

*This series of informative fiches aim to present, in summary, examples of practices and approaches that EU Member States and Regions have put in place in order to implement their Rural Development Programmes in the current period. These examples want to contribute to the understanding of what has worked well and less well in the delivery of the 2007-2013 RDPs and as far as possible, draw lessons in the view of future improvement of the programmes.*

## Promoting Village Tourism in Finland



### BACKGROUND AND SCOPE OF THE PROJECT

The need for a nationwide coordination project on village tourism was raised several times during the 2000-2006 programming period in the meetings of the Thematic Group on Rural Tourism, a working group under the government-appointed Rural Policy Committee. In the 2000-2006 programming period, Finland had several operational programmes, and it was felt that the small local or regional projects did not generate and transfer knowledge efficiently to the entire tourist industry. In the 2007-2013 programming period, it became possible to operate national projects. Thus the opportunity to start a larger village-based tourism project was also realised.

**Keywords:** Tourism, rural tourism, farm diversification,

**EU Member State:** Finland

**Specific Location:** Kukkola, Sonka, Ruhtinansalmi, Northern Kuhmo villages, Peräseinäjoki, Syvänniemi, Vuonislah-  
ti, Killikoski, Möhkö, Himos-villages, Leineperi, Kalkkinen,  
Niinisaari, Ypäjä, Velkua and Lohja archipelago

**Main beneficiary:** Lomalaidun ry - Association for rural  
tourism; 16 pilot villages around Finland

**RDP Measure:** Measure 313: Encouragement of tourist  
activities

**Funds Allocated:** Total project cost: €379 980

EAFRD contribution: €170 991

National contribution: €208 989

Private contribution: €62,950

**Implementation Period:** April 2009 to April 2012

The main goal of the project was to pilot new tools and strategies to support the tourist industry in rural areas, boosting at the same time economic development of villages. Specific objectives of the project included: activating and supporting networking among village entrepreneurs and inhabitants; enhancing cooperation and mutual learning between participating villages; creating quality criteria for village-based tourism products; involving third sector in the development of tourism products; increasing the number of visitors in the village (both domestic and international); increasing business opportunities for entrepreneurs in the countryside and create new job opportunities.

The project was designed and managed by Lomalaidun ry, a national association promoting rural tourism. The members of the association include, Inter Alia, the Finnish Rural Tourism Providers' association, the Finnish Agricultural Producers' and Forest Owners' Union, the Finnish 4H and the Automobile and Touring Club of Finland. Sixteen villages were selected to participate in the project, and inhabitants and entrepreneurs as well as local authorities were actively involved in the implementation of the project.



## Current practices across the EU27



### DEVELOPMENT AND PLANNING

Preliminary researches were undertaken by the Lomalaidun ry association to have a more precise overview of the state of play of rural tourism development and better assess villages' needs to enhance tourism products offered in the countryside. The results of the preliminary research were used in the elaboration of a detailed project plan, needed to apply to EAFRD support. The project plan for this national coordination project included actions along three main lines: 1) know-how for developing village-based tourism; 2) product development and marketing channels; and 3) communication and capacity-building.

The main risk identified when preparing the project plan was the willingness and capacity of villages to participate in the project. These were mitigated by timely communication on the project as well as by the establishment of specific selection criteria for the participating villages, such as existing tourism entrepreneurs and enterprises, the will and resources to develop village-based tourism and an existing network between village actors.

A steering group was created to follow the annual progress of the project. Regular reports were submitted to the steering group and the Managing Authority (MA). A midterm assessment of the project was conducted by an external evaluator.



### IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROJECT

The project started off with the call for applications for pilot villages in 2008. The villages had to show their will, capacity and resources to develop tourism products as well as to prove the existence of a network of relevant actors interested in tourism and in the development of the village itself. A selection committee composed by rural development experts and the executive director of Lomalaidun ry selected the 12 pilot villages from 48 applications. At a later stage, four more villages were included in the project. The selected villages were: Kukkola, Sonka, Ruhtinansalmi, Northern Kuhmo villages, Peräseinäjoki, Syvänniemi, Vuonisahti, Killikoski, Möhkö, Himos-villages, Leineperi, Kalkkinen, Niinisaari, Ypäjä, Velkua and Lohja archipelago.

The project consisted of three types of actions:

1. **Know-how for developing village-based tourism**, within which the following activities were carried on:
  - \* organisation of product development workshops and lectures related to practical aspects needed to run a tourism business (VAT, legal aspects, pricing, cost-benefit calculation) for all participating villages (i.e. village development activists and village tourism entrepreneurs);
  - \* completion of studies, such as village-based tourism in Italy, Ireland and Austria; online visibility of Finnish village-based tourism abroad; mapping of interests and expectations of tour organisers towards village-based tourism products;
  - \* study tour to Ireland; and
  - \* organisation of the annual village-based tourism seminar.
2. **Product development and marketing channels**, which included:
  - \* village visits and product testing by other participating villages, such as hikes, sports events, culture walks, culture productions etc.;
  - \* development, maintenance and update of the project website [www.gofinland.fi/maalle](http://www.gofinland.fi/maalle).

