



Innovately investing in
Europe's Northern Periphery
for a sustainable and
prosperous future



More crafts selected

From the early applications to participate in the Economusee network last spring, half of the planned group of 18 have now been picked. The last meeting of the Project Steering Group saw a further boost to the group as more companies were examined. The group of artisans selected across the six regions so far are:

In Northern Ireland Marion Woodburn Jewellery; in Iceland Gusta Design, producing leather goods, and a producer of superb salted, air dried clipfish; in Norway the Aurland shoe maker, Lundal who is a renowned producer of traditional cured lamb and goat meat products and the Oselvar workshop, which makes wooden boats. In Ireland Studio Donegal, makers of tweed products, is participating and in the Faeroes Filana Wool spinners and in Canada, the Change Island joint craft producers. There are new craft producers to be presented in December and by Christmas, the majority of the crafts should be selected.

Steering Group

The Project Steering Group met in Torshavn in the Faeroes in October and combined the meeting with the regular round of site visits to potential craft companies to be included in the project network. This is always a very valuable activity as it brings a far wider range of skilled artisans into contact with the project. In addition, only by travelling is it possible to experience the actual locations where these crafts are practiced.



Blacksmith

The visit to a skilled blacksmith is a case in point. Although the roads across many of the islands in the Faeroes are great, we needed a ferry to get across to his island. The journey continued through a series of tunnels with lay-bys blasted for cars to pass inside the tunnels - and there was no lighting. The location alone, in a small village in fantastic cultural landscape at the head of an open, exposed bay made the journey worthwhile and the skills demonstrated just underline the fact that great traditions still exist, but are in danger of fading away.



Filana wool spinner

As if the threat to dying skills needed to be spelled out further, the visit to Faeroese crafts business Filana, did just that. The shining machinery was without traces of dust, or particles of wool. Specially imported from England, the only such facility in the Faeroes now lies idle, well-maintained and ready, but lifeless; waiting for a final rescue. The international connections of the project may just be the extra dimension which will help convince the guardians of Faeroese crafts and culture that the islands will be a poorer place without the optimistic din of machines and the clicking of spools. Even the wool is cleaned and ready.

The Slow Food Organisation may also be a partner in the transition process towards an Economusee as they now are interested in supporting natural fibre communities around the world. In addition, Slow Food are already avid supporters of our project.



Hanging by a thread

The rich bird life provided additional sources of food for the islanders for many years. Lowered down from the top of some of the highest cliffs in Europe, those gathering eggs or catching birds had to place their trust in the workmanship of the rope maker. The ropes, nearly as thick as your arm, were all made locally. As interests, diet and priorities change, the need for such ropes fade. Yet such skills, to which locals would entrust their lives, no longer provide viable means of earning living. Could such a craft possibly be helped by the Economusee project?

Meanwhile in Djupivåg

In the village where Gusta Design has been relocated by the proud owner Augusta, other artisans are now talking about pooling resources to draw in visitors. The attention given to the area by the Economusee project is triggering wider local interest. There was even a meeting of local crafts people recently to discuss how best to work to realise their new vision of becoming a craft focus for south-east Iceland.



Djupivåg artisans' meeting

Food traditions – genuine crafts

In Höfn in south-east Iceland the only producer of salted fish dried in fresh air is joining the Economusee network. Although this was the predominant way of sun drying clipfish in days gone by, very few continue to keep the craft alive. Yet anyone who has tasted bacalao prepared with this fish will agree, the skills to produce fish like this, should be captured for posterity. Interestingly, since the steering group site visit in July, the producer decided to open his premises for visitors and had 2500 visitors through the door before the end of the season in the main Scandinavian and from Southern Europe. Interestingly, nearly every Mediterranean visitor bought clipfish. Now he can hardly wait to see how many more the project will attract for him.



Meat, the traditional way

New Norwegian entrant, Johs. Lundal & Sons, is in the ideal location next to a regular pit stop for tourists and regulars travelling the main road from Haugesund to the famous Hardanger region, or onwards to Oslo. This is a true artisan, a family business that has honestly maintained the craft tradition since 1872 of food faithfuls in a region full of rich traditions for curing and smoking meat to preserve it for the long winter months.

Aurland shoes

Regular readers of the newsletter will recognise the name of this product, so full of rich shoe making traditions from the Aurland village. As the work to convert the company to an Economusee, a new interest has been generated in the product. Here the feasibility study is well under way to completion. There is now a timetable, which will see a high-profile opening in July 2009 – in the middle of the tourist season. This would be the first of our 18 Economusees to be adorned by the prestigious badge; the mark of quality developed and protected by the International Economusee Network Society, headquartered in Quebec City. The Aurland shoemaker has recently increased their staff with two new workers as a consequence and expectancy of becoming an Economuseum.

There really is gold in them there hills

Not far from Britain's only goldmine in Northern Ireland's Sperrin Mountains; Marion Woodburn Jewellery specialises in jewellery in gold and precious metals skilfully shaped into designs inspired by the rich Irish history and the even richer cache of legends. Now work has started to convert the company from a successful craft business to an Economusee within the European network.

Tweed

Across the country, facing west on the famous Donegal coast, where the next stop really is America, Studio Donegal continues to mine a particularly rich seam in traditional fabrics. In a truly artisan fashion the company creates an attractive range of products from a woollen fabric so linked to the land that the weft and the warp of any cloth simply transforms the lands of Donegal and the skills and the passions of the people into warmth and comfort in every garment.



Wooden boats

Although the Norse in their wooden boats of old, often struck fear in people on the Northern seaboard, the best of the Viking seafaring traditions can now be bought for cash. In a beautiful setting on the edge of the Hardanger fjord, the hand crafting skills used in these boats live on. The Oselvar, named after the local river, is a slim wooden boat *created* by hand - it is not merely 'made' - in the best tradition. Fashioned in a range of woods, and of hand picked planks, each vessel grows from the narrow wooden keel up, board by board, clinkered and sealed as done for centuries.



Enthusiasm

Such are the skills and the crafts captured by the project so far – and we are only half way! The Canadian model was exciting to those of us fortunate enough to see it in practice at the outset of the project. Now, when the European network is starting to take shape, the work is growing in challenge and in potential. As the project's local stakeholder groups meet, the enthusiasm and the support generated is starting to 'rub off' on to the people we work with. The members even tell us they 'look forward to' the stakeholder meetings as they are so interesting. In Norway there have been two enthusiastic stakeholder meetings since start-up this summer.

The project has captured people's imagination, confirmed their belief in quality, proven the value in craft skills, and it does it all in a series of products that the public can hold in their hands, take home, talk about and treasure. As they do, they help preserve the best parts of their heritage and perhaps best of all, create local employment for young people.

The original memory stick

The stick held by the hand carved figure of a man in this photo, holds all the measurements needed to make one the beautiful Oselvar boats. Cut into the stick are marks, lines and notations. All you need to make any sense of it all, is a lifetime of experience in handling wood, cutting it, estimating its strength, its durability and suitability – plank by plank.



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