



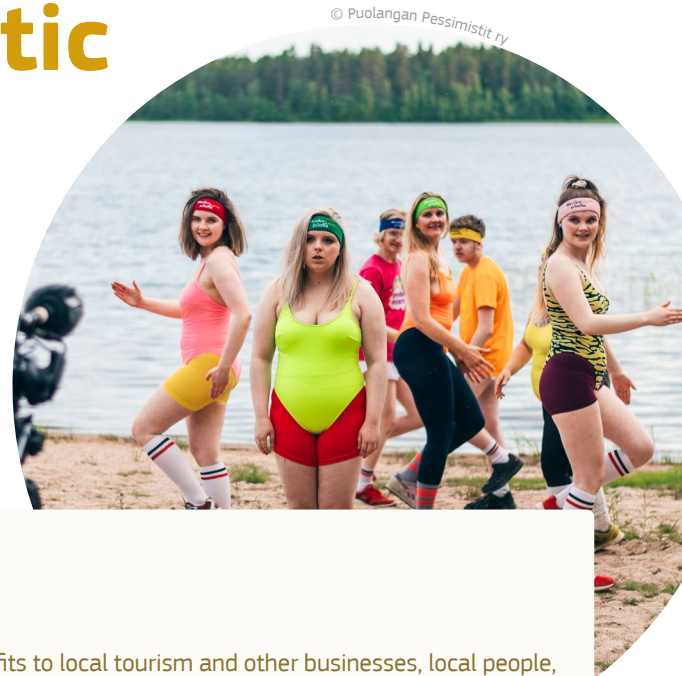
EAFRD-funded projects

# The most pessimistic town in Finland

An original territorial marketing initiative.

The project developed a new type of territorial marketing based on pessimism, a landmark feature of the Puolanka village.

By turning pessimism into a positive brand, the project used wicked humour for territorial marketing purposes. Local youth were actively involved in association activities and producing social media content.



## Location

Puolanka (Finland)

## Programming period

2014 - 2020

## Priority

P6 - Social Inclusion and  
Economic Development

## Measure

M07 - Basic services and village  
renewal in rural areas

## Funding (EUR)

Total budget 49 820

EAFRD 18 832

National/Regional 26 006

Private 4 982

## Project duration

2018 - 2019

## Project promoter

Puolangan Pessimistit ry

## Contact

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## Website

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## Results

The project brought tangible benefits to local tourism and other businesses, local people, Puolanka's cultural production and the marketing of the municipality.

The project managed to turn the negative into positive and to gain visibility and new visitors for the municipality of Puolanka by coming up with a new type of territorial marketing. At the same time, this helped develop and increase cultural activities and a sense of belonging and community. The project also improved the town's services and created employment opportunities for young people. Follow-up activities were designed and implemented using further LEADER funding.

The project gained strong social media coverage which led to dozens of newspaper articles published in different countries. It attracted the attention of international media and the project is now part of an international study on smart shrinkage.

## Lessons & Recommendations

- Instead of imposing things on young people, ask them how they want to get involved.
- Have the courage to do things your own way.
- Having fun is the key to getting people involved, actively participating and staying active – when you are excited about the things you do, you succeed and when you succeed, you get even more excited.
- Everybody's involvement is important, whether they are beginners or experts – encourage people to improve their skills instead of always doing the same things you already know well.
- Use social media in a creative way and think how to involve other people in sharing your message: e.g. funny, "instagrammable" sights or signs, like the road signs outside of Puolanka, which spread easily on social media.

## Context

Puolanka is a remote municipality in Northern Finland with less than 3,000 inhabitants, far from cities and with issues of population loss and ageing. There are few opportunities for hobbies and services are decreasing, closing or moving away – the threat is that the entire municipality is dying. People’s assessments are negative, there seems to be no hope and pessimism (“what’s the point?”) is a widespread attitude. However, the residents are actually happy, satisfied with their life amid nature and actively engaged in associations.

## Objectives

The main purpose of the project was to increase the awareness of the «Puolanka brand of pessimism» on a national level. By turning pessimism into a positive brand, the wicked humour brings tangible benefits to local tourism and other businesses, local people, Puolanka’s cultural production and the marketing of the municipality.

Thus, the project aimed to turn its popularity into tangible benefits for local entrepreneurs, residents, and other operators, and thereby increase the vitality of the municipality.

