

# " HARVEST "

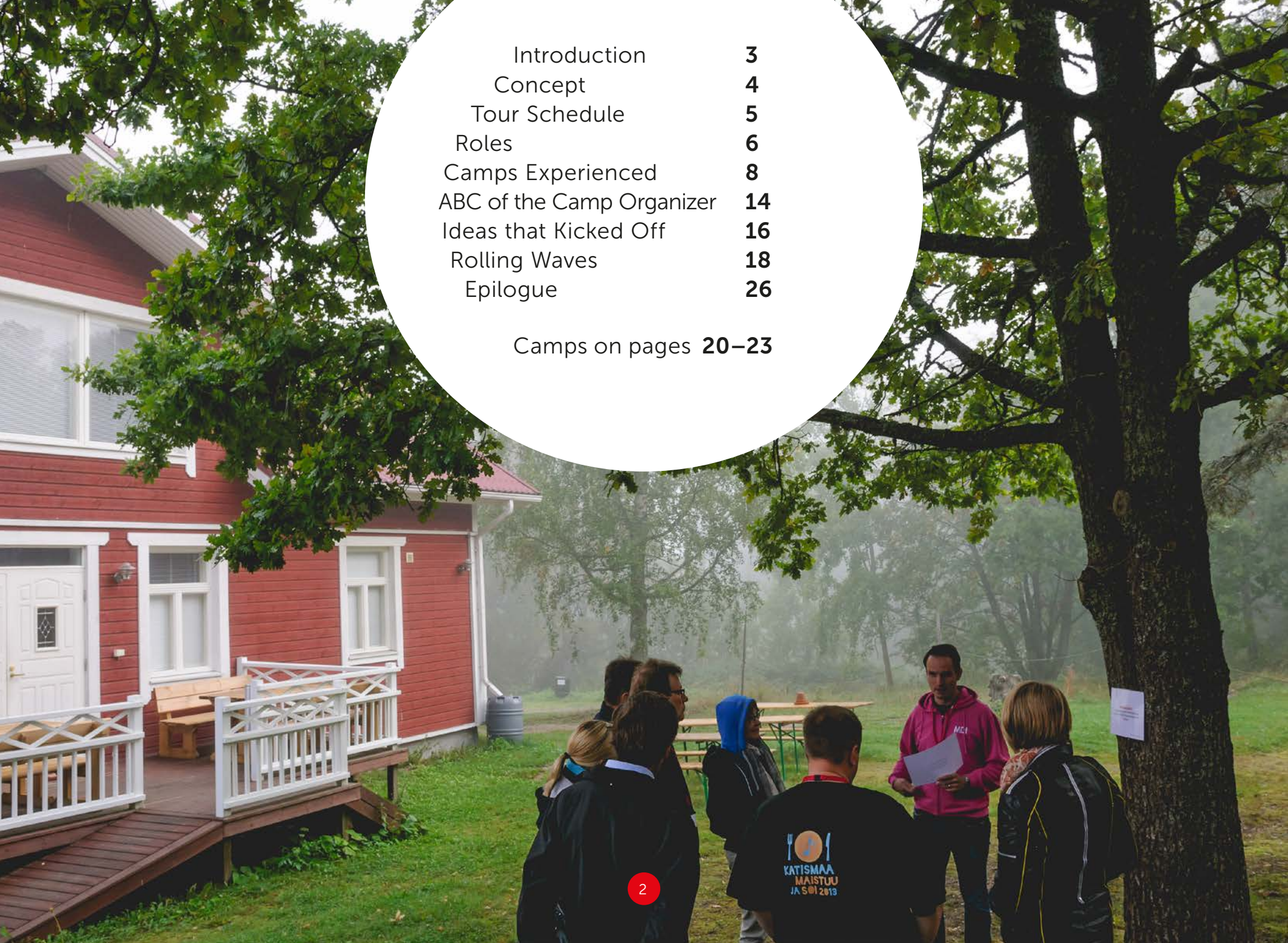
2014

HARVESTING REGIONAL INNOVATION CAMPS

MDI

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Camps on pages **20–23**



# INTRODUCTION

In the beginning of a new program period rural developers look for, try and create new beginnings. There is a great willingness to make rural areas better in Finland and a great number of people to do that. This is the essentiality of developing, people. Courageous, dedicated and passionate people. These people made the regional innovation camps. For themselves, to develop their own region.

