

## FINLAND

# Digital futures

### Location

Jyväskylä

### Programming period

2014 – 2020

### Priority

P6 – Social inclusion & local development

### Measure

M07 - Basic services & village renewal

### Funding (EUR)

Total budget 300 000

EAFRD 126 000

National/Regional 153 472

Private 20 528

### Project duration

2019 – 2021

### Project promoter

Jyväskylän ammattikorkeakoulu, Keski-Suomen Sydänpiiri ry

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### Website

[www.jamk.fi/digistikylassa](http://www.jamk.fi/digistikylassa)

The Digitally Visiting project has pioneered digital skill development in Central Finland. The project has demonstrated that there is a large need for local digital support to develop residents' digital skills, especially in remote rural regions. The project encouraged and guided rural residents to use electronic services and so has contributed to making rural living in Central Finland more appealing.

## Summary

The project aimed to strengthen the digital skills and participation of previously excluded rural residents who felt excluded from society in central Finland. Project activities included the creation of a virtual village house model, digital skills training, digital service days and the development of digital peer support, the utilisation of electronic health applications in promoting residents' well-being and health and making village activities visible through videos and game applications.



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The project has helped to decrease inequality in service accessibility and improve utilisation of online services. It supported rural villages to find new ways to maintain and strengthen communality, developed villages' joint activities and facilitated localised peer and voluntary assistance.

## Results

During its operational period, the project led by the Jyväskylä University of Applied Sciences organised around 100 digital skills training, digital service days or digital tutor training days. In addition, the project was involved in several events with cooperation partners, reaching more than 2,700 rural residents and stakeholders with its activities directly, with further intermediate beneficiaries. The village videos produced by the project have received thousands of views on YouTube and Facebook, and they have helped to create a positive rural image and improve village visibility.

Based on feedback from participants, activities helped to improve digital skills, enabled a pro-digitalisation attitude amongst rural village residents and fostered a willingness to try to adopt new electronic services. This has in turn improved the well-being of residents and decreased the inequality caused by a digitalising society. In the long term, it is hoped the project's impact will help to maintain participants' general well-being.

Also based on feedback from participants, the project has had an impact on rural associations' activities. Along with digital skills training and online lectures, associations have introduced new electronic tools and communication channels, which have made it possible to maintain contact with members and continue activities during the current exceptional times.

## Context

In rural central Finland public services are being reduced and increasingly digitalised. At the same time, there is an aging demographic among residents. It is burdensome, sometimes even impossible, for elderly people to obtain services from a distance without adequate IT skills.

The digitalisation of society provides a vast range of possibilities and facilitates the accessibility of services from home. However, this requires good digital literacy, which is often lacking in elderly people leading to inequality of opportunity. Yle News estimated in the beginning of 2018 that up to one million Finns have not engaged in the digital leap. Amongst Finns who are 65 or older, around half a million do not regularly use the Internet.

## Objectives

The project's aim was to improve the digital skills and pro-digitalisation attitude of participating village residents, which in turn will improve their access to different types of electronic services.

Improved access to electronic services will improve their well-being and decreases inequality and exclusion in a digitalising society.

It is also intended that participation will improve the communality of village residents. Activities in the village will increase and communication will become more effective.

In turn, villages will receive new tools with which they can maintain the vitality of villages. Rural living in Central Finland will become more visible both regionally and nationally, and life in the countryside will feel more attractive.

The project also aimed to help associations to promote the use of computers, smart devices and Internet among their members.

## Activities

The activities of the project were individually planned with each participating village. Many villages hoped for the organisation of digital courses to enable participants to practice using a computer or smart device with the help of a visiting instructor. Topics varied between villages and courses, as sometimes the practice concerned switching on a computer and using a mouse, and other times establishing groups on social media or engaging in spreadsheet calculations. Participants could come to events with their own device or borrow a computer on

the day. Group sizes were a maximum of 15 people so that students could receive individual help, if needed. Courses were well liked especially in villages, where several courses were regularly held. The project also started digital tutor activities in the villages, where digitally competent village residents helped other residents with their digital problems and instructed them in the use of devices. Initial training for voluntary digital tutors was organised, which covered the most common needs for digital support and the characteristics of a good tutor. In addition to villages, digital tutor activities also took place in several Finnish Heart Associations (a not-for-profit organisation working across Finland's 16 regions). The presence of a village or an association digital tutor means that help to solve digital problems is available nearby.



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Digital service days were organised in the libraries of larger municipalities, whereby different authorities, such as health care providers and banks, helped visitors in the use of their own electronic services such as electronic health and well-being applications. Everyone was encouraged to take part, regardless of their level of digital skills. Libraries were selected as a venue and cooperation partner because they are premises open to all, and their activities include providing digital support.

Many villages wanted to improve their ability to use the internet, in which case they were helped to make a village video, or they were helped to establish a website or a Facebook page for their village. Children and young people were also involved in planning and recording the videos, which were then shared on the YouTube and Facebook channels of the project and distributed to the villages where the video was watched during village events. This helped develop a positive image of rural living for the wider public and helped village residents to notice the special characteristics of their own living place and the possibilities for electronic marketing.

## Main Results

During its operational period, the project organised around 100 digital skills training, digital service days or digital tutor training days. In addition, the project was involved in several events with cooperation partners, reaching more than 2,700 rural residents and stakeholders with its activities directly, with further intermediate beneficiaries. The village videos produced by the project have received thousands of views on YouTube and Facebook, and they have helped to create a positive rural image and improve village visibility.

Based on feedback from participants, activities helped to improve digital skills, developed a pro-digitalisation attitude amongst rural village residents and fostered a willingness to try to adopt new electronic services and applications. This has in turn improved the well-being of residents and decreased the inequality caused by a digitalising society. In the long term, it is hoped the project's impact will help to maintain participants' general well-being.

Also based on feedback from participants, the project has had an impact on rural associations' activities. Along with digital skills training and online lectures, associations have introduced new electronic tools and communication channels which have made it possible to maintain contact with members and continue activities during these exceptional times.

The Digitally Visiting project was a pioneer in developing digital support and digital skills as similar development activities had not been conducted in the region before. The activities and cooperation networks achieved by the project created new project ideas, independent development of digital support in the villages and at least one new project (Digitally Active Central Finland).

## Key lessons

Cooperation and networking proved invaluable in organising digital service days, marketing, reaching key interlocutors and recruiting voluntary digital tutors and increasing village visibility, by producing village videos. The project cooperated, inter alia, with the following stakeholders: Finnish Heart Association, Alzheimer Society of Finland, Local Heart associations, Finnish Pensioners' Federation in Central Finland, Villages in Central Finland, Libraries in Central Finland, municipalities in Central Finland, other rural and similar projects and numerous village associations and other local actors. The cooperation was mutually rewarding and helped create new operational ideas, project drafts and courage to try new activities.

The project has showed the value of planning activities together with rural communities. Instructions on the use of devices and services for small groups are a popular and functional method to improve participants' digital skills and to present the benefits of digitalisation to village residents. Digital tutor activities also fit in well in different communities, both in villages and in different types of associations. With the help of a known digital tutor, the use of new devices and services becomes easier, and participants do not have to seek help from far away. Material from digital tutor activities of the project have also been utilised elsewhere in Finland, for example Ostrobothnia has applied for rural development funding for a new digital support project.

Digital skills are a necessity - promoting wellbeing and equality through digital skills!

## Additional sources of information

[www.facebook.com/digistikylassa](https://www.facebook.com/digistikylassa)

Instagram @digistikylassa

Youtube: Digisti kylässä