

# The 10-year history of Rotary eClub of Verkkorotary.fi

## 1. Introduction

Rotary eClub of Verkkorotary.fi, more commonly known as Verkkorotary, has achieved a glorious ten-year existence. Verkkorotary joined Rotary International on 18.5.2004 as the first so called eClub in Europe and the fourth eClub in the world.



In honor of this milestone, we have compiled a booklet of Verkkorotary's ten-year history, and I would like to thank all the participants who contributed to the publication. The other authors I have worked with are Minnamari Dahlberg, Harri Hautala, Pertti Huitu, Mika Lallukka, Markus Saartio, and in particular for the historical part, special thanks go to Jaakko Castrén, who served as the District's IT committee's chairman during 1998-2003, and later as District Governor when Verkkorotary was established. English translation was done by Pertti Huitu and Wei Zhou. Photos were gathered from a variety of sources, and were mainly taken by our members. Especially in the recent years, Raimo Partanen has excelled as our photographer, thanks for his efforts. This is a shortened version of the printed history booklet, and it is being published on our Internet pages.

Jari Karpakka

## 2. The history of the birth of Verkkorotary

The utilization of the electronic media and the Internet started to become more common in the Rotary world in 1990s. In the beginning of 1996, Rotary International (RI) launched its home page and published electronic communication related recommendations and instructions. Finland was involved right from the start. In late 1996, Finland Rotary Office also set up a working group to draw up a proposal for Rotary Finland's Internet policy. In the early years, the main focus of the Group's work was to prepare guidance for using e-mails and making home pages in organizing both the Districts' and Clubs' IT operations. Districts were recommended to establish IT committees and later on the tasks of the IT committee of District 1420 also included exploring the issues related to establishing a cyber club to the District.

The Board of Directors of Rotary International launched Rotary Clubs' pilot program for exploring new operational forms in 2001. Within this framework, District 5450 in the United States launched the first web based club. Rotary eClub of District 5450 (eClub One) received the charter on 1.1.2002.

Online Rotary activity was brought to attention for the next time during Rotary International's Council of Legislation meeting in 2001. The Board of Directors of RI was authorized to launch a pilot project in which a maximum of 20 Internet based clubs could participate on an experimental basis. The Board of Directors appointed a working group to prepare the matter and urged that those who were interested in participating in the pilot project should inform about their interests by November 2001. The Board discussed the issue at several meetings. The starting point was that RI Board of Directors had concerns about the stagnating of the increase of Rotary club members and how its operation can also be attractive to the younger generations. Strong doubts as to where the new operating model may lead to were also brought into attention.

Finland was on the move quite early. The action plan of Rotary District 1420 for 2001-2002 set a target to identify the interest of establishing a so-called cyber club within D 1420. The preparation of the issue took place at the hands of District's Internet activists and Internet working committee. In the District meeting held in Tallinn Estonia in spring 2001, Jaakko Castrén discussed with Matti Keijola from RC Kluuvi if he could take the lead in the preparations of establishing a cyber club. Finally, the advancement was agreed upon in the lobby of Estonia Theater. In autumn 2001, ten District activists were invited to Radiolinja's premises where the meeting facilities were arranged by Jukka Toivio. As the final conclusion of the meeting, Rotary International was informed of our District's interest in participating in the pilot project.

In the next stage, Rotary International requested different reports from the Districts/Clubs that were interested. There were questions about e.g. planning the club's operating policies, reasons for the interest in participating in the project, how the District members react to this issue, potential problems, etc. In November 2002, the District confirmed to Rotary International about its interest in participating in the project with the name Rotary eClub of Verkkorotary.fi. The letter was signed by District Governor Kari Tallberg and the District Governor Elect Jaakko Castrén.

In March 2003, we received an initial notification from the RI Secretariat that the pilot project can be continued by Verkkorotary. In early 2004, on the basis of RI's in-depth studies, it was approved that a pilot

project which involves 14 clubs including Verkkorotary will be launched. The following 14 online clubs would be the pilot clubs

- Rotary eClub One - Colorado, U.S.A. D5450 (2002)
- Rotary eClub Distrito 4500, Brazil (2003)
- Rotary eClub NY1, D7150, New York, U.S.A. (2004)
- Rotary eClub of Verkkorotary.fi, D1420, Finland (2004)
- Rotary eClub District 7890, Connecticut, U.S.A. (2004)
- Rotary eClub of The Southwest USA, D5510 (2004)
- Rotary eClub of 3310, Singapore (2004)
- Rotary eClub of Southeast U.S.A. and Caribbean D5510, USA (2004)
- Rotary eClub Zante Hellas District 2470, Greece (2005)
- Rotary eClub of Latinoamérica, Mexico (27 Jan, 2005)
- Rotary eClub London Centenary, U.K. (2006)
- Rotary eClub of District 3450, Hong Kong, Macau, Mongolia (2006)
- Rotary eClub of Taiwan (2006)
- Norway Rotary E-Club of Norway (2006)

At the same time it was decided that the continuation would be decided in 2010 based on the experience acquired. Prior to this, no other new online clubs could be launched. Online clubs were called Cyber Clubs during the early stage and in the same context, it was decided that the name would be switched to eClub.

As the studies were progressing, the objectives of Verkkorotary's operation also took shape, that is, to find an approach which shows that the rotary action succeeds in the new environment and that it makes it attractive to the younger generation living in the online community world.

The launch of Verkkorotary had been prepared, along side the communication with RI, by looking into various web meeting practices and platforms. Initially various discussion forums and meeting supporting applications (Yahoo Group, MSN Group, telephone conferencing, web 2.0 blogs, etc) were deployed. The club also acquired the MS SharePoint application and a dedicated server for this purpose. A target was set quite soon to obtain a suitable online meeting solution for the Club's use. This would enable establishing a meeting environment which resembles a normal Rotary operation. The Centra application was used for piloting online meetings. Matters were prepared both during online discussions and face to face meetings. Operation took shape quickly in accordance with the current practice.

