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International students revitalizing businesses in depopulating rural areas in Central Finland

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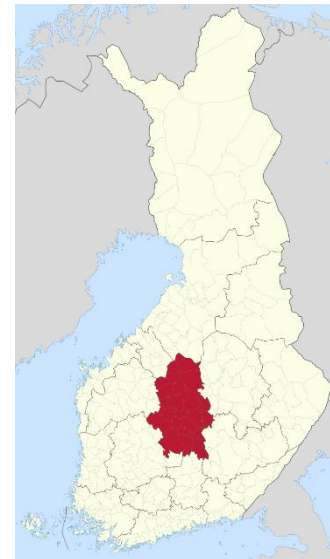
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Central Finland region



- Population ~274 000 (5th)
- Area ~20 000 km² - 83 % forest (2nd most), 15 % water-based
- 22 municipalities - capital: Jyväskylä, pop. 150 000 (7th)
- Industry profile: Forest and bioeconomy, technology, higher education, environmental and circular economy expertise
- Top employment sectors
 1. Health & social services 20,1 %
 2. Manufacturing industry & machinery 13,3 %
 3. Wholesale & retail trade 9,7 %
 4. Education 9,5 %
- Challenges
 - Aging population, low birth rate, high dependency ratio
 - 19 000 unemployed, 14,9 % (2nd highest rate)
 - Competence not generating into growth
 - Most discriminative job market in Finland
- Opportunities
 - 10 800 foreign citizens, 16 000 foreign-born
 - Broad and diverse talent reserve: 3 HEIs, 3000 international students
 - Unclaimed potential: culture, creative industry, tourism, food industry...
 - Positive signs in certain industries: bio and circular economy, renewable industry, well-being, security and defence...



Good Practice: "Career Trips"



En route to Kinnula & Kannonkoski municipalities
Photo: JAMK University of Applied Sciences

The Central Finland's recipe

1. Find relevant companies with open vacancies or future plans - HEI & municipality collaboration
2. Fill a bus with international students and jobseekers (~60) in relevant fields
3. Take a trip from Jyväskylä to a smaller municipality (21) in Central Finland
4. Visit 2-3 companies + local attractions
5. Show the opportunities for
 - a) immigrants to live and work in more rural areas
 - b) companies to recruit and grow
 - c) municipalities to get new residents and taxpayers willing to relocate if assisted and welcomed

Concepts evolved from Career Trips

Hackathon

- International students visit a municipality and stay overnight
- 2-day challenge with a local company solving real business problems
- Gain insights into the local job market
- Network with professionals and build connections
- Opportunity to showcase skills and support future hiring

Talent Sprint Challenge

- New concept combining Hackathon + Career Trip + internship pathway
- Pre-workshops on integration, Finnish working life, key skills requested by companies
- Followed by Career Trip and Hackathon with companies
- Top-performing participants offered internship opportunities



Talent Sprint Challenge
at Digi & Game Center, Jyväskylä

Observations & Results

- Stronger collaboration between municipalities & educational institutions
- Increased internship opportunities and internationalization of the region
- Students gain awareness of local career and relocation options
- Improved visibility of tourism opportunities
- Positive reception from both students and local stakeholders
- Supports dual goal: connecting talent with hidden local opportunities
- Helps smaller municipalities attract future workforce

Key Figures

- Total of 17 trips with +300 students since 2023
- 38 locations visited: companies, factories, museums etc.
- Participant feedback: overall impression 4,3 / 5
- More than a dozen work/internship contracts

Improvement Opportunities

- Ensure more targeted company visits, focusing on active recruiters
- Unclaimed potential on combining entrepreneurially oriented students and businesses looking for successor



International workshop with the municipality of Muurame

Recommendations for rural areas & small municipalities



keskisuomi.fi

"Municipalities are particularly expected to provide support in matters related to the smooth running of everyday life, guidance and advice."

- [Survey](#) for businesses in Central Finland, 2024

- Absorb the talent reserve of bigger cities
- Closely collaborate with HEIs
- Create a checklist for newcomers
- Support the newcomers during settling-in phase
- Don't leave businesses alone
 - Support before, during and after the recruitment
- Name one contact person – accessibility!
- Who coordinates the ecosystem?
 - "Locomotive + carriages = train"

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Thank you!
Kiitos!

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