

“Networking for renewables: local resources and innovative technologies in rural development”*First results of on-line link research and a plan of survey*

One level of my investigations is exploring the Internet as a medium of information flows, existing and intended partnerships, sources and destinations of “marketing” ideas, products, and identities. Or more accurately, trying to use information embedded in the fabric of the web concerning the relationships between various actors engaged in *the development and promotion of the wood energy sector in North Karelia*. Nowadays, “(a)ctors now participate in complex digital ecologies consisting of the Internet, intranets, extranets, web sites, virtual collaborative workplaces...”, and “...the new media do not simply allow organisations to communicate faster or to perform existing functions more effectively, they also present opportunities to communicate in entirely new ways and to perform radically new functions,” they restructure interdependences, reshape interfaces and transform relations (Bach and Stark, 2004: 101)¹. For a region like N. Karelia, I assume this medium to bear a particular importance due to its remoteness from major centres of knowledge and wealth in Finland and within Europe.

So an interesting issue to investigate is whether the more regionally-bound organisations involved in the advance of the wood-energy sector in this region can utilise the potentials of the Internet in decreasing their, e.g., market disadvantages *and* if there exist organisations in a special position within the configuration of these “virtual” linkages in the representation of N. Karelian (E. Finnish) wood-E expertise and products to the world. However, this enquiry, i.e. by link analysis, makes sense only if one accepts the presumption that embedded hypertext/URL references between them (i.e., the “links” I analyse) are not random but represent existing, consciously maintained connections, that they are the online imprints of actual knowledge flows, partnerships, power-relations, or at least, concrete strategies and intentions.

A closer look at the discovered “connections” (embedded hypertext/URL references in organisation web sites) is necessary after applying this relatively simple, and in its approach and epistemology, more quantitative method. Some deeper, *qualitative assessment* of the relationships, esp. of the functions of those on-line references is essential. My off-line fieldwork will serve this. In my presentation I show the first results of my experimenting with the link-analysis method, and share my plans for the survey/interviews I would like to perform during the spring in Finland.

¹ Bach, Jonathan and Stark, David: Link, Search, Interact: The Co-Evolution of NGOs and Interactive Technology. In: Theory, Culture and Society (SAGE) 2004; 21, pp. 101-116.