

Case Study

Project title:

Food Logistics - Providing local food through individual transport and distribution solutions

Key words: *Services and applications for companies, clean transport*

Region: Etelä-Suomi (South Finland)

Programme Type: Innovative Actions, 2000-2006

Duration of project: 1 May 2002 – 30 April 2004

Funding: *€218,000, of which €108 990 European Regional Development Fund contribution*

Synthesis

Finnish SMEs in the food sector worked together to find common logistics solutions when transporting their produce into the capital.

The objective of the project was to create transport and distribution solutions for local food producers and farmers (SMEs) outside the Helsinki area so that they could more effectively reach their customers: restaurants and stores in Helsinki. Another objective was to create a model to define environmental emissions related to local food and investigate the promotion of local food by ecological efficiency of logistics.

The needs of SMEs were surveyed and several common transportation solutions developed. Two networks were created, in the meat and bakery sectors (11 SMEs in total) where a common transportation system is now in use. A common on-line ordering system was setup, taking into account the common transportation that was developed. The project developed an energy passport to show by comparison how "green" the transport was. The passport could be used in marketing to show the energy efficiency of local produce.

Taking into account common transportation and delivery issues when setting up a web ordering system in the food sector for SMEs had not previously been tested. Several new logistic solutions for delivering foods to the metropolitan markets were defined in the project. This cooperation, also across regional borders, had not taken place before. The energy passport showing the eco-efficiency of local food had not been tested previously in the region.

The role of the project manager at Viikki Food Centre (a public body based at the university of Helsinki) was to coordinate the implementation of the project including administration, reporting, and to lead the networking process, both between companies and the experts.

A project management group was established including experts on food from the other food centres located in the different South Finland regions, the Finnish Food Information Association, the Ministry of transport and a logistics consultancy.

During the project, the regional food centres gained a deeper understanding of the needs of the SMEs and the cooperation with the SMEs improved as the confidence was developed. The creation of confidence also between SMEs enabled the formation of co-operation models and networks between enterprises. In these cooperation networks needs and product supply were incorporated, resulting in subcontracting and promotion of each others products. The regional food centres also learned during the project to see the bigger picture of the problems the SMEs are facing, not only working on the development of food products as is their normal core task in these food development centres.

Outsourcing of transportation adapted to the food sector provided flexibility and re-planning of methods and scheduling, especially because of the inflexible schedules of the basic delivery options often available (timing, frequency etc). This project showed that by spending time with SMEs, building confidence and concretely showing the benefits of cooperation, SMEs were willing to change, seeing the benefits. The new methods that were offered provided larger and more economic delivery models and have motivated enterprises to increase and rationalise their marketing operations, especially towards those potential clients to whom it was unprofitable or impossible to deliver products using the previous transportation solutions. Due to fluctuation of demand, enterprises often keep buffer stocks. One aim of the project was to create storage in the metropolitan area. These storage facilities improved the chain of order and delivery and enabled a faster distribution on a more frequent basis and into larger areas

The project was concrete and useful, and without the external help and support of the European Union, the entrepreneurs would not have had the resources (time, personnel, expertise etc.) to find solutions for logistical improvements.

I. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Project objectives

The objective of the project was to create transport and distribution solutions for local food producers and farmers (SMEs) outside the Helsinki area so that they could more effectively reach their customers: restaurants and stores in the marketing area of Helsinki.

The immediate objectives of the project were:

- To identify alternative ordering systems and logistical solutions to deliver food more efficiently to the marketing area of Helsinki from the areas of Kanta-Häme, Päijät-Häme, Kymenlaakso and Etelä-Karjala. (150-250 km from Helsinki). The project aimed to find transportation models for small volume and temperature regulated food products and to fully use transport capacity.
- To organize local food pick up points, from where the products would be transported further to the marketing area of Helsinki.
- Based on the different needs of local areas, to choose the most suitable solutions and pilot them for regional transport as well as the transport to the capital area.
- To further build on the result of a logistics solution in Sörnäinen Market Place (financed by Helsinki city in a project 1999-2001), where a new food delivery system was created. Several companies connected their own transportation to a common system.
- To create a model to define environmental emissions related to the concept of local food.
- To investigate the promotion of local food by ecological efficiency of logistics. (marketing)

- To connect regional centres of know-how in the food sector to work together more efficiently also in the new area of logistics.

