Chapter 11

LOCAL WELFARE SYSTEMS IN RURAL FINLAND AS A REPRESENTATION OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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Introduction

This chapter will discuss whether the place-based approach to welfare that is characteristic of many rural locations in Finland provides a path towards a new kind of socially, economically and ecologically sustainable welfare culture. In doing so we will review how the local welfare systems in two Finnish rural localities – the village of Ullava in western Finland and the municipality of Ilomantsi in eastern Finland – are constructed and functioning and how they meet the requirements of sustainable development.

The Finnish welfare system is designed to guarantee dignity and decent living conditions for all the residents. It has been characterized by the principles of universalism and the central role played by public service agents and professionals. Local self-government, based on representative democracy, ensures the inhabitants of a municipality an opportunity to be involved in public affairs and thus also to influence the decisions concerning the welfare of local people. (Niemi-Iilahti 2003: 280.) To ensure the recognition of the rural viewpoint both at the levels of policy formulation and implementation Finland was one of the first European countries to develop a comprehensive multi-sectorial rural policy. The strategies of rural policy have pointed out the importance of local initiates and participation of the citizens together with the public efforts at the creation of welfare. (OECD 2008.)

Over the past few years challenges have been growing related to the organization and financing of public welfare services. The rapidly aging population has led to a growth in social and health care expenditure as well as to a shortage of qualified people in the workforce. Solutions to the existing problems have been sought including the reforms of municipal system, the renewal of service structures and the intensification of service provision. (OECD 2014.) In addition, discussions concerning the limits of public responsibility and demands to increase people's own role in the creation of welfare have also strengthened; in the spirit of neoliberalism, citizens and their communities are expected to play a greater role in their own welfare. (for example Johansson and Hvinden 2007: 33–34, Kisby 2010, Coote 2011.) In spite of the different systems of social welfare, similar developments to those in Finland are taking place in several European countries. The trend is characterized on the one hand as a horizontal change towards an increasingly deeper welfare mix and on the other hand as a vertical turn between different levels of governance. (Andreotti, Mingione and Polizzi 2012, see also Van Berkel, de Graaf and Sirovátka 2011.)

It is widely recognized that the chosen efforts to meet the existing challenges do not treat all the regions equally, and there is much evidence that the effects of public service reforms have made access to services harder for people living in rural areas. Due to the policies of centralization the withdrawal of public services, especially from the sparsely populated areas, has compounded. In addition, it seems that the possibilities of local people to influence the processes of decision making and the understanding about specific rural circumstances are diminishing simultaneously with the services. Neither the low population density nor the long distances are attractive for private social welfare and health services. (for example Manthorpe and Livsey 2009, Virkki et al. 2011.) As a response to the current ‘efficiency policies’ and as a solution to existing problems many rural communities and municipalities have sketched innovative ways to promote the welfare of local inhabitants and

organize services. While analysing these dynamic arrangements we are using the concept of 'local welfare systems' (LWS), which according to Andreotti, Mingione and Polizzi (2012, see also Minigione and Oberti 2003) emphasizes the connection between people and their living environment as well as the role of cross-sectorial collaboration in an effort to realize better the emergence of welfare needs and the formation of welfare resources. Many researchers around the world (see for example Evers 2010, Pestoff 2009, Matthies, Kattilakoski and Rantamäki 2011) see place-based and participatory approaches to welfare as 'the future model of welfare provision', also.

Our interest is focused on the question of how far local welfare models that have arisen in Finnish rural areas as a response to radically changed welfare state policies can show the way towards a new type of more sustainable welfare culture and social policy in general. The chapter is based on our two years long research project on local welfare service models that support the fluency of everyday life in rural areas in western and eastern Finland. To start, we will discuss LWS as a theoretical concept and draw a picture of it in an ecosocial context as the spatial dimension of sustainable development. Following this, we will present our research setting and move on to describe the function of LWS in practice by using two cases from the Finnish countryside: the village of Ullava and the municipality of Ilomantsi. Then we will review the cases in relation to the core principles of sustainability, which according to Gibbs (2000) are: decent quality of life, fairness and equity, participation and partnership, care for environment and thought for the future. Our exploration is guided by the question of whether the LWS-perspective may offer a possibility to create welfare and wellbeing in a way that would promote the ecosocial transition towards ecological, economical and social sustainability of societies.

