

4th NRN meeting

Improving RDP implementation through networking



29 February – 1 March 2016

Bled, Slovenia

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Day 1: Field visit in Bohinj valley



Field visit summary

29 Feb - morning

Around 50 participants took part in a small tour of **sights and interesting RDP-supported projects in the Bohinj valley**, which comprises 24 villages in the Gorenjska region (Upper Carniola) in north-western Slovenia. The region is the most Alpine in the country. Half the territory of the valley is in Triglav National Park.

Bohinj Tourist Room

The first visit was to a **boutique hotel room** created using skilled craftsmen and traditions from the area to create a distinctly local experience, based on the creation of a **new brand of products "From Bohinj"**. The LEADER-supported initiative was coordinated by a hotel, the tourist board, and a small carpentry company, also working with other local artisans.

The room acts as a display of the concept and local products as well as being a room that can be rented by tourists. *"In most hotels you could be anywhere in the world,"* commented Lorraine Macrae from the Scottish NSU. *"But the features in this room make it so much more special and memorable."*

Pr 'Tonejovc Cheese Farm

The second visit was to a farm making **organic cheese and sausage** and now part of the Bohinj Cheesemakers Trail, supported by LEADER. Their history was that when the farm experienced difficulties getting paid for their milk back in 2000, they applied for RDP funding to develop the infrastructure to make organic cheeses themselves using traditional techniques.

Although it took several years, they finally started production in 2007. They now win awards for their produce, **host visits and also supply local schools** thanks to changes in Slovenian public procurement law. Amongst other products from the farm, the group tasted some excellent Mohant cheese – a local product included in the EU Protected Designation of Origin scheme.

Pri stogih hayracks

Following a short stop to take in the beautiful and atmospheric **Bohinj Lake** – at nearly 320 ha, the largest permanent lake in Slovenia – the group saw some **restored traditional hayracks**, which continue to be an important element of the local landscape in Triglav National Park.

The group heard how hayracks for whole villages are often arranged in clusters in this mountainous area because arable land is at such a premium. Houses are also typically clustered together in small areas.

Conclusions

The guide highlighted that the **“From Bohinj” brand** is now at the heart of the local response to promoting the area, based only on the highest quality local products. Many local producers no longer see themselves as isolated businesses, but as part of the distinct offer of their local area.

“The LEADER initiative shows how, if we work together, we can influence the local economy” - commented a local LAG manager. The group thoroughly enjoyed their visit to this area of the Julian Alps, in which as the guide expressed it: *“Time flies a little bit slower.”*

Day 1: Self-assessment and evaluation of National Rural Networks

1.1 Introduction

13.50 – 14.00

Agenda item

Welcome

Brief summary

Matej Štepec (Slovenian NSU) stressed the Slovenian network's **commitment to European networking** and expressed his hopes for the upcoming exchanges.

Matthias Langemeyer (DG AGRI) highlighted that this is another busy time at EU level - modifications of RDPs are already underway. This type of meeting is important; it can **help us to coordinate effectively** between the EU networks and with the national networks.

Paul Soto (ENRD CP) flagged that there are 26 NRNs present at this meeting. This is very positive and means **we can do a lot together**. The CP wants to support RDP implementation and exchange on themes and processes where the network can learn and improve.

The CP is suggesting '**Communities of Practice**' as a way of working. These are "groups of people who have a passion for what they are doing and learn to do it better through regular exchange and interaction". These will be discussed at this meeting.

Agenda item

Introduction to the structure and content of the day, *Edina Ocsko (ENRD CP) and Hannes Wimmer (Evaluation Helpdesk)*

Brief summary

The ENRD CP and Evaluation Helpdesk jointly presented the **links between NRN self-assessment and NRN evaluation**. It was stressed that the two processes could and should strongly complement each other, as there are several commonalities in terms of 'what needs to be assessed' and 'how'.

There are a number of mutual benefits created in terms of cost-savings, better information and complementarity of outcomes.

Next steps

The European Support Units (ENRD CP and Evaluation Helpdesk), NSUs and MAs all need to work towards creating mutual complementarities and learning between NRN self-assessment and evaluation processes.

