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WELL-BEING AND PARTICIPATION: VIEWS ON POLICY MEASURES IN SPARSELY POPULATED RURAL MUNICIPALITIES IN FINLAND

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Abstract: This article examines how do municipalities aim to promote well-being in sparsely populated rural villages, and how are villagers involved in the measures of well-being undertaken in their municipality. The main analysis is based on the interviews of municipal representatives in the case study of North Karelia, Finland. The analysis of well-being and participation, and their relation to the social inclusion of rural inhabitants is executed under the themes of mobility, services, democratic involvement and civic action. The policy measures seek to improve liveability of the environment and the villagers' quality of life. Participation, as a means and an end of well-being and inclusion, involves the dimensions of structural inclusion, as well as genuine participation and citizen engagement.

Keywords: well-being; quality of life; participation; inclusion; municipal policy; sparsely populated rural area; villages; Finland

Abstrakti: Artikkelissa tarkastellaan, kuinka kunnat pyrkivät edistämään harvaan asuttujen alueiden ja kylien hyvinvointia, ja kuinka kunnissa tuetaan kyläläisten osallisuutta palveluissa ja muissa hyvinvointia tukevissa toiminnoissa. Pääanalyysi perustuu kuntaedustajien haastatteluihin, jotka on toteutettu case-tutkimuksena Pohjois-Karjalan alueella Suomessa. Hyvinvointia ja osallisuutta, sekä kytköksiä kyläläisten sosiaaliseen osallisuuteen, on analysoitu liikkuvuuden, palvelujen, demokraattisen osallistumisen ja kansalaistoiminnan näkökulmista. Politiikkatoimet pyrkivät parantamaan elinmahdollisuuksia ja elämänlaatua kylissä. Osallisuuden edistäminen hyvinvoinnin toimenpiteenä ja tavoitteena sisältää sekä rakenteellisen osallisuuden ulottuvuudet että aidon osallistumisen ja kansalaisten osallistamisen muodot.

Avainsanat: hyvinvointi; elämänlaatu; osallisuus; kuntapolitiikka; harvaan asuttu maaseutu; kylät; Suomi

1. Introduction

The rise of participation improvement is related to the need to strengthen democracy and the need to find new solutions in the welfare state model (Matthies et al. 2011). According to some, the 'Golden-Age' of the welfare state is written in the past tense, and is replaced by welfare intervention (Küntzel 2012). Evers and Guillemard (2012) have termed it as a change from a "Providing State" to an "Enabling State" where the priority is to intervene preventively, and not only provide a cure for a particular problem. They have observed that the enhancement of human capital and the empowerment of individuals have become central issues in order to get inhabitants involved in the welfare state. In the Nordic welfare states, the transformation of universal welfarism has taken steps towards contested neoliberal policies, which has in turn raised a need for the recognition of different forms of participation and the ideologies that lie behind them (Matthies 2014, 7). In principle, the question of participation and empowerment should concern the rights and abilities of individuals or groups to be active, to be able to control and be part of their own lives, decision-making and services, which are seen as essential elements of well-being and a good quality of life (Evers 2009; Juhila et al. 2017, 38–39). Additional epithets such as responsibility, consumerism and activating investment policies, turns the idea towards the binding forms of self-help, self-management and productive citizenships (cf. ibid.). Hence, the intentions for policies of participation vary according to the ideologies behind them.

In Finland, participation and social inclusion have been emphasised in recent policy agendas, which aim at the promotion of well-being. The Strategic Programme of Prime Minister Juha Sipilä's Government (2015) emphasises policies which promote well-being by focusing on measures that are believed to prevent social exclusion and which strengthen the responsibilities of one's own life. Furthermore, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health have set participation as one of the key dimensions of the promotion of well-being. The Ministry (2017) states that:

'Participation entails involvement, influence as well as care and sharing in society's commonly constructed welfare', which presents participation as a multidimensional concept. According to the Rural Policy Programme 2014–2020, the aim is to get rural inhabitants and communities involved, and to influence local development and decision making in a versatile manner. Another element regarding participation and well-being is more concerned with the rural residents in the margins and their accessibility to welfare services.

The well-being and participation are influenced by several sectors in municipality. At first, through the statutory tasks of social and health sectors and education, which are guided by the principles of equity (Basic Education Act 628/1998; Health Care Act 1326/2010; Social Welfare Act 1301/2014), but the extent is partly under the municipal discretion. Well-being, social inclusion especially, is also inflected by other statutory tasks such as culture, libraries, exercise, youth services, but the practices are constructed based on the local conditions, needs and traditions. In addition, various tasks such as the promotion of employment, the construction of information networks and supports granted to the associations are organized as optional local self-government duties. (Rural Policy Programme 2014–2020; Ministry of Finance 2015, 10–11, 93–94.) 'The promotion of well-being' itself, is a statutory task set for municipalities, which 'shall advance the well-being of their residents' (Local Government Act 410/2015). The form of governance and some of the content have been further defined by special legislation such as the Social Welfare Act 1301/2014 and the Health Care Act 1326/2010, which, for instance, requires municipalities to co-operate extensively with both civil society and the private sector. However, the interpretation of what is well-being and what should be included in the policy measures is mainly left for the municipal officers and other influencers.

All of the main concepts of *well-being* and *quality of life* as well as *participation* and *social inclusion/exclusion* have different meanings in different contexts, and are therefore contested. In a broad sense, quality of life is a concept concerned with the overall well-being in society (Shucksmith et al. 2009), but neither researchers nor policy agendas have found any unanimous insight for these two terms, and this has led them to become multi-dimensional and relational (Veenhoven 2000a). In general, participation in social activities is central to the well-being of the individual and social inclusion represents mainly the participation of people in society (Farrington & Farrington 2005; Shortall 2008). Nevertheless, equally important is to challenge the idea that non-participation strictly equates with social exclusion, and that the normative appreciation of active participation offers a favourable model of the role of citizens (Shortall 2008; Matthies 2014, 9). As the participation of citizens underlines the diversity of individuals, groups and places, the structures for participation are locally embedded and hence vary between places (Evers 2009; Juhila et al. 2017, 38–39; Rantamäki & Kattilakoski 2016).

In this paper, we analysed the dimensions of well-being and participation of current policy measures of the 'promotion of well-being', and their relation to social inclusion. A special interest is placed on the rural inhabitants within the municipalities by exploring the municipal measures focusing on villages. Our research question is twofold. Firstly, we ask, *how do municipalities aim to promote well-being in sparsely populated rural villages*, and secondly, *how are villagers involved in the measures of well-being undertaken in their municipality*. These questions are explored in the context of rural Finland and more specifically through the case study municipalities of North Karelia, which represents a remote sparsely populated region (Helminen et al. 2014; Halonen et al. 2015).

