

PREFACE

The regional resource centres have an important role in the Finnish society. The social and public basic structures are undergoing a change. The Finnish business service systems are being reorganised. The Programme on Women's Resource Centres supports the social change, because it contributes to women's entrepreneurship, employment, regional development and equality.

More than ten women's resource centres in different parts of Finland are establishing their position in the global network economy. The new economy is based on know-how and innovations. The economic growth is motorised by micro enterprises networked by utilising the information and communication technology. The women's resource centres serve as a joint innovative base of growth for these micro enterprises. The Programme on Women's Resource Centres and basic funding are needed to support the resource centre activities and develop women's know-how and innovativeness for the benefit of the whole society.

Minister of Regional and Municipal Affairs Hannes Manninen started a study for elaboration of a development plan for the regional resource centre programme the 11th of May 2004 related to the Entrepreneurship Policy Programme for strengthening of women's entrepreneurship in Finland. The objective defined in the report handed over to Minister Pekkarinen was to raise women's entrepreneurship to the European top level, from 33 % to 40 %. Also Minister Sinikka Mönkäre has appointed a rapporteur for studying of a system for equal sharing of the costs of parenthood. Today the willingness to promote women's employment and entrepreneurship seems to be strong.

All this work summarises the voices coming from the field. The views, activity, energy, initiative and responsibility of different female actors have been gathered and summed up in the Proposal for a Programme on Women's Resource Centres. When the studies started, there were only some resource centre projects at different stages. During the studies there are already a dozen of corresponding projects in different parts of Finland. Women's own initiative, commitment and motivation have thus a wider social meaning. Through the ongoing resource centre projects women present their concern about development of both rural and urban regions. They take part in re-organisation of the service structure. They also attend to their own and their families' welfare. Finland cannot afford not to utilise women's know-how to the benefit of general wellbeing – employment and entrepreneurship.

We want to thank all persons we have met at different stages of the development work for their concrete ideas and wishes. They broadened our views, diversified the contents of the study work and the programme proposal. Our particular thanks to the officers of the ministries for their valuable instructions and viewpoints. They have served as an infinite source of learning for us. The proposed Programme on Women's Resource Centres will enable continuing of fruitful cooperation cross the traditional administrative sectors. The Programme on Women's Resource Centres has as its objective to implement the resource centre model in which all will be winners.

In Helsinki the 15th of June 2005

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SUMMARY

Women's resource centres are a growing trend in Europe. They help to anticipate the future changes and to support women's success in both rural and urban regions. There are nearly 500 resource centres in different parts of Europe, of which 150 in Sweden.

The study for elaboration of the development plan for the regional Programme on Women's Resource Centres ordered by Minister of Regional and Municipal Affairs Hannes Manninen started in May 2004. The study aimed at starting a process leading to intensification of the vitality of women's resource centres and to a proposal for contents and implementation plan of the Programme on Women's Resource Centres.

More than ten women's resource centres or resource networks at an early stage of their development from different parts of Finland joined the programme work during the process. A women's resource centre is a centre of know-how operating on the local, local/regional, national and international level and consisting of the region's central female actors. A women's resource centre has at least one physical meeting place for diversified activities as well as an employed coordinator. The activities of women's resource centres focus on three main pillars, namely women's entrepreneurship and employment, women's participation in regional development and promotion of equality. Their strength is a multiple but integrated grip on supporting of women's everyday life. Besides immediate support to women's know-how and activities, the women's resource centres also build and maintain a favourable service structure and innovation environment while producing employment, new enterprises, developing and internationalising enterprises as well as social and cultural capital for the region.

The problems in the activities of the existing resource centres include scattered availability of networks and information related to them, lack of coordination as well as lack of long-term basic funding, the so called catalyst funding. These problems lead to overlapping and use of the resources to the basics, when the activities are characterised by uncertainty and bureaucracy and the results may thus remain on a weaker level. Development and innovativeness of the resource centres as well as functioning of their international relationships depend on solid basic funding as well as on the organisation coordinating the networks.

