

NEST—project
Northern Environment for Sustainable Tourism

An innovative
InterregIIIB -Project



Project plan for

Sustainable nature tourism development
in
Koli National Park and the Koli Resort, Finland

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1. Preliminary PPP -project for main NEST-project process design

Preliminary project “PPP — People-Parks-Progress” for sustainable tourism development project for four countries in northern periphery region started on 21.1.2004, when the INTERREGIIB-program decided to support the Preliminary PPP-project. Finland was integrated to the project through the sustainable nature tourism planning project for Koli National Park and the Koli Resort. Since then there has been 12 meetings, seminars and discussions in Koli National Park and Resort with the next groups of potential partners for the main project:

- 2 meetings with enterprises (appr. 50) integrated with the customer services of the Heritage Centre Ukko in Koli National Park.
- 2 meeting and 1 seminar with enterprises and partners (appr. 20) integrated with “the environmental education through camp schools” project of Koli
- 2 meetings with enterprises (appr. 25) integrated for the marketing of tourism services in Koli Resort
- 3 meetings with the partner associations involved with Koli National Park management
- 2 meeting with regional and municipal authorities running regional development in Northern Karelia Region
- 1 meeting with representatives of the Ministry of the Environment, which is mainly in charge of the basic domestic financing for INTERREGIIB projects.

The results of the meetings and discussion were that all the groups of interests feel themselves as stakeholders for the future development of tourism in Koli National Park and Resort. They are interested to be potential partners in proper task oriented organisations and in subprojects for the main project. Some of them are interested also to support the main project financially.

The potential partners have received all available information about the basic concept for planning the development in the main project. They agree the basic methods and forms of organisation for the process.

The main project was formulated according to the idea of the nesting sites of the grouse (*Lagopus lagopus*, *mutus*, or *scoticus*) as the symbol bird of the Northern Periphery Program. The family of *Grouse* lives and nests in the nature of all the four partner countries of the project. National parks and respective protected scenic highland areas are the natural sites for the northern *Lagopus* –birds. The project name “NEST — Northern Environment for Sustainable Tourism” was chosen for the main project to create the image of basic values of the target areas as highly valuable natural environment and the capacity of these sites to contribute new life and progress through sustainable development for nature oriented tourism.

2. Partners

2.1 International partners

In the INTERREGIIB project “NEST — Northern Environment for Sustainable Tourism” the main partners are as follows:

- Finland; Finnish Forest Research Institute (METLA), Koli National Park
- Island; the Icelandic Regional Institute, The Hornafjordur University Centre and Development Agency for the Region Thingeyjarsysla
- Scotland; The Highland Council
- Sweden; County administration of Västernorrland

The co-ordinating partner is the Hornafjordur University Centre, Iceland.

2.2 Regional partners for METLA-Koli National Park

In the Finnish sub-projects the regional partners for the “NEST — Northern Environment for Sustainable Tourism” -development project are as follows:

- Environmental Centre in North-Karelia Region
- North-Karelian Region
- Karelian Express - the regional organisation for tourism marketing
- University of Joensuu, department of geography
- Municipality of Lieksa

2.3 Local co-operators for the Koli -projects

Local partners taking part to the real planning and outputs of the “NEST — Northern Environment for Sustainable Tourism” -project together with the METLA-Koli National Park are as follows:

- Koli tourism marketing group and the private tourism enterprises (Hotel Koli Ltd etc) in Koli Resort
- Enterprises in the network of the Heritage Centre Ukko in Koli NP

- Enterprises in the network for camp schools and environmental education in Koli NP and Resort

3. Main objectives and tasks for the development project

3.0 The mission for Koli National Park

The Finnish Eastern Karelia Region lies in the most eastern edge of the continental EU. The main natural attraction there is the high forest hill and lake-landscape known as one of the most famous National Landscapes in Finland. Koli National Park together with the Koli Resort is one of the oldest and most popular nature and culture oriented tourism resorts in Finland. Koli NP is ranked as a unique geological nature site on the Finnish tentative list for Unesco World Heritage since 2004. Koli National Park was founded in 1991 after 100 years status as a most famous Finnish nature tourism destination, but also as an example of long term social conflict with development strategies for conservation and tourism. Koli NP provides multi-functional services for annual 100 000 visitors. The services include; heritage centre, national park hotel, harbour with visitor centre, down-hill skiing services, nature trails, huts for hikers, heritage farms, educational information and national park research.

