

Effective Communication of Evaluation Results and Learning

Per Mickwitz

Finnish Environment Institute (SYKE)

Environmental Evaluator's Networking Forum

9.6.2009

Motivation

- In my opinion the biggest challenge for environmental evaluation (and evaluation in any other field) is to produce evaluations **that are actually used** for learning (& development) or for accountability.
- Still we mainly talk about methodological aspects that are secondary for enhancing use (e.g. Birnbaum and Mickwitz 2009).

Effective Communication of Evaluation Results and Learning

Structure of the presentation

- **What are evaluation results?**
- **What kind of learning?**
- **Different kind of communication**

What are evaluation results? *(What is it that should be communicated?)*

- **Empirical results and recommendations**
 - **Theoretical results**
 - **Evaluation methods**
 - **Evaluation framings and further knowledge needs**
- There is more to communicate than just the empirical results and the recommendations.

What kind of learning?

- **Not just instrumental use but also conceptual, legitimizing and ritual use (e.g. Weiss 1998).**
- **Learning can take place at many levels; individuals can learn but so can organizations.**
- **Single and double loop learning (e.g. Argyris 1999, Leeuw et al. 2000):**
 - **in single loop learning an organization develops its practices so as to perform its task more successfully**
 - **double loop learning means that the tasks and the fundamental conditions for accomplishing them are also re-examined.**

The paradox of making evaluations useful

- **When dealing with complex issues learning takes time and requires repetition. When learning involves many actors issues needs to be discussed, and often for quite a long time.**
- **Learning might require that many evaluations produce and disseminate similar results.**
- **But, for an evaluation to be seen as useful it should produce new results, i.e. results not also shown by earlier evaluations.**

Communication strategies

■ Dissemination strategies

- The reporting method
- The “broker” method
 - Steering groups, consultants or facilitators
- The network method
- The demonstration method
- The education method

➤ All dissemination strategies can be used throughout the evaluation process

■ Production strategies

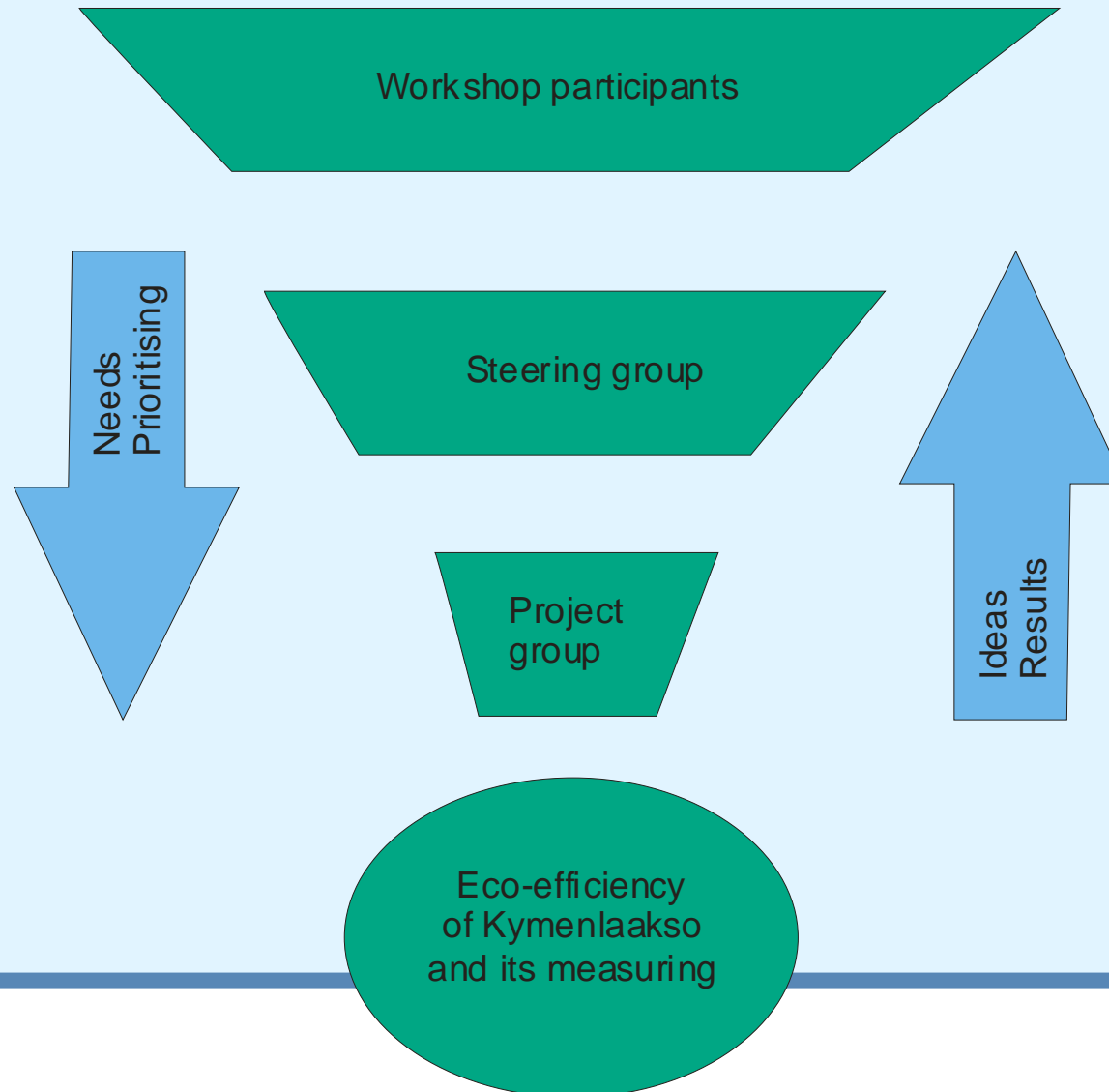
- Interactive; also evaluation questions and methods change

