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Unique initiatives for future rural development: culture-uncommon thematic villages in Lithuania

Abstract: *The expanding possibilities for a better quality of life increasingly accelerate the demand for various unique and uncommon services. The expansion of services had been recently spectated in all sectors and spheres of human activity. The impacts of these changes become evident both in cities and the countryside. The increased requirements and demand for the variety of services in rural areas, at the same time, raised the value of unique cultural resources, specific regions. However, creative innovators found new ways of using unique cultural resources in geographically distanced regions by establishing culture-uncommon thematic villages, which have the potential to mature into unique self-organized business models.*

This paper aims to explain the potential of using unique cultural resources in culture-uncommon environments for future regional development in the EU on the example of thematic villages. Based on a case study, performed in Lithuania in 2018, this research gives evidence of a successful initiative, developed by using cultural uniqueness in the culture-uncommon environment. Research results reveal that creative application of cultural uniqueness in the particular environment might add to the development of rural region both in the economic and social sense. Culture-uncommon thematic villages hold potential to grow till fully mature self-organized business models and expand with the social and economic impact on the particular region's development. Therefore, it is suggested to focus on fostering the use of unique cultural resources in the EU CAP support schemes 2020+ next to the aims of making the EU agricultures equally developed by all indicators in all of the EU regions.

Keywords: *culture-uncommon thematic villages, Lithuania, unique initiatives, rural development*

Regional policy paradigm in recent decades lead to significant changes. The new paradigm is considering regional policy as a tool to assess new critical economic and social features for the 21st century (Gore, 2015). The decrease of negative elements is no longer an appropriate state policy strategy for the prospective countryside with numbers of residential and other advantages (Vidickiene et al., 2016; Strobele & Hunziker, 2017; Bosworth & Venhorst, 2018).

Overall, the previous EU rural policy aimed to make the EU regions equally competitive with maximum productivity enter a new phase of maturity. It should focus now on what had left as unique and unused resources, which hold the potential within, to compose new drivers for rural prosperity. It might be achieved with creative use of particular unique resources making them new generation initiatives which tend to become durable family or local community business models (Bos et al., 2015; Dodds & Jolliffe, 2016; Vidickiene et al., 2016; Walter, 2016). Therefore, regions must be differentiated by the factors that enhance the unique region's competitiveness, and other important socio-economic development criteria: level of education, level of innovation, entrepreneurship level, living standards, etc.

Recently many regional policy scientist and experts in various international scientific conferences and meetings discuss the possibility to use regional uniqueness as an economic advantage rather than attempts to highlight the dimensions of competitiveness (e.g. OECD, 2011; The IMD's World Competitiveness Yearbook, 2018; World Economic Forum, 2018; 9th Annual Forum of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, 2018; Baltic Sea Region Programme Conference, 2018). Thus, uniqueness becomes more and more often recognized as a crucial driver for rural prosperity in the knowledge age.

This paper aims to explain the potential of the use of cultural resources in culture-uncommon environments for future regional development in the EU on the example of thematic villages. The research is explanatory in its nature and is based on a holistic approach using qualitative methodology. Theoretical findings are followed by case study to give actual evidence of creatively used unique cultural resources in the culture-uncommon environment to create a competitive business model using a place-based approach and unique cultural resources.

Theoretical background for using cultural uniqueness as a success factor in modern rural development

The new period of the EU regional policy is interconnected with knowledge society (Tovey, 2016). In the knowledge society, sustainable development of regions highly depends on the ability to use unique resources as critical success

factors (Assche & Hornidge, 2015; Naldi et al., 2015; Smith, 2015; Chan et al., 2016; Salvia & Quaranta, 2017). Modern and creative use of knowledge society features might become crucial success factors for the development of European regions in the future (Dimitris, 2006; Curran & Storey, 2016; Mose, 2016; Vidickiene et al., 2016; Vorley et al., 2016; Dragoi & Balgar, 2017; Marsden, 2017). Many recent findings stress the importance of the concept of “learning region”. Alongside, networking and clustering, innovation and skilled people become crucial resources to empower “basic skills” and as unique resources convert them into the competitive advantage of the region.

