

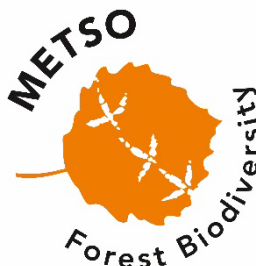
Protected areas of private forests as tourism destination



In Kuusamo cooperation network, visually attractive protected areas are uncovered from private forests. Local nature-based tourism enterprises are offered a possibility to use these spots, nature trails leading to them and potentially existing facilities with their customers. Enterprises make an agreement with the forest owner to compensate the use.

Summary

Kuusamo cooperation network (2016-2019) was one of the first attempts to use private forests as a tourism destination and provide a possibility to compensate their use for private forest owners. The aim of the Kuusamo project was to enable contracts between private forest owners and tourism entrepreneurs. The contract has features of land tenure, collective implementation and result-based agreement. Contracts increase access to attractive landscapes and sceneries, and this recreational access can improve physical and mental health. Contracts support rural viability and vitality. The project was initiated by the Forest Centre who took contact to voluntary forest owners and planned 14 nature trails leading to the protected spots. Local tourism enterprises are offered a map of these nature trails as well as additional facilities (parking area, shelter, fireplace). The length of the trails vary from 2-5 kilometers, and they are not marked into the forest. Forest owner and the enterprise are free to agree the compensation model, for example number of people visiting the spot. By the end of the project, four contracts have been made.

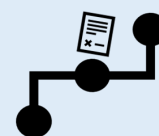


RESULT-ORIENTED



The amount of money that forest owners receives from the enterprise is based on the number of tourists visiting the area.

VALUE CHAIN



The terms of use are agreed between forest owners owning the valuable spot and local nature-based tourism enterprises. Tourism enterprises compensate the visits to the spots, as well as use of trails and other facilities for forest owners. Tourism enterprises can take their customers to new, uncrowded, and untouched places that these trails and spots offer.



Photo by Laila Hökkä

Objectives

1. Create a contract model and enable cooperation to born between forest owner and local tourism enterprises (rural vitality).
2. Promote nature-based tourism (landscape, scenery, recreational access) together with biodiversity protection and forestry, i.e. multifunctional forest management.
3. Deliver knowledge of Finnish forestry and multiple uses of forests to foreign tourists (rural vitality)

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Problem statement

The idea of Kuusamo cooperation network evolved from the fact that there are several, unknown, attractive spots in private forests that are already protected via METSO-program, and these would be beautiful places to visit for outsiders too. Moreover, tourism enterprises needed places that are uncrowded, silent and untouched "pearls", to take their customers, supporting the realization of the significant potential of growth in nature-based tourism in Finland. One of the key ideas in this project was not to give any new restrictions for forest owners who have already voluntarily protected part of their forest. Rather, the idea was to inform tourists about the forestry and silvicultural treatments along the nature trail leading to the protected spot. Forest Centre was the initiator of the project.

The project in Kuusamo was one of the cooperation networks within METSO program. Main aim of cooperation networks was to fit together forest biodiversity protection and other uses of forest through enhancing cooperation among different actors and forest owners. Particularly, the initial focus was in connecting neighboring forest areas to create more clustered biodiversity protection networks. Networks test and develop local ideas, support rural vitality and livelihoods, recreation and multiple uses of forests.

METSO program is biodiversity protection program for the forests of Southern Finland. Southern Finland is dominated by private, family owned forests, and forests have been managed dominantly for timber production. The METSO program was developed as a response to increasing societal understanding that declining forest biodiversity needs to be considered more seriously. Moreover, program was a response for Natura 2000 process, where the top-down approach and poor informing of forest owners led to conflicts. METSO program highlights voluntary means and more acceptable solutions.

The valuable spots that are protected in METSO program were selected according to certain criteria. Especially, the focus was on sites that are in natural state or that can be easily restored. Sites can host endangered species, include notable amounts of some structural characteristics, or be important due to ecological connectivity. Elements such as small natural water features, decaying or burnt wood as well as mature broad-leaved trees are important. Protection is always voluntary for forest owners, who can agree either temporary (10 or 20 years) or permanent agreement.



Data and Facts

Participation: 14 spots and nature trails leading to them were finalized during the project. By the end of the project (2019) four contracts have been made between forest owners and enterprises.

Involved parties: Private forest owners provide their forests to be visited. Nature-based tourism enterprises take their customers into these forests. Customers are typically foreign people. Forest Centre established and led the project, organized meetings for forest owners and enterprises, and planned the nature trails in cooperation with the voluntary forest owners. Part of the trails, and the facilities along them are owned by municipalities or State Forest (Metsähallitus), and their use have been agreed separately with them.

