and regulate the development of the Municipality. All applications for building and new uses must comply with the plan and zoning is used to allocate land use. Agriculture and forestry are not under the control of the Municipality, but are State controlled through the County Governor. The plan must be open to community consultation, which is advertised in the press at local and national levels.

The Municipality has strong connections with *Kodukant* and is enthusiastic about its work. It is keen to support village action “*we have so few active people that we must support them*”. However, what the Municipality can do with the villages depends on the availability of locally active people and the co-operation of the villages. Only 10 villages out of the 54 are active in local development. This is partly because of the high number of old people. The Municipality tries to support every project where they see co-operation between the inhabitants. The Municipality helps to provide local services to the villages – 4 libraries and internet points in the Municipality, there is also funding for village halls in the 5 biggest villages.

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Rural Areas

*Starting from the 19th century the heart of Estonian culture and economy has been a village. It started to flourish when Estonians mastered their State and land again. People started to develop their environment, Estonian nationalism and patriotism progressed and our independence was secured. Like in a real heart our most precious principles and values were fixed there.*¹⁰

Estonia has traditionally been a very rural country. There are 4424 villages and 47 small towns¹¹. 33% of people live outwith towns of over 2,500 population, the Estonian definition of rural areas. The land is rich and supported the bulk of the population until the second period of independence. Estonia was one of the major food producers for the Soviet Union and known for their efficient farming and high production levels. This made Estonia a relatively affluent part of the Soviet block. The rural traditions are strong, and have persisted throughout the centuries of occupation. The village, in particular, is the heart of the rural population – with a long historical tradition. This strong rural tradition was hit hard by independence. Agricultural reforms, the transition to a market economy and EU regulations have dealt a heavy blow to rural areas, whilst the urban economy grew rapidly. This led to big disparities in population and wealth between regions. The rural areas began to empty of population and land became disused. The rural population became depressed and felt powerless to address their problems. This was the situation into which *Kodukant* entered.



¹⁰ President of Estonia, Arnold Rüütel, 2003

¹¹ Riin Saluveer 'Rural and Regional Development Policy in Estonia' 2003

Agriculture¹²

*During the changes the rural people suffered most because three quarters of working places in agriculture just disappeared, and those who could maintain theirs get the lowest salaries in Estonia.*¹³

The most important issue has been the rapid decline in agriculture since independence, resulting from the early agriculture reforms, the change from the command economy of the Soviet period to a market economic model, loss of the large Soviet market, competition with EU producers, lack of capital and the land reform process. This has led to a 75% reduction in agricultural jobs – now just 6% of jobs, and a loss of rural population, now only 30% of what it was before independence. In Viljandi County, for example, there are only 100 active farms left, out of 12,000 agricultural holdings. 300,000 ha. of agricultural land are also unused, with a rapid growth in holdings that are not used for agriculture (hobby farms etc). This has come as a big shock to a country, which was previously seen as one of the most important producers of food for the Soviet Union, and earned a good income from agriculture.

The move from State (*Sovhos*) and Collective (*Kolchos*) Farms to privatisation has also come as a shock. The collective farms were well off compared to farmers now. They also took care of social and built infrastructure and the welfare of the population. The agricultural and land reforms, following independence, have created many problems, both economical and social.

The land has been returned to the former owners from the first independence period 1919-1939. This has resulted in many units that are too small to be economically viable, the average farm size being 50ha. with many much smaller units. Insufficient capital to invest, strict regulations to meet and the loss of the Soviet market has proved too much for many farmers. In particular, the formerly important dairy industry has almost collapsed. The future prospect of entry to the EU is also preoccupying farmers, who are very unsure of the consequences.

¹² Information from the Ministry of Agriculture, Estonian Farmers Union and local contacts.

¹³ President of Estonia, Arnold Rüütel, 2003

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Estonian farmers are also concerned by the trend towards foreign domination of markets. Swedish farmers unions have set up companies in Estonia, which have a monopoly on the marketing of agricultural inputs and produce, at rates unfavourable to the Estonian farmers. Estonian farmers are not allowed to become members of these unions, but must sell their produce to them, as they have no other access to marketing channels. This is just one of many examples of the teething problems of the move to a capitalist economy.¹⁴ Foreign domination of industry is a fact of life in Estonia.

The organisation of Estonian farmers to tackle their problems is not well developed. There are 4 different farmers organisations representing Estonian farmers in Brussels. These are seen as inefficient and the Government would prefer to work with fewer, larger organisations. There is a very direct relationship between the unions and the Government. Each county has an advice centre run by the unions and financed by the Ministry

The following commentary from the County Governor of Saaremaa County gives an impression of the impact of the changes in agriculture across Estonia:

“The soils are relatively rich and good for grain and dairy production. There are 50 farms in the county, but not all are very active. The average farm size is 20-30ha. 10ha. being arable. 10 years ago, every field had 10-20 sheep and cows. But the cattle have gone after independence. The milk prices fell, and Estonia could not export because of the EU regulations, the EU protected market and the loss of the Soviet market. Cattle became too expensive to feed and experience has shown that there is no profit at all from cattle. Everyone invested a lot of money into dairy equipment, this is now all wasted investment. The changes have happened too fast for many people. People are losing their sense of purpose. There is a lack of employment in the rural areas, especially for men. This is a big issue for the community. It has affected the men particularly badly and many are suffering from alcoholism depression. Estonia now has the

highest suicide rate in Europe. We are all wondering what the impact of the EU will be.”¹⁵

CASE STUDY - Saida Farm

Information from Juhan Särgava – Manager of Saida Farm. Former General Manager of the State Farm.

Saida Farm is part of a former SOVHOS or State farm of 6500 ha. from the Soviet period. The State Farm occupied 6500ha. and 270 people lived on the farm. The State farm was responsible for all functions in its area, including those now the responsibility of the Municipality. “*We provided twice what is now provided by the Municipality*”. Functions included: social care/ housing/ roads/ electricity/ schools/ pensioners/ licensing/ registrar/ notary. The General Manager was in charge of all these – a powerful position.

The farm was self-sufficient in food and exported to the USSR. A set price was paid for food produced and the farm had to fulfil a basic quota - over production was paid double (the opposite to the EU) and under-production could mean the Manager being sacked. Estonia was a major producer for the USSR, and was relatively wealthy, with living standards higher than in Moscow.

Saida Farm is now an organic farm of 1000 ha. and 40 employees. It has 520 cattle and produces organic dairy cattle and dairy products. The feed for the cattle is also grown on the farm: grass/ grains/ herbs. The produce is processed in the farm dairy into a range of dairy products – cheese, yoghurt etc. This is an innovative enterprise, as there was no organic production in the Soviet time. Saida Farm has kept the large collective farm model, but managed to diversify into an entirely new market sector. The manager has received training in the US and employs US business management models. Unlike many of the surrounding, traditional farms, Saida is building a profitable enterprise, and starting to address the wider policy questions of agriculture with the Government, spearheading the formation of a new farmers union.

The experience of Saida has demonstrated the importance of farmers embracing risk, innovation and more market oriented management models. The implication being that Estonian farmers have to accept a cultural shift into the market economy before they are able to become competitive.

¹⁴ Estonian Farmers Union in Viljandi and Juhan Särgava of Kodukant

¹⁵ County Governor of Saaremaa – pers. com.

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Forestry

“Estonians like to live buried in the forest. We feel safe there. During difficult times the forest sheltered our independence fighters/partisans. During the Soviet times, the ‘Brothers of the Forest’ planned for independence.”¹⁶

Forestry, as in many European countries, is an integral part of farming in Estonia. Estonia is a very wooded country, in Viljandi County over 50% of the land is forest. Most are native species, naturally grown. 60% of forests are privately owned, mostly by farmers, and 40% are State owned. All farms have a significant proportion of their land under trees. The farmers union identified forestry as being the life-blood of farming. Farmers tend to utilise this natural resource to compensate for loss of agricultural income, to see them over hard times, and to provide raw materials for construction, fuel and forest foods (berries, fungi, nuts, etc.). Forests are used for hunting, which is an important activity. Owners can rent out hunting, often to foreigners. Timber tends to be sold as a raw material to largely foreign owned sawmills. It has been noted that this is increasingly asset stripping without planning, only 25% of trees felled have felling licenses. Wild berries are sold for making preserves, yoghurt etc. mostly to foreign companies.

Land Reform¹⁷

Land is a fundamental issue for all rural areas. During the first period of Estonian independence, the land was in private ownership. During the Soviet period, all land was deemed to belong to the State. In 1991, the process of returning the land to the former owners began. All applications for ownership had to be submitted by 1996, with the option of taking the land or a compensatory payment for the value of the land. The original owners were only entitled to a percentage of the land free, for the rest they must pay the Government.

The County Land Commissions assess the applications for ownership, under the County Governor. The Municipality handles the administration of the registration process. The County Governor has personally to sign all sales to foreign owners, but there is no restriction on foreign ownership. (Saaremaa County reported 501 foreign purchasers of 3500 ha.¹⁸). The County Governor commented that he could not find any good reason for not letting locals sell land to a foreigner if they offer the highest price. If the land price drops too low, the Municipality can buy it.

Successful applicants who were former owners receive titles to the land. However, anyone who had been living on this land during the Soviet period, is also entitled to a proportionate share of the land or its value. If this happens, the original owner is entitled to a similar amount of land elsewhere, and has 1 month in which to choose this land. Any competition for land is decided by the County Land Commission on the basis of criteria to assess the suitability of the applicant.

Any free agricultural land, after this process has been completed, can be rented from the Government. Forest land can be purchased, after the Government has chosen which it wishes to retain for nature reserves etc.

The result of the land reform process is judged not to have been very successful from the point of view of efficient land use. It has resulted in many small-holdings, not viable as economic farm units. It has also resulted in many owners who live in the urban areas and do not wish to use the land. In some cases foreign owners are considered to be land speculators with no long-term interest in the land. However, the process is now almost complete, and the situation for owners is greatly improved from the interim period in which there was no security of tenure and no ability to raise capital for investment. The trauma of moving from a State to a private system of land use is however only beginning.

¹⁶ Mikk Sarv – first President of *Kodukant* – pers. com.

¹⁷ Information from the County Governor of Saaremaa / Saarde municipality / the Ministry of Agriculture

¹⁸ County Governor of Saaremaa – pers. com.

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Business Development¹⁹

“The main problem in rural areas is not just lack of jobs but also that people are less active in trying to find/ set up work. There is need for finance for training and networking.”

²⁰

The development of the private sector is one of the main challenges of this newly independent country. Everyone, from farmers to shop-keepers, has to learn this new culture. The growth of businesses and an entrepreneurial culture requires the development of new skills, attitudes and confidence. There is a big interest in communities in starting businesses, but a lack of skills, capital and confidence. In the early stages of independence, there has been a massive influx of western companies, opening up new opportunities and know-how, but also dominating the private sector.

The Development Centre of Viljandi County is one of 15 County Development Centres. The County Centres are part of a business support network, linked to the Estonian Regional Development Agency (ERDA). The Centre provides a business support system to SMEs, with start up programmes, research, training, advice, trade fairs etc. The Centre has 3 main target groups: businesses, NGOs and Municipalities.

