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The Innovation Camp method for capacity-building and co-developing smart solutions

Finnish National Rural Network

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Turning the Rural Innovations Upside Down at the Grass Root Level since 2012

- The aim of the innovation camps is to create new ideas to develop rural area as well as challenge and develop the people, economy and networks of the rural areas
- Every innovation camp has been implemented based on the bottom–up needs of the region / local area / village, as the development of rural areas is in the hands of the local players
- Finnish NSU organized its first innovation camp with partners in 2012 (national)
- In 2013 and 2014 innovation camps were taken to regional level - through open call 10 areas were selected where regional camps were organized
  - The themes should be linked to LAG strategies or provincial RDP objectives
  - LAGs had a core role in organizing the camps

Roles of the different actors

Level	National	Regional / Local Level	Consultant
Name	Rural Network Support Unit	Local action groups (LEADER), villages etc.	Consultant firm, paid by NSU
Role	Choosing areas where camps are carried out, choosing consultant, basic funding, assisting in organizing the camp, assessing and evaluating the work of the teams at the camps.	Expressing local needs, defining themes, recruiting participants, guests and media, organizing practicalities of the camp.	Facilitating, organizing the camp (leading teams, methods)

Outline of a 48H Regional Innovation Camp

- Consists of three phases
- Carried out in three days
- Participants work in 4 or 5 thematic groups of 6 to 8 persons

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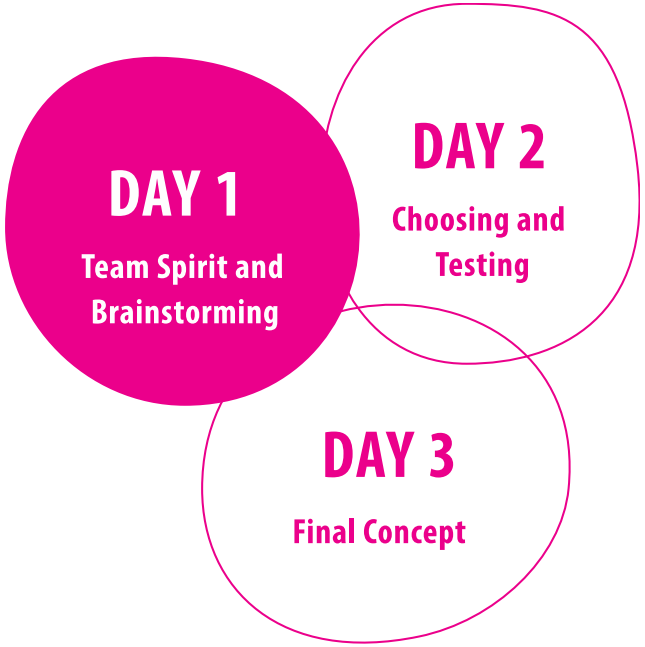

Getting to know each other, teambuilding to create team spirit.

Brainstorming (producing dozens of ideas around the given theme) and outlining great challenges and possibilities.

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Choosing the idea to be further developed in the morning.

Testing and conceptualizing of the idea (e.g. sales pitch, business model canvas) rest of the day. External sparring partners asking wicked questions.

Second day is magical!

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Finalising the concept of the idea, presenting it to others, board of judges, invited guests and media.

Choosing the winner.

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Case Vuolijoki: innovating in the smartest village of Finland

- Vuolijoki won the Finland's smartest village competition in 2020 (organized by the Finnish NSU)
- The prize: an innovation camp to become even smarter
- 4.-5.11.2021 in Vuolijoki village (Kajaani / Kainuu)
- Consultant firm and running expences paid by the NSU + voluntary work of Vuolijoki villagers

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Case Vuolijoki: practical info

- Open call for participation: motivation letter
- 40-50 participants around Finland from rural areas to bigger cities: villagers of Vuolijoki, LAG workers, representatives of the regional authority and ministry of agriculture and forestry, researchers, entrepreneurs, NGO actors, rural youth, villagers from Kajaani area
- Built around four themes chosen by Vuolijoki villagers: new forms of work, new forms of rural living, village children and youth and biogas / sustainable energy
- Two days of living, eating and working in the heart of Vuolijoki

Case Vuolijoki: end results

- Four different ideas developed by four teams:
  - Conceptualising the existing remote working hub, creating off-work activities and services around it
  - Tiny house concept: new forms of housing
  - New forms of participation for the children and the youth: a festival, a scooter tour de Oulujärvi lake etc.
  - Biogas facility (production chain from local farmers to companies)
- Biogas facility was the winner: ambitious but realistic
- Great media coverage throughout the process: regional and local radio, TV and newspapers

Summary: innovation camp as a method for capacity-building and co-developing smart solutions

- Very practical but intensive way to develop new ideas into concrete innovations
- Strengthens the local "innovation environment": can change the processes, create new linkages between people in the area and boost good energy
- Good tool to attract new actors and attention in rural development: people who usually do not participate
- Good way to receive publicity for rural areas and the possibilities RDP offers: media likes concrete processes and results
- Can be used as a tool in smart village development processes: innovation camps work best when there is a clear ownership of problems and solutions created during the camp → village-level works well!

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Jotta voisimme hyvin.

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