



Good Practice Story title: Can a municipality be elevated to a world-class nature tourism destination through public sector cooperation?

Destination: Posio

Country: Finland

Submitting organisation: Posio municipality

Category:

Destination Management

Nature & Scenery

Environment & Climate

Culture & Tradition

Thriving Communities

Business & Marketing

Destination description:

Posio, located in Finnish Lapland, is a picturesque municipality known for its stunning natural beauty and unique attractions. Situated 60 kilometres south of the Arctic Circle, Posio spans about 3,500 square kilometres while having less than 3,000 inhabitants. This serene destination is renowned for its wilderness, with vast forests, numerous lakes, and beautiful hills.

One of Posio's most famous attractions is Riisitunturi National Park, celebrated for its breathtaking winter landscapes featuring snow-laden trees and expansive views. The park offers excellent opportunities for hiking, forest skiing, and photography. Another highlight is Korouoma valley, a dramatic 30-kilometre-long gorge with impressive frozen waterfalls in winter, ideal for ice climbing and nature excursions.

Posio is also home to Pentik's northernmost ceramics factory in the world and the Pentik Culture Centre, which showcases ceramic art and Finnish design, reflecting the region's rich cultural heritage.



Summary of Good Practice Story:

Posio, a small municipality in southern Lapland, is renowned for its strong public-private sector cooperation in sustainable development. A prime example is the development of Riisitunturi National Park. After the state-owned enterprise managing state-owned land, Metsähallitus, built a road and parking area nearby, winter visits to the park increased tenfold. This likely alleviated visitor pressure on parks in the neighbouring municipalities but necessitated enhancements in Riisitunturi, such as reinforcing trails, adding signage, and constructing rest spots. Local businesses have contributed by establishing a wilderness café and gear rental services at the parking area and maintaining winter cycling and skiing routes in the park. Businesses bringing visitors to the park have cooperation agreements with Parks & Wildlife Finland unit of Metsähallitus, committing to shared sustainable tourism principles and guidelines.

Moreover, Posio municipality, in cooperation with the local tourism association, has supported businesses in obtaining sustainability certifications, earning Finland's first Sustainable Travel Finland destination label from Visit Finland. Later on, Posio received Gold designation in the Green Destinations Certification Program and Posio municipality and tourism association facilitated piloting of Good Travel Seal sustainability certification to the Finnish market. Posio is now recognised as one of the leaders in sustainable tourism, particularly known for Riisitunturi National Park, which remains a well-maintained nature attraction despite high visit numbers.

Issues faced:

As with other small destinations, Posio requires extensive cooperation for sustainable development and destination marketing due to limited resources of individual stakeholders. Posio's tourism is developed and marketed through cooperation between the municipality, Parks & Wildlife Finland, and the Posio Tourism Association, which includes most local tourism businesses. Posio had untapped potential as a nature tourism destination because the Riisitunturi National Park was underutilised due to poor accessibility. Local tourism businesses also had limited opportunities to benefit from Riisitunturi for the same reasons, leading nature tourism to focus on nearby municipalities' attractions and Posio's Korouoma valley.

Solution:

Parks & Wildlife Finland's solution to promote sustainable tourism and increase Posio's visibility was straightforward: building a road and parking lot near Riisitunturi National Park. Finnish national parks are free for visitors, so the investment was justified by the indirect





benefits from recreational and commercial use. Maintenance costs of the road are considerable due to regular snow plowing and frost damage. The construction, completed in 2009, proved worthwhile as winter visits to Riisitunturi increased tenfold over ten years. The rise of social media and the park's photogenic nature contributed to the increase. In 2020, the road was widened and parking lot expanded, rest areas built, and trails further reinforced. To ensure sustainability, businesses utilising the national park sign a cooperation agreement with Parks & Wildlife Finland, paying fees per usage and committing to principles of sustainable tourism. Parks & Wildlife Finland closely monitors the increasing number of visits to the national park and any potential negative impacts, and is prepared to take action to mitigate these impacts.

Methods, steps, and tools applied:

Since the 1960s, marked trails have guided tourists to Riisitunturi, with a wilderness hut constructed there in 1969. Proposals for Riisitunturi National Park emerged in 1970s, leading to its establishment in 1982. Riisitunturi area was found to have conservation value, particularly due to its hanging bogs. The area is also known for its hawk owls and pine grosbeaks, snow covered candle-like Siberian spruces, and vast views over hundreds of lakes and hills.

Parks & Wildlife Finland unit of the Metsähallitus, responsible for managing Riisitunturi National Park and other state-owned protected land, has created its sustainable tourism principles already in 2004. Tourism businesses operating in national parks or those affiliated with the parks commit to the principles and guidelines set by Parks & Wildlife Finland. Businesses compensate Parks & Wildlife Finland for the usage of rest areas and other national park infrastructure based on customer numbers. Parks & Wildlife Finland manages visitor pressure to ensure the preservation of natural values and wilderness.

In the cooperation agreement, the commitment involves the following aspects:

1. Supporting the preservation of valuable features at the sites and promoting their protection.
2. Minimising the load on the environment.
3. Strengthening local aspects.
4. Promoting the use of the sites to enhance health and well-being.
5. Promoting growth and job creation in the local economy.
6. Collaboratively communicating the values and services of the site.