1.2 Common Network Statistics & other self-assessment tools

14.00 – 14.30	<i>Note: Presentations can be directly downloaded by clicking on the link provided</i>
Agenda item	<u>Common Network Statistics & other self-assessment tools developed by the ENRD CP</u> - Edina Ocsko, ENRD CP
Discussion	<p>The presentation showed the key tools developed by the ENRD CP to support NRNs in the self-assessment process including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the collection of the ‘common network statistics’ (CNS) • tools for the assessment of results, • a publication planned to demonstrate the added value of networking. <p>The development of the CNS has been a joint work between the ENRD CP and NSUs. A number of comments have been sent by NSUs on the draft template and during the discussion some further issues and suggestions were highlighted including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the importance of learning from each other/ exchanging self-assessment practices (including guidance, tools developed in different MS and specific tools) as the process is not easy • move a step forward and focus on results, quality, impact • developing tools jointly, especially on web statistics, stakeholder survey questions, etc. • Some data are difficult to collect and there may be too much to monitor.
Next steps	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The template is being finalised based on comments received during the NRN meeting discussion and will be sent out to NSUs in April 2016. • The first year will still be a pilot phase. NSUs are welcome to comment or highlight any difficulties with regard to the template and collection of data. • Parallel to this process tools on result/ qualitative assessment are being developed
Relevant Annexes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Summary of key comments received on the CNS (Annex I) • The revised CNS template can be directly downloaded from the event’s webpage.

1.3 Evaluation of National Rural Networks

14.30 – 15.00	<i>Note: Presentations can be directly downloaded by clicking on the link provided</i>
Agenda item	Evaluation of National Rural Networks
Presentation(s)	<p>Evaluation of National Rural Networks, Jela Tvrdonova, ENRD Evaluation Helpdesk</p> <p>Guidelines on Evaluation of National Rural Networks 2014-2020, Hannes Wimmer, ENRD Evaluation Helpdesk</p>
Brief summary of discussion	<p>In the first part of this session, the Evaluation Helpdesk of the ENRD introduced the new Guidelines: “Evaluation of National Rural Network 2014-2020”. The main target audience for the guidelines is the contractors of external evaluation (MAs, NSU) as well as external evaluators. The guidelines are structured into three main parts: i) PART I: Managing NRN evaluation (Who does what? Key steps in evaluation of NRN) mainly targeted at MAs, NSUs, NRNs; ii) PART II: Methodological handbook targeted at external evaluators; and iii) PART III: Toolbox which includes examples of ToRs, good practices on NRN evaluation and a glossary.</p> <p>In the second part of the session, interactive working groups were organised to discuss and get a common understanding of a) the purpose of an external evaluation b) the role of NRN monitoring, self-assessment and evaluation as well as its complementarities; and c) the roles and responsibilities of the NSUs/NRNs in NRN monitoring, self-assessment and evaluation. The main outcomes of the discussion are presented in Annex II.</p>
Next steps	<p>The <i>Guidelines on the evaluation of National Rural Networks</i> will be finalised in April 2016. The issues raised in the group discussions in Bled can still be integrated in the text. The Evaluation Helpdesk will organise capacity building and dissemination activities to discuss various aspects related to the evaluation of NRNs.</p>
Relevant Annexes	<p>The background document “Evaluation of National Rural Networks” can be directly downloaded from the event’s webpage.</p>

Day 2. Building communities of practice

2.1 Why develop communities of practice?

09:00-09:30	<i>Note: Presentations can be directly downloaded by clicking on the link provided</i>
Agenda item	Introduction to the day
Presentation(s)	<u>Introduction to the results of the NRN Survey on the 'RDP themes that the NRNs are working on in 2015-2016'</u> , Ines Jordana & Edina Ocsko, ENRD Contact Point
	Ines Jordana presented the outcomes of a survey carried out by the ENRD CP among all European NRNs, including information on the state-of-play with regards NRN action plans, as well as main thematic areas where they will focus their work in 2016.

2.2 Match-making between networks (speed-dating)



09:30-10:20

Speed-dating exercise

Summary of the discussion

A speed-dating exercise was organised to create a space for discussion between pairs of NRNs. This sought to enable the sharing of experiences and practices and the identification of common topics and potential areas for joint work.