Local Welfare Systems – A More Sustainable Conceptualization of Place-based Welfare Needs and Resources

The concept of 'local welfare systems' (LWS) was introduced by Mingione and Oberti (2003) with the aim of creating an analysis tool to understand the comprehensive substance of welfare and especially its spatial dimension. Their article was based on the results of a comparative research project carried out in six European countries and in 13 cities with the focus on why anti-poverty strategies with a shared goal were put into practice in such different ways. Later the concept has been utilized in comparative research both at the national and cross-national level with the aim to understand the causes and effects of the localization development of welfare policies including the territorial differentiation of welfare and the emergence of local social innovations (see Andreotti and Mingione 2014, Bifulco 2014, Brandsen, Segnestam Larsson and Nordfeldt 2012, Dierckx and Van Dam 2014).

Andreotti, Mingione and Polizzi (2012: 1926, see also Mingione and Oberti 2003, Andreotti and Mingione 2014) have defined LWS as 'dynamic processes in which the specific local socioeconomic and cultural conditions give rise to: different arrangements of formal and informal actors, public or not, involved designing and implementing welfare policies; and different profiles of people in need'. The LWS-approach does not represent the shift of welfare responsibilities from the national to local level, but rather it highlights the specific configurations of needs and various resources that emerge where people live their daily life. Thus, the concept of LWS is not similar to the concept of the *local welfare state*, which encompasses only the actions of the public sector at the local level. It is also not similar to the concept of the *local welfare mix*, which concentrates on the role of different sectors as the providers of welfare services but which does not pay much attention to contextual characteristics that mediate the emergence of welfare needs and resources. The LWS is not a separate part of the national welfare system but rather a local application that

operates in the frame of the national system and joins it together with local elements. (Andreotti, Mingione and Pollizzi 2012.) Instead, we claim that the LWS-approach is a way by which to challenge welfare policies that are more or less based on straightforward need and service -thinking. Furthermore, it becomes possible to find the hidden causes behind welfare needs as well as to identify welfare resources that otherwise may remain unused.

Andreotti et al. (2012, see also Andreotti and Mingione 2013) emphasize that the analysis of practical forms of LWS should begin with a review of the particular socioeconomic- and cultural conditions and an observation of social structures where the system is rooted. And because the LWS are open systems that are in continuous interaction with other systems that are located in different territorial areas and on different societal levels, in addition to having their local characteristics, the capacity of national and local governance to promote and co-ordinate the forms of co-operation and participation of citizens should be taken into account. In this sense, LWS may be also framed as an intersection of local and supralocal dynamics.

One of the challenges related to the analysis of LWS is how to draw in practice the boundaries of the 'local'. Andreotti and Mingione (2013) state that this depends on the subject of examination and on the institutional structure that is responsible for the design and implementation of the regulation of policies. In addition, the degree of autonomy, the potential for mobilization and the collective action of each territorial level are issues that need to be taken into consideration. On these grounds, we set three main criteria for the identification of the territory of rural LWS. The first is 'local identity' that is formed by the common history and maintained by lively interaction and cooperation between the local residents and thus separates the system from the other systems. The second prerequisite for the 'local' is the concrete presence of national welfare policy at least in the form of one public welfare service, and the third prerequisite is a participative civic society that consists

of local associations or the more informal participation of the citizens in local community actions.