During spring 2003, Matti Keijola was nominated to be responsible for launching the operations of establishing eClub of Verkkorotary.fi during the rotary year 2003-2004, with the support from District Governor Kari Tallberg, DGE Jaakko Castrén and DGN Matti Kivinen.

Regular monthly meetings for launch preparations with presentations started in the fall of 2003. The Club also got its own public website with the assistance of Tor Ahlstedt. In the spring of 2004 began the weekly Tuesday meetings, and it was also decided to apply for the Charter. The establishment of a new Rotary club requires a lot of clarification. Especially in the case when a completely new type of club was to be started, almost everybody was involved and, in particular, Matti Keijola. It was also important to ensure a sufficient number of Club's founding members. Some of those members were new Rotarians, some were from other Clubs and possessed Rotarian expertise from earlier days.

Helsinki Finlandia Hall Rotary Club, Kluuvi Rotary Club, Lauttasaari Rotary Club, Ruoholahti Rotary Club (now Helsinki City West) and Tapiola Rotary Club agreed to become the sponsor clubs.

The Club's inaugural meeting was held on 2.3.2004 at Radiolinja's facilities at Keilasatama. District 1420's Governor Jaakko Castrén, DGE Matti Kivinen and 7 other members involved in establishing the club (Lauri Fontell, Elina Helenius, Jari Karpakka, Tomi Laamanen, Marko Päckilä, Harry Svendblad and Jukka Toivio) were present. In the meeting, the Constitution and bylaws of the Rotary eClub of Verkkorotary.fi were approved.

There were discussions about the official language of the Club during the first operational year. The conclusion was that the Club's main language is Finnish and the second language is English.

The establishment of Verkkorotary got significant help by the fact that Jorma Lampén was in the Board of Directors of Rotary International during 2000-2002. Through him, we received information of the starting of the pilot project and its progress in 2001. The District Representative in the COL meetings handling the regulations of Rotary International relating to online clubs was Kari Tallberg, who was able to bring insight from Verkkorotary after having been closely involved in the project from the very beginning. The kick-off was also supported by the relevant articles in Rotary Norden magazine prepared by Håkan Nordqvist. Leena Frischknecht from Rotary International's office in Zürich was a great help in all the Club establishing related administrative tasks as well as in communication with the RI Secretariat in Evanston.

Rotary International approved the Club as a member on 18.5.2004. RI President Jonathan Majiyagbe greeted the new Club with a letter dated 25.5. The ceremonial Charter event was held at Katajanokka Casino on a beautiful summer day of 22.06.2004. Lauttasaari Rotary Club donated the President's chain and Rotary Club of Kluuvi a gavel to the Club.



In the picture from the left : Club Secretary Lauri Fontell , DG Jaakko Castrén, Past RI Director Jorma Lampén , DGE Matti Kivinen, IPDG Kari Tallberg and Verkkorotary's Charter President Matti Keijola .

Verkkorotary was the fourth online Rotary club in the world, the first in Europe and the first in the world which keeps regular scheduled online meetings.

In June 2005, Matti and Kaija Keijola took part in RI's 100-year convention in Chicago. Matti made a presentation of Verkkorotary's operation during a session of online clubs. Matti and Kaija also took part in the dinner organized by the world's first eClub, eClubOne, during which occasion Matti handed Verkkorotary's mouse pad to the club's president and received a pendant in return.

eClubs were finally approved as a permanent part of Rotary in the Council of Legislation meeting in 2010. The common legislative change and principles of actions were prepared based on the experiences of the clubs involved in the pilot project. These were approved after a substantial debate. In the COL meeting, fervent discussions were carried out in opposition to the proposals since these were considered to change the basic principles of Rotary operations.

The principle of operation was confirmed to clubs that it's possible to operate either exclusively online without regular face-to-face meetings, or as so-called hybrid clubs when face-to-face meetings take place once a month, such as Verkkorotary's terra meetings. In addition, it was accepted that it's possible to set up two online rotary clubs in the District instead of one as proposed earlier. In the next COL meeting in 2013 even this restriction was removed. After 2010, following the decisions of Legislation Committee, the number of online rotary clubs has grown rapidly and none of the feared hazards have been materialized.

### **3. Members**

The following 24 persons were the charter members of Verkkorotary: Ahlstedt Tor (Kauniainen Rotary Club), Aronsson Hannu, Boehm von Timo, Castrén Matias (Ruoholahti Rotary Club), Fontell Lauri (Pasila Rotary Club), Helenius Elina, Hulkkonen Mikko, Hämäläinen Jyri, Johansson Carl-Michael, Karpakka Jari, Kauppi Pia-Noora, Keijola Matti (Kluuvi Rotary Club), Komu Markus, Laamanen Tomi, Paajanen Jukka, Parkkinen Matti, Pennanen Juha, Pohjola Ilpo (Joensuu South Rotary Club), Pääkkilä Marko (Kluuvi Rotary Club), Rajala Erkki, Saartio Markus, Svendblad Harry (Maneesi Rotary Club), Toivio Jukka (Finlandia Hall Rotary Club) and Vuorinen Petri. Already at the charter ceremony, there were more new members and member candidates.





In the picture from left: Lauri Vihonen, Tomi Laamanen, Mikko Hulkkonen, Anita Ovaska, Matti Parkkinen, Markus Saartio, Jari Karpakka, Piia-Noora Kauppi, Marko Pääkkilä, Juha Pennanen, Olli Juvonen, Ilpo Pohjola, Jukka Paajanen and Erkki Rajala.