Evert Vedung

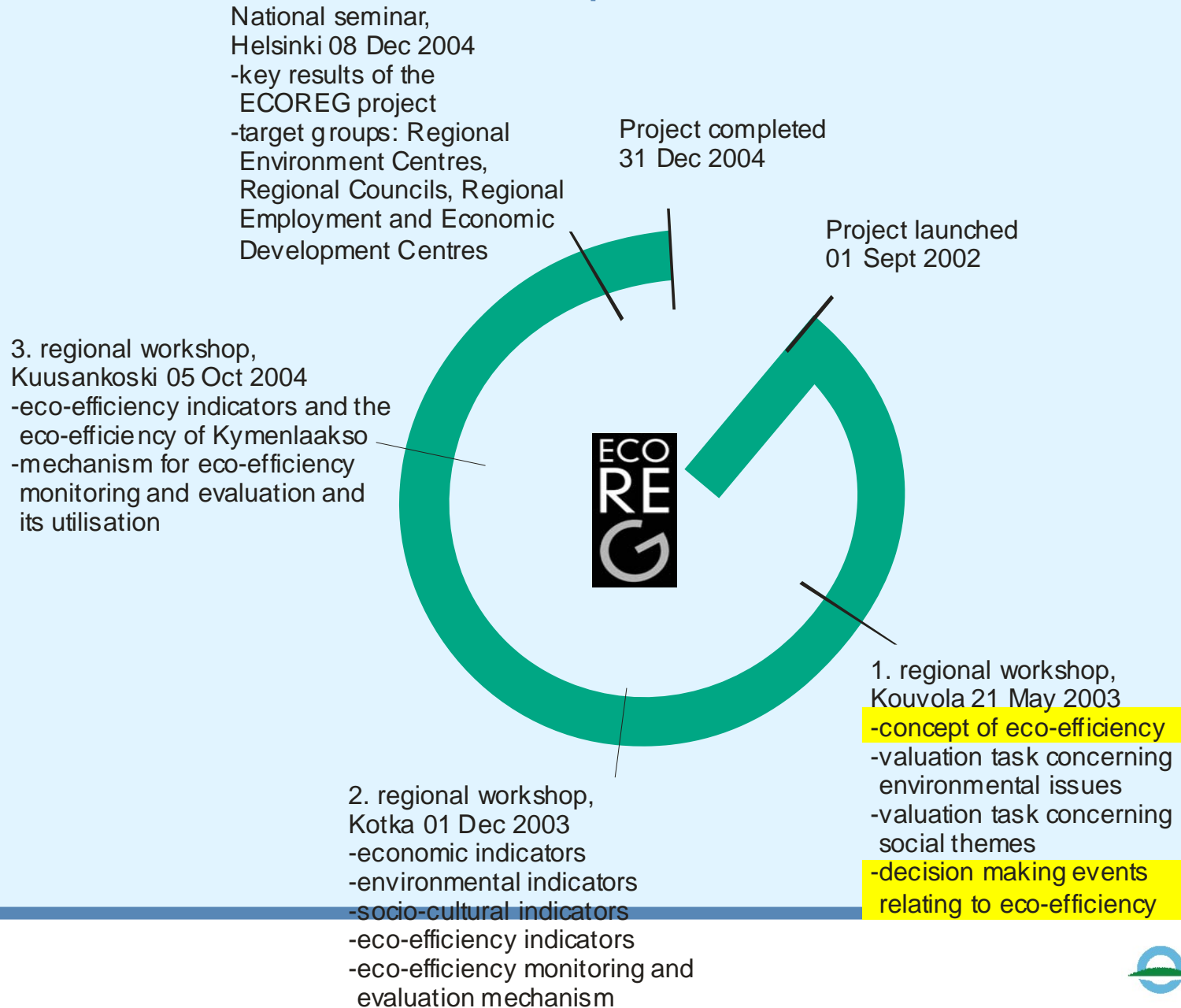
Some comments on the “Dissemination strategy”