As the general measures aiming at management and control of changes in Finland do not identify or support women's regional resource networks and centres, there is a clear need for a special programme. This programme shall integrate the government's existing dispersed but complementing programme documents; a large part of the measures related to women's entrepreneurship defined in the Business Policy programme; the Action Programme for Rural Women; and the Government Action Plan for Gender Equality.

The Programme on Women's Resource Centres proposal was generated as a result of the study. It aims at meeting with the future requirements and at supporting activities related to women's entrepreneurship, regional development and mainstreaming of equality for generating multi-level social, cultural and economic capital. The programme offers a cooperation forum contributing to the equality, a springboard for creation of innovative products as well as an opportunity to tailor-make a new form of a service structure on the local, regional, national as well as international level.

4 PROPOSAL FOR A PROGRAMME ON WOMEN'S RESOURCE CENTRES

4.1 Definition of women's resource centres

A women's resource centre is a centre of know-how operating on the local, local/regional, national and international level and consisting of the region's central female actors. A women's resource centre has at least one physical meeting place for diversified activities as well as an employed coordinator.

The activities of women's resource centres are customer-based (women's special needs are taken into consideration) and take place on the individual, group, network and structural level. The contents of the activities are described by the following three pillars (cf. figure 5):

- *Women's entrepreneurship and employment*
- *Women in regional development*
- *Promotion of equality*

Measures to support women's entrepreneurship and employment in the resource centres include the following:

- a. support to enterprises owned and headed by women at all stages and generating and maturing of entrepreneurship potential
- b. cherishing of women's own know-how, creativity and innovativeness and their further development to new entrepreneurship and action models (new entrepreneurship strategies, social dimension of business activities, network entrepreneurship, cooperatives)
- c. peer support to beginning and working entrepreneurs in the continuous development of their own potential
- d. management of national and international projects contributing to entrepreneurship to develop new business-based thinking and activities raising from women's operation culture
- e. support to the growth and internationalisation of the existing female entrepreneurs through the European women's resource centre networks
- f. elaboration and mainstreaming of good practices gained through projects related to entrepreneurship and employment in cooperation with authorities and organisations

Women's participation in regional development at the resource centres includes the following:

- a. participation in preparation, decision-making, implementation and further development of regional programmes and plans
- b. encouragement of women to apply for and implement projects co-funded by the EU as well as to cooperate in different projects
- c. encouragement to regions in supporting women's theme groups and in recognition of the resource centres as important regional / local actors
- d. cooperation between different women's organisations and individuals with the aim to strengthen the region's social, economic and human capital
- e. support to women's local, regional and international networking
- f. generation of action and service structures and of a favourable innovation environment for the benefit of the region
- g. understanding of women's special characteristics and capacities and awareness of the viewpoint beneficial to both sexes in the structures of thinking on the social, regional administration, company, organisation and individual level

Promotion of equality signifies enriching operation models combining the know-how, thinking models, creativity and wisdom of both sexes, different generations and different ethnic groups

in a way beneficial to the regions. Promotion of equality in the resource centres includes the following:

- a. mainstreaming of equality (through distribution of information, guidance, training) particularly to entrepreneurship and development of innovation environments and service structures, in cooperation with the centres of expertise in different sectors
- b. vertical and horizontal elimination of segregation on the regional and national labour markets (women work in sectors traditionally dominated by men and vice versa)
- c. support in combining work and family by taking into consideration living, work, services and moving as a part of the local and regional governance
- d. development of equality-sensitive statistics and research in cooperation with universities, polytechnics and research institutions, as well as utilisation of the research results in accordance with the needs of both sexes for development of an appropriate, equal and flexible quality of work life

Development to a regional women’s resource centre has its own life cycle (cf. Appendix 2). At the preliminary study and starting stage the activities of the development process take normally place in the form of a project co-funded by the EU. The project can be administered by an already existing organisation such as an enterprise agency, a development company, a polytechnic, a consulting organisation (see the example of Karelli operating in Joensuu in figure 4).