In the context of social policy and social work the LWS approach, on the one hand, offers possibilities to identify the relevance of different social, environmental and economic conditions to welfare, but, on the other hand, it demands to take into consideration the consequences the pursuit of welfare has on the surrounding environment and thus on the welfare of local inhabitants in the future. This kind of broad view on human welfare and over-generational perspective on its effects as well as the attempts to find coherence between different politics is distinctive to the ecosocial approach. The ecosocial approach, by emphasizing the reciprocal relationship between the living environment and human welfare in a local context, calls for deeper understanding about social policy in relation to sustainable development. (Närhi 2004: 14).

Sustainability is commonly understood to consist of three pillars representing the ecological, economic and social aspects of development. Each of these mutually equal dimensions has its own value that has to be taken into consideration in order to meet the present and future needs as discussed in several chapters of this book. (see also WCED 1987: 9, Litting and Griebler 2005). The mutual dependency between the different dimensions of sustainability may be illustrated in two ways. The model of concentric spheres portrays the economic and social dimensions as dependent on the environmental sphere and thus pays attention to the fact that human beings cannot exist without a vital ecosystem. However, in an effort to find out how human beings may live in harmony with the surrounding world we base our thinking on the idea of overlapping circles which see all the three dimensions of sustainability as being equally dependent on each other. The model relies on the idea that attainment of the desired level of sustainability requires that at least the basic level of

sustainability is reached simultaneously as all the dimensions of sustainability (McKenzie 2004: 6).

Although the three pillars are seen as independent, according to Gibbs (2000) five core principles overarching different dimensions of sustainability may be identified. The first is the quality of life that refers to the fulfilment of basic needs and sufficient living conditions such as appropriate housing opportunities, social services, health care and educational and employment opportunities. It has also a subjective dimension made up of a sense of belonging and a sense of self-worth. The second principle of fairness and equity refers to the ability of a community to provide fair opportunities and outcomes to all its members in terms of positive discrimination especially for the most vulnerable ones. A community that promotes fairness and equity understands that different people and groups have various needs, allows diverse viewpoints, beliefs and values and promotes the inclusiveness of people coming from diverse backgrounds, cultures and life circumstances within the community. Thirdly, sustainability is connected to participation and partnership that consist of possibilities to be involved in communal life, to get information and to participate in decision-making when it affects one's own life. It is a question of social networks, social togetherness and democratic structures that promote the sense of solidarity within and outside the community at the formal, informal and institutional level. The remaining two principles, care for the environment and thinking about the future, extend the domain of sustainable development to cover our living environment that sets the ecological limits for human life and reminds us of the temporal dimension of human life that is not limited to our lifetime. (for example McKenzie 2004, Rouhinen 2014.)

To sum up, we understand the LWS as a complex system that on the one hand is rooted in local characteristics and on the other hand continuously reshapes them. It takes form through a process that is shaped by specific historical, cultural and social circumstances

and is steered by the combination of national control and local governance. LWS represent the place-based perspective (see Barca 2009) of welfare that emphasizes the significance of the connection between the people and their living environment, and, furthermore, it highlights the importance of social relationships and social actions in relation to the wellbeing of people both as an experienced phenomenon and as an everyday practice. This comes close to what Helne and Hirvilammi (2015, see also in Chapter 3), by adapting the theory of well-being by the Finnish sociologist Erik Allardt, have called a comprehensive approach to welfare. The LWS-approach, like the comprehensive understanding about welfare, calls for viewing the welfare of human beings in relation to the surrounding world that is both a source of welfare resources and the cause of welfare needs and for taking into consideration the temporal dimension of this mutual dependency in terms of sustainable development.

Research Data and the Method

We will next go about the question of whether the place-based approach to welfare can show way towards a new type of sustainable welfare culture and social policy in general. We aim to achieve this by analysing the structures and functions of two local welfare systems in Finnish rural areas from the perspective of the five core principles of sustainable development identified by Gibbs (2000). The research locations were selected by following the three criteria we set out for rural LWS (see above) and by taking into consideration the suggestions made by the regional village associations. The first is the former independent municipality of Ullava in the western part of Finland, and the second is the municipality of Ilomantsi in the eastern part of Finland[1]. The two cases of LWS together are understood as the replication of rural LWS in practice (for example Yin 2014).