The Centre identified some of the main problems facing business development. The difficulty in getting start-up loans has been a big issue. This has been a particular problem for farms before the land tenure reforms are completed. The Government loans tend not to target rural enterprise activities, with industry and services taking precedence. Tourism is a priority, and is a growing sector. The EU SAPARD programme is the source of support for agriculture and also for rural development activities. The ILO programme ‘Jobs for Women’ has been used to increase the capacity of women to enter business, this has had a very high level of interest.

¹⁹ Information from the Development Centre of Viljandi County

²⁰ Ministry of Social Affairs

Civil organisations²¹

Estonia has 19,013 registered NGOs, employing approximately 16,000 people (4-5% of the workforce). There are also many unincorporated groups, mostly in rural areas. There is a national umbrella organisation for NGOs - The Network of Estonian Non-profit Organisations. This is the equivalent to SCVO and NCVO in Britain. There is also a Roundtable of Estonian Non-profit Organisations, which operates as a network or forum for mutual co-operation and lobbying. The development of civil society in Estonia, as in the other ex-Soviet States, has received substantial investment from western aid organisations. In 2002, the Estonian Parliament adopted the national Estonian Civil Society Development Concept, developed from the example of the UK ‘Compact’. The strategy will lead to a joint NGO commission to determine concrete steps in developing Estonian civil society. Civil society in Estonia, as in the UK, has an increasingly important role to play in delivering services and working in partnership with public and private sectors.

The NGO sector is very diverse and has a long history, of over 200 years, especially in rural areas. The activities of NGOs in rural areas tend to focus around heritage and social issues. There are now approximately 400 small village NGOs – village associations – which have been set up to develop their own communities, and have a broad focus. Some of these groups are very small, with communities of only 5 people amongst them. These begin as informal groups, but tend to move rapidly to establishing a formal legal organisation to enable fund raising and development projects. *Kodukant* is active in training such groups and promoting legal status.

Funding for the activities of village action groups tends to come from the local Municipalities and the national Government Programme for Local Initiatives (established as a result of lobbying by *Kodukant*). Funding sources are also available from targeted funds for specific activities, especially cultural.

²¹ Information from the Network of Estonian Non-Profit Organisations - NENO

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Rural Policy

There is no comprehensive rural policy, and agriculture still dominates the rural policy and funding agenda. Rural and regional development is influenced most directly by the policies of the Ministries of Agriculture and Internal Affairs, the County Governments and the rural Municipalities. The policies of the other sectoral Ministries also have an influence on the rural areas. The Rural Development Department of the Ministry of Agriculture deals with issues relating to entrepreneurship, infrastructure and land, forestry and training. The Ministry of Internal Affairs has overall co-ordination of local government, and regional development.

In recent years, there has been a focus on preparation for EU accession and the development of regional and agricultural policy, including agri-environment and rural development measures. The Ministry of Agriculture has been principally implementing rural development through different EU tools. Currently this is mostly through the SAPARD pre-accession programme (ends 2004) 250 mill EEK (16 mill. Euro) per year.

Planning has been underway since 2001 for entry to the EU and the future EU Programmes. In relation to rural development these include:

- The Structural Funds Single Programme Document for Objective 1 (includes all Estonia) measures targeted at rural communities are Measure 6 and LEADER.
- The CAP Rural Development Plan including Less Favoured Areas, Agri-environment and other measures

The introduction of the EU programmes substantially increased the resources and focus for rural development, though still with a strong bias towards agriculture. There is very little national money for broad rural development. The Regional Development Fund of 4.5 mill EEK (290,000 Euro) per year, to be divided between 15 counties. SAPARD provides 36 mill EEK (1.66 mill. Euro) under the Village Development Measure (6) this is targeted at improving the quality of life and was launched in 2003. Diversification of rural employment and rural infrastructure are also funded by SAPARD.

County Commissions are used to implement the various funding programmes. The members are drawn from civic and private sectors and Municipalities. A Local Initiatives Group makes an action plan including planning the investments they would like to see. This is sent to the central committee, who rank the plans according to criteria and send a decision to the Agricultural Register and Information Board.

Regional development policy influences rural areas, but is not specifically rural. It targets the preconditions for regional development, including transport and communications, business promotion and social infrastructure. County Government is responsible for the co-ordination of sectoral policy and strategic planning at regional level, and the Municipalities for service delivery.

There are 7 specifically targeted regional development programmes, administered by the Estonian Regional Development Agency and the County Governments, these include programmes for:

- Islands
- Areas of Agricultural Restructuring – 4 counties in east Estonia
- Areas of Industrial Restructuring
- Network of Centres
- Setomaa – targeted at a small number of failing Municipalities in east Estonia.
- Cross-Border Co-operation
- Local Initiatives

The Programme for Local Initiatives is of most relevance to the villages (*See case study below*). It was started in 1996, as a direct result of lobbying by *Kodukant*. It is funded by the Government, run by the Estonian Regional Development Agency, and administered by the County Governments. Its purpose is to strengthen local initiative and co-operation, and increase the role of local people. The total fund is worth 450,000 Euro, and the average project 400 Euro. This is an easily accessible and well-used source of funds for rural communities.

In addition to the funds mentioned, the other main funding sources for rural communities are:

- Cultural and social funds - from the taxes levied on gambling, drink and tobacco. Allocated by the Ministries of Social Welfare, Education and Culture.

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Programmes for young, elderly and disabled people.

- Municipalities - have very few assets for promoting local development, budgets to assist with local projects vary between Municipalities, but are never very high.
- Private foundations – including: the national lottery; sponsorship from banks, enterprises and individuals; foundations supported by Estonians living abroad and local entrepreneurs who may provide co-financing for village projects
- Foreign investment and aid - Various aid programmes are open to Estonia, mostly from Finland, Sweden and the USA.



The Ministry of Agriculture is trying to help rural development and assist *Kodukant's* activities. They have achieved an agreement at Government level that they will develop rural life, and in 2001 set up a Rural Development Board to advise the Minister of Agriculture. This includes the Ministries of Finance, Economy, Environment, Internal affairs and several social partners. *Kodukant* is a member of this Board, which gives them access to the Minister. The Board will have more powers when Estonia joins the EU. The Minister would like all EU regulations to be discussed with the social partners on the Board as a consultation mechanism.²²

“The ‘whole country must live’ is the right policy – If there are organisations that can support this work they should be supported. The situation would be much worse if there were no organisations to unite individuals and work with one voice. If Government only decides what to do, they will have a lot of money available but no users – and inappropriate policies. It is very important to work together with representatives of different interests.”²³

²² Information from the Ministry of Agriculture

²³ Ministry of Agriculture official – pers. com.

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CASE STUDY - Programme for Local Initiatives

This Programme is a major achievement of *Kodukant*. It was started in 1996, as a direct result of lobbying by *Kodukant*. It is a fund for local rural development, funded by the Government, run by the Estonian Regional Development Agency and administered locally through the County Governments. The target areas are rural areas in all Estonia, and settlements smaller than 2500 pop.

Its purpose is to strengthen local initiative and co-operation, and increase the role of local people in:

- the development of local areas.
- institutional strengthening of local organisations
- investment in the main aims of the NGO
- training and awareness raising
- research & surveys
- surveys on local history and special features

Two types of projects are eligible:

- local projects – for which local NGOs may apply
- national projects – for which national NGOs can apply

The total fund is 450,000 Euro, and the average project is 400 Euro. There is no maximum limit per project. Each county gets an annual allocation, related to population.

Approximately 700 local and 20 national projects are funded each year, with 75% of the fund going to local projects and 25% to national. Local projects can get 90% of the project cost from the fund. The 10% self-financing can be divided between 50% in-kind/ voluntary work and 50% cash. For national projects, the minimum level of self-financing is 25%.

Each county has their own committee to evaluate local projects. A national committee assesses the national projects. These committees comprise representatives from the NGO and civic sector, as well as Government. Each county is able to decide on its assessment process, within the overall framework of the Programme. Different counties decide on different procedures – some try to fund all costs of some projects, some fund some costs of all projects. In Viljandi County, the local branch of *Kodukant* has a key role in the running of the fund, by acting as disseminator, advisor and collector of applications from communities.

The most common themes for local projects are:

- Events
- Village development plans
- Smaller projects for recreation areas/ public places/ playgrounds/ sports places
- Folk traditions / handicraft
- Most projects are 'soft' projects and very few are capital

Village development plans have been very popular recently, as a result of the promotion by *Kodukant* for villages to undertake a development planning process. Such plans have been seen as necessary when communities apply for funding, especially from EU sources. This provides the 'carrot' to do village plans.

It is not possible to use this money for the running costs of the NGO, only for those aspects directly related to the project. Accessing money for running costs is very difficult for NGOs. Some Municipalities (not more than 10%) have a scheme for giving some money to village groups for running costs. Groups use this to get more money for projects.

The average cost of national projects is 7000 Euro – however many are much less or more than this. The money must be for the direct benefit of local communities, eg. training for local communities. *Kodukant* applies to this fund and in 2003 received 20,000 Euro for the Rural Parliament.

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KODUKANT The Estonian Village Movement



History

The Estonian village movement, *KODUKANT* ('Home Place') was the first village movement to be established in Eastern Europe. The idea of the movement started in late 1991, when supporters of rural life in Estonia made contact with the already established national village movement in Sweden - *Hela Sverige Ska Leva!* - "All Sweden Shall Live".

The motivation was to improve the conditions in the countryside. The transition from a State planned system to market economy had huge consequences for the structure of Estonia's rural settlements, increasing poverty, unemployment and rural depopulation.

In 1992-93, following preparatory work and lobbying, the process to start a rural movement began, with support from the Swedish village movement. Initially, two counties, Viljandi and Rapla, were selected as pilots, supported by partner counties Dalarna and Jönköping in Sweden. In both countries, the county administration was responsible for the projects. The Estonian Ministry of Agriculture provided overall support for the pilot in Estonia. The pilot projects were financed by the Swedish International Aid Foundation SIDA. The Swedish University of Upsala also provided support. In accordance with conditions of the Swedish funding, a co-ordination group from different Ministries was formed.

The success of the pilot projects soon became known and several more County Associations were registered. Today *Kodukant* is represented in all 15 counties. More than 4000 individuals are directly involved in the movement and many thousands are indirectly involved. The national movement of *Kodukant* became legally registered as a non-governmental organization in 1997.

Structure

The mission of *Kodukant* is to support the survival, revival and harmonic development of Estonian rural life and villages, including support to the rural economy, national culture, and the bringing together of village associations. The vision is the balanced development of rural regions, Municipalities and villages.

Kodukant is an association of non-government associations, structured at 3 levels:

- 1 National Association made up of the County Associations and other NGOs
- 15 independent County Associations, one in each Estonian county
- Over 400 Village Associations

- National level:**
- sets overall direction
 - develops the national strategy
 - provides networking and communications
 - supports the county branches through training and other development work
 - advocacy to Government etc.
 - develops transnational links

- County level:**
- members of national *Kodukant*
 - develop county strategies
 - provide the link to the villages
 - stimulate the formation of village associations
 - provide training and support for village associations
 - work with the regional authorities

- Village level:**
- members of the county associations
 - develop village plans
 - unite all village activities and groups
 - undertake local development work
 - work with the Municipalities

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The National Association

Objectives

Technical advice	Consultation in the areas of rural development, rural youth, small enterprise project design and maintenance, woman and gender development.
Networking and communication	Information and linking member organizations to services, partnerships and funding etc.
Capacity building	Training for organisations and individuals in grant writing, strategic planning, leadership, enterprise development and community building, Exchange visits to share best practice.
Advocacy	Serving as a mediator between local villages and national Government by education, advocacy and influencing decisions, taken at the local and national level.
Support of local initiatives	Promotion and support of village days, information days, village development plans and village leaders.
Co-operation	Finding and establishing partners between villages, counties, countries and sectors.