The resource centre activities are divided to the activities for the public good and to business activities. The activities for the public good should be financed through public basic funding (e.g. guidance) in order to achieve the equality objectives defined in the EU’s development projects. Public funding helps to develop and safeguard conditions favourable for creation of profitable business activities. The business activities of the resource centres take place through an own company, which works in accordance with market-based operation principles. (Figure 5).

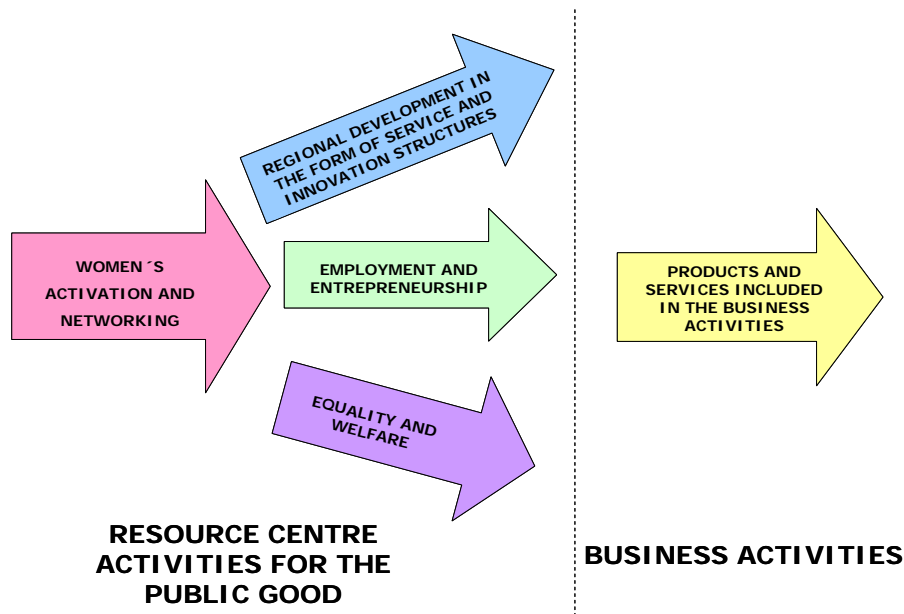


Figure 5. A process chart describing development of women’s activation and networking leading to regional development, employment and business activities. Basic funding should be allocated to coordination of resource activities for the public good.

4.2 Background and necessity of the Programme on Women's Resource Centres

The programme has as its background two intertwined clusters. On one hand our country, its' future success depending on maintenance of women's and men's know-how, creativity and innovativeness, is taking measures to manage the big pressure for change (Ojala & Järnko, 2005). As an example of this we can mention different programmes and reports aiming at taking control of the change in the operation environment. The central instruments include EU-co-funded structural-political programmes, development, centre of expertise and regional development programmes of the regions, proposals for measures of the Finnish Business Service work group as well as the Municipal and Service Structure Reform project. In national efforts aiming at the control of change, women's contribution and potential remain rather invisible. Therefore separate documents improving women's position have been drawn up, such as the *Government Action Plan for Gender Equality*, the *Action Programme for Rural Women*, as well as *Proposals for Measures Concerning Women's Entrepreneurship*. They have not yet been integrated with each other.

On the other hand there are more than ten women's resource networks or women's resource centres, which cover nearly the whole country (appendix 2). They are at different stages of their life cycle. They have been organised in different ways. Generally speaking their beneficiaries are women in the regions concerned. The strength of the resource networks is their multi-dimensional but integrated grip of supporting women's everyday life based on three pillars; entrepreneurship and employment, regional development and promotion of equality. Besides women's know-how and immediate support to the activities, they create and maintain a favourable service structure and innovation environment (figure 6) by producing employment, enterprises and new social and cultural capital in the region.