2. Towards the well-being of rural inhabitants

Well-being and quality of life

To begin with, we explain what we mean with the term 'well-being' compared to 'welfare'. To some extent, we utilize the conceptualisation offered by Veenhoven (2000b) who states that the term 'well-being' may refer either to 'individual well-being', meaning that an individual is well, or 'social well-being' meaning that the society as a whole is functioning well. 'Welfare' instead, refers to a systemic and institutionalised understanding of the 'welfare state', which denotes a structure which attempts to promote either individual or social well-being (cf. Veenhoven 2000b; Evers and Guillemard 2012; Küntzel 2012). Albeit the traditional welfare state is in a current state of change,

the promotion of well-being by public policies can be regarded as an extension of the state policies that seek to influence the field of subjective and individualistic well-being. These policies may include both individual and social dimensions. As it was framed in the Local Government Act (410/2015), the aim is to improve the well-being of their residents, but the Act does not define the meaning or the manner in which this takes place, in the sense of individuals or through processes of social well-being. The formation of legislation and policy agendas therefore leaves space for social and communal approaches.

Well-being is often taken as a synonym for 'quality of life' (Veenhoven 2000b). It refers above all to the dimensions of valuable doings and beings, as well as to social belonging and integration into society (Allardt 1993; Hirvilammi 2015, 24–28). The quality of life is differentiated from the 'level or standard of living', which refers to commodities or material conditions that are themselves necessary for well-being, or to resources that support the ability to reach a certain quality of life (Allardt 1993; Erikson 1993; Sen 1993; Saari 2011; Hirvilammi 2015, 24–28). As the material wealth is also understood as a resource for the quality of life, then policies should acknowledge the material as a means to a good life rather than simply as an end of well-being (Atkinson et al. 2012, 2). The discussion about the policies of means of well-being can be extended to include less material sources of well-being. In initiatives of place development, it has been noted that resident participation can be seen as a mean for development (Shortall, 2004) and also as an end of development (Hayward et al. 2004). Similarly, the participation in a village security group can be seen as a means that creates a feeling of safety and a sense of social belonging in the community. Instead, participation in any village action that creates well-being can itself be regarded as an end. We emphasise that as our question is about measures and actions that seek to promote well-being, these measures are regarded as means rather than an end of well-being. According to our understanding, the changes in welfare state policies refer to an attempt to improve the liveability of the environment, and hence widens the approach towards the notion of an experienced quality of life, albeit that the dimensions of material well-being may still be at the core of structural welfare policies (Veenhoven 2000a; Vaarama et al. 2010).

The common distinction in the measurement and analysis of well-being is formed by objective and subjective dimensions. For instance, Bowling and Windsor (2001) separate objective income, housing and education levels from subjective happiness and life satisfaction. Herewith, the objective dimension could refer to a 'level or standard of living' in the sense of calculable income and education level, and subjective to the 'quality of life' seen as the functional or social belongings which generate happiness for an individual. Veenhoven (2002) supplements these distinctions with an objective dimension which measures standardised income dollars or living accommodation in square meters, as opposed to the subjective dimension which refers to the satisfaction with income. In this sense, the distinction is not about different kinds of well-beings or welfares, but rather with different viewpoints on the same things, such as income.

We exploited Veenhoven's (2002) idea of objective and subjective perspectives on the same premise of well-being, and not as different kinds of premises of well-being. To be precise, the policy measures are seen as normative assumptions that something is or might be good for individual or social well-being, but ultimately the outcome is dependent of subjectively experienced satisfaction, whether something is good or not for the well-being of an individual or group of people. As stated by Farrington and Farrington (2005): 'the opportunity to participate in society means the ability to engage with a reasonable range of activities within society, with reasonable defined in relation to the society in question'. By modifying the idea, normative is set as a counterpart to subjective well-being. Normative well-being is defined in relation to society and is accepted by powerful members of a society as being a normal state. In this case, the powerful members refer to municipal officers and their assumptions of what is reasonable in general. The engagement within society is understood in the sense of a level of living, such as a certain income, health or education level; or in the sense of quality of life, such as feeling socially secure in the village, the ability to live at home, the possibility to indulge in hobbies, or the opportunity to influence local policy – all of which refer to some form of participation in the local community.

Participation and social inclusion

Participation in social activities is most strongly related to social belonging, a central part of well-being, whereas the quality of life of individuals who do not participate in social activities is commonly seen as being compromised (Shortall 2008). From a wider perspective, social inclusion can represent the participation of people in society, as opposed to social exclusion representing non-participation (Farrington & Farrington 2005). As Shortall (2008) notes, social exclusion is usually seen as a problem of political structures which are insufficiently open to allow participation. Hence, non-participation does not necessarily equate with social exclusion, albeit that non-participation may implicate social exclusion (Hayward et al. 2004). Participation should be a matter of individual or group choice for those who have either been offered or not an opportunity to be engaged or included. If people are offered an opportunity to participate in a manner normal to their society, and they exercise their right not to participate, then non-participation should reflect a legitimated choice of individuals or groups, and not a social exclusion created by structures (Farrington & Farrington 2005; Shortall 2008). However, recent policy agendas aim not only at the improvement of democratic social inclusion, but they also emphasise a normative model that seeks to activate citizens (Matthies 2014, 9). In this paper, the interest is on both of these intentions: the means to diminish structural exclusion, and the possible reference to a normative model that favours active participation in the community.

For whatever reason participation is intended, the individuals or groups are the ones who will participate, and the structure's role is to enable participation. Siisiäinen (2014, 31–38) has analysed the ways of taking a part in society through a typology of four faces of participation and involvement, which helps us to understand the perspectives of individuals and structures. From this typology, 'genuine participation' and 'citizen engagement' are the most apposite to describe the different sides of well-intentioned participation improvements. In his typology, the individuals themselves should be the driving force for genuine participation (which includes qualities such as the interestedness of individuals), but there should also be the possibility for conscious refusal to participate. The concept of genuine participation fits with other references to participation (e.g. Farrington & Farrington 2005; Hayward et al. 2004; Shortall 2008). As a counterpart, Siisiäinen (2014, 31–38) sets citizen engagement as reflecting an idea in which the driving force for participation begins from the institution, and with the purpose of getting individuals or groups to participate by their own efforts, but with the assistance of enabling structural institutions. Citizen engagement is then defined by characteristics like activating participation, enabling inclusion, and the idea of supporting individuals to be responsible for their own lives. In such cases, there is also a tendency to slip in an element of binding participation (Matthies 2014). However, as important as it is to understand the differences of these two faces or intentions of participation, it is equally significant to realise that participation and inclusion efforts in real life are very much a combination of actor-directed processes and activation that is initiated from above (Siisiäinen 2014, 38).