Koli is a pilot park among the Finnish National Park Network with the profile of networking with the local society, enterprises and research institutes introducing research and education for the park management. Metla/Koli National Park is a member of EUROPARC Federation. Koli NP is the only national park in Europe, which is under the managerial charge of research institute (Finnish Forest Research Institute) giving challenges for different research based pilot development projects. Park has a Master Plan for park management proposing a detailed operational planning project for sustainable nature tourism development for park integrated with the local society.

3.1 Objectives for the NEST-Koli-project

Koli National Park together with the Koli Resort is the main nature and tourism development centre in North Karelia Region and in the municipality of Lieksa in Finland. For the future the critical issues to be solved in development strategy are as follows:

- the conservation of the bedrock - soil formations and the lake in landscape

- the conservation of the local heritage in swidden agriculture and small scale handicrafts
- transfer the scientific Koli-information for the benefit of education and tourism
- to develop the motivation of actors to conserve the basic values of Koli Resort
- to assure the visitors and customers about the sustainable development of tourism in Koli Resort
- to activate the private investors to create quality oriented services for tourism customers

The NEST-projects strengthens the activities and networks of the potential new type rural developing centres, like visitor and education centres, in or near-by the national parks and other protected areas. In details the NEST-Koli-project sets objectives to create better environment and more sustainable cultural heritage, more jobs and more economical activities to remote rural areas with very limited development strategies until now.

In the whole Europe and other countries the well studied development programs for tourism development are highly appreciated but rare. In four NEST-partner countries there are no other equally comprehensive cases until now on the issues combining sustainable development in the context of national parks and other protected areas and the development centres of rural networks. The results and the products of NEST-projects produce a pilot model for the partner states for further sustainable nature tourism development.

METLA-Koli NP develops sustainable tourism potential, including sustainable management for attractions and resources, and sustainable nature tourism supply and demand, through all the four themes in the INTERREGIIIb project entity.

Theme 1: Networking

Koli NP is creating social capital through networking with the following steps:

Action 1: Koli Networks

A1a: Open international internet network for visitors and customers

METLA-Koli NP makes long term contracts with the international Northern Periphery partners and with the regional and local partners and enterprises to create and update an international internet site, pages and links for changing information and marketing and selling of park related goods and services. All the information is in Finnish and English.

A1b: Park Forum for local managerial network

METLA-Koli NP creates a permanent forum for planning, funding and monitoring the sustainable park management and development in Koli NP.

A1c: Thematic Park Business Actors Network

METLA-Koli NP organises a network of organisations and other actors for developing and changing ideas, goods and services for developing park related economic activities in connection to park related development centres (like visitor centres and heritage centres) within the circle of Northern Rural Periphery Partners.

Theme 2: Park Related Business

METLA-Koli NP is contributing sustainable economical and social development in the park related local societies through the following actions:

Action 5: Developing Sustainable Economical Use for Park Resources

A5a: International workshop on the Park Products and Business -issues

MetlaKoli NP organises an international workshop for developing ideas on economic development opportunities and possible restrictions in parks and other protected areas Northern Periphery countries.

The workshop will be organised in Koli NP in the autumn of 2005. All the partners of the NEST-project will attend there and report of their own plans and preliminary findings. Also the other stakeholders, which are represented in the project steering groups of four NEST-partners will attend the workshop. The workshop produces material for the NEST-project books (see Action 3Scotland).

A5b: An international competition on “park products”

Metla-Koli NP organises an international competition for developing 4 innovative and sustainable park related quality products (goods or services) for the customers of national parks and protected areas involved in the NEST-project.

All the partners activate an local competition to produce innovative goods or services related to their parks and development centres. The Finnish Partner organises the evaluation of the competitions and the awarding process in co-operation with the other NEST-Partners. Samples of innovative “park products” shall be introduced to the partner communities with an exhibition which is planned and produced through the Action A9b.

