

Findings of the 2012 NRN Mapping Exercise

Final Synthesis Report

ENRD Contact Point

Version 1.1 (June 2013)

FINAL DRAFT

Executive Summary

During the last quarter of 2012 the Contact Point of the European Network for Rural Development (ENRD) conducted the third annual NRN mapping exercise. This report is a synthesis of the findings of this exercise, which comprised of the screening of updated country information about the profile and the current priorities of each of the National Rural Networks (NRNs). These inputs were provided by the countries' respective Network Support Units (NSUs) and complemented with relevant information from ENRD resources, such as the EAFRD CRD Gateway¹, the NRN Self-Assessment tool-kit² and experiences of the rural networks on the added value of networking³, as and when appropriate.

The objective of the present report is to have a better understanding of the European rural network typology, as well as the identification of clusters of networks based on their activities (similar or complementary activities pursued, similar methodologies/tools developed and applied). To confirm the typology and the current priorities of the rural networks, this report considered the following categories of information:

For the rural network typology -

- Structure (geographical coverage, operating structure);
- Budget;
- Representation and Participation;
- Operational Mandate;
- Human Resource Capacity;
- Monitoring and Evaluation of Networking.

For the classification of rural network activity into clusters, the annual priorities supporting the RDP implementation during 2012 -

- Thematic Initiatives launched by the Network;
- Collection and Dissemination of Relevant Experiences/Good Practices;
- LAG Support and TNC Activity under LEADER;
- Communication Activities.

The third Mapping Exercise was organised as a survey. Although the questionnaires used comprised of detailed and closed questions, the depth of the information provided by the NSUs varied. The findings presented in this report are therefore not exhaustive and the likely omission of relevant information is therefore unintentional. Survey feedback was received from all but two of the thirty-one Network Support Units (NSUs) addressed by the ENRD Contact Point. In the case of Italy and Luxembourg, data collected during the 2011 Mapping Exercise has been considered, since no update for 2012 was made available.

¹ http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/policy-in-action/communicating-rural-development/eafrd/en/eafrd_en.cfm

² http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/nrn-self-assessment-tool-kit/en/index_en.cfm

³ http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/added-value-of-networking/en/added-value-of-networking_en.cfm

In addition, an attempt was made to expand the Mapping Exercise to the regional layer of rural networking. The report considers the regional dimension to the extent of survey feedback received by the Contact Point, i.e. regional information was made available by NSUs from four Member States.

The screening of questionnaires and of complementary information sources leads to the following summary of updated and (compared to 2011) consolidated findings:

Rural Network Typology

- The main aspects now proposed to distinguish between different types of rural networks are: (i) the NSU's *geographical coverage* (6 regional NSUs and 25 national NSUs, of which 10 maintain "regional antennas"); (ii) the *operational setup* of the entity assigned with network animation (71% of the NSUs are located within public administration); (iii) the requirements linked to *network participation* (45% formal membership, 77% on-going possibility to join); (iv) the networks' *operational mandate* (71% approve the AWP or assign the NSU/NRN members with priorities and/or specific activities applying formal steering committee-type processes).
- The networks' *budgets* and their *human resource capacities* are subject to huge differences. No principles, such as proportionality linked to size of territory, population, regionalisation, RDP budget or actions planned have been applied. As far as the European Union's overall budget for rural networking is concerned, reductions of EUR 18,278,153 (in 2012), and of EUR 2,211,158 (in 2011) have been observed, resulting in a final variation of -4% compared to the overall ca. EUR 515 million committed for the operation of NSUs (including the ENRD).
- Self-assessment is often an integral part of the NSUs' regular reporting duties, and based on progress and/or performance *monitoring*. More than half of the NSUs consider that their regular reporting also includes a formal *evaluation* effort to document the added value of their networking activity. A smaller group of NSUs involve external service providers with the evaluation of their work.

Classification of Rural Network Activity

- The totality of themes identified through this year's Mapping Exercise remains grouped into seven *thematic clusters*. Screening results have led to the modification of eleven, the elimination of six former, as well as the introduction of seven new thematic initiatives. Axis 3 and 4 themes continue to be given preference over Axis 2 initiatives. LEADER is still the most frequently addressed individual theme (77%), followed by New CAP (74%), Rural Entrepreneurship, Local Products (55% respectively) and Forestry (42%). Among the NSU's regional antennas, priority has been assigned to Axis 3-type thematic initiatives that belong to the Economic Diversification cluster.
- The numbers of network actors involved in the identification of *relevant experiences* have significantly improved, while the activity still most frequently occurs at the level of NSU (68%), NRN member organisations (42%), or the MA (35%, often including regional authorities). More competitions have been noted, some of which also start off from the regional level. Like in 2011, the survey confirmed that websites, publications and databases are the main dissemination channels.

- Support to *Local Action Groups* (LAGs) and the promotion of *Transnational Cooperation* (TNC) remain important NRN tasks predominantly assigned to NSUs (81%). Support to these tasks, with little to no exception, also represents the core mission of the NSUs' regional antennas identified so far by the Mapping Exercise.
- Concerning the way in which rural networks approach the planning of their *communication* activities, the findings of previous mapping exercises remain valid, i.e. the NSUs, which have included a communication plan in their AWP or maintain their own proper communication plan represent the minority (45%). Almost all rural networks consider publications, websites (97% respectively) and events (71%) as their principal communication tools for the dissemination of RDP-relevant content. Most of the regional antennas make use of websites (or NSU website sub-sections) and electronic newsletters. 65% (compared to previously 19%) now disseminate information about RDP implementation via radio, TV and web-based video platforms.
- Interest in *thematic cooperation* has become significantly lower, compared to the last Mapping Exercise. This year, eleven NSUs completely abstained from proposing cooperation themes. Accordingly, the quantity of proposed themes declined from previously 51 to now 37. The cooperation interests most frequently stated among NSUs include LEADER TNC (35%); relevant experience, good practice identification/exchange (16%); and short supply chains (16%). The NSU's regional antennas are primarily interested in Axis 3-type thematic initiatives that belong to the Economic Diversification cluster.

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1. Rural Network Typology

1.1 Structure

In accordance with EAFRD Regulation No. 1698/2005 the Managing Authorities (MA) of all EU Member States have established Network Support Units (NSU) in order to animate their rural networks. These differ structurally, both in terms of geographical coverage and organisational setup.

1.1.1 Geographical coverage

As Table 1 below demonstrates, 15 MAs have chosen to establish a single NSU at a national level.

National	Austria, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, The Netherlands
National, with regional antennas	Bulgaria, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Italy, Latvia, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia
Regional	Belgium-Flanders, Belgium-Wallonia, UK-England, UK-Northern Ireland UK-Scotland, UK Wales

The above table also shows that another 12 MAs have introduced additional, i.e. regional, layers to rural networking. Two different types of structures that consider the regional aspect have been identified:

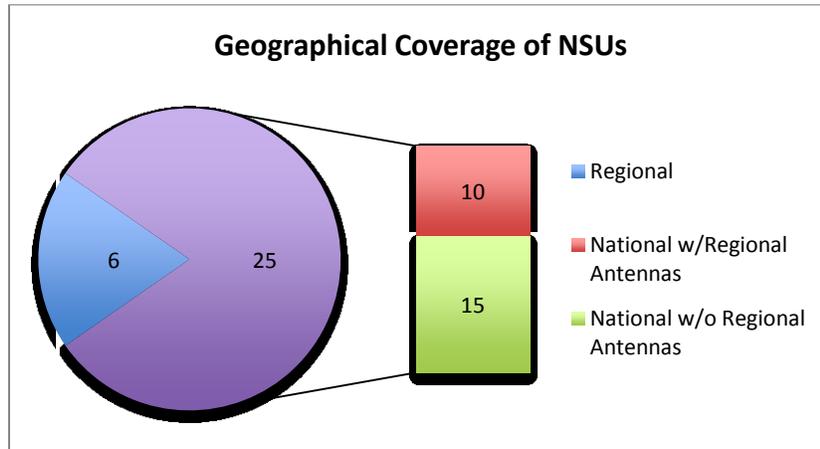
- A further 10 Member States (cf. info box 1 below) are also running national-level NSUs, which carry the main responsibility for NRN implementation tasks. However, there are complementary “regional antennas” which support the regional exchange of information and the coordination of networking activities with the national level. Their design mostly depends on the specific institutional context, i.e. the way public administrations are set up and managed in these countries.

Info Box 1 – NSUs with “regional antennas”

- The recently launched **Bulgarian NSU** is expected to activate 28 “expert-coordinators” across all administrative regions;
- In the **Czech Republic**, a transformation of the NRN structure is underway, which eventually will result in the introduction of “local and regional” units;
- The **French NSU** covers an extensive portfolio of networking tasks, but cooperates also with “correspondents and referents” in 26 regions. The establishment of NSU-type regional bodies is possible; e.g. in Auvergne, Franche-Comté (both located within the MA and co-steered by delegated regional institutions) and in Lower Normandy (outsourcing via a NGO);
- In **Germany**, the national NSU cooperates with correspondents of “Leader networks” in four of its federal states (e.g. in Thuringia);
- In **Italy**, the national-level NSU can count on the support of 19 “regional antennas” to connect with administrations managing regional RDPs and to liaise with local actors’ implementation enquiries;
- The **Latvian NSU** is composed of one central office and disposes of 26 “regional officers” to ensure information flows and the conduct of NRN activities;

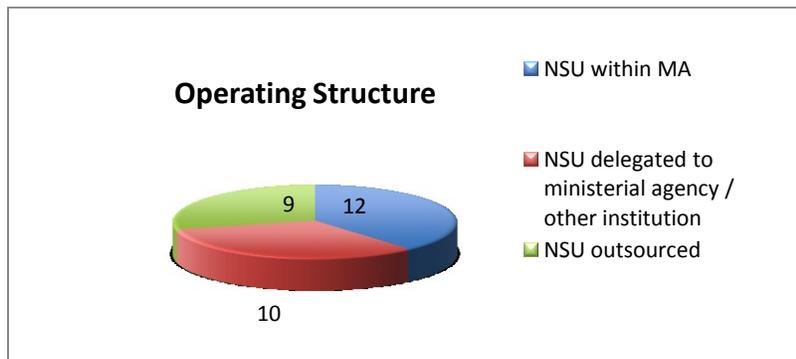
- **Poland** maintains “regional secretariats” in each of its 16 Marshall Offices, which facilitate information exchange and coordination of NRN activities in their regions.
- In **Portugal** seven “focal points” within Regional Directorates (5 on the mainland) and the Secretariat for Agriculture (2 on the islands of Madeira and Azores) are considered integral part of the national NSU;
- The **Romanian NSU** ensures “representation at regional level through 8 Regional Offices” to support Leader, good practices identification and communication;
- In **Slovakia** seven regional coordination offices have been tendered (outsourcing), mainly to support and coordinate networking and capacity building for Leader.

- In 2 Member States (the UK and Belgium) national-level networking takes only place for the purposes of representation and coordination (e.g. national or ENRD events): Otherwise, *England, Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland, Flanders and Wallonia* run fully fledged regional NSUs, operated on the basis of annual work programmes (AWP), and covering a range of rural network animation tasks fully comparable to the other 25 NSUs operated at national level.



1.1.2 Operating structure

Differences in the operational setup of NSUs add to the structural variety, as certain Member States have decided to integrate NSUs within public administration, while others have chosen to procure technical assistance contracts with external service providers.



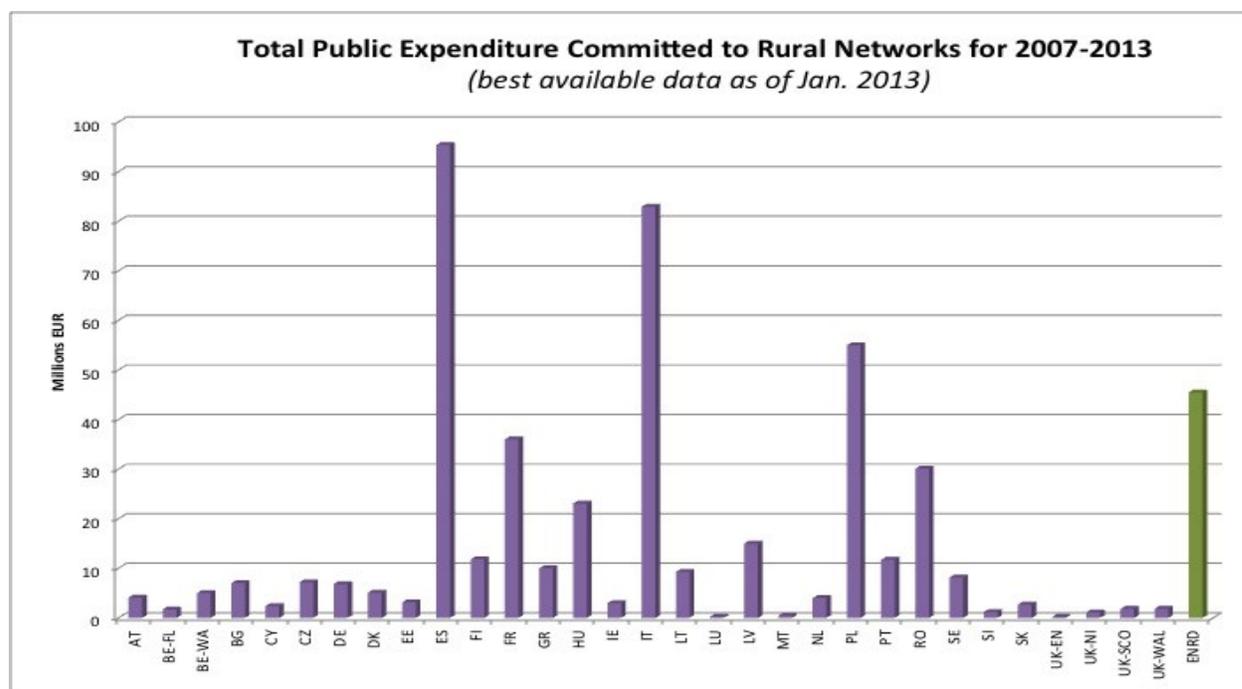
In the case of NSUs situated within public administration, a further distinction can be made between those that are part of the MA structure and the case where the provision of networking services has been delegated to a public sector agency or institution affiliated to the MA:

Within MA	Belgium-Flanders, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Greece, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Slovenia, UK-England, UK-Scotland, UK Wales
Delegated to public sector agency or institution	Estonia, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Portugal, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden
Outsourced to external service provider	Austria, Belgium-Wallonia, Bulgaria, France, Ireland, Poland, Romania, The Netherlands, UK-Northern Ireland

1.2 Budget

AWP implementation by NSUs is usually funded from the Technical Assistance budget of the relevant rural development programme (RDP). In accordance with Article 66 of the EAFRD regulation, some of the Member States with regionalised RDPs (Germany, Italy, Portugal and Spain) have chosen to operate and finance NSUs in the framework of a programme document (NRN-P).

In the absence of regulatory provisions Member States were autonomous in their decision how much of their technical assistance budget to allocate for the operation of NSUs.



The current levels of public spending for the operation of rural networks are displayed in more detail in table 3 below. EAFRD co-financing on average amounts to 61%, but individual rates also vary greatly among Member States, from 100% in Sweden, to 95% in Hungary and 80% in Bulgaria, Latvia and Romania to 0% in Luxembourg and Northern Ireland.

Compared to the findings of the 2011 Mapping Synthesis rural network budgets have been subject to adjustments (cf. highlighted figures) in Austria, Belgium-Flanders, France, Ireland, Latvia, Luxembourg, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, UK-Scotland and UK-Wales.

Table 3 ⁴		2012 Mapping data (Update: Jan 2013)				
Country	2011 Mapping Total budget (Status: Nov 2011)	Total budget (€)	EAFRD (€)	National (€)	EAFRD co-financing rate (%)	Difference (€)
AT	4,000,000	4,120,000	2,006,000	2,114,000	48.69	+120,000
BE-FL	5,000,000	1,740,264	870,132	870,132	50.00	-3,259,736
BE-WA	5,000,000	5,000,000	2,500,000	2,500,000	50.00	0
BG	7,000,000					
CY	2,400,000					
CZ	7,207,696	7,207,696	5,405,772	1,801,924	75.00	0
DE	6,828,112	6,828,112	3,414,056	3,414,056	50.00	0
DK	5,113,333	6,549,894	3,274,947	3,274,947	50.00	+1.436,561
EE	3,153,000	3,153,000	2,365,500	787,500	75.02	0
ES	102,602,910	95,396,840	47,698,420	47,698,420	50.00	-7,206,070
FI	11,800,000	11,800,000	5,310,000	6,490,000	45.00	0
FR	40,000,000	36,000,000	18,000,000	18,000,000	50.00	-4,000,000
GR	10,000,000	10,000,000	7,500,000	2,500,000	75.00	0
HU	23,073,369					
IE	2,750,000	3,000,000	1,500,000	1,500,000	50.00	+250,000
IT	82,919,766	82,919,766	41,459,883	41,459,883	50.00	0
LT	9,297,920	9,297,920	6,973,440	2,324,480	75.00	0
LU	75,000	225,000	0	225,000	0.00	+150,000
LV	10,000,000	15,000,000	12,000,000	3,000,000	80.00	+5,000,000
MT	500,000	500,000	375,000	125,000	75.00	0
NL	4,000,000	4,000,000	2,000,000	2,000,000	50.00	0
PL	55,000,000	55,000,000	41,250,000	13,750,000	75.00	0
PT	22,737,492	11,729,774	9,335,547	2,394,227	79.59	-11,007,718
RO	30,089,584	30,089,584	24,071,667	6,017,916	80.00	0
SE	7,800,000	8,140,000	8,140,000	0	100.00	+340,000
SI	1,200,356	1,200,356	900,267	300,089	75.00	0
SK	2,666,666	2,666,666	2,000,000	666,666	75.00	0
UK-EN	229,713	229,713	114,857	114,857	50.00	0
UK-NI	1,101,012	1,101,012	0	1,101,012	0.00	0
UK-SCO	1,669,296	1,835,587	834,648	1,000,939	45.47	+166,291
UKWAL	2,117,648	1,850,167	925,083.5	925,083.5	50.00	-267,481

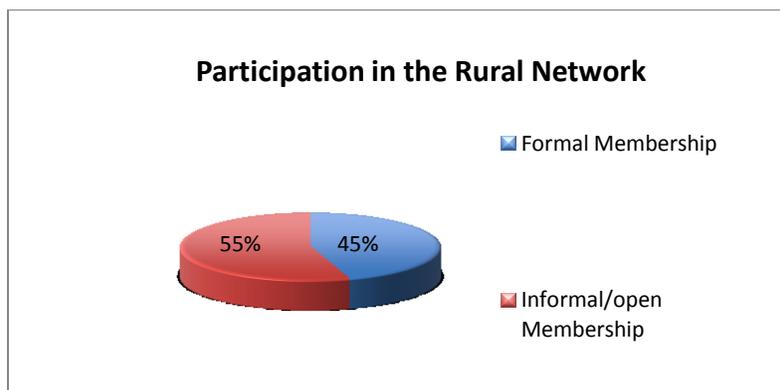
⁴ Updated budget data could not be obtained from Bulgaria, Cyprus and Hungary.