- **Often learning is best promoted when the results are re-disseminated by somebody else**
 - Evaluation findings by Hildén et al. 2002, Melanen et al. 2002 and Kivimaa & Mickwitz 2006 might be used for learning after being included in OECD 2009.
- **Learning might be best promoted if the results are internalized by the “broker” or the receiver.**
 - Then the results are not “linked” to the evaluation anymore.
 - This is also against the “academic instinct” where quotations and “ownership” are essential.

An example of the production strategy: The working process – based on multistakeholder involvement and empowerment



The time span of the ECOREG project – the most important events



Direct implications of the ECOREG project

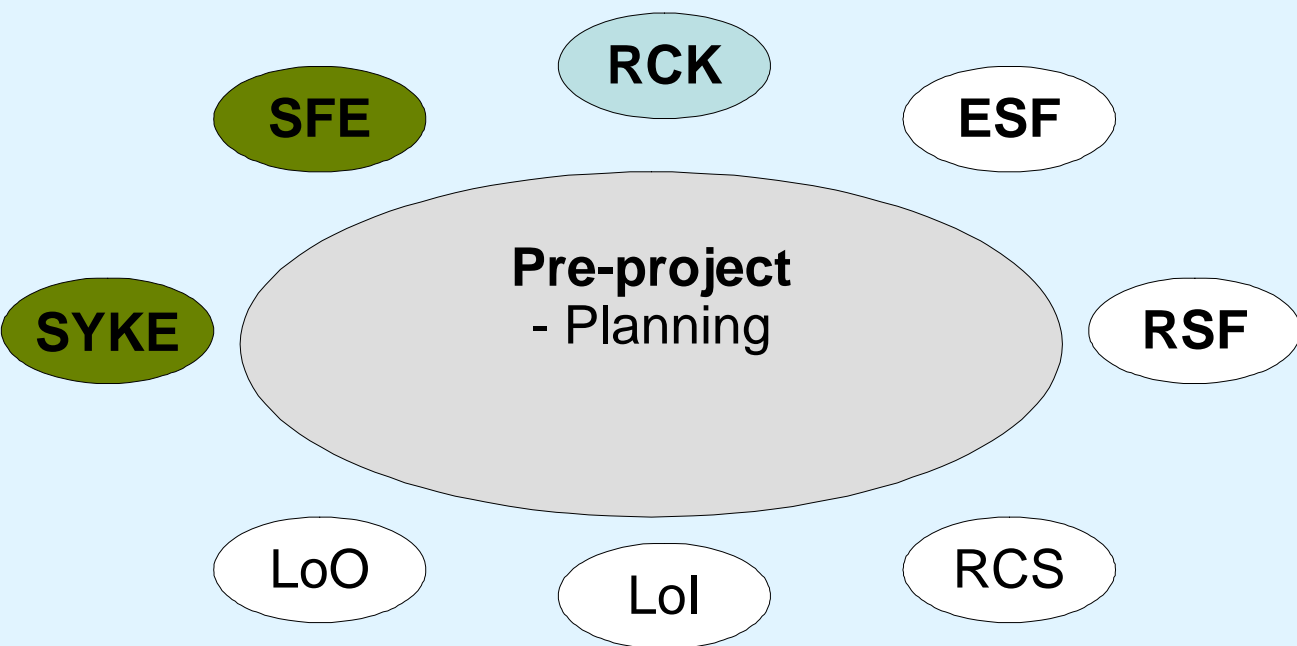
The concept of eco-efficiency found its way to Kymenlaakso's Regional Strategic Plan 2005-2015