Eight persons from the charter members had previous Rotary background and the rest sixteen were new Rotarians, although many of them had previous background of Rotaract. After the establishing stage, several charter members who had rotary experiences returned to their own Clubs at a later stage, and part of the charter members left Rotary activities later. Currently (spring 2014), there are still ten charter members remaining in the Club.

A lot of attention was paid to the member acquisition during the first actual operational year (2004-2005). A "recruitment letter" was drafted and sent by e-mail to about 150 to 200 persons in the target group, including old Rotaractors.

The membership application form was added to the website. The Club's activity was reported in press releases and presentations were made to various Rotary Clubs. Håkan Nordqvist submitted two articles about the development of the Club's operation to Rotary Norden magazine. Also, Rotary International magazine wrote about Verkkorotary in its December 2004 issue. During the first year of actual operation, two members resigned, but quite many new members joined the Club, altogether 11 in total, of which the followings are still our members: Juha-Matti Arola, Harri Hautala, Outi Milner and Heikki Piihola. Thus, the number of members at the end of the first year of operation was already 33, ranging from about thirty to about seventy years old, and covering a rather diverse professional spectrum already at the early stage.

After the initial active member recruitment stage, the development of memberships was not very abundant in numbers, and it was even decreasing at times. Clearly, the challenge was to engage new members well enough into the Club activities. Some of them became passive and left the activity sooner or later. Unfortunately, this applied to a number of initial charter members as well.

Typically, about half of the members have been active in the Club events and projects, and a typical online meeting has been attended by 10-20 persons. The participation to Terra meetings has been limited by the geographical location of the members. Especially in recent years, more people living outside of the Helsinki metropolitan area and Finland also joined as members. On the other hand, the life phase of some members has also taken them outside Finland, and they have still been able to participate in our meetings online.

During the last couple of years, the membership development has been positive again. The Club also got its first female president and an increasing number of female members which already account for one third of all the members. Membership development at the end of different periods was as follows:

	Men	Women	Altogether
• Charter 2004, June	22	2	24
• Rotary year 2004-2005	28	5	33
• Rotary year 2005-2006	29	6	35
• Rotary year 2006-2007	27	6	33
• Rotary year 2007-2008	27	7	34
• Rotary year 2008-2009	23	4	27
• Rotary year 2009-2010	26	6	32
• Rotary year 2010-2011	29	10	39
• Rotary year 2011-2012	26	9	35
• Rotary year 2012-2013	27	11	38
• Rotary year 2013-2014 (beginning)	30	12	42

At the moment, the age structure of our members varies from 34 to 74. One member was born in the 30's, 10 in the 40's, 7 in the 50's, 13 in the 60's, 10 in the 70's and 1 in the 80's. Professional distribution is also fairly representative, the actual IT professionals are just a few.



During 2009-2010, membership development was favorable, and we got the Membership Development and Extension Award from the District.



Sometimes the handover of the membership pin to a new member requires a bit of waiting time. In the picture, a membership pin was handed over on 16.11.2011 to our member Olli Heinonen living in Boston when he visited Finland. The occasion was celebrated in a proper way. Raimo Partanen, Jari Karpakka, Pertti Huitu, Olli Heinonen and Juha-Matti Arola were present in the celebration.

#### 4. Utilized IT technology during different periods

During the trial phase (until 2004) of the Club, Yahoo's free community service was used. Later, we changed to MSN community services. The experiences of these were not encouraging. It turned out that written communication among the members and presentation preparation was demanding and time consuming. Online discussions did not take place. Softwares were not suitable for arranging actual online meetings. Already at an early stage it was realized that only interactive online meetings where participants' voices and possibly also images conveyed to other participants would have an uplifting effect on the spirit of the Club, which was comparable to the traditional Rotary Club meetings.

##### 2004-2005

With the temporary support of the District, an own server was acquired (which was paid back to the District) and equipped with Microsoft software, especially the SharePoint Portal, based on which the internal pages of the Club were built by Jukka Paajanen. This was a great step forward. The management and communication of the club were now web based.

The Club's official website at [www.verkkorotary.fi](http://www.verkkorotary.fi) was launched on 5.4.2004. In spring 2004, an agreement was made with Tieturi that we could utilize the Centra conferencing software which they were using. It allowed 20 user to be present simultaneously, transferred both audio and video, also the speakers' PowerPoint images. The system proved to be very useful and got the approval from the members. However, the contract between Tieturi and the software provider ended in the end of 2004.

Since February 2005, Live Meeting system, sponsored by Microsoft and telephone conferences arranged via Elisa were used. Live Meeting was considered to be useful, but not comparable to Centra. The Club also experimented using Habbo Hotel during a telephone meeting. To get a steady conference platform was considered to be very important for the future operations.

In addition to online meetings, other web services which support the activities were also quickly adopted by Verkkorotary, which included the possibility of donating for makeups via the Internet. Internet makeup was introduced already in June 2004 both in Finnish and in English. It was possible to donate by text message, online banking accounts, as well as international credit cards. In January 2005, the Rotary 100-year celebration's registration and admission fees were also handled online with the efforts of Verkkorotary members. In the early days, the most active members for online payments were Matti



Kivinen, Hannu Aronsson and Jukka Paajanen. Portalify Oy's Coinlet online payment system was used as the technical solution in addition to Verkkorotary's built-in features on its own web pages. Online Payments, however, were not used anymore after the early stage experiments.

#### 2005-2006

The Club's external website external and so-called internal portal still operated on its own server and utilized Microsoft SharePoint Portal software. Online meetings continued using Centra which was sponsored by Finland Travel Bureau (Suomen Matkatoimisto).

In April 2006, we also tried to hold the meeting at Habbo Hotel, and it succeeded quite well, although of course, it was not possible to make any actual presentations. Members, however, could meet online and exchange greetings in an interesting way.



An online meeting at Habbo Hotel, participated by a dozen verkkorotarians. Participants were able to build their own character and discussion took place mainly by means of dialogue bubbles.

