

Integrating different policies and actors around rural depopulation in Finland

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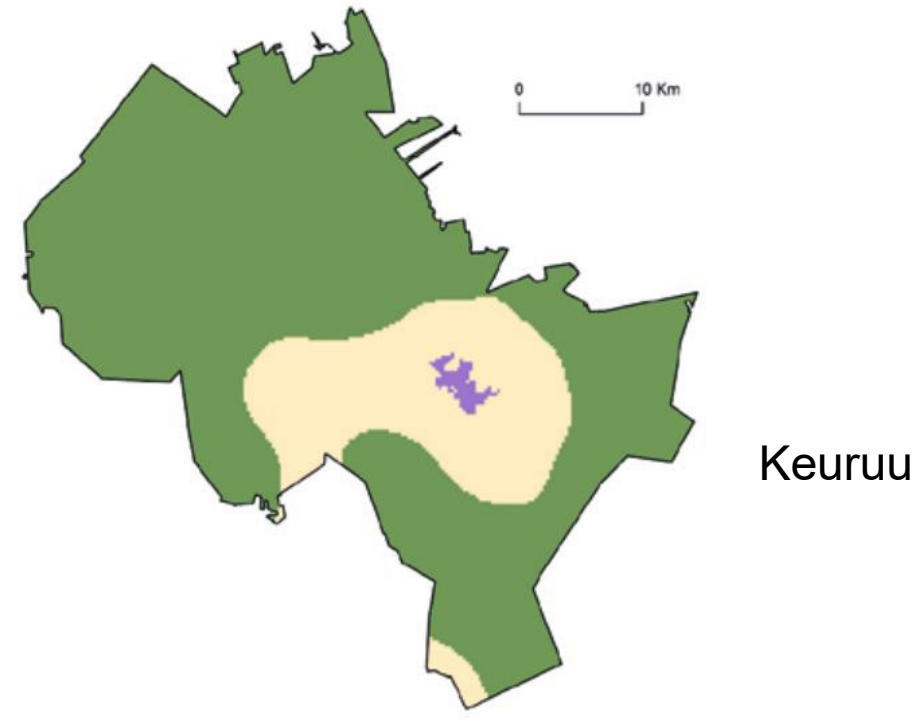
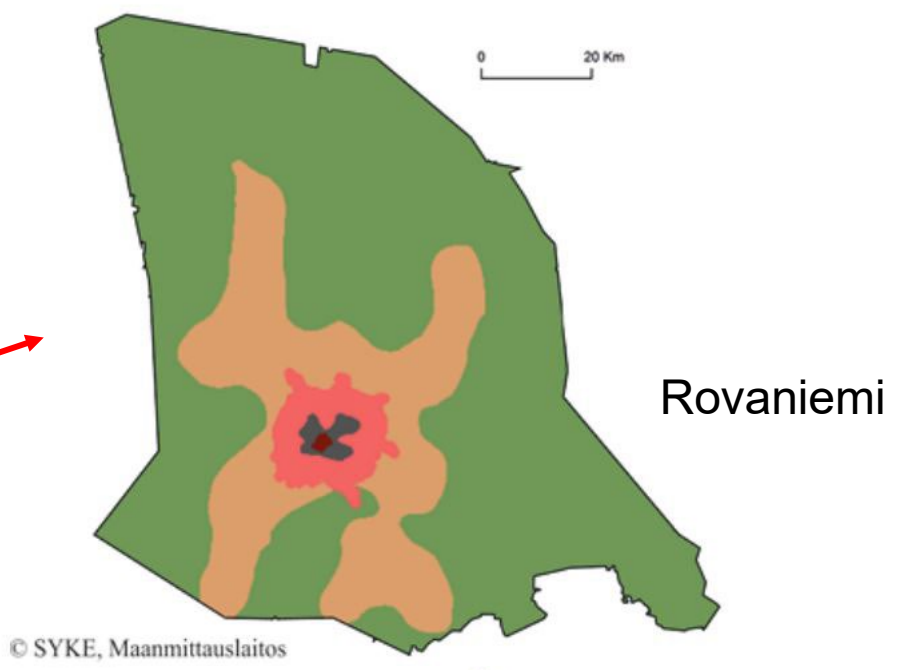
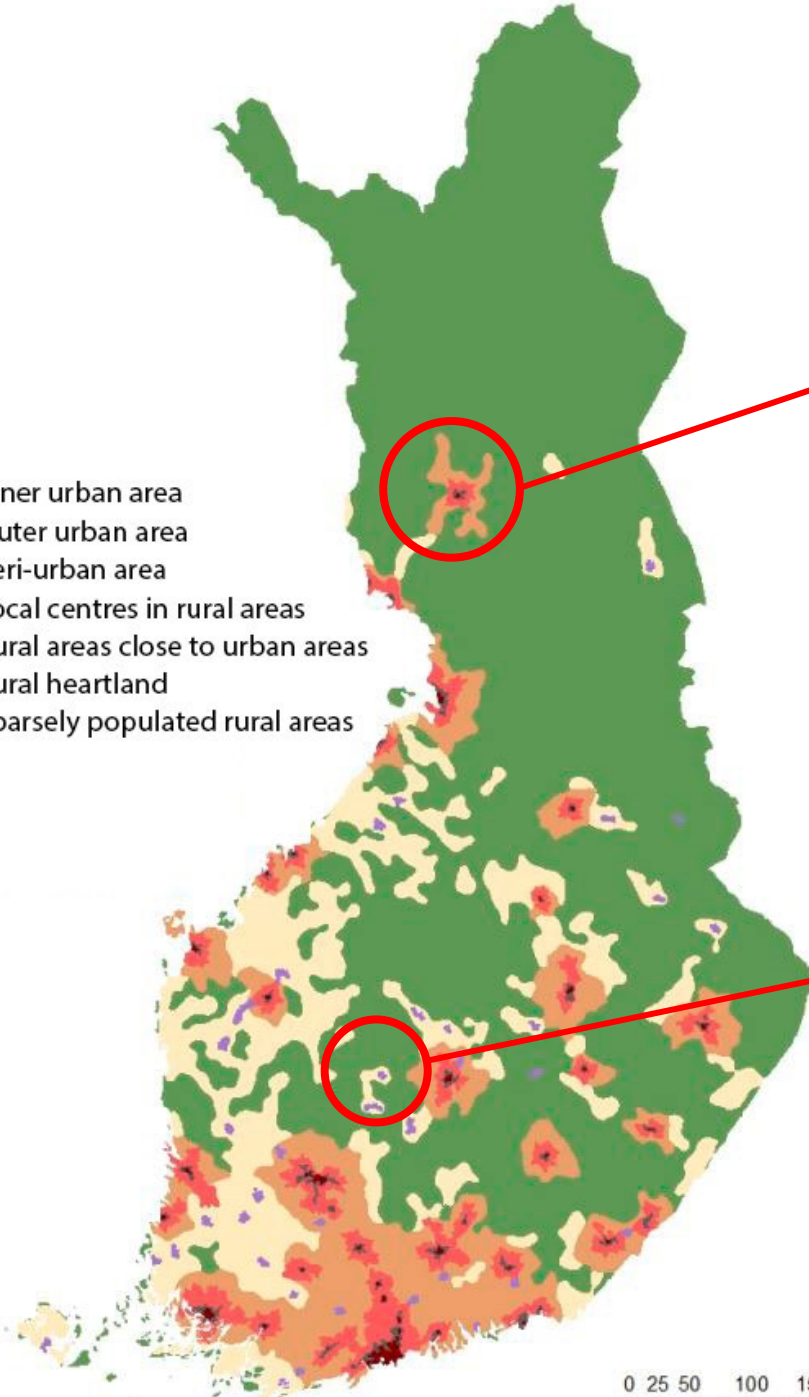
Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry

Sparsely populated areas in Finland are vast



- Sparsely populated areas cover 68 % of Finland's surface area
- Only 5 % of the Finnish population live permanently in sparsely populated areas
- 83 of 309 municipalities are classified as sparsely populated
- ... but sparsely populated areas can be found in almost every municipality when using 250 m * 250 m spatial data
- More detailed viewing of the regions and their classifications: [here](#)

- Inner urban area
- Outer urban area
- Peri-urban area
- Local centres in rural areas
- Rural areas close to urban areas
- Rural heartland
- Sparsely populated rural areas



Sparsely populated areas in Finland



- There are major challenges due to the long distances and sparse population
 - population decline and ageing that have continued for many decades
 - weakening of the dependency ratio
 - concentration of public and private services in just a few locations
- According to the Government Programme 2019-2023, ‘an action plan including experiments to boost vitality and wellbeing will be drafted for areas with a declining population’



Parliamentary working group on sparsely populated rural areas 2020-2023

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- The task of the parliamentary working group on sparsely populated areas is **to monitor** the special questions related to these areas and **to strengthen** their viability and **to develop the vitality and wellbeing**
- Four main themes guide the work of the working group:
 - Vitality
 - Education
 - Multi-locality made visible and possible
 - Needs for changes over the long term that require wider legislative processes
- All the parliamentary parties are taking part, and different rural actors and stakeholders have been heard when choosing the main themes.
- Group is governed and funded from Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry

Working together



- 8,5 million euros have been directed to promote vitality; projects developing rural tourism, cultural activities and primary education in sparsely populated areas
- These measures are nationally funded, and complement the rural development done under the CAP-scheme. Measures focus on improving social aspects of rural areas. Economic and environmental aspects were an integral part of the project funding criteria.
- Coordination between different public bodies, sources of funding, and the levels of governance have been observed.
- Building the governmental background to new measures is cross-sectoral and therefore time consuming. Working group has a cross-administrative secretariat.

Lessons we are learning



- Using parliamentary working group as a tool for fighting rural depopulation and addressing rural development in general is a newcomer of the rural development field in Finland. The currently active working group is completing its work, and the future is still unknown.
- Ways to communicate objectives and achievements is an ongoing task. We hope to change some of the most negative perceptions by presenting the possibilities and advantages of having such vast rural areas.
- It would be interesting to hear whether other countries have appointed any similar working groups, or are planning to
- It would be great to share experiences of the benefits, drawbacks and lessons learned from this kind of parliamentary work, and to discuss the ways this kind of nationally designed and funded policy connects with the CAP.

Rural proofing is recommended - raising awareness and training of legislators within central government



- Rural proofing has had broad political support from the start, but rural proofing is to be *voluntary*
- Rural proofing is a part of the new ***Guidance on the impact assessment of government legislative proposals in 2022*** (Ministry of Justice)
- **Developing the method** in order for it to be easily used within existing legislative processes.
- Investments in **raising awareness and training of legislators** within central government.
- **Rural Policy Council, rural policy networks and Island Committee** - processes for supporting rural proofing (knowledge, information) and assessing impacts of legislative drafting.