[1] The case study is a part of the research project 'Rural local welfare systems – research on local service models supporting the fluency of everyday life in the western and eastern parts of Finland' that is being carried

The preliminary understanding about the research locations is based on information given by the regional village associations together with that available on the websites of municipalities and other local actors and the information gathered from the database of Official Statistics of Finland. This was deepened by the observations made during the field visits that included interviews with local key actors (three in both research areas). In the case of Ilomantsi the notes of observations made in the constitutive meeting of the village council as well as the discussions with the local residents in the gathering are used as research data. In the case of Ullava, the data gathered in local discussion forums organized during our previous research projects (see Matthies, Kattilakoski and Rantamäki 2011, Matthies and Rantamäki 2013) is used as well to some degree. In addition to this, the researchers have actively followed the news concerning the research localities in the local media in order to get to know the ongoing progressions and changes that affect the localities.

In the first phase of the data analysis type descriptions representing the structure and function of local welfare systems in Ullava and Ilomantsi were outlined following the definition of LWS by Andreotti et al. (2012). Following this, the cases represented were analysed using thematic content analysis guided by the five core principles of sustainable development identified by Gibbs (2000) in order to recognize the contribution of rural LWS to ecosocial transition in practice.

Two Cases of Local Welfare Systems in the Finnish Rural Area

Both of the research locations lie in sparsely populated rural areas, which is the most common rural type in Finland. Characteristics of this type include dispersed small settlements located at a distance from each other, low density and a one-sided economic structure. (SYKE 2014.) The challenges commonly related to the areas such as the decline and ageing

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of population, low educational level and a bigger share of the population outside the working life in comparison with other areas are typical also for the research localities as may be seen in Table 11.1.

Table 11.1. Socioeconomic and Demographic Structure of the Research Localities in Comparison with Finland as a Whole (OFS 2015).

	Village of Ullava (in municipality of Kokkola)	**Municipality of Ilomantsi**	**Finland in total**
Regional location	Western Finland (Central Ostrobothnia)	Eastern Finland (North Karelia)	Northern Europe
Population / density (inhabitants / km^2) 2013	912 / 6,27 (Kokkola 47 931 / 32.74)	5 614 / 1.96	5 451 270 (median 5 931) /18.0
Change of population 2003–2008 **2008–2013 (%)**	-3.7 % -9.6 %	-8.8 % -9.5 %	+2.0 % +2.3 %
Gender distribution 2013 F/M	F:48.9 % / M:51.1 %	F:49.5 % / M:50.5 %	F:50.8 % / M: 49.2 %
Average age 2013 - **<16 years** - **16–64** - **64<**	42.3 years - 18.9 % - 60.1 % - 21.0 %	52.0 years - 10.3 % - 57.2 % - 32.6 %	41.9 years - 16.4 % - 64.2 % - 19.4 %
Main type of activity 2012 - **Labour force** - **Unemployed** - **Persons outside the labour force**	44.3 % 7.4 % 55.7 %	39.4 % 16.7 % 59.3 %	48.3 % 10.7 % 51.7 %
Educational levels 2012 (inhabitants ≥ 18 years) - **Basic education**[2] - **Secondary education** - **Higher education**	710 44.4 % 48.6 % 7.0 %	4905 41.4 % 51.4 % 7.2 %	4 347 944 28.5 % 52.2 % 19.3 %

2 9 years of comprehensive school education.

Next we will move on to looking at the daily life in these two rural localities from the perspective of the factors related to the welfare of local residents identified in our study.

