Finnish-Russian co-operation in environmental education

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The idea of environmental education is to increase the level of ecological, social and cultural sustainability. One of the aims of Finnish-Russian co-operation in environmental education is to make people understand that nature does not know any borders. It is also work to lower prejudices between nations.

When the Nature Reserve Friendship was established, the co-operation was on a rather abstract level, mainly meetings of directors and making plans for future actions. Now we have stepped to more concrete work.

Part of the co-operation is financed by both organisations, Metsähallitus and Kostomuksha Nature Reserve, but main financieration comes from the Finnish ministry of the Environment from the budget for cross-border co-operation. This extra budget has made it possible to expand the common activities.

Fig. 1. Heads of the cooperation partners, Ms. Merja Väisänen from Metsähallitus and Mr. Sergei Tarhov from Kostomuksha Nature Reserve.
For four years we have made a written plan for co-operation between the Friendship Park and the Kostomuksha Nature Reserve. This plan can be clearly divided into four sections: development of co-operation, environmental education, management plan and development of ecological tourism. In the field of environmental education the common works are divided into visits of school groups, participation in the March for Parks -happening, creating relationships between the Finnish and Russian schools and development of the methods of environmental education. Environmental education is, however, included in all co-operation. It can not be separated from other concepts.

On Finnish side of the Nature Reserve Friendship environmental education is mainly dealt with in the Kainuu Nature Centre according to the principles of education in Metsahallitus. In our work the presence of the Research Centre of Friendship park is a great help and support. By combining the forces of these three organisations - Metsähallitus, Kostomuksha Nature Reserve and the Research Centre of Friendship Park - we have been able to do much more than any of these would have done alone.

During only a few years this work has received many forms. Some examples:

**March for Parks**

Already four years the Friendship Park has participated in the March for Parks -happening in Kostomuksha. Finnish school children have sent their drawings, stories and other works to Kostomuksha and joined the competitions and exhibitions. For three years now the best parts of these works have been collected into a booklet, which every participant gets and which will remain as a concrete remembrance for future times. So far Finnish school groups have not attended the main festival, but the staff of Frienship park has joined it several times. It can already be seen that slowly this world wide happening is coming familiar also in Finland.

*Fig. 2. The logo of the March for parks event.*
Groups

In the Kainuu Nature Centre and Friendship park we have had numerous visits of Russian school groups and specialist of environmental education. These groups come not only from Kostomuksha, but all over Russia to get to know both Finnish and Russian side of the Nature Reserve Friendship. In Kuhmo we have had visitors from more than 15 National Parks and Zapovedniks in Russia. Like Kostomuksha Nature Reserve is working as a window to the west, Friendship park is becoming a window to the east. As we are told, the results of these visits are becoming visible since in many places around Russia they are now building visitor centres of their own utilising the experience and knowledge they got in the Kainuu Nature Centre.

Camp school

In autumn 2000 the first camp school of Finnish school children in Kostomuksha was organised. Organising this pioneer camp was a result of common planning work of four sides: Kainuu Nature Centre, Kostomuksha Nature Reserve, Kontio school from Kuhmo and Kostomuksha school no. 3.

The Finnish group visited their friendship school, where Russian pupils had organised different programs together with their teachers first to get to know each other. Then the groups spent three days together and managed very well without a common language. The pupils visited the Kostomuksha Nature Reserve. They were told about the beavers living in the area, about the nature of the area, about the traces of Ice Age, about history, culture and so on. They got information about Kostomuksha town and its surroundings, and they learned a lot about travelling abroad. This camp school was a success, which no doubt will have successors now that the biggest planning work has been done.
Seminars
Together with the Russian partner we have organised common seminars for Finnish and Russian teachers both in Kuhmo and in Kostomuksha. The main idea of these seminars is to create contacts between schools and to hear how environmental education is dealt with in both countries and also to get some new ideas for practical work. We have created materials and programs for environmental education for different age groups to be used in nature, in the protected areas and in schools, and we help teachers in their realisation.

In environmental education both sides have something to give and something to receive. Maybe the biggest difference is that on Russian side people, also children, know more about species and have more exact information about nature, whereas on Finnish side we are dealing with wider objects like ecological sustainability.

Fig. 4. A camp school group.

Fig. 5. Finnish-Russian seminar of environment education for school teachers in 2000.
**Training**

Since environmental education is not meant only for young people, but for everyone, we have organised different training courses, for example on ecotourism for Russian and Finnish enterprises on how to use protected areas in ecotourism. We have studied nature together on both Finnish and Russian sides, we have done common field work in the landscape ecological planning, we have organised training in customer service and guiding etc. All this is also a part of environmental education.

![Excursion to Kostomuksha in 1999.](image)

**Information materials**

Different information materials support environmental education. For example, in co-operation we have done a brochure of the Nature Reserve Friendship, we have worked out badges with the emblem of the Nature Reserve, we have internet pages and some small publications. Together we have planned and built exhibitions in the Kainuu Nature Centre, and now in the office of the Kostomuksha Nature Reserve there is a newly built exhibition.

We have also set direct contacts to the Russian Environmental Education Centre “Zapovedniks” and as a result of this we have had their exhibition in Kuhmo Arts Centre during the 10 years anniversary symposium of the Nature Reserve Friendship. Co-operation with the Ecocentre “Zapovedniks” has only begun, but undoubtedly the centre will be a part of our co-operation in future.
Visits

The least part in co-operation do not play the visits on both sides. To know the culture and history helps us and all people from different countries to understand each other better. It also helps us to understand why nature has developed and changed as it has, it helps us to realise what has happened and why. It is our duty to spread this information and prepare the soil more favourable to nature protection.

These are a few examples of what we have done in co-operation so far. On the other hand we have done a lot, but on the other hand this is only the beginning. There is a lot to be done and new ideas come up all the time. One of them is that we have participated in a project of Finnish and Karelian Ministries of Education to organise an ecological forest travel seminar for young European people. The idea is to make it a yearly event, which will increase knowledge of our areas and work we have done for nature protection and environmental education.

The co-operation in environmental education between the Friendship Park and Kostomuksha Nature Reserve is on a higher level than anywhere else in Finnish-Russian cross border co-operation. It is our privilege to be the initiators in this work, but we hope that in future this will not be only our work but will spread and become wider and more popular in other parks as well.

Fig. 8. Akonlahti, Kostomuksha Nature Reserve in July 2000.