As participation is understood as an aim of the promotion of well-being and also as a means to enhance social inclusion or prevent exclusion, there is a need to look at the concepts of inclusion/exclusion more closely. In a simplistic sense, social inclusion means individuals or groups having access to the assets and resources that are deemed critical to well-being (Room 1995; Reimer 2004). Social exclusion can prevent participation, and may manifest in e.g., a lack of access to citizen rights, health care or education, and also in a lack of societal integration through limited power or a limited ability to participate in political decision-making (Shortall 2008). Structural exclusion is also seen as an evolutive concept. Shucksmith and Chapman (1998) point out that structural exclusion used to be more linked with distributional exclusion as the lack of resources of an individual or household, which is closely connected with the exclusion seen due to poverty. Subsequent policies have been sliding towards more multidimensional and relational concepts of social exclusion, which highlight inadequate social participation, a lack of social integration, and powerlessness (Shucksmith & Chapman 1998; Room 1999). Later, Reimer (2004) widened the insights on the distributional and relational perspectives of social exclusion, which approach is utilised in this paper. According to Reimer (ibid.), the distributional approach denotes that individuals or groups are excluded from access to resources or services that are available to others, and which can (but not exclusively) be the outcome of poverty. He connects the relational approach with the participation seen in various types of social institutions and social

relations, by which social exclusion implies that individuals or groups cannot participate in social networks or institutions that are available to others. The excluded individuals or groups are thus at the margin, and outside the mainstream. The common reference of marginal groups is made towards people with a certain character or status such as youngsters and elderly people, unemployed persons, poor people or migrants, who either are or at risk of being excluded more than those in the mainstream (Room 1999; Shucksmith 2004; Abbott & Sapsford 2005; Mewes & Mau 2013; Siisiäinen 2014; Walsh et al. 2014). Rural people can definitely be seen as being outside the mainstream by statistics and geography, but are they also on the margin, and at risk of being excluded from policies of well-being more than others?

Rural residents at the margin?

Rurality is hardly a definite site in which to study marginalization. There are different types of rural areas and these point out that not all rural areas are unevenly separated from the economic or social processes of the mainstream (Marsden 1998; Kainulainen & Rintala 2003) which mould the well-being and inclusion of people. Also, when exploring the differences of well-being, the relativity of the concept should be kept in mind, as well as the rural location. As shown by Shucksmith et al. (2009), the rural-urban differences in qualities of life are minimal in the richest countries (to which Finland belongs), which therefore implies that rural well-being is likely to be relatively similar to its urban counterpart. The other view relates to the subjectivity of marginalization. Matthies (2014, 8) notes that certain rural or urban communities can be regarded as marginalized collectively from the point of view of participation, but not all of the individuals associate themselves as being marginalized, nor value a particular form of participation in the same way as their neighbour next door or in the mainstream.

There is, however, a tendency in richer countries to approach the concept of rural communities from the perspectives of marginalization and/or exclusion. Bock (2016) cites Copus et al. (2011) noting that rural marginalization tends to be linked with remoteness, population decline, unemployment, and unfavourable socio-economic democracies which influence the manner in which people in rural settings may be connected with the mainstream. The realization of social exclusion is mainly connected with insufficient community facilities and infrastructure such as poor services, public transportation and roads (Room 1995, 238; Copus et al. 2011). The main questions that arise from remoteness and rurality are linked with distance, and how it influence the access to resources or activities that are available to the mainstream population (e.g. Farrington & Farrington 2005); and also how our understanding of what rural is, influences the structural institutions and understandings of rural inclusion (cf. Shucksmith & Chapman 1998).

Regarding accessibility and participation in the rural context, Farrington and Farrington (2005) refer to the ability of people to reach and engage in opportunities and activities which are normal to their community. By 'reach', they imply that spatial distance and physical mobility and transport use are related to distance, albeit they note that spatial distance alone is not the cause of the spatial separation which influences accessibility in rural areas. The marginalization by accessibility also affects some population groups more than others. For instance, the youth reaffirm the discourse of marginalized peripheries when recreation, schools, friends and public transport connections are lacking from their home village, and hence without the lift from adults, youth are excluded and confined to their home environs (Tuuva-Hongisto et al. 2016, 34). Bock (2016) emphasises that the lack of access to resources due to remoteness may also be explained as a result of a low connectivity, by which she refers to socioeconomic and political connections, and hence the access varies between different rural areas and is not able to be paralleled with a distance in kilometres. Digitalization is considered as a means by which distance and remoteness can be reduced, but it should be remembered that digitization has two sides. For example, technology can either help or limit the involvement of aging villagers in their interaction with the surrounding society and the service systems which feature in the villagers' everyday lives (Kilpeläinen & Seppänen 2014). Digitalization may increase inequality and the experience of exclusion in remote areas through either inadequate connections or a lack of skills. As a whole, marginal rural areas represent an ideal type of remote area with the lowest connectivity and reversibility in the typology of social situations of rural areas (Osti 2010). In the opposite corner

of this typology are the networked rural areas which have overcome their obstacles with the highest categories of connectivity and reversibility (ibid).

Distance is also related to the understanding of the rural setting and the stereotypic ideas it attracts. In a simplistic way, distance may cause the problem that representatives of the structures at the centre may not recognize the issues of rurality in their decisions and actions, which subsequently influences the accessibility and participation of the rural inhabitants. The stereotypical perceptions of 'rural' as opposed to 'urban' are still alive, although concepts such as 'differentiated' are often used to described rural areas. Shucksmith et al. (2009) present two types which dominate the representation and ideas of rural. In this typology, the idyllic pastoralist highlights stability, integrity, a strong nexus of values, traditions, and personal and family relationships, whereas the modernist emphasises the perceived backwardness of rural life, its lack of innovation, constraints, and resistance to change. In some cases, these typologies may lead to odd assumptions, for instance, by overvaluing family relationships and thus diminishing the need for assistance from the public sector, or by overemphasizing backwardness and hence excluding rural residents from a new technology.

In looking to achieve an understanding of overall well-being, Veenhoven (2002) emphasises that in order to mobilize the necessary support for people, political representatives must have an idea of what people want and they really need to achieve the most meaningful objectives, which entails the use of information received from individuals and groups. Similarly, in order to promote the participation of rural residents, the representatives of institutions should make an effort to find ways to support accessibility, and also develop the contemporary idea of the rural setting that directs their sphere of influence. In so doing, the process is again turned back on participation and having an opportunity to influence the matters that concern one's own life.

3. Empirical study on rural well-being

Multiple data, a case study and theme analysis

The research method used here is empirical case study, under which the contemporary phenomenon is examined within its real-life context and any prior theoretical or conceptual information is exploited on the basis of the analysis (Yin 2003). In this paper, the focus of analysis is given to the measures of the promotion of well-being of villagers, at the scale of the municipalities, from the perspectives of municipal representatives. The North Karelia was chosen as a case study region because of its extent rural areas (Helminen et al. 2014), and because the transforming of the responsibility for providing public social and welfare services from municipalities to regional organisation (Siun sote 2016) has stimulated discussion around the promotion of well-being in municipalities.

The data is collected by using qualitatively-driven mixed method design, where the qualitative interviews from the micro-level compose the core of the data, which is backgrounded with municipal welfare reports from micro-level and supplemented with an open answer of the national survey from macro-level (Morse & Niehaus 2009, 85–116). The interviews were conducted in 2017, and cover 12 of the 13 North Karelian municipalities. One municipality offered no response to our interview request. The national survey was carried out in 2017 and was aimed at 220 municipalities that cover sparsely populated rural areas in Finland (SYKE 2014). In all, 159 municipal representatives responded to the survey, from which 114 gave an answer to the open answer that was utilized in this article. The question for the open answer was: 'Describe a concrete example of how municipality promotes the well-being in sparsely populated area.' The municipal welfare reports are drawn from the period of 2013–2017 and give an insight of the main issues related to well-being and social inclusion in these 12 municipalities of interviews.

