

FINLAND

Diversifying the rural economy

Location

in Hämeenkyrö

Programming period

2007 - 2013

Axis / Priority

Axis 3 – Axis 3 - Quality of life in rural areas and diversification of the rural economy

Measure

M312 - Support for business creation and development

Funding (EUR)

Total budget 39 954
EAFRD 3 157
National/Regional 3 859
Private 32 938

Project duration

2009 – 2010

Project promoter

Arteles Creative Center

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Three Finnish artists used EAFRD funding to transform a remote former school in rural Finland into a residence for international artists, now the largest in all Scandinavia.

Summary

The closure of public and private services in Finland's countryside has left thousands of empty schools, banks, shops, health care centres and town halls. Three young Finnish artists, who had worked in artist residences abroad, wanted to create something similar in Finland. They thought its remote rural location could be inspiring.



Three Finnish artists used EAFRD funding to transform the former school into living and working facilities for international artists including a range of audio, photography and artistic equipment. The individual bedrooms were also well equipped.

Results

By the end of 2016, nearly 600 artists from over 50 countries have been able to develop their creative projects at the site.

Nearly 20 people have worked in the centre, with three full-time jobs created.

In six years it has grown into one of the largest and most international residency centres in all Scandinavia.

The local community renovated an arts exhibition hall.

Lessons & Recommendations

- ❑ The artist residence model can easily be transferred to other 'exotic' rural locations anywhere in the world.
- ❑ The key factor for the project's success was that the founders of the artists' residence already knew the business and its international networks very well.
- ❑ The founders also chose to give artists full freedom to create without any pressures from outside or from the art world unlike many other residences that require detailed plans before entry.

Context

The closure of public and private services across the Finnish countryside has left thousands of empty schools, banks, shops, health care centres and town halls. Abandoned buildings in remote Finnish villages can provide a major resource. With luck and/or careful planning a sad ending may turn into a happy beginning.

Haukijärvi (Pike Lake) school, a typical village school in Hämeenkyrö municipality, in South West Finland, is an inspiring example of a new beginning. The school played a significant role in the village since 1901, educating local children and guiding their cultural pursuits such as music. The facilities were also used for various celebrations and festivals organised by village members. A library was also operational until the 1970s. The school closed its doors in the summer of 2009 as the students were transferred to a larger school.

The most famous student of the former Haukijärvi school was without doubt F. E. Sillanpää, the only Nobel-prize winning author from Finland. This fact caught the eye of three young contemporary Finnish artists, who had been working in several international artist residences abroad and wanted to create something similar in Finland.

Objectives

After buying the property for a reasonable price, the artists Teemu Räsänen, Pekka Ruuska and Inga Mustakallio visited a local LEADER office and got advice on how to plan a business investment project. This would help them to renovate the school into an artist residence.

Their objective was to install Finland's first international residence, the Arteles Creative Center, into these historic facilities. The target group was mostly urban artists who would find the northern location, its peace and silence and the fact the nearest shop was ten kilometres away exotic and inspiring for their creative work.



Activities

Working and living facilities were built in the two residency buildings to host 12 to 14 artist simultaneously. The studio and working spaces were specially designed to serve creative professionals. Residents can have 24/7 access to all common and work spaces.

The shared studio space, overlooking neighbouring fields, was equipped for 2D and small-scale 3D artists. There is a wide selection of equipment and gear at hand, including a light board, printers, scanner, sound and audio gear, and a photo studio for photographers.

Every artist gets their own private bedroom in shared housing. All rooms have large working desks, proper lights and comfy, wide beds (120 cm) with bed linen and towels provided.

Some rooms were designed with an integrated workspace, suitable especially for artists who need more space, work with sound/media or just prefer to create in private.

Some rooms are more secluded, ideal for writers and researchers. There are bigger rooms and smaller rooms – each one is different, with its own history and personality.

Both residency buildings were equipped with kitchens and shared bathrooms. The renovation project ended in the Spring of 2010, and the first artists arrived in June 2010.



Main Results

Since June 2010, Arteles Creative Center has bloomed with creativity in close cooperation with the surrounding Haukijärvi village community that has even renovated an arts exhibition hall in the neighbourhood.

By the end of 2016, nearly 600 selected artists and creative professionals from over 50 different countries have freely explored, experimented and expanded their creative practices and thinking.

Nearly 20 people have worked in the center and a great amount of voluntary work has been required to make it the center it is today, offering three full-time jobs.

In six years it has grown into one of the largest and most international residency centers in all Scandinavia.



Key lessons

The project proves rural areas can be a major source of inspiration for creativity. The artist residence model can easily be transferred to other 'exotic' rural locations anywhere in the world.

The key factor for the project's success was that the founders of the artists' residence already knew the business and its international networks very well.

They also chose to give the artists full freedom to create and think laterally without any pressures from outside or from the art world unlike many other residences that require detailed plans before entry.

"Freedom for creativity. Don't do art - do what you want and then call it art, if you want."

Teemu Räsänen