The speed-dating resulted in the identification of specific topics in which the NRNs would like to work together, identifying the potential for communities of practice. All the ideas were clustered around three main areas:

- NRN functioning
- RDP-related topics (other than LEADER)
- LEADER/CLLD

Next steps

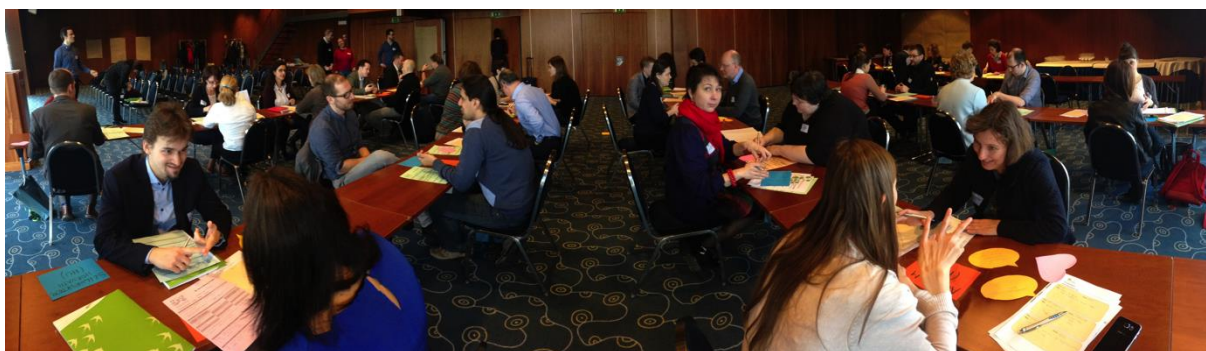
Some of the NRNs already indicated their interest in joining specific communities of practice during the meeting. A specific Excel tool has been developed to help NSUs identify partner NSUs with similar interest (which is available on the event webpage – see link below).

If you would like your NSU to be added to one of the thematic clusters indicated in the Excel document please send an email to NRNmeeting@enrd.eu.

Relevant Annexes

Communities of practice identified (Annex III)

The 'Communities of practice' (excel tool) can be downloaded from the [event's webpage](#).



2.3 Workshop 1: Cooperation measure

10:20-11:30	<i>Note: Presentations can be directly downloaded by clicking on the link provided</i>
Presentation(s)	<p>M16 Cooperation measure & EIP-AGRI Operational Groups, <i>Sirpa Karjalainen, DG AGRI</i></p> <p>EIP-AGRI Operational Groups on the Cooperation Measure, <i>Pacôme Elouna Eyenga – Margarida Ambar, EIP-AGRI Service Point & Riccardo Passero, Italian Rural Network</i></p>
Discussion	<p>Participants highlighted both the need and the desire to further exchange on the following issues and topics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More good examples of Operational Groups (OGs) working in practice • Methodological examples presenting successful processes for supporting the creation of OGs. • Cooperation outside the context of OGs (using other M16 sub-Measures) – for example, a specific request from Scotland to find out who else is working on sub-Measure 16.5 • The specific challenges and potential in MS with regional RDPs • How to enable the effective combination of M16 sub-Measures in calls for projects • Partner search tools and processes • Further information on what each NRN is working on with regards M16 (mapping reports) and more peer-to-peer exchange.
Next steps	<p>The Service Point is continuing to develop the EIP-AGRI toolkit and database on the development and operation of OGs.</p> <p>EIP-AGRI workshops are taking place on ‘OG First Experiences’ (Apr 16) and ‘Networking for Innovation’ (Oct 16).</p> <p>The CP is starting a screening of all the RDPs for M16 – which will be followed by an analysis and summary reports by sub-Measure.</p> <p>The CP is also organising an ENRD M16 Workshop (June 2016) focusing on non-OG cooperation opportunities and potential – notably around supply chains (M16.4) and environmental projects (M16.5).</p>

2.4 Workshop 2: Smart supply chains

10:20-11:30

Presentation(s)

[Ave Bremse on NRN activities in Estonia on Short Supply Chains](#)

Discussion

The question asked was on the main themes and topics where cooperation is possible. The main topics from the discussion were as follows:

