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SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND ECOSYSTEMS DEVELOPMENT



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# October 2024 NEWSLETTER SEED- Social entrepreneurship and ecosystems development

## The project

Starting this year, six organizations from three countries joined forces to further develop social entrepreneurship in their own region. Together they have successfully applied for an [Erasmus+ project](#), which investigates, on the one hand, how the regional ecosystems of social entrepreneurs can be strengthened and, on the other hand, how students can be encouraged and supported to become social entrepreneurs. There is partners from Italy, Finland and The Netherlands.

## Second learning tour in Finland

The Second Learning Tour was organized in Kuopio and Savonlinna from October 7th to 11th, 2024, with Savo Vocational College and Samiedu as the host partners. On Monday, the team began with a self-assessment to establish the current state of everyone’s knowledge about social entrepreneurship in Finland. This was followed by a presentation from the Savo Consortium, delivered by Savo Vocational College Vice Principal Jukka Kosunen and Jarmo Hänninen from YYO (Centre of Expertise for Social Enterprises in Finland). YYO provides advice, assistance, and training to companies with a social purpose, aiming to foster the creation of new social enterprises in Finland.



During Jarmo’s speech, many questions were raised: How can we promote more social innovation in Eastern Finland? Are there new ways to fund and invest

in social innovations? How do we support social innovations? How can non-profits continue after initial startup funding?



The discussion was followed by a presentation from

Kati Lundgren, an Innovation Manager at the Savo Consortium of Education. She explained how Savo Vocational Colleges focus on minimizing their ecological footprint internally and maximizing their ecological handprint externally. This means considering how sustainable they are as an education provider and how they can positively impact society. She also mentioned that teachers are tested on their sustainability skills and sustainability studies are integrated into every field of study for students.



Mika Mujunen, a lecturer in the field of business education, explained how entrepreneurship education is integrated into every field of vocational education.

On Tuesday morning, we visited Rantasalmi, where we toured the Tornado Theatre and Music Hall. There, we met Petteri Koskikallio, Executive Director of the Rantasalmi Wind Band, and Katja Koivunoro, the Upper Secondary Principal. Following this, we learned about how business education is organized at Samiedu and the functioning of welfare areas in Finland. The third sector is a crucial stakeholder in Finnish society. We also met Heli Kinnunen from the South Savo Entrepreneurs’ Association and received video





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greetings from Anna-Kristiina Mikkonen, a Member of the Finnish Parliament.



In the afternoon, we had an amazing time at Puruvesi Service Home in Kerimäki. At the service home, we gave presentations about the Netherlands and Italy, which the residents seemed to enjoy a lot. We also visited Restaurant Kulttuurikellari, which offers interesting opportunities for many associations and small enterprises by renting out spaces.

Sari Kautonen from Yhdistystalo Kolmonen ja Hattu ry. shared information about financing and examples of social entrepreneurship projects. The organization has 160 member associations, and Kolmonen provides management and support for



Milla Laisi-Wessman explained how entrepreneurship is a cornerstone for Samiedu, although social entrepreneurship, while an important part of entrepreneurial thinking, is not discussed as much. Arttu Laukkanen talked about how TUVA education supports students in learning entrepreneurial skills. TUVA is preparatory education for upper secondary qualifications, aiming to develop study skills and help students find a suitable study path.



On Thursday, we visited TELMA education, which is designed for students with special needs to help them prepare for work and independent living. TELMA is suitable for students who need more support and need to learn everyday skills such as self-care, communication, working in groups, and, depending on their abilities, cooking, cleaning, and being part of society. Every student has a personal learning and plan. At Telma we also visited immersive room where we can learn about different kind of work environments.

Thursday afternoon we visited Elävä säätiö. Elävä Foundation is a non-profit organization focused on social coaching and rehabilitation through diverse





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work activities. Operating in the North Savo region, it is the largest circular economy and workshop operator in the area. Each year, Elävä Foundation engages with around 800 individuals at risk of social exclusion, half of whom are young people.



The foundation's activities support the reuse of various products and the recycling of materials, with its revenue used to employ young people and long-term unemployed individuals, as well as to provide coaching services. Additionally, Elävä Foundation offers work activities and coaching for those at risk of social exclusion, helping them find pathways to employment and education. At Elävä Foundation, they shared the following thought:

"We do not have many social enterprises in this region; instead, we have a larger number of associations that operate with a social focus. We continue to discuss what defines a social enterprise. Doing good for society is essential for both associations and social enterprises."

Savas Louhumäki Activity Center, offers work and day activities for individuals with special needs, particularly those on the autism spectrum. The center operates within a framework of autism rehabilitation, using a solution- and resource-oriented approach.

The primary goals of Louhumäki's diverse and stimulating activities are to support and enhance clients' independence in daily life, promote social interaction, and foster community participation. Key values at the center include self-determination and inclusion. While clients primarily engage in

activities at the center, they have also organized pop-up cafés and participated in environmental clean-up efforts. The pop-up cafés, in particular, have been very popular.

Additionally, Louhumäki collaborates closely with Louhumäki Homes, which provide 24-hour and temporary housing for individuals with moderate to severe intellectual disabilities and autism. This integrated approach ensures a supportive and enriching environment for all residents and participants.

On Friday, we had a very interesting visit to the PeeÄssä consumer cooperative. Juha Lyytikäinen HR manager of PeeÄssä explained that the cooperative is owned by its customers and that PeeÄssä values sustainability. Their mission is to make Northern Savo the best place to live. Together, proudly and actively, they strive to create a better community.

## Final thoughts from the learning tour

The most important success factors for the entrepreneurs highlighted during the learning tour in Finland included several key elements. Firstly, **personal commitment was crucial**, as it drove the entrepreneurs to persevere through challenges and remain dedicated to their goals. An entrepreneurial attitude was also essential, fostering a mindset of innovation, risk-taking, and resilience.

Another significant factor was the ability to **connect with others** and maintain an **openness to cooperation with other organizations**. This collaborative spirit enabled the entrepreneurs to build valuable networks, share resources, and gain new perspectives. The **visibility of the organization** played a vital role as well, helping to attract support, customers, and partners.

Additionally, having an **external perspective** allowed the entrepreneurs to stay informed about market trends and opportunities,



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ensuring they remained competitive and relevant. Finally, an **openness to innovation** was key, encouraging continuous improvement and adaptation in response to changing circumstances and new ideas.

Together, these factors created a strong foundation for success, enabling the entrepreneurs to thrive and make a positive impact in their communities.