Uniqueness in common understanding refers to a state or condition wherein someone or something is unlike anything else in comparison (Weisse, 2004). When used to humans, it often relates to personal characteristics, or some specific attitude, signalling that it is unlike the personality traits that are prevalent in that individual’s culture (Strack, 2006). When the term uniqueness is used concerning an object, it is often within the realm of product, with the term being a factor used to publicize or market the product to make it stand out from other products within the same category. Therefore unique initiatives might be understood as the use of uniqueness to develop a particular business model, which tend to become attractive when exploiting uniqueness as an object to attract people.

Various unique features of the region can be taken as a new way of developing economic activities and using this for the economic advantage. Thus uniqueness becomes an important element for the creation of regional prosperity. Use of region’s uniqueness leads to regional economic benefit using new success factors. Additionally, uniqueness itself can be named as a reason that can help to get an economic advantage by using special features of the region, the strengths of the regions that exist at the moment or region basic skills which can also be unique. These unique elements of the region used in the economic activities can make the region very specific and thus reaching its competitive advantage not in a reckless way but based on sustainable development, cooperation and responsible environmental principles (Gedminaitė - Raudone, 2013).

The concept of cultural uniqueness is important for the creation of regional prosperity and it should be used for getting the economic benefit when the new success factors emerged in modern rural development. Cultural uniqueness itself can be named as a reason that can help to get an economic advantage by using special features of the region, the strengths of the regions that exist at the moment or region basic skills which can also be unique. Thematic villages are one of the possible tools for regional development with a focus on a certain topic (e.g., local food, craft, healing or gardening practices, history, etc.). Applying the concept of the thematic village provides an opportunity to strengthen the social activeness and self-confidence of the residents of the thematic village, and also for getting additional income.

The cultural environment is normally understood as a set of beliefs, practices, customs and behaviours that are found to be common to everyone that is living within a certain population (Madison et al., 2009). Therefore, culture-common environment for a particular unique initiative would be understood as an environment, for which this initiative is acceptable as ordinary activity in a particular field. Accordingly, culture-uncommon environment refers to different from a particular local culture environment with a set of beliefs, practices, customs and behaviours that are found in another cultural environment. For instance, American culture is different from European and, therefore, particular innovative initiatives which come to the EU from America are unique and culture-uncommon for Europeans. The same situation might be illustrated with another example from Scandinavia and Europe. The Viking culture has very expressive and specific features that are not usual, or different from the bigger share of Europe.

In this research, Viking culture initiatives in European countries are considered to be unique initiatives in Viking culture-uncommon (i.e. European) environment. Thus, these unique initiatives developed as business models compose particular competitive advantages and create attractiveness for places to visit. At the same time, such initiatives contribute to modern rural development as they ensure rural vitality of particular regions.

Methodology

The study is explanatory in its nature and is based on a holistic approach. Aiming to better disclose scientific approaches and provide actual evidence for the value of unique initiatives that might innovatively serve for rural prosperity in future, a qualitative methodology was employed.

Taking into account the fact, that the EU support had been put to equal access in all regions, evident disparities among them still exist. It means that abilities to acquire publicly provided funds differ among regions, and there are reasons behind it (Naldi et al., 2015; Mose, 2016; Vanhove, 2018). Theoretical findings suggest that there exist particular success factors, which ensure purposeful and fruitful use of opportunities, provided by the post-industrial phase of development. Accordingly, there is a sense to employ appropriate issue-focused methodologies to get deeper into using qualitative research methods.