- A need for producers to have **consistency of quality and supply**, and to be consumer-oriented;
- Support for farmers (through NRNs) in **cooperation and marketing**;
- Enabling **logistics** to ensure access from producers and into key markets;
- Accessing **public markets** – ensuring producers have the scale required;
- Looking at **specific consumer groups** as a target e.g. gluten-free;
- Coordinating **multiple brands** – animal welfare, organic local etc.;
- Bringing **local food initiatives** together – possibility of development of Protected Food Names

Next steps

Analysis of RDPs (and potentially modification) by NRNs. Several countries volunteered to analyse support for supply chain development. There was an expressed desire for specific actions:

- Consider **RDP modifications** especially Netherlands on Supply Chains
- **Analysis of supply chain actions** within RDPs with input from specific NRNs – Scotland, Austria, Estonia, Slovenia
- Create a **public procurement (food) exchange** between NRNs
- Create an **online exchange platform** for local food initiatives
- A **photo competition** on successful EAFRD projects – local food in pictures
- Creating a **border market** between Croatia and Slovenia

2.5 Workshop 3: Young farmers

10:20-11:30

Note: Presentations can be directly downloaded by clicking on the link provided

Presentation(s)

[Steps to build an efficient & interactive Network for and with Young \(Farmers\)](#),
Paola Lionetti, Italian Rural Network

[Swedish NRN activities on " Young Farmers"](#), *Nils Lagerroth, Swedish Rural Network*

[Young Farmers: Portuguese experience and interests](#), *Maria Custódia Correia, Portuguese Rural Network*

[Activities and concerns on Young Farmers thematic](#), *Xavier Delmon, Belgium-Wallonia Rural Network*



Discussion

During the discussion relevant NRN practices to engage with young farmers were presented, as well as a number of key issues have been discussed, including:

- The importance of **generational renewal and training and education** (including through support from ESF), including young agricultural students, or those who just left school and would like to become farmers
- The relevance of using the **right communication tools** when engaging with or providing information about young farmers, including films and videos about young farmers, podcasts and instagram and relevant project information.

Workshop participants highlighted the importance of working on a number of topics further, including:

- Sharing **training methods** (thinking about new ways of training, improving skills to apply for RDP calls)
- Exchanging further about **communication tools** and their use/benefits
- Sharing experience with regard to **thematic group work** on young farmers
- Sharing information on **facilitating access to land and capital** for young farmers.

Next steps

Participants showed strong interest in working further on the 'young farmer' theme. An **email list was created including network contacts with an interest to exchange further** on the theme. **Other participants are welcome to be included in this discussion.**

It was suggested that fiches on 'NRN activities on young farmers' and a wider platform are created in the future in order to benchmark practices.

2.6 Open space discussion on NRN themes of interest

10:20-11:30

Discussion

Open space discussions facilitated by NRN members took place on themes identified by participants, including:

- The work of NRNs on **social inclusion**
- Governance of **regionalised networks**
- Support needs with regard to **LEADER/CLLD**
- Work of networks and rural stakeholders in **arts & culture**
- **Promotional activities** of networks (including Open Farm Days)
- **NRN action plans** & action planning



Next steps

Possible joint actions identified included:

- Setting up a **regular platform (video or phone conference sessions)** on the issue of **integration of migrants**;
- Setting up an **NRN cluster/platform** to exchange about common issues among **regionalised networks** (the next session is now planned back-to-back with the NRN meeting in Amsterdam);
- Promoting the wider use of **Learning Networks among LAGs** to address common issues and discuss common themes;
- Request for **guidance and exchange on action plans** and action planning among networks.
- Identification of more **examples on the use of arts and culture** to: engage communities; connect groups; communicate rural realities etc.

Relevant Annexes

Detailed description of outcomes of discussions are in Annex IV.

