

## **Hyypä Valley landscape projects** - The Finnish Candidate for the Landscape Award of the Council of Europe 2013

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The Hyypä Valley is located in Kauhajoki, western Finland. It represents the varying riverside cultural landscape of Southern Ostrobothnia's open agricultural expanses. Land forms give this landscape its special character: a narrow elongated valley with steep slopes begins on the edge of wide open spaces. Linear villages nestle along charmingly undulating village roads. The built environment includes large Ostrobothnian country houses and outbuildings that embody the region's strong building traditions, dating back to the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

In the Hyypä Valley have been implemented major, long-term landscape maintenance through several projects. The base project is titled the Establishment of the Hyypä Valley Landscape Conservation Area. Within this project, the following have been achieved: 1) A Preservation Plan, including definitions of the special landscape features and values, and numerous illustrated instructions for preservation actions, 2) Co-operation and confidence building among the 1200 landowners and villagers, the local municipality, regional and state authorities, specialist organisations, enterprises, international volunteers and local associations, 3) 41.5 ha of landscape maintenance operations have been implemented, 4) Permanent action groups for landscape maintenance and a discussion forum for villagers, associations and authorities have been established and 5) A juridical Landscape Conservation Area in Hyypä has been founded by the Ministry of Environment, in the autumn of 2009. A landscape conservation area can be established in order to preserve and manage a natural or cultural landscape of outstanding beauty, historical interest or other special value. The purpose of landscape conservation area status is to promote landscape conservation in an incentivebased, voluntary manner.

The project for the establishment of the landscape conservation area was launched in August 2006. It culminated in the actual establishment of the Hyypä Valley Landscape Conservation Area by a decision of the Ministry of the Environment in August 2009. During the project, the area's values and special characteristics were defined, the usage and maintenance plan for the Hyypä Valley Landscape Conservation Area was prepared, extensive landscape conservation work was carried out, and information was distributed on these activities. Simultaneously, the Finnish Forest Centre implemented forest nature management projects in the area.

The decision to establish the Hyypä Valley landscape conservation area further strengthened the need of local actors to nurture and actively utilise the landscape values of Hyypä Valley. A long-term approach and the intention to maintain enthusiasm for voluntary landscape conservation are emphasised in landscape planning and conservation. With this in mind, the City of Kauhajoki established the Hyypä Valley Landscape Conservation Board, to serve as a forum for information exchange between authorities and activists in the village. Correspondingly, landscape conservation work group under the Hyypä Village Association has already led to the initiation of the River Hyypänjoki's restoration, as the first and primary follow-up project implementing the usage and maintenance plan. In 2010–2012, a plan was commissioned on the restoration, the intention being to implement the plan in 2012–2014. In addition, the Finnish Forest Centre has carried out maintenance projects on minor water bodies in 2009–2011.