Description/type of activity:

1. Viikki food centre, (a public body based at the university of Helsinki), the project manager, together with the regional coordinators (Experts from the different regions in the food industry, all Non Profit Organisations) contacted food SMEs in the region to find out their logistical needs. 400 companies were contacted by phone or asked to fill in a questionnaire about their needs (if they had their own transportation, how often it was used, volumes, at what times, types of customers, costs, product type etc). The logistics requirements were therefore defined together with SMEs. 139 need surveys were carried out and 90 consultation visits were made by the regional coordinators.
2. Transveritas Oy (logistics consultants) at the same time looked at what transportation would be available, costs, temperature, size of vehicles, capacity and routes etc). Based on this, common transportation systems were developed and contracts with transport companies negotiated. For delivery to the metropolitan area, the existing distribution solutions of enterprises operating in the Helsingin Tukkutori terminal were used. (Tukkutori is a storage terminal in central Helsinki from which common delivery to customers is organised)
3. Different ordering systems and solutions were examined and a common ordering system for SMEs was then set up. It was found that Finfood Oy (Finnish food information association) already had an ordering system for consumers to buy food on-line but this system did not work. This system was modified to be used by the SMEs as sellers and Hotels/Restaurants/specialised shops as customers. The participating SMEs used a common logistics system for better efficiency of delivery. It was tested in 10 SMEs who still use it.
4. In addition, an energy passport was developed by Transveritas Oy to demonstrate how "green" the transport was. In the calculations were included factors such as: type of vehicle, energy consumption, usage of vehicle, distance travelled. The passport was created specifically for each SME and could be used in marketing to show the energy efficiency of local produce.
5. Common collection pick up points were established (i.e. to transport flour, jam and juice all in the same vehicle)
6. Two networks were created, in the meat and bakery sectors (11 SMEs in total) where a common transportation system is now in use. It is the first time these companies have worked together, and the cooperation is concerned not only with transport but also selling and promotion of their products.

Beneficiaries:

The beneficiaries were SMEs in South Finland and transportation enterprises. Ultimately, the consumers benefit from eating locally produced food and having a cleaner environment.

II. POLITICAL AND STRATEGIC CONTEXT

Strategic context:

The Food Logistics project was one of 5 projects of the Innovative Actions Programme of South Finland that formed part of the implementation of the strategy of the South Finland Regional Alliance. The Alliance is an inter-regional voluntary co-operation organisation for the regional authorities, of seven regions: Southwest Finland, Uusimaa, Itä-Uusimaa, Kymenlaakso, South Karelia, Kanta-Häme and Päijät-Häme. The role of the Alliance as a lobby and cooperation organisation, is to create networks and partnerships. The Regional programme for Innovative actions enabled its members to generate concrete results regarding what can be achieved through cooperation, both on a project and programme level.

The work of the Alliance is based on a four-year action strategy. The main activities foreseen for 2001-2004 were:

1. To increase the attractiveness of the regions and the competitiveness of companies in the environmental, logistics and information society sectors
2. To promote high-level competence in the above mentioned sectors
3. To develop municipal co-operation
4. To create connections to other regions

Point 1 (above) formed the basis for the Innovative Actions Programme in South Finland which aimed to support innovative ways to disseminate know-how from expertise centres to the entire programme region, i.e. from high-growth areas to low-growth areas. Through earlier studies, the two sectors included in the programme (logistics and environment) had been found to be pivotal for the economic performance and development of the region. All regional councils had a focus on these sectors in their strategic development plans.

The products of small food producers and rural enterprises reach the market through many different routes. Often it is the entrepreneur himself who transports the goods to the customer, and the distance may be hundreds of kilometres. In Finland, there are not enough comprehensive logistical systems to meet the needs of small businesses and enable a systematic and fast delivery of small-scale food volumes. The larger distribution companies do not deal directly with small SMEs due to the small scale of their business. This shortcoming affects ordering systems and transport-combining terminals that could be used in order for the SMEs to be more cost-effective. SMEs often do not see the full picture of the possibilities available through cooperation and need someone to coordinate activities and show what is possible.

Innovation:

Taking into account common transportation and delivery issues when setting up a web ordering system in the food sector for SMEs had not previously been tested.