2.7 Closing of the event & future work of the ENRD

14.30 – 15.00	<i>Closing & upcoming events</i>
Presentation(s)	Introduction to the next NRN meeting (Amsterdam, May 2016) , Brenda Vrieling, Dutch Rural Network.
Upcoming events	<p>The following upcoming events and activities were announced:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Netherlands: 5th NRN meeting (11-12 May 2016) • Estonia: LEADER Cooperation Fair (24-25 August 2016) • Slovenia: “Protecting environment in Agriculture” conference (in cooperation with Austria) • Call to visit the Wallonian network’s new website, and to subscribe to the Swedish Rural Network Newsletter. <p>For information, these are the EU Rural Network’s Governance upcoming events:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5th Sub-Group on Innovation – 02 June 2016 • 5th RN Steering Group – 16 June 2016 • 4th Leader/CLLD Sub-Group – 2nd half September (tbc) • 6th Sub-Group on Innovation – October 2016 (tbc) • 6th RN Steering Group – 25 October 2016 (tbc) • 3rd RN Assembly – 01 December 2016
Next steps	http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/en/news-events/events

Annex I: Summary of comments received on CNS

Importance of learning and exchange between networks

- Not easy – learn from each other (focus group?)
- Sharing experience and practice is important
- Share best practice, indicators, methods, analysis (ideas on how data can be analysed)

Move to the next level – focus on results

- Need for support for result indicators
- Result indicators need to be able to capture the extent to which the network is supporting the implementation of rural development
- Getting to the next level: impact, quality, how?
- Continuous assessment is important (e.g. quarterly – not sporadic)

Tools to be developed

- Is it possible to develop a **common set of stakeholder survey questions** that NSUs could use to help them set up their own surveys?
- Should we have common **web statistics**? Might be better to have **training and guidance so the NSUs are able to set specific analytics nationally**; training is needed in data collection: social media & website
- Are best websites about specific objectives (e.g. SH engaged in for a/ publications downloaded?);
- If we talk about website outputs: track uploads rather than downloads
- Contacts & comments excel
- Portugal defined output and result indicators and developed a guidance document
- Links between data & databases from different MS

Budget & targets figures

- NRNs are open to provide the budget amount. Percentages will not allow comparison benchmarking
- Estimated percentage of NSU budget should be moved at the 'main' level of indicators (e.g. Level 1: Events). Sometimes the budget is not related to specific items or impossible to collect. The NSU budget is not necessarily structured in this way.
- Introduce baseline/targets; before & after

Complexity

- Need to make CNS simpler ... too much to monitor
- Certain data would be difficult to collect (especially for small networks)
- Some indicators do not look relevant
- Be critical of data; capture unexpected
- Individual members of thematic groups – a lot of checking and time is needed for this
- Risk of double-counting (e.g. events)

Annex II: Outcomes of the interactive session on NRN evaluation

An interactive capacity building exercise was conducted in small working groups of 7 to 8 people, focussing on three questions.

1. The purpose of external NRN evaluation has been discussed by participants in the first part of the exercise. They have highlighted the importance of learning through external evaluation. Evaluators can give recommendations on how to improve NRN activities and help to identify successes and failure factors. Evaluation can reliably assess to what extent NRN activities responds to the needs of the right stakeholders and give hints on how to better target NRN interventions.

External evaluation also provides the hard evidence on the extent to which the NRN meets its objectives and helps to demonstrate the results of its work. Participants have generally been very positive towards external evaluation of NRNs, and recognised its value to provide an independent view. The use of robust and solid methodologies does lead to useful recommendations on future NRN activities.



2. Specific contributions of NRN monitoring, self-assessment and evaluation to continual learning, as well as the interrelationships between these processes were discussed in the second part. Participants agreed that monitoring gives timely information on the state-of-play of the activities, targeting of funds and stakeholder involvement. This kind of information permits rapid reaction and programme improvement. By contrast, evaluation has a long-term strategic foresight, whereas self-assessment can give motivation and encouragement as well as allows seeing the bigger picture. The intersection of self-assessment and evaluation was seen as important for combining different perspectives.

3. Responsibilities of stakeholders in NRN monitoring, self-assessment and evaluation were discussed in the third session. Participants identified which stakeholders have a crucial role on rapid reaction, timely information, targeting, improved programme and financial engineering, stakeholder involvement, providing discussion platform information, simplification.