Structure

Membership	<i>Kodukant</i> is a representative organisation with direct membership. Membership is open to anyone who supports the aims of <i>Kodukant</i> . At national level membership is only open to organisations and community groups, but at county level it is also open to individuals. The Boards, at national and local levels respectively, vet all applications. There are no prohibited categories as such, but <i>Kodukant</i> aims to be neutral of any political party.
General Council	25 members representing the 15 county Boards and other key organisations, representing 2700 member groups. Meets at least once per year. Responsible for: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• developing and implementing the legal statutes of the organisation;• setting the overall strategic direction of the organisation• guided by the membership and Rural Parliament• approving the annual report and financial statements• electing the Board.
President	Elected by General Council for 3 years, to represent <i>Kodukant</i> at national and international levels. A new function since 2002, prior to which the tasks of President and Chair were combined.
Board and Chairperson	7 members, elected by the General Council. Meets once a month. Responsible for: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• implementing the decisions of the General Council• developing the action programme for the organisation• the day to day management of the organisation• appointment and management of staff
National Managing Director	Appointed by the board and responsible for: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• implementing the decisions of the Board• fund raising, implementation and monitoring of projects• management and support to 15 County Co-ordinators and project staff• financial and office administration• administrative support to the Board, General Council and Membership.• co-ordinating the development of the national and county <i>Kodukant</i> strategies
Revision Committee	3 members, elected for 3 years. Responsible for monitoring of finances and activities and ensuring these meet the decisions of the General Council and Board.
County or County Associations	15 legally independent associations, linked into <i>Kodukant</i> . Each has its own board, manager and office. Members are village associations, local NGOs and individuals.

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Funding

It is difficult to assess the true cost of running Kodukant. So much of the work is done voluntarily, and without any mechanism for costing this fully. The staff of the organisation are part-funded through different projects, but also put in a lot of volunteer work.

The movement is financed by a variety of project-based funding sources. It has no core funding from Government, though this is currently the focus of discussions with the Government. The main funding currently comes from projects financed by the Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Social Affairs, Estonian Local Initiatives Program, European Union and the Baltic American Partnership Fund. *Kodukant* has also received support from a variety of foreign aid organisations and co-operation programmes.

Kodukant charges membership fees. For the 15 County *Kodukant* Associations, these are set at 1200 EEK (77 euro).

The County Associations

See *Case Study – County Associations*

There are 15 County Associations of *Kodukant*, one established in each administrative county of Estonia. The first two associations, Viljandi and Rapla, were established as pilots, at the start of the movement, and registered in 1995. The last of the associations were set up in 2002. Each association is an independent organisation, but they all work within the umbrella of *Kodukant* at a national level. Each County association is a full member of *Kodukant*, with a seat on the General Council and representatives on the main Board.

The County Associations are free to establish their own structures and activities, however they work closely together to ensure a common pattern of activity across the country. Each has a membership, mostly drawn from the village associations, and other local rural NGOs. Individuals can also be members of the county level. The membership elects the Board of the association, which takes responsibility for the organisation.

Each region currently has staffing of at least 1 part-time person. The ability of the County

Associations to employ staff depends largely on their ability to raise project funding. All staff are employed through different projects. One national project (E-Villages) has enabled the part-time employment of county staff. The funding was raised by *Kodukant* centrally, from the EU PHARE Programme and national and local sources. Most associations also charge a small membership fee.

Each County association has a 5-year strategy, linked to the overall national *Kodukant* Strategy (see *Case Study – Kodukant Strategy*). All strategies at national and county level are published together in one document. The current strategies run from 2003-8. The strategies were developed with support and training from *Kodukant* centrally.



Most of the action of *Kodukant* takes place in the County Associations. Their main work is to support village groups through information and training events and study visits. Two information days are held each year, which enable village leaders to gain access to a wide range of information on rural policy, organisations, funding sources, local activities. One village day is held each year, to connect villages and other organisations and provide a market place for their work.

The regions run a wide range of local activities and projects. These typically include:

- Promotion of village associations
- Training for village leaders
- Information and dissemination events, newsletters, website, publications, exhibitions
- County village days
- Networking activities between villages and regions

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- Focused projects – eg. environment, tourism, food

The Village Associations

See Case Study – Village Associations



*Members of Soometsa Village Association
(see case study)*

The aim of *Kodukant* is to encourage broad-based, legally constituted village organisations, which can co-ordinate the activities of the area. Villages traditionally were not organised, apart from specific interest groups. *Kodukant* engage in mobilising local communities, encouraging them to become more organised. This takes place through the county staff and Board members visiting communities, attending village meetings and talking with village activists, also through making links between communities. Approximately 400 villages have so far taken up the challenge of establishing their own village association.

The important features that have been promoted by *Kodukant* are:

- Village societies are set up of free will by each village
- According to the area they wish to relate to
- They are owned and managed by the village people
- have an elected committee and a village leader
- are organised as legal companies, able to trade and hold funds
- produce village plans through a process of consultation with the village people
- network with each other – locally, regionally and nationally.

An example of a typical process of village development provided by one village association:

“The village has 65 people, and started to become active in 1998. One member of the village visited the county offices of Kodukant to ask for support. A village meeting was set up and the villagers were asked to invite as many people as possible, 20 people attended the meeting. The Kodukant county manager attended the meeting and spoke about the activities of Kodukant in the county. The meeting decided to start a village group. A village leader was elected and eventually we formed a legal NGO. We have since developed a village development plan, through Kodukant’s E-villages project, and applied for funding under the Local Initiatives Fund, which requires communities to be organised in order to apply. This was a carrot to set up a village association.”



*Members of Ruhve Village Association
(see Case Study)*

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CASE STUDY - *Kodukant* County Associations

'Society *Kodukant* Viljandimaa' Viljandi County

Information provided by the County Co-ordinator of 'Society Kodukant Viljandimaa'

Viljandi County was one of the 2 pilot counties from which *Kodukant* was established, and is now one of the 15 county associations, which exist in all Estonian counties. It has been active for 9 years, and was formally established in 1995, from the activities of a number of enthusiastic individuals.

It has a Board of 7 people, all of whom are voluntary, and 1 full-time and 1 part-time staff members, who are entirely funded through project based funding. There are 250 villages in the country, over 50 of which have village associations, which are linked to the *Kodukant* county network. The Board are elected at the AGM for a 2 year period, and are usually representatives from the village action groups. They meet monthly, usually in open meetings in the villages. The office is open to the public on at least 3 days per week.

Kodukant Viljandi, as do all county associations, has its own development strategy, which nests with the national *Kodukant* strategy. The strategy outlines the following vision and objectives:

Vision: People in the villages of Viljandimaa are happy, co-operative, trained and believe in the future. They are able to provide villages with resources and create value.

Development trends and future activities:

- Work with members, network and co-operation partners
- Information centre as a meeting place
- Exchange of knowledge, skills, experience via training and study visits
- Increase village (home) feeling – symbols of the village, common activities, co-operation
- Promote a nature-preserving way of thinking – environmental projects in the Municipalities
- Promote alternative possibilities for enterprise – training on entrepreneurship
- Openness to suitable co-operation projects
- Work with the media – information on the web-site of *Kodukant*
- Systematic map of the activities – archive, chronicles
- Crediting active people, societies and villages.

Several information days are held each year, enabling village leaders to gain access to information on rural policy, organisations, funding sources, local activities. Two larger networking events and village days are held each year, to connect villages and other organisations and provide a market place for their work.

Projects and activities have included:

- Local environmental projects
- Learning village
- Sustainable village
- Village Training Centre
- Entrepreneurship courses for rural women
- Friendship days of the villages
- Training of the village leaders

The South-Estonian Advisory Centre for NGOs started as a structural unit of *Kodukant* Viljandimaa in 2000.

Environmental projects are particularly successful, involving a lot of local activity, and include a national project to clean up the road verges, involving many young people.

Funding is based on projects, and they run about 3-4 projects at one time, to ensure cash-flow. However it was noted that it was very difficult to make strategic plans for more than one year ahead on this basis.

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'Kodukant Saaremaa' **Saaremaa County**

Information provided by the County Co-ordinator of 'Kodukant Saaremaa'

This is one of the last of the 15 county associations of *Kodukant* to be set up in Estonia. Established in May 2002, it was legally constituted as an independent organisation in June, and in November became a member of *Kodukant* national organisation. People had tried several times over the years to start a Saaremaa branch of *Kodukant*, but failed.

Membership – *Kodukant* Saaremaa has 19 members, mostly local NGO societies and one individual. Membership is open. The organisation is run by a Board of 5, elected at AGM, and who meet a minimum of 4 times per year in open meetings. Last year they had 11 meetings.

Finances – The annual membership fees is 200EEK (12 Euro) for the founder members and for all future members 200EEK to join and 200EEK annual payment. The annual membership fee for a county association to belong to *Kodukant* national is 1200EEK (72 Euro).

A county co-ordinator is employed on a part-time basis. There is very little money for salaries, and most work is done voluntarily. The co-ordinator is partly funded to implement the PHARE funded *Kodukant* national E-Villages Project. Funding for local activities is drawn from local sources, eg. the County Government provides small amounts of funding for the village days and newsletter from the national Local Initiatives Programme. The Municipalities in Saaremaa do not yet provide funding to *Kodukant*, though in other counties they do.

Strategy - *Kodukant* Saaremaa have developed a county strategy. *Kodukant* nationally has supported all counties to produce strategies. The group reported that they would not have succeeded with the strategy and the village days etc. had it not been for the support of *Kodukant* nationally. They organised a project to discuss and consult on the strategy before it was written. The strategy now forms part of the suite of county strategies under *Kodukant*. These are all linked to the national *Kodukant* strategy, which sets the overall direction and framework of objectives.

Activities – the county organisation in its first year has organised a range of activities:

- Newsletter
- Information days on how to develop village life, and on the EU information
- Promoting the formation of village societies. There are not many village societies on Saaremaa, and it is important for them to work together, the county organisation promotes such networking. The aim is to help people in villages to be more entrepreneurial.
- Village Day 2002 – “The village comes to town” – this was the first Saaremaa village day. It's purpose was to show town people what goes on in the villages, and to promote village enterprises. The village societies spoke about their activities. National and local politicians were present and were asked to present what they had/ were doing for the villages. An auction was held, lead by a prominent Estonian figure, which raised funds for *Kodukant*.
- Village Day July 2003 – “Honour local food” – focussed on the local food traditions of the island. Foods were brought from the villages for tasting and awards were given. The problems of regulations attached to serving local foods were looked at and the food regulator participated in the programme. At the end there was a party serving the local foods.
- From the village day has come a continuing local food project. They have set up an award scheme for food heritage – intended to help the tourist market. They are also working on support for local producers in packaging and marketing local foods. This local project is being done in conjunction with *Kodukant* nationally.
- Project to promote IT and broadband. All libraries are connected to broadband, but people don't know about this.