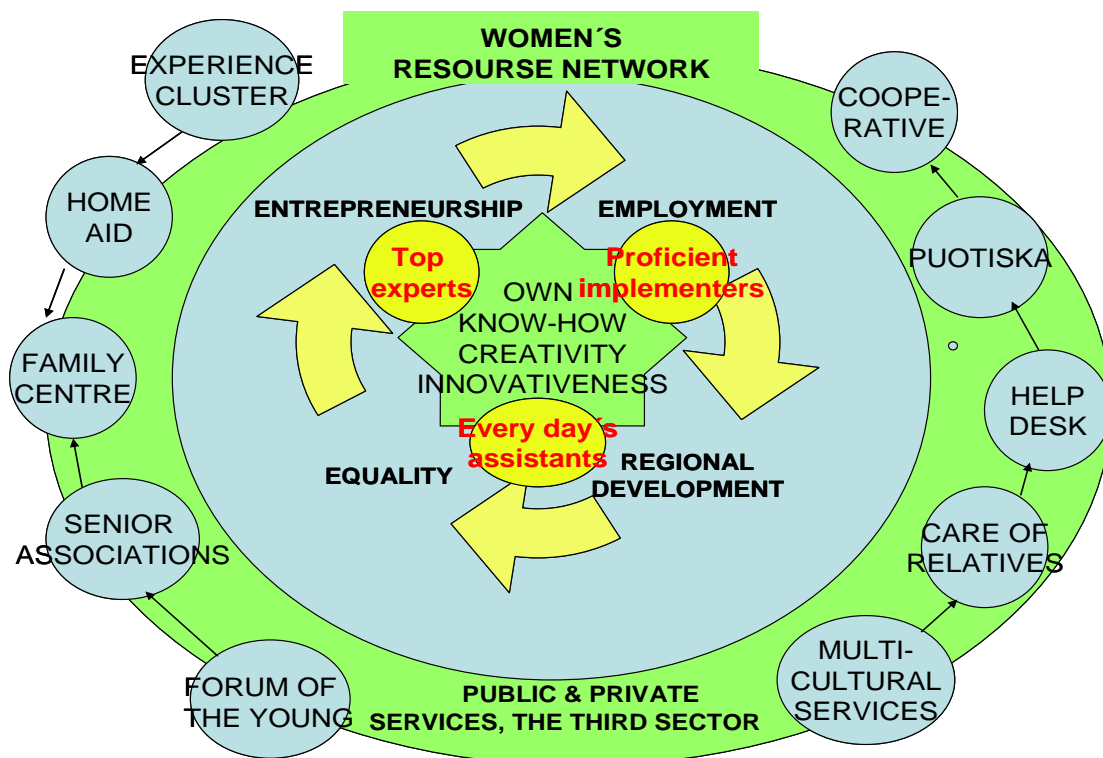


Figure 6. A resource network supporting women with their know-how as creators of the future, reformers of the service structure and producers of multi-service combinations.

The problems in the activities of the existing resource centres include scattered availability of networks and information related to them, lack of coordination as well as lack of long-term basic funding, the so called catalyst funding. These problems lead to overlapping and use of the resources to the basics, when the activities are characterised by uncertainty and bureaucracy and the results may thus remain on a weaker level. Development and innovativeness of the resource centres as well as functioning of their international relationships depend on solid basic funding as well as on the organisation coordinating the networks. The efficiency of the regional resource centres can be considerably improved through coordination of the work related to the basic tasks. At the same time increased cooperation contributes to the realisation of innovative solutions (see experiences of Sweden in chapter 3).

Women are not in the "hard core" of the Finnish innovation system. Their contribution and added value as producers of services, organisers and users is not recognised. Women's potential as producers of social innovations and tailor-made welfare services complementing and filling the vacuums left by the large-scale welfare production in different arenas remain thus totally unused (cf. Koski, 2005; Lehto, 2005). Also the unequal development of citizens' dependency ratio will require contributions to the "women's sector", i.e. service entrepreneurship. No networks can succeed automatically. They have to be maintained and cherished so that they can produce social capital and thus safeguard the quality, continuity and availability of services.