The data collection by interviews enables us to examine the details related to the knowledge which is based on the experiences, perceptions and opinions of the interviewees (Rubin & Rubin 2012). The interviews were carried out as expert interviews with municipal representatives who are responsible for the promotion of well-being in their municipality. The purpose of the expert interviews is to compose knowledge of a certain phenomenon, practices and processes (Alastalo & Åkerman 2017, 373–376). The themes relevant to this paper focus on the participation related

to the understanding of the rural in the municipalities, accessibility by mobility, the services provided in the villages, the democratic involvement in planning and decision-making, and the promotion of civic action in the village. The interviews were semi-structured (Willis et al. 2007, 205) as these main themes composed the structure of all interviews, but the specific questions were tailored on a basis of the individual perceptions of an expert (Alastalo & Åkerman 2017, 378–380).

The utilised analysis method is a content analysis that enables replicable inferences from the texts (Krippendorff 2004, 18), which are based on the interviews and open answers. We analysed the interviews and the complementing open answers of the survey thematically based on the same themes that were utilised in the semi-structured interviews. According to the qualitative content analysis, the interviews and open answer were organised under these themes using phrases, sentences or paragraphs as units for analysis, which are re-contextualised on the basis of the previous literature (Krippendorff 2004, 83, 87–89). These units referred to the themes in the form of descriptions of the policy measures and practices or personal points of view given by the interviewees or the respondents of the survey. The analysis is supported by the excerpts from the interviews, which we have translated from Finnish to English; otherwise they appear in the same form as in the transcribed interview data or as a format offered by the interviewee if the interview was carried out via e-mail. The interviews are numbered as I1–I12. The welfare reports of the municipalities under study are used to give an illustration of the local perspective on structural well-being in North Karelian municipalities.

Structural well-being at the case study of North Karelia

North Karelia struggles with common peripheral problems related to structural well-being such as a nationally high unemployment rate, morbidity index and distorted dependency ratio (Bock 2016; Table 1). These features are repeated in the municipal welfare reports (2013–2017) in a section that provides information about the state of local well-being and the structures of welfare in comparison with other similar municipalities in Finland. The distorted dependency ratios based on ageing, unemployment and poverty are presented as a structural quality that already hinders the local well-being or presents a plausible risk for well-being in the future. Morbidity is described as high, which is partly connected with an unhealthy lifestyle. Social exclusion and mental health issues often recur in the objectives that should be tackled. Most of these problems concern individuals in all of the population groups, but special concern is placed on the families with children, youth and the unemployed who suffer from overall malaise and exclusion. Overall, any descriptions of strengths and the positive sides of well-being are rare. In this respect, the problems that should be addressed dominate the policies of well-being in municipalities, and raises the question as to how promoting and enabling participation are woven into this setting.

Tab 1. Unemployment rate, morbidity index and dependency ratio of North Karelia and Finland (THL Sotkanet 2017a; 2017b; Statistics Finland 2017).

Variable	North Karelia	Finland
Unemployment rate, %[3]	17.1	13.2
Morbidity index, age-standardised[4]	120.5	100
Demographic dependency ratio[5]	62.7	59.1

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[3] THL, Unemployed people, as % of labour force: The indicator gives the unemployed as a percentage of the total labour force. An unemployed person is someone who is not in an employment relationship or who is not full-time self-employed or a full-time student.

[4] THL, Morbidity index, age-standardised: The index describes the morbidity in a specific municipality or region in relation to the whole country's morbidity. It takes into account seven different groups of diseases and four different aspects of weighting to evaluate the significance of diseases. The value of the index increases as the morbidity in the region increases. The age-standardised index describes those regional differences that do not depend on differences in age structure.

[5] Statistics Finland, Demographic dependency ratio: The demographic dependency ratio is calculated as the total umber of persons age 0–14 and the number of persons aged 65 and older divided by the number of persons aged 15–64 and then multiplied by 100.

Rurality in North Karelia

North Karelia as a whole represents a rural-like region with extensive rural land cover and only one urban area at the regional centre (Fig. 1). This sets all municipalities within the region into the rural context and underlines the importance of rural perspectives. However, rural regions are not all alike, which implies the differentiated approach taken on rural areas (Marsden 1998; Kainulainen & Rintala 2003). According to Helminen et al. (2014), rural areas may be typified into three groups by their qualities. Rural areas close to urban areas are physical, but the amount of population is lower than at the centre and these areas can include characteristics more typical of other rural areas. Rural heartlands are areas, with rural centres and relatively dense but rural-like population structures. In sparsely populated areas, the settlement pattern is scattered and remote from the centres. Even the smallest population centres are rare and extensive uninhabited areas can be located between them. As it can be seen from the map, the rural heartlands and sparsely populated rural areas dominate the structure of the whole region, and which both refer to the sparse rural area in the empirics.
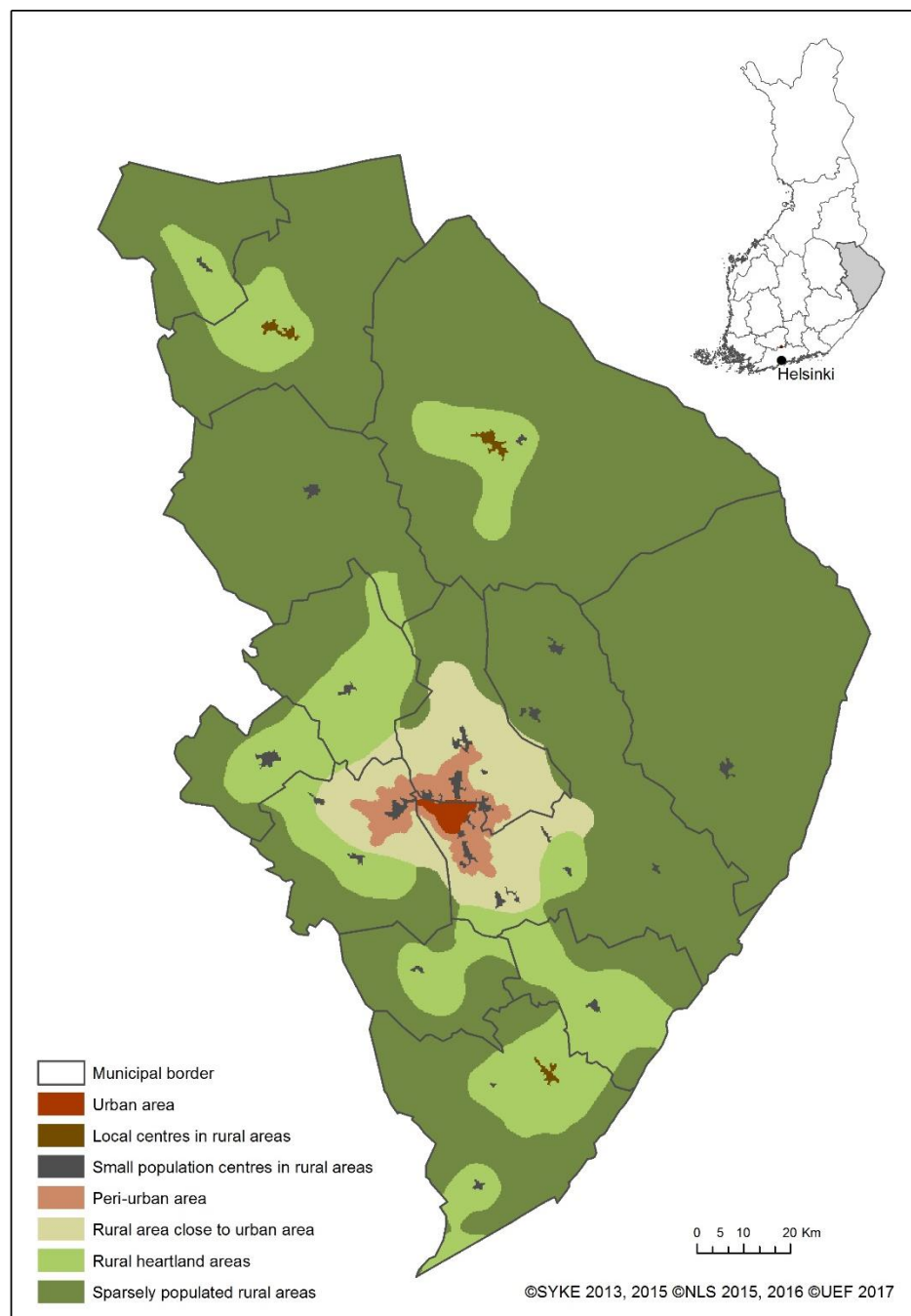