The case study method was selected as appropriate to solve the issue and get actual evidence for previous theoretical presumptions. The case study will help to explain how and why decisive success actions originated: at a micro level – what is specific to the area and project; and macro-level – what are the needs for national legislation that should be taken into account to accelerate such type of initiatives. Besides, the choice of the case study method was inspired by the fact that, after reviewing the research on the issue, it has become clear that the relationship between rural vitality and the content of implemented projects, characteristics of participants and implementation methods have not been studied before.

The case study method, based on Yin (2003), is appropriate when certain criteria are met: a) the main purpose of the study is to explain the subject under investigation, to find answers to *how?* and *why?*; b) there is no possibility to manipulate the behaviour of the investigated actors; c) contextual relevance of the study; d) unclear relationship between the phenomenon under investigation and the context.

In this research, studying the success of the unique cultural initiative in a culture-uncommon environment as rural prosperity factor of Lithuanian countryside, the aim is to explain how the project, the purpose of which corresponds to the decisive success factor in the development of the post-industrial village, contributed to solving a certain problem of two families at the micro-level and why it became a decisive factor for the success of rural prosperity in the region, where it was implemented.

Since the project has already been implemented and the obvious result is that the behaviour of the actors involved and the project organization process was not affected. The contextual analysis helps to assess the transferability of the project under investigation to address the prosperity problems of other rural areas.

Aiming to answer the main questions of the case study, how and why the project became a decisive factor for increasing the prosperity of the countryside in the Lithuanian rural area where the project was implemented, the following case study questions were formed:

1. What is the content of the project?
2. What geographic location and natural resource advantages does the settlement have?
3. Who initiated the project?
4. Where did the idea of the project come from (during the discussion of the activist group, did anyone see a similar example abroad or in Lithuania, etc.)?
5. Who participated in the project: activist professions and education?
6. What interest does the project have in the implementation of the project: a) individual project participants and b) local government?
7. How do the external organizations or individuals, who do not live in this area, cooperate in developing the project?
8. What support was received and will be needed in the future? What would project promoters do faster if support was provided at the start of project implementation?
9. What else could be improved and developed by increasing the vitality of the settlement?
10. What special features should the settlement and its population have to implement a similar project?

Using an explanatory single-case study methodology the case was carefully selected and there is an opportunity to thoroughly describe the main mechanism for using cultural uniqueness as a success factor, which would not be allowed in a survey or experimental research strategy (Yin, 2003).

This research corresponds to the success factor that transforms the unique way of life (Viking lifestyle) into business (“Viking village”) and thus creates conditions for the region’s prosperity in the future. It is illustrated by the established culturally unique thematic “Viking village” in Viking culture-uncommon environment of Lithuania, more precisely, in one of the 60 districts of Lithuania, Širvintos district.

Results and Discussion

Viking culture unique thematic “Viking village” would be the culture-common initiative in Scandinavia, were Vikings made significant input in the historical development of Scandinavian regions. Until now “Viking villages” are quite popular in Scandinavian counties and serve as a historical heritage in a form of various live experimental museums, which attract a lot of local visitors as well as tourists from around the world.

Lithuania represents a culture-uncommon environment for unique “Viking village”, since Lithuanian culture and traditions significantly differ from Scandinavian. Lithuania is a small country in north-eastern Europe with a population of 2.9 million as of 2018. It is also known as one of the three Baltic States, next to the Latvia and Estonia, situated along the south-eastern shore of the Baltic Sea. Lithuania is bordered by its so-called ‘Baltic sister’ Latvia to the north, Belarus to the east and south, Poland to the south, and Kaliningrad Oblast, a Russian exclave, to the southwest. Vilnius is the capital and the largest city with 0.5 million inhabitants, listed among the 30 Greenest European Capital Cities in 2011 (TGCI, 2012). The country is known for its UNESCO World Heritage Sites: a unique Vilnius Historical Centre – the Old Town is recognized among the largest and most beautiful old towns in Central and Eastern Europe; Kernavė, is the first capital of Lithuania, and until today has preserved traces of the most important stages of the humankind history; the Curonian Spit, deservedly titled the Lithuanian paradise, has retained its social and cultural importance, as local communities adapted to the changes in the natural environment to survive; and Struve Geodetic Arc, one of the largest and most impressive endeavour to determine the size and shape of the Earth (UNESCO, 2019). Among world’s Intangible Cultural Heritage, Lithuania represents the Baltic song and dance celebrations, Cross-crafting and its symbolism; and ‘Sutartines’, Lithuanian multipart songs. Lithuanians are also unique for the official Lithuanian language, which is often said to be “the most archaic and conservative among the live Indo-European languages” (Zinkevičius, 1993). A small piece of the heritage described might be emphasized in this research as a reflection of values, which were settled,