A Former Independent Municipality Ullava

The hundred-year-old municipality of Ullava was incorporated into the town of Kokkola in the frame of a national reform programme for centralizing the local government structures in 2009. Thus, the former independent Finnish-speaking rural municipality turned into a remote neighbourhood of the old trading and industrial town of Kokkola with a Swedish-speaking minority. The total population of Ullava is about 900. Current projections show that the population will increase by 100 people by 2030, but the share of inhabitants under 15 years will decrease (Kokkolan kaupungin kaavoituspalvelut 2013). Ullava consists of two village centres; roughly speaking half of the residents live in the parish village located about 50 kilometres from the downtown area, and the other half live in the village of Rahkonen that lies a further 20 kilometres away. The main sources of livelihood are agriculture, forestry and services. The recent accounts and plans concerning the beginning of mining and wind energy production have strengthened the trust of local people in the future of the village.

At the moment, the residents are quite satisfied with the level of public services available in Ullava, and some believe that they have even improved since the consolidation of municipalities, but a degree of uncertainty can be observed. Both the parish village and the village of Rahkonen have their own elementary school (1–6 grades) and a kindergarten for children under school age, but the fear that at least one of the schools will be closed in the nearest future is very strongly present. The health centre located in the parish village offers

the services of a public health nurse, a medical doctor and a dentist yet it seems that every time there is a shortage of doctors in the main health centre the doctoral services in Ullava are reduced. In addition to the services for all, there are domestic and residential care services for certain groups like the families with children and the elderly. The nearest hospital is located in Kokkola, and so the staff of the municipal retirement home has decided to give first hand medical aid during the night times to the elderly who live in the senior terrace house run by the local elderly house association. They see this as being both rational and economical. This represents hands-on thinking that has been passed down from the time when all the services belonged to the same municipal organization, and as such the employees feel they have a holistic responsibility.

As the public transportation connections are scarce, the inhabitants of Ullava see it as being very important that they have the basic services in the village. At the moment, there is a village shop both in Rahkonen and in the parish village. The one in the parish village is run by a community-owned service co-operative that was founded after the local entrepreneur closed the doors of the parish village shop and decided to focus on the one he has in Rahkonen. That made the residents of the parish village fear that without a shop also other services, including the local member co-operative bank, would disappear. As such, they decided to begin to build their own future. The service co-operative is run by a group of voluntary villagers with different knowledge and skills. The grocery itself provides employment for four shop assistants and opportunities for practical work-training for those suffering from long-term unemployment. An important role is played also by a group of local retirees whose weekly responsibility is to shelve the items on sale – though many of them say that it is their weekly therapy to meet each other and to do something worthwhile. During the last few years a set of different activities and services has been built around the grocery. These include the cafeteria that offers lunch every workday and draws also people from

outside Ullava, the branch office of the pharmacy, an outlet for the handicrafts made at a day centre by mentally disabled people as well as weekly karaoke- and lottery evenings and village market or other common events at least one in a month. The members of the co-operative have plenty of other plans, but they have decided to move forwards step by step so that people will not get tired and so there is always something to wait for that is new.

In regard to the village shop the input of volunteers and voluntary organizations is crucial in relation to the well-being of the villagers. Local associations including village-, youth- and sport associations as well as hunting clubs and clubs for women and children offer many kinds of distractions and social actions for the residents of different ages and life situations. Many of them work also in close cooperation with the public services by organizing educational occasions, offering help to the people living in residential care services or collecting money for deliveries such as a camera for the retirement home and a school trip to an amusement park that otherwise would not be possible. Apart from the more organized action, the tradition of neighbourly help is still alive. One of the villagers put this into words by stating that ‘during the winter time the snow is ploughed also from the drive of the oldster living in the house next door’.

Behind the active village action in Ullava there is a conscious objective to secure and diversify the basic services available in the village and to cement the sense of solidarity among the villagers as well as to improve the quality of life in a broader perspective. In addition to the lively action at the village level the residents are systematically utilizing the possibilities offered by the democratic system at the municipal level. Their motivation is a shared impression that without their own input it is likely that step by step all the services will be moved downtown, the families with children will follow them and in the long term this would sound the death of the whole village.