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CASE STUDY - Village Associations

Soometsa Village Association

Soometsa is a small group of 'villages' in Parnu County. The total population is 150, 40 of whom are under 15 years, 10 are between 15-20, 60 are of working age, and 40 are pensioners. The village is a long way from the Municipality centre, and there are no services, shops, school etc. The community are mostly farmers.

The village began to work with *Kodukant* two years ago, when one resident visited the county office to identify what they could do to help. This led to a village meeting being set up and addressed by the county manager of *Kodukant*. The result was the formation of a village group. Initially the work was run by an informal group, but in 2002 the village decided to form a legal organisation in order to raise funds and undertake project work. The village NGO has 7 Board members.

The activities of the group to date have included:

- Organising a village day, to bring everyone together and discuss the needs of the village. This was very successful and led to the establishment of the village NGO.
- Creating an outdoor village recreation area – one of the first and most important projects of all Estonian villages following independence. These recreation areas are a historical focus for village activity, but were abandoned during the Soviet period. This typically comprises a large hearth for the mid-summer bonfire, picnic tables, the special Estonian swing, a basic sports area, sandpit for children etc. A lot of thought and care goes into the design of the area, utilising local natural materials. The recreation area serves as a village meeting place and helps to build the sense of community.
- Participating in the *Kodukant* E-villages project and produced their own village plan which has enabled them to apply for more sources of funding, especially from the EU SAPARD 6 programme for rural villages.
- Developing a commercial scheme for gathering and selling berries from the forest. The group signed a contract with a Finnish yoghurt producer to gather 10 tons of forest berries. These are gathered by village members and sold for 16EKK (1 Euro) per kilo, which is considered to be a good price. Each person can gather between 20-100 kilo per day. The community organisation acts as the contractor and co-ordinates the pickers. The community retains 2.5EKK per kilo to cover their costs in managing the project and to contribute to community funds.
- The group are currently engaged in a project to develop a village centre on 7 ha. of communal land. This will include a meeting place with internet access, library, workshop and a place where the local doctor can visit and hold surgeries. The Municipality have given 40,000EKK (2424 Euro) to start the project. They have also received technical advice on building design.
- The village is situated on the edge of a nature reserve for a large area of bog-land and forest. This is owned and managed by the Government, but provides good recreational opportunities for the local people and for tourism. The village are developing a nature trail through the forest with the aim of teaching the children about nature. The area is a source of obvious pride and affection for the local community.

The group said that *Kodukant* had been essential to their development, without it they would not have had the confidence, information or organisation to proceed effectively. *Kodukant* has provided workshops, training and opportunities to network with other village groups. They have been trained in writing funding applications and developing village plans. *Kodukant* has also proved to be a good contact with the Municipality and other organisations needed for undertaking their development projects. The village would not otherwise have had these contacts.

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Ruhve Village Association

www.ruhve.tt.ee - village home page

Ruhve Village Association is a very good example of the potential of a village association to stimulate local organisation, action and development, even in the smallest village.

Ruhve is situated on the south east coast of Saaremaa County, in the Municipality of Laimajala Vald. The Municipality has 24 villages and a population of 925 in 116 km². Ruhve Village now has a population of 8 people year round and about 100 in the summer. The permanent residents are all pensioners, but are still working, fishing and keeping cows for their own use. The population, as in most villages on the island, has dropped sharply since independence. During the Soviet period the land was mostly in big agricultural collectives, employing many people. All land belonged to the State, and housing was cheap. Since independence, the young people have moved to work elsewhere. As the older people died the houses became empty and were sold – mostly for second homes.

The land is limestone with thin soils, and was previously cultivated, but now trees have taken over and, as elsewhere in Estonia, this reversion to natural forest is seen as a problem. Fishing was important, with a small port, but during the Soviet period the use of boats was banned. Now it is mostly a holiday area. In summer the village is very active. Because Saaremaa has so many tourists, development is mainly connected with tourism, the environment is seen as very important for this. There are many migratory birds, and many nature protection areas. The coastal areas are well researched and there are plans for the development of the area for wildlife. Hunting is a popular activity, as throughout Estonia.

Ruhve Village Society has 32 members (largely summer residents), with 8 Board members and a village leader (who is retired from the Ministry of Agriculture). They divide the tasks between themselves, and all work is done voluntarily. The membership fee is 100 EEK (6 Euro). All meetings of the Society are open to the whole village. In 2002, 9 meetings were held and 7 events and work days. In 2002 the village society decided to form a local village party – *Küla Valde* – to put forward candidates for election to the Municipality, they succeeded in winning a seat.

The Village Society has developed a Village Plan, '*Ruhve – yesterday, today and tomorrow*'. The plan is for 1.5 years ahead. A village meeting was held in 2001 to start the plan and all 32 members were involved in developing it. The plan was produced by the village leader, in co-operation with the resident and holiday communities. It is very professional and goes into great detail on objectives, tasks, timetables, funding etc.

The main achievements of the Village Society to date include:

- co-operation and information at all levels
- village 'political' party formed and candidate elected to the Municipality
- village information day and mid summer day
- village development plan
- village leaflet and home page
- village information signs
- meeting places and sports grounds created and maintained
- village fire/ swing made and recreation area improved
- beach cleans/ bush cutting/ verges tidying and nature conservation work

Sources of funding/ resources:

- Voluntary labour – the most important
- The Government Local Initiatives Programme
- Local Municipality
- Local fund-raising
- SAPARD 6
- Ministry of Agriculture – pays owner for cutting hay on old farms
- Ministry of Environment – pay for cutting beach meadows for the birds

The Village Society co-operates with *Kodukant*, the County Government of Saaremaa, the Laimajala Vald Municipality, in developing its work and plan. They also attend training events and workshops set up by *Kodukant* and others. They have participated in the *Kodukant* beautiful farm scheme.

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Activities

Kodukant undertakes a wide range of activities at national, regional and local levels. These include:

- Strategic activities to develop, set, promote and implement policy
- A wide range of projects including information, training, partnership and local development
- Stimulating village action and the development of village and County Associations
- Mediation and advocacy between local communities and national and local government
- International co-operation to share and promote rural development

Strategic activities

Strategic planning is a well-developed and key part of the movement. This allows the development of a clear direction for the movement, based on priorities agreed at village, regional and national levels. It also allows other organisations and the Government to understand the priorities of the rural villages. The villages undertake their own planning processes, and are instructed by *Kodukant* regional staff in the planning methods. The County Associations produce their own strategies for 5-year periods. These nest with the national *Kodukant* Strategy.



The President of Estonia addressing the 2003 Estonian Rural Parliament

The strategic process consist of a number of elements:

The Rural Parliament	A biennial forum, which brings village members together with representatives from local and international organisations, authorities and decision-makers. Plays an important role in setting overall strategic direction and making links with the membership and Government. <i>See Appendix 1</i>
The <i>Kodukant</i> Statement	The statement identifies key issues in rural development for the coming 2 years. It is produced at the Rural Parliament and presented to the Government and authorities. It guides the work of the national and county Boards who are required to take account of the Statement in preparing their own plans and projects. The statement is based on information gathered from the contacts with the county branches, membership and local people. (see Case Study – <i>Kodukant</i> Statement for 2003 example) <i>See Appendix 2</i>
The <i>Kodukant</i> Strategy	The strategy is developed over the period of 1 year, through meetings at county level and in the villages. It addresses the goals and objectives of the organisation at national and county levels for a 5-year period. It identifies the actions that <i>Kodukant</i> can take to address issues at village and State levels, and internally in the organisation. <i>See Appendix 3</i>
The Annual Action Plan	The action plan is developed and targeted at national and county leaders and discussed with county members. This guides the practical implementation of the Strategy.
The Publicity Strategy	This provides guidance on all aspects of communications, both within the organisation and with external interests at local, national and international levels.

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Projects

Kodukant undertakes a multitude of projects, at national and regional levels. At regional level these are mostly developed locally and vary from region to region, though within the priorities established nationally and through the regional strategies. Current and recent national projects include:

Estonian Program for Local Initiatives	A national fund for rural initiatives, for which <i>Kodukant</i> was the initiator. During the first year (1996) 1.1 mill. EEK (68 000 Euro) was given to rural projects in Estonia, it has now grown to 6 mill. EEK (375 000 Euro). <i>See Case Study – Program for Local Initiatives for details</i>
Handbooks for village leaders Handbooks for village leaders	Teaching village leaders how to start the development processes, write development plans for their own villages, apply for money.
Environmental project	(1997–2002) <i>Kodukant</i> , in Viljandi county, organised a twin environment project between one Swedish and one Estonia Municipality. The aim was to spread information about energy saving, waste disposal and awareness of sustainable development in general. Targets: School children and local people. An important outcome was road side cleaning, which now has been spread over the whole of Estonia.
European development exhibition	(1998) To share experience of networking.
Travelling Workshop	In 1999 <i>Kodukant</i> received representatives from EU and candidate States, local development and public sector, in seminars in 10 Estonian villages. The seminars had an effect on SAPARD activities and started the 'Rural Life Co-Operation Programme of the Candidate States' - 'PREPARE'. Rural Parliaments have since started in Hungary and Slovakia.
Local Healthy Foods	A range of activities to stimulate local food production and consumption. Supported by the Ministry of Agriculture – 140,000 EEK (8500 Euro)
Village leaders Capacity Assessment	To assess the strengths and weaknesses of village leaders in order to target training and resources, and to create a directory of village leaders. Funds from the Social Ministry and Ministry of International Affairs. – 140,000 EEK (8500 Euro)
EU Coffee Talks	To discuss Estonian integration in EU, consisted of 30 meetings, 2 in each county. Funded by EU – 110,000 EEK (6,700 Euro)
Access to Assets	To strengthen the sustainability and increase professionalism of local rural NGO's. Training and consultations in organisational development. Funded by EU – 313,000 EEK (19,000 Euro)
Estonia – The Natural Way	To provide training for individuals involved in rural tourism. Co-operation with Estonian Eco-tourism Association.
AITUMA	Helping women to start small enterprises and to establish a regional marketing network.
The Estonian Village Project 2003-4	To prepare villages throughout Estonia for the implementation of EU programmes, by training village leaders in writing village development plans, a prerequisite for funding. 3.7 mill EEK (225,000 Euro) total - funded through the EU Phare Programme (2.7 mill. EEK), and local match funding (1 mill. EEK)

See Appendix 3 – Kodukant Strategy for information on future plans

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KODUKANT – Estonian Villages Project

The 'E-Villages Project' is worth a special mention, as this project has played a key role in recent the development of the movement. The intention of the project was to build the capacity of the villages and prepare them to join the EU. The project also funded staffing in each of the 15 County Associations, who worked with the villages.

- 200 village development plans have been made – these will help the villages when it comes to raising funding from EU and national sources.
- All the *Kodukant* regional co-ordinators have been trained in village planning, this will be a resource for the local communities in the future
- The regional co-ordinators have delivered training to village leaders, using top Estonian trainers
- A handbook for village leaders was prepared on village development plans
- A video was also developed
- Better PR for villages promoted, to change the attitude to rural areas in the towns
- A Public Relations Strategy and Development Strategy for *Kodukant* was produced.

The E-Villages project enabled communities to produce village development plans. This has proved useful to the Government in enabling communities to apply for funds for commonly agreed needs.

