



A Spotlight on Lapinlahden Lähde Entrepreneurs

Acknowledgements

This report aims to shed light on the potential of the Lapinlahden Lähde Entrepreneurs. With their strength, resilience, and passion, these entrepreneurs are ready to thrive. We invite and encourage policymakers and funders to provide further support, as a strong entrepreneurial community in Lapinlahden Lähde will benefit the City of Helsinki.

This report would not have been possible without the contributions of various representatives of the Lapinlahden Lähde Entrepreneurs. These representatives have provided their input during the workshop and the writing of this report. The authors would like to thank all of them.

Dr. Bernadetta A. Ginting-Szczesny
Prof. Ewald Kibler
*Entrepreneurship Unit at Aalto University
School of Business (ENTU)*

This project is funded by the Research Council of Finland.



Table of Contents

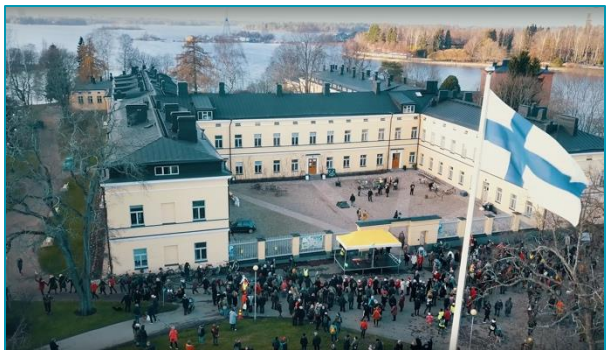
- 1 A Spotlight on Lapinlahden Lähde Entrepreneurs
- 2 A Challenge Mapping Workshop
- 3 Challenge 1: The Identity
- 4 Challenge 2: The Value
- 5 Challenge 3: The Community Leadership
- 6 The Future
- 7 What is Next?

A Spotlight on Lapinlahden Lähde Entrepreneurs

Entrepreneurship research and policy often focus on high-growth, tech-driven ventures funded by venture capital, yet these businesses represent only a small fraction of the entrepreneurial landscape. In reality, the majority of entrepreneurs in our communities are what we call “everyday entrepreneurs”—those who run small, often single-person businesses like self-employed artists, shopkeepers, and service providers.

According to Suomen Yrittäjät¹, of the 443,731 companies in Finland, 95.5% have fewer than 10 employees, with single-person businesses alone accounting for 70% of all business owners. Despite their small scale, these microenterprises generate a turnover of €97 billion (17.5% of the national total in 2022) and employ 20.7% of the workforce in companies, contributing meaningfully to both economic growth and employment. Yet despite their importance, the challenges these everyday entrepreneurs face often go unaddressed.

Lapinlahden Lähde has become an important space for everyday entrepreneurship in Helsinki. Originally functioning as a psychiatric hospital until 2008, Lapinlahden Lähde reopened in 2013 as a center for arts, culture, and mental wellbeing.



Today, much of Lapinlahden Lähde's space is rented out to self-employed individuals and microenterprises, who work in diverse fields including art therapy, wellness, visual design, audiobook publishing, and arts and crafts. 86 everyday entrepreneurs are currently operating as tenants at Lapinlahden Lähde, creating a unique entrepreneurial community.

Like many everyday entrepreneurs, those at Lapinlahden Lähde are responsible for almost every aspect of their business—from production and sales to marketing and budgeting—leaving them often stretched thin. This was especially true during the corona pandemic, which hit small businesses hard, forcing them to adapt their offerings or develop new ones amid limited support. For some, the nature of their business made it difficult, if not impossible, to shift operations online or work from home. In addition, Lapinlahden Lähde Entrepreneurs have



faced ongoing uncertainty regarding Lapinlahden Lähde's future, including past discussions around changing ownership and upcoming renovations. While it's now somewhat clearer who will oversee the renovations, questions remain about operational disruptions, potential rent changes, and more.

As Lapinlahden Lähde soon undergoes this period of physical transformation, it is an opportune time to consider the future of entrepreneurship within the community. Although business challenges can often be addressed with sector-specific solutions, we have uncovered that many issues go beyond typical business concerns, requiring knowledge-based solutions that span multiple sectors.

To develop these solutions, collaboration between researchers and practitioners is essential. Such collaborations can combine the analytical power of research with the hands-on experience of entrepreneurs, resulting in practical, meaningful solutions to support Lapinlahden Lähde Entrepreneurs in a sustainable future. With this in mind, ENTU has taken on this challenge by initiating an innovative program to bring research and practice together.