Several new logistic solutions for delivering foods to the metropolitan markets were defined in the project (for the specific sectors of bakery and meat as well as a mixed one for dry food products). This cooperation, also across regional borders, had not taken place before. Another logistics solution was to use the spare capacity of Valio's own transportation (large dairy product producer). This would not have been possible for 1 SME, but by working together with other SMEs (10), the requirements for space were large enough to make it interesting for the large company.

The energy passport showing the eco-efficiency of local food had not been tested previously

in the region.

In this project, the innovative logistic idea was developed in a very short period to become an effective system which is still in use.

Political support:

The project was seen as important by the City of Helsinki, which contributed financial support of €17 000.

III. IMPLEMENTATION

Programming:

Viikki food centre (public food expertise organisation acting as project manager) had worked to develop and improve food products with SMEs for many years. The project manager, Ms Piilo, works as a brand manager at the food centre. She is an expert working with the companies to further develop their food produce including branding of new products.

This experience had shown her that SMEs were often not happy with how the transportation of their products was organised, and that there was room for improvement. Assistance was needed to look at this issue on a larger, more comprehensive scale. It was something considered too difficult for one SME to start looking at alone.

Viikki thus submitted a project application together with the regional coordinators (similar Non profit food development organisations) from the other regions in South Finland, which was approved by the Steering committee. Finfood, (the Finnish food information association) found out about the project through a newspaper in the food sector and joined the project. They funded the IT programmers so that the web ordering system could be updated to suit the needs of the SMEs.

The rationale for the project was:

- SMEs cannot compete with larger companies to supply hospitals, municipalities and larger stores since these often favour purchases based on both larger quantities and costs. For an SME, transportation cost can be significant since it cannot take advantage of the more advanced logistics solutions for larger companies. Therefore the customers are often the restaurant sector, delicacy or specialised stores.
- SMEs' food industry products from the metropolitan and rural areas reach the metropolitan market through different routes. Often it is the entrepreneur himself who transports the goods to the customers and the distance may be hundreds of kilometres. For larger companies there are efficient logistical systems in place. The companies (or groups of companies) of the fresh food industry have nation-wide systems functioning for general merchandise trade and institutional kitchens (hospitals, municipalities, schools etc). In addition, there are many regional, company-level systems. However in Finland, there are not enough comprehensive logistical systems to satisfy the needs of SMEs and to enable a systematic and fast delivery of small volumes of food. By looking for alternative ordering systems for SMEs and combined deliveries and

storage, the profitability of the SME can be increased.

- In the food delivery chain, the environmental effect of food transport is significant. Food delivery as a cause of emissions had not been studied so the significance of local manufacturing cannot be emphasised sufficiently. Delivering small-scale transports uneconomically results in considerable emissions compared to a logistic system that works effectively. Many Finnish food industry enterprises are located in South-Finland where the main market is also. Shorter transportation distances and thus, lesser environmental effects could play a positive role in the idea of local food and its marketing. Knowing about emissions and diminishing environmental effects is based on good logistic planning as well as its effective realisation.
- Public appreciation for locally manufactured food is forecast to increase in the coming years. Individual consumers as well as enterprises appreciate domestic products and food manufactured locally. Environmental friendliness is becoming an increasingly important factor for consumers. Organic food, for example, may lose one of its strongest arguments if distributing by small-scale transport operations result in high emissions. When it comes to local food, environmental friendliness and transportation expenses are linked. However, this pro-environment aspect of local food has not been fully taken advantage of in its marketing.
- In rural areas, logistics traffic is light and distances long. Therefore, costs are higher. Enhancing a logistics model for small entrepreneurs would enable an easier entry to market, savings in transportation costs and greater efficiency by directing entrepreneurs' efforts from the transportation of goods to the actual manufacturing. The logistics model should include distribution inside a province as well as deliveries nation-wide. Creating a functional logistic service requires improvement in the co-operation of companies. Entrepreneurship, local knowledge and a country-wide network can help small companies to survive.
- For developing urban logistics (distribution of goods) and regional logistics (transfer of goods and partly people) several projects have been carried out both in the metropolitan area and elsewhere in the country, but not in the field of food producers and/or SMEs. Promoting methods that rely on sustainable development has had a key role in creating logistic solutions for companies as well as inhabitants and enterprises in cities and in rural areas. The project of Helsinki's Tukkuutori terminal serves as an example of developing urban logistics. (storage area in central Helsinki with common transportation to the customers in the capital)

Management structure quality and effectiveness:

The role of the project manager at Viikki Food Centre (a public body based at the university of Helsinki) was to coordinate the implementation of the project including administration, reporting, and to lead the networking process, both between companies and the experts.