Comments from communities that had participated in the project were that the process had been very useful in establishing a planning process, and through this making better links with the Municipalities and their plans.

Stimulating village action and Village and County Associations

A significant effort has been put into promoting and supporting the development of village associations. This is undertaken through a range of programmes for training, information, networking and direct support.

Some of these are listed above. Much of this is carried out through the medium of the County Associations who, in turn, are facilitated and supported by the national association. This work is successful in raising the capacity of local people to tackle their own development process and to work effectively with the authorities.

Mediation and advocacy with villages, local and national Government²⁴

"The most important achievements are obtained through lobby work, but for this determination is needed. The best way to get a political voice for the villages is to organise a party and invite the politicians."²⁵

Working with the Government

As a result of contacts made with Government, *Kodukant* has naturally become a mediator between villages and the Government through education, advocacy and lobbying. Since its foundation, *Kodukant* has always pursued a partner role to the public sector in the development of rural Estonia.

Kodukant has a well-developed system for enabling issues to be raised from within the movement, as seen above. Issues are raised by the members and the main brainstorming takes place at the Rural Parliament every two years. Twenty delegates from each County Association are selected. Their task is to prepare proposals and questions before the Parliament, and to put these to the working groups, which work out the declaration to be sent to the Government, Ministries and Municipalities – the '*Kodukant* Statement'. This forms the basis for working with the authorities at different levels, to promote rural issues and policy.

Kodukant makes a point of talking, on a regular basis, to every Ministry and inviting them to events, to inform them about its work. They have tried to establish a key contact in each Ministry, but so far have not succeeded

²⁴ Information from interviews with the Ministry of Agriculture and *Kodukant* leadership

²⁵ *Kodukant* Board Member

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in all Ministries. The most important Ministries for the work of *Kodukant* are the Ministry of Agriculture, which is very supportive of their work, the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Ministry of Social Affairs. Connections with the latter have proved more difficult to develop.

Representatives of *Kodukant* are also members of several committees on national, regional and local levels. A representative of *Kodukant* takes part in the round table meetings with the President of Estonia, which make proposals for the civil society. *Kodukant* is also a member of the Rural Development Board set up to advise the Minister of Agriculture.²⁶

“Kodukant has achieved this position over time, and with difficulty. It took time to earn the respect and understanding of Government. The Government didn’t know or understand what Kodukant was doing. The Government initially thought that Kodukant was just about social work and cultural activities, it now understands that it is about much more than this.”²⁷

Working with Local Government

Each County Association works with the public authorities and NGO’s in its own district. This varies between counties, but some have developed very effective systems for involving local communities through direct contact (discussions, village days, training, study tours, etc). Kodukant nationally trains and prepares the County Associations for this role.

Kodukant is encouraging greater involvement and participation between villages and Municipalities. The County Associations also work with the Municipalities to engender support for the work of the villages. The response is variable, but many Municipalities have come to understand the benefits of more organised villages and are including the village plans into their own planning processes.

It was noted that the Municipalities are not able to do the work that is undertaken through *Kodukant* as they are fully occupied

with delivering their statutory functions. They are not always as closely connected to the villages, are not as aware of the problems at village level, and can’t do so much at local level as the village NGOs can. Municipalities sometimes forget that it is important to think for the whole community, and are more representative than participative in approach.

“Many Municipalities once thought they were doing everything and that there was no need for any other organisation. They treated the movement badly and the local people involved in it. But this is no longer the case, the Municipalities have come to learn how useful the movement is to them.”²⁸

International co-operation

Kodukant is very active internationally. Having started from links with Sweden and Finland, they appreciate the value of such co-operation. *Kodukant* is now engaged with supporting other EU Pre-accession countries to develop their own rural movements. *Kodukant* is a member of the steering group of the PREPARE Programme and Network. It is also a member of the Nordic network: *Hela Norden Ska Leva*. Through the medium of these networks, they are now able to engage in lobbying at EU level. *Kodukant* also have several EU funded projects and many trans-national partners.



²⁶ Ministry of Agriculture

²⁷ President of *Kodukant*, pers. com.

²⁸ President of *Kodukant*, pers com

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Achievements

Kodukant was voted 'Estonian NGO of the year 2000' – as an organisation which is concentrated on improving living conditions, seeks to create a sense of social conscience, approaches existing problems in a new way and targets a sizeable segment of society.

Their achievements have been considerable in the 12 years since the work started, and the 7 years since the organisation was fully established. During this time they have:

- highlighted the importance of the rural areas
- developed a strong presence within the country and with the Government
- established 15 county level associations
- helped to establish and train numerous village associations
- involved over 4000 individuals directly in the movement
- given confidence and empowerment to many rural people
- established themselves internationally
- taught other countries how to establish rural movements
- undertaken a wide range of projects, some trans-national
- delivered rural development in a very cost effective way
- run the organisation with no core funding for 7 years
- maintained the energy and enthusiasm of the hundreds of volunteers
- developed the Rural Village Innovation Measure together with the Government
- promoted the successful National Programme for Local Initiatives

More specifically, the movement has made big strides in key areas of rural development. The following are issues and comments raised by different people from the villages and the Government:

Local involvement

The work is interesting and fulfilling. The villages feel part of something bigger, and get stimulation for their work. It gives local people a role in their community, and makes them feel useful and valued. It gives local people a goal to work for. It helps to make the most of people and places.

Social capital

Kodukant enables the additional use of social capital by mobilising so much voluntary action in the communities. This is much needed by Government. The added value of more active local communities is also being felt at Municipality level. People in the villages are starting to think and be more active.

Links to Government

Kodukant has helped the Government to communicate more directly with rural people. It has also enabled Government to gain a better impression of the needs of rural people. The work of *Kodukant* in highlighting rural issues has helped the Government to see rural development more holistically, and not just as relating to agriculture. This has led to more opportunities and options being opened up.

Strategic planning

Villages have been trained to make village development plans. These are used by the Municipal and County Governments in preparing their own development plans. They also enable villages to apply for funding in a more structured and agreed way. Feedback from the villages, through *Kodukant*, means that village issues are being brought to the notice of the authorities and the whole country is starting to work together.

Leadership

The identification, development and training of 'village leaders' has helped to prepare people for public office, and many of these leaders are now standing for and being elected to the Municipalities.

Local confidence

opportunities to network with other village groups. They have been trained in writing funding applications and developing village plans. *Kodukant* has also proved to be a good contact with the Municipality and other organisations needed for undertaking their development projects. The village would not otherwise have had these contacts.

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Problems

The work has not been without its problems and frustrations though. The following is a summary of some key issues raised:

Government

There was an initial lack of interest and understanding from Government. This has improved over time, but there are still significant parts of the Government that do not relate to *Kodukant*.

Kodukant has experienced difficulties in undertaking effective lobbying in relation to central and local government. There is a widely held view that they need to be more professional and stronger in their lobbying role. *“Kodukant is not influential in social welfare. It is showing what local people are, but is not lobbying or playing a major role in policy.”*²⁹

Municipalities

The Municipalities were initially hostile to the village movement, and regarded it as unnecessary and in competition with their own work. This has now improved.

Media

There has been negative reporting of the village movement by the media. Village development is not seen as newsworthy and the press are always looking for the negative angles and conflict stories. *Kodukant* has had to learn how to work effectively with the media, and now has a Publicity Strategy to guide this work.

Local connection

Some people in the villages commented that the structure of *Kodukant* is still too far from the people. Operating at county level, with very few paid staff, it is hard for the co-ordinators to make good contact with all villages.

Funding

Funding for the core work has proved very difficult to obtain for the movement, forcing them to rely on project funds. Difficulties in finding money for staff salaries and uncertainty in general financing has forced the movement to be very resourceful, but has

also resulted in an over-reliance on volunteer labour.

Volunteer time

The work needs a significant commitment of voluntary time. *Kodukant* has relied almost totally on volunteer labour, at all levels. The Boards have to implement much of the work programme, without pay or expenses, in the absence of sufficient paid staff. Individual Board members spoke of spending all their free time and half of their income on expenses for *Kodukant*.

There is too much work for the most active people in the organisation, resulting in fatigue. There may be a limit as to how long people will be prepared to continue this level of input.

²⁹ Parnu Association of Municipalities

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Commentary

“Communism taught people that they are not able to do anything, landowners did the same, so people have not developed confidence. Once we were village fools – now we are active people”

President of Kodukant, Kaja Kaur, 2003

“Starting already from the 19th century the heart of Estonian culture and economy has been a village. It started to flourish again when Estonians mastered their State and land. People started to develop their environment, Estonian nationalism and patriotism progressed and our independence was secured. Like in a real heart our most precious principles and values were fixed there.

But by now this heart has suffered a lot from bad times experienced during the past years. But when the heart is not sound, the body cannot function. We all know the song which says that Estonia lives as long as its villages live. We have sung this song untold times – sometimes with all our heart and protesting, sometimes thoughtfully to ourselves, but always knowing for sure – the song tells the truth. By now I am convinced of it more than ever.”

The President of Estonia, Arnold Rüütel, 2003³⁰

* * * * *

Origins of the movement

The history of the occupation and final independence of Estonia provides an understanding of how such a successful rural movement could have been organised in such a short time. This is a story in which rural communities play a critical role. The President of Estonia, who was a key figure in the independence process, has credited the rural communities with preserving the culture, language and identity of Estonia through centuries of occupation. He has also attributed much of the energy behind the bid for independence to the rural people.

³⁰ Excerpt from the speech delivered by the President to the Estonian Rural Parliament, August 2003

“When we told Moscow that we wanted to be independent, but this had no result, we wondered what we would do next. When we saw the Berlin wall collapse and other States fought for their independence. When we had no more resources left to deal with Moscow, we sat and thought what to do. We called on our rural communities, more than 4000 people gathered and we asked them what we should do. In the vote, 100 were against independence and 4000 for it. Moscow was shocked and afraid that all republics of the Soviet Union would do the same. This was all because we have un-written laws which we follow every day in our villages.”⁶

Paradoxically, following independence, it was the rural areas that suffered the most, while the urban areas grew stronger. The agricultural reforms led to an immediate and massive downturn in agriculture and with it most of the jobs that rural villages had relied upon. Under the Soviets, Estonian rural areas had actually been relatively well off, supplying much of the food for the Soviet Union. Suddenly they faced a bleak future, with little clear sign that the Government was doing much to help. This crisis is not the only reason that the movement began, but it explains the commitment and sense of urgency that has driven it forward.

Character of the movement

Kodukant is of the rural communities. It embodies the spirit and values of the rural villages and is driven by a passion to retain rural life and traditions. It comes ‘from the heart’ as well as from the mind, and the heart of the village shines through all that the movement does and stands for. The Estonians were famous for their ‘singing revolution’ when people joined hands and sang for independence, all the way from Tallinn to Riga. By the same tradition, *Kodukant* celebrates the rural culture in a way that touches the hearts of those who meet it.

The strongest impression of *Kodukant* is that it represents and promotes the spirit of rural village life. It is a voice and market place for rural people and a uniting force for the many dispersed rural communities. Most importantly the movement is ‘bottom up’,

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owned by the rural people and a source of great pride to them. It is run with great energy and enthusiasm, by many hundreds of rural people. It is also clearly respected by national and local government. *Kodukant* is also an emerging leader in the expanding village movements in Central and Eastern Europe. It has close relationships with the established movements in the Nordic countries, and is an active player in the growing rural lobby at EU level, through the mechanism of PREPARE.