The following *vision* is formulated for the future Kymenlaakso:

"An attractive and eco-efficient, internationally interactive region"

Eco-efficiency also has a central role in Kymenlaakso's **Regional Development Programme 2007-2010** that implements the Strategic Plan. Relevant **ECOREG indicators** are used for monitoring the Programme.

Production, use and further development of the ECOREG indicators in Kymenlaakso, Phase 0, - 2002(9)



Legend

SYKE = Finnish Environment
Institute

SFE = Southeast Finland
Regional Environment Centre

RCK = Regional Council of
Kymenlaakso

ESF = Employment and
Economic Development
Centre for Southeast Finland

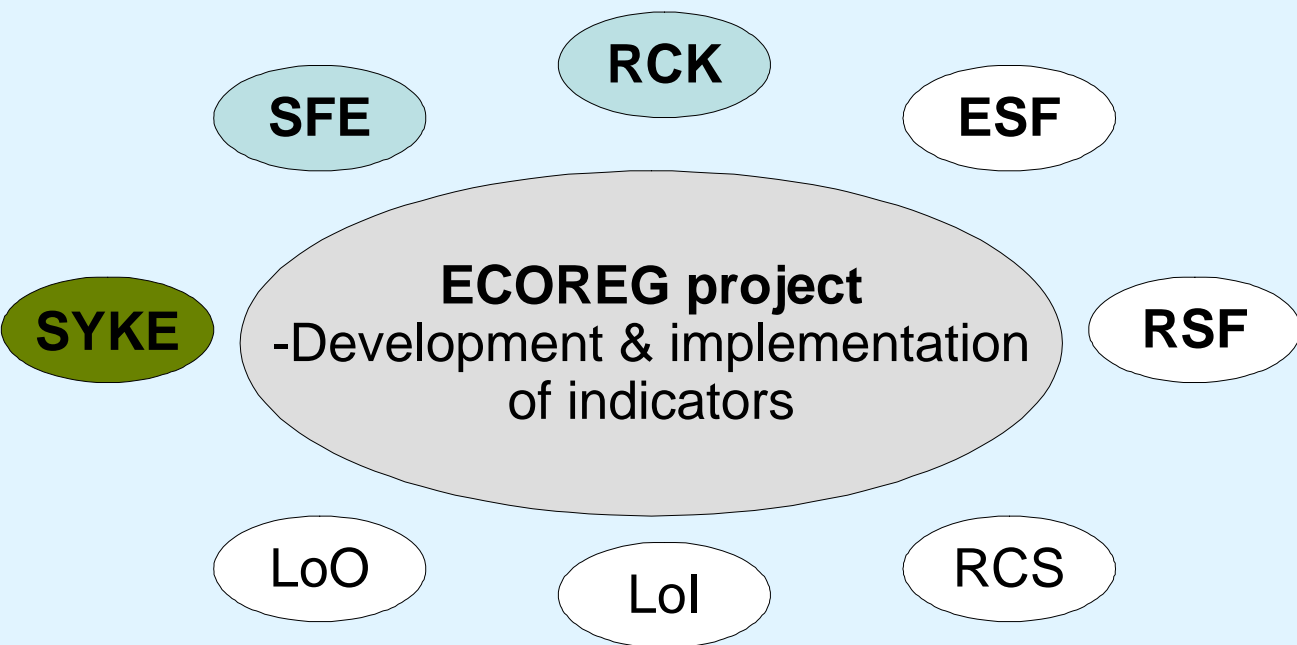
RSF = Regional Road
Administration of Southeast
Finland

RCS = Regional Council of
South-Karelia

Lol = local industry

LoO = other local actors

Production, use and further development of the ECOREG indicators in Kymenlaakso, Phase 1, 2002-4