A Challenge Mapping Event

Before developing solutions to support a sustainable future for Lapinlahden Lähde Entrepreneurs, we first needed to identify the common challenges faced by the community. Listening to and including the entrepreneurs' voices are essential for understanding and prioritizing the most pressing and core challenges that they are facing at the present. To explore this, we organized a workshop on 7-8 October and invited representatives from the entrepreneur community at Lapinlahden Lähde.

Table 1. Overview of representatives

Representative	Organisation	Sector
Anne Himberg	Taukotila	Massage therapy
Arja Renko	Self-employed artisan	Artisan
Auli Nissinen	Be You Be Magic tmi	Energy healing
Mikko Bossa	Lapinlahden taidekoulu	Art training & education
Mira Reijonen-Mahoney	Seishin Shiatsu	Massage therapy

Over the course of 10 hours, the group worked together to identify, define, and prioritize the main challenges faced by the entrepreneurs in Lapinlahden Lähde. The activities were based on the Lego® Serious Play® method and facilitated by Professor Pablo Munoz, a certified Lego® Serious Play® facilitator and Professor of Entrepreneurship at Durham University, UK. This approach allows us to reflect individually and collectively, bringing together diverse perspectives, negotiating viewpoints, and building a shared narrative.

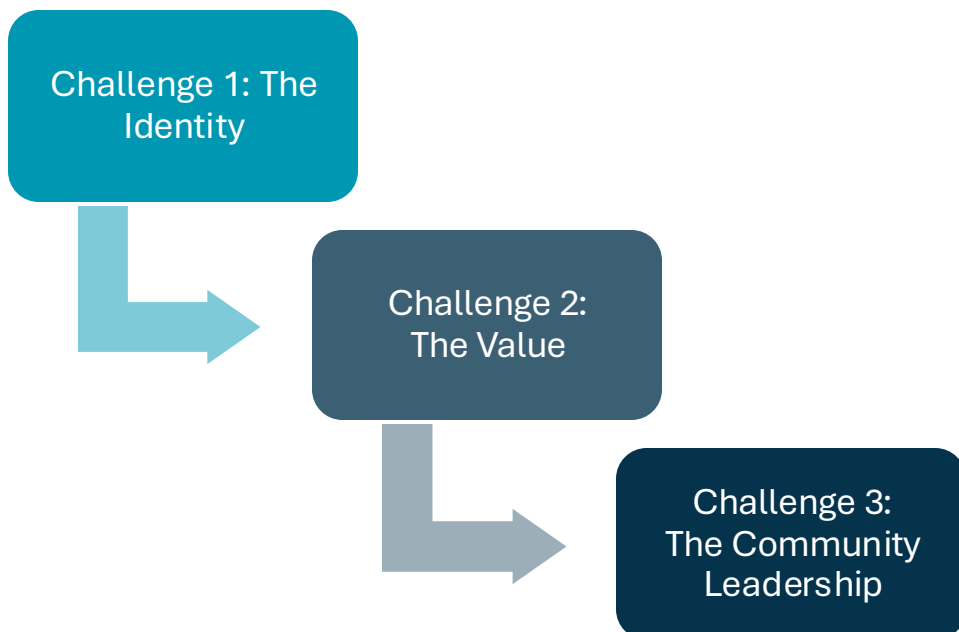


The first day began with an exploration of individual identities and personal connections to Lapinlahden Lähde, followed by identifying commonalities between identities within the group. Next, we identified collective aspirations and frustrations around entrepreneurship in Lapinlahden Lähde, working towards building a consensus on these themes.



On the second day, we continued with brainstorming all possible challenges facing entrepreneurs at Lapinlahden Lähde, leading to a visual overview of these challenges. We then identified “agents”—individuals, organizations, or entities with the potential to address these challenges—and mapped connections between the agents and each challenge. Through this activity we identified the entrepreneur community itself as the primary agent for ensuring a sustainable future for entrepreneurship at Lapinlahden Lähde, although it still faces significant challenges. We then engaged in a prioritization discussion, which led to a synthesis of three main challenges, each interlinked and composed of multiple elements. Addressing the first challenge would help resolve the second and support progress on the third.

Figure 1. Overview of the main challenges of the Lapinlahden Lähde Entrepreneurs



Challenge 1: The Identity

Who are the Lapinlahden Lähde Entrepreneurs?

A central challenge faced by Lapinlahden Lähde Entrepreneurs is the question of identity. Currently, it remains unclear who they are as a collective. Workshop participants expressed a sense of fragmentation, feeling disconnected from one another. As one participant noted, “there isn’t this glue that binds everything together yet.” This points to a strong desire for greater connection and cohesion between the entrepreneurs, which is difficult to achieve without a clear identity.