The aim of an innovation camp is to **produce new ideas and approaches** for rural development and to **weave new networks** between rural developers. Besides this people also learn about an intensive way of working, highlighting rural strengths and marketing the possibilities of the rural development programs in developing new ideas and experimenting with them.

There were five regional innovation camps in 2014, four Finnish speaking and one that covered the whole of Swedish speaking Finland. This is the story of the organizers' and campers' experiences of the camp as a learning process and as a tool for rural development. The story presents the five camps and ideas born at them. The ingredients of the story were collected by an electronic survey and theme interviews in October-November 2014. Totally 26 interviewees and 93 respondents participated in the harvest.

INNOVATION CAMPS 2014

SWEDISH-SPEAKING  
REGIONS

CENTRAL AND  
NORTHERN OSTROBOTHNIA

OSTROBOTHNIA AND  
SOUTHERN OSTROBOTHNIA

SOUTHWEST FINLAND AND  
SATAKUNTA

NORTHERN SAVO

*Enjoy the new crop  
of rural development.*



Päivi Kujala  
Rural Network Unit



Tommi Ranta  
MDI



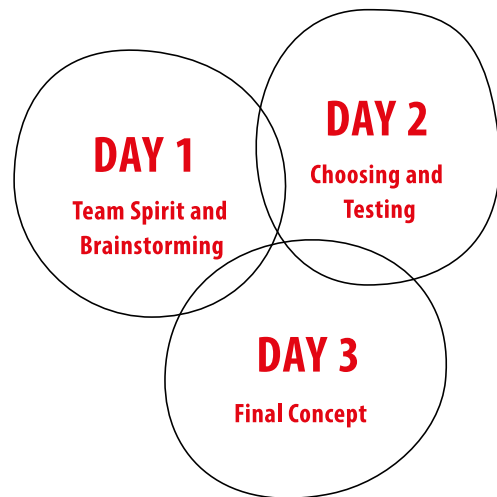
# CONCEPT

TURNING RURAL INNOVATIONS UPSIDE  
DOWN AT GRASS ROOT LEVEL

The aim of the 48 hour regional innovation camp is to create new ideas to develop rural areas, as well as challenge and develop the people, economy and networks of rural areas.

Every innovation camp is implemented based on the bottom-up needs of the region, as the development of rural areas is in the hands of the local players.

The camp consists of three phases and is carried out in three days. Participants work in 4 or 5 thematic groups of 6 to 8 people.



**DAY 1. Team Spirit and Brainstorming.** Start by lunch. Getting to know each other, teambuilding to create team spirit. Brainstorming (producing dozens of ideas around the given theme) and outlining great challenges and possibilities.

**DAY 2. Choosing and Testing.** Choosing the idea to be further developed in the morning. Testing and conceptualizing the idea (e.g. sales pitch, business model canvas) for the rest of the day. External sparring partners asking difficult questions. The second day is magical. At the end of the day groups make a play (theatre, dance and singing) about the journey they have gone through during the camp. Creative plays describe both the frustration and pleasure of pursuing and developing the idea.

**DAY 3. Final Concept.** Finalizing the concept of the idea, presenting it to others, board of judges, invited guests and media. Final lunch.

# Touk SCHEDULE

**Swedish-speaking regions 17.–19.3.2014**

Parainen

**Central and Northern Ostrobothnia regions 1.–3.4.2014**

Siikajoki

**Ostrobothnia and Southern Ostrobothnia regions 10.–12.6.2014**

Isokyrö

**Southwest Finland and Satakunta region 9.–11.9.2014**

Eura

**Northern Savo region 6.–8.10.2014**

Suonenjoki

# ROLES

## NATIONAL

Rural Network Unit  
Agency for Rural Affairs

Choosing areas where camps are carried out, choosing consultants, basic funding (budget around 30 000 € / camp), assessing and evaluating the work of the teams at the camps