This year’s mapping exercise confirmed budget reductions in five Member States, most of which were significant compared to the state of play in 2011: Belgium-Flanders (-65%), France (-10%), Portugal (-48%), Spain (7%), UK-Wales (13%).

Budget increases, which have been noted in another six Member States (Austria, Denmark, Ireland, Luxembourg, Latvia, Sweden and UK-Scotland) partially offset the reductions noted above and in 2011, resulting in a final variation of -4% (reductions of EUR 18,278,153 in 2012, and of EUR 2,211,158 in 2011), compared to the overall ca. EUR 515 million committed for the operation of NSUs (including the ENRD).

1.3 Representation & Participation

In application of the partnership principle under Article 6 of EC Regulation No. 1698/2005, Member States have taken different approaches to network governance. The spectrum of stakeholder inclusion in and/or representation by the rural network ranges from open access to formalised and/or rather restricted participation. As a consequence two main types of participation in the rural networks have evolved in the current programming period.

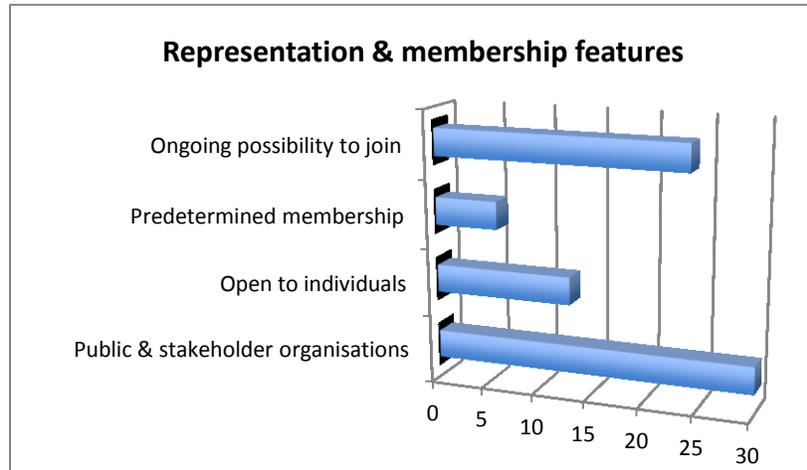


The response to the more targeted questions of this year’s mapping exercise shows that

- Fourteen (as compared to an estimated nineteen in 2011) rural networks maintain formal processes, i.e. assignment or approval of applications by the MA, to determine membership and hence admission to the network;
- Seventeen (2011: twelve) networks from fifteen Member States (includes regional NSUs) consider membership in a more informal way, i.e. anyone representing a stakeholder group involved in or concerned by rural development is usually considered a member and as such is admitted to participate in the activities of the rural network.

Formal membership	Belgium-Wallonia, Bulgaria, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Spain, Sweden, UK-Northern Ireland
Open membership	Austria, Belgium-Flanders, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Slovakia, Slovenia, The Netherlands, UK-England, UK-Scotland, UK Wales

While a majority of 24 rural networks remain open to new members throughout the 2007-2013 programming period, 6 of them comprise of members pre-determined by the Managing Authority. Both public sector bodies and private stakeholder organisations are represented throughout the rural networks in the EU. However, only thirteen of them (as compared to an estimated 8 in 2011) do also accept individual rural actors among their members.



The range of network members varies, but usually includes potential RDP beneficiaries, plus representatives of municipalities, micro-regions, rural associations, agricultural chambers and unions, professional organisations, academics, consultants and many others. During this mapping exercise, some NSUs have provided more details about the categories of members typically participating in rural networks, as summarised in info box 2 below:

Info Box 2 – Additional feedback on network participant characteristics

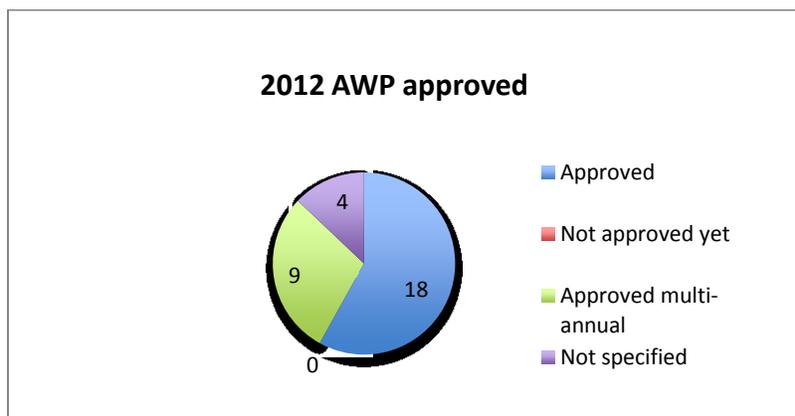
- **Belgium-Wallonia** makes a distinction between four categories of network members: (1) RDP beneficiaries: farmers, foresters, communes, enterprises, training organisations and others; (2) public services: General Directorates for Agriculture, Natural Resources and Environment (nature and forest departments included), administrations related to economy, employment, training and research, town and country planning, housing, energy and heritage, as well as the administrations for tourism and culture, and the French and German speaking communities; (3) the network of LAGs; (4) associations, organisations and other entities active in rural areas including agricultural unions, representatives of foresters and local contractors (energy, food, etc.), associations for the environment and culture, representatives from local communities and small towns, as well as local development and tourism agencies.
- According to its communication strategy, the **French National Rural Network** counts among its members the regional rural networks, its members, rural and territorial associations, and rural consultants.
- The network members in **Greece** are categorized into two main groups, i.e. (1) organisations representing programme beneficiaries and other stakeholders concerned by the objectives of the RDP measures; and (2) administrative authorities involved in programme management and implementation at national level.
- Participants in **Hungary's rural network** include those involved or interested in agriculture and rural development, e.g. individuals; local governments; micro-regional associations; medium, small and micro-businesses; registered societies, social and interest groups; higher education institutes; professional and commercial chambers; and legally registered religious groups.
- Rural network participation in **the Netherlands** involves both public and private sectors, is topical and hence differs from one activity to another. According to the NSU, the core group of partners

involved in network activities comprises of LEADER groups, other formalised area-based groups, theme specific groups (involved in the combination of farming/nature/recreation, rural reconstruction or national parks), regional- or village-level committees of inhabitants and various private sector initiatives, mainly involved in economic development.

- With 56 and 53 members respectively, agricultural associations and LAGs represent the majority of participants of the **Portuguese NRN**. Among the larger groups of network participants are also representatives of forest associations (29), cooperatives (26), central government (23), federations, local governments (20 each) teaching and research and regional directorates (19 each). Other members include socio-cultural associations and associations for tourism, enterprises, environment, socio-professionals, irrigators, as well as NGOs and foundations.

1.4 Operational Mandate

NSU service delivery is usually based on work plans, of which many institute the improvement of the efficiency of the implementation of their Rural Development Programmes (RDP) as the core mission. These work plans are usually agreed upon and approved in the form of Annual Work Programmes (AWPs) by MAs in each of the Member States.

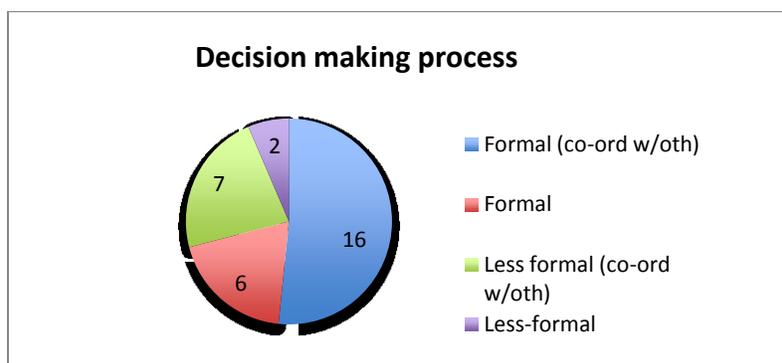


As shown in the chart above, the present mapping exercise clarified that the operation of 9 (compared to an estimated 4 in 2011) of Europe’s 31 NSUs is actually based on multi-annual work plans (Denmark, France, Greece, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal, Spain and the Netherlands).

According to table 5 below, an important proportion of the 2012 AWP’s obtained approval in late 2011 or early 2012, which suggests that most networks plan their operation in sequence with the calendar year.

Late 2011	Austria (Dec 2011), Cyprus (Dec 2011), Finland (Dec 2011), Germany (Nov 2011), Slovakia (Dec 2011), UK-Northern Ireland (Dec 2011)
Early 2012	Belgium-Wallonia (Jan 2012), Czech Republic (Jan 2012), Estonia (Feb 2012), Ireland (Feb 2012), Latvia (Jan 2012), Romania (March 2012), Slovenia (March 2012), Sweden (March 2012), UK-Wales (March 2011), UK-Wales (March 2012)
Other	UK-England (July 2012), UK-Scotland (July 2012)

When it comes to decision-making, all Member States dispose of particular mechanisms e.g. to approve the AWP, to assign the NSU or network members with the implementation of AWP priorities and/or specific activities and to review the progress/completion of AWP implementation.



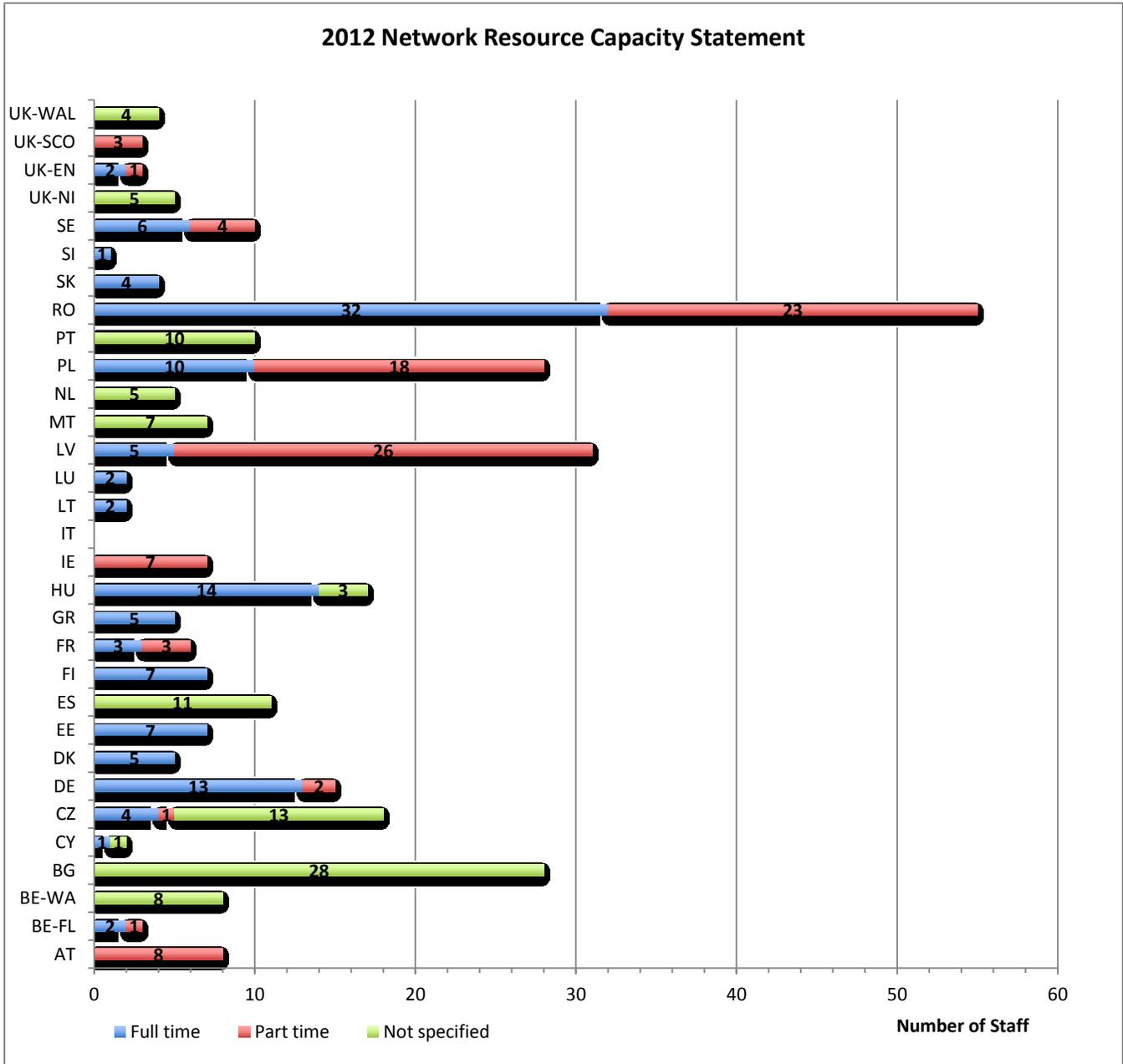
Two distinct types of decision-making processes have been identified, the first being formal steering-committee-type structures (22 networks), to which the NSUs often provide secretarial assistance functions. The 9 networks involving less formal decision-making processes mainly rely on consultation and mutual agreement, and very often the NSUs fulfil a moderator or facilitator role. Each of the decision-making mechanism types includes a group of networks, which have highlighted that their decision making process also foresees the co-ordination with concerned ministerial units and organisational entities or with other relevant networks if and as appropriate:

Formal (steering-committee-type)	Bulgaria, Cyprus, Germany, Slovakia, Sweden, UK-Northern Ireland
Formal, including co-ordination with others	Austria, Belgium-Wallonia, Czech Republic, Finland, France, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, UK-Wales
Informal (consultation and mutual agreement)	Estonia, Luxembourg
Informal, including co-ordination with others	Belgium-Flanders, Denmark, Greece, Malta, The Netherlands, UK-England, UK-Scotland

In application of the subsidiary principle the decision how rural networks are meant to assist RDP implementation has been left to the Member States (under Article 68.1b minimal tasks were defined). The four Network Programmes (NRN-Ps) with their more rigid framework and intervention logic clearly identify the functions and tasks of the respective NSUs. In the case of all other networks the different examples of operational mandates of NSUs range from largely independent implementation of planned (multi-) AWP activities to cases where AWP implementation is subject to continued scrutiny/modification and/or requires repeated approvals by the MA for procurement purposes.

1.5 Human Resource Capacity

As part of the 2012 mapping exercise NSUs for the first time were invited to provide an overview of their human resources allocation. The chart below shows the numbers of staff each NSU has at its disposal to manage its workload.



With the exception of the NSUs' absolute staff figures, the feedback obtained was often incomplete. As shown in the chart above, in a number of cases it remains to be specified if NSU staff is employed in full- or part-time capacity.

In addition, many NSUs did not relate their staff figures to specific tasks, which render a more in-depth analysis impossible at this stage.

Info Box 3 – Additional feedback on human resources

- The two persons of staff within the **NSU of Cyprus** can call on the support of other MA agricultural officers and/or administrative personnel as and when needed.
- The five full-time employees of the **Danish NSU** are animators both of the national rural and the national fisheries network.
- Among the staff of the **Finnish NSU** is a Swedish-speaking network coordinator, who collaborates with stakeholder groups in Swedish-speaking areas and the Province of Åland.
- The **Irish NSU** works with external contractors to facilitate specific actions.
- The **NSU of Malta** draws on seven MA officials to contribute as and when needed to the activities foreseen in the NSU's work plan.
- The **Scottish NSU** works with external contractors to manage the events and the network's website.

What is certain is that the ability of NSUs to engage in the design and implementation of tools, techniques, initiatives and other networking activities depends on the level of human resources available. Like networks, which already face significant budget constraints, those networks that have been the subject of budget reductions (cf. section 1.2) will be therefore less likely to expand and further develop contacts with their wider constituency and may have difficulties to participate in networking initiatives at European level.

