



*Delivering Services in Rural & Remote Areas:  
A Transnational Exchange of Ideas and Practices*

*Palvelujen saatavuus syrjäisellä maaseudulla:  
mallien ja kokemusten siirtäminen maasta toiseen*



# **Transferring models: the study trip as a tool**

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## **Introduction**

The transferral of experiences is highly relevant from at least two different kinds of viewpoint. On one hand, many international projects and policy programmes argue that they are creating useful models or best practices, and transferring them to new users. Naturally a practice can be claimed to be more valuable if it is transferable (or even saleable to others). Another viewpoint interested in transferring models is that of the receiving end, as it is developers to whom the models are transferred that can possibly learn from the original pilots and models. There is a wide-selection of literature on local and regional development that refers to learning regions or learning organizations and networks, suggesting that they are more efficient and more able to react to changing local needs and changing external challenges. The ambitious objective of the NPP Deserve project is to combine these interests. It aims to use and transfer models and also to use them for solving local development tasks. The basic idea and argumentation of the Deserve project is to improve the access to services in remote rural areas by transferring models.

## **Problems of transferral of experiences**

There are naturally many different mechanisms that may be used to transfer models and experiences. The transferral of models or experiences has to overcome different kinds of obstacles. Here we make a distinction between three kinds of obstacles to transferral of experiences, including: 1) obstacles of interpretation (language and media), 2) problems of transferring non-formal knowledge (experience), and 3) understanding the role of local contexts.

The most obvious method of transferring experiences is through written reports and presentations. These try to catch the transferable lessons and experiences in a formal language that can be received by persons working in another culture and place. The limitation of such formal communication is the low rate of interaction and two stages of interpretation. Firstly, individuals may formalise some parts of the original success story, selecting those parts that s/he thinks are relevant for understanding it. At the receiving end, the reader or the listener again translates the presentation into her or his local language and selects those parts that seem to be of interest locally. Only in a few cases might there be a possibility to communicate with the author, to ask questions or to describe local conditions. Even if such a possibility of communication formally exists, it is not often used because of tight schedules, a lack of communication skills, cultural barriers, etc.

In addition to these problems of communication, there often are also problems on a deeper level of understanding than just formal communication. Many researchers of learning make a difference between formalised knowledge and tacit (hidden) knowledge and claim that tacit knowledge cannot be transferred by written texts and other formal presentations. Some elements of tacit knowledge can be transferred by direct observation and spontaneous interaction. By improving the forms of communication (for example by including visual and artistic media), one also may transfer feelings and less abstract narratives. Probably the best way to transfer tacit

knowledge is to work together, when learning takes place by doing and on-going discussions and instructions.

Working together also may help to solve the third set of problems in the transferral of experiences, namely that of different contexts. There are many examples of excellent pilot practices that fail in different environments. Quite often something that functions in the setting of, for example the Nordic Welfare State, does not work in a country where many services are delivered through the voluntary sector, and vice versa. Another well-known example is the model of family farming in Finland, which did not work in the context of Russia where many legal and public institutions (like land ownership) and services to family farms were missing. To be able to understand what will function in another place, one has to transfer also a detailed understanding of the practical conditions in both the original model case and in the transferred case. This is widely recognised and many reports concerning context have been written and presented. However, it is not often known how context influences the differences between practices. This understanding, however, could be crucial for solving these problems and making local recommendations: one may try to replace an institution in one country by another type of organisation, or one may propose a legislative change, and so on. For an understanding of the practical role of contextual differences, again working together or at least getting to know the practical working process in another context is of vital importance. If there are enough resources (time and finances) available, this understanding may be gained by exchange of persons. Only in rare cases are both financial and time resources of the relevant persons available. One has to remember that when sending an inexperienced person into another context, although it may be valuable in terms of training and personal development, it is not useful for recognising the practical significance of various contextual differences.

In this report we understand that study trips may be seen as a tool of overcoming, at least to some degree, these three types of obstacles. We do not conclude that every study trip or excursion would serve in the transferral of models. Study trips may serve many good purposes. In this report we attempt to define how the study trip could be put to serve the purpose of learning about the different experiences of others in another context. We report on the practical experience of using the study trip in the Finnish Deserve project, define the tools developed through it and offer our 'model' of the study trip to be used by others.