## REGIONAL / LOCAL

Local developers  
Local action groups, universities, development agencies, regional advisors, financiers

Expressing local needs, defining themes, recruiting participants, guests and media, organizing the practicalities of the camp



## CONSULTANT

MDI

Facilitating, organizing the camp (leading teams, methods)





# CAMPS EXPERIENCED



**86 %** of the respondents thought that the innovation camp was an energizing and empowering experience.

**78 %** thought that the innovation camp gave **new ideas** to develop rural areas and their own job.

We asked the campers if something unique was born at the camp. The answer was definitely. The camp gave **new ideas**, especially when the campers had discussions with previously unknown people from different backgrounds (universities, companies and the public sector). However, it was even more important to **meet new people** and realize that co-operation is possible. Like one of the campers said, *"It is not often that you gather so*

*many people interested in the same issue and really talk and innovate".* **Communication between the groups** is essential in giving feedback about the ideas.

The most significant effects of the camp were **getting to know the method and co-operation between regions and organizations**. The three-day innovation camp taught different ways to dig out new ideas.

The campers created new partnerships and strengthened the existing ones. The camp also gave hope and confirmation that there are lots of possibilities in rural areas just waiting for implementation. The camp connects people afterwards, too: it is easier to contact someone that has walked through the same path.





### **THREE DAYS.**

The camp consists of highly intensive work. Sometimes the flow tires you. The method needs to be tiring in order to be effective and to get things done. The fast pace and continuous interruptions of the coaches, combined with brain- and heartstorming work: people become excited and expectant and leave relieved, happy and satisfied.

### **BALANCING THE OBJECTIVES.**

The aim of the innovation camp is to create new ideas and network people. However, these two aims can conflict. The ideas born at the camp may not be straightforwardly implementable even though they might have extremely well-functioning pieces. On the other hand, there might be a good idea that not everyone continues to develop. The final experience of the camp relies on the expectations. The most essential thing is that almost all the groups found a common idea to get excited about.

### **NEW AQUANTANCIES.**

About a half of the campers know each other and the other half are unknown. At first, all the groups encountered some stiffness and reluctance, but already during the first day people got to know each other and found their own roles. The camp work also softened people to let go of their own opinions and to listen to each other. They worked to the fullest, which is why the critique against your own idea sometimes felt bad. The friction caused frustration and conflict, but also a better result than a group of nodding and like-minded people. The campers especially highlighted new acquaintances as the best result of the camp. The camps lowered the threshold for co-operation that has resulted in new action. However, a few of the campers had a critical attitude towards the improved co-operation.



## **ENOUGH TIME, FINALLY.**

Usually you do at least five things at the same time until the e-mail program beeps. The innovations camp enables immersing into one theme. Doing it with your hands and writing on the wall clarifies the brainstorming process. The unofficial surroundings, such as the forests and lakes, and instruments let you take natural pauses between the work. Partly, the 48 hour camp gives an illusion of loads of time, but actually the camps are strictly scripted and there is not much spare time.

## **NOT FOR EVERYONE OR EVERYTHING.**

Innovation camp is not for everyone. The image of fun brainstorming may fade if you have not had any previous experience of working under pressure. Your own idea may not be the one that gets support; the group might have it all wrong. All this is understandable. Some of the campers were disappointed because the ideas were not innovative enough. For one the results were too conventional and for another flying too high. You can't please everyone. That is unfortunate, but the organizers just have to take it.