Posio Tourism Association, founded in 2005, market Posio as a tourism destination, advocate for its members' interests in cooperation with public sector, and represent Posio in regional and national tourism development initiatives. The association has 14 international tourism





businesses, many of them small enterprises with fewer than five employees. Posio municipality has supported the association since its inception, recognising that tourism business membership fees alone cannot cover all its expenses. Posio municipality sees tourism destination marketing as part of its strategy to attract new residents.

Riisitunturi National Park's enhanced accessibility through road and parking construction in 2009 led to a tenfold increase in visits over ten years. With Riisitunturi becoming a globally recognised attraction, local businesses increasingly utilised its trails and rest areas for commercial activities. Posio's reliably snowy winters and winter sports opportunities have not gone unnoticed by those considering a move to the countryside.

Posio municipality and Posio Tourism Association cooperate closely with Parks & Wildlife Finland to ensure all stakeholders' needs and perspectives are considered in tourism development. Recent initiatives include the addition of a wilderness café adjacent to the Riisitunturi National Park parking lot in 2020, a project facilitated by Posio municipality's economic development services.

Posio was first to receive Visit Finland's Sustainable Travel Finland label in 2020, with over half of its international tourism businesses achieving sustainability certification. This was supported by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development through its local action group Koillismaan Leader. Posio joined Green Destinations Certification Program in 2022, achieving a score of 8.9 out of 10. Moreover, in 2022, Posio municipality and Posio Tourism Association, together with Green Destinations Finland, piloted Good Travel Seal sustainability certification in Posio. By 2023, over 100 Finnish tourism businesses have received Good Travel Seal.

As part of its strategic choices to operate more sustainably as municipality and tourism destination, Posio municipality has joined the Towards Carbon Neutral Municipalities Network, committing to reduce emissions by 80% from the 2007 level by 2030. Posio municipality also enables active participation of its residents in work towards sustainability. Posio municipality, together with national institutions, has strongly supported voluntary water body restoration efforts in Posio since 2021.

Riisitunturi National Park's latest development in 2022 was the inauguration of a 20-kilometre trail for winter cycling and skiing, maintained by a local tourism business. The park features also a longer 26-kilometre summer hiking route, offering diverse experiences for visitors to explore and enjoy. While the shorter four-kilometre day trail lacks official winter maintenance, its high visitation numbers ensures year-round accessibility as the snow packs firm on the trail under the footsteps of visitors.

Achievements and results: The majority of Posio tourism businesses employ fewer than five people, and many of the entrepreneurs also engage in activities outside the tourism sector.



Typically, tourism entrepreneurs in Posio are local individuals who integrate tourists into their daily lives, such as fishing or observing reindeer herding. The trails in Riisitunturi National Park are popular among locals, attracting visitors to witness seasonal changes, northern lights, and magnificent frost-covered trees year after year. Authenticity continues to be one of the leading principles in developing tourism products in Posio.

Despite the emergence of Riisitunturi National Park as a world-class nature tourism attraction, Posio tourism revenue has not grown significantly since 2009 when it was first studied. Direct tourism income totalled €7.5 million in 2019. However, Posio municipality, among other local tourism stakeholders, recognises tourism as a vital industry with considerable potential and therefore strongly supports its sustainable development.

Success should not be measured solely in monetary terms. Riisitunturi National Park has become a globally renowned attraction, sustainably utilised by local tourism businesses adhering to shared principles. Posio tourism stakeholders continue to pursue sustainable development supported by public funding and guided by sustainability certifications and programmes.

Lessons learned and advice:

Posio, long overshadowed by more renowned neighbours like Rovaniemi and Kuusamo, has actively pursued development initiatives to raise its profile as a sustainable tourism destination. The long-term strategic choices have begun to produce lasting results.

Joint projects, focusing on sustainable tourism and enhancing international recognition, have been funded through sources like the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). Additionally, Posio has received support for its smaller initiatives through the local action group Koillismaan Leader, backed by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development. Municipal and other public funding has been crucial for all development projects. Posio Tourism Association has represented tourism businesses in these initiatives. The investments in sustainable tourism have made Posio known within the tourism industry and among travellers.

The successful development of Riisitunturi National Park exemplifies how relatively small public investment has led to increased awareness of Posio as tourism destination and municipality. The next big thing for Posio might be utilising its many crystal-clear waters and extensive waterways for sustainable tourism. Development funding has already been sought.



Recognitions and additional references

2020: First in Finland to receive Visit Finland's Sustainable Travel Finland destination label

2022: Gold designation (8,9/10) in Green Destinations Certification Program

2023: Finnish Lapland Tourist Board's award for efforts in sustainable tourism

Stakeholders

[Posio municipality](#)

[Posio Tourism Association](#)

[Parks & Wildlife Finland](#)

Posio attractions

[Riisitunturi National Park](#)

[Pentik Culture Centre](#)

[Korouoma Nature Reserve](#)

Other relevant links

[Parks & Wildlife Finland cooperation agreements](#)

[Parks & Wildlife Finland Principles of Sustainable Tourism](#)

[Visit Finland Sustainable Travel Finland programme](#)

Posio social media channels

[Posio municipality Facebook](#)

[Posio municipality Instagram](#)

[Posio tourism Facebook](#)

[Posio tourism Instagram](#)