A project management group was established consisting of: 4 experts on food from the other food centres located in the different South Finland regions (Non profit organisations), the programme manager of the Regional programme of innovative actions, a member each from Finfood ry (Finnish Food Information Association), and the Ministry of transport and 2

members from Trans Veritas Oy (private logistics consultants). It met 3 times a year with good co-operation. This group worked for the overall development and direction of the project.

In addition, Viikki had one staff member working on the day to day running of the project.

Partnership:

- Food expertise centres from the different regions, acting as regional coordinators, all Non Profit Organisations:

South- and South-East Finland: Viikki Food Centre, project coordinator (public body based at Helsinki University,

Central Finland: Agropolis Oy

South East Finland: The Rural Advisory Centre for Kymenlaakso

South-Carelia: The Rural Advisory Centre for South Carelia

Within the regions, the regional coordinators (food expertise centres) were responsible for communication to local companies. In addition, registers of all the food industry enterprises in the region were used. Both the regional coordinators and Transveritas had a close cooperation with the SMEs. The food experts were in charge of reporting within the regions and of giving advice to entrepreneurs and collecting the necessary information from them. New co-operation between the regional coordinators also took place in the new field of logistics, not only in food development.

- Trans Veritas Oy – a consultancy company in the transport and logistics sector. The logistics specialists from Trans Veritas Oy played an important role in investigating the transport possibilities available and offering solutions for different logistical systems in Finland and their suitability to SMEs.
- 28 SMEs participated as beneficiaries of the project.
- For the development of the common ordering system (local food market), Finfood – the Finnish Food Information Association participated by developing the electronic system with their own resources.

Organisation	Type	Role
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	Association	
Agropolis Oy	Food expertise centre, non profit organisation	Regional coordinator
The Rural Advisory Centre for Kymenlaakso	Food expertise centre, non profit organisation	Regional coordinator
The Rural Advisory Centre for South Carelia	Food expertise centre, non profit organisation	Regional coordinator
SMEs	Private firms	Beneficiaries

Marketing:

The target group was SMEs in the food sector. Since the regional coordinators were familiar with the SMEs in their region they were contacted directly by the food experts. The experts contacted 400 enterprises to check their interests in improving their transportation systems and their specific requirements.

The Regional Programme for Innovative Actions organised 2-3 seminars where the project results were presented.

An article was written in a sector based magazine resulting in interest from other Finnish regions who wanted to know how the project had been implemented. The programme manager also promoted the project resulting in interest from Sweden.

Obstacles in terms of design or implementation:

- During the implementation it became clear that the needs of companies varied significantly when it came to time tables, temperatures, amount of merchandise, requirements for hygiene, speed of distribution, market areas and other services. The need for temperature regulated transportation was found to be relatively small compared to other forms of transportation. These factors meant that it was not possible to implement just one or two transportation systems since individual companies require their own service solutions. This increased the complexity of the operation.
- The needs of companies operating in rural areas differ from those of companies that operate on the metropolitan market. For companies operating in South- and South East-Finland, there is one specific element that has to be considered in developing transportation and distribution logistics: Storage. Because of the small-scale stocks of companies in the field of general merchandise trade and the Hotel/Restaurant/Catering sectors, there is a constant need to keep a stock of merchandise. In addition, the greatest demand is usually at weekends, and this aspect sets its own limits to the planning of production and distribution. The logistic requirements of companies in the South and South-East Finland are in most cases met with organising the cost-efficient distribution in the metropolitan area. Transports coming from further off, however, require more organising with basic transportation and regional collecting.
- Transferring to a new transportation system is a strategic decision for a company. Usually, this decision is quickly made only when the capacity of the current system has reached its limits. It turned out that it is surprisingly hard to get companies to evaluate and try out a new transportation system.