### **Study trip from Finland to Scotland**

In the May 2005 eleven persons involved in rural development processes in eastern Finland participated in a study trip to Scotland. The trip was organised by the NPP Deserve project. The organiser in Finland was the Deserve team working in the University of Joensuu, and the programme of the trip was integrated into the programme of a Deserve International meeting organised by the Scottish partner of Deserve, the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (SCVO). The participants of the study trip came from the regions of North Karelia and Kainuu, where the Finnish Deserve project is working. The group of eleven members included persons from two universities, two regional councils, and from four different voluntary organisations working in social services and in village development.

## **Remote rural areas**

The participants of the study trip come from organisations working in remote rural areas. Both North Karelia and Kainuu belong to the Finnish periphery. They are located far away from centres; their income levels is below the national average and the unemployment rate is high; the share of agriculture and forestry is still large and these sectors are going through rapid and deep structural changes. The population remains scattered in many small village communities or even in single farmsteads in sparsely settled areas. Many of the earlier-available service units have been closed or are threatened to be closed because of cuts in state and municipality budgets (public services) or because of the diminishing demand of the population (ageing and population decrease). The existing development, training and research organisations, many of which were established during the construction of the Finnish Welfare State in the 1970s and the 1980s, try to respond to these challenges by increasing the educational level of the population, by creating knowledge about local development and by participation in the local processes formulating strategies, programmes and projects, and influencing policies.

The area that the group visited was the Cowal peninsula and archipelago in western Scotland. The group learned very early on that in spite of the short geographical distance to the city of Glasgow, this area is remote because of the time-consuming traffic connections (ferry dependency, scattered communities, long road distances caused by the narrow lochs and bays). Access to services is an acute problem, especially for those without their own means of private transport.

We try to focus in this paper on the question “*how could the rural developers from eastern Finland benefit from visiting the Cowal area in Scotland*”. What kind of transfer of experience took place? To gather an understanding of the experience of the trip we conducted two small questionnaires that were filled out immediately during the trip. The first one was filled during the flight from Helsinki to London and the second one on our flight back. The flights proved to be a quite comfortable setting for collecting thoughts and filling out short survey forms.

### **First form: on the way towards Scotland**

In our survey form of we had several sets of questions. One mapped out the *previous networking relationships* of the participants of the trip. Did they know each other and did they have previous experiences of joint work? The main result was that some North Karelians knew each other and the Kainuu people knew each other before the trip, but the only links between these two counties were the Deserve project staff and their mutual relationships. Nor did those working in the social sector or in village development know each other personally. The trip turned out to be an important meeting of rural and social development workers from the two counties. The newly-found group spirit was enhanced by practical difficulties during the travel (starting with the bankruptcy of the travel agency and continuing as a delayed flight, lost luggage, and a fire alarm at London airport).

Another set of questions in the first form were about *expectations* regarding the trip. For which questions do you expect to find answers in Scotland? What do you expect

to see in Scotland? The answers to both questions were not very surprising. Being aware of the outline of the local programme in Cowal, people expected to learn about the functioning of the village halls and about the co-operation between public, private and voluntary sectors. Hope was held for specific information about measures to develop rural information networks (funding, broad band solutions, teleworking, content production, e-services), and naturally for Deserve service models and for the progress of the Deserve project in different countries.

The question concerning more general expectations about Scotland produced two kinds of answers. On one level people expected things that might be called 'tourist experiences': exotic nature, Scottish products, fog, rain, moors, lambs, old buildings and castles, quilts, and whisky. On another level there were at the same time many professional expectations: wanting to see how services work, to hear about people's future prospects, to know how problems of marginalisation have been dealt with, including local solutions and insights (village halls and information networks).

The third set of questions the first form asked concerned opinions and experiences about how one gets *new ideas and how experiences are transferred*. According to the responses new ideas are brought about by: 1) discussions and increased experiences (reading, travelling); 2) trial and error, practical experimentation, attempts to solve problems; and 3) refining earlier experiences (combining things, utilising the experiences of others).