As the general measures aiming at management of changes in Finland do not recognise or support women's regional resource networks and centres, there is a clear need for a special programme. This programme shall integrate the government's existing dispersed but complementing programme documents; a large part of the measures related to women's entrepreneurship defined in the Business Policy programme, of the Action Programme for rural Women and of the Government Action Plan for Gender Equality.

4.3 Special characteristics and objective of the Programme on Women's Resource Centres

The Programme on Women's Resource Centres aims at meeting with the future requirements and at supporting activities related to women's entrepreneurship, regional development and mainstreaming of equality in order to generate multi-level social, cultural and economic capital.

The programme offers a cooperation forum contributing to the equality, a springboard for creation of innovative products as well as an opportunity to tailor-make a new form of a service structure on the local, regional, national as well as international level.

4.4 Two-step implementation and organisation of the Programme on Women's Resource Centres

Planning, implementation and organisation of the programme take place in two phases: The Intermediate Phase 2005-2006 and the Programme Phase 2007-2013 (cf. figure 7).

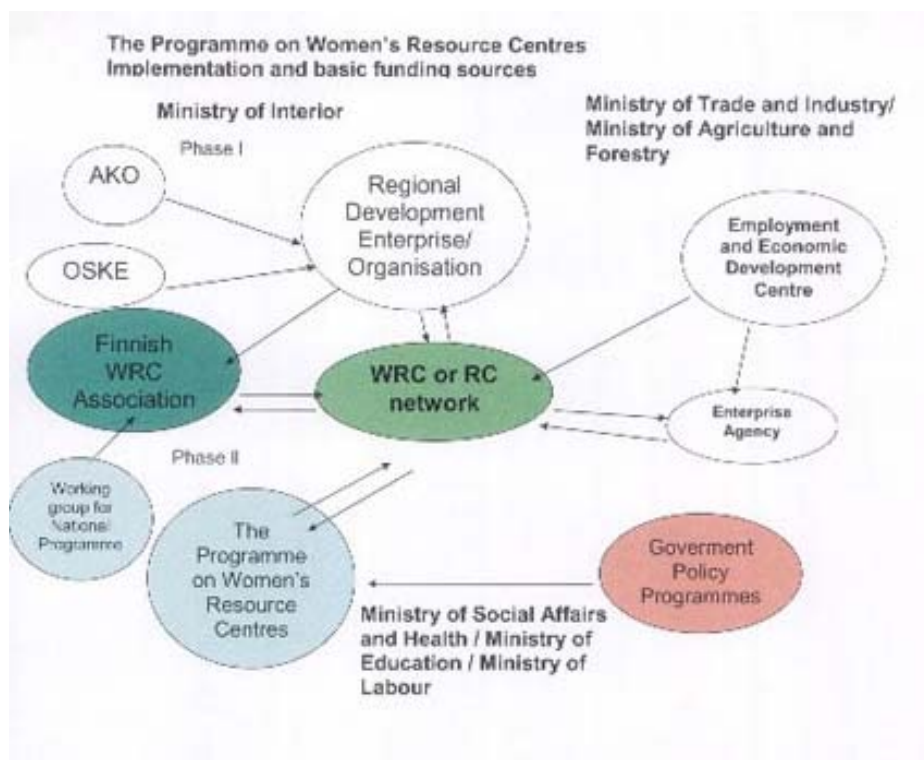


Figure 7. The two-step implementation and basic sources of funding of the Programme on Women's Resource Centres.
I Intermediate Phase 2005–2006 and II Programme Phase 2007–2013.

