

Project number: 6255
Funding source: EU Northern Periphery Programme

Date: May, 2015
Project dates: Jul 2011 – Mar 2014

Craft International



Key external stakeholders:

Fáilte Ireland; Bord Bia; Crafts Council of Ireland; Northern Periphery Programme; LEADER companies; SME's and local authorities.

Practical implications for stakeholders:

This development project resulted in:

- 1) Increased awareness of international models of rural enterprise support that are applicable to Ireland
- 2) Leveraging INTERREG programmes and international networks to support rural enterprise and connect with international stakeholders
- 3) Developing Irish stakeholder network to access these funding sources and integrate with national networks

The outcome/technology or information/recommendation is.....

- Improved viability, in terms of sales, visitor numbers and employment, for artisan producers who joined the network
- Opportunity for other artisan producers to join the network

Main results:

Development in an Irish context of an internationally generated model of rural enterprise support

Opportunity / Benefit:

- 1) A proven model of rural enterprise support to be used by agencies to stimulate enterprise diversification.
- 2) Access to an international cultural tourism network for rural SME's who qualify for membership.
- 3) Development of, and instructional material on, a six step model for structuring a visitor learning experience to an artisan producer.
- 4) A dedicated web-based sales platform developed for Économusée network members.
- 5) Demonstration of the benefits of networking as a strategy for capability building and business development for artisan food companies.

Collaborating Institutions:

Hordaland County Council, Norway, Économusée Society Network, Canada, Innovation Centre, Iceland, Centre for Local and Regional Development, Faroe Islands, Causeway Coast and Glens Heritage Trust, Northern Ireland, Tourism and Economic Council of Greenland, Jämtland County, Sweden

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External collaborators:

Project Partners:

Hordaland County Council, Norway

Économusée Society Network, Canada

Innovation Centre, Iceland

Centre for Local and Regional Development, Faroe Islands

Causeway Coast and Glens Heritage Trust, Northern Ireland

Tourism and Economic Council of Greenland

Jämtland County, Sweden

External Stakeholders: Bord Bia; Fáilte Ireland; Crafts Council of Ireland

1. Project background:

Craft International, funded by the EU Northern Periphery Programme, built on the success of the previous Économusée Northern Europe (ENE) project, in which Teagasc was a partner. The ENE project sought to replicate and adapt the successful Économusée model for artisan business development and cultural tourism networks from Quebec, Canada to Europe. Craft International sought to bring more Irish artisan producers, particularly food producers, into the International Économusée Network and improve their viability through increased on-site and on-line sales. Whilst the first project focused on how best to select, recruit and create a network of skilled artisans producing high-quality products, Craft International focused on three different strands of work (website and web-based shop: transfer of Canadian knowledge on direct sales; developing strategic linkages to national and regional tourism plans), all vitally important for the development of an efficient international network of high quality artisan products. For the network to survive, the project had to continue working with the original artisans, recruit new ones, and up-skill all of them and concurrently develop an international platform for sales and marketing.

2. Questions addressed by the project:

Craft International had a central research question:

- Can the Canadian Économusée model of rural enterprise support be adapted for use in Ireland specifically and Northern Europe more generally?

There were 3 overarching objectives to be achieved to answer that question.

- Development of a network website and separate web-based shop
- Transfer of Canadian knowledge and experience on direct sales
- Strategic linkages to national and regional tourism plans

3. The experimental studies:

This development project was based around the following key activities.

Activity 1: New partners and artisans

Strategic focus: To bring new partners through induction and to select the new group of artisans

Outcome: All project partners through induction and quality assurance (QA) phases within 2 months of project start and ready to select further artisans. All artisans were selected within 6 months of project start.

Activity 2: Preparation and conversion

Strategic focus: All new artisans brought through QA and premises converted to project model

Outcome: All new artisans delivered an approved feasibility study/business plan and their premises were adapted to the Canadian business model.

