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Abstract

Culture, Local Development Work, and Environmental Scanning

The living conditions of the Southwest Finland archipelago have changed in the course of modernization process. Former sources of livelihood, mainly agriculture and fishing, are not profitable any more. During the twentieth century, the population has been decreasing heavily. Now, municipalities and the Regional Council of Southwest Finland have a challenge to develop new means by which this area, among others, can retain its vitality, and in this work they are using national and EU funds for local development.

When Finland became a member of the European Union, Finnish regional administration changed to fit in with the structural politics of the Union. Finland then had the right to apply for financial support from EU regional and structural funds for development work. Regarding this integration process in terms of identity, it seems relevant to direct attention firstly to decentralization of the planning and decision making from the central to the local level, secondly to the acknowledgement of local distinctiveness as a merit, and thirdly to the reciprocal competition between regions when resources for development work are being dispensed.

Regional Councils, and also municipalities, subregions and other organized areas are geared to make use of their regional distinctiveness and heritage, among other things, to improve economic and living conditions in their own area. Every area needs to be special, and specially different from its neighbours. Every area should formulate an authentic local culture and identity, which should also materialize as products and services. Areas strive to get economic support from the European Union and national funds. In this whole process they engage in reciprocal competition for the same resources. In Southwest Finland archipelago this issue is specially complicated, because several organizations are working there in local development, and their working areas are partly overlapping.

The new administration, the competition for the remarkable EU support, and the activity of regions has exaggerated tensions between different archipelago areas. These tensions show firstly in the principles with which the representative areas of different organizations are defined, secondly when different areas may promote their entrepreneurial activities with the same cultural phenomena, and thirdly different organizations may also form contradictory archipelago images.

To ordinary people the own and intimate archipelago area means many kinds of things. It could be said that the central and unifying factor is the individual and intimate relationship to ones own surroundings, the people and the nature. Phenomena, which are essential for organizations, are not common and important for so-called ordinary people. They may take part for example in renovation of traditional village settings, but at the same time they criticize the musealising of the archipelago and emphasize that the modern way of life must be possible also there.

If administration and development work is not able to take into consideration the dynamic and heterogenous basic nature of culture, and the way how organizations may create also tensions in the culture, they will cause conflicts and their aim to improve living conditions is partly going to fail. With help of cultural understanding, it would be possible to alleviate these negative phenomena and really to reach sustainable cultural development.

See further following articles:

Katriina Siivonen, Does European Union leave room for local identities? Locality as a cultural semiotic process in Southwest-Finland archipelago. – *Ethnologia Scandinavica* vol 32/2002. Lund, Folklivsarkivet 2002, p. 63-77.

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Katriina Siivonen, Elämää identiteettien saaristossa. Alueellisuuden muutoksia Eurooppaan integroituneessa Varsinais-Suomessa. – Ed. Maija Mälikalli and Katriina Siivonen, *Muuttuvat asemat. Kompassi integraation arkeen*. Kulttuurisen vuorovaikutuksen ja integraation tutkijakoulun julkaisuja 5. Turku, Kirja-Aurora 2000, p. 102-118.

See also following articles:

Katriina Siivonen, Mikä on kulttuurisesti kestävä? Kulttuuri arkisena vuorovaikutuksena. - *Kulttuurintutkimus* 20 (2003):2, p. 11-17 (in print).

Katriina Siivonen, Kulttuuri – matkailun hyödyke vai paikallista elämää? – Ed. Hanna Nurminen, *Elämää ja elämyksiä saaristossa. Näkökulmia kestäväan matkailuun*. Turku, Kirja-Aurora 2002, p. 37-50.

Katriina Siivonen, La culture – source de profit pour le tourisme ou vie des gens du pays? – *Managers who think*, <http://www.undo.net/Management/>. Published 4.2.2002.