protected, cherished and handed over by Lithuanian people from generation to generation throughout the centuries (Wolchik & Curry, 2014), and which are completely different from Scandinavian Viking culture.

The above-described features of Lithuania are considered a completely culture-uncommon environment for the establishment of “Viking village” and, therefore, represents an appropriate case to study for this research. Further analysis is devoted to the precise case study to explain how unique Viking culture initiative became a business model using success factors of the post-industrial phase of rural development in Lithuania and how it might contribute as a future recipe to the development of regions using unique cultural initiatives in culture-uncommon environments.

Content of the project. The “Viking village” is a non-governmental organization, established by two families. The authors of the idea are convinced that the greatest value is the family and the most meaningful investment is the children. Therefore, one of the main goals of this organization is to promote meaningful, active children’s leisure with family, friends and peers. At the beginning of the creation of the “Viking village”, the authors of the idea did not know exactly what the outcome of the project would be. Admiring the 9th-12th century people’s lifestyle, warfare in the Viking Age itself in northern and eastern Europe, initiators were looking for the strongest word to title the project, reflecting this historical period not only in the geographical area of Lithuania, but also across Europe. The creators of “Viking Village” were also convinced that they would work with children, and therefore sought for a name that would seem like a playful, interesting and attractive curiosity, above all, for children. The name “Viking” was chosen as the main hero of the Vikings in the general sense. Over time, the idea has evolved, attaching itself to a conceived name that, according to the author of the idea, is a great help to achieve their primary goal of communicating with children. The “Viking village” implements live history education programs and organizes day camps for children and crafts celebration families (Viking Village, 2015b; Viking Village..., 2019).

The founders of “Viking Village” counted that before the idea was embodied, they had already spent more than 10,000 hours working with children. The invaluable experience of social, psychological and pedagogical work gained when working with children with disabilities from social risk groups living in rural areas, volunteers from other organizations in Lithuania and abroad, and so on. The authors of the idea emphasize that they follow the basic principle of their activity: the best education is when the educator feels left part of himself and the child has found himself. Therefore, while working, they seek to involve children actively in the process of education, and the acquired practice allows choosing the most effective methodologies to attract and creatively educate children (Viking Village... 2016). The main methodology used in the “Viking Village” is experiential education or “learning by doing”, which allows children to experience the content of learning. Therefore, in “Viking Village” all education is implemented according to the

principle of experiential education: less speaking, more doing. Effective methods, objects, copies of finds and museum exhibits (over 100) revive history, periods, lifestyles of people. Education is based on the sources used in general school education, but in the “Viking Village”, they become live illustrations of historical textbooks. Things are touched, explored, eaten, and compared. When selecting an object (e.g. board games, writing, Lithuania of the King Mindaugas, Viking Age), they try to analyze it with different comparative methods, illustrating history with educational means. Speaking of medieval board games, they are displayed and analyzed throughout the history of the game from ancient times to the present day. When it comes to the Viking Age, it is not only the history of Lithuania in the Viking Age that is being shown to children but also compared in the European context, encouraging the perception that Lithuania is a small part of the big world.

