



Identification, Dissemination and Exchange of good practice in
Local Employment development and promoting better governance

Networking Innovators - Northern Finland, Sweden and Norway

Leader organisation	Länsi-Lapin Koulukuntayhtymä
Purpose of the project	<p>The North Calotte region suffers from high unemployment and unbalanced trade. One element contributing to this situation is a lack of innovation and support for inventors in the region. To remedy this deficiency and boost research and business innovations, a partnership was initiated during the Europartenariat held in Luleå in June 1996. At the time the public authorities were keen on promoting and strengthening innovation policies.</p> <p>This project, which was funded with the support of the INTERREG II Community Initiative, aims to develop cross border co-operation between the adjoining border regions in Sweden and Finland (and Norway) to overcome unemployment, emigration and unbalanced trade caused by geographical remoteness.</p> <p>The overall aim of the project was to develop a network of inventors in the North Calotte region to promote and provide services for the complete innovation/invention process, from the creation of an idea to the development of the commercial product. The goal was to counteract large companies from outside the region buying up patented innovations and promote links between inventors and potential partners.</p> <p>Objectives of the project:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• To develop regional company networks, marketing skills and help them to expand internationally.• To develop service network that benefits inventors and prototype manufacturers.• To develop skill levels• To remove barriers caused by distance and national boundaries.• To provide international exposure to innovation
Geographical focus	<p>The project started off as a joint project between Northern Finland and Sweden. At a later date when the project was increasingly seen as a success, the Northern Norwegian authorities also joined the project.</p> <p>In Finland the project was mainly concentrated on Western part of the county Lapland. The project assisted inventors from both remote rural areas and bigger towns in the county (Rovaniemi and Kemi).</p>
Project partnership	Partnership arrangements between the Finnish, Swedish and Norwegian authorities. The project partners in Finland were Finland Kalot Training Ltd, Länsi-Lapin Koulukuntayhtymä, Aurorum Teknikbyn Ab, Lapland Employment and Economic Development Centre and Vinn.
Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Development of a network of companies in which the companies can share marketing skills, resources and contacts.

- Creation of a joint service network to aid investors, prototype manufacturers, marketing and manufacturing companies.
- Search and assessment of new ideas, innovations and inventors.
- Development and production of prototypes.
- Product marketing and market analysis.
- Product development.
- Organisation of training and inventors events, trips to trade fairs for inventors etc.

Target groups

- Inventors, inventor associations, private persons.
- SMEs that work in the field of prototype production, marketing or manufacturing.
- Research and development organisations.

Particular successes

- As a whole, the project has succeeded in increasing contacts with almost 350 active inventors and has registered 785 new inventions.
- 7 new companies and 4 new manufacturing companies, as well as 34 new jobs have been created.
- A total of 99 new marketing channels and 37 new customer contacts have been developed in order to launch these new inventions successfully on the market.
- This project has been instrumental in creating significant economic growth in this region to the value of some €5,972,000.
- Mainstreaming in Finland: Prior to the project inventor organisations and support in Finland tended to be focussed in Helsinki. The project was running some 3-4 years after which the Lapland Employment and Economic Development Centre took over the project and appointed two part-time Innovation Officers (Keksintöasiamies) to keep some of the activities running.
- Traditionally inventor organisations in Finland have been concentrated in Helsinki. The project has helped to create more local and regional inventor organisations and networks, which again has had a significant impact on inventors across the country.
- The project has produced many new inventions that are now marketed nationally/internationally, have received international exposure and have won national and international inventor awards (e.g. Oscar du Public, Innosuomi etc.)

Lessons

- Publicity received through the local and regional newspapers was fundamental to the success of the project.
- Constant development work is crucial for the success of the project.
- Local employment projects should not be designed to last only the funding period but longer term plans should be explored already from the start of the project in order to ensure sustainability.
- Too large project organisation can be weakness to a local employment development project. In this case, a small project organisation ensured flexible and efficient operation.
- The project experienced some problems caused by the inconsistency and uncertainty of financing. The project implementation should not begin before the funding is clear.