A5c: Monitoring customer satisfaction

Metla-Koli NP produces a case study about customer satisfaction in connection of chargeable services and fees in the visitor centres.

Different models for financing and acquiring resources for park management are discussed widely in organisations which are respective of the parks and related protected areas. New fees and chargeable services create varying feedback among the customers of the parks. Also the park related business in or in connection of the parks is a new approach for developing welfare and local sustainable development. The case study organised by the Finnish Forest Research Institute on customer satisfaction gives important information for the strategy in the economical sustainable development.

A5d: Models for organising business oriented services

Metla-Koli NP produces a case study about different models for organising enterprises and third sector actors to produce information services for visitor guidance and interpreting local heritage in park visitor service centres.

The governments seldom have enough resources in their budgets for developing the parks and park visitor centres according to the wishes and needs rising in the local park related resorts. Thy some part of the park services can or need to be produced through external business services or through the non-commercial services produced by the third sector actors. The new innovative ideas and case studies to solve the customer services in NEST-projects will be analysed in the case study report produced by the Finnish Forest Research Institute.

Theme 3: Quality for Development

METLA-Koli NP is contributing sustainable development through quality related approach with the following actions:

Action 9: Ecolabel assuring the quality of management and giving new tools for sustainable nature tourism marketing

A9a: Ecolabel for park and the local society

METLA-Koli NP aims to create an innovative sustainable tourism quality development process for the park and the surrounding resort including the local society. The final target is to achieve the EUROPARC Sustainable Tourism Charterpark –label for the park together with park related actors in the local society.

The European Federation of National and Natural Parks (EUROPARC) has developed a model for sustainable tourism development process with similar targets that Koli NP

shall face in future. The process is creating an integrated development program for the park and park related local society. The process creates and strengthens networks and tailors the development steps for each local partners. The process is organised under the framework of “European Charter for sustainable tourism in protected areas” and it integrates also the local resort and enterprises as the users of park resources to the process. The process awards the actors with the “EUROPARC – Charterpark” ecolabel certification at the end of successive project.

In the Europe there are 17 Sustainable Tourism Charter -parks until 2003. In France there are 7, in Germany 3 and in Italy and Portugal 2. In Spain, Italy, Austria and Northern Ireland/UK there are 1 in each. All Charter parks are playing a leading role in the development of sustainable tourism in their country and in Europe. There are no EUROPARC Sustainable Tourism Charterparks in Finland, Island, Sweden or in Scotland. Koli National Park together with the Koli Resort shall be the pilot project of EUROPARC – Charterpark concept in Finland.

The main process flow for Koli National Park and Koli resort is as follows:

1. Registration as a candidate Charter park with Europarc Federation
2. Producing the Charter requirements; Forum (see Action A1b), Strategy, Action Plan
3. Evaluation by EUROPARC
4. Completion of the requirements
5. Implementation of 5-year Strategy and Action Plan
6. Monitoring and renewing the process

In this NEST-project the first 4 steps will be produced. The key actions occur in the step 2 of the process. The Forum integrates all the stakeholders as partners to create an participatory planning process. The costs of the Forum are budgeted in the Action A1b. . The Strategy integrates the basic needs and efforts of the partners to common visions and goals. Especially the networks for local product marketing (see Action A1c) and environmental education are studied in the strategy as a priority segments. The strategic key issues studied in the ecolabeling process are as follows:

- Protection and enhancement of natural and cultural heritage
 - Improving the quality for the tourism experience
 - Raising the the local and public awareness
 - Development of tourism specific to the area
 - Training of actors
 - Protection and support of the quality of life for local residents
 - Social and economic development
 - Control of tourist numbers

The Action Plan is a formula supporting the unique needs and resources for each partner. The steps for development are identified and agreed in the Action Plan directly for each partner. Especially the following criteria are studied in the Action planning process with each local actor:

- Landscape protection
- Energy saving
- Waste management
- Skills for customer services
- Customer satisfaction
- Access for handicap customers
- Education in information services
- Sustainable use of raw materials
- Use of local products and services

A9b: Social benefits gained through the quality development process

Metla-Koli NP produces a case study about the social capital gained within the local society and the segments of customers through the ecolabeling process in Koli NP and Resort.