The ways of transferring experience are quite similar to those of getting new ideas. These answers can also be divided in three categories: 1) exchange of knowledge and experiences (publications, seminars, networking, exchange of staff); 2) going to see activities in other places, experimenting with their ideas at home, learning about mistakes; 3) construction of common understanding (that enables the transfer of experiments from one place to another). During the trip this question instigated collaborative work on at least one Power-Point presentation about the transfer of experience (it was presented in August by Veli-Matti Karppinen at the Finnish Deserve workshop in Nurmes).

### **The second form: going back to Finland**

On our flight back we again asked the participants to fill in a two-page questionnaire form. The sets of questions were about how expectations were fulfilled, what questions were answered, were there any surprising experiences, and has the study trip influenced one's thinking about rural problems at home.

Quite many of the *expectations* were met, especially the tourist expectations (rapidly changing weather, Scottish breakfast, nice people, and the practical organisation of the trip). Also the similar challenges of the countries participating in the Deserve meeting were mentioned. A reasonable picture of the situation in different countries was formed. Getting to know fellow Finnish travellers was regarded as a pleasant surprise.

What *questions were answered*? New information was gained about the situation in the remote areas of Scotland, the role of religious differences, challenges and

possibilities of the area. Participants learned about the village hall and its services, and its role in the local community. Information was received about distant learning and the models of village development. International interaction and discourse appeared to be complicated and challenging, but through knowing individuals this is facilitated in the beginning – you know whom to contact for extra information.

The *list of surprises* is interesting because it may refer to increased understanding of the different contexts. A strong impression was made by the important role of voluntary work and donations in local development, and by the ingenious ways of raising funds. The impact of retired persons was surprisingly important in voluntary work. The other side of the coin was the small role of the public sector in local village level activities. Local planning seemed to be less ‘programmed’ than in Finland. Some obstacles seem to be bigger than in Finland, such as difficulties in the transport of persons, and the slow speed of the electronic communication networks, which has a vital impact on developing e-services. However, in spite of the difficulties, people have a strong will to keep on doing development work.

Among the *very positive surprises* the respondents mentioned that the discussions with other Finns during the trip created a lot of thoughts and hopes about future. The top surprises in Scotland were a motor-boat cruise, the excellent quality of the hotel, the Scottish dialect, and the flowers (rhododendrons and others).

Some things *could have been better*. Some of the presentations were lacking, especially for someone coming outside of Deserve. More emphasis should have been put on talking about the reasons and background of successes and failures, and also on their impacts. Many member of the group felt that Finnish know-how was not sufficiently presented to others. The practical organisation of the event called for some comments: information was sufficient about many things, but some details of programme and schedule did not reach everyone adequately.

### **What did you learn?**

The second form had questions about possible changes in one’s thinking about rural problems and policies. Many of the rural problems were similar in both countries, such as an ageing population, sparse settlement structure, problems in access to training and education, and difficulties in transport. In both countries they are included in plans and reported to funding authorities. For Finns, road transportation in Finland is easy after the experience of Scotland.

The trip gave reasons for many kinds of thoughts or conclusions about development in the Finnish countryside:

- Thoughts about the role of village action have been raised, and the role of participation and the importance of knowing persons are important.
- Village halls represent social capital.
- To make successful projects one has to build trust in co-operation between village inhabitants, project leaders and funding bodies.
- In Finland the appreciation of information technology networks is higher than in other countries when developing services and livelihoods in rural areas.

- Remote and sparsely populated areas need some kind of service centres. Village plans seem to be valuable in local development work.
- How does one guarantee the continuation of transport services for the elderly?

We asked the participants of the study trip what lessons worth learning they noticed. Was there something that we might learn from? The themes of the answers come back to the earlier mentioned ones: village transport services, a combination of different sources of funding, voluntary donations, care of the landscape, wireless networks. Many individual details were mentioned: the attention given to handicapped persons, the young entrepreneurs' project (presentation by Edna Cameron), the well-organised boat cruise, Argyll College, networking, etc. These were said to be like seeds of thought that could start growing in one's mind. The use of the question forms during the trip was also mentioned as a new way of combining evaluation with the strengthening of the objectives of the project.