Estonian Rural Parliament 2003

Kodukant is a lesson in how a common need and passion can build strength and empowerment, in the face of great hardship. It shows how working together can improve the image, confidence and lives of rural people, in a very short time, despite opposition and lack of resources, and in a country undergoing enormous change. The leaders and workers in the movement deserve great credit for this huge achievement and inspiration.

The power of a name

*You have to be able to use your language so that people can understand. When the mind is getting tired you have to use your heart.*³¹

Each culture uses language to convey subtleties of meaning. In Estonia it became clear that the choice of names held great significance, and is important for understanding the spirit which the movement wished to convey. The name *Kodukant* means 'home place'. This is significant in that the movement is very strongly 'bottom-up' and represents rural people in their 'home

place', not in any artificial administrative unit. It also conveys the deep sense of place that is such a powerful feature of the villages.

The national gathering in 1919, which claimed the first Estonian independence, was called *Maapaev*. The literal translation of the word *Maapaev* is 'Country Day'. The word *maa* is very significant in the Estonian language. It has a wide meaning – earth, soil, land and country – *maailm* – world. It goes back a long way into the Estonian rural culture, to the time before Christianity. It is the name of the Estonian counties *Viljandimaa*. *Maapaev* is also the name given to the biennial Estonian Rural Parliament. The ancient name for the Estonian people was *Inemene Maal* – Earth People, this was chosen as the logo for the 2003 Rural Parliament.

The Estonian Government was concerned about the use of the word *Maapaev*, when it was first chosen for the rural parliament, 5 years after the start of the second Estonian independence in 1991. This early concern about the motives of the village movement has long since been dispelled, but revealed the sensitivity that surrounds the birth of any social movement, especially when a country is struggling to define its own recent independent status.

The village

*The home place is important to people – we need to know where we came from and our history, to know where we are going.*³²

The village is a very important, traditional social unit in Estonia, and historically has also been a unit of administration, though this has not been the case in recent times. The power of the village in the social consciousness of Estonians is clear to see. This is evidenced by the statements of the Estonian President. It is also clear to see within the villages. The reason for this is not only that the village is the core social unit, in what has always been a very rural society, but also that it became a refuge for people and for their cultural values throughout the periods of occupation.

³¹ Mikk Sarv – First President of *Kodukant*

³² Village Leader of Jani Village

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There are many symbols of this 'village heart', two of the most important and historical being the 'village fireplace' and the 'village swing'. It is notable that the first communal act of the emerging village associations is always to create a village green, or recreation ground, to house the fireplace for the annual midsummer village bonfire and the village swing. These represent the main meeting place and heart of the community, and much creative energy goes into constructing them.

"Every community has its own purpose and priorities. The village is a tribe, with unwritten village rules and laws".³³ The bonds that bind people to place cannot be underestimated. These traditional 'tribal territories' often go back into ancient history, and have been strengthened over time through the addition of parish boundaries etc.



The Estonian village swing

The tendency of governments to create artificial administrative units, that ignore the power of these traditional territories, does not always make for the most successful allegiances or smooth running systems and, given an opportunity, the traditional territories will re-exert themselves. This is the underlying energy that *Kodukant* has tapped into, and partly explains why the local Village Association has proved to be so successful. The reaction against the centralised administration of the Soviet period is part of this, as is evidenced in this quote from one of the village leaders:

"The Soviet period broke the traditional tribal traditions and territories – and formed units

which we did not relate to. The idea of the Village Association builds on the human tendency to support the local 'tribe' and to feel allegiance to something that they themselves own and have created. People have had enough of centralisation – we don't want to go back to it. We don't need to do everything at the centre through big organisations - we can do it in the villages. There are too many levels and sectors".

The Village Associations

"Without our old opportunities for meeting around the village pump, we have to organise such opportunities. The village is deciding what they want and the village organisation is deciding what is feasible. In this way, the whole village is working together for the area"¹⁰

The Village Associations do not 'belong' to *Kodukant*, they are independent entities. However, they are the roots and focus of the movement and many are formal members. The Village Associations are a formalisation of the village as a unit. The model is based on that promoted by the Finnish Village Movement, and is intended to unite the diverse local interest groups into a cohesive force, able to plan and manage the development of the village in its entirety. It is also intended as a partner for working with the local authorities.

The importance of preserving the villages, as the foundation of rural life, is at the heart of *Kodukant*. The forces for change and erosion of this local level are great, as jobs and services become more centralised. *Kodukant* is promoting the message that only if the villages get organised and start to address their own futures will they survive. This message was reflected in discussions with local Municipalities, who have the responsibility for local development:

"The Municipality wants to support those who are investing in the villages. The village is the foundation of the system. The village centre is very important. It is not good enough for people to have to drive to the next town. The village centre should have an information

³³ Village leader Lääne-Virumaa County

¹⁰

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centre, meeting places, internet access, library, school.” Municipality leader

The villages are trained and networked by *Kodukant* to undertake a development process, from producing a village plan to raising funding, lobbying the authorities and implementing projects. The message is to utilise all available human and other resources to ensure the future of the village.

Leadership is an important concept: *“If we have local leadership and direction then the work can be controlled more effectively, rather than doing everything through big organisations.”³⁴ The village leader is important for lobbying the authorities and negotiating for better services.”³⁵ Every village elects a ‘village leader’ and their role seems critical to the village development process. *Kodukant* works to support village leaders through training and networking. The development and training of ‘village leaders’ has also helped to prepare people for public office, and many of these leaders are now standing for and being elected to the Municipalities.*



Kodukant village workshop

The evolution of the capacity and activities of the villages, follows a similar path to the Finnish experience, though is not as well advanced. The typical pattern of development starts with restoring and enhancing the basic fabric and environment of the village, and providing for the cultural and recreational needs of local people. Undertaking a village plan is usually a second stage. This leads to working with more strategic policies for

different sectors of the community – young, old, in-comers etc. Eventually, at a third stage, the village has the confidence to work with economic development and service delivery.

The villages equally progress through stages of developing partnership with the local authorities. Initially there is typically some resistance from the Municipalities and local politicians to the idea of villages getting organised. However, the experience has been that this dissipates as the authorities realise the importance of the village in helping them to deliver their demanding work. As the Municipalities have such limited resources to carry out their basic functions, the villages are able to help with the many tasks that are beyond those resources. Through the E-Villages project, villages have been trained to make village development plans. These are now of use to the Municipalities and County Governments in preparing their own development plans. They are also enabling villages to apply for funding in a more structured and agreed way. In one village, a further step in becoming part of the democratic process had been taken, the village had formed their own ‘political’ party in order to put forward candidates for the municipal elections.

“The added value of more active local communities is being felt at Municipality level. People in the villages are starting to think and be more active, local leaders are being identified and local village plans are being developed”.³⁶

The extent of the voluntary effort that goes into the work of the Village Associations is an indicator of the power of the village as a development unit and focus of energy and allegiance. It was said that *Kodukant* enables the additional use of social capital by mobilising so much voluntary action in the communities. This is much needed by Government.

The village movement is contributing very effectively to the building of social capital. It is mobilising the energy, knowledge and skills of people in the many small and relatively isolated communities. It is helping to link local action to regional and national priorities. The

³⁴ Village leader – Jani Village

³⁵ Municipality in Lääne-Virumaa

³⁶ Parnu County Association of Municipalities

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role of *Kodukant* in building village capacity was noted by many people. The following were typical comments:

- *“Kodukant is very good at village level. They are good at community involvement, and encouraging communities to look within for solutions before looking outside. They are good at linking community experience to help solve problems.”*³⁷
- *“Kodukant has been essential to the development of our villages, without it we would not have had the confidence, information or organisation to proceed effectively. Kodukant has provided workshops, training and opportunities to network with other village groups. They have given training in writing funding applications and developing village plans. Kodukant has also proved to be a good contact with the Municipality and other organisations needed for undertaking village development projects. The village would not otherwise have had these contacts.”*³⁸

The County Associations

Kodukant has now successfully mobilised 15 County *Kodukant* Associations – one in each of the Estonian administrative counties. This process took 7 years to complete, from the formation of the first 2 County Associations in 1995, to the last in 2002. The inspiration for the County Associations originated from the partnership with Sweden in 1992-3. Other counties watched the growth and achievements of the County Associations, and eventually formed their own. *Kodukant* nationally has assisted this process of mobilisation through networking and training.

The County Associations are independent legal bodies, but working very closely within the umbrella provided by *Kodukant* nationally. They adopt similar patterns of activity, link their county strategies to the national strategy, and work in parallel with each other. However, they are free to determine their own agendas. This model was very consciously adopted to reflect the principal that *Kodukant* is a bottom-up organisation, and does not

attempt to rule from the top. Hence, the main *Kodukant* Board is composed of representatives from all the County Associations (and the County Boards include many Village Associations). The strategic planning process is originated from the bottom up, from village to county to national levels. Each county sends a delegation to the Rural Parliament. Most of the activists at national level are drawn from the County Associations. This also ensures that the issues *Kodukant* is dealing with at national level truly reflect the very local position.

The County Associations are quite dynamic in their work. They have built extensive partnerships between the various county and local NGOs and public bodies. The public bodies are conscious of the usefulness of this linking mechanism, that can assist them in their task of working with local communities. *Kodukant* is seen to add value to their work.

The main concerns expressed related to the capacity of the County Associations to cover all of the villages effectively, with so few staff and resources. In reality much of the work is done through volunteers and Board members, who put in significant time and effort. This comes back to the ever-present issue of financial resources. A great deal of creativity is needed to develop sufficient project-based funding to maintain the activity at county level.

The National Association

*“Kodukant is an atypical example of a national NGO in that it is very grassroots”.*³⁹

The management of *Kodukant* reflects its fundamental philosophy – namely that it is bottom-up, decentralised and driven by the village people. Throughout the organisation, at local regional and national levels, it is ‘village people’ who are the key players. Through the membership structure, village activists and local NGOs are able to become Board members at regional level and then be elected to the national Board.

There is no ‘head office’, instead a dispersed network of volunteer Board members and

³⁷ Network of Estonian Non-Profit Organisations - NENO

³⁸ Soometsa Villages - Parnumaa

³⁹ Network of Estonian Non-Profit Organisations - NENO

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paid co-ordinators runs the organisation through various forms of communications technology, and occasional meetings. At present, *Kodukant* has only one national manager, who works out of the office of the County Association in Parnu.

The level of commitment and energy invested by the staff and Board members is outstanding. However the organisation knows that, to keep pace with its rapid rate of growth, it will have to seek funds to employ more people, the commitment to increasing the core staff to 5 is reflected in their strategy for 2003-8. The Board members do not receive pay or expenses for their work and it is clear to see that, whilst their energy is impressive, tiredness and personal financial commitment are issues to be addressed. It was also noted that *Kodukant* is training people who then leave to go into business where they can make more money.

Kodukant, in common with most of the other rural movements (except for Sweden), has experienced great difficulty in attracting public funding for their organisation. To date, *Kodukant* has not had Government money for core funding and are lobbying for support. "When we meet Ministers they think that we are doing good work, but they won't fund us".⁴⁰ The Ministry of Agriculture stated that they were working to find funding to support *Kodukant*, as a partner, to enable them to participate. If this is not forthcoming, the organisation will have to continue funding extra staff through project funding, as they have for all of the current staff.