Municipality of Ilomantsi

Ilomantsi is the easternmost municipality in Finland alongside the border of Russia and is characterized by Orthodox Christianity and the Karelian folk tradition and culture. The total area of Ilomantsi is large (3172 km²), and the distance from the most remote villages located in tree-covered hill landscape to the municipal centre is over 80 kilometres. The total population of Ilomantsi is about 5,600, with the average age of the residents being 52 years that is over 10 years more than the average age in Finland. At present, approximately every third resident of Ilomantsi is over 65 years old while the percentage of children under 15 years is only 10.3 per cent. Under the circumstances llomantsi seems to be one of those Finnish municipalities with a very rapidly aging population. The biggest employers in Ilomantsi are the service sector, The North Karelia Border Guard District and forestry. Almost 17 per cent of the working population is unemployed, and the considerable share of these are long-term unemployed. The municipality is trying to ease the situation for example by employing the long-term unemployed to work for the environmental care of the villages. Throughout history development in the villages of Ilomantsi has been closely connected with the development of the logging industry and the forest industry in general, and the current situation is a direct result of radical changes that have taken place in the forestry industry. (Rannikko 1999.)

With the exception of two village schools (grades 1–6) and the mobile library on wheels most of the public services like the social services and primary health care, the kindergarten, the secondary school (7–9) and the high school are physically located in the municipal centre. For the inhabitants of the surrounding villages daily transportation to the centre is available. The specialized medical care services including nighttime emergency are provided by the North Karelia Central Hospital that is located about one hour from the centre of Ilomantsi. In addition to the municipal services, the services and activities provided by the village actors create the basis and promote the wellbeing of the villagers and the welfare of

the communities. These include many kinds of leisure activities and cultural facilities. The village house offers rooms for various social clubs and other social events like annual Christmas parties and the 'Day of the village house'. Home revival meetings organized by the Orthodox Church every second week gather people together and maintain the tradition of visits. Many of the elderly people living in villages do not have their own car so the possibility to get a ride when needed is highly appreciated as are other forms of neighbourly help.

Due to the reduction in the population many of the villages go through a kind of critical period and have to fight for their survival. However, Ilomantsi is known as a village-friendly municipality with the aim to retain its village population in the future, and in 2011, the municipality decided to map the willingness of the local village associations to co-operate for the villages. The idea was to bring the services nearer to the villagers in a municipality where there are long distances to travel, to develop village action and different models of working in partnership and in general to increase the feeling of safety among the people who reside in the furthermost parts of the municipality. As a result of the process the function of two village houses was developed towards a multiservice centre. A few years later the municipality sent a survey to all of the villagers served by existing multiservice centres to find out their service needs and for ideas about how to address these. According to the results, the priorities are the availability of health care services and the possibility to receive IT-training.

Today the central part of the operation of multiservice centres is a weekly 'service day' when a range of services is available in the village houses. The municipal services include preventive social and health care services such as the public health nurse, the services of a registered nurse for people with heart disease, diabetes or dementia and an opportunity to get an influenza vaccination every autumn. Also, local small entrepreneurs including a

masseur, a hairdresser, a physiotherapist and a pedicure offer their services. All together about 20 different service providers visit the multiservice centres regularly. The village associations are in charge of the overall maintenance of the houses and prepare lunch, which is available for a small fee. During the service days various themes like home safety, healthy eating, digital services and optical fiber connection are discussed together. Also different educational courses like first aid -, IT- and English-courses are organized. In addition to the services the essential part of service days is the possibility to catch up with other villagers and to get both informal and formal information. To make it possible for all to participate in service days the municipality organizes transportation to the village houses from the surrounding villages. Multiservice centres are based on close cooperation between the municipality and local associations and residents. Each of the multiservice centres has its own action group that consists of the villagers and service providers taking part in the service days along with the representatives of local associations and municipal authorities. The named contact person, who usually is the chairperson of the local village association, is in charge of communication between the village and the municipality and other partners in the cooperation.

