

# The Villa Karo Wiki Experience

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# Villa Karo

Is a Finnish African residence and cultural center in Grand-Popo, Benin.

Location by the Atlantic Ocean beach, nearest cities are Cotonou (85 km), historical city Ouidah and Lome (63 km) in Togo, various restaurants and hotels.

Founded in 2000 by writer Juha Vakkuri (1946-2019) and named in memory of his passed son Karo

- builds cultural bridges between Finland and West Africa
- promotes cooperation between artists and researchers





# Mission

To increase understanding between people in a world defined by global interdependence.

We believe that as the field of arts and social sectors expands and enriches, new thinking and new solutions will emerge to drive social change.

Africa is an emerging continent and understanding this continent is critical.



# Villa Karo

Offers arts, culture and science professionals and researchers an opportunity to work in residence.

More than 630 Finnish artists, cultural operators and researchers have worked in residence.

The cultural centre also offers a wide range of services in Grand-Popo.

## **Projects in Villa Karo have:**

- outlined questions of differences and identities
- explored the interfaces between tradition and modernity
- addressed the relationship between community and communality, otherness and modes of viewing
- discussed the significance of ritualistic practices today



# Facilities

## Residence buildings:

- Main building
- Research center
- Musée Karo, the museum of contemporary art
- Petit Musée, the cultural-historical museum
- Library
- Café Karo
- Cinema Karo
- Multifunctional centre  
Lissa Gbassa  
(lectures, exhibitions, outside/inside concerts etc)



# Resources

1.8 people work at the office in Helsinki.  
Benin has a management team of 4 + staff of 11.

Main funders are the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture (170,000€ / year) and Svenska kulturfonden (20,000€ / year).  
Raises around 40 % of funding through donations, special projects and membership fees.

Most important resources are the professionals who have visited the residency.



# Results

- 50-90 short stories or works of poetry
- 10-20 non-fiction books
- 20-30 dance acts
- hundreds of compositions
- 15-25 tv/radio documents
- 10-15 translated works
- more than 20 new musical line-ups
- hundreds of art exhibitions
- 10-15 manuscripts (tv/theatre/radio)
- 15-20 performed plays
- more than 10 directed productions (movie, documents etc.)
- 20-30 scientific articles

The cultural centre attracts around 12,000 visitors every year!



# How to apply?

Residency applications are processed twice a year. The application period is continuous, ie the application can be submitted at any time. After the application deadline, applications will be processed within 1-1,5 months.

**Deadline for the next autumn and spring periods 15. March. Deadline for the next spring and autumn periods 20. September.**

The application

- a short **resume, CV**
- **work plan**, which should include the desired dates for the residency

residency period can be from 6 weeks up to 12 weeks. For well justified reasons, there is some flexibility for a shorter period in the research center, depending on availability.

# How to apply?

The application should include the following:

- Name/s as shown on passport
- Contact information (email, phone number, home address)
- Birth date
- Your potential affiliation to a community member (see list under “Community Members” tab)

The applications with attachments in pdf. format should be sent to [hakemukset\[at\]villakaro.org](mailto:hakemukset@villakaro.org).

# Who?

Cultural and social science professionals, artists and researchers can apply for a residency in Villa Karo. The residency is suitable for both one's own research and artistic work as well as community projects. Ideally, if a resident could also offer something to the local community.

The staff at Villa Karo will help you with getting contacts and organising your work.

Every year, we invite West African professional artists, researchers and cultural professionals to a residency without weekly rental costs or office fees, and we offer a small allowance (50€ /week) for working and material costs.

Avecs, with the age limit of 16 years are also welcome to join the residency. Their name and contact details must be provided before the start of the residency.



# Who?

Every year 4-6 West African professional artists, researchers and cultural professionals are invited to a residency without weekly rent or office fees and we offer a small allowance (50€ /week) for working and material costs.

Applications with resumes and work plans in English or French to **info@villakaro.org**.

If the applicant already has funding for residency, we process the application in a joint application, so the number of West Africans can be higher than 6 people each year.

Applications will be evaluated by a separate panel. Decisions are not explained to the applicants.

## Residency covers

- airport transfers Cotonou/Lomé – Grand-Popo – Cotonou/Lomé
- resident room, breakfast, cleaning, laundry and Wi-Fi connection in Villa Karo for the weekly rent
- assistance and support both in planning your trip and in Benin

## Resident's own costs

- office fee 200 EUR
- travel expenses to Benin

- EUR 120 weekly rent in the main building / EUR 200 weekly rent in VKRC
- visa 100 EUR (90 days) and travel insurance
- antimalarials and vaccinations (yellow fever vaccination is compulsory for all arrivals)
- hotel nights in Cotonou on arrival in Benin (approx. EUR 15-50)
- possible excursions with Villa Karo and your own excursions
- large-scale interpretation services (eg. for own work)

# Villa Karo and Wikipedia/Wikimedia

free wifi for residents

mobile network in Benin

- covers all country
- expensive for ordinary people

mobile (smart)phones common with many adults, not so many laptops and tablets

strong oral communication and tradition

multi-lingual society  
(French, English, Mina, Fon, Yoruba)





# Villa Karo and Wikipedia/Wikimedia

## Short history

2017 Wikipedia introduction in a local school

WMFI: articles, competitions

2019 Wikipedia event in Villa Karo

2019 photo session with WMBE  
in Abomey Calavi University of Benin

2023 WMFI associate member of Villa Karo



# Ideas what to do?

- photos, articles, interviews
- local history the Mono district
- old photos – old places
- natural history, the mono river estuary, coastal erosion (history)
- nature, plants, animals
- traditional artisan livelihoods: salt, fishing, palm oil
- museums in Benin
- local schools, university (in Abomey-Calavi)
- language, mina, fon, oral tradition
- art, culture, religion
- music, dance, rhythm
- annual Vodun Festival (January) and Nonvitcha (Pentecost)



# Sources

[Villa Karo](#) homepage (en, fi, fr)

[Wikimedia Suomi](#) Finland Chapter

[Wikimédiens du Bénin](#) User Group

[Wikiviews from Benin: Wikipedia in the Tower of Babel](#), GLAM Newsletter Jan. 2020

[Grand-Popo](#), Wikivoyage

[History of Grand-Popo](#), Wikibooks





# Thank you, Akpe, Merci



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