#### 2006-2007

The Club's official website and internal pages continued to work as before. The usage of Centra sponsored by Finland Travel Bureau continued until the end of 2006. After that, in the beginning of 2007, followed by a short break, the operation continued with the same solution by the sponsorship from our member Ilpo Pohjola's company Blue Innovation Oy. In the interim period, the Club tried again Habbo Hotel and simultaneous telephone conference.

During the operational year, members from several continents (Europe, Asia and North America) participated in the online meetings. Other online conference techniques including Meet24 system were studied and pilot usage was tried in smaller groups.

In March 2007, with our member Teemu Arina's contribution, Dicole's wiki and blog-based operating environment were used, which brought a new type of offline based activity for communication and documentation generating.

#### 2007-2008

The Club's website and internal pages worked as usual – side by side with Dicole environment. Online meetings were still held using Centra sponsored by our member Ilpo Pohjola's company Blue Innovation Oy.

#### 2008-2009

The Club's website and internal pages still operated in its own server (at member Jukka Paajanen's home). During this period, mapping and planning work started, the purpose was to make reform in stages, first for the Club's external website, and later to provide the necessary framework for internal services.

Online meetings were held using Centra until December 2008 when the contract with the Club ended. The commercial conditions of the system were changed to time-based (versus the previous fixed cost). The Club gave Ilpo Pohjola big thanks for the long-term sponsorship. With our members Teemu Arina's contribution, the Club received from Humac Oy an Adobe Connect Pro software which was taken into official usage at the beginning of January 2009.

#### 2009-2010

Organized by Maria Jokelainen, a new Joomla based publishing system provided by netFinn Finland Oy was taken into usage at the beginning of the operational year. [www.verkkorotary.fi](http://www.verkkorotary.fi) site was renewed during autumn using the new system. The site included both public pages and members only pages where plenty of previous years' presentation materials and meeting minutes were stored during the operational year. Our website took part in Rotary Finland's (Suomen Rotary) competition for the best website and got an honorable mention due to the fact that the recordings of our online meetings were available on the site. The platform of our online meetings during this operational year was still Adobe Connect Pro web conference environment, and the service provider was changed from Humac Oy to Ilona IT Oy in spring 2010.

#### 2010-2011

During this period, the use of IT tools was diversified and we tried new things. We visited Second Life environment as our avatars during one weekly meeting. Our President Juha-Matti used Talk Fusion recordings as the monthly newsletter. We marketed our December international meeting through Rotarians LinkedIn Group. We launched an internal Facebook group in August 2010. The President recorded a general presentation of Verkkorotary to YouTube. At the beginning of this period, our online meeting platform began to support better quality audio and video, thus allowing higher quality meetings.

#### 2011-2012

Online meeting platform continued on Adobe Connect. A team was formed for the practical arrangement of the meetings. Together with the Sergeant-at-Arms, our members took turns to ensure for the proper functioning of the weekly meetings and technical aspects of guest speakers' presentation. During this operational year, "Good Online Meeting Etiquette" was drafted, which formed the framework of our meetings.

Board members were equipped with [verkkorotary.fi](http://www.verkkorotary.fi) - email addresses, and they were encouraged to use it for the preparation and communications of Club's different activities. The home pages were updated on a regular basis and an extensive reform project was prepared. However, due to limited resources, the implementation was postponed. The Club's presence in the social media was gradually increased, both in Facebook and LinkedIn.

The usage of Facebook as a channel of information and discussion was favored for its ease of use, non cost, and in particular, ease of maintenance. This was especially emphasized in the management of user accounts, as each member took care of the account name by himself. The Facebook page administrator only had to approve the member as a user.

Google services had also developed and there was a free service platform for small businesses and organizations. The platform allows for 10 free e-mail accounts and an online calendar. After a difficult start, the Club's event calendar was moved to Google platform and part of the e-mail accounts were put into

usage. A pilot Verkkorotary blog was launched on Blogger. It worked particularly as a publishing platform for the event calendar.

#### 2012-2013

The online meeting platform (Adobe Connect) being used was considered to be reliable and efficient. In April 2013, the Club purchased an official license in collaboration with Rotary Finland. The new version of the software and good server capacity makes the audio and video of the meetings quite smooth, also the functional reliability is at a higher level than ever before. Attendance activity increased from the previous year, reaching an average of more than 60%.

The need for new home pages became actual because the current Joomla based system was difficult to maintain. The latest browsers and Joomla editor did not work well together and the Club lost its deep knowledge of Joomla. The draft version of the new website was made on Google pages for testing purposes. The event calendar of the Club was also made on the Google platform. The platform of the home pages is free of charge for the Club.

After giving up Joomla, the password protected members only part of the web pages were no longer available. However, they had been used quite infrequently and the contents were mainly old from the time when the pages had been established. As a result, there was no more need to maintain Club members' personal passwords and user names to the internal pages. The membership registration of Verkkorotary is part of Rotary Finland's membership information System. Thus, an own separate register could be given up.

#### 2013-2014

When Verkkorotary has now reached 10 years of age, we have three main systems at our use: 1) Adobe Connect meeting system, 2) the website and Club calendar based on Google platform, and 3) Facebook group for members. All of these systems have been developed actively in recent years to serve the needs of verkkorotary. LinkedIn group is still there, but not in active usage anymore. The aim has been to develop the technology so that its use is easy, reliable, easy to maintain, and involves as little work as possible. In addition, efforts have been made to keep the costs on the lowest level. The IT expenditure of the Club is around 50 euros per month.

The future looks good. From the perspective of Club's operations, there are free and affordable services on the Internet, which enables Verkkorotary to expand and develop its operations. Also, the skills of the members as a user of various services are constantly evolving. Everything is possible on the Internet, but you need to keep it cool because the possibilities of maintaining effective services for a small club are rather limited.