In addition, the project aimed to engage young people in the municipality’s activities and to create meaningful leisure, cultural and employment opportunities for them.

The project “is targeted at all the world’s optimists to make them pessimists.”

## Activities

The project started in August 2018 with LEADER support under the coordination of the Puolanka Pessimist Association. It takes the contradiction between resident’s pessimism and happiness as a basis and highlights it by means of humour and a bold attitude.

In the early phase, humorous road signs were set up along the main roads with texts like “Are you lost? Next up: Puolanka” and “Soon, Puolanka. You’ve still got time to turn around”.

The project activities were planned and implemented based on the skills and interests of young people in Puolanka. Music and videos were the preferred choice of local teenagers, who were involved in designing and creating videos and musicals and appeared in them. The project produced short videos for Facebook and YouTube as well as other social media content and a magazine. The ‘Puolanka pessimists’ clips and music videos address the challenges and problems faced by the municipality in a humorous way.

Local operators collaborated to write scripts and contributed to the production of performances at the summer theatre, including a “pessimism musical”.

In addition, the project developed local cultural activities by consolidating and renewing the previous cultural activities on offer, based on cooperation with local and regional actors.

Thanks to this project, Puolanka is the most pessimistic town in Finland and yet everyone knows its name!



A snapshot from the  
‘Buy our empty properties’  
music video shooting.  
Credit Santeri Rahkamaa



Artists in the ‘Cardboard box  
love’ music video setting.  
Credit Tommi Rajala



Characters from the  
New Pessimism Musical of 2021.  
Credit Tommi Rajala



# Main results

The project managed to turn the negative into positive and to gain visibility and new visitors for the municipality of Puolanka by developing a new type of territorial marketing. At the same time, this helped develop and increase cultural activities and a sense of belonging and community. The residents benefitted from new services and cultural activities.

The out-of-the-ordinary roadside advertisements have attracted tourists and visitors to the municipality.

Young people experienced inclusion and gained opportunities for influencing, hobbies and employment in their municipality.

The Puolanka Pessimist Association expanded its operations and attracted new members interested in the activities of the association. In addition, the Puolanka Pessimist Association developed its product sales by creating new types of merchandise and opening a web shop, all reflecting the pessimistic attitude of Puolanka.

The project shows a new kind of cooperation between the municipality and the association. Companies in the area also benefit from more visibility.

Videos scripted and produced by the locals have gathered over 100 000 views on social media and one of the videos was included in the e-learning material of an upper secondary school. The social media phenomenon also includes 29 000 “pessimist” Facebook followers.

Two national TV news channels (YLE and MTV) visited Puolanka to cover the premiere of the first “pessimism musical”. This was the first time that a premiere of an amateur theatre company in Kainuu was able to attract national media attention.

The Pessimist Days event was awarded the press’ favourite event at the Finnish municipal marketing championships in 2018.

The project gained strong coverage on social and traditional media, with dozens of newspaper articles published in different countries. Following a visit and an article by the BBC, Puolanka is now involved in an international research project on smart shrinkage led by Aalto University (Finland) with Erfurt University’s technical department (Germany). A visit to Germany took place in May 2022 and a visit to Puolanka is scheduled in August 2022. [More info](#)

The project generated some follow-up activities, also funded via LEADER: an old building was purchased and renovated into a House of Pessimism and a gallery for the audience was built adjacent to the summer theatre building. The new facilities can also be used for events by other organisations.

The project is in line with the EU Youth Strategy, as well as with policy objectives on the health and well-being of young people and on social inclusion. Special attention has been paid to gender equality and making sure all genders find activities of the association attractive. The project follows the objectives of the Long-term vision for rural areas and promotes digitalisation as it relies heavily on digital marketing.

# Key lessons

A distinctive municipal brand can be successfully built by boldly basing it on typical features and unique characteristics and by using youth’s expertise. Authenticity can also lead to success, without the costly use of professionals.

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## Additional sources of information

[Video 1 - Whole summer ruined](#)

[Video 2 - Buy our empty](#)

[Video 3 - Slushy Autumn](#)

[Video 4 - Finding females from Puolanka](#)

[Video 5 - On the path to the North](#)

[Video 6 - The Pessimists’ Fast Food Stand](#)

[Article: Puolanka - Finland’s ‘best worst’ dying town](#)

This project has been categorised under ‘Socially inclusive & innovative futures’ by the nominating National Rural Network