1.6 Monitoring & Evaluation

As a consequence of more targeted requests the present mapping exercise achieved more consistent feedback about the monitoring and evaluation practices of the rural networks in the Member States.

According to the NRN fiche inputs obtained, self-assessment is often integral part of the NSUs' regular reporting duties, and based on progress and/or performance monitoring. Table 7 provides an overview of the type of indicator information the NSUs apply for this purpose:

Assessment against quantitative target indicators	Belgium-Wallonia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, The Netherlands, UK-England, UK-Scotland
Assessment against quality & results	Austria, Belgium-Flanders, Belgium-Wallonia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, The Netherlands, UK-England, UK-Northern Ireland

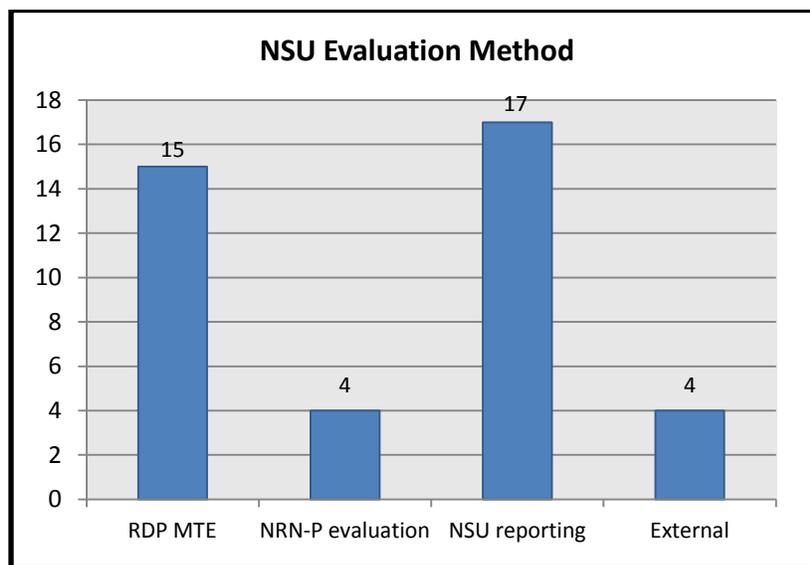
- 55% of the NSUs confirmed that they undertake quantitative assessments, by comparing result units with target indicators, which were established as part of their AWP's;
- 61% of the NSUs consider qualitative and result-oriented assessments, mainly by conducting phone, questionnaire and online surveys among network constituents to

establish their satisfaction with the networking services provided (e.g. publications, events, website).

Table 8 lists the NSUs, which confirmed that they have been evaluated in the context of the RDP mid-term evaluations, including all those operated on the basis of a NRN-P (c.f. table 8 and the chart thereafter).

Table 8 – NSU evaluation	
RDP mid-term evaluation (MTE)	Austria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Greece, Ireland, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Poland, Romania, Slovenia, UK-England, UK-Scotland
NRN-P evaluation	Germany, Italy, Portugal, Spain
Evaluation covered by / included in regular NSU reporting	Belgium-Flanders, Belgium-Wallonia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, The Netherlands, UK-Northern Ireland, UK-Wales
External NSU evaluation	Estonia, France, Sweden, UK-Wales

The chart below shows that more than half of the NSUs consider that their regular reporting also includes a formal evaluation effort to document the added value of their networking activity. A smaller group of NSUs involve external service providers with the evaluation of their work.



Info Box 4 – Additional feedback on evaluation

- Each AWP of **Belgium-Flanders** is based on the findings of the NSU's self-assessment of networking services provided during previous years.
- In **Bulgaria** the achievements of RDP implementation, including the contribution of the NRN, will be the subject of a national conference, to be held at the end of 2015.
- A special evaluation of the **Czech Network** was scheduled to take place in December 2012.
- The Steering Group supporting the MA's unit in charge of RDP evaluation in **Greece** has been reinforced by members of the NSU to support the assessment of activities under the NRN's AWP.
- **Poland's rural network** envisages to evaluate its functioning through a comparison with NRNs of other EU Members States.
- The **Portuguese NSU** intends to launch a questionnaire survey among its members in order to examine the effectiveness of rural networking.
- The **Romanian NSU** plans the development of an indicator system to capture quantitative data for monitoring and control, and intends to apply a participatory system for qualitative feedback, to which it refers to as "empowerment evaluation".
- A further evaluation of the **Scottish rural network** is expected to take place in 2013.

2. Rural Network Classification

2.1 Priorities supporting the RDP implementation

2.1.1 Thematic Initiatives

Forty-nine different thematic activities have been identified through the updated fiches that the NSUs⁵ have provided during the screening exercise. The thematic choices made by rural networks reconfirmed all seven thematic clusters established during the first round of the NRN mapping in 2010.

Compared to 2011, the 2012 screening has led to the modification of eleven, the elimination of six former, as well as the introduction of seven new themes. Modifications of themes were made in order to:

- integrate new themes closely linked with already existing themes (e.g. the integration of *employment* with the existing *rural job creation* theme,
- merge closely related themes (i.e. the *quality of life* theme with the *social issues and demography* cluster);
- take into account changes of a specific theme's focus (e.g. the former *CAP and RDPs* theme was modified, since all rural networks concerned are now focusing on *the new CAP, the future of the countryside and the preparation of 2014-2020 RDPs*).

As a result the seven clusters in table 9 below comprise of the following thematic initiatives (themes which were newly introduced or complemented by closely linked themes are printed in *italics*):

⁵ In the case of Italy and Luxembourg the NRNs' thematic choices for 2011 have been considered, since no update was available.

Table 9 - Thematic Initiatives	
(A) Rural Policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>New CAP, future of the countryside, preparation of RDP 2014-2020</i> • Efficiency of Rural Development Measures • Rural Development & Integration with other policies • Monitoring & Evaluation (incl. <i>self-assessment</i>) • <i>Networks & Networking</i>
(B) Agriculture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agriculture & market (<i>efficiency, competitiveness</i>) • Sustainable farming, multifunctional agriculture, <i>high nature value farming</i> • Young Farmers • Animal welfare (incl. transhumance/seasonal migration, <i>livestock buildings</i>)
(C) Sustainable Use of Agricultural and Forestry Land	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustainable development of rural areas • Agri-environment • Environment & Cross-compliance • AEM & climate change • Water • Arid areas • Renewable Energy • <i>Green infrastructure, green buildings</i> • Forestry, forest & environment (flood/erosion challenge, integral nature protection) • Climate Change • Nature Protection & Natura 2000 • Biodiversity as a resource for agriculture and rural development • Public Goods • <i>Community-supported agriculture</i>
(D) Cooperation and Leader	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leader (incl. <i>future of Leader</i>) • Cooperation of local communities • <i>Community-led local development</i>
(E) Economic Diversification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rural Entrepreneurship (<i>incl. farm enterprise, farm partnership, small farm cooperation, diversification</i>) • <i>Young adults/entrepreneurs in rural areas</i> • Innovation & Research in rural areas • <i>ICT / Communication</i> • Rural Job Creation / <i>Employment</i> • Training & Skills • <i>New forms of mobility</i> • Direct & regional marketing/sales • Rural and Agro-Tourism • Local Products / <i>short supply chain</i> (food, tourism/leisure, rural-urban linkages) • The village in the new economy (incl. <i>economic activity in a rural context and diversity</i>) • Broadband • <i>Rural financing, local risk capital, local funding</i> • Rural Cultural Heritage
(F) Quality of Life, Social Issues and Demography	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Quality of life for the rural population</i> • Social Farming • Women, <i>women investing in rural areas</i> • Equality (gender, <i>minority, poverty, disabled</i>) • Youth • Demographic change • <i>Integration</i>
(G) Planning and	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local Spatial Planning, Landscape Management

Territorial Development	• Land Use
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Thematic activities of rural networks continue to be dominated by themes linked to axis 2 and 3 of the RDPs.

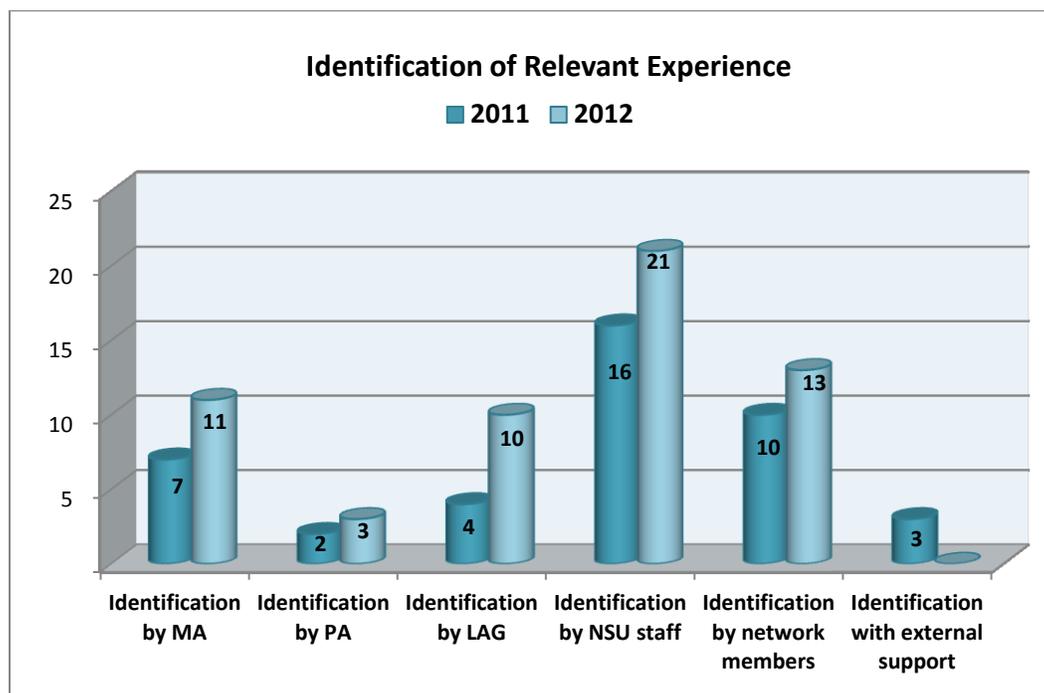
Various existing thematic initiatives clearly cross-reference between the proposed cluster areas, such as Multifunctional Agriculture, Social Farming and LEADER in particular. Some other themes appear closely related and, subject to reconfirmation with the networks concerned, may be merged (e.g. the themes 'Women investing in rural areas' and 'Young adults/entrepreneurs in rural areas' with the theme 'Rural Entrepreneurship'; or the themes 'Training & Skills' and 'New forms of mobility' with the theme 'Rural Job Creation/Employment').

The specific/common preferences of rural networks in terms of cluster and themes, and the particular methods how these are being dealt with, will be addressed in section 2.2 below.

2.1.2 Relevant Experiences / Good Practices

The responsibility for the identification (i.e. the collection and collation) of relevant RDP implementation experience in the Member States differs, at times depending e.g. on the RDP's or rural networks administrative set up, on the RDP measure addressed or on the type of beneficiary.

During 2012 the focus of rural networks on the collection of relevant experience continued to intensify throughout the European Union. According to the chart below the numbers of different network actors involved in the identification of relevant experiences was higher than previously. Most notably, the number of rural networks involving LAGs has more than doubled to 10 (previously: 4). The involvement of external expertise (previously considered by 3 networks) does not seem to play a role any more.



The above chart reconfirms that the identification of Relevant Experiences most frequently occurs at the level of NSU staff, through network members (incl. representatives of rural stakeholder organisations) or the MA. Table 10 below clarifies that this does not exclude the involvement of combination of multiple actors/entities in this exercise:

Managing Authority (MA)	Austria, Belgium-Flanders, Belgium-Wallonia, Czech Republic, Finland, Malta, Poland, Slovenia, Sweden, The Netherlands, UK-Northern Ireland
Paying Authority (PA)	Czech Republic, Lithuania, Slovenia
Local Action Groups (LAG)	Austria, Belgium-Flanders, Belgium-Wallonia, Denmark, Finland, Poland, Slovenia, Sweden, UK-Northern Ireland, UK-Scotland
Network Support Unit (NSU) staff	Belgium-Flanders, Belgium-Wallonia, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Luxembourg, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Romania, The Netherlands, UK-Northern Ireland, UK-Wales
Network members	Austria, Belgium-Wallonia, Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, The Netherlands, UK-England, UK-Scotland
External support	-

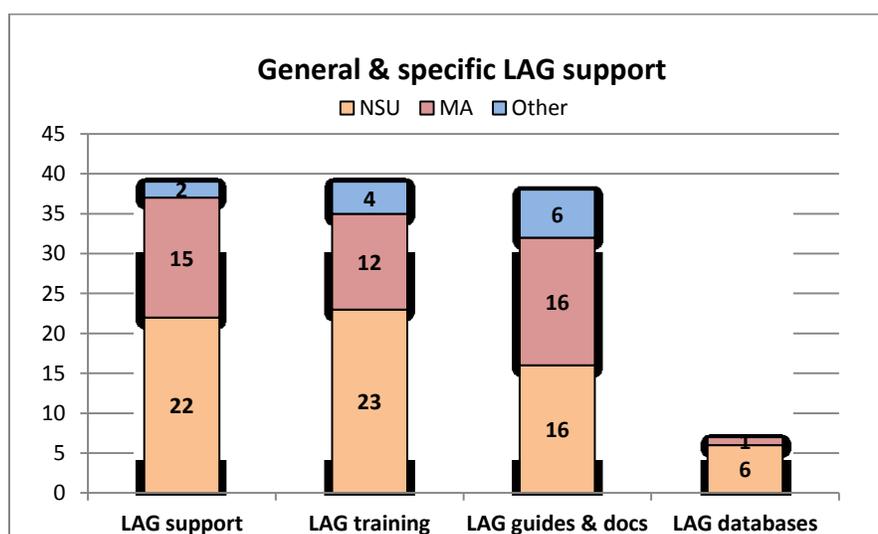
The different ways in which the networks disseminate the results of the collection and collation of Relevant Experience will be addressed in more detail in section 2.2 below.

2.1.3 LEADER-related activities

2.1.3.1 LAG Support

An important number of rural networks continue to provide general and specific support services for LAGs, often through the combined efforts of NSUs and MAs.

The chart below shows that, like during previous years, a large proportion of them provide dedicated human resources to respond to the general support needs of Local Action Groups (LAG)⁶.

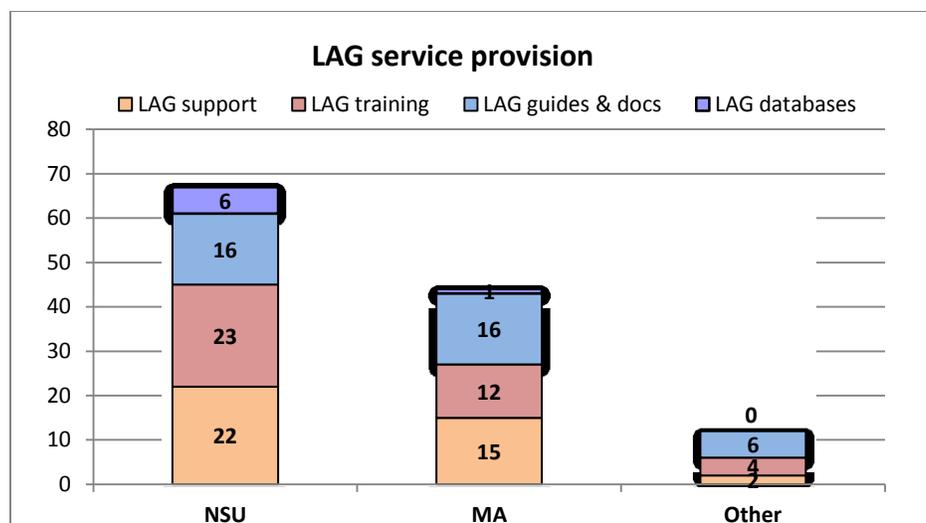


⁶ In the case of UK-Wales 2011 data has been considered, since no update on LEADER activities was available.

Compared to 2011, no change of priorities has been observed among the specific LAG support services. Table 11 below illustrates that training and events for LAGs are still given the highest priority, followed by the provision of documentation and guides for LAGs and the operation of national LAG databases. The latter continues to absorb low levels of NSU capacity though, most probably because this service is also catered through the ENRD website's LAG database (input for this European LAG database was gathered with the support of the NSUs during earlier stages of the programming period).

Table 11 - General & specific LAG support services	
General LAG support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NSU: Austria, Belgium-Flanders, Belgium-Wallonia, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Spain, Sweden, The Netherlands, UK-Northern Ireland • MA: Belgium Wallonia, Czech Republic, Estonia, France, Greece, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, UK-England, UK-Scotland, UK Wales • Other: Belgium-Wallonia, Lithuania
LAG training & events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NSU: Austria, Belgium-Flanders, Belgium-Wallonia, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Luxembourg, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, UK-Northern Ireland, UK-England, UK-Scotland • MA: Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Malta, Poland, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, UK-Scotland, UK-Wales • Other: Belgium-Wallonia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Lithuania
LAG guides & documentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NSU: Austria, Belgium-Flanders, Belgium-Wallonia, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Italy, Latvia, Luxembourg, Romania, Slovakia, Spain • MA: Belgium-Flanders, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, UK-Scotland • Other: Czech Republic, Denmark, Lithuania, Malta, Poland
LAG databases	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NSU: Belgium-Wallonia, Denmark, Estonia, France, Poland, Spain • MA: Bulgaria • Other: -

Above table and the below chart though clarify that MAs play a far more important role than assumed after last year's mapping exercise: the numbers of MAs involved in general LAG support (15 compared to 4 in 2011) and LAG training and events (12 compared to 3 in 2011) quadrupled and for guides and documentation they still doubled:



In summary, the general needs of Local Action Groups (LAG) are supported by rural networks through dedicated human resources in all but two Member States (Hungary and Slovakia). Provided by twenty-three NSUs and twelve MAs in all but two Member States (Ireland and the Netherlands), LAG training is still given highest priority among the specific Leader activities.

