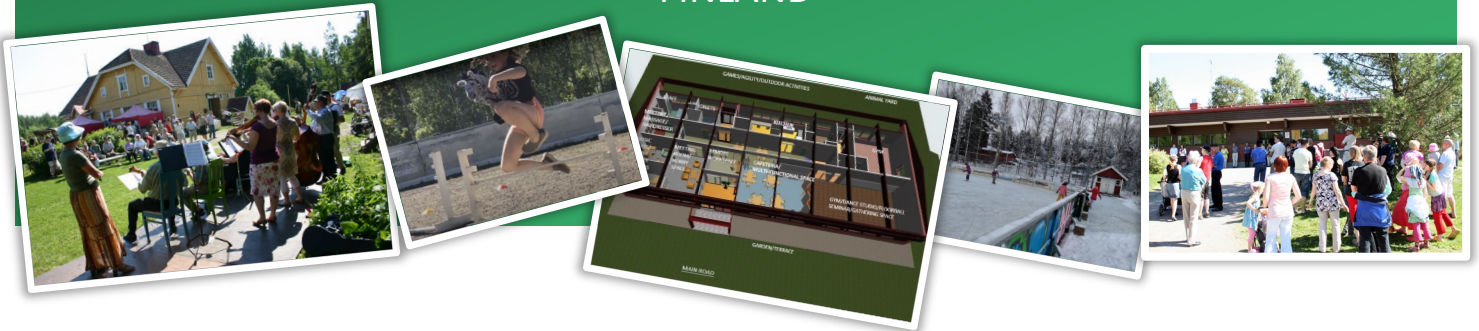


Highlights of the Raudanmaa Smart Village Strategy

FINLAND



About Raudanmaa

Raudanmaa is a rural area in Western Finland with some 600 inhabitants which consists of several small hamlets and houses surrounded by beautiful lakeside nature, woods, and fields. The village belongs to the Kangasala municipality and is situated 30 km from Tampere city of 100 000 inhabitants.

People in Raudanmaa live very close to nature, which is a great asset for both to new residents and visitors from nearby cities. The main aspiration is to be a service-oriented, innovative village where daily life runs smoothly. We want to bring new, innovative enablers to boost the village economy and living conditions.

We are proud of our local community that is very active and supportive of new initiatives. We have several active associations and organise regular gatherings of villagers on matters that concern everyone. We have built our own water supply, sewage system and optical fibre network. One of our main concerns now is to create a well-functioning multi-service smart village hall that provides activities and services to local residents and visitors in the area. We gathered the opinion and ideas from all villagers to develop a plan for the village hall and are currently developing detailed plans for the construction, functioning and sustainability of the hall.

Key challenges & assets

The heart of village activities used to be the school, which closed down in 2018. The lack of a common venue deteriorates the sense of togetherness as local people do not meet each other naturally for common activities, in village cafes, clubs and hobbies. In this situation, we need to think about new, flexible solutions, bringing the public and private sectors together with a third sector to sustain services in the village.

Some other challenges identified were the lack of promotion of the local nature destinations and lack of public. The village could also benefit from a stronger brand and communication and utilisation of social media to motivate residents to participate more in the common efforts. This would also increase the appeal of our digital footprint among possible visitors, new residents and business partners.

The big lakes in the area are surrounded by agriculture and forestry - dependent farms. During the past 30 years the water quality has deteriorated. One important issue for the future is to think how this can be stopped and bring water quality back to the state when you could drink the lake water.

Funding any large development project would need a lot of external support and it should also rely on voluntary work. Our village associations do not have any extra funds or large events for fundraising, so innovative ways to fund the common projects are needed.

Some of the key assets in Raudanmaa are the strong entrepreneurial and innovative thinking among the residents and many active farms with local food produce. The villagers have founded co-operatives and built water and sewage networks and optical fibre network, offering good infrastructure as a basis for future development. There is a strong sense of belonging to the community, several active associations organising

activities for children and adults. Traffic connections are also good, 10-30 minutes to three nearest city centres and functioning bus service. There are also attractive natural resources, beautiful lakeland nature that offers relaxation and joy to residents and visitors.