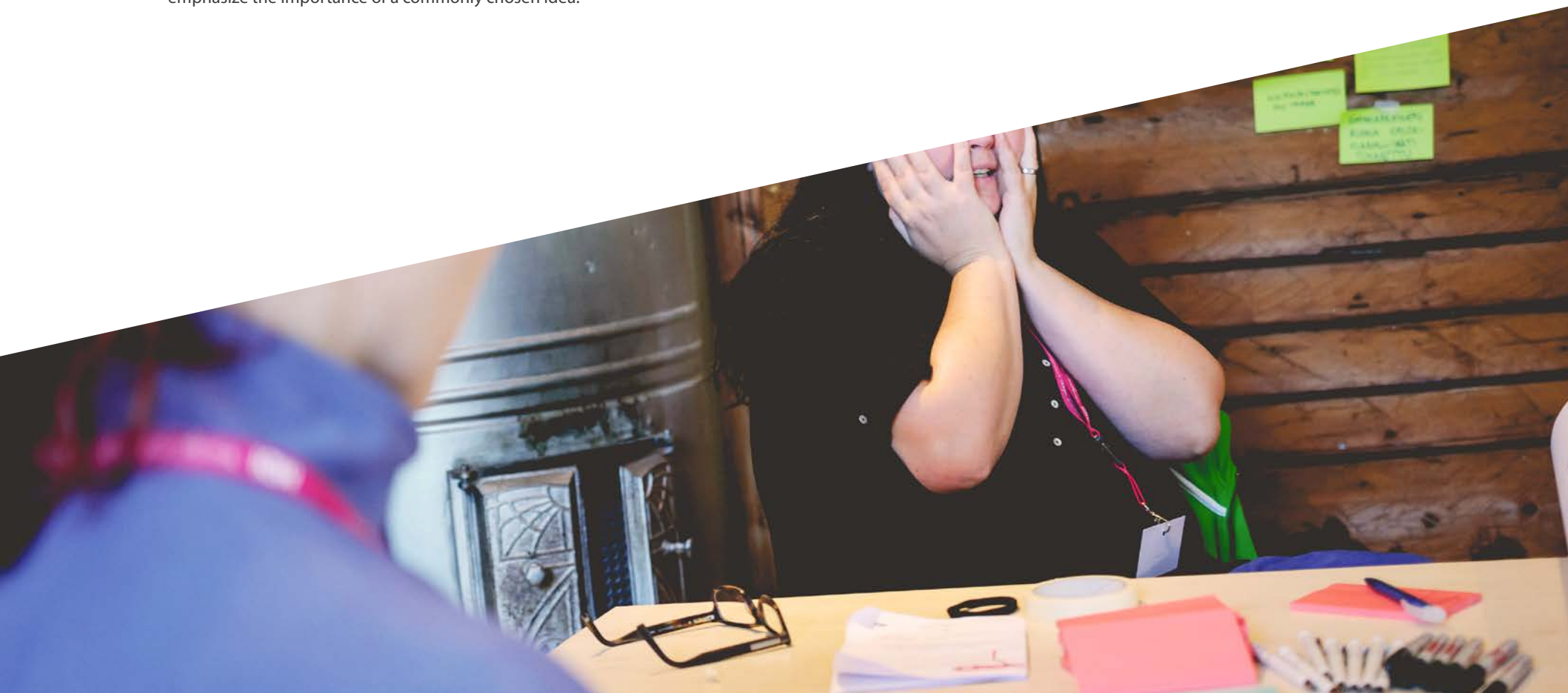




## **DOES NOT ALWAYS WORK.**

There is a lot to do in organizing a camp. At some camps the themes were too wide and at some there were competing ideas in the same group.

The participants have different motives: some burn for rural innovations and some come to develop their own product. Sometimes the discussion is dominated by one of the group members, but mainly the group work runs smoothly. Developing the ideas is slow, though, and it depends heavily on the participants, not on the public sector or financers, to take the ideas further. To ensure the most functioning group work, you have to emphasize the importance of a commonly chosen idea.





WHICH WORDS DESCRIBE THE **CAMP**

interesting  
network diverse promising  
**intensive** common  
dynamic  
thoughts work team buzz fun people co-operation funny sun  
unexpected time casual  
**inspiring** positive juggles goes practice  
new far-reaching  
strong camp approach high-quality ideas rewarding expectations money  
regions close together  
closer things atmosphere enthusiastic develops different pressure  
promotes enthusiasm networks importance summer sporty  
**hard-working** challenging  
communal tiresome creative good  
program spirit networking linking  
connectedness well-organized objectives working fresh  
pulling participatory

WHICH WORDS DESCRIBE  
THE FEELINGS **AFTER THE CAMP**



A word cloud of various terms related to feelings after a camp, centered around the word "enthusiastic". The background shows a person in a dark setting, illuminated by the warm glow of a fire in a stove. A green light source is visible in the upper left corner.