Diversity was identified as a defining characteristic of Lapinlahden Lähde. The entrepreneurs value the wide range of backgrounds, interests, and sectors represented in the group. However, this very diversity makes it challenging to define a collective identity. The entrepreneurs are wary of adopting an identity that might overshadow their diversity. There is a need for an inclusive identity that can bring them together while preserving the unique qualities that each individual brings.

Individual entrepreneurs and small businesses tend to identify more closely with their specific sector rather than the place where they operate. This is especially true in the context of Lapinlahden Lähde, where there are entrepreneurs from various business sectors, each with their own workspaces spread out across the floors and buildings. This makes it more difficult to feel a sense of belonging and connection, with entrepreneurs end up being more interested in their own activities than in the collective.

“
These are what we are known for: culture, art, wellness for the mind. That's the identity of the house. There are many different people -- there's writers, there's photographers, there's videographers, there's like a whole sort of people who work here. But maybe that's one of the problems, because we don't know how we can combine our forces.

Mira Reijonen-Mahoney,

Seishin Shiatsu



Further, unlike typical (co-)working spaces in Finland, which are often tech and startup-oriented, Lapinlahden Lähde Entrepreneurs are primarily running small, independent businesses in fields that are less visible or traditionally valued. External stakeholders may see them as not ‘real’ entrepreneurs, which leads to undervaluation, lower visibility, and less support. Defining and communicating a unified identity in Lapinlahden Lähde is therefore necessary to build stronger connections both internally and with external stakeholders.

”

Challenge 2: The Value

The potential of Lapinlahden Lähde Entrepreneurs

The second challenge closely connects with the first: the need for Lapinlahden Lähde Entrepreneurs to clearly define and communicate the value they bring to both the Lapinlahden Lähde community and the wider society. When this value remains unclear, it creates uncertainty among stakeholders and reluctance to invest in funding and support, potentially stifling the promising future of entrepreneurship in Lapinlahden Lähde.

This challenge is influenced by Lapinlahden Lähde's long and well-known history as a psychiatric hospital. This has left a lingering stigma that continues to influence how its current entrepreneurs are perceived. Workshop participants mentioned how Lapinlahden Lähde is often seen as a place for "outcasts" and "hippies",

— “

As a worker here, you can be as you are because many of us who work here are not suitable for paid work. They think that you are too old, too slow, too ugly, too everything. But here you can be an autistic if you are autistic, or if you have health problems, or if you have mental health problems. Let's find a solution for you here! And so customers also get some kind of a relief that they can come as they are.

Anne Himberg, Taukotila



” —

which in turn affects the self-image and confidence of the entrepreneurs operating there. They feel that they are not taken seriously and are often viewed as engaging in hobbies rather than legitimate businesses. This perception undermines the value of their entrepreneurial efforts, as well as their strengths as individuals and a collective.

This is further complicated by the fact that Lapinlahden Lähde is currently more widely known for its free events and community services than for its small businesses. This creates an additional barrier for entrepreneurs who must convince stakeholders of the worth of their paid products and services. They often find themselves needing to continually prove their value, striving for visibility and recognition as ‘serious’ entrepreneurs.

Without a clearly defined value, Lapinlahden Lähde Entrepreneurs struggle to attract support, funding, and new clients, as stakeholders may be uncertain about what they offer. This ambiguity also hinders the growth of the entrepreneurial community within Lapinlahden Lähde, as other potential entrepreneurs may not recognize the benefits of joining. Further, the lack of clarity affects both external engagement and internal collaboration, leaving it unclear what Lapinlahden Lähde Entrepreneurs can offer to one another and to the broader community.

If the main structure is unsecure and unstable, it affects people like us very much, creating this feeling of separateness. But I believe that the renovation can build a more secure base for all and will lift the profile of the area automatically because then Lapinlahden Lähde becomes more attractive to people. Now everybody has a little bit like, what is this Lapinlahti? They think there is something strange going on here, that it has a bad reputation and strange history. That's why we need a sense of security here, and then it will lift the status of this place automatically.



Mikko Bossa,
Lapinlahden taidekoulu

Challenge 3: The Community Leadership

Sustainable leadership in the entrepreneurial community

We are the lifeboat. I totally agree that we need a couple of people to take the lead to fully commit and kind of have that passion to draw in the rest of us. We already have the kind of focus, the same direction that we want to go, and we need to understand that it takes time. Like wings, they start very fragile and not ready to fly. And there are different kind of wings, but they all fit in into the same lifeboat.

Auli Nissinen, Be You Be Magic tmi



The final challenge is the need for sustainable leadership within the community of Lapinlahden Lähde Entrepreneurs. While there is a strong desire for growth and collaboration, there is a lack of meaningful leadership to steer the group forward. There is a need for an individual or a group of individuals who can serve as a “smaller form of engine”—a guiding force to keep the community moving towards its goals.