Geographic location and natural resource advantages of the settlement. Viking Village is located near Družai village, in Širvintos district, distant from the capital of Lithuania – Vilnius approximately 50 km, from local Širvintos town – 5 km. The Družai settlement is located just off the national highway and up to the Viking Village is a paved road. So it is a very convenient place for guests to come not only from the capital city but also from other big cities of Lithuania. In 2018, there were 102 homesteads with 311 inhabitants in Družai village, which is the second village of Širvintos eldership. Community activity in Družai village became more active since 2002. Družai neighbourhoods are more attractive from a geographical point of view than abundant natural resources. The greatest advantage of the area from natural resources is the valley of the river Širvinta flowing out of the area, distinguished by its picturesque nature and the riverbed offering many challenges. That is why the area is attractive for nature lovers, aspiring for adventure, water entertainment.

Project initiators. The main idea initiator of the “Viking village” is Mindaugas Korsakas. He is a promoter of the “Viking” way of life, but his partners, wife Judita Korsakienė and his sister Edita Gilė are equally involved in the realization and development of the idea. Therefore, the “Viking village” can be called a joint project of two families.

Pathway of the project idea. The idea arose to allow every initiator to engage in the kind of activities related to life in nature. In the Širvintos district, the initiators of the idea hold 5 ha plot area next to the river. According to them, a more accurate description of this situation would be a description of the place available, and the “Viking village” Museum of Living History was born by integrating the experience of each. The Museums of Viking Lifestyle or similar activities as larger or smaller living history museums, are situated all over the world and are popular in Scandinavian Europe (Denmark, Sweden, Norway). Usually, it is the initiative of reconstruction club members or state museums.

“Viking village” as innovation is original because all activities, according to the initiators, are “grown” in their family. The innovation is also unique

because it is a family organization. In Lithuania, there have been no similar initiatives in the area of “Vikings” on a regional or national scale.

Project actors. Most of the activity is organized by the authors of the idea (4 persons), by sharing roles, investing their funds and time. Judita Korsakienė performs the functions of director of the public institution “Viking Village” in parallel with educational activities. Mindaugas Korsakas takes care of the experiential educational activities of the museum, produces antique board games, other wood carving articles and is the main builder of this museum. Edita Gilė supports them in their education. She takes care of the possibilities of cooperation with the institutions, is responsible for the project activities and presents the “Viking village” as a unique innovation in various events. Paulius Gilis (husband of Edita Gilė) takes care of the logistics and technical part of the museum. The website, information on social networks, the building of an experiential museum, and the maintenance are organized by themselves, but they consult a lot with specialists from different fields – archaeologists, teachers, reconstructors, etc.

The founders of the “Viking village” are innovators by nature. In their life, they have tested various jobs. Lessons learned and personal initiativeness are the factors that led to the implementation of the “Viking village” idea. The authors of the idea, through their education and the development of their previously acquired professions, are constantly supplementing knowledge from various fields and gathering the training which is demanded at that time.

Interest in the implementation of the project. Individual project participants can be divided into three main groups according to their interests. The first stakeholder group is the authors of the idea to live in nature and engage in activities that meet the needs of social and cultural influences: communicating with different people, children from different social groups, helping them to know the world, cultures, and traditions of various activities.

The second group is represented by the main visitors to the “Viking village” – pupils and children. Their most important goal is to spend their time actively in nature. Pupils can participate in educational programs in the history of life, where they learn how to build fire, grind grains, shoot arcades, play games, see military armour, and so on. Their emotions and thinking are inspired by interesting stories, interactive tasks that are based on general education programs, and the skills acquired to increase the motivation to learn the history and make it easier to understand.

The third group is active leisure lovers and families. In “Viking village” there is a possibility to rent kayaks and camps, and stay in the countryside. Those who want to break away from the bustle of the city and stay without electricity and the Internet, can settle down in a cosy campsite, spend a few days in the Vikings tent, sit down on the bonfire, and listen to stories about Vikings and antiquity. “Viking Village” is proposed as an opportunity to learn how

to shoot the arch. Seekers of exceptional senses can celebrate their birthday, as people did in ancient times and get to know the 11th-12th centuries. It is also possible to become a Viking military, measure soldier's ammunition and test weapons, play antique table and field games, the Viking game "Kubb", swim in the river, and taste delicacies on the campfire. Visitors to the "Viking Village" can also participate in the Old Craft Camp and get acquainted with ancient culture and crafts.

