

FINLAND

Rural revitalisation

Location

Kolari

Programming period

2014 – 2020

Priority

P1 – Knowledge transfer and innovation

Measure

M1 – Information and information actions

Funding (EUR)

Total budget 300 355
EAFRD 126 149
National/Regional 174 206

Project duration

2015 – 2018

Project promoter

Leader Fell Lapland / Leader Tunturi-Lappi

Contact

nina-maria.moykkynen@tunturileader.fi

Website

www.tunturileader.fi

This project is an example of how villagers can get access to high-speed broadband networks even in remote and sparsely populated rural areas.

Summary

Internet connectivity is a significant problem for sparsely populated rural areas and villagers are sometimes obliged to find their own solutions. In this example, an information project was established to help villagers to set up cooperatives and apply for public grants to build their own high-speed broadband networks.



The project also acted as an intermediary, helping the cooperatives to learn from each other and to negotiate the necessary network arrangements with service operators. The project organised 70 events across the region, with 1432 participants, and the project staff contacted over 1700 people through door-to-door promotion. The project promoters are the LAG associations Fell Lapland and Tunturi-Lappi.

Results

The project helped 20 different cooperatives in the Finnish Lapland region.

Thirty-one different villages in Lapland gained access to high speed internet and over 3000 people became connected.

The project resulted in over 3.2 million EUR of additional EAFRD funds being invested in the development of high-speed broadband networks in Lapland.

Lessons & Recommendations

- Show an example, be present and be a part of the village to get results.
- Be genuine and supportive, show an example to establish trust.
- Because all villages in Lapland are small, co-operate and use the network, share the knowledge and lessons learned.
- Use the two level model: encourage the villagers and authorities work together and speak the same language.
- Knowledge of the High-speed Broadband Network must be shared and best practices shown to the rural areas and to the stakeholders higher in the chain.
- There must be a trusteeship model for high speed broadband networks in rural areas, especially in the Arctic.
- The measurement of how the High-speed Broadband Network has actually changed the life in the village will be studied in Lapland. The project will enhance understanding in the village communities of the benefits of the project.

Context

In the past, high-speed broadband infrastructure in Lapland was developed through small individual projects. However, these solutions tended to provide only very weak internet connectivity and entirely ignore the more sparsely populated areas.

It was clear that a systematic and coordinated approach was required and that the inhabitants of small villages would need to mobilise and take action themselves.

In order to get started, it was necessary to collate existing examples of successful high-speed broadband set-up initiatives, systematise the model and disseminate it across the territory.

The approach in Lapland differs from other sparsely populated areas because of the Arctic environment. The project also focused on involving the Sami people in all actions taking place.

With the help of a high speed broadband network, the area's cultural heritage, local knowledge and the Arctic environment are more likely to be saved for future generations. The project did a great job of creating a model to work on two levels; firstly to awaken the desire within the villages to see the possibilities and get them to work together, secondly to encourage the authorities speak the same language as the villagers, helping them access financing to achieve their goals.

Objectives

The project aimed to share information on high-speed broadband networks with villagers, demonstrate the possibilities it would bring and explain the steps they would need to take in order to access it. The project then helped villages apply for public grants in order to set up their own high-speed broadband networks. It also helped them to learn from other villages in the region who were going through the same process.

Activities

After the project received financing from the Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment in Lapland, key stakeholders were contacted. These included the municipalities, villages and network operators in Lapland, who were brought together to learn about public grants and the process of setting up their own network.



The project helped small communities to see the importance and possibilities of high speed internet for their homes, culture and prosperity.

The project assisted the creation of 20 new cooperatives in Lapland. These entities stood as potential beneficiaries and applied for public support to build their own networks. The project then continued to serve as an intermediary, helping the cooperatives to learn from each other and to negotiate the necessary network arrangements with service operators.

The project organised 70 events across the region with 1432 participants, the project staff contacted over 1700 people through door-to-door promotion.

Main Results

Economic benefits:

During the project, 20 different cooperatives in Lapland received support and assistance. Thirty-one different villages in Lapland gained access to high speed internet and over 3000 people became connected. A large number of citizens were either directly involved in, or received information from the project's activities. The economic results cannot be directly quantified due to the nature of the project, however, it resulted in over 3.2 million EUR of RDP funding being invested in the development of high-speed broadband networks in Lapland.

Overall the potential for future benefits is tremendous. Connectivity enables new solutions for working and entrepreneurship. The Finnish and Norwegian fibre optic networks were connected recently in Kilpisjärvi Lapland, and this has now created the possibility of, and interest in, creating data centres in Lapland.

Environmental/climate action benefits:

Villages with high-speed broadband access are arguably more environmentally friendly than those that are not connected. Thanks to the internet there is no need to drive to city centres for shopping, there is the possibility of working, studying or even having a doctor's appointment from home.

Social benefits:

The project reached a large number of people across Finland with over 300 households, and close to 6000 people in Lapland benefitting directly from the project's actions. This number is huge when considering there are 180 000 people living in the whole territory. The methodology was specifically tailored to the needs of rural communities, providing villages with a model of cooperation that would help them to build their own high-speed broadband networks. The social connectivity established through the project brought together villages from different parts of Lapland.

Networking:

This project is an example of effective networking. Different stakeholders; villages, municipalities, authorities and operators worked together to implement a model that can and should be considered all over Europe in the effort to address the internet connectivity gap by establishing high-speed broadband networks in rural areas.

The project was a platform that helped gather and share knowledge, enthusiasm and most importantly people, to improve their quality of life and the livelihood of their own rural areas. The networks are growing, with more villages building their high speed internet connections.

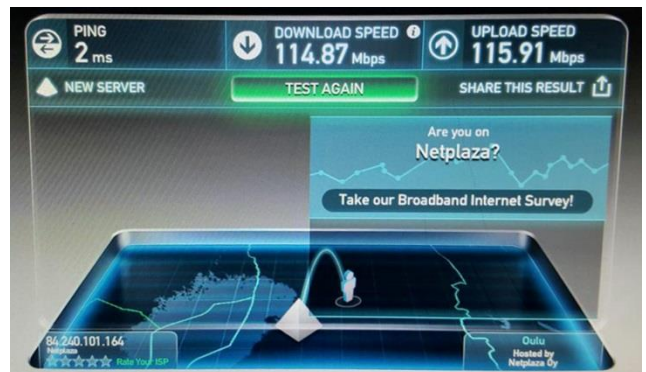
Transferability:

This project is transferable to all rural areas facing similar issues. The capacity of villages to take collective action and keep their communities alive is something everybody should learn from. The villages are willing to share their experiences and learning, this is extremely important and useful for future investments.

Synergies with other EU policies:

The project was based on the LEADER principles and especially the idea of bottom-up development. It is also closely aligned with EU action on 'smart villages'.

There are of course links to other EU-funds, for example the ERDF. High-speed internet access supports all of the key priority areas, innovation and research, the digital agenda, support for SMEs and the low carbon economy.



"The project has been a tremendous help for us living in rural villages. We now have reliable internet access, prior to the project we did not know that this was possible. New families have moved to our villages, and they are able to work and study remotely. Even the youth are excited because the connections are stable. We could not have done this without the project. We would not have known what to do, and how to build the network. And we are more than happy to share our experience and knowledge to help others to get the whole village to work together for a common cause."

Katri Jylhä, Secretary of the Kijisjärvi-Vuola village association

Additional sources of information

<https://www.facebook.com/kuitukylassa/>

*This project has been categorised under 'Rural Revitalisation' by the nominating National Rural Network