## **5. Verkkorotary is doing good**

Rotary is a service organization, and already from the very beginning, it was clear that the Club would also need to develop its service activities, as a well functioning Rotary club should do. At a quite early stage after the establishment phase, we started the exchange student activities and have continued that as one of our main "do good" activity. Other service activities have been varying, and we have been engaged in various fund raising events. Naturally we have been trying to enhance the Rotary organization's possibilities of benefiting from the Internet technology. Both the District and Rotary Finland committees have utilized our meeting tools for their own meetings, thereby enhancing the time efficiency and reducing the carbon footprint.

## Exchange students activities

Verkkorotarians have been involving in the youth exchange almost from the very beginning of the Club. The types of youth exchange are: one-year exchange, summer exchange (family to family) and camp exchange. Verkkorotarians have been involved in all these types. In addition, verkkorotarians have participated as the hosts for GSE (group study exchange).

Even before the Club's official participation of the youth exchange program, our charter member Juha Pennanen and his family served as the host family for several Rotary exchange students. The first exchange student sent by our Club was Anna Karpakka. She was on a camp exchange in Belgium in summer 2005. In the following summer of 2006, Tiina Karpakka attended the camp exchange in Austria.

Verkkorotary proposed two GSE exchange students to New Zealand, however, neither was selected. Instead, the Club actively participated in arranging the program and providing the accomodation for the incoming New Zealand team to Finland in February 2007. One of the GSE participants made an online presentation for Verkkorotarians after returning to New Zealand.

We first participated in the one-year exchange during 2007-2008. The decisions of participating in youth exchange must be made during the previous autumn, so in the fall 2006, Susanne Valkeakari, who had trained us to use Centra told that her son Santeri Vilos would like to apply for the youth exchange. Jari Karpakka proposed that the Club would participate in the youth exchange while promising to be the youth exchange officer. After Jari, Heikki Piuholta took the YEO responsibility during 2009-2010, and afterwards, the task has been performed by Minnamari Dahlberg.

In contrast to the camp or summer exchange, one-year exchange is a relatively big financial investment for the Club which sends the student. One-year exchange is literally exchange, as the club which sends a young Finns abroad is committed to receive a foreign student to Finland, to find a suitable school and host families (typically the young student lives in three different families during their exchange year), to train the families and to keep in touch with the school, host families, and of course the young student him/herself. The club sponsors the young student for the local transportation, school books, as well as pays pocket money, in such a way that the typical financial investment is about € 2,400 per exchange student per year.

As the investment for one-year exchange is relatively high, we agreed at the early stage of sharing the costs half and half together with Finlandia Hall Rotary Club. In addition, we turned to another sponsoring club, Lauttasaari Rotary Club which donated to us two paintings with the theme "tern" by its member Erik Bruun. One of these paintings was auctioned and the other was raffled among the members. Santeri spent his year as an exchange student in Eureka, Illinois, United States. In return, we acted as the host club for Brazilian Mariana Sampaio who was in Lauttasaari high school during 2007-2008.

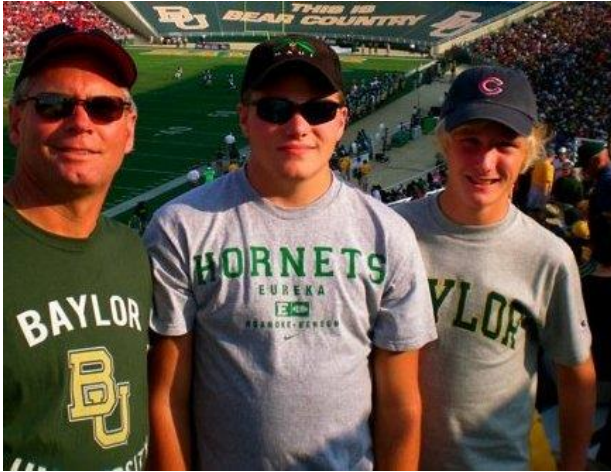


Photo on the left: Santeri (right) with the father and brother from his first host family. Photo on the right: Mariana on the right and YEO Jari Karpakka on the left.

The following year, i.e, during 2008-2009, we sent Jessica Öller to the southern part of Mexico City, Tlalpan and we got Denise Zamorano Sarmiento from Mexico as an exchange student. During that period, we divided the costs into three parts with Finlandia Hall and Lauttasaari Rotary Club.



Jessica (right) and her friend Sandra, both were in Mexico through the Rotary exchange, on the right photo is Denise

In summer 2009, Lotta Castrén attended a summer exchange, i.e. family to family exchange. After Lotta had spent a month in the United States, the daughter of her host family took turns and came to stay at Castrén's for one month.

During 2009-2010, we sent Pauliina Piuholta to Australia and in January 2010 Adrian Beadle from Australia arrived as an exchange student for the calendar year 2010. Costs were divided further into three parts and shared with Finlandia Hall and Lauttasaari Rotary Club.





Photo on the left: Pauliina in Australia; on the right: the exchange student Adrian Beadlen from Australia with his host family Piuhola.

Anni Koponen travelled to Puebla in Mexico during her exchange year 2010-2011, and during the corresponding school year, we hosted Paola Cortes Perez from Mexico. Co-operation on youth exchanges continued between Finlandia Hall Rotary Club and Verkkorotary Club.



Photo on the left: Anni with her father Pekka Koponen; on the right: Paola, Adrian and Piuhola's daughter.

Wilhelm Sanmark was our outbound exchange student in Chile, and Matias Pascual Soto Silva from Chile was our inbound exchange student during 2011-2012, still in cooperation between Finlandia Hall Rotary Club and Verkkorotary.



In the photo: Terra meeting at Pennanen, with the theme of exchange students. Sitting on the sofa: Liisa Stjernberg, Minnamari Dahlberg and Wilhelm Sanmark.



