



Attractive Oulu Region 2018

The Attractive Oulu Region project unified the central tourist destinations of the Oulu Region and advanced growth and internationalisation through innovative models of collaboration. Collaboration and co-marketing helped strengthen the international attractiveness of the region by turning it into a year-round travel destination. As a result of the project, the Oulu area now appears as a unified travel region with a robust internal operation model and actors working together for a common goal.



Photo: Ulla Anttila / Eventours

A region working toward a common goal is attractive internationally

Tourism as a business is growing globally at 5 percent a year. The updated tourism strategy of the Oulu area aims to increase travel-related overnight stays significantly from 600 000 to one million by 2020.

The job of the Attractive Oulu Region project was to turn the vision into reality by increasing overnight stays by foreign tourists by 30 percent. The total increase would create 800 new jobs and around 100 million euros of growth in tourism-related income. The export income from foreign tourists would have a strong growth effect on the regional economies. In accordance with the Oulu area tourism strategy, the project focuses strongly on internationalising tourism.

The travel region is geographically expansive and diverse in content. This provides challenges for the development work, but also opportunities, which the project seeks to exploit. One of the most important goals of the project is to create a collaborative network between the various areas and actors. This co-operation helped create an image of a diverse but unified travel region for foreign tourists.

The whole is larger than the sum of its parts

The project covered almost the entire Oulu Region, which is reflected by the notable variety of participants. The project was a collaborative effort by Syöte, Kalajoki, the Oulu area and Rokua Geopark. Also participating was the Parks & Wildlife department of Metsähallitus. Their role was in covering national parks and other internationally attractive areas. Each participating travel region brought their attractions, contacts and customer groups to the project. The project utilised these local strengths for the use of co-marketing and the development of expertise and new products.

“The unified presentation of the tourist centres of the Oulu area for target markets created the image of a cohesive and diverse travel region. The highly varied tourism offerings turned an unknown region into an attractive tourist destination”, describes Project Manager Vesa Krökki, the CEO of the development company Humanpolis Oy.

The results speak for themselves

Breaking into the Asian tourism market was one of the specific goals of the project. Vesa Krökki recounts the successful opening of the Asian market:

“The Oulu area discovered a new and characteristic product that is especially suitable for the Asian market: educational visits. Camp schools for Asian, especially Chinese, children were organised already during the project. The project’s success is indicated by the rise of Japanese tourists as the most important international customer group in accommodation statistics for Oulu. Education visits are a significant addition to the tourism product range.”

Organising tour operator familiarisation visits and attending marketing events in China, Japan and Germany were

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Humanpolis Ltd, Parks & Wildlife Finland of Metsähallitus, Kalajoki Tourist Association, Syöte Tourist Association, BusinessOulu

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Budget: **2 199 996 €**

ERDF funding from the Council of Oulu Region:
1 539 997 €

crucial parts of the project. Existing markets in Central Europe, the Nordic countries and Russia were also strengthened with targeted marketing and digital consumer campaigns.

One of the most visible and important results of the project are the comprehensive product manuals describing the region’s offerings in German, Chinese and Japanese. Other regions do not have similar tools for operating in the Asian market. In addition to launching the Asian trade, the number of tour operators selling the Oulu area in Germany was doubled.

Vesa Krökki sums up the results of the project: “All tourist centres that participated in the project gained new customers and increased business. This would not have happened without the efforts of this project.”



Photo: Ulla Anttila / Eventours

Goals

- Increasing awareness of the Oulu Region as a travel region of international standards by increasing the amount of international contacts, invitations for bids, offers and trade for businesses in the travel regions.
- Helping businesses to discover and open new sales channels to international markets.
- Helping businesses develop their sales and internationalisation processes.
- Strengthening the attractiveness and competitiveness of the travel regions by bolstering new products and communications with the brands of the most important natural attractions in the Oulu area.
- Enhancing the internal networking, collaboration and co-operative product development of the tourism industry actors in the Oulu area.

Results

- International awareness of the region was increased in China, Japan and target countries in Central Europe.
- Dozens of international tour operators familiarised themselves with the region.
- Comprehensive product manuals of the region's tourism offerings were created.
- Several tourism products of the region were sold to different tour operators and new trade was commenced.
- Key themes were designed for regional tourism products for different markets. Regional collaboration in the tourism industry was intensified and the visibility of the Oulu area increased.
- According to a questionnaire, the actors participating in the project were satisfied with the results and the collaboration that has followed.

Oulu Regional Council allocates funding for regional development from the ERDF

Oulu Regional Council is a Managing Authority for the Sustainable growth and jobs 2014–2020 – Finland's Structural Funds Programme in Northern Ostrobothnia.

European Regional Development Fund's (ERDF) main objectives are to improve the competitiveness of SMEs and produce and use the latest information and knowledge.

'Sustainable growth and jobs 2014–2020 – Finland's structural funds programme' has two priority axes and seven specific objectives for ERDF. Each project must deliver at least one of these specific objectives.

ERDF priority axes and specific objectives:

1. Competitiveness of SMEs
 - Generating new business
 - Improving transport and logistic connections that are important to SMEs (Eastern and Northern Finland)
 - Promoting growth and internationalisation of enterprises
 - Promoting energy efficiency in SMEs
2. Producing and using the latest information and knowledge
 - Development of the centres of research, expertise and innovation on the basis of regional strengths
 - Strengthening innovation in enterprises
 - Developing solutions based on renewable energy and energy-efficient solutions

More information on Structural Funds in Finland from the dedicated website www.rakennerahastot.fi