The process will be carefully studied as a research project by the Finnish Forest Research Institute. The research is focusing on the awareness of enterprises upon sustainable development, segmentation of the visitors and the visitor awareness monitoring model. The research report will benefit the NEST-project during the process and also other parks and nature tourism resorts in Europe.

Theme 4: Environmental Education

METLA-Koli NP is contributing sustainable development by activating environmental education and transfer of scientific knowledge for the benefit of educational nature tourism programmes in connection to National Park with the following actions:

Action 13: Programmes for Environmental Education in Koli NP

A13a: A new educational and international thematic trail in the park

Developing a geological nature trail with educational information in Finnish and English for schools and special user groups in Koli NP. The basic scientific information in Finnish for the thematic trail has earlier been developed in co-operation with the Finnish Geological Survey Institute.

Thematic trails are useful for transferring the scientific knowledge for environmental education. The park related camp-schools serve today mainly the local schools. However the camp-schools and nature-schools have a high capacity to create interesting programmes also for international camp-schools and other visitor groups. The lag of international information is today one of the most difficult constraints for further

development. In Koli NP the scientific geological substance is available today only in Finnish. The information tables, trail structures and basic materials for camp-schools on paper prints in Finnish and English will be produced by the Action A13a.

A13b: International educational pages for 3 thematic trails in internet

Creating educational international internet pages for the educational content on 3 thematic nature trails (geological, biological and cultural heritage trails) in Finnish and English for the benefit of camp school programmes in Koli NP as a part of the Northern Periphery Camp-school Network.

The schools and visitor groups who are planning a tour to Northern Periphery nature are nowadays actively seeking preliminary information through the internet. If the basic educational substance about thematic trails could be delivered through internet to potential customers, the decision to travel to some Northern Periphery Park would be more easy and realistic. In Koli NP the basic substance information on two thematic trails (biological and cultural heritage trails) shall be translated into English. The educating information about all the three thematic educational trails, including the geological trail produced in the Action A13a, will be delivered through the internet to potential customer groups as products of the Action A13b-sub-project.

4. Products of project

NEST -project aims to produce in Koli NP and Koli Resort benefits as follows:

- Better status in park management and in tourism marketing with the EUROPARC Charterpark ecolabel for sustainable development in nature and cultural heritage on the Koli NP and Resort
- Work and incomes created for the local society (more than 50 enterprises have activation of marketing and selling) through the development of new type development centres in NP and Resort
- Social capital is gained through the new networks uniting the park and the local society
- More satisfied and educated visitors and customers when the quality of leisure environment and content of the information services are better than earlier and the skills of tourism actors are more quality oriented
- Education oriented study reports (3) and the summary book of project proceedings serve other parks and resorts.
- Thoroughly tested pilot model for new type of sustainable development for nature tourism resort for the benefit of other similar centres.
- The core group for International “Grouse Park” -network is created under the Northern Periphery label for continuing development.

5. Evaluation and Steering

The regional Steering Committee for Koli NEST-project includes the following partners:

- Finnish Forest Research Institute
- Environmental Centre of North Karelia
- Region of North Karelia
- Karelia Expert - Tourism Marketing Ltd
- Lieksa municipality
- Local enterprises
- Local associations

The role of the Steering Committee is to give advice for the working plan, to control the use of the resources for the project in principal level and to evaluate the results and findings in the process.

The evaluation of the project products as a part of EUROPARC-Charterparc process is in charge of EUROPARC Federation. The Federation shall nominate an independent evaluator to study the results of the project and report the results to the Federation for the possible certification.

6. Monitoring the development

The Koli NEST-Project produces a plan and starts the actions for the sustainable tourism development in Koli National Park and in Koli Resort. The realisation of the plan will take 5 years after the first steps. The sustainability of the process itself is controlled by a monitoring committee (like the Forum). The partners in the monitoring committee should be more or less the same than in the project steering committee. However in Koli Resort already exists a so called Koli Advisory Committee under the leadership of the local Lieksa municipality. All the main stakeholders are members of the Advicory Committee. Therefore the monitoring of the proceedings of the process after the Koli NEST-Project will be a task for the Koli Advisory Committee.