

## Study visit to Finland – The land of the lakes and berries (17.05.2015 - 24.05.2015)

### Participants:

Germany: Sara (SoLaWi Netzwerk), Peter and Dominique (Die Agronauten)

After arriving at Tampere, the biggest inland city in northern Europe, we went to Ylöjärvi where we stayed at a house at the lakeside – Finland has about 188.000 lakes. We used the first day to work intensively on the document “Training in Alternative Food Distribution Systems (AFDS): Regional Logistics.

We met up with the participants from France and Belgium that arrived a day later. Being complete we began our visits of projects in Finland with a community village and its farm, called “Kurjen tila” which is located close to Tampere. This project started with a group of 10 families who wanted to find a place to live on the countryside. After several years without success most had given up, but then they got the offer to buy a farm with the belonging land<sup>1</sup>. Now they – 7 families with around 40 people – are 4 years living and working there. Beside

<sup>1</sup> According to the founders finding a farm with its agricultural land is something that is getting more and more difficult in Finland because the farmers cannot find successors and therefore sell the land to neighbors apart from the farm houses.

of 2 old houses they could use for living, they got the permit to build 8 more – which they are building using organic methods. The farm with 30 ha is run by only two people (one learned after buying how to grow vegetables) but with the help of up to 4 volunteers<sup>2</sup>. On the farm they have many animals, like 9 cows (Finnish breed) mainly for meat production, 64 sheep (Finnish breed) for wool, skins and meat and chickens for eggs. Moreover they produce vegetables and herbs on about 1.5 ha and cereals are also planned. The community feels well accepted in the surrounding population.



Community Farm (L), Inside the Supermarket Bus (R)

Afterwards we went to the Ahlman foundation which is in Tampere. This foundation exists already for 110 years and educates young people in different professions and also has projects related to local and traditional food. Examples are: a garden of regional edible plants and a dairy farm with cheese production e.g. eggcheese which is a Finnish speciality only made by 2 producers, yoghurt, buttermilk and sour cream. The cows they have are Finnish traditional breeds, too.

It was also there where we met Eeva and Antti who are administrators of two of the REKO regional groups. REKO is an abbreviation for fair consumption (that is the translation, for sure). REKO is a concept where consumers and producers get in contact via Facebook. The REKO users in Finland are increasing exponentially – after about 2 years now counting more than 40,000 consumers and 60 regional groups. Groups are founded on Facebook for every regional group and then producers and consumers can join. The groups and therefore also the members are checked by the administrators who work on a voluntary basis.

The REKO is a great opportunity for the farmers because they get better prices for their produce and the customers pay less as well. As this is a fast growing movement they are in

---

<sup>2</sup> Funded by the European volunteer program.

exchange with the (tax) authorities which are supporting it so far. It is a welcomed development because the farmers' markets were almost extinct in Finland.

Some skeptical questions came from the foreign visitors, but the REKO administrators are optimistic that it works fine and they want to stick to: "*Keep it simple*" as long as they can.

On our last visit of the day we went to see a rolling supermarket. It is a big bus converted into a supermarket. Those buses are usually in remote regions, but this one is offering mostly local products in a more urban area.

#### **4<sup>th</sup> Day: Pedersöre municipality, Farmer owned Slaughterhouse, Rosenlund museum and garden**

Our trip continued in Pedersöre, a municipality in the Swedish speaking region in the west of Finland. The mayor welcomed us and explained that 18 % of the agricultural area is cultivated by organic farmers (compared to an average of 10 % in whole Finland). Then we had a look at a small scale slaughterhouse (maximum of 1000 animal units per year) which is owned by a group of 18 farmers. With this slaughterhouse the farmers can get a diversity of products to be sold directly to customers. There is less stress for the animals because the slaughter house is nearby and well designed. With less stress in the process also the meat comes out with better quality. Moreover the farmers could improve the quality and the diversity of their products.

In the evening we got a tour through the "Rosenlund" Garden in Jakobstad which was built by a priest in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. He was very interested in agriculture and introduced not only apple trees in the area but also new techniques.