Legend

SYKE = Finnish Environment
Institute

SFE = Southeast Finland
Regional Environment Centre

RCK = Regional Council of
Kymenlaakso

ESF = Employment and
Economic Development
Centre for Southeast Finland

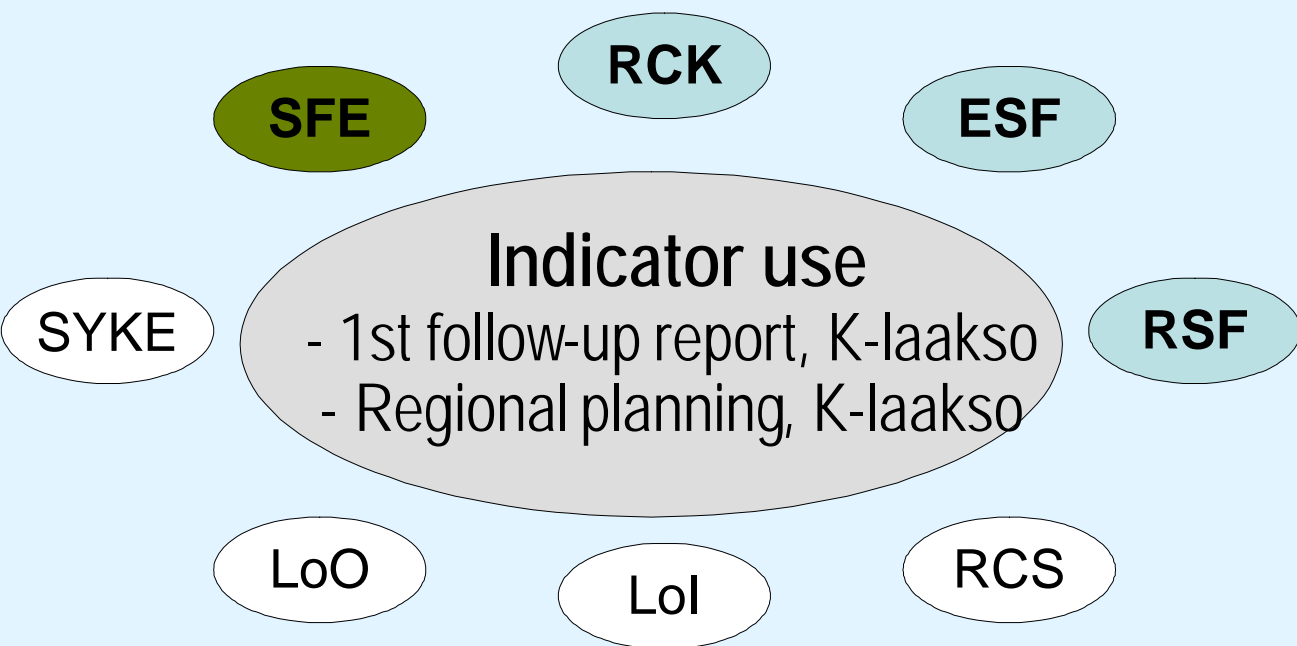
RSF = Regional Road
Administration of Southeast
Finland

RCS = Regional Council of
South-Karelia

LoI = local industry

LoO = other local actors

Production, use and further development of the ECOREG indicators in Kymenlaakso, Phase 2, 2005-6