In addition to multiservice centres Ilomantsi founded a village parliament in 2014 in order to develop local democracy further and to promote the dialogue between the municipality and its inhabitants. Based on the principles of deliberative democracy (see Dryzek 2009) the village parliament offers to the local authorities and the members of the village associations a chance to sit down together once or twice per year to share their views and ideas concerning the development both at the municipal and village level. The objective of shared discussion is to create a common view of the existing and future needs and to think up a plan of how to meet them. The support given to villages and local communities is seen as an important welfare resource by the municipal decision-makers. Regardless of the quite

small monetary value, its importance as an enhancer of cooperation and a builder of mutual confidence between the municipality and local inhabitants is enormously valuable. In the midst of ongoing societal changes, this might be seen as a prerequisite for the continuity of life outside of the population centres in the future.

The two cases of LWS represented above have a shared goal to keep the villages alive by taking good care of the wellbeing of the villagers. This is done by trying to protect the services that are seen as important from the perspective of daily life and by developing different actions that improve the quality of life of the villagers. Despite the shared goal there are differences in the way the LWS are working in different environments. In the case of Ullava, where a quite good selection of basic services is still available, the villagers are devoted to a 'democracy of doing' (see Raisio and Lindell 2013), while in Ilomantsi different models of local democracy as a mediator and supporter of reciprocal discussion between the municipal authorities and villagers play a significant role. However, as a side-effect, in both of the cases the sense of community, democratic citizenship and local economy are strengthened.

The Function and Structure of Rural LWS from the Perspective of Sustainable Development

The contribution of the rural LWS approach to ecosocial transition towards a more sustainable welfare culture in general is captured in Table 11.2. One may say that the basic idea of sustainable development sits well with the traditional rural culture and life-style. For many centuries, the Finns have believed that you should always leave your inherited land to your children in a better shape than the one you got. Farming as a traditional source of livelihood taught rural people to respect nature as a diverse source of wellbeing as well as to understand its vulnerability. Still, nowadays, nature is the main source of livelihood (agriculture and forestry) and healthy food for the people living in countryside. In addition it

is a potential source for recreation for most of the Finns. Something that people want to protect so that the rural life-style would be an alternative for future generations.

Table 11.2. The Relevance of Rural Local Welfare System from the Perspective of Sustainability.

Core Principles of Sustainability / Steps of Ecosocial Transition	**Corresponding phenomena in the appearance of LWS**
Decent quality of life for all	The efforts to improve welfare are based on the recognition of local needs and resources. Comprehensive perspective on welfare with the starting point of the fluency of daily life.
Fairness and equity	Consideration of special local characteristics in general, including the challenges and the possibilities, makes it possible to guarantee decent and equal living conditions for all people living in different regional environments.
Participation and partnership	Utilization of various resources including the knowledge and skills of people coming from diverse backgrounds, cultures and life circumstances with the aim to reach shared goals. Seeing the importance of community-oriented actions and bridging social capital (see Putnam 2000) in the relation to preventive efforts of social policy.
Care for environment	Immediate individual and communal relationship to the surrounding nature as a source of food (smallholding, gardens, forest berries, game and so on) and livelihood as well as understanding its potential as a recreational source motivate people to take good care of it. Locally developed cost-effective ways to provide services based on cross-organizational co-operation, utilization of common resources and linking together paid and voluntary work save existing resources as well as produce new ones.
Thought for the future	Recognize the future challenges related to current societal trends and make a community-level plan of how to prepare oneself to meet them. The aim is to meet the current needs in a way that is sustainable also from the future perspective.