absorbed successful contact  
joy working anticlimax idea  
empowered emptiness  
back expectantly spirit nostalgia  
strengthened experience positive basis energies community feel  
flows  
ideas grateful empty new sceptical enthusiasm  
relieved really confusion inspiration  
continue thought  
money  
good waiting  
eagerness  
in-depth meaningful  
learning image satisfied  
forward useful larger  
tired  
enthusiastic  
living time follow-up  
camp pick-up  
interesting hopeful confused  
already realism little  
raised



# ABC OF THE CAMP ORGANIZER

Preparing, excitement and action – these are the ingredients of a camp that makes people flow and keeps up the feeling after the camp, too. Here are the TOP 5 tips for a successful camp process.





- 1. Good planning makes it.** The more careful the preparation, the better the camp. Especially if you have a lot of entrepreneurs coming, it pays to formulate the themes to ensure that the group gets under way as quickly as possible. On the other hand, if the innovation camp aims at building a bridge and networks between regions, then a looser form of brainstorming might work better.
- 2. The innovation camp works best when you want to look for different opinions and new people.** It is important to invite as heterogeneous people as possible to make the idea solid. *"People with similar opinions will not change anything."* Different opinions form creative friction that squeezes the idea into something bigger.
- 3. The camp is just an impulse for further networking.** Entrepreneurs come to the camp to develop their own ideas and to get new partners. Time is money and for an entrepreneur the camp is sometimes like a very welcomed vacation to brainstorm.
- 4. It is essential to ensure the implementation and diffusion of the ideas.** Especially in the period of transition, it is important to allocate the responsibilities. Local business activities can support the idea and contact the financiers, for example. It is also extremely useful to link the ideas to a bigger picture of the local rural development plan.
- 5. The Rural Network Unit spreads information, tells about rural development trends and gathers innovative developers.** The camp organizers of 2013 and 2014 can work as piloting areas for new methods. The Rural Network Unit looks at things from above and makes sure that the regions do not blindly develop their region. Activating the co-operation concretizes at the regional innovation camps. It is hard to activate co-operation without real content, which is why the camps and themes form a common agenda and reason to develop the region together.

# IDEAS THAT KICKED OFF

This section briefly describes some of the ideas that kicked off as a result of regional innovation camps during 2014.

14 ideas out of 23 have been implemented in some way at the time the survey was undertaken:



- Seven respondents told that the idea has developed into a **project**
- One respondent told that the idea has created a **company**
- Four respondents told that the idea has produced a **new way** of doing something
- Two respondents told that the idea has become something **concrete**
- **26** respondents told that the idea has become something else

## FOOD & WRECK

The joint innovation camp for the **Swedish speaking regions** created an idea of combining wreck tourism and restaurants. After visiting the wreck the local food entrepreneurs serve contemporary food for the travellers. The group created a Mat&Vrak Facebook group and included the idea into several project applications. The idea will be piloted in the Turku archipelago, potentially in Brännskär or Utö.

## SERVICE POINT

The innovation camp for the **Central and North Ostrobothnia regions** created three similar ideas that were combined into a concept to bring services, e.g. groceries back to remote areas. The partners are an online food market to purchase the goods and a local newspaper to handle delivery. The idea will apply for funding from Tekes – the Finnish Funding Agency for Innovation and from local authorities. The idea is especially sizzling because of the combination of existing delivery mechanisms and digitalization.

## BIOENERGY FROM THE ROADSIDES

**The Ostrobothnia and South Ostrobothnia regions** developed several ideas around local energy. One of the groups created a new harvesting tool that harvests grass from the roadsides. From the point of view of a biogas plant the idea creates cost savings and ensures the input of solid matter during summertime. Grass from roadsides replaces bale feed and other more expensive solid matters. The idea also employs local contractors. The idea has been taken further during autumn 2014 and a biogas plant is committed to take it even further.