### 3) Communication and capacity-building, which included:

- \* the organisation of a standardised system for monitoring the project and collect feedback about the activities organised;
- \* internal and external communication.

The initial project plan did not have to be modified. During the project implementation it was realised, however, that some issues required more attention than initially thought. For instance, over the course of the project it became clear that it is necessary for the project initiator to keep an eye on the level of enthusiasm in the villages and to try to boost it, if necessary.

The biggest change to the project plan was the cancellation of the use of the standardised customer feedback form in 2010 due to the lack of interest by participating villages. In practice, this meant that the customer feedback, if collected at all, was more difficult to summarise and compare amongst villages.



## RESULTS OF THE PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

The project resulted in improved internal networks within the villages, giving them the possibility to share practices and learn from other people experiences.

The coordination project enabled the preparation and implementation of action plans for developing tourism in the participating villages, in line with local resources; the use of various tools that helped villages to develop new products and monitor their results; the identification and detailed descriptions of best practices, which contributed to build the capacity within the participating villages, and; an increase in professional skills of tourism entrepreneurs and greater involvement of villagers in tourism-related activities and village development.

The national coordination project has also fostered the development of smaller projects that were financed from the RDP, either through Axis 3 or LEADER in some of the participating villages. Initially, these local projects supported the implementation of the national coordination project in the villages. In a second stage, project beneficiaries used the skills and knowledge gained through the national project to create new businesses and diversify the local tourist economy. The national coordination project has directly led to the creation of two cooperatives that offer touristic events and programme on a part-time basis in two eastern Finnish villages.

The increased participation of inhabitants in the economic development of their villages, particularly elderly people (e.g. through cultural activities, volunteering or through collecting of local stories), and the involvement of the third sector in the tourism industry are two unexpected results of the projects.



## LESSONS LEARNT

Giving the possibility to a number of villages to take part on the project without the need to co-finance the activities implemented represented a success factor, being the financial capacity of villages usually limited. Furthermore, the pride for being selected as a pilot village created a positive atmosphere that contributed to increase local participation.

Knowledge and experience of the project initiator in working with local tourism initiatives represented also a positive factor for the success of the project.

More integration and coordination between the national projects and all smaller projects implemented at local level would have made the project more successful. Moreover, not all villages applied for other financial sources (EAFRD and others) to implement local projects and as a result they were not able to fully utilise the potential

offered by the national project.

The effect of the project at local level depended highly on the commitment and effort of the individual villages and its associations and entrepreneurs. In some villages, retaining the interest and engagement of people over time proved to be a challenge. More effort than expected had to be put into maintaining the enthusiasm of the villages in the development of village tourism products that benefit and engage the entire village through communication and inspiration. In general, villages required a lot of support in the product development phase, as well as in coordinated marketing. These factors should be considered when planning similar projects.

The project showed that development of village-based tourism and village-based tourism products is a long-term process, which requires a lot of effort, skills and cooperation within the villages and with the educational institutions related to tourism.



## WHAT'S NEXT?

The goals of the project were realised to a large extent and some of them were furthered. Nevertheless, during the project implementation it was realised that more development and capacity-building is needed. Some issues, such as product development and cooperation with tourism schools, proceeded slower than expected.

The project was followed by another national coordination project, Development of Village-Based Tourism II (2012-2014), which picked up on the work started in the first project. It would have been a waste of resources and momentum to stop the project at the end of the funding, since development of village-based tourism requires long-term vision and investment into skills, knowledge and capacity at local level. There are plans to continue with a new village-based tourism project in the future programming period. The new project will be more closely linked to regional and local development plans.



## SUMMARY

This national project led to and coordinated village tourism development processes through the development of cooperation structures and increasing knowledge of tourism business in the villages. The project helped the villages to identify their unique themes (based on strengths, such as nature, culture, sports, food or history) and to develop the themes into travel products that are marketed professionally.

### *Tips/lessons related to the beneficiary:*

- ◆ Cooperation with other local actors helps designing and implementing a strategy tailored on needs and potential of a village or a group of villages. Developing specific tourist products around a common theme pays off in the long term.
- ◆ It is useful, if possible, to hire an external project manager who coordinates the activities in the village and keeps people informed, interested and inspired. If the project coordination is done part-time and/or rests on individual entrepreneurs/village association leaders, the risk of overburdening and project tiredness is increased.
- ◆ There is no single governance model for developing village-based tourism: each village should find out their own working method over time when developing their own themes and touristic products. Time, persistency and willingness to cooperate are required for a good result.



### *Tips/lessons related to Managing Authorities and other public sector actors:*

This kind of coordination projects should be implemented at the beginning of a programming period, and regional/local projects should be connected to it to realise the full potential of national projects.