The issue of public funding should not be so difficult as it appears to be. The level of output *Kodukant* has achieved from the funding it has received so far has been extensive. The amount of leverage and voluntary input is substantial. The Ministry of Agriculture recognises that *Kodukant* is very good at using finance. However, it was said that decisions on which organisations the Government supports is largely a question of good lobbying of MPs. This was also the Finnish experience.

Kodukant is all about getting involved. Although the work requires a significant commitment of voluntary time, most people

enjoy it and want to continue. The work is interesting and fulfilling. The villages feel part of something bigger and get stimulation for their work. It gives local people something to do, a role in their community, and makes people feel useful and valued. It gives local people a goal to work for. It helps to make the most of people and places.⁴¹

Relationship with Government

"The relationship between the State and the local level is that the State is like a giraffe, looking down from a great height – it does not see the details at local level. So the State needs the villages. It is important to recognise and work with the village identity from the inside".⁴²

It was commented that the Government cannot do the work of *Kodukant*, they are too remote from the people and there is insufficient capacity in the Government organisations. The Government is not seen as rural, or as particularly supporting rural interests. The Government needs *Kodukant* as a disseminator and link to the community.

Kodukant has helped the Government to communicate more directly with rural people. It has also enabled Government to gain a better impression of the needs of rural people. The work of *Kodukant* in highlighting rural issues has helped the Government to see rural development more holistically, and not just as relating to agriculture. This has led to more opportunities and options being opened up. The Government is beginning to benefit from having more capable and organised villages.⁴³

Kodukant is not satisfied with its relations with the Ministries however. The development of good working links and trust has proved to be a slow process. One of the difficulties is that the spread of rural issues spans the competencies of several Ministries, in particular the Ministries of Agriculture, Internal Affairs, Finance and Social Affairs are key. To date, good working relations have been built with the Ministry of Agriculture who are strongly supportive of *Kodukant*. "All the

⁴⁰ *Kodukant* National Manager

⁴¹ President of *Kodukant* - pers. com.

⁴² *Kodukant* village workshop report

⁴³ President of *Kodukant* – pers com.

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work they have done is marvellous". However, relations with other Ministries have proved more frustrating. This has been noted as an issue in all of the national movements.

Kodukant sees one of its key roles as being advocacy to the Government, on behalf of the rural communities. Their aim is to work in partnership with the Government to help to develop rural policy. The movement has developed a number of activities to enable this, including strategic planning, events, liaison with Ministries, participation in various policy-related committees. Despite this, the general view was that *Kodukant* is still not effective in working with policy and in lobby-work. This view came from the Ministries, local authorities and members of the movement.

The following were comments from Ministry and local authority representatives:

- *"Kodukant is not very successful in influencing policy yet, they need to be stronger in lobbying"*.⁴⁴
- *"At Ministry level, there is need for more influence from Kodukant on policy. The power of Kodukant is weak"*.⁴⁵
- *"Kodukant is not influential in social welfare policy. It is showing what local people are, but is not lobbying or playing a major role in policy"*.⁴⁶

Rural policy in Estonia is still weak and dominated by agriculture. It also lacks integration across the rural sectoral issues. The need and scope for advocacy and lobbying is great, and *Kodukant* is one of the few organisations with the breadth and grassroots credibility to do this.

The Ministry of Agriculture was keen to point out that *Kodukant* needs to increase its capacity and effectiveness in bringing this work to bear in the policy arena. *"Kodukant is an umbrella body uniting all rural interests, with the potential to help to unite policy issues before policy is developed"*. It was suggested that *Kodukant* needs to work with other organisations to gain solidarity on issues and to lobby. They also need to work more closely with the Parliament itself, as this is where the final decisions are taken. A Rural

Development Board has recently been established and it was seen as a good time to work with them.

One of the issues discussed was that Estonian NGOs, in general, lack strong leaders who are capable of doing good lobby work. This is a specialist activity, which needs an understanding of Government, policy, regulations, the EU, etc. NGOs, like *Kodukant*, do not have enough money to pay for such people, who tend to go to the private sector. *Kodukant* has recognised this problem, and wants to involve more people with the power to represent *Kodukant* at the policy level. It was also suggested that *Kodukant* has developed so fast that it has not kept up with the needs of managing such a big organisation and of working at national level.

It was suggested that *Kodukant* leaders should be bolder and more prepared to stand up for themselves. *"Kodukant members are too nice – it is not in the rural culture to fight and lobby at high level. Kodukant don't want to push themselves too much"*. *Kodukant* does not make strong enough statements to Government and the Rural Parliament gathering was seen as very friendly, but not confrontational enough. The advice was that *Kodukant* should consider dividing functions within the organisation between dealing with the bottom up and the top down as these need different skills, people and approach.⁴⁷

Relationships with local authorities

"It always serves society to ask advice from the people" - Inscription on the old town hall in Kuressaare, Saaremaa – 1670

The work of *Kodukant* at regional level is strongly focussed on building effective partnership with the range of regional local authorities, NGOs and Municipalities, and on developing links between the villages to these organisations. Each region undertakes this in their own way and is at a different stage in development, it is not therefore possible to make any overall conclusions. The following points were raised in discussions:

⁴⁴ Ministry of the Interior

⁴⁵ Ministry of Agriculture

⁴⁶ Parnu County Association of Municipalities

⁴⁷ The Network of Estonian Non-profit Organisations – pers. com.

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The Ministry of Agriculture commented that some of the most negative reactions to *Kodukant* had been from Municipalities. Mostly this seemed to be fuelled by the fear that *Kodukant* and the Village Associations could threaten the power of local politicians. It was also suggested that administrative reforms had led to competition between levels and posts, and that some may see *Kodukant* as a competitive organisation.

Kodukant observed that it very much depended on how the local groups related to the Municipality, whether they work in partnership or just put demands to them. The type of municipal leader is also very important in determining the quality of the relationship.

There have been some conflicts with County Government. This has usually been for a specific reason, and has been resolved in all cases. Saaremaa County Government commented that there was a perception that *Kodukant* tended to be too political.

However, the positive comments far outweighed the negative in all regions. This example from Saaremaa was typical: *“The goals of Kodukant are good. Their work is very useful, especially the village plans and projects. Kodukant is well represented in many institutions, and is helping local people to have a voice in decision-making. It is working well with the Municipalities and with the regional programmes. Kodukant Saaremaa was the last region to set up. The County Government had tried to do some of this work previously, but we find the presence of Kodukant very helpful as it had proved to be difficult to cope with the number of local groups”*.⁴⁸

Other regional organisations were also working well with *Kodukant*, for example:

- The Development Centre of Viljandi considered *Kodukant* to be “very good partners”, with whom they were working in joint training, promotion and information on business development in rural areas. They were also undertaking advocacy on behalf of women entrepreneurs. *Kodukant* were seen as a future delivery mechanism for training.

- Viljandi County Farmers Union said that both organisations were fighting for the same goals for rural areas. The Union was working for agricultural production and the village movement was delivering social support. *“The two organisations support and help each other and there is no competition between us”*.
- Parnu County Association of Municipalities noted that *“feedback from the villages through Kodukant means that the whole county is starting to work together. Kodukant are bringing village issues to the attention of the authorities”*.
- Poide Municipality, Saaremaa - *“It is clear that Kodukant and the village action groups are helping to harness the energy of the rural villages”*.

“I have learned that when I believe in something I just have to start it and other people will follow and want to know how to go on. We all need courage and step-by-step we get braver. To become brave you have to believe in yourself – to do something for others. Then the spark has a flame. When we get together and organise we become brave enough to talk to the authorities. When we become brave enough to talk to the authorities, they start to respect us”.⁴⁹

International co-operation

*“The first initiatives in the Estonian villages were modelled on the Swedish village movement. Now Europe has become curious to see how, in a comparatively short time, we have managed to create a fixed structure, effective network and developing partnership with the Government. Reflections on our Rural Parliaments have started the same kind of activities in Hungary and Slovakia. We hope we can also “infect” our southern neighbours with the ideas of village movement. To help them, Kodukant are working with the PREPARE international network and Latvian Ministry of Agriculture to start “moving” their villages. Lithuanians and Polish have also been seriously scouting and investigating tricks of the village movement because they have considered the Estonian model as a good example.”*⁵⁰

⁴⁸ The County Governor of Saaremaa – Pers. Com.

⁴⁹ Village leader

⁵⁰ Kaja Kaur, President of *Kodukant* – speech to the Rural Parliament 2003

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It is clear that *Kodukant* is already very much part of Europe. International co-operation has always been important for the movement, probably because it was through such co-operation that *Kodukant* was born. Links to Finland and Sweden have been critical throughout the development of *Kodukant*, and they are still their closest partners. However, since *Kodukant* has established itself so successfully, they are also embarking on the work of supporting the development of similar movements in other parts of Eastern Europe.



International delegates at the 2003 Rural Parliament

Critical to this work is their involvement in the PREPARE Programme and Network. This has been the vehicle for mobilising the new movements, and for raising funding. A more recent development is that, through the PREPARE Network, *Kodukant* is able to engage directly in lobbying and advocacy with the EU. PREPARE has spread the principals of working through partnership at all levels and with all players. This lesson is evident in the whole approach of *Kodukant*.

Entry into the EU presents new opportunities for *Kodukant*. The Ministry of Agriculture has commented that the EU focus on rural development will make a difference to attitudes of Ministries. *Kodukant* are already experienced in how to work with EU funds, and will benefit from this experience in the future. Their strong international partnerships will provide a foundation for utilising EU funding to good effect.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 Maapaev - The Estonian Rural Parliament

The name

The term 'Rural Parliament' was first coined by the Swedish village movement, who used it to describe their rural gathering. This is derived from the ancient Nordic concept of the 'parliament' – or '*Thing*'. The *Thing* was based on individual and family representation in the parliament, to take decisions on the future direction for the community. The concept for *Kodukant* is that all rural people are getting together to improve their lives.

In Estonia, this gathering has the name *Maapaev*, the literal translation of which is 'Earth or Country Day'. This was taken from the German *Landstag* – which has a stronger meaning of a gathering of the whole country. The word *maa* is significant in the Estonian language, meaning – earth, soil, land and country – *maailm* – world. The ancient name for the Estonian people was *Inemene Maal* – Earth People, which was also chosen as the logo for the 2003 rural gathering.

In reality, the Rural Parliament is a large conference and celebration of rural life and the village movement. It is a showcase for the work of the many small rural communities, a way of networking these communities and an opportunity for the Government bodies to speak directly with them.

"The Rural Parliament is a really festive event. It shows that the tree in our garden has grown quite big already." Rural Parliament speaker.

The purpose

Since 1996, *Kodukant* has sponsored the Estonian Rural Parliaments to bring together its members with other players to discuss solutions to the issues of rural development. There have now been 5 rural parliaments

since 1996, each with a different focus.⁵¹ The 2003 gathering focused on 'rural people and communities'.

The purpose of the Rural Parliament is to:⁵²

- give rural people direction
- identify tasks
- identify solutions for addressing the tasks
- give a message to the Government

The goals of the rural parliaments are to:

- increase the awareness of the different aspects of rural life
- promote and support the development of new projects
- increase awareness of the importance of using local resources to develop the rural areas
- involve the general public, media and decision-makers in the process of promoting rural development.
- prepare materials on the different themes of the parliament
- provide opportunities for networking
- develop an action plan to be presented to the Estonian Parliament
- exchange ideas and best practice examples with leaders from across Estonia and Europe.