The village activities and the personal commitment of people in Scotland were felt to be more 'traditional' by nature than in Finland. Maybe Finnish village culture has been changed into new (more individualistic) forms because of new and young inhabitants.

### **After the study trip**

Towards the end of the return trip home, the travellers found out that they should meet again to continue the discussions about Scotland and about common problems in Finland. They were also interested to hear about the results of the two questionnaires filled in during the flights.

Surely these are not uncommon phenomena at the end of any trip. In this case, however, the need seemed to be especially strongly motivated and focussed, because the group had common objectives and also some of them had common future tasks in the preparation of regional policy proposals. A date for a common workshop organised by Finnish Deserve was set for less than one month's time in June.

In the preparation for the workshop the following principles were followed: although the results of the trip to Scotland would be presented, it was not the only topic. The programme of the workshop consisted of three themes: 1) information about *the Scottish situation and experiences* (report about the trip and seminar in Scotland); 2) discussions about the transfer of experiences (results of the questionnaires, and a presentation from Kainuu about an earlier experience of international co-operation between villages); and 3) planning of Finnish activities to improve access to services in remote rural areas (presentations about villages). Another principle was that the scope of participants was not limited to those on the trip, but all persons who had been participating in Finnish Deserve seminars earlier were invited. In this way both the information about Scotland and the results of the discussions during the trip could be distributed and shared. We tried to follow the guideline that a learning network is also an open and growing network.

The meeting met with overwhelming enthusiasm. Our tight schedule for the workshop was destroyed by discussions that could not be stopped. On the spot we decided to

continue the workshop after the summer holidays in August. We continued in the second workshop by focussing more on the issues of transferral of experiences and future activities. One additional possibility to learn more about the transferral of experiences was to participate in the national conference on the international relations of villages, organised by the Finnish Central Association of Village Action. This conference took place in the town of Vammala in September. During this large seminar there were also presentations by individuals who were involved in Deserve from both North Karelia and Kainuu.

After these common meetings, the networks in Kainuu and North Karelia have concentrated on things of their own. The Kainuu network has focussed on selecting and starting village level mini-projects supported by Finnish Deserve. The North Karelia network has been involved in building a new regional forum to support rural services. Its preparatory meetings are continuing and the forum plans to hold a large regional meeting in April 2006.

### **Study trip as a part of the local policy development process**

One of the aims of the Finnish Deserve project is to help the local makers of strategies and policy proposals to understand the new possibilities of developing services for remote areas. In this process information about new models and experiences may influence how the priorities of and action lines for project proposals are defined. In Finland the year 2005 was called the 'super year of programmes', because so many regional, national and EU plans and programmes were prepared, many of which set the stage for future projects of rural development.

The members of the Finnish Deserve team influence the policy programme work in many ways, and the experiment of the study trip is only one of them. All the members of the study trip group are involved in discussions about new programmes in some ways. Many of them work in organisations that propose and implement new projects. In diagram 1 one may see the whole process, which consists of presentations of the models of different Deserve countries, participation in the meetings that prepare regional programmes, the study trip, and the workshops that discussed the experiences of the study trip. This process of network building has led to a joint effort to build a new regional forum of rural services in North Karelia. Another future action may include a joint study trip to northern Sweden.

Diagram 1: Making an impact in the rural policy planning process (North Karelia)

Deserve in regional rural policy planning processes															
Presenting Deserve models to rural developers (seminars)	X				X		X					X			
Participation in meetings preparing rural programmes				X	X						X	X			
Study trip to Scotland							XXX								
Workshops & Seminars about study trip results								X		X					
Planning of Rural Service Forum in North Karelia											X	X	X		
Presentations about rural services and development					X						X				
	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	March	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan
	2004		2005												2006

### Conclusions: the study trip in the transferral of experience

In most cases study trips are found to be useful, but we may use them even more effectively for transferring models and experiences from one place to another. The study trip may help to overcome barriers of experience transfer. In the beginning of this paper we mentioned three such obstacles: 1) obstacles of mediated interpretation, 2) problems of transferral of non-formal knowledge (experience), and 3) understanding the role of contexts. In our experience a study trip may be used to lower all three types of barriers. Members of the group may share their language skills and cultural competence. They can learn jointly during the trip. They can also share their knowledge about their home context and jointly discuss the meaning of differences between the visited place and home.