## LOCAL FOOD APP

The innovation camp for **Southwest Finland and the Satakunta region** created an idea of a Local Food App. The problems with locally produced food are various: it is hard to buy and sell local food. The application gives a purchase channel for the whole country. Through the application, restaurants and professional kitchens can buy quality food and raw material. The Local Food App was presented successfully to local business authorities in Uusikaupunki. The group is applying for funding.

## VILLAGE OF HAPPY TRAVELLERS

The innovation camp for the **North Savo region** created an idea called Village of Happy Travellers that unites local villages to produce tourism and transportation services for travellers. The concept can be implemented also in holiday villages. The idea is strongly connected to the local tourism strategy and attractions. The group will apply for funding.



# ROLLING WAVES

Innovation camps create rolling waves for new openings to develop rural areas in Finland. The local action groups look for new themes and ideas to invest in. The needs are both typical of the region and common for the whole country. In 2014 the themes rose from local rural development strategies, strengths and needs. For example, the Swedish speaking camp invested in crossing the linguistic and geographical borders, the Central and North Ostrobothnia regions focused on young people, the Ostrobothnia and South Ostrobothnia regions innovated in local food, local energy and local tourism, Southwest Finland and the Satakunta region in the food industry and the North Savo region in tourism.

From the regional development point of view the camp create something that is impossible to reach otherwise. It collects regional development and willpower over regional borders. It brings new flames to people and boosts strategies. Enthusiasm and will combine in innovation campers. During the upcoming program period the enthusiasm will be channelled into keeping rural areas inhabited, restoring local services and readjusting to climate change. These strategic and exciting issues need help to get implemented. Also, people need support to find new partners, because it is too easy to work with the same people. Like after the camps of 2013, also the campers of 2014 hope for a lower funding threshold.

Innovation camps have three objectives:

- 1 ) create new networks
- 2 ) get new people into development work
- 3 ) create new ideas and approaches

The first objective was well met, because the camp mainly consists of group work. *"The camp made previously unknown people encounter one another"*. It has been slightly more difficult to get new people into the development work. Entrepreneurs are especially hard to catch for a three-day camp. The limited number of camp seats restricts the possibilities to invite people from the outer circle. Developing the ideas is a big part of

// The camp offered a possibility to create new ideas. These ideas and contacts wouldn't have been born without the camp and its positive atmosphere.

the daily schedule at the camp, but according to the entrepreneurs it is more important to meet people and hear about their ideas. The brainstorming has instrumental value, too: it brings unknown people together to swap opinions. At its best this creates potential business ideas or new approaches.

The three-day camp ends almost furtively. The first impressions of suspicion turn into nostalgia and deep thoughts, but also into promises, thankfulness and enthusiasm. It is a useful idea to sit down after the camp to cross-fertilize the ideas, to agree on responsibilities and the next meeting. Some innovation camps have met afterwards. The individual groups have also met on their own initiative.





## CAMP

# SWEDISH-SPEAKING REGIONS

The joint innovation camp for the Swedish speaking regions was organized in Parainen from 17–19 March, 2014. The camp was organized by local action groups from all around the Swedish speaking coast of Finland. The innovation camp focused on breaking barriers between Swedish and Finnish speaking people, between countryside and cities and between young and old people. The themes varied from en-

trepreneurship in the archipelago, to activating teenagers in the rural areas. All the themes pursued cooperation, networking between people and novel ideas to improve living in the countryside. The archipelago group became interested in creating a new tourism concept that combines old wrecks, storytelling and local food. The idea is yet to be piloted. The innovation camp succeeded in bringing together rural

developers and entrepreneurs from the Swedish speaking Finland. There were especially open and enthusiastic discussions that got fuelled up by the key note speeches. A few examples of the concrete benefit of the camp are new Facebook groups formed around the ideas.



## CAMP

# CENTRAL AND NORTHERN OSTROBOTHNIA REGIONS

The joint innovation camp of the Central and North Ostrobothnia regions was organized in Siikajoki from 1–3 April 2014. The camp was planned and organized by local action groups and the Union for Rural Education and Culture. The camp got into the core of developing rural areas. It built new approaches to rural entrepreneurship,

especially from the point of view of young people. Three of the five groups developed an idea around partial ownership of the countryside. One group created a new tourism route to get introduce travellers to the light northern summer and another group decided to build a JobiHub, a workation centre that combines work and vacation. The

camp resulted in the formation of new networks. As previously mentioned, three of the five ideas dealt with the same issue and are now developing together. The participants hoped to hear about the ideas developed in other camps and were thus invited to the Rural Forum in Oulu later in the spring.









