

# Crowdsourcing – On New Conditions for Local Development

After travelling 90 minutes from the county’s capital, Luleå, in the heart of Arctic Sweden’s Lapland, I finally arrive at the Swedish hinterland’s best-kept secret, Vuollerim. And, as suspected, it is more than just the famous Northern Lights that are lighting up this remote community’s development and that have enticed international networks to choose Vuollerim as the venue for Crowdsourcing Week.

The fact that the news of the this tiny community’s development has reached business developers, universities and investors the world over can be seen as a result of the brave new world we now live in, where the Internet of Things touches even rural areas. How can the social model now being developed in Vuollerim, which has inspired both locals and global social developers, also inspire today’s decision-makers? Founder of Crowdsourcing Week, Epi Ludvik Nekaj from Singapore, takes a walk through Vuollerim after three days of intensive discussion. Nekaj’s feelings about what is driving Vuollerim forward are unmistakable. What’s more, his Singaporean heart

beats even faster when the conversation turns to Vuollerim’s multifaceted development. Around 40 non-profit organizations and 60 companies have set up shop in this village with 800 residents: proof as good as any of vital social development.

Crowdsourcing Week’s arrival in Vuollerim is something that surprises neither Nekaj nor the event’s other international delegates. For Nekaj, it’s only natural. “Our role is to find places and people who drive social development forward,” he says, and adds: “Vuollerim is the place political leaders should be looking to”.

The idea of holding a top-level meeting in Vuollerim came to Nekaj during Crowdsourcing Week Europe, held in October 2014. “It took a year

for us to get Crowdsourcing Week to Vuollerim,” explains Eva-Lena Skalstad from the Lapland Vuollerim company.

The spread of the news about Vuollerim’s development to a major international network like Crowdsourcing Week is largely a result of the networking and Internet-driven society we now live in. “Naturally, we need to travel and keep in contact with people who share our ambitions,” says Skalstad.

Nonetheless, it’s not always easy to get traditional stakeholders in the municipality and region to accept an interactive and inspirational social model like the one Vuollerim’s residents have created. Based on the conversations and dialogues held



**Examples of projects, companies and organizations in Vuollerim** (<http://neighbourhood-economics.org/crowdsourcing-week-summit-in-vuollerim-sweden/>)

**Vuollerim Economic Association** (<http://www.vuollerim.se/vaxthuset>). The first locally-owned company, founded in 1999.

**VIVA** was founded in 2006 and now has more than 150 joint owners. VIVA owns and operates Hotel Vuollerim Lodge. The hotel is open year round and has 16 rooms named after the district's villages, all of which have been "adopted" and decorated by village residents. The hotel serves homemade traditional Swedish cuisine, prepared fresh, and exudes a warm and welcoming atmosphere.

**Vuollerims friskola independent school** (<http://vuollerimsfriskola.se/foretaget>) was established when the town's local school was threatened with closure. The school has been open since 2009 and currently has 100 co-owners.

**Lapland Vuollerim Welcomes You AB** is the town's tourism company and is owned by 50 co-owners. In 2014, Vuollerim was named one of the world's top three sustainable tourism destinations (Europe).

**The Village Team AB** is a local company based in Vuollerim that operates as a limited company with an open and broad ownership model. Its shareholders are fully aware that no dividends will be paid to individual shareholders and that any surplus will be reinvested in the district's continued development, in accordance with the company's business concept. The principal idea is to utilize local expertise and resources and to act as a catalyst for the implementation of initiatives and opportunities that contribute to the district's and municipality's positive development, with teamwork as the business model.

**Nytänk** is the local youths' own development project aimed at stimulating and promoting the younger generation's opportunities to influence social development. [www.nytank.se](http://www.nytank.se)



during the conference, it's easy to understand how difficult being an innovator and social developer can be; to break with traditions and conceptions. A Swedish author from the 1940s, Folke Fridell, wrote a book entitled *Av egen kraft* [In Your Own Strength], and was a pioneer of his time in Sweden, marrying individual responsibility with both leadership and cooperation. A cooperative social model was developed.

That era was also characterized by a suspicious attitude towards advocates of change. Perhaps, with time, the winds of change turn suspicion into curiosity and, with the help of international attention, begin to inspire new cooperation locally and regionally.

In the lead up to Crowdsourcing Week, a number of meetings were held with key figures from the Municipality, County Council, County Administrative Board, funds and other organizations to share experience and encourage the continued mutual development of crowdsourcing.