In the slaughterhouse (L), the Rosenlund Garden (R)



## 5<sup>th</sup> Day: The fisherman, the REKO Founder and the REKO market

This day was dedicated to REKO. In the morning we visited one of the 10 remaining fisherman of Jakobstad, called Roland Semskaar. He goes fishing all year long – in winter through ice wholes which he reaches with his car. He is very satisfied with the regional REKO group of which he has been part of since one year. While showing us his sauna on the quay with a huge window facing the sea he explained us: *“I am really happy about REKO because a lot of the customers there are funny young people like you.”* In fact, at his shop the buyers are much older and REKO is helping him to get new young customers.

Afterwards Thomas Snellman, who is part of our learning partnership, showed us his organic farm. Thomas is one of the founders of the REKO, although he is not selling there or having another advantage from it except of the possibility to be a customer there. He has a herd of 35 cows which are always outside – even when is -42 C°. Their food consists mainly of grass or hey and silage in winter, respectively. Besides of his 32 ha of agricultural land he also has about 20 ha of forest. Some of that he turned into a protected area as it never has been cut. In this “national park” Thomas’ 69 year old sister is living with her husband producing their energy with solar panels, a small wind turbine and firewood.



At the Roland Semskaars place (L), Thomas Snellman and his herd (R)



## Living in the forest

In the afternoon we had the chance to interview some customers and producers of the “REKO market” that took place that day. Everybody we were talking to was happy with this new opportunity to get local food. Producers liked that they

- Can sell directly to the consumers and talk to them
- Get a better price
- Can produce things that they couldn't produce before
- Could even start a new business

Consumers were fond of this because they

- Could buy directly from the producers and talk to them
- Get local food – often products that were not available before

One of the explanations for the fast growing REKO system is, that in Finland there are almost no farmers' markets left.



At the REKO market

## **6<sup>th</sup> Day: CSA “Herttoniemen Ruokaosuuskunta” in Helsinki, Perho training restaurant, Helsinki Island**

After some hours in the train, we arrived in Helsinki to head straight to the “Perho” training restaurant which is part of a vocational school. There, the students can become chefs and professional kitchen staff amongst other professions. This culinary school has a partnership with the Urban Cooperative Farm “Herttoniemen Ruokaosuuskunta” (CSA) from which they get 10 shares of vegetables and the students also go there to experience sustainable food production. A special optional class is about “sustainable gastronomy studies” which is in popular demand.



The mentioned CSA was our next destination. There we realized, how difficult the conditions are in northern countries like Finland as the growing season is so short, because of cold winter and the short summer with very long days. Therefore the members of this CSA only get vegetables for a period of about 6 months. The members are supposed to work 10 hours a year (if not they have to pay 10€/hour) on the fields of 3 ha of vegetables. The Transport to the 5 distribution points is done by an external logistic partner where the 100 members can pick up their shares.

*“The compost heap is the heart of a farm”* – Heidi, the head gardener of Ruokaosuuskunta

We finish the day with a picnic on “Suomenlinna” a group of islands in front of Helsinki which was former fortress constructed by the Swedish rulers.



At the CSA “Herttoniemen Ruokaosuuskunta”

### **7<sup>th</sup> Day: CSA “Omamaa” in Järvenpää (North of Helsinki)**

We used our last day in Finland to get to know another CSA close to Helsinki (about 30 min north of Helsinki). Jukka Lassila showed us around on the farm called “Omamaa” which belongs to his family since the 17<sup>th</sup> century. One of the first things we saw were huge brown letters “written” into a meadow saying: “Food Sovereignty Now” – a message to the passengers of the planes from and to Helsinki airport. It was enriching to witness that the farmers on this farm like to experiment on their fields i.e. the vegetable beds are many single strips spread over a big meadow, or plots with many different fruit trees and shrubs and other plants like strawberries in the understory, a wooden heated greenhouse and other things.

Remarkable about the CSA is that they produce not only vegetables and eggs, but also rapeseed oil and products from cereals including bread. Hence the shares are consisting of all the food one person needs including recipes to prepare the received ingredients – the only drawback is that this person has to be an egg eating vegan.

We finish our stay in Finland with a visit at the World Village Festival in the city center to listen to international bands.



At the CSA “Omamaa”