Annex III: Speed-dating matches

Overall topic	Specific topic	Community of practice
NRN Functioning	Governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Defining roles between all the actors involved in the RDP (NRNs, PAs, MA) – Exchange on the approaches for NRN governance structures and models of operation of NRNs – Information on how to run the steering committee
	Knowledge exchange - Thematic working groups	Information exchange of the results of Thematic Working Groups (e.g. expert teams, transferring good practice in implementation of RDP, follow up)
	Capacity building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Peer to peer exchange meetings on specific RDP topics (e.g. tenders, measures) – Stakeholder workshops – Ideas for NRN activities – Experts on capacity building – Rural inspirators - share ideas that come from meetings – B2B events – Involvement of stakeholders through specific competition of projects
	Communication	Communication tools: Examples of website, social media & stakeholder survey
	NRN Macro clusters	Nordic – Baltic cooperation
		Cluster of regionalized Member States (IT, ES, FR, DE, PT)
	Evaluation	NRN central Europe – Adriatic cluster
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Quality of the NRN self-assessment – Evaluation, impact indicators. How to measure the NRN work and its value? – Monitoring and Evaluation of NRNs – Sharing information, experience and tools 		
RDP topics	Farming	Small Farming: Exchange of information
		Training for farmers: Exchange of experiences
		Social farming
		Young farmers

	Rural tourism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Rural tourism – Territorial branding / tourism through LAGs: Common workshops and knowledge exchange
	Innovation	Innovation camps: Sharing experiences (e.g. Finland)
		EIP Innovation / operational groups: Exchange of information on how to involve farmers? How to stimulate partnerships (including between public and private partners)?
	Social inclusion	Social Inclusion: Exchange of information and organisation of Thematic Working Groups (e.g. Migrants)
	Short Supply Chain	Short Supply Chains & local food: Sharing experiences (public procurement for local producers)
	Public procurement	Public procurement procedures: Exchange of information (e.g. simplification for tenders on investments)
	Forestry	Forestry
	Environment	Results-based agri-environmental payments: Collective approaches
	Financing systems	Financing systems
Cooperation & TNC	Cooperation measure	
	Leader cooperation and TNC: Exchange of experiences	
LEADER	LEADER Capacity building	LAGs and FLAGS: Knowledge exchange
		LEADER Learning Networks
		Multi-funding: Exchange of experiences
	Events / Visits	LEADER event of central European countries
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – LEADER fair – Study visits of local action groups 		

Annex IV: Open space discussion summaries

1. The work of networks on 'social inclusion'

Discussion:

The session was initiated and facilitated by the Swedish NRN. At the start of the session Matthias Langemeyer (DG AGRI) explained the expectation from the Commission with regard to the integration of migrants. The Commission would like Member States to use the RDP in a flexible way to welcome refugees and deal with social inclusion. He urged networks to send relevant examples supported by the previous programme.

The Open Space discussion was continued with a "round the table" session where all participants (representatives from Finland, Germany, Slovenia, Greece, Sweden) talked about their situation and their challenges and experience of social inclusion of refugees. Among others:

- *Finland* had a seminar in January on the theme (and they also have a number of LEADER projects);
- In *Slovenia* they try to promote the integration of migrants, and encourage LAGs to initiate projects;
- In *Germany* a workshop will be organised on the topic in April 2016, and a pool of good practices is collected;
- In *Sweden* the Steering Group considered the topic a top priority; and there have been links between farmers and immigrants (in order to find immigrants with the right skills and know-how). Good practice examples are currently collected, and a LEADER conference will be organised in April;
- *Greece* has a slightly different context, as immigrants often just enter the country, but would like to settle elsewhere. In the draft call for LAGs there is the possibility to take actions to address the immigration crisis but depends on their local strategy if they will use this possibility.

Next steps:

Some of the networks including Finland, Germany and Sweden plan to set up a platform for regular exchange of experience and also a possibility to ask colleagues about advice on social inclusion. This platform may be arranged as periodical video or telephone meetings with a pre-defined agenda.

2. Governance of regionalised networks

Discussion

This open space discussion was initiated and led by Riccardo Passero (Italian Rural Network), with participation from the Portuguese and Spanish Rural Networks.

Regionalised Member States have a different geographic and administrative set-up to non-regionalised Member States, which requires context-specific ways of networking and coordination. The discussion highlighted the different working scenarios for the Portuguese, Spanish and Italian networks.