The farewell party for Pascual was arranged at SFW Hall on 5.6.2012. His host families, friends and members of the Verkkorotary and Finlandia Hall Club were present in the party. DGE nominee Ilkka Torstila gave him a gift - the guitar that Pascual had borrowed. What a wonderful act! The young man was moved when receiving the gift and also by the whole great event. And the rest of us were touched by his playing.

For the period 2012-2013, with Finlandia Hall Rotary Club, we sent Vivi Dahlberg as an exchange student to Taiwan and we hosted Vivian Liu from Taiwan in the corresponding school year. In spring 2013, we also received Nicole Fuentes from the United States.



On the left: Nicole and Vivian, on the right Vivi

In summer 2013, several members of our Club hosted the students who participated in the camp exchange arranged by District 1420. Lilli Dahlberg sent by our Club participated in the camp exchange in Turkey.

During the current period of 2013-2014, together with Finlandia Hall Rotary Club, we sent Pihla Kivihuhta as an exchange student to spend an exchange student years in the USA and we hosted Kieran Klockars from Canada.



Photo on the left: Pihla Kivihuhta; photo on the right: our current YEO Minnamari Dahlberg and Kieran Klockars.

For 2014-2015, in co-operation with Finlandia Hall Rotary Club and Lauttasaari Rotary Club, we will send two exchange students: Jenni Nummela to Peru and Aarne Nykänen, most likely to Australia & New Zealand. Incoming exchange students are likely to be from the same countries.

Rotary Youth Exchange is perhaps the most visible part in Rotary activities and provides an amazing experience for exchange students as well as for their host families.

### **Other Verkkorotary service activities and fund raising**

In addition to student exchanges, our other service operations in the early stages were mainly to introduce new communication tools for the usage of Rotary. So the District and Rotary Finland utilized the meeting platform which we had been using. And we had a number of District events which were recorded and distributed to the Internet.

During 2009-2010, we started to prepare for RYLA seminar which should be carried out partly through the Internet. Baltic Sea was chosen as the theme, and the preparation was in cooperation with Finlandia Hall Rotary Club. The program and brochures were ready, but in spite of the online marketing, we did not receive a sufficient number of people who showed interest in participating, so we cancelled the event.

During 2010-2011, we joined a project launched by RC Kluuvi, which was to sponsor audio book devices to senior homes and care centers. A single device costs about 500 euros.

The target group of the fund raising were people with limited reading abilities who live in senior homes, hospitals and other medical institutions within the District clubs' area, and several Rotary clubs in the District area joined in this project. There are a lot of institutions in this District which can not afford to purchase the device, even if there is a need for it. Users of those listening devices are not only visually impaired people: in hospitals and nursing homes there are also people who still find it difficult to read books, sometimes even impossible, for example, those who suffer from dyslexia, muscle injury or aphasia. The project was implemented together with Celia library. Celia is a special national library which produces and lends fiction and non-fiction audio books to the customers. Celia serves people with reading difficulties nationwide.

During 2010-2011, we made an audio book project together with Finland's oldest Rotary Club – Helsinki Rotary Club, endowing five listening devices to Kustaankartano Center on 20.12.2011.



During 2012-2013, we donated audio book listening devices to nursing home Sofia on Friday, 8.3.2013. The Club President Pertti Huitu and past President Raimo Partanen handed over the devices to the residents at the beginning of a coffee event arranged on the International Women's Day. The gifts were received by Tiina Kuisma, Head of the nursing home together with the lively resident - Irmeli.



On behalf of Rotary eClub Verkkorotary r.y., Club President Pertti Huitu donated the audio book devices to nursing home Sophia on 8.3.2013. A cheerful International Women's Day party was also held there.

We have done fund-raising mainly through membership fees, but we have also organized a variety of events. For example, in February 2012, we organized a Valentine's Day concert at Steiner school's Michael Hall in Helsinki. The leading performer was artist Elina Vettenranta. The concert was excellent.



The concert poster and concert of Elina Vettenranta

In spring and autumn 2012, we also took part in Stop Polio Now fund raising organized by the Rotary. We acquired five collection boxes, caps and vests. Box collection was carried out during the events, as well as, for example, at Tapiola business center area on 24.10.

In autumn 2012, A cello concert evening was held at the Music Center on 20.11, during which the 130-year-old Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra played cello music. Numerous members of Verkkorotary came to the event with families and friends, and part of the ticket sales was used in financing the audio book project.

Together with several other clubs, Verkkorotary made an initiative to District 1420 in February 2013 for Rotary to join the new Children's Hospital 2017 fund raising project. The District made the decision to join this important project aiming to collect € 100 000 over the next three years. The District recommends that clubs would annually donate at least 20 euros per member. During 2013-2014, Verkkorotary collected the money for this purpose from, among others, selling tickets to members of Verkkorotarians, their family members and friends for a theater evening at the National Theater. The aim is also to steer the income from the ten year charter celebration for this purpose.

## 6. Activities and events over the past years

The meeting scheme of our Club has since the very beginning taken the format where an online meeting will take an hour. It will start by the President informing about general and actual Rotary related topics, then with the weekly presentation followed by immediate discussion. In order to get our members more familiarized with each other there can also be a short personal presentation of a member, a so called EGO-speech of some ten minutes before the main presentation.

Our first meeting of the month has been called a TERRA- meeting. We then gather face-to-face in different places, very often as guests of some company or organization, museum, etc. Those meetings generally take some two hours. An active participation into various kinds of Rotary events has made it also possible to meet with each other physically. As a good example, Verkkorotary was awarded a prize for the best attendance at the District 1420 Conference on February 2005.

