

Product Development and Processing in Sustainable Reindeer Husbandry (“Ofelas” – a project lead by Finland and sponsored by the Arctic Council and the Northern Forum)

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The Product Development and Processing in Sustainable Reindeer Husbandry 2002-2005 project, later referred as Ofelas, was a co-operative project of the Arctic Council and the Northern Forum. This project carried on the Northern Forum project “Reindeer Management” which had similar aims in several reindeer herding areas in Finland and Russia since 1997. The project implemented the program of the Arctic Council 2000-2002 under the Finnish Chairmanship, whereby "Finland contributes to the development of basic industries in the Arctic by strengthening *inter alia*, sustainable reindeer management, related product development and processing as well as training in this field."

The main aim of the project was to ensure sustainable reindeer husbandry by reindeer meat and related product development and further processing, especially education and research connected to it. Geographical emphasis of the project was on Russia, where reindeer husbandry has met serious difficulties after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Under this project, training sessions on meat processing and by-product development took place every year from 2002 until the end of 2005. The main financing came from Finnish-Russian Neighbouring Area Co-operation funds, the Northern Forum, the Saami Education Institute, the National Board of Education in Finland as well as from Russian regional administrations.

The project worked in close cooperation with the Reindeer Herders' Union of Russia and Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North, RAIPON. Consultations were conducted also with the representatives of the Russian Federation's Ministry of National Issues, Ministry of Agriculture and Ministry of Economic Development and Trade.

The main results from the Ofelas projects include:

- The appreciation and the price of reindeer meat in the market has grown and the income of reindeer herders has increased in the participating regions.
- Between 2002 – 2005, a total of 87 reindeer herders, enterprise managers and veterinary surgeons from the Russian federation were trained in self-supervising of slaughterhouses and meat cutting plants according to western standards in Finland.
- Student exchanges in the field of reindeer husbandry education were realized between Finland, Russia and U.S.A.
- The level of professional knowledge and skills in reindeer husbandry, especially related to meat handling, product development and further processing of reindeer meat and reindeer by-products, have risen among the students and other participants of the project.
- Enhanced collaboration between educational institutions over the circumpolar reindeer herding areas as a result of the work carried out under Ofelas.
- A Reindeer Herding Development Plan for the Izhma Municipality of the Komi Republic was finished in June 2003. It was drafted under the supervision of the Ministry of Agriculture in Komi Republic by the Komi Republic Geographical Information System Centre and financed by the Northern Forum.
- On the basis of the received feedback the development of this plan was continued in February 2004 by beginning the drafting of a reindeer herding development plan that would cover the whole area of Komi republic. The plan, entitled the Resource and Production Opportunities of

Reindeer Husbandry in the Komi Republic, was financed by the Northern Forum and finished during the same year.

- Cooperation between Finland and Komi Republic under the Ofelas project produced one company-level result: the ZAO Izhma Reindeer Meat was established with Finnish and Russian capital. Its field of business is the development of reindeer meat processing and marketing in Moscow and St Petersburg.

In May 2006 the International Steering Committee of the Ofelas approved the following conclusions based on the results of the project:

- product development and further processing has become one of the key areas in developing education for reindeer husbandry and one of the most effective methods to bring out added value on reindeer products and to strengthen reindeer herding as a living livelihood;
- education in food hygiene and correct working methods for reindeer herders, veterinarians and slaughterhouse workers in addition to simultaneous marketing efforts, is of utmost importance in efforts to raise appreciation of reindeer products among customers;
- education in product development and further processing can achieve its objectives only if the educated employees are able to utilize modern slaughterhouses and meat cutting plants that meet the hygiene requirements of high quality foodstuffs;
- development of utilization of reindeer by-projects is an important factor in preserving reindeer husbandry;
- reindeer husbandry supportive sustainable tourism can provide the reindeer people with additional and more stable income source;
- the states in which reindeer husbandry is practiced have to secure satisfactory and equal education for reindeer husbandry.

In May 2004, the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade in Russia, together with RAIPON, proposed to the Arctic Council a new project called "Sustainable Development of Indigenous Peoples of Russian North". One of its sub-projects is called "Development of Indigenous Peoples of the North Traditional Economies, Expanding Access of Indigenous Population to Economic Activities and Increasing Employment Opportunities". The project was approved by the Arctic Council in fall 2005.

Finland will take part in the project by carrying out the before mentioned sub-project on development of traditional livelihoods. The main responsible organisation is the Saami Education Institute. The State Provincial Office of Lapland will act as the contact organisation to the Arctic Council and the Northern Forum as well as to the regional administrations of the Russian Federation and the reindeer husbandry areas.

The sub-project was started and within the framework and funding of Finnish-Russian Neighbouring Area Cooperation Project "Development of SMEs in the Northern Russia Regions". The Project is governed by the Finnbarants, a joint organization of the University of Lapland and the Rovaniemi University of Applied Sciences.

In the course of the Ofelas project, two separate EU-projects were established supporting the same aims as Ofelas:

1) Sijid – EU-Interreg III A North - project for developing Sami reindeer herding education and the curriculum of Reindeer husbandry entrepreneur

2) EU-Kolarctic-Tacis Joint Project Application: "ARGIS - NJAPOI –RÁIDU" - >

"Development of culture and nature based tourism as a joint project of Nenets autonomous okrug and the province of Lapland"