

FINLAND

Environment & climate action

Location

Lappeenranta

Programming period

2014 – 2020

Priority

P6 – Social inclusion & local
development

Measure

M7 – Basic services & village
renewal

Funding (EUR)

Total budget 139 000

EAFRD 46 704

National/Regional 42 256

Private 27 800

ERDF 22 240

Project duration

2015 – 2017

Project promoter

Pien-Saimaan
Suojeluyhdistys NGO

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Website

www.piensaimaa.fi/

Supporting co-operation and knowledge sharing to tackle eutrophication in a vulnerable lake system.

Summary

Pien-Saimaa is a lake system in south-eastern Finland covering approximately 120 square km and is a significant source of income and well-being in the area. The lake system is vulnerable to eutrophication and therefore action was needed to protect the system's water quality.



The project increased cooperation between all the relevant stakeholders. It organised a series of training sessions on wetlands construction and management for land owners and constructors. A wetland expert was also hired to provide technical support, and through this process 64 new wetlands were created. It also supported the design and construction of water protection measures in forests (e.g. trenches). The promoter of this project is the Finnish NGO Pien-Saimaan Suojeluyhdistys.

Results

The water quality in the lake improved significantly in some areas. The changes are gradual and the project cannot claim to have achieved all this alone, since there are other projects in the area, but the wetlands are a substantial contributor.

The project helped to create 64 new wetland sites whereas only 15 had originally been foreseen.

The project created an extensive network between different types of stakeholders, from municipalities, SMEs, private citizens and foundations and other third sector actors, who are now working together to protect the lake from eutrophication.

The project was replicated at five other nearby water systems .

Lessons & Recommendations

- Wetlands are a great tool to improve biodiversity. They are especially beneficial for birdlife, but also for elk, bats, amphibians and aquatic invertebrates.
- Landowners, both public and private, and local people need to be included very early on. Without their involvement, the wetlands will not get built, and even if they are built, they need to be maintained to ensure their future.
- Sharing is caring, and we therefore need good contacts with the media and also complementary service offerings e.g. nature trails, boats, hunting possibilities etc.
- Wetlands are only one solution for water protection. Using several methods (selective fishing, reed cutting, pump solutions) can further improve the results.

Context

Pien-Saimaa is a lake system in south-eastern Finland covering approximately 120 square km and is a significant source of income and well-being in the area. The water in the system is quite shallow and water circulation is slow. This makes the lake system vulnerable to eutrophication and has a negative impact on the lake's potential to be used, either for professional or recreational purposes. Action was therefore needed to protect the system's water quality.

The project took a new approach in its activities. The main focus was on the people, and on how to get them involved in the process. The poor water quality was accepted as a fact, there was no finger pointing, and the goal was to find solutions, not to place blame.

Participation and involvement were vital. The beneficiaries not only got to plan and implement the work, but to also see the direct effects of this. It is easy to research and plan, but there is great need to see and experience the effects. It helps when the people involved can feel proud of their activities and achievements.

Objectives

The objectives of the project were to improve the water quality in the Pien-Saimaa lake system by creating more wetland sites. It also aimed to reduce the influx of nutrients from nearby forests into the lake, and increase knowledge sharing and cooperation between all of the lake system's stakeholders.

Activities

The project focused on the development of maintenance plans for existing wetlands and the creation of new ones. Micro-organisms in the wetland naturally purify the water from different pollutants and excess of nutrients. In addition, wetlands also act as biodiversity hotspots and carbon sinks, thus contributing to the fight against climate change.

The project also supported the creation of water protection plans to be implemented by the forestry sector. This included the creation of trenches in the forests which prevent nutrient runoff from the forest into the lake.

The project organised six training sessions for land owners and one for constructors.

It helped create 64 new wetland sites and this process is still ongoing, despite the fact that the project has ended.

Five forestry water protection sites were implemented.

The project employed a wetland expert, who motivated the land owners to build new sites, supported them in planning the sites, created their maintenance plans, supervised the construction work and helped to source and secure appropriate financing.



Main results

Economic benefits:

The improved water quality in the lake system has definitely brought economic benefits to the area, although these are hard to quantify. The fisheries sector benefited from the improved water quality in terms of revenue generated from both professional and recreational activities, boating and other service providers, cottage rental, etc.

Other indirect economic benefits were created, for example the value of real estate around the lake has been affected by the quality of the lake's water.

The construction of the wetlands and forestry protection sites generated income for the local contractors.

Environmental / Climate action benefits:

The water quality in the lake improved significantly in some areas. Originally, the project envisaged the creation of 15 new wetland sites, but ended up contributing to the creation of 64 new sites.

The initiative effectively improves the quality of local water resources, fighting eutrophication. In addition, wetlands act like carbon sinks, effectively contributing to climate mitigation.

The project also benefits soil quality and biodiversity. The main beneficiary in biodiversity terms is birdlife, but various other species also benefit from the wetlands.

The wetland expert who was hired by the project did not only create interest in the wetlands, but also made it much easier for landowners to actually build one.

Social benefits:

Improved water quality has a positive effect on the livelihood and well-being of the people that either obtain their income from the lake, live, or spend their free time close to it. The shores are quite densely populated, there are approximately 2500 summer-houses around lake Pien-Saimaa.

Networking value:

The project created a massive network of different types of stakeholders from municipalities, SMEs, foundations, private citizens and the third sector, who are now working together towards a common goal. A new cooperation between the third sector and private companies has been established that will help stakeholders to access private funding for works to protect the lake’s water quality.

Over 400 participants attended the largest events of the project. The project holders estimate that they reached thousands of people who are either directly affected by or who had an interest in the project.

‘Networking through doing’ was very important, as the people involved are committed to maintaining the sites and are empowered by both the cooperation and by results they can see, feel and be proud of.

The hands-on approach that the project used helped get people involved. The focus was on getting things done, the people felt that they were actually making an impact. The project helped, gave advice and found contacts, so that the people could focus on the doing.

Transferability:

The project can be replicated in other contexts. This approach has already been repeated in five other nearby water systems.

Synergies with other EU policies:

The project directly contributes to several elements of EU environmental policies and legislation in fields such as soil, water quality, climate mitigation and biodiversity, amongst others.

At a regional level, the initiative is fully in line with the environmental goals of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region.

There have been a number of other EU and private projects in the same water system, some still continuing, for example ERDF funding has been used for the pumping sites. The work started by the project is continuing, with more wetland sites still being built using private funding.



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“We are extremely proud of our project. We started with practically nothing, i.e. no financing or experience. But we networked and got support from authorities and other NGOs, and these even led to new projects.”

Marjut Sassi, Project coordinator

Additional sources of information

<http://www.piensaimaa.fi/>

*This project has been categorised under ‘Environment & Climate Action’ by the nominating National Rural Network