PUBLIC GOODS



Landscape and scenery



Recreational access /
Improvements to physical
and mental health



Rural viability and vitality

INDIRECT EFFECTS

Forest owners were asked stories about their forests. These stories are included into trail descriptions, and this might increase the local cultural heritage. The establishment of trails evoked some new projects in villages such as building a sightseen tower, which might further increase recreational use, and rural viability more broadly also among local people. Even though most of the spots were already protected, some new biodiversity protection areas were established when planning the trails.

CONTRACT

Private-Private contract

Contract conclusion:

Written agreement



Payment mechanism:

In the example agreement payment system is x-number of euros per visited person (product price). However, forest owner and enterprise can freely agree the payment system for each case separately.



Financing party:

Market-sector oriented



Start/end of the program:

First contract was made in January 2018 and three contracts in December 2019. It is up to contract parties to agree the length of the contract. It can be, for example, five years. The project ended in 2019, but the aim is that forest owners and enterprises can continue establishing new agreements.

Requirements for forest owners: The key idea of the contract is that there are no new restrictions or demands for forest owners. However, if forest owner conducts silvicultural treatments (pre-commercial thinning, harvesting) s/he needs to report this to another party of the contract and to Forest Centre who can update the description of the nature trail and spot accordingly.

Controls/monitoring: There is no control or monitoring. The agreement is based on trust; enterprises honestly report the amount tourists visiting the spot.

Conditions of participation: In the project, there was limited amount of resources to construct nature trails, and not all the volunteered forest owners were able to participate. Besides limited resources, the spots needed to be attractive enough also for the customers of the tourism enterprises. Example contract is freely available for all interested in the internet pages of the project (Kuusamon yksityismetsien luontohelmet tutuiksi, 2019).

Risk/uncertainties of participants: There are no great risks for forest owners or nature-based tourism enterprises. Forest owners haven't invested their money; the ecologically valuable spots have already been protected and compensated, and the nature trails have been planned by the project. It is in the responsibility of the tourism enterprise to take care of their customers not to harm e.g., the facilities or endangered species in the forest. The trails are marked only on maps, there are no signs in the forest. If there are many visitors, the trails may become visible in forest, which may increase the use of them by private people (based on Everyman's right).

Renewal/termination: Forest owner and enterprise can agree about the renewal.

Funding/Payments: Forest owner and nature-based tourism enterprise make an agreement about the use of the spot, nature trail and the services included (e.g., fireplace, parking place). Enterprise pays for the forest owner according to agreement. In the example agreement, the compensation is based on the number of persons visited (e.g., 5 euros per person). However, the parties of the agreement can freely decide the compensation level and the basis for payment (lump sum, per person). In the agreement, it is possible to define minimum and maximum number of persons visiting the spot for example during one year. Typically, this kind of compensation is not much compared for example to sums received from biodiversity protection or timber trade. According to the experiences during the project, it seems that for the forest owners, it is more important to agree about the terms of the use and be aware who and when is using the nature trail and facilities included, than to get small level of monetary compensation.

If a forest owner has very attractive spot in an easily reachable area, s/he can find several enterprises interested. In these cases, it is possible to get reasonable compensation, e.g., by providing also firewood and a good shelter (cabin)."



LOCATION

FINLAND



Region: Kuusamo FI1D6

Context features

Landscape and climate: Kuusamo is located in northeast Finland, in highland area (200 meters above the sea). Boreal spruce and pine dominated forests as well as big and smaller lakes are typical. Climate is continental, average temperature around the year is 0°C and the snow cover is one of the greatest in Finland. Growing period during the year is 125-135 days, the annual temperature sum is 800-900 degree days.

Forest owner structure: The project was targeted for private forests in Kuusamo area, however, some of the nature trails and facilities are in commonly owned forests, state or municipality owned forests. In Kuusamo area, the average size of forest holding is 39 hectares. 65% of the owners are living in their holdings or in a same municipality. In Kuusamo, forest owners are on average 60 year old and 72% of them are male.

Information: www.metsakeskus.fi/kuusamon-yksityismetsien-luontohelmet-tutuiksi

SUCCESS OR FAILURE?



The presented contract solution, in which protected areas of private forest are used as places for tourists to visit, can't be yet classified as success or failure. The acceptance of forest owners was in general high, but the enterprises have been cautious to make contracts. During the project, four contract were made, and by the spring 2022, project leaders were not aware of other contracts. If the number of contracts remains low, the use of public money to map the spots and nature trails in the project hasn't been efficient. According to first experiences, the compensation level that forest owners receive was not very high, although all they receive is additional income from their forests. On the other hand, the project was piloting this kind of contract solution, and all the experiences are valuable when establishing similar compensation models elsewhere.

Reasons for success/failure:

- Forest owners have already protected part of their forest and nature trails to these spots can generate new income to them (success).
- The compensation level is low, especially if there are only few enterprises interested (failure).
- Tourism enterprises are cautious to agree the contracts (failure).

SWOT analysis