Info Box 5 - Additional feedback on support for LAGs

- The **Danish NSU** runs a telephone hotline for LAGs, which is open 5 days a week and maintains also an email account to reply to questions obtained in writing.
- NSU phone consultation services are also available for LAGs in **Estonia**.
- Similarly, the **Portuguese MA** offers phone and email support to all questions and doubts expressed by LAGs.
- In **Slovenia**, Leader implementation is also supported by the NGO 'Slovenian Rural Development Network', which integrates most of the LAGs.

Regional support for LAGs

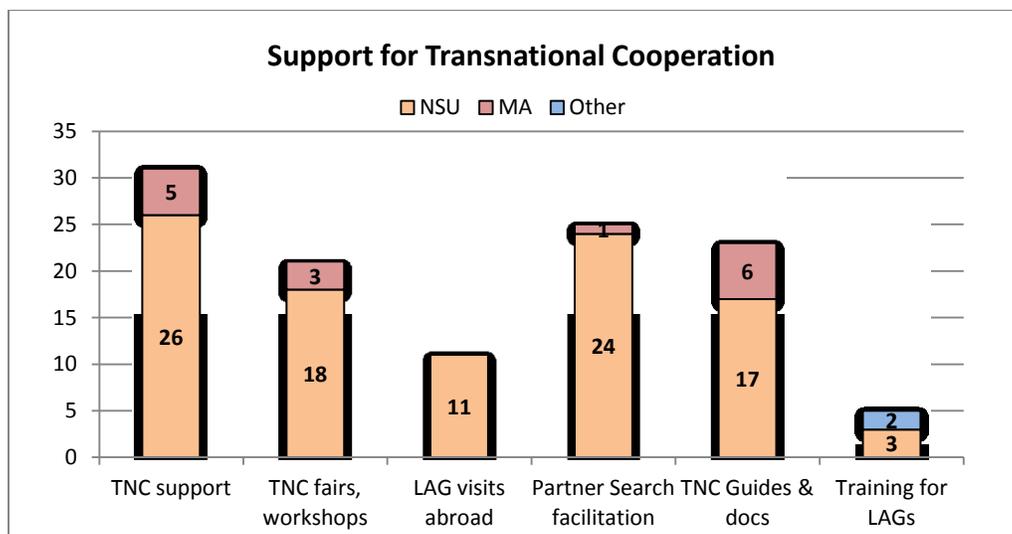
- In **France** the Ministry of Agriculture coordinates its advisory support services on rules and regulations for LAGs through its regional antennas (DRAAF correspondents). The regional antenna for Franche-Comté organizes interregional LAG meetings and training to facilitate the sharing and exchange of experience.
- Regional MAs in **Germany** have developed LAG guidelines and documents. There are Leader networks in some federal states (e.g. Thuringia), which provide additional support for LAGs.
- All of the regional secretariats of the rural network in **Poland** are tasked with LAG service provision, and most of them provide administrative guidance and organize training and events.
- It is the main tasks of the **Slovak** regional coordination offices of the to meet the support needs of LAGs.

2.1.3.2 Support for Transnational Cooperation (TNC)

In 2011 eighteen NSUs actively supported LAGs, with activities related to transnational cooperation, allocating dedicated human resources, which back then was an improvement as compared to the figure of fourteen NSUs noted in 2010. This trend continued in 2012, with 26 NSUs committing resources to support TNC in general.

NSUs have also continued to organise TNC fairs or to ensure the consideration of modular cooperation elements (i.e. workshops, exhibitions and cooperation corners) in the context of other NRN events such as annual conferences or thematic seminars. With eighteen NSUs, this year’s levels of effort remain the same compared to 2011 (twenty in 2010), leading to the conclusion that further information and encouragement was needed to launch TNC engagement among LAGs in the Member States concerned.

This need is further underlined by the fact that seventeen NSUs were involved in the development and dissemination of TNC-related guides and documentation (eleven in 2011).



According to the above chart more NSUs invested time and efforts to support LAGs with their search for transnational partners, be it in the form of e.g. database search engines, partnership offer circulars (twenty-four NSUs, compared to twenty in 2011) or by organising LAG visits abroad (eleven NSUs, compared to seven in 2011). This trend does not apply to similar extent to TNC training and mentoring (previously supported by 3 NSUs and 5 external service providers), which indicates that NSUs prefer the aforementioned activities to ensure that up to date information about TNC achieves a wider outreach among their LAG communities.

TNC support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NSU: Austria, Belgium-Flanders, Belgium-Wallonia, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, The Netherlands, UK-Northern Ireland, UK-Wales • MA: France, Greece, Lithuania, Malta, Poland • Other: -
TNC fairs & workshops	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NSU: Austria, Belgium-Flanders, Belgium-Wallonia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Sweden, UK-Northern Ireland • MA: Finland, France, Poland • Other: -

LAG visits abroad	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NSU: Austria, Belgium-Flanders, Belgium-Wallonia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Greece, Latvia, Luxembourg, Portugal, Slovakia • MA: - • Other: -
Partner Search facilitation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NSU: Austria, Belgium-Flanders, Belgium-Wallonia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Sweden, UK-England, UK-Northern Ireland, UK-Scotland • MA: Malta • Other: -
TNC Guides & documentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NSU: Austria, Belgium-Wallonia, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovenia, UK-Northern Ireland • MA: Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain • Other: -
Training for LAGs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NSU: Austria, Romania, Hungary • MA: - • Other: Belgium-Wallonia, UK-Wales

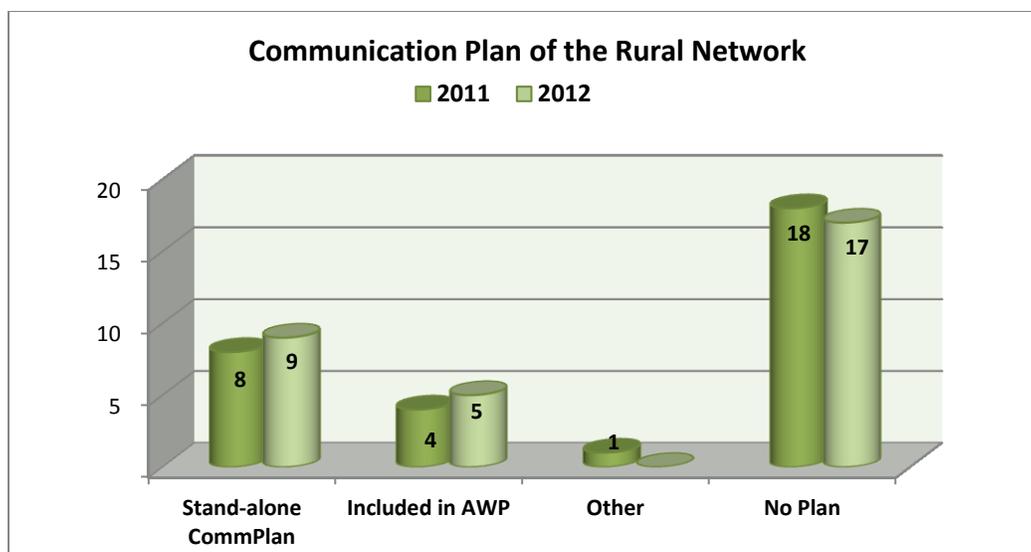
The overall positive trend of increased NSU resource mobilisation (in some Member States complemented by MA resources, as documented by chart and table 12 above), is most likely due to the nearing end of the programming period and an ambition to improve the absorption capacity for funds remaining available to LAGs for the implementation of TNC projects.

Info Box 6 – Regional support for Transnational Cooperation

- **France:** dedicated resources have been made available at the regional antennas for the Auvergne, Franche-Comté and Lower Normandy for the purpose of Transnational Cooperation.
- **Poland:** the majority of the rural network's regional secretariats facilitates the dissemination of cooperation offers and co-organises LAG visits abroad.
- **Slovakia:** most of the network's regional offices have organised LAG visits abroad to facilitate the identification of potential partners and the exchange of project ideas.

2.1.4 Communication

Little change has been observed concerning the way in which rural networks approach the planning of their communication activities. The findings of previous mapping exercises remain valid, i.e. the chart below illustrates that networks, which include a communication plan in their AWP or maintain their own proper communication plan represent a minority.

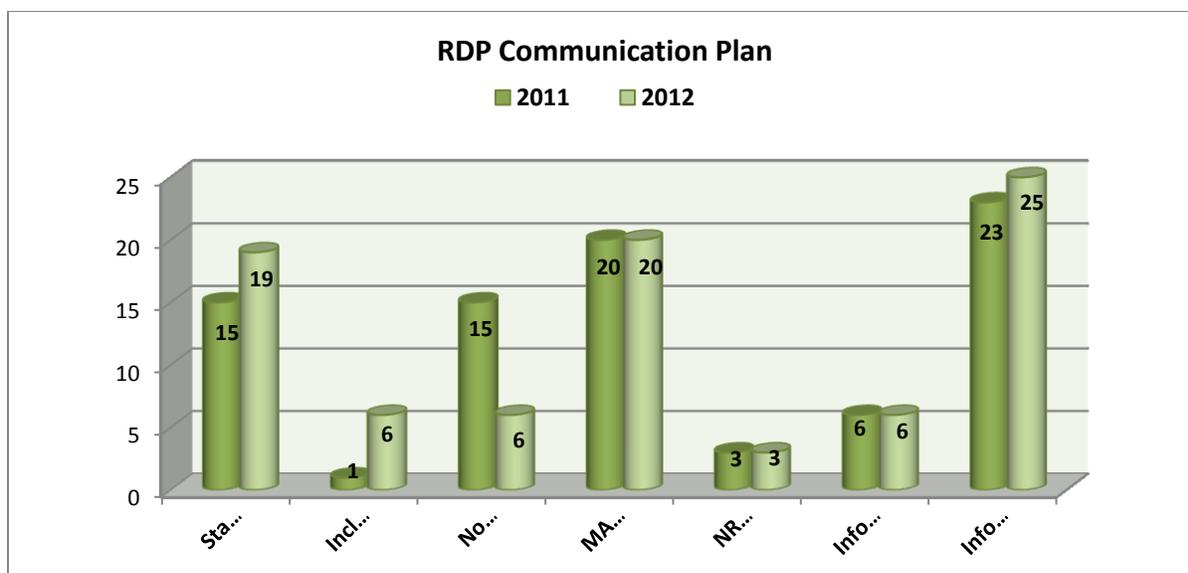


As demonstrated in table 13, a majority of seventeen NSUs either do not maintain a communication plan or have not made a relevant statement in their updated NRN fiches.

Table 13 - Communication Plan

Stand-alone Communication Plan	Belgium-Wallonia, Cyprus, France, Hungary, Portugal, Romania, Spain, UK-England, UK-Northern Ireland
Communication Plan included in AWP	Austria, Belgium-Flanders, Denmark, Estonia, Sweden
No Communication Plan	Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Finland, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, The Netherlands, UK-Scotland, UK-Wales
Other	-

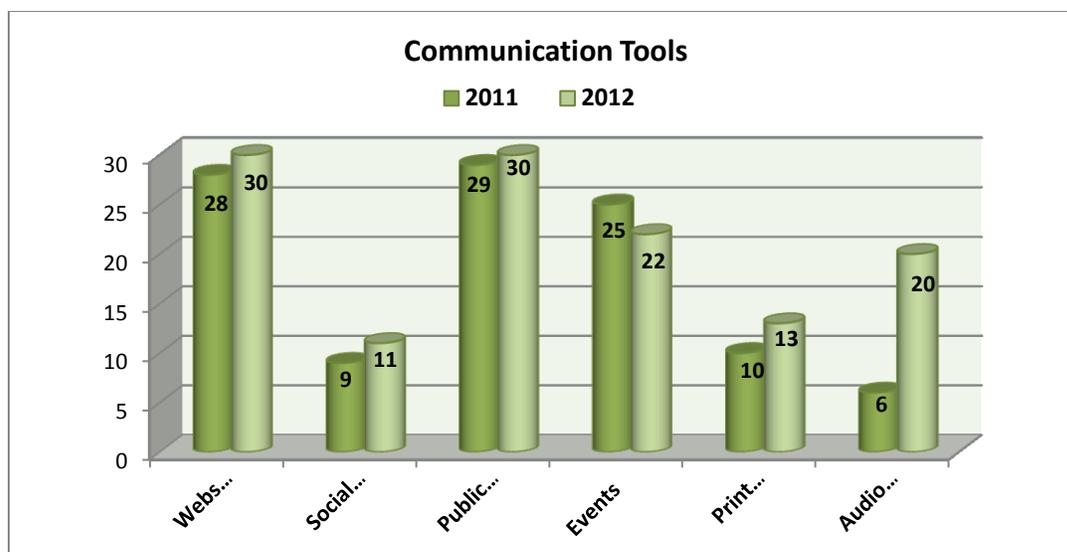
In some cases the absence of communication plans at network level is owed to the fact that RDP communication represents a responsibility of the MA. Compared to the previous mapping exercise, the existence of separate RDP communication plans is now confirmed for nineteen (previously fifteen) Member States, in further five (previously one) the plan is included in the RDP. Accordingly, the number of MAs, which either do not maintain a communication plan or have not made a relevant statement in their NRN fiches has decreased by two thirds (cf. chart below).



The above finding is consistent with the fact that NSP and RDP information is provided via the websites of the twenty-five MAs (2010: thirteen MAs / 2011: twenty-two MAs) listed in table 14.

Stand-alone RDP Communication Plan	Belgium-Flanders, Belgium-Wallonia, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovenia, Spain, UK-England, UK-Northern Ireland
RDP Communication Plan included in RDP	Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia, Sweden, UK-Scotland, UK-Wales
No RDP Communication Plan	Austria, Bulgaria, Luxembourg, Portugal, Romania, The Netherlands
Responsibility for RDP communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MA: Austria, Belgium-Flanders, Belgium-Wallonia, Cyprus, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, UK-Northern Ireland, UK-Scotland, UK-Wales • NRN: Estonia, Italy, Latvia
NSP/RDP web info hosted by NSU	Finland, France, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Romania
NSP/RDP web info hosted by MA	Austria, Belgium-Flanders, Belgium-Wallonia, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Germany, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, The Netherlands, UK-England, UK-Northern Ireland, UK-Scotland, UK-Wales

The following chart illustrates that publications, websites and events remain the means that almost all of Europe's rural networks consider their principal communication tools for the dissemination of RDP-relevant content. More advanced, but to a much lesser extent applied communication techniques involve the use of social media such as web blogs, web forums and social networks by eleven (previously nine) NSUs. The communication of information via external print media (i.e. through the provision of articles and press releases) has also become slightly more popular among the NSUs.



Most remarkable though is the extent to which NSUs are now making use of audio-visual media. Table 15 lists twenty networks, as compared to six in 2011, which now disseminate information about RDP implementation via radio, TV and web-based video platforms (e.g. YouTube).

Website	Austria, Belgium-Flanders, Belgium-Wallonia, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, The Netherlands, UK-England, UK-Northern Ireland, UK-Scotland, UK-Wales
Social Media (web forum, web blog, social network)	Belgium-Wallonia, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Italy, Romania, Slovakia, Sweden, The Netherlands, UK-England, UK-Northern Ireland, UK-Scotland
Publications	Austria, Belgium-Flanders, Belgium-Wallonia, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, The Netherlands, UK-England, UK-Northern Ireland, UK-Scotland, UK-Wales
Events	Austria, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Romania, Spain, Sweden, UK-England, UK-Northern Ireland, UK-Scotland, UK-Wales
Print Media (articles, press releases)	Belgium-Wallonia, Cyprus, Estonia, France, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Romania, UK-Wales
Audio-visual Media (radio, TV, DVD, web)	Belgium-Flanders, Belgium-Wallonia, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, The Netherlands, UK-Scotland

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Austrian NSU assigns top priority to communication via its website, which it describes as easy to handle and widely known among rural actors interested in agriculture, forestry, environment and Leader. • The website is considered the most effective way to directly reach network members by the team of the Belgium-Flanders NSU. • For the Cypriot NSU its website and electronic newsletters are the quickest way to get information out to its network members. • Similarly, the Czech NSU has a preference for website and newsletter, describing them as its most flexible communication tools to directly reach out to rural stakeholders.

- According to the **French NSU**, the Internet in general is a very important tool to facilitate communication with the wider public.
- The **Greek NSU** emphasizes that communication through website, publications and via the press is more affordable, while enabling access to many people.
- The same means of communication are employed by the **Lithuanian NSU**, which considers these as the best to directly reach out to the network's stakeholders.
- In **Malta**, events based activities were very well attended by the general public, which is why the NSU deems them to be a good way to inform the wider public about the benefits of the RDP.
- It is the view of the **Slovenian NSU**, that electronic newsletters greatly support the frequent distribution of updated information on rural development issues.
- The **Swedish NSU** confirmed that its website and Facebook page achieve the highest consultation rates.
- **Eleven NSUs** (Austria, Belgium-Flanders, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Greece, Malta, Portugal, Slovakia, Sweden, UK-England, UK-Northern Ireland) unanimously stated that email-communication still works best for them to speedily disseminate information and collect stakeholder feedback, as and when needed.