Next steps

The rich interaction fostered the need of establishing an NRN cluster to exchange and analyse the different network models and practices in regionalised Member States. An exchange platform of this kind could explore:

- NRN organisation and steering of the NRN Programme;
- governance and support for regional RDPs (dealing with several MAs, meeting the expectations, how to effectively improve the quality of RDP implementation: which are the most effective tools?);
- evaluation of the NRN Programme;
- public procurement issues dealing with the NRN Programme;
- integration/demarcation among NRN Programme activities and regional RDP Technical Assistance;
- how to improve the accountability of the “NRN Programme”;
- effective involvement of stakeholders in large regionalised Member States;
- the programming process of annual activities;
- the role of NRN regional antennas;
- identification of possible thematic issues for events and strengthening cooperation.

3. Support needs with regard to LEADER/CLLD

Discussion

This open space theme was proposed and led by John Grieve from the ENRD Contact Point. The discussion was specifically focused on the Learning Networks experience, which had been previously discussed during the speed dating session and was highlighted by the Belgian Flemish NRN. Only two NRNs joined the discussion, Austria and Scotland.

Learning Networks were thought to represent an important tool as a forum for LEADER Practitioners to work on the approach and method. This can be done in a reflective manner as a means of continuous improvement, strengthening the added value the approach delivers, unleashing the potential and avoiding the mistakes of the past. As such they can form a basis for re-animating LEADER and reconnecting the various stakeholder groups, identifying and addressing barriers e.g. has LEADER become too big and important to take risks?

Next steps

Such networking activities can be used between LAGs and other stakeholders both within MS or regions and between them. Specific topics suggested included:

- learning the lessons for LEADER from the ex post evaluations,
- strengthening LEADER innovation,
- working with risk,
- developing a new (radical) LEADER view for the future, of what this thing can achieve.

Such Learning Networks may represent a way of building on the previous LEADER Focus Group approach.

4. Work of networks and rural stakeholders in arts & culture

Discussion

This small group discussion was led by Brenda Vrieling (Netherlands NSU), supported by Ed Thorpe (ENRD CP). Participants identified that arts and culture can be used as a tool for revitalising and energising rural areas and rural communities. Approaches include using arts and culture for:

- **Connecting groups** – rural and urban; farmers and consumers; rural communities and administrations etc.
- **Communicating messages** – portraying rural needs and rural realities in art form to make it more understandable to a non-rural audience
- **Bringing communities together** – engaging the community around an arts project can be the start of ‘getting people talking’ and lead to broader community initiatives
- **Promoting a shared cultural identity** – built around a common heritage
- **Engaging young people** – who might be motivated to join in an arts project and through that medium, engage in rural discussions and thinking.
- **Attracting tourists** – through the provision of a unique artistic offering

The group exchanged some **examples of specific projects** that they were aware of. They also discussed some of the options for **funding such initiatives**, many of which currently rely on arts funding, rather than coming from the RDPs. **LEADER/CLLD** offers a lot of potential.

Next steps

The Dutch NSU is hosting the next NRNs’ meeting (11-12 May) in Amsterdam, in conjunction with the **Amsterdam Rural Forum**. These events have a specific focus on the use of arts and culture in rural development. The network could usefully identify more concrete examples from across Europe to feed into this event.

The ENRD CP will include another article on arts and culture approaches in the Spring 2016 edition of **Rural Connections**.

These activities will hopefully contribute to generating more energy and engagement to continue working and networking on this topic.

5. Promotional activities of networks (including open farm days)

Discussion

This discussion was initiated and led by Ave Bremse (Estonian NRN), supported by David Lamb (ENRD CP). The discussion highlighted the need to develop rural places as destinations for visitors, and that this can be developed especially through collaboration and by changing the image of rural areas. Approaches were identified by the group as follows:

- **Creating urban-rural links** to develop rural tourism and change the image of rural areas as places worth seeing and visiting
- **Creating value** for rural areas and places by considering new activities and collaboration
- **Integrating Rural Services** to focus on visitor needs and demands
- **Promoting rural areas** using available media, including television programmes, specialised magazines and online content

- **Networking** with other stakeholders to create value, such as collaboration with National Geographic to create photography opportunities in rural Estonia.

