

FINLAND

LOCAL DEVELOPMENT

Location

Turku - Savolinna

Programming period

2014 – 2020

Priority

P6 – Social inclusion and local development

Measure

M07 – Basic services and village renewal

Funding (EUR)

Total budget 193 895.0

EAFRD 81 435.9

National/Regional 112 459.1

Project duration

2017 – 2019

Project promoter

Brahea Centre of Turku University

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The largest inter-territorial cooperation project in Finland for 2014-2020, aims to promote cultural heritage as a vehicle for tourism development.

Summary

The St. Olav Ways – otherwise known as “the pilgrim paths to Trondheim” - are a network of routes through Sweden and Norway that are certified by the Council of Europe. A project to extend the network eastwards, from the Atlantic coast through Finland towards the Russian border, has resulted in an inter-territorial LEADER project.



The project activities have included mapping all of the Saint Olav-related historical sites in Finland; organising info events in each participating LEADER area; establishing contacts with Norwegian and Swedish route operators; as well as developing marketing plans and mobile applications.

Results

Hundreds of people from different sectors took part at the eight territorial info events which were organised by the project.

Some good publicity – in the form of television coverage - allowed some project objectives to be implemented earlier than originally scheduled.

For both religious and non-religious visitors, the route offers new opportunities for mindfulness and spiritualism: an emerging trend of global tourism.

Lessons & Recommendations

- ❑ Scientific evidence is of crucial importance in establishing the credibility of any heritage experience or product.
- ❑ The initiative emerged from a motivated, grassroots-level group of enthusiasts. A key question throughout the planning phase was how to handle this energy and work towards focused, concrete and practical goals.
- ❑ The project is the largest inter-territorial LEADER project in Finland for the 2014-2020 period, involving eight rural areas from the West Coast to the Eastern border. The planning and decision-making process could have been smoother, however, as it took several years for the project to become operational.

Context

Over the past few years, tourism has been the fastest growing business sector in Finland; supporting 140 000 jobs in 2018. Most of the demand is targeted at rural areas, especially Lapland, the Baltic Sea Archipelago and the inland lake area. Yet Finland's share of the Nordic countries' tourism economy is only 14%.

The St. Olav Ways is the only cultural heritage route in the Scandinavian region that has been officially recognised by the Council of Europe. It concerns the legend of Olav II, a Norwegian Viking king - and later Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox saint - who lived from 995-1030 CE and who contributed to the adoption of Christianity in Norse Scandinavia. Each path and trail of the route network leads towards and ends in the Norwegian city of Trondheim (where Olav is buried) following paths used by thousands of pilgrims over the centuries.

Several years ago, a group of history and tourism enthusiasts came up with the idea of expanding the route further east: at first through the old sailing routes of the Baltic Sea Archipelago to the Finnish city of Turku, and from there following the inland waterways towards the Russian border. The development of the sea route part of the network extension - Saint Olav's Waterway - is supported by the Central Baltic Interreg programme and is due to launch in May 2019 (<http://www.st-olav.com/en/>).

The St Olav Mainland Route: artefacts found along the inland waterways suggest that the Norse people were trading with Finnish fur hunters and also using the river and lake routes as a shortcut to the Viking city of Holmgård (in what is now Russia). Along these waterways, 22 churches and castles are dedicated to Saint Olav, starting with the old Dominican Monastery in Turku (established in 1249), around which the former Finnish capital was built.

Objectives

- To establish the first Council of Europe certified cultural route to continental Finland.
- To negotiate with the public, private and NGO stakeholders of eight LEADER territories regarding the most favourable itinerary for the route.
- To signpost the route in the countryside and on mobile and on-line applications.
- To develop "pilgrim passports" and stamps to be collected at each of the route's historic sites.
- To develop new heritage events, products and businesses in connection with the route and in cooperation with the participating LEADER territories.



Activities

1. Identification of historical sites: all Saint Olav-related historical sites in Finland were surveyed and mapped. Info events were organised in each participating LEADER area, in order to gather local-level input and support for the project. Contact was also established with Norwegian and Swedish route operators.
2. Route mapping: negotiations with public and private landowners began during this second stage, as the project needs their permission to place signage along the route. The creation of new visitor facilities and services started, and a marketing strategy and mobile applications went into development.
3. This third phase of activity concerns the physical setting up of the route by embedding wayfinding and signage panels in the countryside. An administrative association, supported by a scientific committee, has also been established in order to manage the route after the completion of the project and stand as a Finnish representative member of the Nordic Saint Olav's Route Organisation. The marketing plan and mobile applications are now due to enter the implementation phase and the route is due to open, with a festive inaugural ceremony, in August 2019.

Main results

Hundreds of people from different sectors took part in eight territorial info events which were organised by the project. Finnish national television covered the events and, according to one news broadcaster: *"There is great enthusiasm among the project staff, partners and volunteers to build the "Northern Santiago de Compostela"*.

The increased visibility this provided enabled some of the project objectives to be implemented earlier than scheduled, e.g. Saint Olav's Route Association, was established as early as February 2018.

For both religious and non-religious visitors, the route offers new opportunities for mindfulness and spiritualism: an emerging trend of global tourism and one that will now be further developed for tourists in Finland thanks to the creation of this new route.

Key lessons

Scientific evidence is of crucial importance in establishing the credibility of any heritage experience or product. The St Olav Mainland Route initiative emerged from a motivated, grassroots-level group of enthusiasts, and a key question throughout the planning phase was how to handle this energy and work towards focused, concrete and practical goals. With their experience in project management and their understanding of research and evaluation methodologies, the Brahea Centre of Turku University provided the grounding and pragmatic influence that the project needed in order to move forwards.

The project is the largest inter-territorial LEADER project in Finland for the 2014-20 period, involving eight rural areas from the West Coast to the Eastern border. The planning and decision-making process could have been smoother, however, as it took several years for the project to become operational.



“Look at how St. Patrick’s Day or the Santiago de Compostela route are known throughout the world – we must find something similar with our Nordic Saints; whose stories are equally intriguing but less well-known.”

Olli Osara, village development activist from Vesajärvi,
Hämeenkyrö

Additional sources of information

n/a