Legend

SYKE = Finnish Environment
Institute

SFE = Southeast Finland
Regional Environment Centre

RCK = Regional Council of
Kymenlaakso

ESF = Employment and
Economic Development
Centre for Southeast Finland

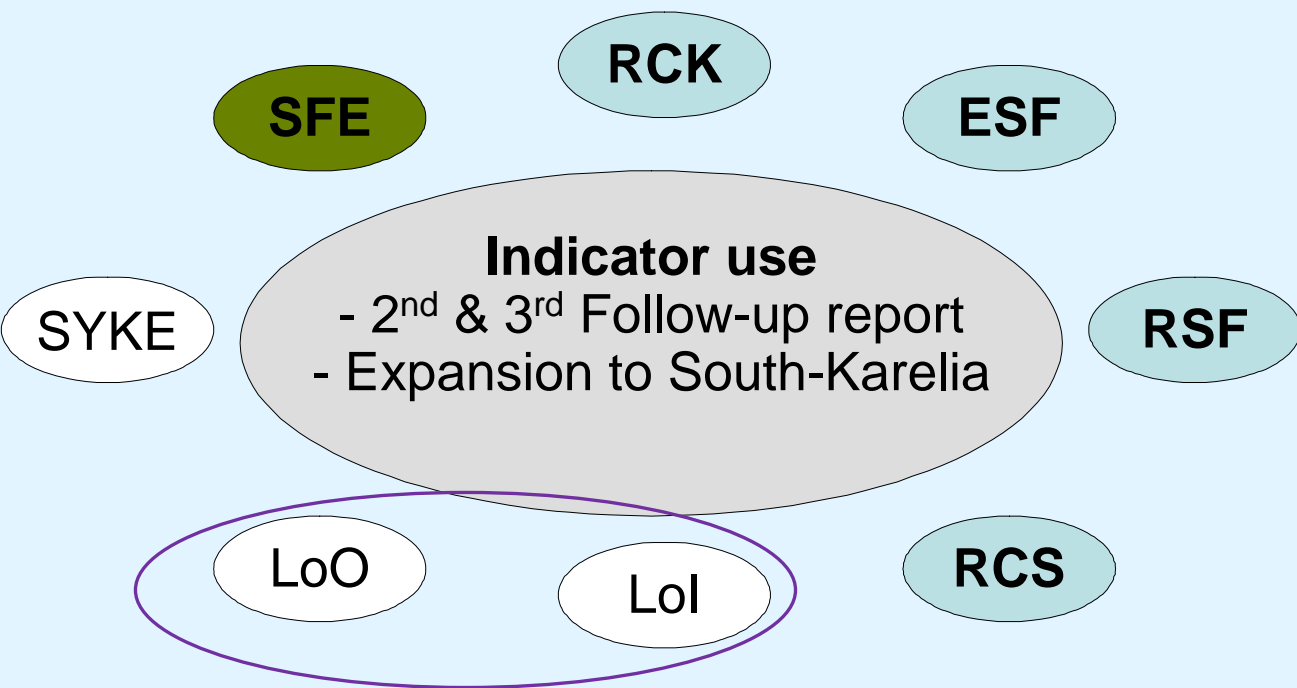
RSF = Regional Road
Administration of Southeast
Finland

RCS = Regional Council of
South-Karelia

LoI = local industry

LoO = other local actors

Production, use and further development of the ECOREG indicators in Kymenlaakso, Phase 3, 2006 -



Legend

SYKE = Finnish Environment
Institute

SFE = Southeast Finland
Regional Environment Centre

RCK = Regional Council of
Kymenlaakso

ESF = Employment and
Economic Development
Centre for Southeast Finland

RSF = Regional Road
Administration of Southeast
Finland

RCS = Regional Council of
South-Karelia

Lol = local industry

LoO = other local actors

Framing of an evaluation affects it's ability to be used for learning

“I can't help wondering if this deductive and problem-focused approach might not actually limit our creativity, innovation, and understanding of the process and impact of environmental programs and their evaluations.” (Preskill 2009, 101)

■ **Sometimes vague and new concepts and framings may provide a better platform for learning than well established and externally imposed concepts and framings. They provide more space for learning through jointly constructing the concepts and framings.**

- **Regional eco-efficiency (ECOREG)**
- **Maybe: ecosystem services, eco-innovation, ...**

Key messages

- **Production strategies**, where users are involved in the whole evaluation process are especially important for promoting learning among ‘intended users’.
- **Dissemination strategies** are important to increase the possibility of unintended use.
- Not only the empirical results and recommendations should be communicated it is also important to communicate theoretical results, evaluation methods and evaluation framings and further knowledge needs.

Sources for additional information

- **Mickwitz P. and M. Melanen 2009.** The Role of Co-operation between Academia and Policymakers for the Development and Use of Sustainability Indicators – A Case from the Finnish Kymenlaakso Region, *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 17(12) 1086-1100. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2008.12.003>
- **Rosenström U. 2009.** “Sustainable development indicators: Much wanted, less used?”, Doctoral thesis, Monographs of the Boreal Environment Research 33, Helsinki: The Finnish Environment Institute.
<http://www.ymparisto.fi/download.asp?contentid=101462&lan=en>
- **Weiss C. 1998.** Have We Learned Anything New about the Use of Evaluation?, *American Journal of Evaluation* 19(1): 21-33.
- About the ECOREG-project: www.environment.fi/syke/ecoreg