The appreciation of a sustainable way of life is strongly present when rural people design their daily life. They struggle to have daily services nearby so as to avoid unnecessary travelling and to make them reachable for those to whom travelling is challenging for one reason or another. This includes also the preparedness to develop skills that are essential to

adapt the opportunities provided by new technology. The specification of the services essential for daily life is made in a dialogue within the community and between the local residents and municipal authorities in order to make sure that the services provided meet the actual needs of the inhabitants. Different forms of local economy applied in the communities show that people recognize the limitations of welfare policy based on continuous economic growth. They are seeking for alternative and more comprehensive ways to meet the needs so that both individual and communal effects are taken into consideration. This is not only about sound management of finances with the aim to save money but also the aim to make good use of additional resources that appear during the processes as seen in the case of the service co-operative in Ullava. And what is interesting is that the people are doing this also in the context of public services – one could even state that they regard the public funds as if they were their own.

Instead, the 'final output only matters' – the logic of the LWS approach raises the possibilities hidden in communal processes where various people work for a shared goal. Cross-organizational collaboration, linkage of paid and voluntary work and exploitation of various resources including the different knowledge and skills of people of different ages and life situations increase both the quality and the economic efficiency of the services. While the improvement in the services upgrades objective living conditions the possibility to participate in common actions and contribute to the common good strengthens the sense of self-worth at the individual level and, in addition, increases the sense of belonging to a community. It might be a question of ostensibly small things like giving a ride to a neighbour or bigger ones such as the establishment of a service co-operative. These are extremely important aspects from the perspective of human welfare but very difficult – or we might even say impossible - issues to put in a form of a product that one could buy at the market of welfare services.

In general the LWS perspective on welfare in the rural context may be crystallized into living conditions that fulfil the basic needs of the residents and offer chances for social intercourse that brings together people from different ages and life situations – and par excellence makes this also possible in the future. While dominant welfare thinking is strongly guided by the principles of market-led economy and based on the ideology of continuous economic growth, the LWS-approach offers an alternative way to view the welfare needs and resources in relation to local circumstances and takes into consideration the heritage of past generations as well as the rights of those following them. In this frame of reference, the specific characteristics related to local geographical circumstances or demographical structure may be turned into extra resources instead of viewing them as a cause of additional cost.

What LWS Perspective Would Contribute to Social Work and Social Policy?

In her book *Green Social Work* Lena Dominelli (2012) argues that professional social work should return to work with and within communities in order to contribute to ecosocial transition. Following Dominelli's idea the LWS-perspective discussed in this chapter in a rural context offers an alternative way to approach the welfare of people instead of the current mainstream thinking that is based on the identification of individual problems and the provision of professional solutions. Actually, it exemplifies a return to the core principle of social work that is to see 'human-in-environment', which practically highlights the importance of a very direct physical, social and cultural contextualization of people's situation (see Richmond 1917, Germain and Gittterman 1996). In this regard the LWS-perspective is a kind of tool for the 'social diagnosis of communities' that has a research-oriented view to welfare needs and causes behind them but that is also used to make visible the existing welfare resources.

The two cases of LWS represented here show very concretely that the LWS-approach calls for to meet the existing welfare challenges in way that is sustainable both from the perspective of human beings and environment (see also Andreotti et al. 2012). They show that the closer welfare policies are developed to their specific context, the more likely they will meet the actual needs of people and facilitate the participation of the citizens in a society both at the level of welfare provision and decision-making. In addition, the more it becomes possible to bring together diverse welfare resources including the process of working together for the common good, the more the economic effectiveness of welfare policies will be improved.

We end up with a kind of circular reasoning: On the one hand, the LWS-perspective justifies the significance of the ecosocial approach in social work, and, on the other, ecosocial social work is a way to promote LWS thinking at the level of national social policy. This, from our point of view, is the only way towards a more sustainable welfare in terms of economic, ecological and social sustainability.

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