The participants

Each rural parliament has grown in size. In 2003 there were 400 delegates: 300 were from the villages of 15 counties, 100 were guests, including 57 trans-national delegates from 14 countries. The Estonian delegates are chosen by each county organisation of *Kodukant*. In addition there are delegates from the national membership and from the Government and public bodies at county and Municipality levels. Whilst still small in comparison to the 2000 people that attend the Swedish Rural Parliament, this is a great achievement for *Kodukant*, who have only a fraction of the resources of the Swedish movement.

⁵¹ Reports of the Rural Parliaments are available through the *Kodukant* website: www.Kodukant.ee

⁵² Kaja Kaur, President of *Kodukant*

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The Programme for the 5th Rural Parliament Held in Haljala, Lääne-Virumaa, on August 23, 2003.

Maapäev is opened and closed by rural cultural presentations – song and dance. This helps to define the context of the event, and to celebrate the rural heritage.

The presentations were opened by the President of Estonia, Arnold Rüütel, who is himself from a rural community on the island of Saaru, and was a key player in securing independence for Estonia. The President gave support to the sentiments of the opening song: “when our villages live, we will live”, a reference to the concept ‘All Europe Shall Live’, which is the common theme of all the European village movements. The President is known to be very supportive of *Kodukant* and the village movement. In his talk he referred to the role that rural communities had played in the gaining of independence. He stressed the problems that have afflicted rural communities since independence, and the need to work to preserve them. He spoke of the unwritten rules and values embodied in rural community life, and their importance in developing good values in the children.

The gathering was also addressed by leaders from the county and municipal authorities, and the leaders of the *Kodukant* movement.

One whole day was devoted to workshops on community, environment, health and local food, rural entrepreneurs and life-long learning. These were held in various villages around the county. Delegates were also accommodated in the homes of village people. In this way the Parliament was rooted in the local area.

The third day gave the floor to representatives from the key Ministries, and gave the opportunity for rural people to question them on their policies. *Kodukant* also published their Statement to the Government on the final day.

The final day was devoted to an international conference, in which many of the transnational delegates, including myself, were able to make presentations. This helped to create links and to identify the many common issues that are affecting rural communities all over Europe.

The event was covered widely in the press and national television, which extended the opportunity for all people in Estonia to share in the achievements, issues and needs of the rural areas. This event was truly ‘of the rural community’. It captivated the imaginations of all who attended, and provided a strong platform for communicating with decision makers and the Estonian people. *Kodukant* are to be congratulated on their achievement – most of which was accomplished by volunteers.

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Appendix 2 The *Kodukant* Statement

Recommendations of the Participants of the 5th Rural Parliament

To the President of the Republic of Estonia, to the Parliament, to the Government, to the governors of counties, to the local governments and to all the citizens.

In Haljala, Lääne-Virumaa, on August 23, 2003.

After discussing the main subject of the 5th Rural Parliament - People in the Countryside - and evaluating it through different sub-themes like community, environment, healthcare, entrepreneurship and lifelong learning, we have come to a conclusion that:

To ensure sustainable development for the people in rural areas, it is necessary to:

1. Continue the support for local self-initiative projects from governmental resources
2. Support the organising of village life development areas, which are self-initiated and extend beyond the borders of administrative territories, establishment of such non-governmental organisations and preparation of them for managing the development projects.
3. Ensure the counselling service for village leaders and village life development associations through governmental measures (start an appropriate governmental support system for counselling the village leaders and development associations).
4. Bring the decision making on village development projects and rural entrepreneurship support to the regional level closest to the applicant.
5. Bring the information on public services and public services themselves offered to rural people from children to elderly people as close to their homes as possible.
6. Ensure the availability of elementary-, primary-, advanced-, basic- and

hobby education for rural people of different target groups (equally to urban people)

7. Use the experiences of EU member States and other rural development associations and institutions in promoting rural life more than before to widen the opportunities of rural people and communities.
8. Reinforce regulations ensuring information and fair market relations by reducing legally unfair competition, usury and deliberate bankruptcy of enterprises.
9. Ensure the reflection of rural problems in national social agreements.
10. Continue co-operation in order to achieve a functioning partnership (clear obligations, rights and responsibilities) between villages and Municipalities, County Governments and the State Government inside the Estonian local government system.
11. Through national regulations ensure the survival of biological diversity of nature and through the healthy living environment also the healthy generations in our rural areas.

The necessities and working directions mentioned above have been defined thanks to the eleven years of work of the movement *Kodukant* and as the result of the project Estonian Villages (2002-2004 Phare ACCESS). During the implementation of the project mapping of the needs of different target groups of rural people has taken place in co-operation with experts; a preliminary nation-wide support system for development associations and village leaders has also been created at the county level.

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Appendix 3 The *Kodukant* Strategy 2003 – 2007

The strategy is primarily aimed at the member organisations, to help form a common understanding and to strengthen the organisation. The strategy was prepared with the support of the EU PHARE Access Project – ‘Access to Assets’. Through this project the leaders of the movement and county organisations were trained to produce County Plans and a common strategy.

Rural decline since 1990 has been severe. Agricultural employment has decreased by 75%, and there has been an exodus of young and educated people. Low population density, high average age, low income and closed local community are characteristics of Estonian rural areas, leading to a negative image. However, rural areas also offer good quality of life. They are suppliers of raw materials and are of strategic importance. Rural areas lack knowledge of new opportunities and how to apply for funding. The perspectives of rural people are not well understood by the Government.

The development of rural life has four main tasks:

- Developing economic and social solidarity by maintaining and creating employment
- Overcoming development barriers by supporting entrepreneurship, infrastructure & technology
- Raising living standards in villages
- Maintaining rural society.

Rural life must be looked at in an integrated way. The *Kodukant* strategy is based on an integrated approach, and is person centred. The strategy therefore contains all aspects of rural life and creates the basis for development.

Vision

- 35 member organisations with 5000 members
- 7 full-time national employees and 15 county organisations with 1 employee
- 50 mill EEK annual turnover at centre
- establish a Foundation for Village Development

Development of networks

Support active networks of:

- village leaders
- village associations at county level
- international – PREPARE/ Ecovast/ Forum Synergies
- Information about their activities

PR, communication, representation of members

- Raise profile and confidence with decision makers
- Increase participation of key figures in *Kodukant*
- Increase public interest in village life
- Communications system
- Work with media
- Co-operation with decision-makers and financial institutions
- Representation of the members at State and international levels.

Training

- Professional team and well trained village leaders
- Skills of organisational management, project development, implementation of development plans
- High quality training
- Increased competitiveness of rural areas
- Training needs assessment of members
- Data base of trainers
- Training of different levels of *Kodukant* leaders and members
- Village leaders training programme
- Training for rural inhabitants
- Training visit programme for foreign guests
- Training principles

Support to small entrepreneurship in rural areas

- Preserve and develop existing companies in rural areas
- Enterprise initiatives to create a wide basis for entrepreneurship
- Creation and development of multi-level information system
- Training projects
- Co-operation projects/ networks
- Development of personal advisory service system

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Organisation management and financing of *Kodukant*

- Stable financing
- Well functioning Board
- Members taking an active part in local elections
- Influential people participating in *Kodukant* activities
- Strong, motivated, integral team with 15 county co-ordinators and 4 full time employees at centre
- Credit scheme for work
- Co-operation with Ministries of internal affairs and agriculture/ MPs/ Municipality leaders
- Realisation of sustainable projects
- Create and advisory Board
- Project committees
- Village Development Foundation
- Resources for Board in budget
- Communication between Board and members
- Continuous work with membership
- Chronicle of *Kodukant*

Development Projects

- E-villages
- Roots of entrepreneurship
- Rural day of villages
- Training of village politicians
- Monitoring the strategy

Regional Strategies

Each of the 15 *Kodukant* County Associations has a strategy, which nests with the national *Kodukant* strategy. All are published together. Each lists the mission, vision, development trends and future actions. An example from Viljandi County is included below:

Society *Kodukant Viljandimaa*

Mission:

Society *Kodukant* Viljandimaa is a vital NGO which unites people interested in village and rural development, develops the village movement, gathers and exchanges information, trains leaders and develops co-operation networks.

The Society was established in 1995 to exchange experiences from people to people, from village to village. The organisation consists of private individuals and a network of more than 40 societies.

Vision:

People in the villages of Viljandimaa are happy, co-operative, trained and believe in the future. They are able to provide villages with resources and create values.

Development trends and future activities:

- Work with members, network and co-operation partners
- Information centre as a meeting place
- Exchange of knowledge, skills, experience via training and study visits
- Increase village (home)feeling – symbols of the village, common activities, co-operation
- Promote a nature-preserving way of thinking – environmental projects in Municipalities
- Promote alternative possibilities for enterprises – training on entrepreneurship
- Openness to suitable co-operation projects
- Work with the media – information on the web-site of *Kodukant*
- Systematic map of the activities – archive, chronicals
- Crediting active people, societies and villages.

Important projects and activities:

- Heimtali – Green Village
- Parsti Environmental Project
- Learning Village
- Sustainable village
- Village Training Centre
- Entrepreneurship Courses for Rural Women
- Friendship Days of the Villages
- Training of the Village Leaders

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Appendix 4 ESTONIA - Itinerary

- 17.8.03 Meeting with the President of *Kodukant*
- Meetings in Viljandi County:**
- 18.8.03 *Kodukant* Viljandi County organisation
The Estonian Farmers Union
Network of Regional NGO Resource Centres
Development Centre of Viljandi County
- Meetings in Pärnu County:**
- 18.8.03 Saare Municipality and Kilingi-Nomme Town Council
Local village leaders
Local women's group
- 19.8.03 Soometsa village NGOs
Tourist farm
Pärnu County Government
Pärnu County Association of Municipalities
Pärnu Business Development Centre
- 20.8.03 Muraka Municipality
Muraka Village NGOs
- 21.8.03 *Kodukant* Pärnu County organisation
- The Kodukant Maapäev – Rural Parliament:**
- 22.8.03 Presentations by the President of Estonia, Ministries and *Kodukant* members
Village action groups market place
Cultural events and exhibitions
- 23.8.03 Thematic workshops in villages
Presentations by Ministries
- 24.8.03 International conference
- 24.8.03 Meeting with Michael Dower – Secretary of the PREPARE Network
Meeting with the *Kodukant* Manager
- Meetings in Saare Island County:**
- 25.8.03 Saaremaa County Governor
Kodukant Saaremaa County Association Board
- 26.8.03 Paatse Village Development Society
Leisi Municipality
Leisi Varks – cultural NGO
- 27.8.03 Ruhve Village Development Society
Poide Municipality
Muhu village societies and community centre
- Meetings in Harju County:**
- 27.8.03 Vanamoisa Village celebrations
- 28.8.03 Harju County Government
Kodukant Harjumaa
Kotka Municipality and Village NGOs
- National level meetings:**
- 29.8.03 *Kodukant* national organisation
Estonian Federation of Non-Profit Associations and Foundations
Estonian Program for Local Initiatives
Ministry of Agriculture
- 30.8.03 Saida Farm