Municipal border
Urban area
Local centres in rural areas
Small population centres in rural areas
Peri-urban area
Rural area close to urban area
Rural heartland areas
Sparsely populated rural areas

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Fig 1. Regional structure of North Karelia.

4. Empirical findings on the promotion of well-being

Understanding of rurality

The extensive sparsely populated rural areas of North Karelia (Fig. 1) surely poses a question of accessibility as the common public services and administration are located in the municipal centre, and multifaceted services even further away. Other actions also have a tendency to take place at the centres, and in this respect, the dominating structure within the region is close to the marginal rural areas presented by Osti (2010). The first impression given by the interviewees underlines the conventional understanding of welfare services and verifies centralization as a normative structure of public welfare services: 'All the services are here at the municipal centre.' (I12) with the emphasis of fixed and conventional services: 'The services concentrates, for instance, the basic education.' (I9) Only three respondents directly referred to measures aimed at villages which could include both conventional welfare services: 'We have strong villages, nine primary schools' (I4) and preventive measures: 'We have several villages – and preventive measures are also aimed at them.' (I7) Otherwise, the interviewees wondered as to what the possible measures of well-being concerning the villages might be.

The extent of sparsity is differently and unevenly distributed though (Helminen et al. 2014; Fig. 1). At the lowest, only a small corner of the municipality is sparsely populated, and at the highest, the whole municipality is sparsely populated with the exception of a small centre. A regional centre is a diverse municipality that consists of all variations from urban to sparsely populated areas. These structural differences influence on the ways in which rural areas outside the centres are understood and acknowledged (cf. Shucksmith & Chapman 1998).

The interviewees of the monocentric municipalities with the extent sparse rural areas gave the simplest description of municipal spatial structure that concerned the division between the municipal centre and the villages: 'The municipal centre is different than the villages' (I1) or the whole sparsely populated area: 'We use the term sparsely populated area.' (I5) In these cases, the interviewees pondered participation through the measures of well-being directed to the villages or the accessibility from villages to the centre via transportation or online connections. In the polycentric municipalities with less extent sparse rural areas, the services and other measures around them are concentrated on a main centre and one or two other centres. The idea is that through a polycentric structure, the services and other measures have been brought close enough to the villages: 'The polycentricism means that the centres bring all the services close to villages.' (I6) The municipality of the regional centre has a clearly distinguishable structure. In this diverse municipality, the interviewee makes a difference between the downtown and four rural areas, which have previously been independent municipalities. The municipality has acknowledged that special characteristics exist in these rural areas, but so far there have been no specific measures concerning these areas, and the question of the participation and inclusion of the inhabitants is currently under development:

> [Rural inhabitants] have not been included. The inclusion is one big theme, which needs to be better taken into account during the next strategic period. It also includes this [perspective]. … We have detected that rural areas demand their own kind of recognition compared with the centre. (I2)

In the case of the relatively small and concentrated municipality, the interviewee pondered how reasonable the inherent division between the centre and the rural is: 'We have relatively small rural areas compared with parts of North Karelia or Eastern Finland, or other areas outside the growth centres, or regional peripheries. Our area is the smallest in scale in North Karelia and the population density is relatively high – i.e., most of the inhabitants live in the centre, or a few kilometres from the centre.' (I8) Partly, the matter of questioning the division is ideological reflecting that the municipality and its actions should be based on the idea of the whole population, and not some particular grouping: 'We cannot really separate the rural areas and the centre. It is the whole population.' (I6)

Mobility of inhabitants

The ability of inhabitants to participate in activities and be engaged with services is strongly observed through spatial distance and physical mobility (as referred to by Farrington & Farrington 2005). The mobility of inhabitants is a way by which inhabitants may have access to a service or action, or be connected with other people. From this approach, the transportation possibilities refer to indirect means of how participation around measures of well-being may or may not be promoted. The normative presumption is that rural inhabitants are attuned to use private cars and drive long distances: 'People can move nowadays. … People visit the supermarket more often than blood tests, and the hypermarket is 80 kilometres away from here, at the regional centre.' (I3) The ownership of a car is also seen as a commonly accepted necessity in rural areas: 'Of course you must have a vehicle of your own. It is a necessity, if you have to travel around the services on a daily basis.' (I12) As a replacement for driving your own car, the neighbourly-help is typical: 'Many times people seem to come with a lift from their neighbour.' (I1) Using publicly supported transportation out of the municipal centres is seen as an exception rather than a rule: 'But we do consider [publicly supported transportation] on specific occasions, when people are physically disabled, or if it is necessary for another reason.' (I8) The normative assumptions verify the generalised understanding of the rural (cf. Shucksmith et al. 2009) as a place of car ownership and a driving culture.

