

FINLAND

LEADER

Location

LAG Keskipiste-LEADER.
Reisjärvi

Programming period

2014 – 2020

Priority

P6 – Social inclusion & local
development

Measure

M19 – LEADER/CLLD

Funding (EUR)

Total budget 56 620
EAFRD 19 024
National/Regional 26 272
Private 11 324

Project duration

2017 – 2019

Project promoter

Friends society of the
Reisjärven Kristillinen
College.
(Reisjärven Kristillinen
kansanopistoyhdistys)

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Website

<https://silta.rkropisto.fi>

SILTA supports entrepreneurship among young people by providing a cooperative structure through which they can grow their business ideas and receive training, mentoring and peer support.

Summary

Today, young people have plenty of opportunities to trial their business ideas in various practical experimental business programmes. However, previously after the end of these programmes, young entrepreneurs did not have support and advice to continue growing their businesses. A bridge (“SILTA”) has been missing.



For this reason, the SILTA project developed an education model based on cooperative entrepreneurship. As members of a cooperative called Versosto, young entrepreneurs can run a business alone or in groups, get mentoring and training, develop their businesses and encourage each other. The project promoter is the Friends Society of the Reisjärven Kristillinen College.

Results

In the first year of operation, the turnover of the cooperative Versosto was approximately 240 000 EUR.

The co-operative is still up and running and currently has over 60 members between the ages 16-21.

The members of the cooperative offer a range of services including filming, photography, marketing support, etc.

According to a survey of 30 members: 53% ‘strongly agreed’ and 40% ‘somewhat agreed’ that the project had increased their interest in entrepreneurship. When asked whether the project had impacted positively upon the likelihood of them staying in, or later returning to, rural areas, 13% ‘strongly agreed’ and 30% ‘somewhat agreed’.

Lessons & Recommendations

- ❑ Give them the tools – young people will make it happen: young people’s idea – young people’s active participation - young people’s own cooperative .
- ❑ It’s important to support young people’s entrepreneurship in all possible ways, because among other things it increases young people’s interest in staying and living in the countryside.
- ❑ Young people who are interested in entrepreneurship want to do things together, create networks and give/get peer support from other young people (= Versosto).

Context

Nowadays there are a variety of practical educational business programmes for young people to help them experiment with new business ideas. At the end of these programmes and when their business begins to grow, the young entrepreneurs are often left alone. They may not have support from school or home, or they may not yet be ready to set up a limited company. Thus there is a gap between trial entrepreneurship and full-time entrepreneurship.

Young people's interest in entrepreneurship is high. Many have the interest and desire to develop themselves and learn more skills. They also want to network and to belong to a community of entrepreneurs. SILTA-Bridge is addressing these needs.

Objectives

The project aimed to offer young people a community-based entrepreneurial platform where they can implement their business ideas, get support, network with others and develop their skills.

Activities

For this purpose, a cooperative called 'Versosto' was set up. It is owned by the young people who are its members. They democratically decide how to run the cooperative and keep in touch through a dedicated WhatsApp group, organising sparring weekends (structured collective feedback and brainstorming sessions) and other activities.

Spring 2017 - A weekend entrepreneurship course was held and 40 young people took part. Over the weekend, young people shared their expectations and ideas for action. The WhatsApp group was established and has since become an active peer group for cooperative members and mentors. The group has about 70 members.

Autumn 2017 – A benchmarking exercise was carried out to compare the cooperative with other educational cooperative student societies operating in Finland. A second sparring weekend took place where the Versosto Cooperative was formally founded with about 20 founding members. The project and the cooperative are promoted through their joint website, a blog and social media. Young people take responsibility for producing the content.

Spring 2018 – The young people organised two further sparring weekends with a programme that included inspiring entrepreneurial examples, a chance for participants to pitch and receive feedback on their own business ideas, sports activities, etc.

The SILTA project and the co-operative were presented in nearby municipalities. The young people planned and carried out the presentations themselves.

Autumn 2018 - A study trip to Spain was organised by a team of young people within the cooperative. During the trip, the participants were able to network with local young people, see examples of businesses in operation and learn about how they work.

Spring 2019 – The collected documentation and analysis of the cooperative education model will be published and made available via the project's website.

Main Results

Economic benefits:

- In the first-year, the turnover of the Versosto Cooperative was approximately 240,000 EUR. The co-operative is still up and running and currently has over 60 members between the ages 16-21.
- The businesses that have been created are very diverse. The largest one was a call-centre that eventually grew so big that it became necessary, for risk management reasons, to sell it to a client company. The call-centre was run by three members of the co-op and employed 40 other young people. It now has its operations in Oulu and Fuengirola.
- The members of the cooperative offer a range of services such as filming, photography and the creation of marketing materials. Members of the co-op have also been contracted to create murals for municipalities.
- The cooperative has launched another innovative business idea; capitalising on their experience in engaging and inspiring young people, they now provide motivational speakers for events.
- A full and regularly updated list of services offered by the cooperative is available on their website.

Environmental benefits:

The members of the cooperative have tried to reduce travelling by using web meetings where possible.

Social benefits:

The Versosto cooperative has over 60 young people as members. According to a survey of 30 of the members:

- 53% 'strongly agreed' and 40% 'somewhat agreed' that the project had increased their interest in entrepreneurship.
- When asked whether the project had impacted positively upon the likelihood of them staying in, or later returning to, rural areas, 13% 'strongly agreed' and 30% 'somewhat agreed'.

Networking value:

A network of young people, mentors and affiliated sponsors has been formed around the co-operative.

The SILTA-model has attracted interest from across the country and a national Finnish Cooperative Centre has also signalled their interest in the SILTA-model.

Transferability :

The SILTA (Bridge) model can easily be transferred to other areas and countries. The co-operative was established by the project, but is branching out and growing on its own.

Synergies with other EU policies :

The project idea originates from the ERASMUS + - KA2 Strategic Partnership project "Transinnovation Camp for Youth", where Finnish, Latvian, Romanian and Hungarian young people took part in innovation camps to develop their entrepreneurial ideas and skills.

The project supports the European Commission's Entrepreneurship 2020 Action Plan.



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"Versosto has supported me and my business with mentoring from experts and overall life-skills development. As a young person, beginning my own business feels a bit scary. The Versosto Cooperative was a great solution for me – they helped me to understand how to get my business to work and so I went ahead and did it! My aerial photogrammetry will soon start cooperating with a big rural advisory organisation" Member of the Versosto

Additional sources of information

www.versosto.fi/

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