Intermediate Phase: Support to women's resource centres and networks in 2005-2006

The following measures will be taken in 2005–2006:

1. Support to the regional women's networks and women's resource centres with project funding. The resource networks or already established resource centres interested in participation in the Programme (cf. quality criteria below) will be supported through project or operation environment funding granted by the regional councils, TE Centres and regional and municipal development companies. Depending on each region's situation and life cycle the women's resource centres can operate as independent projects, ideological associations, cooperatives or limited companies or as units of a regional institution such as a municipal business development company or an enterprise agency. The last-mentioned are recommended, because in accordance with the plan of the Business Service work group (Paasivirta, 2005) the region's actors shall cooperate with each other. This way the women's resource centres can be taken into consideration in regional service consortiums.

2. Establishment of the Finnish Association of Women's Resource Centres. The national women's organisations and associations interested in improvement of women's activities will immediately establish the Finnish Association of Women's Resource Centres. The association will monitor and support development of the women's resource centres, define the quality criteria for resource centres as well as maintain international relations. It will also aim at including the Programme on Women's Resource Centres in the next Government Programme.

3. Appointment of a rapporteur. A rapporteur in accordance with the proposals for measures to promote women's entrepreneurship will be appointed for the period 1.9.2005 – 31.12.2006. Her/his main duty will be contribution to taking into use of women's resources during the ongoing social structural change. In practice he/she should integrate the dispersed measure proposals to support women's activities e.g. in cooperation with the Finnish Association of Women's Resource Centres, by supporting and monitoring realisation of the proposals defined in the Report on Women's Entrepreneurship of the Ministry of Trade and Industry and in the Action Programme for Rural Women and contributing to the development of the regional women's resource centres. Furthermore he/she should introduce the women's perspective to the programmes of the next structural fund period as well as prepare inclusion of the Programme on Women's Resource Centres in the next Government Programme.

At the same time the Intermediate Phase will be followed up by several actors: by the monitoring group of the Government Action Plan for Gender Equality (Ministry of Trade and Industry, 2005, 20), the Entrepreneurship Policy programme, the Rural Policy cooperation group and the Finnish Association of Women's Resource Centres.

Programme on Women's Resource Centres (vv. 2007–2013)

The Programme on Women's Resource Centres is a *fixed term (2007 – 2013) joint project* of the Ministry of the Interior, Ministry of Trade and Industry, Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry and Ministry of Labour. It is headed by a *national programme work group* appointed by the Ministry of the Interior (cf. figure 7).

The programme's national coordinator is the Finnish Association of Women's Resource Centres.

The duties of the Finnish Association of Women's Resource Centres will include development of a national operation model, coordination of and support to the development of regional and local resource centres as well as maintenance and creation of international contacts e.g. through participation in the activities of the international Women's Resource Centre Network (Appendices 1 and 2, chapter 3). The duties of the Finnish Association of Women's Resource Centres will also include drawing up of quality criteria for the regional centres and services provided by them, monitoring and evaluation of the activities as well as dissemination of good practices.

The quality criteria for the regional women's resource centres could include:

- starting point in all activities: female customers
- focusing on three "pillars", which are entrepreneurship and employment, women's participation in decision-making in regional development as well as promotion of equality
- joint activities and partnership between the region's female actors and central organisations

The members of the Finnish Association of Women's Resource Centres will include women's national organisations, regional and local associations and enterprises, as well as municipal or regional development companies and business service offices. The management group will consist of the key partners of the women's resource networks and women's resource centres.

The regional women's resource centres fulfilling the required criteria and chosen through competitive bidding will serve as regional operators.

The programme will be implemented through network management. A well-working internet-based feedback system will have an essential role in the implementation. Monitoring and evaluation will take place both by external evaluators chosen through competitive bidding and through the policy programmes.

The programme's national basic funding. A total of 4,8 million EUR is suggested to be reserved from the state budget for the years 2007–2013. In addition, own municipal and private funding will be required from the regions. According to the proposal, ten regional resource centres fulfilling the quality criteria would get 70.000 EUR/year for their basic activities during six years. The programme also suggests an annual sum of 100.000 EUR for a period of six years to the Finnish Association of Women's Resource Centres, which will coordinate the national programme and be in charge of international relations.