For the purpose of essential needs, the municipalities have tried to find compensatory means that could replace full-size and time-scheduled bus services. The most common form mentioned in both the open answers of the survey and the interviews is the combination of taxi and public transportation, which is usually referred to as '*call-taxi transportation'* or '*service transportation'*. The point is to offer access to the services provided at the centres. This kind of reduced public transportation may be partly or fully scheduled or routed, which usually means accessibility to the centre once or twice a week. The wishes of users are taken into account if possible: 'The call-taxis have regular schedules and routes, but you also may place requests.' (I3) The cost lies in between the normal taxi charge and normal public transportation tickets (local busses or trains), which both the interviewees and survey representatives assessed as being relatively low-priced. The services can be used to access a variety of services including shops and exercise facilities, albeit the transportation is often centred around the opening hours of public services: 'For the most part, the service transportation is linked to the opening hours of health centres and libraries, but there are also other practices.' (I3) The high dependency ratio relating to the aging is clearly seen in the case of transportation as the most common group of users mentioned are the elderly: 'The transportation is utilised by elderly people. … For instance, a group of pensioners assembles weekly … It is scheduled with the call-taxi.' (I12) This approach validates the questions of participation possibilities, and ultimately the inclusion of older people within the rural context (Walsh et al. 2014).

The public transportation of children is another specific issue that is raised in the open answers and the interviews. Public transportation to primary schools is regulated by law, which guarantees the minimum standard of return transportation once a day during the school period. As an example of municipal culture differences, only single municipalities try to exceed this minimum by enabling transportation support for the children of divorced parents, or by organising more returns after a school day: 'The change is possible. If you are not using the first route, you may use the next one.' (I1) The accessibility to education after primary school may also be catered for: 'The upper secondary students may use the transportation to primary schools' (I1), or not: 'The students get no support [for transportation] on the education level of second degree' (I2) depending on the municipal policies. The common age for beginning the second degree is 16, which means that they only have a right to obtain a moped-driving license. Otherwise, students at a distance are reliant on the transportation support from their parents or other driving adults. The level of accessibility varies according to the form of education, which means that accessibility tends to be better for upper secondary school students, rather than those at vocational school.

The empirics of this study supplement the discourse of marginalized peripheries from the perspective of rural youth (Tuuva-Hongisto et al. 2016). Especially, the question of accessibility outside school time is seen as a private matter that concerns relatively few children

and young people. The main assumption is that those who need to get to the centre will have access, despite the lack of public transportation:

> *The number of children living there is marginal. So few are living in the villages, their accessibility is not a problem. Those who are living there will have access to the centre. Parents take them to practice or anywhere else. (I3)*

Services in the villages

Participation in services is a crucial part of well-being and creating a sense of inclusion (Matthies 2014). As Bock (2016) pointed out, the distances in sparsely populated rural areas and the lack of public services can lead to rural areas being consigned to the margin. The equality of services and inclusion require attention not only in relation to different population groups, but also in relation to different types of regions. The interviews with municipalities revealed that services of well-being do not often focus on villages and their inhabitants: 'No kind of [service] come to mind.' (I2) Municipalities do not necessarily even know what such targeted activities could be: 'What could be aimed at the villages? I do not even know.' (I3)

There are relatively few services or activities which are targeted specifically at villages. The typical services are village schools, activities of the Adult Education Centre, mobile library and elderly home care. The extent of the Adult Education Centre in providing different courses and guided hobbies was especially highlighted in the open answers. In the interviews, the creation of sports opportunities and the development of electronic services were raised as central means of the promotion of well-being. Instead of mobile services, municipalities tended to develop home-based services such as a village helper as part of the home care service provision.

Currently, the focus of municipalities is placed on fast and functional on-line connections that provide the opportunity to use electronic services. New digital solutions have been piloted, for example, in home care for the elderly. New technology enables elderly people to be connected to home care through a shared terminal. Connections are also seen to play an important role in preventing loneliness and exclusion. For instance, an elderly person can communicate via a network with family members and relatives who may be far away:

> *We have built fibre network for everyone who has wanted it. … We have a project where home care customers can get at home a terminal device that will help them to stay in touch with home care. … At the same time, the same device provides means for communicating with family and relatives elsewhere. ... The loneliness can be cured. (I1)*

To improve the accessibility of services, the municipalities with the extent sparse rural areas have sought new kinds of solutions by developing services in their villages. In one case, the municipality has organised regular service-days in the village, whereby different service providers and actors provide the necessary services and training, for example, in health counselling: 'We have organised service days. … People gather, for instance, once or twice a week, at the village house, where there is a computer training, a hairdresser, some health lectures etc.' (I1) In the diverse municipalities, multi-service desks have also been established in the centres of former municipalities: 'The municipality has established multi-service desks in the centres of former municipalities.' (I2) Singular municipalities with extent rural areas have employed a 'village helper' who works around the villages and provides an extended home service for elderly villagers: 'We have this kind of village assistant because we have many villages with elderly inhabitants. … There are many 70–100 year olds living there. The assistant cleans the yard, cleans the gutter, carries firewood, tidies up, helps with cooking, etc. We have evidence that it will help prevent them from entering into institutional care. This is the promotion of well-being at its best.' (I3)

Mobile services have not been heavily developed in the case study area, and there is no significant interest towards furthering these kinds of solutions. Electronic services are considered as a replacement for mobile services: 'We have no mobile services at this time. More in the direction of having services via e-services. After all, we have constructed some broadband network, little bit everywhere in the municipality. For a long time, there has not been any feedback in the municipality that remote connections would not work.' (I4) In the open answers, some

solutions for mobile services were presented, for example, in the area of mobile health services. The most typical mobile service is a mobile library, which is also seen to be in use around the municipalities of the case study region.

Both, the open survey answers and interviews with municipalities, highlighted sports facilities and guided sports activities as measures to support the well-being of villagers. The importance of exercise opportunities is often simply linked with any sensible activity, but indirectly, these opportunities are set as a part of the means of diminishing the problem of unhealthy lifestyles and their associated morbidity. Providing recreation is regarded as a means to sustain experienced well-being: 'The municipality has leased land from land-owners …, which municipality has subleased to the villages so the villagers can go to refresh themselves in the lake areas.' (I1) Municipalities also build, refurbish and maintain different kinds of sport facilities in villages: 'We have ski-trails, jogging tracks and hockey rinks in the villages. It is the facility of what has been exported there.' (I3) The development and maintenance work is done both by the municipalities themselves and in co-operation with local sports clubs and village associations: 'The municipality cannot alone, for example, maintain trails in every village. We simply do not have enough resources. … When we have the co-operation agreement, it will be managed for the compensation [for the local sports clubs or village association].' (I4) Co-operation with the civil society is therefore significant because without it, maintaining sports facilities in villages would often not be possible.

The importance of widespread co-operation with local associations was clearly underlined. The reasons for this partly relate to exact measures which can be enabled through the co-operation. Emphasis in this area is connected with an understanding of the necessities for inhabitants' well-being, and why municipal representatives should have an idea of what people need (cf. Veenhoven 2002):

> The aging of the population will bring about changes that are being considered together with local associations. How can we promote the well-being and health of older people? Co-operation with the civil society is particularly important now. In recent years, the municipality has regularly invited various associations to discuss and devise different events to promote well-being. (I8)

Co-operation between the civil society and municipality is seen as particularly important in preventive work: 'All of these village projects and others require people who have a desire to do the thing. These are much more effective than public projects. … If there were no co-operation, much of the real work for well-being would not be done. We would lose so much. The municipality does the curing work, it cannot be done by the civil society. In order to avoid the need for that, civil society is needed.' (I3)

Democratic involvement

As Veenhoven (2002) emphasizes, political representatives must have an idea of what people want and really need, and therefore they need to develop a variety of ways for citizens to be heard and to participate. Supporting participation is important not only from the standpoint of democracy and local development, but also from the point of the well-being of individuals and communities themselves. Participation is also a means to promote social inclusion or prevent exclusion, and so involvement itself reinforces the well-being of individuals (Hayward et al. 2004; Shortall 2004).

