



Stronger



Prosperous

The Day of Countryside Living, Estonia



SUMMARY

The Day of Countryside Living is an Estonian initiative aimed at attracting people to the Estonian countryside to address challenges such as depopulation, lack of services and urbanisation. It started in 2019 and attracts around 40 Estonian rural municipalities every year, from Hiiumaa to Setomaa and from Alutaguse to Häädemeste. The event follows an 'open doors' format, where local communities showcase rural life and its offerings. Visitors can explore local schools, municipal centres, kindergartens, health facilities, cultural and sports centres, community buildings, local enterprises, libraries, companies and more. This helps people make informed decisions about relocating to these areas. Companies also present available job opportunities and real estate. In total, more than 500 enterprises across Estonia participate in this event which attracts thousands of visitors annually.



CONTEXT

Maal elamise päev – the Day of Countryside Living – is an initiative aimed at attracting more entrepreneurial and enthusiastic people to the Estonian countryside. The event was designed in 2019 with **positive branding of the rural lifestyle**, with active communities and services offered by rural municipalities. It contrasts with the image it is very often portrait in the Estonian national news more focused on the negative trends such as the closing of schools given the decreasing number of children in needs of that service. The initiative aims to tackle the problem of rural depopulation by supporting families, who are thinking about returning or finding a new home in the countryside, to make informed decisions and establish contact with relevant organisations before moving. The event is sponsored by the Estonian Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Rural Affairs, as well as different organisations under a cooperation agreement. The Day of Countryside Living has been celebrated annually since 2019 on the third Saturday of September, preceded by a conference a week earlier.



OBJECTIVES

The project's long-term objective is to **shift the demographic trends** of rural areas in Estonia by providing a true and direct understanding of how people live, work and study in the countryside. Since jobs are becoming more flexible, it is often possible to do remote work from home in rural areas, and the need to stay in the city is more connected with the availability of services. Therefore, the purpose of the annual event is:

- > To reaffirm that rural areas have versatile opportunities for professional and entrepreneurial self-fulfilment (including outside agriculture); and
- > To show that living and working in the countryside has many advantages and can be enjoyable.

Themes: Demography, access to services, housing.
Rural revitalisation

Country: Estonia

Organisations: Estonian LEADER Union (non-governmental / civil society organisation) - Centre of Estonian Rural Research and Knowledge (National Rural Network) - Ministry of Regional Affairs and Agriculture (public authority) - Rural Development Foundation (public authority) - Association of Estonian Cities and Municipalities (non-governmental / civil society organisation) - Estonian Village Movement Kodukant (non-governmental / civil society organisation)

Start & end date: 04/2019 - Ongoing

Budget: 65 000 EUR annually

Funding sources: Estonian government

Website: <https://maalelamisepaev.ee>

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ACTIVITIES, KEY ACTORS, AND TIMELINE

Each year the event brings together many individuals and organisations willing to share their stories and show what the rural lifestyle offers. This is achieved thanks to cooperation between 10 rural organisations and rural municipalities, and the leadership of the Estonian LEADER Association to coordinate efforts. Visitors can explore local schools, municipal centres, nurseries, health centres, cultural and sports centres, community buildings, local businesses, libraries, businesses and more. This helps them make informed decisions about relocation to these areas. Companies also present job opportunities and real estate available in the area. More than **500 companies from all over Estonia** normally participate in this event. In 2022, **over 20 000 visitors attended**. Participants can use an interactive map available on the initiative's website to familiarise themselves with participating rural municipalities and plan their itinerary for the day. The initiative's platform also publishes dozens of stories about people in Estonia who decided to move from the city to the countryside. The target audience for the day is not just visitors from urban areas, but also rural people themselves to celebrate their lifestyle, increase their self-esteem and take pride in their achievements.



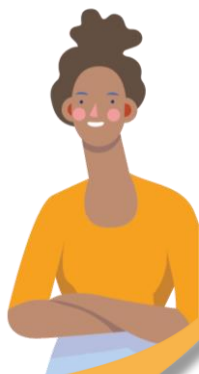
RESULTS

The initiative has turned around the general image of the rural lifestyle, building a positive and attractive narrative by highlighting successful examples with real people. The years of the COVID-19 pandemic have contributed to this, as many families started to think about moving to the countryside during the crisis. The event has also strengthened cooperation between municipalities, communities and entrepreneurs in rural areas. These different actors come together every year to work together in local teams to design the programme of the day, creating bonds and more opportunities for cooperation for rural development in their municipalities. Lastly, the initiative has set up a steering committee to define and guide efforts towards common goals and create novel **partnerships between ministries, national networks, municipalities and local action groups**. This committee includes the Estonian Village Movement Kodukant, the Estonian LEADER Union, the National Rural Network, the Rural Development Foundation, the Municipality of Rakvere, the Chamber of Agriculture and Commerce, the Estonian Farmers' Confederation and the NGO Partnerlus.



SUCCESS FACTORS/LESSONS LEARNT

A good marketing and communication campaign co-designed by all the actors involved and led by the steering committee lies behind the success of this initiative. A week before the event, an opening conference on rural policy is organised to raise this topic higher on the political agenda and gain the attention of media and policy-makers at both the national and local levels. The event website and social media are active all year round to **highlight stories about rural lifestyles and rural businesses**. During the visitor day in September, an adventure game based on geolocation is available that can be played on a mobile app. This encourages people to visit more places and win prizes from participating organisations, while the organisers can get more feedback from participants to keep improving the format. The main challenge has been growing the number of participating municipalities, which still requires more effort to keep increasing their involvement, sometimes by relying more on the network of local action groups, which tend to have fewer constraints to join the initiative than public administrations. The initiative has taken inspiration from other open days in Estonia and neighbouring countries to design its programme, such as an event in Finland using farm visit to promote local food.



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