## CAMP

# OSTROBOTHNIA AND SOUTH OSTROBOTHNIA REGIONS

The joint innovation camp of the Ostrobothnia and South Ostrobothnia regions was organized in Isokyrö from 10-12 June 2014. The camp was organized by a vast group of educational organizations, rural development projects, local action groups and universities. There was an idea competi-

tion and a seminar prior to the camp to collect ideas and to ensure that the ideas that would be further developed were strong enough. There were five groups in the camp, of which two discussed new ways of delivering and producing energy, two dealt with distributing local food and one with

revolutionizing rural tourism with a GastroTrain. All the five themes and ideas have developed after the camp. Due to the nature of the business ideas, the developing lies in the hands of the owners. All the participants were however invited to an after party meeting to hear about funding the ideas.



## CAMP

# SOUTHWEST FINLAND AND SATAKUNTA REGIONS

The joint innovation camp of Southwest Finland and the Satakunta region was organized in Eura from 9-11 September 2014. It was planned and executed by local action groups and ProAgria Western Finland. An enthusiastic bunch of students and developers took part in the camp to innovate

around food. The common theme, food, is strategically important to both regions. The groups discussed commercializing, branding and the logistics of local food. One of the groups focused on developing everyday innovations for entrepreneurs. Due to the strict definition of the themes the groups

had to work hard on their own theme and not get too involved with the other ideas. This both frustrated and gave new energy to the innovators. After the camp, new people have been interested in the food issue, in the innovation camp method and in planning new meetings.



## CAMP

# NORTH SAVO REGION

The innovation camp of the North Savo region was organized in Suonenjoki from 6-8 October 2014. The organization group consisted of rural developers from local university and action groups. The main theme of the camp was tourism, viewed from different points of view: nature tourism, local

food, service quality in the region and new products. A new application to assemble hiking teams and to stay at local homes, a concept to coach local entrepreneurs to produce higher quality services and to invite Asian tourists were developed during the camp. All the ideas suit the region well.

Though the three-day camp was a bit too long for some entrepreneurs, people were in general happy and satisfied that they came to look at local tourism from a new point of view.









# EPILOGUE

## INNOVATION CAMPS AS PART OF REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Strong will and knowledge to develop their own region – that was seen and felt in 2013-2014 at the ten regional innovation camps run by the Rural Network. The innovation camps looked like the organizing regions, but the common things were unexpectedness, willingness to experiment and authenticity.

It was surprising how boldly people threw themselves into creating something new, sometimes through a painful process. Almost every time, the final results, which had been worked out together, were better than anyone could have imagined. The willingness to experiment was shown in the feeling to get things done and in the atmosphere that enables development. The campers and *MDI* as their facilitator succeeded in this at almost every camp. The local approach and regional challenges and possibilities created authenticity.

The camps worked on new products, services and approaches to develop rural areas. They raised the willingness to learn more, and belief to do better together. The camps helped in networking, and surprisingly people found new partners from their own region.

Are there creative people in the countryside? Yes, the innovation campers can prove this. Rural areas will play an important role for Finland in the future if and when rural inhabitants are courageous and willing to tackle new challenges. The bioeconomy, culture tourism, forest tourism and several other things turned into business concepts or projects during the camp. Entrepreneurs or development agencies take the projects further.

On behalf of the *Rural Network Unit* I would like to thank everyone that has taken part in the camps. It was totally awesome to make and realize these innovation camps. The different regions of Finland are the strength and wealth of Finland.

Päivi Kujala  
Director of the Rural  
Network Unit









# " HARVEST "

2014

**MDI** *Management Design Intelligence*



Euroopan maaseudun  
kehittämisen maatalousrahasto:  
Eurooppa investoi maaseutualueisiin