Based on our empirical data, the strengthening of the inclusion of residents in local decision-making is seen as important, and the involvement of residents is supported by various means. However, there are differences in the consideration of rural areas. In a diverse municipality, the public hearings are held similarly in the centre and rural areas, but without special focus on rural residents: 'There are no different rural versus centre opportunities for participation. There have been traditional hearings, some big issues have been debated similarly [in the rural areas] than in the centre, but nothing special or different. … It is our duty to have a conversation and listen to local people, and that is fulfilled both in the centre and in the rural areas. But there is no specific consideration regarding rural people.' (I2) Depending on the municipal culture, municipalities of any structure may have special discussion forums targeted at the villages, and local policy makers and officers make regular village-tours. Often these tours are conducted in

co-operation with different partners and projects: 'Also, there is now a village tour. … The Union for Rural Culture and Education of Eastern Finland and Jake-project [that aims at the developing of civil action] has been our partner. … The village evenings are important. The locals appreciate being present – talking, informing and responding to the questions. … Speaking face-to-face increases confidence and generates a good and positive atmosphere.' (I4)

Individual municipalities with extent rural areas have established a village parliament in order to improve the relational dimensions of inclusion by promoting social participation and diminishing powerlessness (cf. Shucksmith and Chapman 1998; Room 1999). The municipality invites village associations to convene annually to discuss common issues and development needs: '[The village parliament meet] once a year. … It is a good practice, particularly in this kind of wide-ranging municipality, where villages are far away from each other. … Criticism is not necessarily related to the unrealised issues, but [criticism comes] if they are not taken into account, if we have not been present.' (I1) Residents of sparsely populated areas have also been involved in the preparation of municipal rural strategies and welfare reports: 'When a city developed a rural strategy, people in the sparsely populated areas participated in the strategy, whereby appropriate development points emerged during the process.' (I5) The involvement of residents and communities in the creation of policies for well-being in the municipality is seen as a process of well-being itself:

> *Dimensions of well-being and inclusion have been opened up and discussed with churches, associations and entrepreneurs. We have considered together what well-being and inclusion means to everyone, and how each could contribute to it. This process has been a form of well-being itself, especially through communality and participation processes.* (I6)

There are also municipalities of any structure where the new governance model introduces an advisory board of welfare and inclusion. Smaller working groups operate under the advisory board and they are tasked with considering specific issues and taking things forward. The advisory board consists of local councillors and municipal citizens. With the new body, 'perceptions and participation will go hand in hand' (I12). Other more traditional organs that support the democracy and inclusion of residents are youth councils, councils for the elderly, and the discussion and feedback forums which feature on municipal websites.

An important part of civic participation are the associations and the political activity in which the villagers are actively involved. According to our empirics, villagers are well included in local political institutions and in this respect cannot be regarded as being marginalized outside the mainstream (cf. Reimer 2004). On the contrary, the opportunities for influence are described as being strong as far as villagers are concerned:

> *Village activists are also politically active. In our kind of community with respect to the population, the opportunities for influencing the matters of villages are much stronger than the opportunities for influencing the central area. They are also listened to differently when they come from the villages and they have a bit of a difficult time, e.g. the distances among other things. In any case, they are not weak or do not have less influence. On the contrary, they have even more. They are politically so strong, and often strongly networked. There is no need for them to create any new influence – they are fully involved in everything.* (I3)

Civic action of villagers

Participation through civic action such as village action is seen as important in both the eyes of the municipalities of the case study and also in the open answers. The statements buttress the approach by which the locally embedded structures for participation and empowerment support the rights and abilities of inhabitants to be active, which in-turn improves the well-being of the community (Evers 2009; Juhila et al. 2017, 38–39). Primarily, the intention is to support the genuine participation of inhabitants, but on some occasions, support shifts to the side of citizen engagement (cf. Siisiäinen 2014), for instance, when some action cannot be realized without active citizen participation. This is also closely related to the different forms of participation, where participation may be seen as either an indirect mean to enable some other

aim of well-being, or as a direct aim i.e., as an end of well-being (cf. Hayward et al. 2004; Shortall 2004).

The interview and the open answers show several types of measures for supporting action in the villages. These measures can involve the maintenance of infrastructure like village-houses or ski-trails, or free access to facilities such as the premises of the village-school. Low-level financial support for associations is a widely used form of village assistance. Albeit the support is mainly equally distributed, the financing can be influenced by the village's own activity: 'If the village is active, it gets and benefits more. It cannot be pushed by the municipality.' (I1) In this respect, the action is based on genuine participation as a form of initiative for inhabitants, and the support follows these initiatives.

Although grants are often small, they are important for the villages since they enable both structural and mental support for action. For instance, the facilities for social activities can be provided for villagers through grants which also uphold civic action: 'We have grants for the maintenance of village houses. If there is a gathering place, it probably increases the activity of the villagers.'(I4) This kind of example refers to citizen engagement rather than genuine participation. The maintenance of a village house requires active inhabitants, and the gathering place is represented as a place which further activates inhabitants. The renovation of village houses as common gathering places, the building, restoration and maintenance of sports facilities, as well as arranging recreational opportunities and joint events are noted as contributions to community well-being. Although the support for the action partly presumes a level of citizen engagement, the interviewees express their appreciation towards civic action and underline the voluntary work of inhabitants:

> *Village associations have built facilities, for example, village houses, where people can act together, and thereby it increases well-being. They also organize cultural and sports events. Now we have one village association which has built a sports hall with voluntary work and EU-funding. The municipality is involved in providing mental support, with little money, but not so much. That is how they build exercise capacity for themselves. Village associations are doing a lot of work.* (I3)

Village action is seen to play an important role in strengthening communality, and thence the social well-being. Another role related to well-being is the feeling of safety, which has been felt to be compromised after the centralization of public security units. In order to tackle this problem, municipalities of extent rural areas have intensified co-operation with civil society by creating village safety, which improve preparedness and safety in sparsely populated areas. The aim is to increase the participation of residents in maintaining village safety, and also to encourage neighbourly help. These groups work in emergency rescue operations, and on accident and crisis situations, for example, if there is a storm damage or power outages:

> *With the regional rescue department, we compiled the village safety. … Villagers who have received training have a readiness to safely move fallen trees for example, … and they have been encouraged to give neighbourly help, to go checking that everything is fine if the homecare service has not had time to visit yet. (I1)*

The villagers' safety groups have been developed together with the rescue services of North Karelia, the association for rural culture and education, the municipalities and the villages. 'The village associations built this network of safety for the village together with the rescue project. There is now a safety net. One number to call, if there is an emergency.' (I3) The village security groups promote a local social belonging and create a sense of social security as well, forming communal resources for help. In a sense, the village action and the strengthening sense of social belonging can be regarded as an indirect mean and an end, whereas the sense of safety and the realization of safety by action can be considered more as final aims, i.e., the ends of well-being.