It was very characteristic during the first years of the Club to make an intensive search and tests of various new innovations, alternatives and options offered by Internet. Many of our members had regular business travels and they were very eager to try to participate in our weekly meetings from abroad. Occasionally the local poor quality of net connections, however, made it challenging to join our meetings. One of our members Mrs Piia-Noora Kauppi, while she was serving as a Member of European Parliament regularly participated the meetings from Brussels. During the term of 2005-06 we had enjoyed the attendance of several visiting guests from many continents, such as from Europe, Asia and North America. One unforgettable experience we had when our member Mr Juha Pennanen succeeded to participate in our online meeting from an aeroplane on his flight from Frankfurt to Teheran. It's also worth mentioning that once we arranged a virtual concert online, ie the musicians from our Club were co-playing their instruments at home by their computers.

On March 13, 2007 our Club arranged the first "World Congress" of e-Clubs. Every pilot club was invited to participate. Having that all successfully executed we got an inspiration to continue with the concept of global meetings on every second Tuesday of every second month at 22:00 – 23:00 hrs immediately after



our own club meeting. This practice was valid for several years, with various intensity. It was continued also during the preparatory period of new bylaws for e-Clubs by COL (Council of Legislation). RI accepted officially the principle of the establishment of eClubs finally in 2010.

On December 14, 2010 Verkkorotary called on an international e-meeting under the title "How to establish an eClub?" For that meeting we compiled a handbook of all our experiences and practices so far. This meeting was widely promoted under Rotary - chat at LinkedIn and we received some visiting guests even from Brasil and USA.

Over the years some joint meetings were arranged also with the local Rotaract - Espoo club. Many of our members have a personal Rotaract background. For various reasons the activities of Rotaract has not been so active in Finland in the recent years. Even Rotaract - Espoo has ceased operations. Fortunately we still have one active Rotaract club in the District 1420 ( Rotaract - Helsinki) and we are optimistic to have more established in the future.

Some photos about the TERRA meeting visits to various places will follow.



17.8.2004 on a boat cruise in front of East Helsinki, organized by Juha Pennanen



4.1.2005 our Club President Matti Keijola is introducing our web pages



MTV terra as a guest to our member news editor-in-chief Heikki Piuholta 8.1.2008: Matias Castrén on the TV news reporter's chair.



1.6.2010 practising golf in Espoo. On the photo standing Matti Kivinen, Antti Parkama, Riina Jokinen, Jari Karpakka, Jarkko Jokelainen, Heikki Piuholta, Pekka Koponen and Erkki Rajala, in the front Teemu Arina.



12.6.2012 horse back riding, organized by Juha Pennanen



9.4.2013 as guests to Indian Ambassador Mr. Manickam in Katajanokka.



Kayaking on 13.6.2013 in Helsinki archipelago



Terra meeting 3.12.2013 in Aalto University Executive Education unit.





7.1.2014 meeting in Helsinki Finnish Club. From left Pentti Heikkurinen, Ville Sirviö, Erkki Rajala, Jyri Hämäläinen, Tuulikki Juusela, Jari Karpakka, Piia-Noora Kauppi, Leila-Mari Ryyänen, Iiris Aaltio, Paula Kyrö, Matias Castrén, Risto Keränen, Jaakko Castrén, Matti Kivinen, Olli Lipsanen, Pertti Huitu and Heikki Savander. Raimo Partanen was taking the photo

We have organized joint meetings with the domestic Rotary Clubs also using internet. We successfully organized a joint meeting with Nurmijärvi-Klaukkala on 13.4.2010, where they were in their normal meeting room, some of our members had gathered at Svenska Klubbben. Some of our members participated online, and we had joint presentations and discussions, where the Nurmijärvi-Klaukkala Club was displaying the meeting on the wall with a monitor and using a common microphone.

We have made multiple presentations of our activity online to other Clubs over the Internet using our conferencing software.

On 21.3.2013 we organized a joint meeting with RC Töölö and RC Kamppi, where participation was possible also over the Internet to those of their members, who could not join locally.

As regards some regular terra activities, we have traditionally had a joint Christmas church meeting with RC Eira, RC Finlandia Hall and RC Kluuvi.

We have had the privilege of enjoying interesting presentations from diverse sources. Giving a presentation and meeting online has also been a new, inspiring experience to our guest speakers. We have compiled a separate instruction for the guest speakers. Because there are no geographical limitations, we have occasionally had some really up to date presentations from "where the things are happening", such as by professor Outi Korhonen from Cairo University during Egypt uprising in spring 2011-

Among the traditional activities the change of chains is always a festive occasion, as well as Governor's visits. They are always arranged as a terra meeting, with online participation possible where feasible



Change of chains 8.5.2005 at Matti Keijola's home in Klaukkala.



Pictures from change of chains in Nokia premises in August 2008, Harri Hautala gave the chains to Markus Saartio.



Change of chains in restaurant Mestaritalli 22.6.2010. from left to right new AG Pentti Ranta-aho, new president Juha-Matti Arola, past president Jari Karpakka and past AG Ilkka Torstila.



Governors visit 30.10.2012 in restaurant Ravintola Blue Peter, AG Rauno Selenius, club president Pertti Huitu and DG Harry Hedman.



Terra meeting 29.10.2013 in restaurant Töölönranta, where our activities are presented to DG Ilkka Torstila. Some of the members are online instead of the restaurant.

## 7. Verkkorotary actively contributes to the District activities

As told already earlier, our Charter President, Mr Matti Keijola was very intensively involved with Rotary Finland and with the leaders of our District throughout the whole charter process of our Club. In fact he had started to develop the idea already in 2001. Matti and the IT Committee of District 1420 kept continuous dialogue and finally the District officially assigned him the task of preparing the eClub practises and the chartering of the Club.

It was only natural that the activities of the members of our new Club were directed towards settling the operations of our own Club on a firm ground. The Club, of course, participated actively in the meetings, conferences and training sessions of our District as well as networking with existing clubs and disseminated widely information about the new Club. The District on the other hand carefully observed and gave proper guidance for the first paths of this new, somewhat unconventional Club.