“For example, through contact with

Luleå University of Technology we have secured a solid regional partner with whom to develop methods for smart regional development. As the region's leading technology university, it has long worked with the concept of smart regions and crowdsourcing as new elements within social development,” say Birgitta Bergvall-Kåreborn and Anna Ståhlbröst from Luleå University of Technology (LTU). The Internet plays an important role in building new networks that extend beyond the regional level.

The discussions held here in Vuollerim reached as far as to California, from where the world's leading organization for social capital, SOCAP, took part in the programme. “SOCAP looks like it's on its way to having a Nordic platform,” says promoter Bert-Ola Bergstrand, who came to Crowdsourcing Week from Social Capital Forum in Gothenburg, Sweden.

You could really feel in the crisp northern air that sound arguments gained an easy foothold. Delegate Hjörtur Smárason, from Iceland



Innovation Embassy, drew parallels with the development that took place in Iceland after the financial crisis. And this dialogue even extended to models for new currency systems where demand-regulated, sustainable trade is developed for local markets.

Martijn Aarets, from Crowd Expedition in the Netherlands, says that what has shaped Crowdsourcing Week could be described as a very strong desire for professional development and networking.

“It’s easy to find a breeding ground for development in an environment like this,” he says, and adds: “Here you find everything from enthusiastic young people and well-educated technicians and engineers to life experience from the Sami culture. And, not least of all, leadership, which must also exist if you’re going to create a social model that supports a vision of survival and development.”

As you walk through the village you can see how the local supermarket is upgrading its energy system,

investing heavily in geothermal energy. At the centre of this alternative energy development lies Swedish national hydropower company Vattenfall, whose site office is located in the middle of the village. In Sweden, 20-25 per cent of all hydro-electricity is generated in Jokkmokk Municipality, and is monitored from the operations centre in Vuollerim.

Will we see a new role for the company’s view on local, sustainable social development when it comes to fairly distributing the surplus of resources from hydropower to rural development? There should be room for better local economic development on the part of state-owned hydropower company Vattenfall for Vuollerim’s social model.

For those of us who left Vuollerim after three days of lively debate, it is clear that we have come a long way from the fragile nature of northern Swedish rural development projects of the past. Can Vuollerim’s young growth potential survive and lay the foundation for a new social model? Only time will tell, but it is abundantly clear that the Internet of Things can open a pathway to new forms of dialogue, cooperation and professional development.

That said, without social relations and inter-personal interaction, no new social models will be created. Those of us who attended Crowdsourcing Week in Vuollerim will likely also take away the conversations and the social interaction; the stories told around the camp fire in the storytellers’ hut, the dinners where each course was eaten in a different resident’s home and the conversations held with the community’s newest residents, refugees from Africa.

And, to quote Epi Ludvik Nekaj’s concluding remarks from Crowdsourcing Week in Swedish Lapland: “We’ll see you in Vuollerim again next year.”

## ► FACTS ◀

### **Crowdsourcing Week**

– Programme in Vuollerim

**Crowdsourcing Trends:** Global Ideas, Local Action Epi Ludvik Nekaj, Crowdsourcing Week

**Reversing the Brain Drain – And the Future of Work.** Hjörtur Smárason, Innovation Embassy

**Crypto Currency – [PART 1]** Intro to the theme, tool for leveraging local businesses and local capital Epi Ludvik Nekaj, Crowdsourcing Week

**Cutting Edge Innovation.** Practical Examples on Crowdsourcing in Vuollerim. Creative Business Development, presentations and visits. Local Speakers

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**Disruptive Energy Technologies & Models** Carl Malbrain, Chairman of the Board, Blijdorp

### **Digital Session: Accelerating Impact investing in the Local Economy**

Kevin Jones / Christine Egger, Social Capital Markets / Neighbourhood Economy

### **Digital Session: Turning the Tides, Democracy in a Sustainable Future**

Ingrid Stange, Partnership for Change

**Keys for designing a common good foundation in business and collaborative economy and processes. Experiences, understandings and success factors from Vuollerim.**

Local Speakers

### **Crypto Currency in Practice [PART 2]**

Epi Ludvik Nekaj, Crowdsourcing Week

### **Mayors Working Together for a Sustainable Future**

Kaj Embren, The Nordic Mayoral Initiative to COP 21 in Paris

### **The Relationship Economy, Continuity and Change**

Bert-Ola Bergstrand, Lund Open Innovation Center

### **Opportunities and Challenges of Crowdsourcing for Smart Regions**

Birgitta Bergvall-Kåreborn & Anna Ståhlbröst, Luleå University of Technology, LTU

**Interactive Workshop:** Open Innovation 2.0 with Collaborative and Interactive Platforms. What will it look like?