Main objectives of smart village strategy

Objective 1: Maintain the communal spirit and appealing feel of the Raudanmaa area

Objective 2: Ensure smooth services for residents, visitors and tourists

Objective 3: Foster living environment and clean countryside

- Develop nature/rural tourism
- Secure rural business viability and housing
- Protect the lake ecosystems

Objective 4: Maintain innovative village culture

- Develop communication and branding

What is smart?

Community Participation in Strategy Development

There has been wide involvement in the strategy development process by the villagers. There were initial workshops and info sessions to map the needs and wants of the residents in 2019. A SWOT analysis was carried out in 2020 and a first draft of the strategy was presented in a common workshop attended by several village associations.

In 2021, a follow-up questionnaire related to the strategy intended to identify the most important development priorities and confirm whether people still agree with the draft strategy. Ownership of the objectives grew with time as awareness of the strategy increased – very soon the community took ownership of the service-enabling activities and is currently fulfilling the strategy through various projects and activities towards the common goals.

The most important factors for the strategy work is to get the community to work on it – to really find the things that are important to them in particular, to communicate the strategy effectively, to get the activities focused and organised. The networking possibilities offered by Smart Villages network and Smart Rural 21 project as well as local Leader group Kantri ry and Suomen Kylät ry have also played an important role in the strategy development. Benchmarks have been gathered from various new village contacts, as well as from local village partners developing their areas.

Links to other strategies

Kangasala city: *Mahdollisuuksien maaseutu/Rural areas of possibilities*

Leader group Kantri ry strategies

The themes of the Kantri ry's programme 2014-2020 "Responsibility for Community and Environment" are:

1. Environmentally responsible living;
2. Communal, inclusion and local youth;
3. Local business.

The Rural Development Programme for Mainland Finland coordinated by the rural development unit of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (*Manner-Suomen maaseudun kehittämissuunnitelma*):

Focus Areas that we link to in the Rural Development Programme and what have been our main grounds for support are these:

1. Diversify rural industries and create employment by improving the competitiveness of businesses, supporting new entrepreneurship and promoting the networking of companies.
2. Improve vitality and quality of life in rural areas by strengthening independent local activities.

EU Rural Development policy priorities 2014-2020

FOCUS AREA 1A: Innovation, cooperation, and development of the knowledge base in rural areas;
FOCUS AREA 6B: Fostering local development.

Smart village strategies

Smart villages are communities in rural areas that use innovative solutions to improve their resilience, building on local strengths and opportunities. They rely on a participatory approach to develop and implement their strategy to improve their economic, social and/or environmental conditions, in particular by mobilising solutions offered by digital technologies.

What smart actions are implemented and planned?

- ✓ **Smart village hall project:** the villagers started to plan how to regain services in the village in 2019. The workshops and strategy development sessions crystallised that the main point of development should be a smart village hall. This would provide a platform for public, private and 3rd sector actors to offer services and enable activities for villages and visitors. In 2020, the business plan and concept were finalised and in 2021 the villagers acquired the premises through a co-op that includes villagers and summer residents. The smart village hall project is transforming the old school building into flexible spaces for meetings, exercise, hobby clubs. It also runs a cafeteria to bring extra income.
- ✓ Within the Smart Rural 21 project, we have had benchmarks of Belgian children's farm concept and are developing this **educational farm in combination with children's farm and animal-assisted therapy facility**, which could also offer a new kind of virtual afternoon care for children spending time at home after school.
- ✓ Covid-19 restrictions brought new flexible service ideas for small groups – **gym rental for families and spring excursions for classes from nearby cities** – both of which have already started.

A smart action that we are planning...

The next bigger initiative for our village is to develop a digital service platform, including service provision to villagers and village hall entrepreneurs. This platform will also pilot a 'virtual afternoon care' concept, utilising the animals of the children's farm and combining them with educational personnel and interactive elements.

This strategy highlight has been developed in the context of the 'Preparatory Action for Smart Rural Areas in the 21st Century' project funded by the European Commission. The opinions and views expressed in the strategy highlight are those of the participant villages only and do not represent the European Commission's official position