

Lapland lives from its nature

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Lapland has always been the treasure trove of natural resources in Finland. There was the time of tar, gold and salmon. After the wars, we moved into the era of timber, ores and energy. The natural resources and the jobs connected to their harvesting and processing have always brought food to the tables of Lapland.

However, the utilisation of our natural resources has been carried out sustainably; Lapland is still the purest place in Europe. Studies show that Lapland has the cleanest air and purest food; reindeer, game, fish, berries and mushrooms. Similarly, almost unnoticed, the natural resources and also the natural conditions have become the foundation of lines of business in Lapland, especially tourism and testing operations.

Focus on bioeconomy

In recent years, the field has gained a new umbrella term or buzzword: bioeconomy. Bioeconomy has been highlighted as a key target for development in Finland and the rest of Europe. The first Finnish Bioeconomy Strategy was prepared in 2014. Its aims include creating new economic growth and new jobs through the growth of bioeconomy business and products and services that offer high added value. The Government Programme of Prime Minister Juha Sipilä also considers bioeconomy as a strength and highlights the promotion of self-sufficiency as one of its key projects.

These policy definitions certainly suit Lapland – they are already a way of life for us! Even though nature is already the foundation of our economic life, Lapland still has a lot of untapped potential that is based on rich and pure natural resources. We meet all the preconditions to be able to grow into an important expert region, on the scale of Europe, of Arctic bioeconomy business based on renewable natural resources.

In Lapland, the opportunities for the sustainable use of natural resources and natural conditions have been highlighted in all the regional programmes and strategies published in recent years: the Lapland Agreement and its implementation plan, Lapland's Rural Programme, the Lapland Bioenergy Programme and the Arctic Specialisation Programme. All of these programmes share a basic starting point: that the sustainable increase of the degree of processing of natural resources through close co-operation between research, development organisations and businesses in the natural resources field is central for the vitality of all of Lapland.

EU regional policy as a framework for development work

Today, the regional promotion of all lines of business in Finland is based on the regional and programming policy of the European Union. One of the central focus areas of the regional policy for the current programming period (2014–2020) is the promotion of innovation. The EU has launched the concept of Smart Specialisation to support regions in finding innovation opportunities for their own industries and services. In Smart Specialisation, economic growth is based on the utilisation of competence structures in the development of the region's economic life. Smart Specialisation helps find interaction between different industries and technologies within the region and between regions.

This is strengthened by the regional and national structural funds' requirement that there must be Smart Specialisation strategies. One of the key objectives of the Smart Specialisation Strategy is helping regions integrate their own development activities with the EU's various financial instruments and programmes. This helps create proposals that complement each other. Lapland was one of the first regions in Finland to prepare its own smart specialisation programme, which was named the Arctic Specialisation Programme.

The aim of the Arctic Specialisation Programme is for Lapland to be a leader in the utilisation of Arctic natural resources and conditions. As the most Arctic region in Finland, we know how to commercialise our Arctic expertise and sustainably leverage our Arctic business opportunities. We strive to be an active Arctic operator and an important international hub of Arctic traffic and knowledge. We link the Arctic Region to the European Union and offer our residents a unique and appealing living environment.

Cluster work as the basis for development

Last year, we launched wide-scale cluster work in order to deploy Arctic specialisation. Over a year ago, Lapland was selected as a European model region for cluster development among six top regions. Lapland is in good company – the other regions selected based on an open application were Hamburg, Stockholm, the Centro Region in Portugal, Nord-Pas de Calais in France and the West Region in Romania.

The model regions were selected to develop and implement new European modes of operation for clusters that innovatively utilise the natural strengths of the regions, for example. The model regions receive expert advisory services from the European Cluster Observatory.

We launched the actual cluster work last year with the ASP (Arctic Smartness Portfolio) Project, which is aimed at taking growing clusters from Lapland towards international arenas and new markets. Strengthening regional co-operation is considered the starting point; strengthening the interaction between Lapland's economic life and RDI activities is vital for success.

Lapland's current five Arctic smart specialisation clusters comprise networks of companies, business support services, financiers, research and education organisations and other operators in the region: Arctic Industry and Circular Economy, Arctic Smart Rural Community, Arctic Safety and Security, Arctic Development Environments and Arctic Design.

Research, development and innovation in key role

RDI activities play a key role in today's cluster-based development of industrial and commercial activities. Educational institutions must be on the front line, listening to and supporting the needs of business. At its best, the co-operation can create new things for not only school operations but also for the contents of successful business.

Since its founding, the Lapland University of Applied Sciences has upheld a strong business-oriented operating model. The core of the Lapland UAS strategy is knowledge of the Arctic environment, which refers to the comprehensive management and utilisation of the conditions. I am extremely pleased that the strategic areas of emphasis – safety and security knowledge, managing distances, smart use of natural resources, Arctic co-operation and cross-border

expertise as well as service business and entrepreneurship – are completely in line with the focal points of the regional development work!

The focus of the smart use of natural resources directly touches almost all of the above-mentioned clusters of Lapland. I envision that, in this focus area in particular, Lapland University of Applied Sciences will play a key role in the development work in the near future. The interfaces and consolidation of lines of business that use the natural resources and conditions, promotion of diversity and increasing the value added are core areas of cluster-based development that need active and high-quality RDI activities in order to succeed.

Provisions and something to carry them

Lapland has always lived, lives today and will in future live from its nature. Naturally, the way and forms of life are constantly developing. In the future, sustainability, ecology and the need to find synergy between different lines of business will continue to be highlighted in the use of natural resources and natural conditions. I strongly believe that these themes also contain the provisions, or preconditions, for future growth in the natural resources field. To carry these provisions, we need strong RDI work that goes hand-in-hand with business as well as international networking. We already have the provisions and the things we need to carry them here in Lapland – all we need to do is load up and start our journey towards new Arctic success stories!