However, not every trip and not every travelling group functions in this way. People take part in study trips for many reasons, and the composition of the group may be very heterogeneous. Members of a study trip group may not be interested in the same things, they may not be eager to know each other or to share their skills and experiences. It is important that the members of the group have common objectives or common problems to be solved. Common interests and objectives motivate the members to discuss with each other, and it supports the formation of a network. When people find the other persons useful in terms of the common objective, this creates trust and makes joint learning enjoyable. In such a case, a trip is not an end in itself. Neither does it end after coming back. It becomes part of a longer joint process of networking and co-operation. It is possible to facilitate and enforce these kinds of elements in the study trip. We have listed measures serving this purpose in the following list of recommendations.

## **Recommendations**

- The group should consist of persons with different backgrounds and complementary competences, who have however a common objective or common challenges to meet.
- The study trip should enlarge the network resources of the participants, e.g. the trip is an opportunity to learn to know new people who have similar interests.
- The programme of the trip should be many-sided but one main object should be related to the common objectives of the group.
- The trip becomes a part of a group learning process, in which group members may share their skills and competences and jointly make observations during the trip.
- The learning process and co-operation is continued after the trip. Discussions about the expectations and lessons learned can be facilitated by, for example, easily filled in forms before, after and during the trip. The learning process may be continued after the trip in group discussions and seminars.
- The trip may be an important part of a longer process of future networking and co-operation. It may serve as a tool to overcome barriers of experience transfer and it may help to contribute some results towards the common goals of the group.

## **Appendix 1: List of participants of the study trip**

### *North Karelia*

Ms Sinikka Eronen, Joensuu District Leader Association (Local Action Group)  
Mr Jarmo Heiskanen, Regional Council of North Karelia  
Ms Marleena Laakso, North Karelia Association for Social Care  
Mr Esko Lehto, University of Joensuu, Karelian Institute  
Mr Jukka Oksa, University of Joensuu, Karelian Institute  
Ms Elina Pajula, Finnish Federation for Social Welfare and Health, North Karelia office

### *Kainuu*

Ms Andra Aldea-Partanen, University of Oulu, Kajaani University Consortium  
Ms Paula Karppinen, Joint Regional Authority of Kainuu  
Mr Veli-Matti Karppinen, Kainuun Nuotta ry (Kainuu Regional Voluntary Association)  
Ms Tarja Lukkari, University of Oulu, Kajaani University Consortium  
Mr Mauri Saastamoinen, Nakertaja-Hetteenmäki Village Association

**Appendix 2: Questionnaire form at the beginning of the trip**

(translated and condensed, there are empty lines for answers after each question)

**A. BACKGROUND**

Date:

- 1 Name
- 2 Year of birth
- 3 Place of residence
- 4 Your role in development work
- 5 Your earlier experience in development activities

**B. TRANSFERRING EXPERIENCE IN DEVELOPMENT WORK**

- 6 In your opinion, how do you get new good ideas?
- 7 In your opinion, how can you transfer experience and lessons?
- 8 What are your previous experiences of international exchange?

**C. EXPECTATIONS ABOUT YOUR TRIP TO SCOTLAND**

- 9 What did you know beforehand about Scottish rural areas or rural development?
- 10 What questions do you expect to be answered?
- 11 What do you expect to see in Scotland?
- 12 How well did you know your colleagues (before the study trip)?

*List of the participants of the study trip*

1 = I did not know her/him beforehand,  
2 = I know her/him by name,  
3 = I have met her/him,  
4 = I have co-operated with her/him, specify how

**Appendix 3: Questionnaire form on the way back**

(translated and condensed, there are empty lines for answers after each question)

**A. BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**1**      **Your name**

**B. YOUR EXPERIENCE ABOUT THE TRIP TO SCOTLAND**

**2**      **What corresponded to your expectations?**

**3**      **For which of your questions did you find answers?**

**4**      **What surprised you?**

**5**      **How do you view the rural areas from your own region after this trip  
and what things do you feel to be important now?**

**6**      **Have you been able to learn something from what you have seen on this  
trip?**

**YOUR COMMENTS**

**Thanks for your efforts!**