Regional support to communication

- The regional network antennas in Auvergne and Franche-Comté (France) and Thuringia (Germany) maintain their own **websites**. The Polish regional secretariats administrate their own website sections as part of the central NSU's web platform
- **Publications** are the second most frequently means of communication applied at the regional level, in the case of Franche-Comté and Lower Normandy (France) and Thuringia (Germany) these are mainly electronic newsletters, while the Polish regional secretariats offer a wide variety of thematic publications.

2.2 Network activity clusters

This section indicates opportunities of comparison and exchange, which have been identified as a result of the screening of the latest NRN fiches. It therefore intends to facilitate cooperation among rural networks on methodological approaches to the different services they provide, aiming to increase the efficiency of RDP implementation.

2.2.1 Similar or complementary activities

2.2.1.1 Thematic Initiatives

The thematic choices of the different rural networks provide useful baseline information for opportunities of exchange and cooperation across Europe from a topical point of view.

In addition to the aspect of clusters dominating by their variety of themes (identified in section 2.1.1 above), the following table therefore maps out the networks' specific preferences by cluster and individual theme, hence clarifying commonalities at general and specific level:

Table 16 – Thematic cluster / initiative choices of rural networks		
Thematic cluster	NRN/ cluster	Rural networks pursuing thematic initiatives
(A) Rural Policy	24	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New CAP, <i>future of the countryside, preparation of RDP 2014-2020</i> (23): Austria, Belgium-Flanders, Belgium-Wallonia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, The Netherlands, UK-England, UK-Wales • Efficiency of Rural Development Measures (4): Denmark, Italy, Slovakia, Slovenia • Rural Development & Integration with other policies (1): Italy • Monitoring & Evaluation [self-assessment] (4): Belgium-Wallonia, Hungary, Italy, Spain • Networks & Networking (1): Belgium-Wallonia
(B) Agriculture	12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agriculture & market [efficiency, competitiveness] (7): Austria, Estonia, Italy, Lithuania, Malta, Romania, UK-Wales • Sustainable farming, multifunctional agriculture, <i>high nature value farming</i> (7): Austria, Belgium-Flanders, Belgium-Wallonia, Hungary, Latvia, Malta, Romania • Young Farmers (4): Belgium-Flanders, Belgium-Wallonia, Italy, Romania • Animal welfare [incl. transhumance/seasonal migration, livestock buildings] (2): Austria, Spain
(C) Sustainable Use of Agricultural and Forestry Land	23	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustainable development of rural areas (2): Poland, Romania • Agri-environment (5): Austria, Finland, Germany, Greece, UK-Wales • Environment & Cross-compliance (1): Italy • AEM & climate change (1): Greece • Water (4): Czech Republic, Germany, Italy, Malta • Arid areas (1): Czech Republic • Renewable Energy (8): Belgium-Wallonia, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Portugal, Sweden, UK-Northern Ireland • Green infrastructure, green buildings (2): France, Romania • Forestry, forest & environment [flood/erosion challenge, integral nature protection] (13): Austria, Belgium-Wallonia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Portugal, Romania, Spain, UK-Scotland, UK-Wales • Climate Change (2): Ireland, UK-Wales • Nature Protection & Natura 2000 (4): Austria, Germany, Ireland, Romania • Biodiversity as a resource for agriculture and rural development (4): Austria, Ireland, Lithuania, Portugal • Public Goods (1): Belgium-Wallonia • Community-supported agriculture (1): Ireland
(D) Cooperation and Leader	27	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leader [incl. future of Leader] (24): Austria, Belgium-Flanders, Belgium-Wallonia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Poland, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, UK-England, UK-Northern Ireland, UK-Scotland, UK-Wales • Cooperation of local communities (6): Austria, Belgium-Wallonia, Italy, Latvia, The Netherlands, UK-Northern Ireland • Community-led local development (5): Hungary, Ireland, Lithuania, Portugal, UK-Scotland
(E) Economic Diversification	25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rural Entrepreneurship [incl. farm enterprise, farm partnership, small farm cooperation, diversification] (17): Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Sweden, UK-Northern Ireland, UK-Scotland, UK-Wales • Young adults/entrepreneurs in rural areas (5): Finland, Latvia, Portugal, Romania, UK-Scotland • Innovation & Research in rural areas (8): Finland, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Romania, Spain, Sweden • ICT / Communication (1): UK-Northern Ireland • Rural Job Creation / Employment (3): Austria, Romania, Spain • Training & Skills (2): Hungary, Poland • New forms of mobility (1): Belgium-Wallonia

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Direct & regional marketing/sales (3): Germany, Malta, Spain • Rural and Agro-Tourism (7): Belgium-Wallonia, Germany, Malta, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Spain • Local Products / short supply chain [food, tourism/leisure, rural-urban linkages] (17): Austria, Belgium-Wallonia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, France, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Spain, UK-Northern Ireland, UK-Scotland, UK-Wales • The village in the new economy [incl. economic activity in a rural context and diversity] (7): Belgium-Wallonia, Germany, Hungary, Latvia, Poland, Portugal, Spain • Broadband (1): UK-Wales • Rural financing, local risk capital, local funding (3): Hungary, Ireland, The Netherlands • Rural Cultural Heritage (5): Hungary, Poland, Portugal, Romania, UK-Wales
(F) Quality of Life, Social Issues and Demography	18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality of life for the rural population (5): Finland, France, Lithuania, The Netherlands, UK-Scotland • Social Farming (3): Belgium-Wallonia, Estonia, Portugal • Women, women investing in rural areas (3): Latvia, Spain, UK-Northern Ireland • Equality [gender, minority, poverty, disabled] (5): Austria, Italy, Romania, Spain, UK-Wales • Youth (7): Austria, Estonia, France, Lithuania, Poland, Sweden, UK-Northern Ireland • Demographic change (1): Germany • Integration (1): Sweden
(G) Planning and Territorial Development	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local Spatial Planning, Landscape Management (5): Denmark, France, Italy, Lithuania, Poland • Land Use (1): Czech Republic

Compared to the previous screening of the 2011 NRN fiches, the group of thematic clusters that in 2012 were the 'busiest' ones remains the same. However, the frequency of initiatives within three of the four clusters has intensified:

- *Cooperation and LEADER*: with twenty-seven networks, this cluster once more displays an increase of thematic initiative (2010: fifteen, 2011: twenty-three) and has become the most popular one;
- *Economic diversification*: following a significant increase of thematic activity between 2010 to 2011, the number of networks pursuing the theme in 2012 remains steady at twenty-five;
- *Rural Policy*: as more and more rural networks are now focusing on the future of the countryside and the preparation of the 2014-2020 RDP, initiatives within this cluster increased significantly from previously sixteen to now twenty-four networks.
- *Sustainable use of agricultural and forestry land*: activity under this theme also increased with twenty-three of the networks engaged (2010: sixteen, 2011: nineteen);

The most frequently addressed individual themes again belong to the above 'busy' clusters. Axis 3-type themes continue to dominate over Axis 2-type or policy themes:

- LEADER, including the future of LEADER: twenty-four networks;
- New CAP, future of the countryside, preparation of RDP 2014-2020: twenty-three networks;
- Rural Entrepreneurship, including farm enterprise, farm partnership, small farm cooperation, diversification: seventeen networks;

- Local Products / short supply chain, including food, tourism/leisure, rural-urban linkages: seventeen networks;
- Forestry, forest & environment, including flood/erosion challenge, integral nature protection: thirteen networks.

2.2.1.2 Relevant Experiences / Good Practices

A number of Member States have followed the example of an initially small group of networks, which organised competitions as a method to support the identification of projects representing relevant experience. It seems to have now become an established practice to dedicate these competitions to a specific theme or categories of themes of relevance, in order to establish for and communicate to the wider rural community examples of practices contributing to the achievement of the RDPs' objectives.

Project holders obtaining RDP-funded support are invited to participate and usually are required to submit a project dossier, comprising of information categories that will determine the selection as relevant RDP implementation experience. The selection of projects culminates in award ceremonies held e.g. in the context of a rural network's annual conference or a dedicated event organised to promote the results of the competition. Info Box 8 summarises nine examples of competitions, which were conducted or launched in 2012:

Info Box 8 – Examples of competitions identifying relevant experience

- **Austria:** the NSU organizes a project competition, which focuses on a different topic every year. The 2012 "Equal Opportunities Innovation Award" included award categories for women, youth and a mixed group covering themes such as migration, disabled people and others⁷. A committee of experts assesses the projects and awards prizes.
- **Cyprus:** an open competition for projects funded under the 2007-2013 RDP was launched and planned to close by mid-autumn 2012. The period was extended, as the number of applications was low. A panel of experts will select the winners of the competition.
- **Estonia:** "Notice Innovative Agriculture" was the network's second competition, which in 2012 aimed to identify project examples from axis 1 of the RDP. Eighteen projects were nominated across three categories: best agricultural cooperation project, best agricultural innovation project, best agricultural knowledge transfer project.
- **Finland:** the "Best Practices 2012" competition started in spring. Regional authorities chose one LAG to represent their region. A jury selected four semi-finalists for each of the competition's five categories and the most outstanding Leader-group. Winners were announced at a Rural Gala, which gathered rural developers, entrepreneurs, politicians and decision makers.
- **Germany:** the NSU for the third time organized the competition "Be strong together", which awarded project promoters offering solutions on how to locally address the challenges of demographic change⁸. LAG and regional MA representatives voted online for projects on local supply concepts, clever ideas for the school of tomorrow and charitable civic associations or care concepts for all generations.

⁷ Detailed info is available at: <http://www.netzwerk-land.at/lepreis2012>

⁸ Detailed info is available at: <http://www.netzwerk-laendlicher-raum.de/beispiele/wettbewerb-2012/>

- **Greece:** the NSU plans to hold a competition and to award selected relevant practices in a public award ceremony, announcing the farmer and / or the project of the year.
- **Poland:** the “Friendly Village” competition is organized annually to identify and award the best infrastructural projects implemented in rural areas⁹. Organized in two stages, projects that successfully passed regional competitions are eligible to take part in the national competition. At the national stage the Central Competition Commission appointed by the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development selects the winners. Projects are assessed for: innovation, functionality, usefulness and impact on the economic development of the region. The competition maintains a technical, social and ecological category. Award winners are presented at a national conference.
- **Sweden:** In the system of the “Rural Best Award”¹⁰ the county administrations, together with all LAGs, nominate candidates within seven categories: rural entrepreneur, rural innovation, rural development project, environmental initiative, youth initiative, integration initiative and Leader of the year. A scientific council, together with the steering committee, conduct the evaluation of applicants and selects the winners.
- **The Netherlands:** In July 2012 the NSU launched “POP Prijs 2013”. In the spring of 2013, for the second time since 2010, the “Passion of the countryside prize’ will be awarded to successful, inspiring, special or innovative projects, in order to put the country’s rural areas once more into the spotlight¹¹. A jury will nominate from the entries twelve finalists. From these, four winners one for each RDP axis will be selected. The jury primarily assesses how innovative, replicable or original it is, and whether it is based on a special partnership or a permanent structure.

2.2.2. Common interests in terms of methodologies and tools applied/developed

2.2.2.1 Thematic Initiatives

The 2011 mapping exercise established that rural networks apply different, sometimes multiple, types of approaches/methods to address thematic issues. In order to ensure consistent findings as part of the 2012 screening networks were specifically asked to confirm which of the four types of approaches/methods they practice, i.e.:

- Thematic (Expert/Practitioner) Working Groups;
- Management Committees, Steering Groups;
- Events (Seminar, Workshop, etc.);
- Stakeholder surveys, analysis, consultation.

The following analysis hence consolidates the information about the most common methodological approaches for each thematic cluster.

In addition, the thematic focus of those regional antennas, which provided relevant information¹², has been given consideration for the first time. Interestingly, thematic choices and methodological approaches of these regional units are not necessarily consistent with the selection made at the national level. For this reason, and in order to allow for comparison of the 2012 results with the findings of previous mapping exercises, the choices of regional antennas

⁹ Detailed info is available at: [http://ksow.pl/fileadmin/user_upload/ksow.pl/pliki/ENRD -
_projekty_zagraniczne/Polska/PL_Success_Story - Friendly_Village.pdf](http://ksow.pl/fileadmin/user_upload/ksow.pl/pliki/ENRD_-_projekty_zagraniczne/Polska/PL_Success_Story_-_Friendly_Village.pdf)

¹⁰ Detailed info (in Swedish) is available at:

<http://www.landsbygdsnatverket.se/huvudomraden/aktiviteter/natverkstraffar/landsbygdsngalan2012.4.29a582d01364dc6657380000.html>

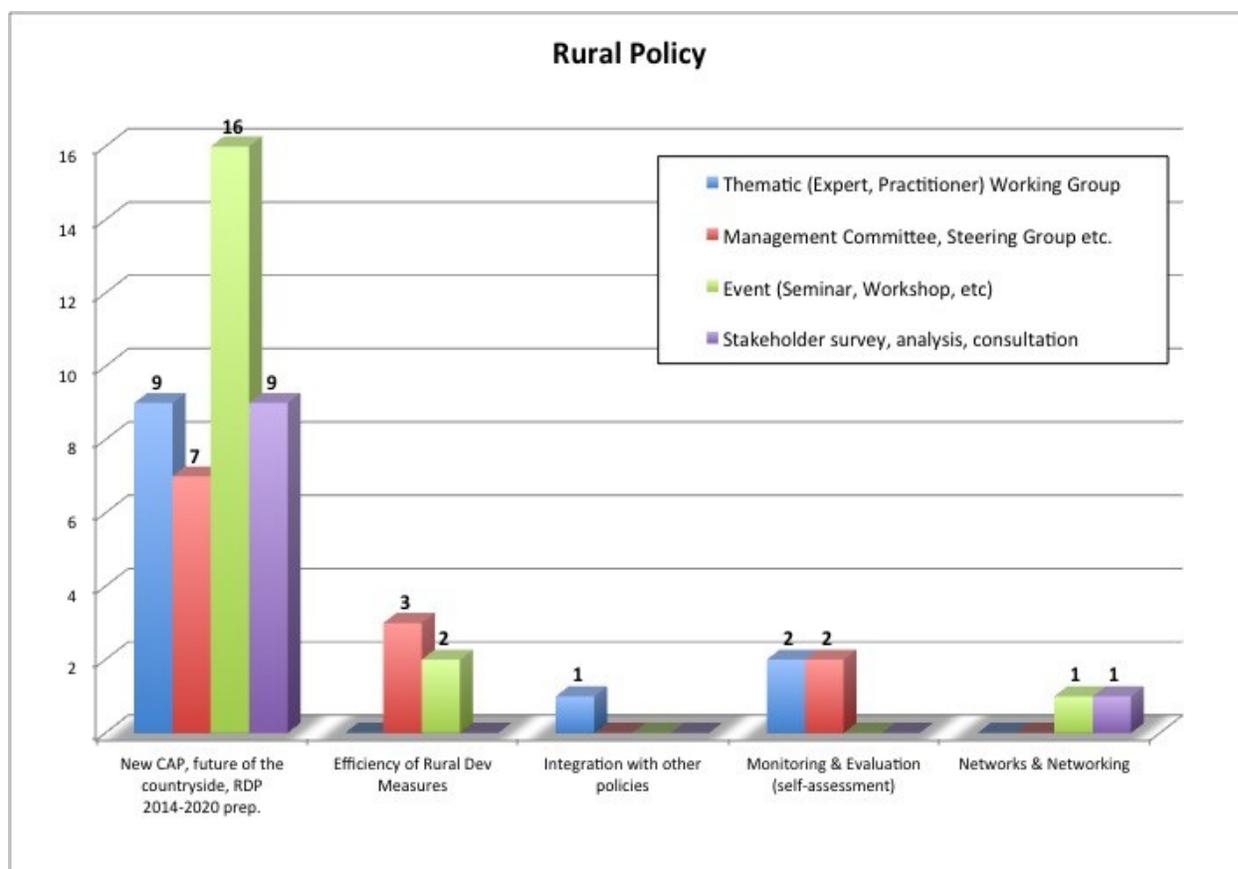
¹¹ <http://www.netwerkplatteland.nl/pop-prijs-2013>

¹² Mainly from France, Poland and Slovakia.

have been summarised separately in info boxes located at the end of each thematic cluster subsection.

(A) Rural Policy

As far as the *Rural Policy* cluster is concerned, there is a clear preference among rural networks to inform and exchange about issues related to the new CAP and future programming period in conference/seminar and workshop settings (now a thematic choice of sixteen, compared to nine networks in 2011).