It is quite understandable at the beginning that the District wanted to utilize primarily the special IT knowhow and expertise of our members. Mr Jukka Toivio, our charter member, acted as a member of District IT Committee up to 2009. (He wanted to transfer his membership to Finlandia- Hall RC later on). Mr Markus Saartio had been invited as member of the same Committee already in 2006. He then continued in this capacity until 2011 and later on as chair of the Committee in 2011-13. For same period he was even chairing the IT Committee of Rotary Finland in 2011-2014.

The main focus of Markus's activities have consisted of organizing necessary training and producing related guide books, of informing clubs about best practices, of spurting clubs to utilize social media etc. He had a very central role in supporting the process when the clubs were entered into new membership registry of RI and RF. In early 2014 the IT Committee renewed the District's web site.

The role of the IT Committee of RF is both to serve as a discussion forum between similar committees of all Districts (6 in Finland) and to offer information and advice about the best practices. It organizes also a country wide competition about "best club home pages". In order to facilitate the Districts, the IT



committee is conducting continuously research and comparisons on latest IT trends and practices. For instance in 2012-13, the Committee studied and compared the use of event registration systems for Clubs' and Districts' use.

In 2012-13 our member Mr Juha-Matti Arola has worked as a secretary of District IT Committee.

Mr Mika Lallukka, present chair of the IT team of our own Club, has been called upon to continue as successor of Markus as chair of IT Committees of both RF and the District for the term 2014-15.

Mr Jari Karpakka, our charter member, was invited to work as an AG (Assistant Governor). The duty consists of guidance to the clubs by assisting the District Governor. Jari's assignment covered three years, ie 2011-14. He was responsible for six clubs in Southern and Western Helsinki

Mr Erkki Rajala, also a charter member of our Club, will succeed Jari as an AG for 2014-17.

Mr Pertti Huitu, Past President of Club in 2012 -13, has been invited in January 2013 to begin as acting chairman the Communications Committee of D 1420 followed by an appointment as chair for 2013 onwards. The previous Committee resigned in the middle of the term. Main duties of the Committee have been: organizing the start of Rotary's fund raising campaign and communications for the New Children's Hospital, assisting in End Polio Now campaign, supporting the activities of District's Save the Baltic Sea initiative as well as Youth Exchange and Rotary Foundation operations. This Committee had also responsibility of the content of District's new web site. Since January 2014 Pertti attended also in the coordination work of multi-district communications chiefs.

The activities of Verkkorotary in youth exchange has been noted as well: from 2014-2015 onwards our youth exchange officer of many years, Minnamari Dahlberg, was nominated into the District's Youth exchange committee.

## **8. eClubs globally in 2014**

The original pilot project of eClubs consisted of 14 chartered clubs, four of them in Europe. All of those are still active with the exception of two clubs in Europe, namely Greece and Norway. Most of the eClubs, however, are still quite moderate in size. Rotary eClub One, oldest in the world, has a bit over seventy members. Rotary eClub of the South West USA might be the biggest so far with a hundred or so members. Most of the others seem to be fairly small, typically some twenty to thirty members each. Some of the eClubs are so called "hybrid" clubs having one monthly terra meeting like Verkkorotary or Asia's first eClub E-Club 3310. The majority of them meet only online. Some of their members, however, enjoy personal fellowship by getting together also physically eg in connection with various conventions, conferences and many joint Rotary projects.

The worldwide number of eClubs has grown very steadily since the decision of Council of Legislation (COL) in 2010. The new bylaws in 2010 acknowledged the status of eClubs as an established form of the Rotary movement as well as gave the right to set up new eClubs (max two clubs per District). COL 2013 abolished even this restriction. In the other Nordic countries there are today one eClub in Denmark, one in Iceland and two in Sweden. In Finland our Club prepared a survey in 2007-08 together with District 1390 about the interest to establish a new eClub, but with no result. Rotary's LinkedIn group have since then discussed

very actively about various eClub meeting models to be recommended for proposed new clubs. On one hand there are so called hybrid clubs, like Verkkorotary, where the members are primarily coming from the same region and they also meet physically in TERRA type of events. On the other hand there are eClubs, which are connected only via Internet and with no geographical preference. Some clubs seem to have similar online conferencing systems as verkkorotary for online meetings, some others do not have scheduled online meetings at all.

According to the listing obtained from RI there are (May 2014) 146 eClubs worldwide already.

## 9. Closing remarks

Verkkorotary has now an honorable history of ten years behind. One can honestly say that it is a very long time indeed with special reference to the fact how relatively young Internet is. We have gathered a lot of experience about how to compile and develop a new social network, about how to communicate with each other on a personal level as well as about how to use these meeting techniques. The available meeting platforms at the beginning were less sophisticated and network speeds were slower than today, so that even time to time the telephone conference was the only solution available. Since then the technology has advanced very fast so that today we can enjoy really professional meeting facilities.

It has been important, however, to keep in mind that we are part of Rotary and need to focus into Rotary activities in our operations and less on Internet technical matters. Our member Mr Juha-Matti Arola, then responsible for training personnel at the global KONE Corporation, once said that he could first test certain new practices of collaboration on the Internet at Verkkorotary which later on could be applied to his own work when training the company personnel. It has been very inspiring to observe recently how entering a meeting is possible with completely new devices, such as smartphones and tablets. It all has made it possible to attend our meetings “without borders” all over the world and even from very specific places such as eg airplanes, construction sites or even from a maternity hospital. It has been important that also our family members have had opportunities to participate into meetings, not to forget our Terra events. The children of our younger members are constantly eager meeting participants, too.

The next ten years will certainly bring along lots of new devices, applications, software and tools for facilitating better communication thus making it even easier to participate. I'd like to wish Verkkorotary most exciting next ten years

*Jari Karpakka*

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