The empirics underlines a locally embedded view on well-being, which is built on everyday living environments, and where prosperity should also be considered at the level of local communities and villages. Hereby, the co-operation between the public sector and civil society is seen as a keen issue in the promotion of the well-being of villagers:

If we go to the local level, closer to everyday life, that is the well-being of the village and the promotion of local vitality, well-being and health, then the village associations, in co-operation with the city and with other potential actors, play a big role. (I8)

5. Conclusion and discussion

This article has examined the measures taken by municipalities to promote the well-being in sparsely populated rural villages and the inclusion of villagers in measures of well-being enacted in the municipalities. The analysis shows that the main public welfare services are mostly concentred at the municipal centres. The measures targeted at villages have emphasis on new public policies, which underline preventive and enabling measures. The approach emphasis the improvements in the qualities of life and liveability in the environment though material resources are still regarded as important for the support of well-being. The measures are partly influenced by characteristics and problems, which are typical of North Karelian municipalities including issues such as an ageing population, social exclusion and unhealthy lifestyles. The questions for the participation of groups such as elderly people, the immobile and children are raised more often than with the other inhabitants of the villages.

Most of the opportunities for being involved in an action or service related to well-being refer to participation, which in itself creates well-being as an end. Another element of participation indirectly concerns the measures of well-being, which place the promotion of participation as a means of promoting some other form of well-being. The different types of policy measures that support for participation in measures of well-being are related to different types of structural inclusion and active participation (Table 2). The distributional inclusion enhances structural access to resources and services whereas relational inclusion enables structural participation in social action and networks. Furthermore, attempts at improving active participation have been made either in the form of genuine participation or citizen engagement. The relational inclusion and active participation always includes some kind of social dimension, but the distributional inclusion may exists without meaningful social dimension. The role of a villager, or villagers, as an actor refers doing things alone or with others, or any kind of intercourse with other people. A non-actor refers to a more passive role of a villager, just a receiver of provided service. As well as one measure of well-being may be both a means and an end of well-being, the different types of structural inclusion and active participation may be both a means or an end of inclusion. Hence, it is a thin line between the types of inclusion and the types of participation.

Regarding mainly structural inclusion, participation is supported through accessibility to a sphere of services and actions which promote well-being. One part concerns above all the distributional and only secondary relational inclusion through mobility. The normative acceptance is the private ownership of a car and private driving. Public transportation is reduced to 'service transportation' and serving school routes, which mainly enhances the participation of the elderly, children and those with mobility problems. Another part concerns both distributional and relational inclusion which are supported by providing services and actions in the village, which thence promotes relational and active participation. The services aimed at villages are village schools, the activities of the Adult Education Centre, mobile library, elderly home care, and guided sports activities. The creation of an infrastructure for communal interaction, exercise and recreation, and the development of electronic services are raised as central means of promoting well-being. These services can be solely provided by the municipality but often the maintenance of the services or action includes active participation from local communities and associations, which also support the co-operation between municipality and civil society.

Tab 2. The type of structural inclusion and active participation by the type of policy measures.

Type of policy measure	Support for participation	Type of structural inclusion	Role of villager/villagers	Type of active participation
Publicly provided: - mobility to the centre - services in the village - electronic services	access to services or resources, social action optional - electronic appointment - transportation to healthcare - mobile library - guided courses in the village	distributional, relational possible	receiver, actor or non-actor	genuine participation optional
	access to social action and networks through services or resources - village schools - group activities in the village - social communication through on-line - transportation to social activities	relational through distributional	receiver, actor or non-actor	genuine participation optional
Publicly provided: - possibilities in democratic involvement in the village	access to social action and networks - access to democratic forums	relational	receiver, actor	genuine participation
	access to services or resources through social action and networks - access to planning and decision making	distributional through relational	receiver, actor	genuine participation
Publicly supported: - civic action and resources in the village	access to social action and networks - gratuitous financial grants - gratuitous access to facilities	relational	receiver, actor	genuine participation
	access to social action and networks through resources - financial grants against group activities - access to facilities of social gathering against maintenance	relational through distributional	producer, receiver, actor	genuine participation through citizen engagement
	access to services and resources, social networks optional, through social action - village safety - access to sport facilities against maintenance - development projects through village action & Leader	distributional, relational optional, through relational	producer, receiver, actor	genuine participation optional, citizen engagement

Especially relational inclusion and active participation are supported by creating possibilities for participation in democratic involvement regarding planning and decision-making. Village tours and hearings are used for the improvement of the democratic involvement of villagers either in the form of democratic actors or in more as the recipients of information. These tours and hearings can also be used as means to find out what people want and really need regarding their individual or social well-being in the community, which may lead to the improvements of distributional inclusion. Villagers are represented as relatively powerful due to their importance in local political activities, and their opportunities for other types of democratic involvement are described as relatively good. The measures though refer to a direction of behaviour, which favours active inhabitants – in principle, the loud and active are heard well, but the question of those who are less vocal is still open.

Relational inclusion and genuine participation are also promoted by supporting civic action in the villages. Opportunities for civic action were mostly supported by awarding small financial grants, giving mental support or providing facilities for action. As much as the action is motivated by the inhabitants, in principle, the policies of improvement show some references to the citizen

engagement which normatively favours productive and active citizenship. In these cases, the inhabitants may receive a service or action or the access to the resource that benefits their well-being only by their own efforts, which are then supported by the municipalities. The study also revealed that active villages simply gain more than those that are passive. Superficially, this may be seen as the choice of inhabitants but may also refer to a form of structural exclusion if the causes do not originate from the choices of inhabitants, but more from lack of capabilities or opportunities to participate.

As a whole, the participation related to policy measures of well-being indicate both genuine participation, and the expectations and demands of the citizen engagement. The measures support the rights and abilities of individuals or their community to be active, and to be able to control and be responsible for their own lives. Partly, the measures demand citizen engagement, which refers to the responsibility of inhabitants through activating policies, and turns the idea towards self-management. In principle, the intention for participation is seen as enabling rather than binding, and means that inhabitants may exercise their choice regarding their participation. But then again, a policy promoting well-being seem to favour active citizenship.

While these were examples of means to promote well-being, participation and inclusion, the measures showed diversity among inhabitants, villages and municipalities, resulting in the locally embedded structures of participation. Even the structural marginalization of rural was shown differently depending on the relative size and remoteness of the whole municipality, and the inherent plurality of areas inside the municipality. As the research indicates locally embedded solutions relating the regional structures of municipalities, diversity of inhabitants, and municipal traditions and cultures, it prompts further questions about the differences between municipalities related to 'the promotion of well-being'.

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