Activity 3: Doing Business

Strategic focus: To boost artisan business by increased sales and promotion

Outcome: All artisans survived the economic crisis with improved sales. Large share of sales and promotion based on project internet profile. Économusée integrated in regional visitor strategies in partner regions.

The project developed three generic products and services:

1. **Artisan businesses:** The project continued to work with the 15 businesses from the Économusée Northern Europe project and added a further 20 companies to this group, thus achieving a stronger brand presence, better synergy and improved integration. There is now a stronger sense of being part of a network.
2. **Services:** The project developed eight Services Fact Sheets, which outline in detail the business development work done for the 35 artisans in the network. In order to help profile the artisans, the project planned and delivered a new brand website and an e-sales website. These were integral parts of the work to lift the profile of peripheral artisans and to integrate regional artisan networks into regional and national tourism strategies. The project strategy to integrate the artisans and build their profile continued with the work to develop a Facebook account and a Twitter account for the project, which is being maintained post-project by the Swedish partners.
3. **Products:** The project submitted 19 Product Fact Sheets to cover the work done on specific promotional work for individual artisans. Sixteen of these are artisan-specific brochures to help them with the promotion and branding of the actual Économusée. However, in addition to individual brochures, an Irish-Northern Irish brochure was developed to cover all of the seven Économusées on the island of Ireland.

4. Main results:

- A new artisan network website www.economusee.eu was launched in 2012. This was a major part of the brand development needed for the hitherto fairly unknown Économusée brand.
- A separate new internet sales website, <http://shop.economusee.com> was launched in June 2014.
- After the ENE project there were 15 artisans in the European network. At the close of the Craft International project, there were 35 artisans in the European network.
- The project had a total job creation target of 21. The actual documented job creation for the project was 43 full time jobs and 2 part time jobs, with a further 6 jobs being planned when the project ended. In Ireland, 24 people were employed in the four Économusées. Since joining the network, 2 new jobs were created and 3 more are planned.
- The first two Irish artisans to join the network (in the ENE project) reported a 5% and 15% increase respectively in visitor numbers during the Craft International project.
- Building the Économusée brand in Ireland, and Europe, was a project objective and a challenge. The publicity secured when the Connemara Smokehouse was launched as an Économusée in the spring of 2013 covered the printed media as well as radio and TV. The estimated value of the media coverage for that event alone was over €71,000.
- Feedback from artisan members of the network confirms that from their perspective, the two best aspects of the project are the ability to share experiences and to work in partnership.
- The All Ireland Économusée network met in March 2014 with the 34-member Irish Tour Operators Association to discuss inclusion of the network in tour itineraries for 2015. This process is on-going and being followed up by the artisans.
- The Économusée concept was discussed as an important heritage tourism promoter at UNESCO Conference, Bergen 2014.

5. Opportunity/Benefit:

- 1) A proven model of rural enterprise support to be used by agencies to stimulate enterprise diversification.
- 2) Access to an international cultural tourism network for rural SME's who qualify for membership.
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6. Dissemination:

International peer learning

- In May 2012, European artisans (three from Ireland) were brought to Quebec to meet their Canadian counterparts, visit Économusée sites and engage in networking and training events. Resources from Laval University and Quebec's Économusée network were used for coaching and training events for partners and for artisans.

National level

- Économusée concept discussed at Government appointed Commission for the Economic Development of Rural Areas, Ballyhaise, Co. Cavan, May 22nd 2013
- Économusée model presented at meeting of 'Growing Galway Food' in Teagasc, Athenry, October 17th, 2013. This initiative is sponsored by the three county Galway LEADER companies and Galway County Council.

Presentations

- Heanue, K., (2011) Linking local culture, heritage and the landscape to the local economy – the impact of Économusée. *The National Rural Development Conference 2011*. Towards 2020: Building a Vibrant Rural Economy, Wednesday 19th October 2011, Hodson Bay Hotel, Athlone, Co Westmeath.

Popular publications:

Heanue, K., McIntyre, B. and Heneghan, M. Supporting Rural Enterprise Development, *TResearch*, Volume 7: No. 3. Autumn 2012. pp.34-35.

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