Transferability:

The results of the project can be transferred, but it requires the development of company-specific transportation systems. There is not one solution suited to all SMEs in the different sectors.

As a result of the project, several alternative logistic solutions can be proposed. These are based on the results where the transportation of food from different provinces to the metropolitan area became more cost-efficient than with the companies' previous transportation systems.

The common ordering system can be transferred. Finfood ry would be pleased to supply further details. (www.ruokakori.fi)

The energy passport model (see attached), can be transferred. The project has also received interest from Swedish regions. The region of North Karelia had been in contact for further details and will now implement a similar project in their region based on the results of this food logistics project. The energy passport includes a résumé of energy consumption from the manufacturing place into the metropolitan markets, estimated on the basis of detailed information. The same tool could be used for other market areas as well. The initial data could be, for example, vehicle specific information of consumption, distance and refill, and based on the given information, very specific, energy consumption data can be attained.

IV. EFFECTIVENESS

Effectiveness

The goals of the project were achieved:

- The project studied the options available for ordering and transportation systems and helped businesses to choose suitable partners. It worked with each company to find the best transportation model for them.
- Product development with Finfood ry gave rise to a new web ordering system, www.ruokakori.fi, piloted in 10 enterprises who still use it. Here the SMEs sell their products to the Hotel/Restaurant/Catering/specialist shops and the delivery is jointly organised.
- The project developed logistics solutions for bakery products, meat products and dry foods. During the project, a co-operation network was developed for transportation of bakery and meat products. The network is still in place and the members promote each other's products to new customers in new areas. SMEs had not had this co-operation before, also spanning across regions. A common operation model which aimed to reconcile the different distribution needs was tested and implemented. This model included collection from the bakery, delivery to the terminal, sorting, distribution and handling of the empty boxes. Common transportation and terminal solutions were planned, carried out and piloted for the networks in a close cooperation with enterprises belonging to these groups.
- The difficulties SME face in finding partners for cooperation were taken into account in the project and these expectations were met: development of cheaper transportation and delivery methods, rationalisation of delivery and the possibility to centralise the enterprise's resources to productive, core tasks. Individual transportation and delivery

solutions were planned for the enterprises which reduced costs. Developed solutions were adapted to also suit larger models of company co-operation. Entrepreneurs were assisted when necessary in conducting the transportation and delivery agreements. By presenting the cost comparisons of transportation and delivery to SMEs, those were then more interested in co-operation in the delivery of their products when they could see concretely that costs and time would be saved by working together. New markets were also developed through the cooperation.

- Logistical operation models were piloted in 28 enterprises; this resulted in the conclusion of 18 distribution contracts. After the end of the project, one entrepreneur had made of saving of 48% in his transportation costs. Although exact figures are not known, many SMEs increased their turnover and made savings in their transportation costs. A transporting company developed its business for the bakery sector and increased the numbers of trucks and employees. It has created a fixed route with pickup points for the bakeries in: Helsinki-Turku-Lohja-Hanko.
- The project negotiated general contracts on trunk transports, distribution and refrigeration as well as bakery terminal functions and other storage with Matkahuolto Oy, Valio Oy and the Tukkutori terminal. Thus, during the project, co-operation with 3 different, large transportation/storage companies took place. The co-operation with Helsingin Tukkutori terminal provided freezing and refrigeration services as well as collection and terminal storage service for several enterprises. With Valio Oy negotiations were also for transportation and distribution services covering not only the region but the whole country. In addition, for basic transportations into the metropolitan area, 30-40 offers were requested from different transportation companies. This also included shared people/goods transportation in the case of Matkahuolto Oy. The information from this survey then created 6 competitive co-operation models for cost efficient transport of the products for the food producing SMEs.
 - Outsourcing of transportation requires the entrepreneur to fill in different kinds of consignment notes and platform labels as well as renewing invoicing practices. Food producers do not know how to speak to transportation companies so here Transveritas did the work for and with them to make them understand the new requirements.
 - An energy passport was developed which can be used to determine the energy consumption of transports of local food and compare it with the energy consumption of imports. It was implemented for 20 enterprises.
 - One obstacle for expanding the market area of SMEs was the return transportation cost of packing boxes. With disposable packages the enterprises could profitably organise occasional deliveries outside the established market area, as well as reduce the costs and risks regarding the launch of campaigns in a new market area. The project investigated the possibilities to find a disposable bread box (card board) that would respond to the transportation demands. The models of these bread boxes are very often protected and owned by enterprises. As a result of the project, a model that could be used freely was found and tested.
 - The regional coordinators also now have a better cooperation not only in the food sector but also on a larger level.