Until now, local authorities were not actively involved in the project. The initiators of the idea think their activities are known to the municipality, but there have been no cooperation initiatives so far. But in a small municipality, communication with individuals is taking place. Efforts are being made as far away from political issues as possible, but at the same time, it harms relations with the authorities. According to the initiators of the idea, when elected local government is changed, people also change, and accordingly, communication changes as well. So sometimes it becomes difficult to ensure the continuity of some ideas already discussed and generated.

External organizations or individuals, who do not live in this area, but cooperate in developing the project. The "Viking village" does not belong to any other organization, is unrelated to any political, religious or state institutions and, according to the initiators, does not promote the lifestyle of any single tribe. The project involves collaboration with several types of organizations.

The first type of organizations are the institutions that support the "Viking Village" projects. Due to their support, new educational methods are being developed; schools are visited in various towns of Lithuania.

Organizations of the second type – museums and other organizations that help to gain experience that is necessary and important for the implementation of educational activities and development of "Viking village". Very fruitful cooperation in Lithuania is established with Kernavė Museum. And extremely valuable is a foreign collaboration with the experienced Viking Museum Lofotr (1983), which is located in the north of Norway, on the island of Westvagoya in the archipelago of Lofoten. This experiential museum teaches to implement education and organize the activities of the museum profitably. The "Viking Village" has recently become a member of the "Reach for Change" Incubator of the Global Fund in Sweden, and Edita Gilė, one of the founders of the idea, has become the leader of social change under this fund. Participation in this incubator helps strengthen the organization fighting weaknesses, teaches how to plan and evaluate activities aiming to enhance social impact and create a sustainable social business. At present, she has been among the top 10 leaders of this fund (www.reachforchange.lt), having overcome numerous recruitment stages in Lithuania.

The organizations of the third type share experiences in education with children. These are Lithuanian museums or teachers who are being educated or trained.

Support received and demanded in the future. The “Viking village” has received support for several projects from Lithuanian central government institutions. The largest implemented project is the Mobile Life History Museum “Viking Age” (Viking Village, 2015a), funded by the European Economic Area and Norwegian Financial Mechanism (EEA Grants). During the project, in collaboration with the Lofotr Viking Museum (Norway), a mobile life history museum “Viking Age” was created and it keeps travelling through Lithuanian schools (Mobile living history..., 2016). The project helped grow the “Viking village”, but it was a great challenge to learn the bureaucratic subtleties of public procurement and other international project management issues. However, the initiators were assisted by goodwill workers from various government and other institutions (the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Lithuania and the Central Project Management Agency) who intensively and thoroughly consulted in the face of various situations. One of the biggest challenges of this project was to align an art product into public procurement requirements. However, this support was targeted, project-oriented, but not directly focused on developing the organization’s capabilities.

Initiators have plans to apply for the EU funds for the development of the organization. This support would be a great help in implementing the planned targets much faster than it would be possible when using only own individual internal resources. Support is expected from local authorities in the field of tourism, publicizing, attracting visitors to the Širvintos region, which is not famous for tourism yet. Support at the national level is also needed, as the “Viking village” started with a particularly low focus on non-formal education. Thus, the activities of the “Viking village”, at that time, simply did not fit into any frame: usually, the historic type of education was narrative, excluding children, activities, allowing touching, measuring weapons, tasting various products, and so on. Recently, the situation has improved, European projects promoting non-formal education in traditional and non-traditional settings (museums, parks) have emerged, but it would be useful to improve the legal framework for the liberalization of educational methods.

