

South Ostrobothnia aims at building an agile and international future

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South Ostrobothnia is known for its strong entrepreneurial spirit and the regional center Seinäjoki has repeatedly been recognized as Finland's best city for entrepreneurship. This pro-entrepreneurial mindset is also reflected in the region's ambition to develop new, more effective ways to connect education and working life, both locally and internationally.

The region recognizes that in an era of globalization and rapid technological change, co-operation between educational institutions, businesses, and the public sector is crucial. South Ostrobothnia utilizes international networks, such as the **HEROES network**, to promote new learning and co-creation.

Education meets a slowly changing reality

Although extensive foresight work is being done in the region to identify future competence needs, the current education system is not always able to react quickly enough. Many future professions are still undefined and particularly degree-oriented education is often perceived as too rigid.

Decreasing funding for targeted training programs raises concern, especially regarding immigrants and those needing rapid skills updates. Commercial, tailor-made training for companies is often seen as more effective than publicly funded projects, where themes are defined top-down and participants are sought afterward.

On the other hand, digital training stands out positively: it attracts clearly more participants and interest than many other forms of education, highlighting both the importance of digitalization and the existing skills gaps in this area.

Concerns about young people’s skills and social interaction

“Competence should provide the ability to adapt to new systems with a reasonable amount of effort.”

Declining learning outcomes and diminishing social skills have emerged as worrying trends. As digital communication channels increase, face-to-face interaction often takes a back seat. At the same time, technical competence in critical areas, such as artificial intelligence and sustainability reporting, is still developing.

The local and physical presence of Seinäjoki University of Applied Sciences (SEAMK) is seen as highly important, not only for student networking and engagement, but also for strengthening ties with working life.

Three dimensions of resilience

1. Human resilience: skills for future citizenship

“Students should build more international networks. Aiming for the nearest factory doesn’t necessarily bring high value-added jobs to the region.”

Basic digital skills, such as understanding artificial intelligence and machine learning, as well as the ability to quickly learn new systems are essential. In an age of information overload, critical thinking and broad general knowledge are also vital. Social skills, empathy and cultural understanding support social cohesion and overall well-being.

Proposed solutions include strengthening cooperation between educational institutions and working life, practical project-based learning, encouraging students to create startups and exposing them to international experiences already during their studies.

2. Business resilience: competence for decision-making and growth

“In order to strengthen the labor market and business environment, we need more social rather than technical skills.”

Business success depends on the use of data, artificial intelligence, innovation capacity and collaboration with researchers, developers and financiers. Business knowledge, international networks and customer understanding are key success factors.

A practical solution is to deepen cooperation between educational institutions and companies through joint projects and internships.

3. Natural Resilience: Making Sustainability Part of Everyday Life

“Generally speaking, Finns are more open to change than many other nationalities, but we could still be more open.”

Circular economy principles, clean transition regulations and sustainability reporting require greater understanding, especially in small and medium-sized enterprises. Concrete tools, such as carbon footprint calculators, and the integration of skills with research and technology are essential.

Support measures include helping companies interpret regulations, providing clear tools and utilizing RDI networks in practice. Regional networks and educational institutions can serve as platforms where digital, social and ecological competencies converge.

The future is built together

“In South Ostrobothnia, development never stands still: when change is needed, it can be made quickly.”

In summary, South Ostrobothnia is a region committed to boldly developing education, skills and business life toward a more agile, digital, and international direction.

As part of the HEROES collaboration, all partners are conducting studies on the current and future competence and training needs in their regions. The goal is to strengthen smart regional resilience and to align joint educational content with evolving demands. The work focuses on three interdisciplinary themes and their intersections: human resilience, business resilience, and natural resilience. This article summarizes the key findings from SEAMK’s study, conducted between May 29 and June 13, 2025, consisting of a ten-question survey and a focus group interview.

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