While optional scenarios, such as expert working groups or stakeholder consultation for the same mechanisms for the same purpose represented only the second choice, they have gained a lot more in importance compared to the previous screening. According to table 17 all the other, more current (but less prominent) rural policy themes, make also use of other methods and approaches:

Thematic (Expert/Practitioner) Working Groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New CAP, <i>future of the countryside, preparation of RDP 2014-2020</i>: Belgium-Wallonia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Malta, Portugal, Romania, Spain, UK-England • Rural Development & Integration with other policies: Italy • Monitoring & Evaluation (<i>self-assessment</i>): Belgium-Wallonia, Hungary
Management Committees, Steering Groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New CAP, <i>future of the countryside, preparation of RDP 2014-2020</i>: Belgium-Flanders, Cyprus, Finland, France, Lithuania, Poland, Slovenia • Efficiency of Rural Development Measures: Denmark, Italy, Slovakia • Monitoring & Evaluation (<i>self-assessment</i>): Italy, Spain

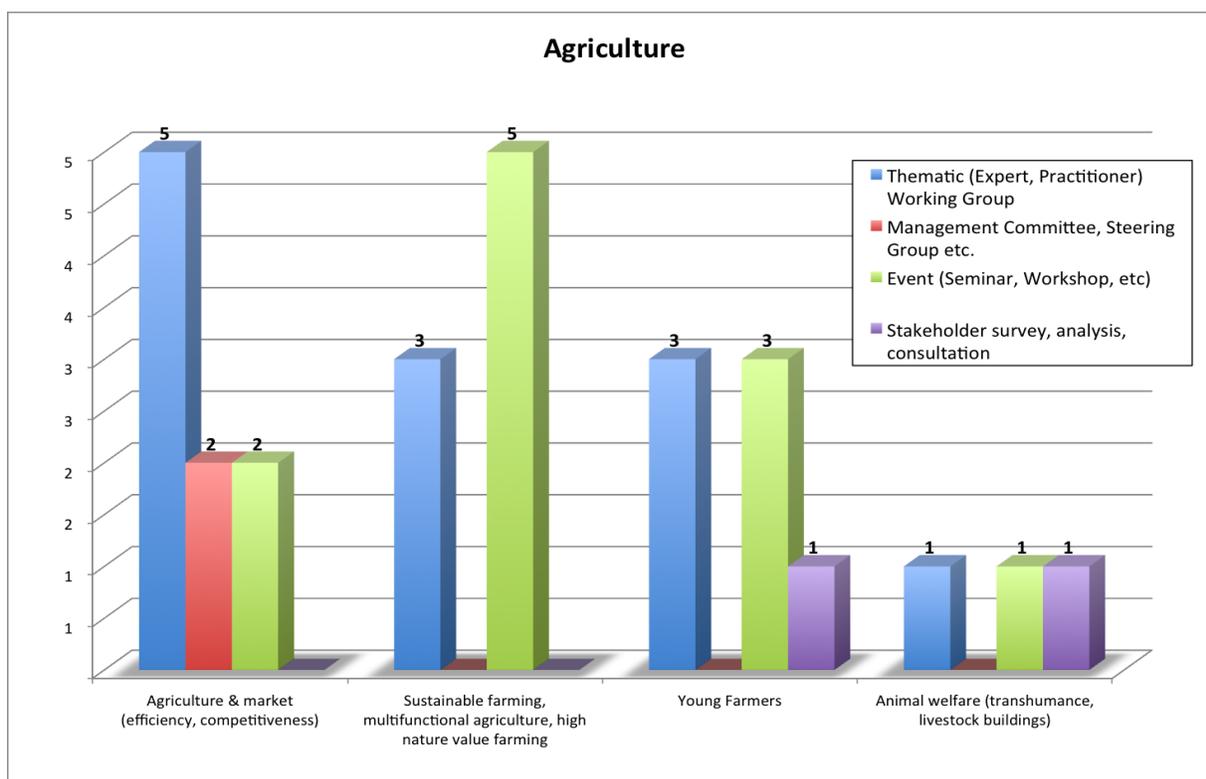
Events (Seminar, Workshop, etc.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New CAP, <i>future of the countryside, preparation of RDP 2014-2020</i>: Austria, Belgium-Flanders, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Malta, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, UK-Wales • Efficiency of Rural Development Measures: Italy, Slovenia • <i>Networks & Networking</i>: Belgium-Wallonia
Stakeholder surveys, analysis, consultation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New CAP, <i>future of the countryside, preparation of RDP 2014-2020</i>: Belgium-Flanders, Cyprus, Denmark, Hungary, Malta, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain • <i>Networks & Networking (1)</i>: Belgium-Wallonia

Some of the NSUs’ regional antennas identified in info box 1 above (section 1.1.1) do also pursue Rural Policy cluster initiatives. Examples are provided info box 9 below.

Info Box 9 – Rural Policy themes supported by regional antennas of NSUs	
<i>New CAP, future of the countryside, preparation of RDP 2014-2020:</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Auvergne/France (TWG), • Nitra/Slovakia (TWG, Steering Group), • Trenčín/Slovakia (event, consultation/analysis), • Prešov/Slovakia (all methods). 	
<i>Monitoring & Evaluation (self-assessment):</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Auvergne/France (TWG). 	

(B) Agriculture

The sustainable farming theme of this cluster continues to be principally the subject of various types of events and expert working groups.



Agriculture & market, which has become the most frequently addressed theme within this cluster (previously: sustainable farming), and the young farmers theme were mainly addressed through the organisation of thematic working groups and events (see also table 18 below):

Table 18 – Networking approach to Agriculture cluster	
Thematic (Expert/Practitioner) Working Groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agriculture & market (<i>efficiency, competitiveness</i>): Austria, Italy, <i>Malta, Romania</i>, UK-Wales • Sustainable farming, multifunctional agriculture, <i>high nature value farming</i>: Belgium-Wallonia, <i>Hungary, Malta</i> • Young Farmers: <i>Belgium-Flanders, Belgium-Wallonia</i>, Italy • Animal welfare (incl. transhumance/seasonal migration, <i>livestock buildings</i>): Spain
Management Committees, Steering Groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agriculture & market (<i>efficiency, competitiveness</i>): Austria, <i>Lithuania</i>
Events (Seminar, Workshop, etc.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agriculture & market (<i>efficiency, competitiveness</i>): Austria, <i>Estonia</i> • Sustainable farming, multifunctional agriculture, <i>high nature value farming</i>: Austria, Belgium-Flanders, Belgium-Wallonia, <i>Latvia, Romania</i> • Young Farmers: <i>Belgium-Flanders, Belgium-Wallonia, Romania</i> • Animal welfare (incl. transhumance/seasonal migration, <i>livestock buildings</i>): <i>Austria</i>
Stakeholder surveys, analysis, consultation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young Farmers: <i>Romania</i> • Animal welfare (incl. transhumance/seasonal migration, <i>livestock buildings</i>): Spain

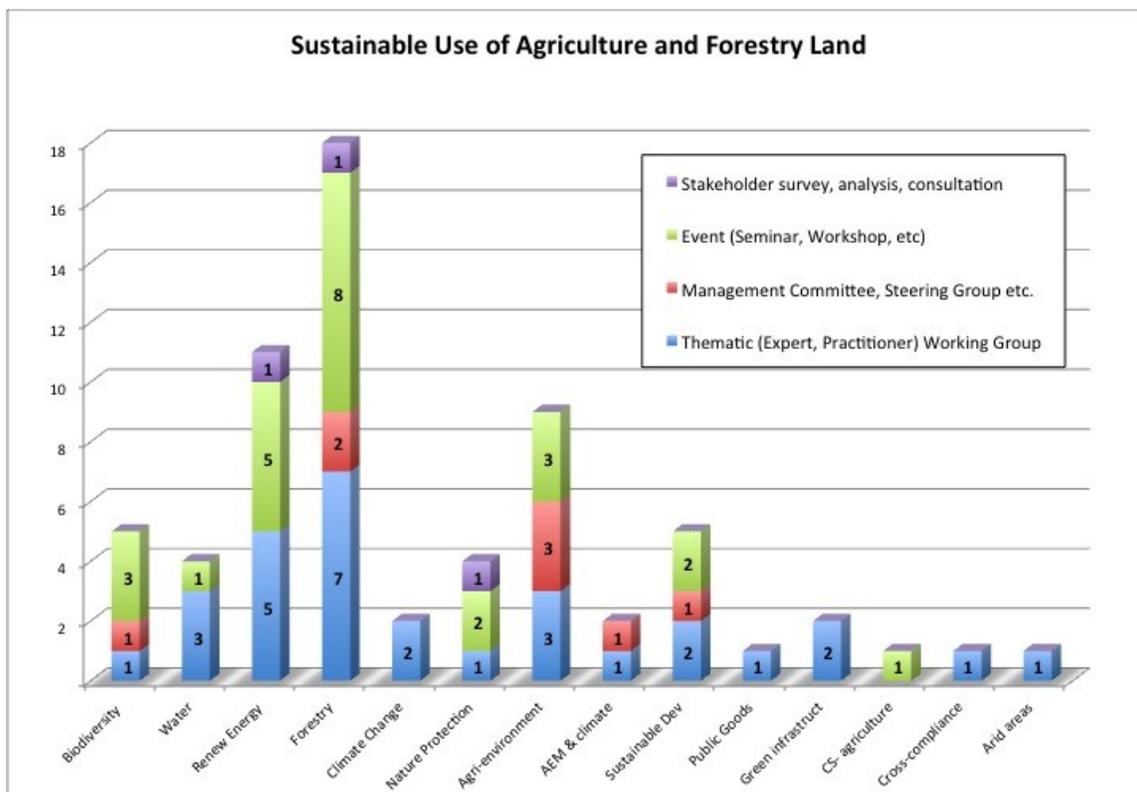
Those NSUs' regional antennas, which the mapping exercise found pursuing initiatives falling under themes belonging to the Agriculture cluster are listed info box 10 below.

Info Box 10 – Agriculture themes supported by regional antennas of NSUs
<p><i>Agriculture & market (efficiency, competitiveness):</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lubelskie/Poland (TWG, event), • Mazowieckie/Poland (event, consultation/analysis), • Opolskie/Poland (TWG, event), • Podlaskie/Poland (TWG). <p><i>Sustainable farming, multifunctional agriculture, high nature value farming:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pomorskie/Poland (event), • Lodzkie/Poland (event).

(C) Sustainable Use of Agricultural and Forestry Land

The cluster embracing themes related to the *Sustainable Use of Agricultural and Forestry Land* most frequently relies on thematic (expert/practitioner) working groups.

Compared to the previous mapping exercise, events still play an important role, in particular for rural actors to meet, exchange, and thus to obtain relevant information related to the themes Forestry (now most frequently addressed), Renewable/Bio-Energy, and Agri-Environment. The chart illustrates that Forestry (including environmental issues such as the flood/erosion challenge, integral nature protection) is the only theme displaying the use of all of the four methodological approaches:



The networks of this cluster, which predominantly involve Thematic (Expert, Practitioner) Working Groups, can be found in the following table:

Thematic (Expert/Practitioner) Working Groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustainable development of rural areas: Poland, <i>Romania</i> • Agri-environment: Austria, <i>Greece, UK-Wales</i> • Environment & Cross-compliance: Italy • AEM & climate change: Greece • Water: Czech Republic, Italy, Malta • Arid areas: Czech Republic • Renewable Energy: Belgium-Wallonia, Italy, Portugal, Sweden, UK-Northern Ireland • <i>Green infrastructure, green buildings: France, Romania</i> • Forestry, forest & environment (flood/erosion challenge, integral nature protection): Belgium-Wallonia, Czech Republic, <i>Hungary, Italy, Portugal, Romania, UK-Wales</i> • Climate Change: <i>Ireland, UK-Wales</i> • Nature Protection & Natura 2000: <i>Romania</i> • Biodiversity as a resource for agriculture and rural development: <i>Portugal</i> • Public Goods: <i>Belgium-Wallonia</i>
Management Committees, Steering Groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustainable development of rural areas: Poland • Agri-environment: Austria, Finland, <i>Greece</i> • AEM & climate change: Greece • Forestry, forest & environment (flood/erosion challenge, integral nature protection): Austria, <i>Lithuania</i> • Biodiversity as a resource for agriculture and rural development: <i>Lithuania</i>
Events (Seminar, Workshop, etc.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustainable development of rural areas: Poland, <i>Romania</i> • Agri-environment: Austria, Finland, <i>Germany</i>

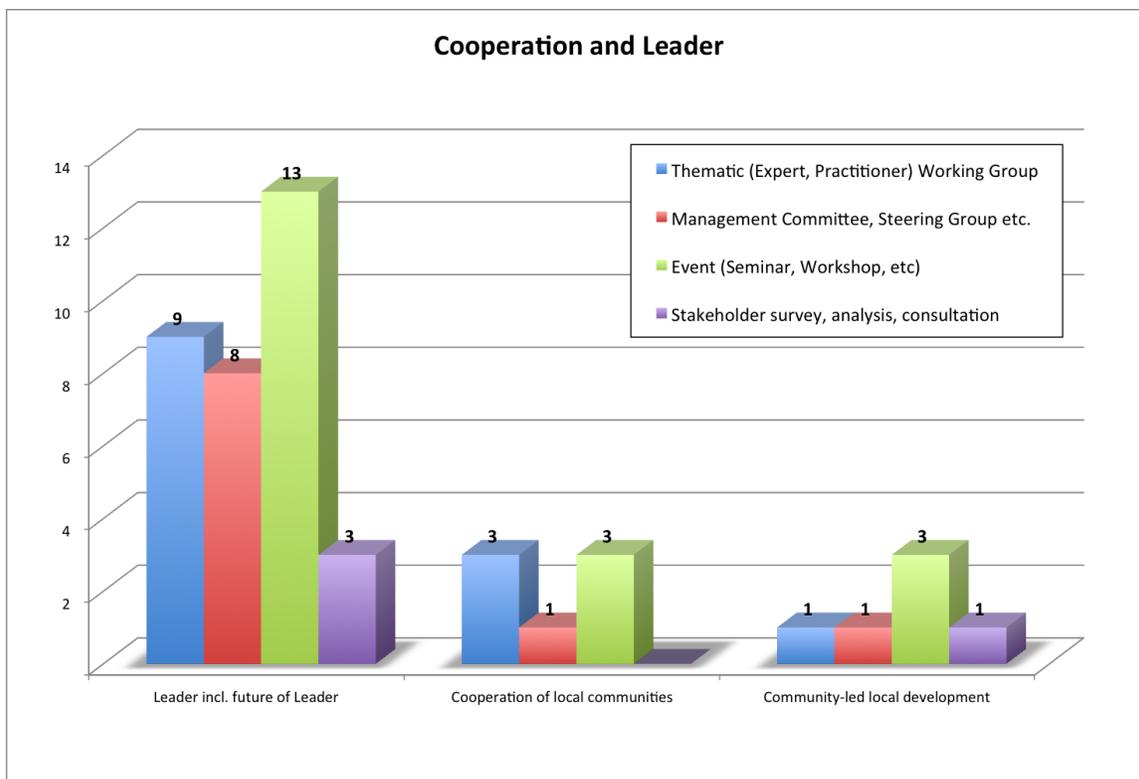
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Water: Germany • Renewable Energy: Finland, Germany, <i>Ireland, Portugal, Sweden</i> • Forestry, forest & environment (flood/erosion challenge, integral nature protection): Austria, Belgium-Wallonia, <i>Estonia</i>, Germany, Italy, Portugal, Spain, <i>UK-Scotland</i> • Nature Protection & Natura 2000: <i>Austria</i>, Germany • Biodiversity as a resource for agriculture and rural development: Austria, Ireland, <i>Portugal</i> • <i>Community-supported agriculture: Ireland</i>
Stakeholder surveys, analysis, consultation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Renewable Energy: <i>Ireland</i> • Forestry, forest & environment (flood/erosion challenge, integral nature protection): Czech Republic • Nature Protection & Natura 2000: <i>Ireland</i>

Info box 11 lists the NSUs' regional antennas that support themes belonging to the cluster on Sustainable Use of Agricultural and Forestry Land.

<p>Info Box 11 – Sustainable Use of Agricultural and Forestry Land: Themes supported by regional antennas of NSUs</p>
<p><i>Sustainable development of rural areas:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Slaskie/Poland (TWG), • Opolskie/Poland (TWG, event).
<p><i>Environment & Cross-compliance:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wielkopolskie/Poland (event).
<p><i>Renewable Energy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lubelskie/Poland (TWG, event), • Mazowieckie/Poland (event, consultation/analysis), • Swietokrzyskie/Poland (event), • Pomorskie/Poland (event),
<p><i>Forestry, forest & environment (flood/erosion challenge, integral nature protection):</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Franche-Comté/France (TWG, event)
<p><i>Biodiversity as a resource for agriculture and rural development:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pomorskie/Poland (event).

(D) Cooperation and LEADER

Within this cluster LEADER displays as slightly reduced event activity, but the screening exercise observed the launch of numerous expert working groups (nine, as compared to six in 2011) and steering committees (eight, compared to previously three), which mostly focus on the lessons learned and the capitalisation of achievements und Leader with a view to the preparations for the next programming period.



Cooperation retains a comparable intensity across the different methodological approaches. As can be seen in table 20, the implications and opportunities of the future multi-funding approach for the preparation of local development strategies has prompted some networks to introduce community-led local development as a new thematic initiative.