Rather than relying on external help, workshop participants emphasized the importance of developing a leadership from within the entrepreneurial community itself that can guide the bottom-up movement. This leadership role would provide the direction and coordination needed to help the community organize itself more effectively.

Given that everyday entrepreneurs tend to be stretched thin—juggling every part of the business themselves, such as marketing, budgeting, production, and other responsibilities—resources like time and energy are limited. As a result, community involvement often takes a back seat. A strong leadership presence could help alleviate this issue by offering a sense of direction and organization, ensuring that collective efforts are more focused and efficient.

Effective leadership would also play a crucial role in empowering others within the community, encouraging commitment and participation. Currently, a lack of coordination has led to situations where a great deal of effort is put into activities without clear outcomes, leading to feelings of frustration and exhaustion. The often-changing tenants of Lapinlahden Lähde adds another layer of complexity, as this creates uncertainty and makes it harder to establish sustained momentum. A sustainable form of leadership is needed to ensure that the community’s energy is directed effectively, but the leadership group will also require resources and support to effectively carry out its responsibilities.

When we are who we are and we talk openly about the things we have here in Lapinlahti, it's clear that everyone wants this place to be open for everyone. I think it is important that you don't keep ideas inside. Of course, you can keep your business idea to yourself, but we have a lot to learn. It makes life easier to try to work together and help each other in some way. We cannot save the whole world, but we can save some part of it.

Arja Renko, self-employed artisan



The Future

How would the future of Lapinlahden Lähde Entrepreneurs look like if we were able to solve these three main challenges?



Challenge 1: The Identity

If the identity of the Lapinlahden Lähde Entrepreneurs is clearly defined, it would foster cohesion within the community and create stronger connections with external stakeholders. This sense of belonging would lay the foundation for collaboration and mutual support.



Challenge 2: The Value

If the value that Lapinlahden Lähde Entrepreneurs bring is identified and communicated, it would attract customers, policymakers, funders, and potential new members to engage with them now and in the future.



Challenge 3: The Community Leadership

If sustainable leadership with a supportive system is established within the community, it would ensure the continuity of the community. More entrepreneurs may be encouraged to join and contribute to the community, helping it to grow and flourish.

What is Next?

This report outlines the main challenges identified by representatives of entrepreneurs in Lapinlahden Lähde. While entrepreneurship within this community may seem to be at a difficult stage, the upcoming renovation of Lapinlahden Lähde, support from Lapinlahden Lähde management, and a collective willingness to change present unique opportunities to address these challenges and reshape the future for Lapinlahden Lähde Entrepreneurs. The entrepreneur community itself is resilient, compassionate, and driven, and this report can serve as a starting point for the changes needed. Both Lapinlahden Lähde management and local policymakers can leverage these insights to begin addressing and transforming these challenges into opportunities, benefiting not only the Lapinlahden Lähde Entrepreneurs but also the wider City of Helsinki.

Three key questions emerge from the challenges outlined in this report:

- 1 How can Lapinlahden Lähde Entrepreneurs work together towards developing a shared identity as a group of entrepreneurs in Helsinki?
- 2 How can Lapinlahden Lähde Entrepreneurs better define, measure, and communicate the value they create to diverse stakeholders?
- 3 How can Lapinlahden Lähde Entrepreneurs implement a leadership model that effectively supports their community?

These questions are complex, in part because existing research does not yet provide direct solutions. Current theoretical and technical knowledge lacks the specific focus or depth required to generate meaningful answers. This calls for fresh research and new approaches. ENTU will continue working with Lapinlahden Lähde Entrepreneurs to address these challenges, collaborating on research-practice initiatives to develop practical, evidence-based solutions grounded in solid theory. Together, these efforts aim to support Lapinlahden Lähde Entrepreneurs in building a sustainable, thriving future.

About this report

About the Entrepreneurship Unit at Aalto University School of Business (ENTU)

Our vision at ENTU is to advance inclusive entrepreneurship through research and education. Our research is pronouncedly multi-disciplinary, applying theories and methods from psychology, sociology, economics, geography, history and philosophy to diverse entrepreneurial phenomena. Much of our research is applied, with relevance for public policy. Our education embraces experiential learning methods, establishes strong networks with local and international entrepreneurial ecosystem partners, and encourages a strong experimentative and entrepreneurial approach within our students.

We thank Professor Pablo Munoz for facilitating the challenge mapping event.

Reference

¹Suomen Yrittäjät (2024). Entrepreneurship statistics: Data based on Statistics Finland's 2022-2023 information. Available at: <https://www.yrittajat.fi/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/entrepreneurship-statistics-2022.pdf>