Further developments focused to increase the vitality of the settlement. The initiators of the idea “Viking Village” would like to expand the range of interactive activities for children – the area is suitable for it, and the initiators are full of ideas. They feel that “Viking Village” as an idea is at the centre of historical education; it is gradually becoming “grown-up”. Therefore, there are ideas to diversify activities: to organize survival camps for a wider group of clients, to expand experiential education, other sensory activities in the areas of natural cognition, to create a small animal farm and so on. Initiators want to start activities that can help reduce the urban gap between nature and education or sensation. “Viking village” activities would be relevant and useful for volunteering. Education is a time-consuming activity, so the initiators lack the time to look for volunteers, training, and communication and so on. Therefore, this area is planned to be developed in the future. At the local level, cooperation with various non-governmental organizations working

in a similar field would be beneficial. The founders of the “Viking village” have ideas for developing cooperation at the regional level. There are no tourism promotion programs, organizations, centres, activities in Širvintos district that could help to publicize and attract visitors, therefore cooperation with the municipality would give benefits not only to the “Viking village”, but also improve the activities of the municipality.

Special features aiming to implement a similar project. For natural resources, a similar project can be implemented in any area where there are conditions for organizing various activities in nature. In this case, the river Širvinta and its valley, a beautiful, wild landscape, have advantages for experiential education. According to the initiators of the idea, the right place to take your favourite activities and combine it with work is an important factor for successful project implementation.

As social business “Viking village” needs more time for development. Investments in “Viking village” are currently unprofitable. However, it is the stage of learning and looking for opportunities and perspectives on how to adapt existing equipment to a wider range of activities. The “Reach for Change” Foundation provides a lot of advice and assistance in this area.

The biggest challenge in implementing a similar project is to develop a socially-oriented idea with extremely low starting capital. If the initiators of such educational project do not have an economic or managerial background, it is not possible to create services that would not only create social and cultural added value for society but would also be profitable. Paying less attention to the cost of education compared to the attention paid to the content of education is constantly leading to missing cost-efficiency questions. But quality is always on top.

The most important thing in this project is the ability to turn a lifestyle into an income-generating activity, to work without employees, to constantly improve, to find new solutions. According to the initiators of the project, for the implementation of a similar project, it is the most important to put the main goal as not the desire to squeeze out as much profit, as to make the idea live, and the process is a delightful activity for heart and soul. Also, project organizers believe that people are increasingly appreciated by small, family-run organizations that can touch, become aware of the true creators of ideas, rather than hired employees. However, it is a very long, complicated and hard way of self-cultivation. The fact that two family members are related to the rest of the family and it helps to move forward firmly: when one of the “hands-off” or lack strengths the initiative is taken over by others. Founders already spent five years in the “Viking village”, and it has already demanded a lot of effort and time, but the impressions and gratitude experienced by visitors motivate them to continue their activities and foster new ideas as unique initiatives in culture-uncommon environments.

Conclusions

In the industrial era, living place was expected to be close to the workplace. Nowadays rural prosperity is much more accelerated by the attractiveness of living and running favourable dream activity, which might also generate income as an innovative business model in the rural countryside.

Change, based on social innovations, that uses unique cultural resources in culture-uncommon environments can make better progress throughout the region when it is accelerated by appropriate government policy, based on modern principles of the knowledge society. Rural development public policy should necessarily support entrepreneurship and various innovations, that creatively empower unused resources of the regions.

Implemented case study proved that there is a great demand for innovations in the post-industrial stage of rural development and they should be supported via different EU programmes and other funds. It does prove the importance and urgency of various support schemes according to changes in basic needs of the rural residents. Future support schemes should take into account different individual and community initiatives to ensure rural prosperity in regions.

Performed case study elucidates the crucial role of knowledge and innovative thinking of local leaders – all of them are higher educated, are addicts of their idea, have international experience in collaboration or other activities. However, rural prosperity agents – innovators – feel lack of knowledge in economics and management basics and, therefore, are not able to use effectively government and private financial funds to implement their brilliant ideas.

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