Thematic (Expert/Practitioner) Working Groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leader (<i>incl. future of Leader</i>): Austria, Belgium-Wallonia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, Poland, <i>Romania, UK-England, UK-Scotland</i> • Cooperation of local communities: Belgium-Wallonia, Latvia, <i>UK-Northern Ireland</i> • <i>Community-led local development: Portugal</i>
Management Committees, Steering Groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leader (<i>incl. future of Leader</i>): Austria, Denmark, Italy, Lithuania, Poland, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, <i>UK-England, UK-Northern Ireland, UK-Scotland, UK-Wales</i> • Cooperation of local communities: Italy • <i>Community-led local development: Lithuania</i>
Events (Seminar, Workshop, etc.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leader (<i>incl. future of Leader</i>): Austria, Belgium-Flanders, Belgium-Wallonia, Cyprus, Estonia, France, Germany, <i>Hungary</i>, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Poland, <i>UK-Northern Ireland, UK-Wales</i> • Cooperation of local communities: Austria, Italy, <i>The Netherlands</i> • <i>Community-led local development: Hungary, Portugal, UK-Scotland</i>
Stakeholder surveys, analysis, consultation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leader (<i>incl. future of Leader</i>): Denmark, Ireland, <i>UK-Northern Ireland</i> • <i>Community-led local development: Ireland</i>

LEADER themes have also been confirmed to be the subject of support activities by some regional antennas, as shown in info box 12.

Info Box 12 – Cooperation and LEADER themes supported by regional antennas of NSUs

Leader (incl. future of Leader):

- Lodzkie/Poland (TWG, event),
- Nitra/Slovakia (event),
- Trenčín/Slovakia (event, consultation/analysis),
- Prešov/Slovakia (all approaches).

(E) Economic Diversification

The theme of Innovation and Research saw a significant increase of interest among rural networks and joined the group of the top 3 themes most frequently addressed within the *Economic Diversification* cluster. The Rural Entrepreneurship and of Local Products / Short Supply Chain remained among the most frequently addressed themes. As displayed in the chart below, the rural networks addressed these three and the Tourism theme (which came again fourth), by all four types of approaches/methods:

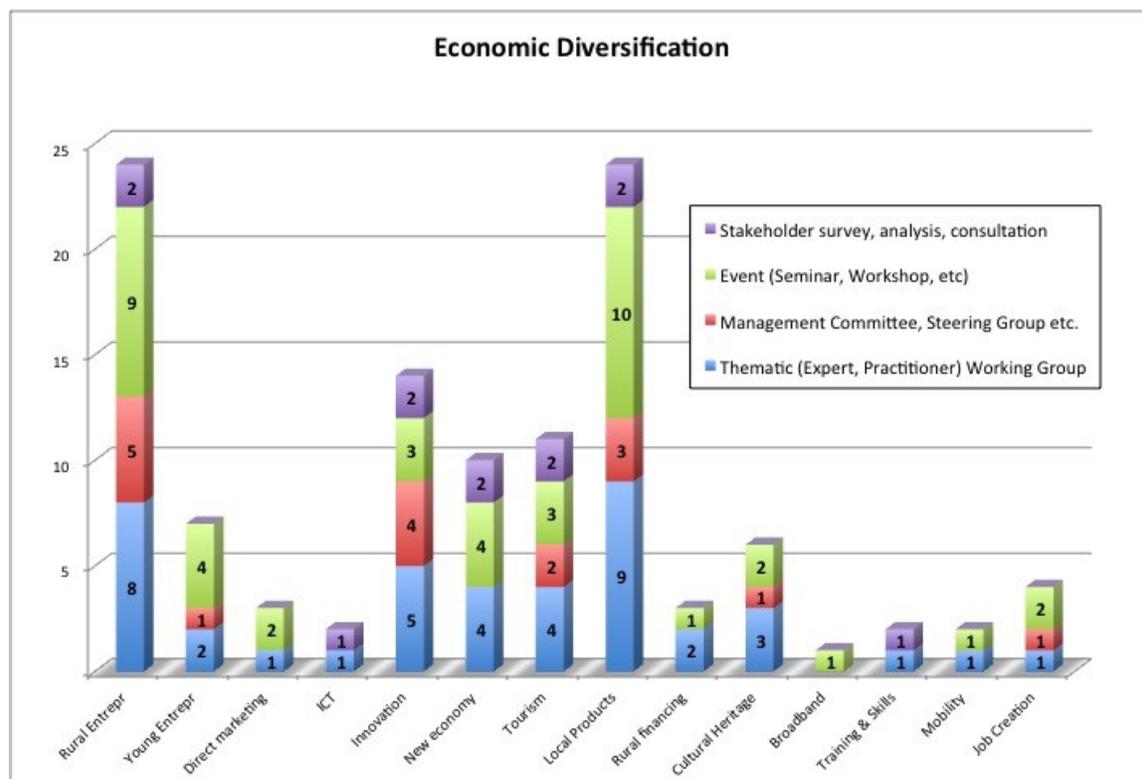


Table 21 and the chart above confirm that both Events and Thematic Expert/Practitioner Working Groups equally represent the most frequently applied methodological approaches of this cluster:

Thematic (Expert/Practitioner) Working Groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rural Entrepreneurship (<i>incl. farm enterprise, farm partnership, small farm cooperation, diversification</i>): France, Ireland, Italy, Malta, Portugal, Romania, Sweden, UK-Wales • Young adults/entrepreneurs in rural areas: Portugal, UK-Scotland • Innovation & Research in rural areas: Finland, Greece, Hungary, Spain, Sweden • ICT / Communication: UK-Northern Ireland
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rural Job Creation / <i>Employment</i>: Romania • Training & Skills: Hungary • New forms of mobility: Belgium-Wallonia • Direct & regional marketing/sales: Malta • Rural and Agro-Tourism: Belgium-Wallonia, Malta, Romania, Spain • Local Products / <i>short supply chain</i> (food, tourism/leisure, rural-urban linkages): Belgium-Wallonia, Cyprus, France, Hungary, Malta, Portugal, Romania, UK-Northern Ireland, UK-Wales • The village in the new economy (incl. <i>economic activity in a rural context and diversity</i>): Belgium-Wallonia, Hungary, Portugal, Spain • Rural financing, local risk capital, local funding: Hungary, Ireland • Rural Cultural Heritage: Hungary, Portugal, Romania
Management Committees, Steering Groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rural Entrepreneurship (incl. <i>farm enterprise, farm partnership, small farm cooperation, diversification</i>): Estonia, France, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, • Young adults/entrepreneurs in rural areas: Finland • Innovation & Research in rural areas: Finland, Italy, Lithuania, Sweden • Rural Job Creation / <i>Employment</i>: Austria • Rural and Agro-Tourism: Germany, Poland • Local Products / <i>short supply chain</i> (food, tourism/leisure, rural-urban linkages): Cyprus, Lithuania, Poland • Rural Cultural Heritage: Poland
Events (Seminar, Workshop, etc.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rural Entrepreneurship (incl. <i>farm enterprise, farm partnership, small farm cooperation, diversification</i>): Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Portugal, Romania, UK-Northern Ireland, UK-Scotland, UK-Wales • Young adults/entrepreneurs in rural areas: Finland, Latvia, Portugal, Romania • Innovation & Research in rural areas: Finland, Romania, Spain • Rural Job Creation / <i>Employment</i>: Romania, Spain • Training & Skills: Hungary, Poland • New forms of mobility: Belgium-Wallonia • Direct & regional marketing/sales: Germany, Spain • Rural and Agro-Tourism: Belgium-Wallonia, Slovakia, Spain • Local Products / <i>short supply chain</i> (food, tourism/leisure, rural-urban linkages): Austria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, France, Latvia, Portugal, Romania, Spain, UK-Scotland • The village in the new economy (incl. <i>economic activity in a rural context and diversity</i>): Belgium-Wallonia, Germany, Latvia, Portugal • Broadband: UK-Wales • Rural financing, local risk capital, local funding: The Netherlands • Rural Cultural Heritage: Portugal, UK-Wales
Stakeholder surveys, analysis, consultation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rural Entrepreneurship (incl. <i>farm enterprise, farm partnership, small farm cooperation, diversification</i>): France, Ireland • Innovation & Research in rural areas: Greece, Spain • ICT / Communication: UK-Northern Ireland • Rural and Agro-Tourism: Belgium-Wallonia, Spain • Local Products / <i>short supply chain</i> (food, tourism/leisure, rural-urban linkages): Romania, UK-Northern Ireland • The village in the new economy (incl. <i>economic activity in a rural context and diversity</i>): Poland, Spain

In accordance with the feedback received, the Economic Diversification cluster displays the most intensive level of thematic activity among the NSUs' regional antennas (cf. info box 13).

Info Box 13 – Economic Diversification themes supported by regional antennas of NSUs

Rural Entrepreneurship (incl. farm enterprise, farm partnership, small farm cooperation, diversification):

- Pomorskie/Poland (event),
- Žilina/Slovakia (TWG, event).

ICT / Communication:

- Auvergne/France (consultation/analysis).

Direct & regional marketing/sales:

- Malpolskie/Poland (event),
- Žilina/Slovakia (TWG, event).

Rural and Agro-Tourism:

- Podlaskie/Poland (TWG),
- Pomorskie/Poland (event),
- Wielkopolskie/Poland (event),
- Trenčín/Slovakia (event, consultation/analysis),
- Žilina/Slovakia (TWG, event).

Local Products / short supply chain (food, tourism/leisure, rural-urban linkages):

- Franche-Comté/France (event, consultation/analysis),
- Auvergne/France (event),
- Kujawsko Pomorskie/Poland (event),
- Slaskie/Poland (event),
- Swietokrzyskie/Poland (event),
- Podkarpackie/Poland (event),
- Podlaskie/Poland (event),
- Trenčín/Slovakia (event, consultation/analysis).

The village in the new economy (incl. economic activity in a rural context and diversity):

- Opolskie/Poland (TWG, event),
- Podkarpackie/Poland (TWG, event).

Rural Cultural Heritage:

- Kujawsko Pomorskie/Poland (event),
- Opolskie/Poland (TWG, events),
- Pomorskie/Poland (event).

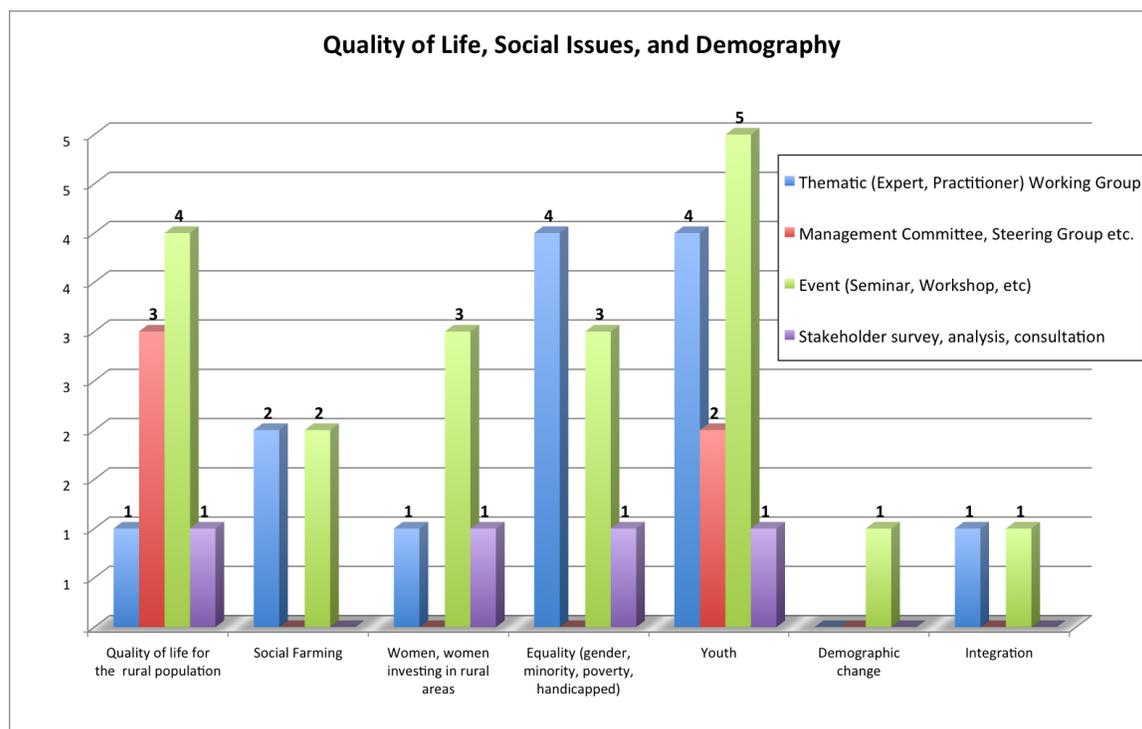
(F) Quality of Life, Social Issues, and Demography

With 18 active rural networks, thematic initiative within this cluster has once more intensified¹³, compared to 2011 (13) and 2010 (8) respectively.

Nineteen networks have held events and thirteen ran Thematic (Expert, Practitioner) Working Groups, of which eight used these approaches to particularly focus on equality and youth issues.

¹³ The migration of the *quality of life* theme from the Leader and Cooperation to the present cluster only in part caused this increase in intensity (accounting for three of the additional five networks).

The improvement of the quality of life retains a comparable intensity of thematic activity across the different methodological approaches.



While previously the networks did not undertake research in the social issues and demography field, table 22 shows that four topics in this cluster are now the subject of survey and analytical work.

Thematic (Expert/Practitioner) Working Groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quality of life for the rural population: France Social Farming: <i>Belgium-Wallonia, Portugal</i> Women, <i>women investing in rural areas</i>: UK-Northern Ireland Equality (gender, <i>minority, poverty, disabled</i>): Austria, Italy, Spain, <i>UK-Wales</i> Youth: <i>Austria</i>, Poland, Sweden, UK-Northern Ireland Integration: Sweden
Management Committees, Steering Groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quality of life for the rural population: Finland, France, <i>Lithuania</i> Youth: <i>Austria</i>, Poland, Sweden, UK-Northern Ireland
Events (Seminar, Workshop, etc.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quality of life for the rural population: Finland, France, <i>The Netherlands, UK-Scotland</i> Social Farming: <i>Belgium-Wallonia, Portugal</i> Women, <i>women investing in rural areas</i>: <i>Latvia</i>, Spain, UK-Northern Ireland Equality (gender, <i>minority, poverty, disabled</i>): Austria, <i>Romania</i>, Spain Youth: <i>Austria</i>, Estonia, France, Poland, Sweden Demographic change: Germany Integration: Sweden
Stakeholder surveys, analysis, consultation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quality of life for the rural population: France Women, <i>women investing in rural areas</i>: UK-Northern Ireland Equality (gender, <i>minority, poverty, disabled</i>): Spain

	• Youth: Poland
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As shown in info box 14 below, a few of the NSUs’ regional antennas support the equality and demographic themes of the Social Issues cluster.

Info Box 14 – Quality of Life, Social Issues, and Demography themes supported by regional antennas of NSUs

Quality of life for the rural population:

- Lower Normandy/France (TWG).

Women, women investing in rural areas:

- Podlaskie/Poland (event),
- Wielkopolskie/Poland (event).

Equality (gender, minority, poverty, disabled):

- Lower Normandy/France (event).
- Swietokrzyskie/Poland (consultation/analysis).

Youth:

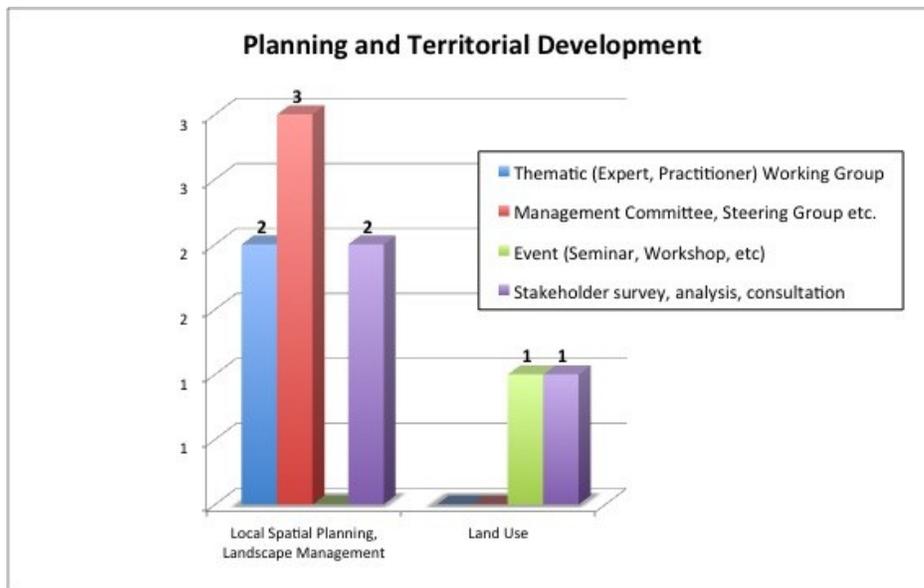
- Lower Normandy/France (TWG),
- Podlaskie/Poland (event),
- Lodzkie/Poland (TWG, event).

Demographic change:

- Franche-Comté/France (event, consultation/analysis).

(G) Planning and Territorial Development

With six active networks, the smallest of the six thematic clusters is in decline, compared to the number of nine networks, which was established during last year’s round of the NRN mapping exercise.