Impact:

During the project, the regional coordinators gained a deeper understanding of the needs of the SMEs and the cooperation with the SMEs improved as the confidence was developed. The creation of confidence also between SMEs enabled the formation of co-operation models and networks between enterprises. In these cooperation networks needs and product supply were incorporated, resulting in subcontracting and promotion of each others products.

The regional coordinators also learned during the project to see the bigger picture of the problems the SMEs are facing, not only working on the development of food products as is their normal core task in these food development centres.

Outsourcing of transportation adapted to the sector in question provided flexibility and re-planning of methods and scheduling, especially because of the inflexible schedules of the basic delivery options often available (timing, frequency etc). Normally the SMEs would not change their transportation arrangements until the current capacity was exceeded or was not sufficient for another reason. This project showed that by spending time with SMEs, building confidence and concretely showing the benefits of cooperation, SMEs were willing to change, seeing the benefits. The new methods that were offered provided larger and more economic delivery models and have motivated enterprises to increase and rationalise their marketing operations, especially towards those potential clients to whom it was unprofitable or impossible to deliver products using the previous transportation solutions.

Due to fluctuation of demand, enterprises often keep buffer stocks. One aim of the project was to create storage in the metropolitan area. These storage facilities improved the chain of order and delivery and enabled a faster distribution on a more frequent basis and into larger areas.

Sustainability:

The valuable expertise developed during the project and the agreements made with transportation companies will be used in the future through projects of development and services in the region.

The web ordering system and shared transportation are still in use. Also active are the 2 networks in the meat and bakery sector that was developed in the project. The project manager also believes that companies that had an energy passport developed will continue to use it in their marketing.

Viikki food centre is currently looking for further financing since it can see the demand from the enterprises to organise their transportation in a more efficient way and it now aims to do this on a larger scale. Planning of reorganising enterprise-specific requirements and logistics require its own resource allocation.

V. CONCLUSIONS**Lessons learnt:**

- It is worth developing enterprise-specific transportation systems since cost savings are significant

- Building confidence and relationships between the enterprise and the developer is a prerequisite for getting results. The developer must meet with the companies on a one-to-one basis in order to get information. SMEs will otherwise not share information, fearing to give other SMEs an advantage. Time was needed to build this confidence. Explanations about the transportation options available also had to be explained in a clear way related to the specific company needs.
- Environmental emissions and energy consumption will decrease by reorganising transportations
- Efficiently working transportations enables a larger market to be explored.
- Co-operation between enterprises creates new opportunities
- The Helsinki Tukkutori terminal has had a key role in organising the transports. It showed the importance of having a physical storage place in the middle of the city of Helsinki and that from there organise common transportation. On the other hand it was not found useful to setup "collection points" in the periphery where SMEs could leave their food. Instead the transporter picked up the food from the individual SMEs which worked better.

Good practices:

- Co-operation was created between regions, between poorer and richer areas. This co-operation directly affected the SMEs and the regional coordinators.
- Both growth and employment was increased; entering the market became easier through the new transportation methods. Of importance was that the SME now had more free resources for their core business; manufacturing, product development and packing etc.
- The ICT skills of the SMEs were improved by using and being taught how to use the web ordering system. The software was free for them; however they needed their own PC.

Community added value:

The project was concrete and useful, and without the external help and support of the European Union, the entrepreneurs would not have had the resources (time, personnel, expertise etc.) to find solutions for logistical improvements. Making logistical changes are an important strategic decision for an enterprise, and therefore, the functionality and reliability of the decision had to be 100 % ensured before testing. Hence, the changes for the operation models in place developed really slowly. The first piloting took place at the end of 2003 and continued in the beginning of 2004. If the realisation period had been longer, there would have been more practical arrangements made for the SMEs.

Anything you would like to add ?

After the end of the project the project manager has received many thanks from the participating enterprises for being given the opportunity to improve their logistical system.

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The Innovative Actions Unit of DG REGIO thanks you for your co-operation !