The networks involved in this cluster make use of all the approaches from the range of identified methods and approaches to address planning and territorial development. As the cluster is small in size the three networks, which have recently embarked on the local spatial planning theme (cf. networks printed in italics in table 23), may find it useful to engage in methodological exchange with current and previous cluster participants to compare perspectives and generate ideas of particular interest:

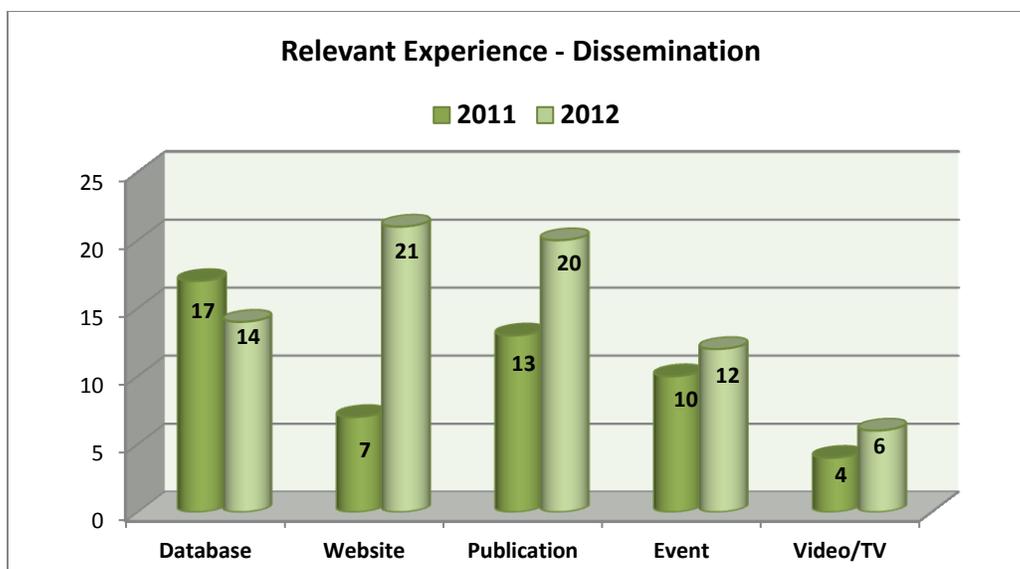
Table 23 – Networking approach to cluster on Planning and Territorial Development	
Thematic (Expert/Practitioner) Working Groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local Spatial Planning, Landscape Management: <i>France</i>, Italy
Management Committees, Steering Groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local Spatial Planning, Landscape Management: <i>France</i>, Lithuania, <i>Poland</i>
Events (Seminar, Workshop, etc.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Land Use: Czech Republic
Stakeholder surveys, analysis, consultation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local Spatial Planning, Landscape Management: <i>Denmark</i>, <i>France</i>, Land Use: Czech Republic

Only a single regional NSU antenna pursues thematic initiative under this cluster (cf. info box 15).

Info Box 15 – regional antenna support to the Planning and Territorial Development theme
<p><i>Local Spatial Planning, Landscape Management:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lower Normandy/France (TWG).

2.2.2.2 Relevant Experiences / Good Practices

The following chart and overview of examples serves to clarify the most common dissemination channels, which rural networks have chosen to inform about examples of Relevant Experience, complemented by some illustrative examples.



Overall, the mapping exercise registered an increased number, both of rural networks actively involved in the dissemination of examples of Relevant Experience and of the variety of dissemination channels they used in 2012 (cf. table 24 below)

Table 24 - Dissemination of examples of Relevant Experience	
Database	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Austria, Belgium-Wallonia, Czech Republic, Estonia, France, Germany, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia; UK-England, UK-Scotland, UK-Wales
Website	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Austria, Belgium-Wallonia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Spain, Sweden, The Netherlands, UK-Northern Ireland, UK-Scotland
Publication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Austria, Belgium-Flanders, Belgium-Wallonia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Germany, Ireland, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, UK-England, UK-Northern Ireland, UK-Wales
Event	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Belgium-Flanders, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, France, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Romania, Slovakia, Spain, UK-England, UK-Wales
Video/TV	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Belgium-Wallonia, Czech Republic, Cyprus, Estonia, Hungary, Malta

The reduced number of 14 networks (compared to 17 in 2011) referring to project databases as their chosen means of dissemination may be misleading though, as some respondents of the mapping exercise may consider their database conceptually as a part of their network's website. Some of the networks listed in info box 16 (a) below do offer their database content also in English language to make it more accessible to the wider community of rural stakeholders across Europe.

Info Box 16 (a) – Dissemination of Relevant Experience through project databases (In national language unless otherwise stated)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Austria (in English): http://www.netzwerk-land.at/englisch/project-database-le07-13 • Belgium-Wallonia: http://www.reseau-pwdr.be/menu-de-gauche/bonnes-pratiques/bonnes-pratiques-wallonnes.aspx • Czech Republic: http://eagri.cz/public/web/mze/venkov/uspesne-projekty-prv/fotogalerie- 	

projektu

- **Estonia** (in English) www.maainfo.ee/index.php?page=3451
- **France:** <http://www.reseaurural.fr/centre-de-ressources/recherche>
- **Germany:** http://www.netzwerk-laendlicher-raum.de/beispiele/projekt Datenbank/?no_cache=1
- **Latvia:** http://laukutikls.lv/vietejas_iniciativas/lab_a_prakse
- **Poland:** <http://ksow.pl/baza-dobrych-praktyk.html>
- **Portugal:** <http://www.rederural.pt/index.php/projetos-relevantes-financiados-pelo-feader>
- **Romania:** <http://www.rndr.ro/PaginaGeneral.aspx?idContenido=196>
- **Slovakia:** <http://www.nsrv.sk/index.php?pl=47>
- **UK-England:** <http://rdpenetwork.defra.gov.uk/projects>
- **UK-Scotland:** www.ruralgateway.org.uk/en/projects/database
- **UK-Wales:**
<http://wales.gov.uk/topics/environmentcountryside/farmingandcountryside/ruraldevelopment/projectsdatabase/?lang=en>

Compared to the findings of the previous two years, more rural networks disseminate information about relevant RDP project implementation experience through their websites (increased by two thirds) and online publications (increased by one third). Selected examples can be found in info box 16 (b) below.

Info Box 16 (b) – Dissemination of Relevant Experience through online publications

- **Austria (in English):** the NSU has published a brochure about best-practice examples in the field of nature protection (concerning the implementation of the M323, based on article 57 of the current legislation): http://www.netzwerk-land.at/umwelt/m323-broschuere/m323-broschuere_english
- **Belgium-Wallonia:** the NSU issues thematic leaflets like this example on erosion, mudflows and flooding: <http://www.reseau-pwdr.be/carnet-du-reseau/erosion,-coulées-boueuses-et-inondations-carnet-du-reseau-n°1.aspx>
- **Czech Republic:** <http://eagri.cz/public/web/mze/venkov/publikace-a-dokumenty/brozura-uspesne-projekty-programu.html>
- **Ireland:** project case studies can be consulted via <http://www.nrn.ie/the-national-rural-network/case-studies/>
- **Poland:** a selection of good practice examples is available at <http://ksow.pl/turystyka-wiejska/przyklady-dobrych-praktyk.html>
- **Romania:** <http://www.rndr.ro/PublicatiiLista.aspx?TipPublicatie=3>
- **Slovenia:** a presentation of relevant RDP projects across the different RDP axes: http://www.mko.gov.si/fileadmin/mko.gov.si/pageuploads/publikacije/Program_razvoja_pod_ezelja/Gradimo_vitalno_podezelje.pdf
- **Spain:** a wide selection of publications on relevant experience with innovative projects, cooperation projects, and of examples of good practices developed by projects for elderly people, disabled people and projects addressing gender equality has been made available by the Spanish NSU at <http://www.magrama.gob.es/es/desarrollo-rural/publicaciones/publicaciones-de-desarrollo-rural>
- **Sweden:** a publication presenting the winners of the Rural Best competition: http://www.landsbygdsnatverket.se/download/18.3c1967aa13afeea1eb880001632/Landsbygds+bästa_2012_web.pdf
- **UK-Wales:** RDP project information can be accessed via the NSU's LAG map: <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/environmentcountryside/farmingandcountryside/ruraldevelopment/walesruralnetwork/lagmap/?lang=en>

The events disseminating Relevant Experience considered in this section exclude activities of the rural networks, which were connected to competitions and award events, as these have been classified as means of identification of Relevant Experience (c.f. section 2.2.1.2).

Info Box 16 (c) – Dissemination of Relevant Experience at events

- **Belgium-Flanders:** the NSU regularly offers seminars and field visits;
- **Bulgaria:** the recently launched NSU intends to organize events facilitating the exchange of experience, knowledge and good practices in the country and other Member States;
- **Czech Republic:** the NSU uses its participation in agricultural and tourism fairs to present examples of good practice;
- **Italy:** the NSU continues to organize visits to 'the best projects of Italian LAGs' (<http://www.reterurale.it/flex/cm/pages/ServeBLOB.php/L/IT/IDPagina/4902>);
- **Latvia:** to inspire the exchange of relevant experience the NSU organizes inter-territorial and trans-national experience exchange visits, exhibitions and demonstrations of farming methods;
- **Romania:** during 2012 the NSU organised ad-hoc seminars about opportunities for the development of business in rural areas for young farmers; entrepreneurship in non-agricultural activities; and short food supply chains.

A growing number of rural networks use television and videos to expand the dissemination of relevant RDP project implementation experience to the wider public. Info box 16 (d) below summarises those initiatives witnessed by the 2012 mapping exercise.

Info Box 16 (d) – Dissemination of Relevant Experience via TV & video

- **Belgium-Wallonia:** the NSU has posted good-practice videos onto its Facebook page: <http://www.facebook.com/pages/R%C3%A9seau-rural-wallon/266680454766>
- **Cyprus:** A radio and TV programme will be produced in order to inform the broader public about the good practice examples identified through the NSU's recent project competition.
- **Czech Republic:** the NSU's website connects to a pdf-document providing links to 146 project videos, which have been uploaded on the web for consultation (mainly YouTube): <http://eagri.cz/public/web/mze/venkov/uspesne-projekty-prv/databaze-vidoi-a-reportazi-o-cinnosti-1/>
- **Estonia:** projects selected in the context of the competition "Notice Innovative Agriculture" in 2012 were videotaped and disseminated on TV in cooperation with the Estonian public broadcasting company;
- **Hungary:** a selection of project videos is available on the rural network's website <http://www.mnvh.eu/galeria/video>
- **Malta:** In the two Maltese TV programme features "Malta u lil Hinn Minnha" and "Mad-Daqqa t'Għajn", the MA sought to showcase RDP-financed projects, as these programmes have a wide viewership. They focus on various subjects, not just agriculture and rural development.

2.2.3. Cooperation interests

2.2.3.1 Thematic dimension

The NRN fiches provided the rural networks also with opportunity to specify areas in which they may seek or offer cooperation with each other. Overall, interest in thematic cooperation is

significantly lower compared to the last mapping exercise. Eleven NSUs completely abstained from proposing cooperation themes. Similarly, the quantity of proposed themes is in decline. There were no proposals for new themes (those printed in italics have been adjusted/updated with related subjects). Instead, the total number of proposed themes has shrunk to thirty-seven (2011: fifty-one) themes. Since the Italian NSU did not provide an updated NRN fiche, this figure is bound to experience further reduction, as the twenty-one (!) thematic choices of the Italy NSU stated in table 25 below date back to 2011¹⁴. New thematic choices of NSUs are printed in italics.

For the sake of consistency, the resulting list of thematic cooperation interest maintains the clustering applied to the Thematic Initiative Clusters above. Like last year, a specific cluster for Networking tools & methodologies has been added:

Table 25 – Thematic cooperation interests	
Cluster	Theme / rural networks interested to cooperate
Networking Tools & Methodologies	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Networking tools and methodologies (1): <i>Slovenia</i> 2. Leader networking (2): Italy, <i>Romania</i> 3. <i>Network self-assessment</i> (2): Greece, Italy 4. <i>Rural development project methodology</i> (including access to funding) & management (1): <i>Hungary</i> 5. Relevant experience, good practice identification and exchange (5): Italy, Romania, <i>Slovakia</i>, Spain, UK-Scotland
Rural Policy	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop synergies with other programmes (1): Italy 2. Thematic and integrated programming (1): Italy
Agriculture	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Innovation and quality systems under axis 1 (3): <i>Cyprus</i>, Italy, <i>Spain</i> 2. Competitiveness (1): Italy
Sustainable use of agricultural and forestry land	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Agro-Forestry, multifunctional forest (1): Italy 2. Cross-compliance (1): Italy 3. Climate change (1): Italy 4. Renewable Energy (2): <i>Hungary</i>, Italy 5. Water management (1): Italy 6. Bio-diversity (1): Italy 7. Soil (1): Italy
Cooperation and Leader	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Leader TNC, <i>in particular partner search facilitation</i> (11): Austria, Greece, <i>Hungary</i>, <i>Ireland</i>, Italy, <i>Latvia</i>, <i>Malta</i>, Romania, Sweden, UK-Scotland, <i>UK-Wales</i> 2. Leader Partnership Management (1): Austria 3. LDS development and goal achievement for LAGs (1): <i>Slovenia</i> 4. Cooperation of local communities (1): Italy 5. Basic services for rural economy & population (2): <i>Hungary</i>, <i>Spain</i>
Economic diversification	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Rural Entrepreneurship incl. Creation & Development of micro-enterprise (2): <i>Hungary</i>, <i>Poland</i> 2. <i>Short supply chains [food, tourism, services, mobility]</i> (5): <i>France</i>, <i>Hungary</i>, Italy, <i>Poland</i>, <i>Portugal</i> 3. Natural and cultural heritage (1): Italy
Social issues and demography	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Youth; incl. young farmers facing new rural challenges (3): <i>Hungary</i>, Italy, <i>Poland</i> 2. Equality, social integration (2): Italy, Spain
Planning and territorial development	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Problems specific to remote rural areas e.g. small islands, LFAs (1): Italy

¹⁴ It is noted that the cluster of axis 2 themes (Sustainable use of agricultural and forestry land) is almost solely supported by choices made by Italy in 2011.

The cluster for *Cooperation and Leader* attracts the most important levels of interest, followed by the cluster regrouping different *Networking Tools & Methodologies* (both in terms of variety of cooperation themes and total instances of cooperation interest), and the *Economic Diversification* cluster (number of NSUs). Given the uncertainty about Italy's current thematic preferences, the cluster of Axis 2 themes (*Sustainable use of agricultural and forestry land*, almost solely supported by former Italian choice,) was not included in this ranking.

According to table 25 above, the cooperation interests most frequently stated among rural networks (top 3) are related to themes pertaining to Axis 3/4 and networking tools/methodologies:

- LEADER TNC, in particular partner search facilitation (11 NSUs);
- Relevant experience, good practice identification and exchange (5 NSUs);
- Short supply chains [food, tourism, services, mobility (5 NSUs).

Thematic preferences expressed by some of the NSUs' regional antennas¹⁵ have been given consideration for the first time. Interestingly, these are not necessarily consistent with the choices made at national level. For this reason, and in order to allow for comparison of the 2012 results with the findings of previous mapping exercises, the choices of regional antennas have been summarised separately in info box 17 below.

Info Box 17 – thematic cooperation interests expressed by regional antennas
<i>Networking Tools & Methodologies</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Network self-assessment: Franche-Comté (France) • Relevant experience, good practice identification and exchange: Prešov (Slovakia), Trenčín (Slovakia)
<i>Agriculture</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CAP: Prešov (Slovakia), Trenčín (Slovakia) • Innovation and quality systems under axis 1: Malopolskie (Poland),
<i>Cooperation and LEADER</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LEADER TNC: Franche-Comté (France), Slaskie (Poland), Swietokrzyskie (Poland) • LDS development and goal achievement for LAGs: Prešov (Slovakia), Trenčín (Slovakia)
<i>Economic diversification</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rural Entrepreneurship incl. Creation & Development of micro-enterprise: Trenčín (Slovakia) • Regional marketing of organic food: Malopolskie (Poland), Podkarpackie (Poland) • Rural and Agro-Tourism: Malopolskie (Poland), Trenčín (Slovakia)
<i>Social issues and demography</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth: Lower Normandy (France)

2.2.3.2 Macro-regional dimension

In addition to the thematic dimension, some NSUs have made reference to three macro-regional cooperation clusters:

¹⁵ From France, Poland and Slovakia.

- The *Nordic-Baltic Cluster* (established in 2008, in the context of the European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region) involves eight rural networks from Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Sweden. Cooperation is based on the voluntary initiative of the partnering NSUs, which initially focused on knowledge transfer between NRNs, NFNs, MAs, LAGs and FLAGs and on topics such as RDP project application/control procedures and best practice awards for RDP-funded projects. Currently the cluster runs a joint pilot project in preparation for a long-term Nordic-Baltic macro-region platform on youth and innovation.
- Seven networks cooperate in the *Mediterranean Cluster* (established in 2012), i.e. Italy, Greece, France, Spain, Portugal, Cyprus and Malta. Sharing RDP implementation experience (axis 1 measures 123, 132 and 133), the cluster focuses on the development of Mediterranean agricultural products of high quality. Beyond the sharing and exchange of EAFRD support experience for quality agricultural products, the cluster participants intend to develop recommendations for joint action at macro-regional level and the establishment of an expert network supporting the set-up of a Mediterranean platform for quality food.
- Two rural networks (Hungary and Romania) stated their interest in the macro-regional strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR), without further specifying their current involvement. The strategy promotes cooperation, seeking to create synergies and coordination between existing policies and initiatives (i.e. in the areas of mobility, energy, bio-diversity and water) implemented across the Danube Region¹⁶. The strategy focuses on synergies among existing programmes; therefore participation does not provide access to specific, new sources of funding.

¹⁶ Source: <http://www.danube-region.eu/pages/what-is-the-eusdr>