A number of specific examples were presented, including the Estonian example: https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/sites/enrd/files/gp_web_template_ee_ng.pdf and examples including open farm days in the Czech Republic and Portugal, and pick-your-own farms for fruit and vegetables in Belgium.

Next steps

There was an expressed desire for joint work by all participants in the session to develop the promotion of rural areas and extend the activity, and to consider development of some of the projects identified to communicate best practice clearly among participants and beyond.

The projects offered will be followed up in the development of Good Practices, and consideration of the Amsterdam NRN as a further development point for joint activity with the focus on culture and arts.

6. NRN action plans & action planning

Discussion

The discussion was initiated by the Scottish NSU and aimed to discuss issues around developing an NRNs' Action Plan. The discussion identified that there is a lack of clarity on what an Action Plan should include and how detailed this should be. As a result, NRNs' Action Plans greatly vary in content and length.

On the one hand, representatives from Slovenia, Belgium-Flanders and Hungary explained that their Action Plans are very detailed documents covering a wide range of NRNs activities. On the other hand, representatives from Cyprus, Scotland and England, explained that their Action Plans consist of few pages (less than 10) explaining only the basic elements of the NRNs' intervention logic. Where NRNs have very general Action Plans, more detailed Annual Plans describe the annual activities and specific objectives.

The discussion identified the main elements to be included in an Action Plan such as:

- Intervention Logic,
- Purpose/mission and its connection to RDP, Regulations (and communication plans)
- Structure of the NSU,
- Governance including the decision making system and the functioning of the Steering Group,
- Types of activities and tools used,
- Explanations on how the mission and activities will be translated in annual plans,
- Financial plan,
- Description of the monitoring and evaluation activities.

Next steps

The participants requested from the ENRD CP to create guidance on the NRNs' Action Plan. Such Guidance should aim at communicating what to keep in mind when creating the NSU Action Plan. Participants highlighted that no formal recommendations are necessary from the Commission.

A starting point for this guidance can be the NRN profiles (currently being developed), where a specific section is devoted to the review of action plans (and action plans can also be attached/shared).

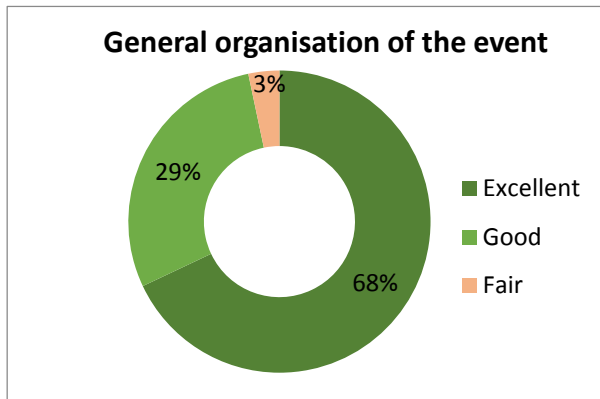
Annex V: NRN meeting participants' feedback

23 filled evaluation forms were received (approx. 40% of participants, not taking into account ENRD CP participation). The main findings of the participants' feedback can be summarised as follows:

- ✓ The **organisational aspects of the event were rated high** (97% rating it good or excellent). All participants rated the networking dinner and field-visit excellent or good. A large majority (around two-thirds) of respondents rated these aspects excellent.
- ✓ The **NRN self-assessment and evaluation sessions were rated positively, but relatively lower than other sessions of the event**. The NRN self-assessment session was rated slightly higher than the session on NRN evaluation.
- ✓ Besides the fieldvisit the **speed-dating session (find our RDP partners) was the most appreciated session** of the event 68% rating it excellent. According to the comments the session was appreciated because this **gives the opportunity for NSUs to directly exchange about their practices and drive the agenda**.
- ✓ Among the workshops the **'smart and competitive rural areas' and the 'young farmers' workshops were rated excellent or good** by all respondents. The workshop on the 'cooperation measure' received slightly lower rating (21% rating it poor or fair, the rest good or excellent).
- ✓ The **open space discussion was rated good** by a large majority of respondents.

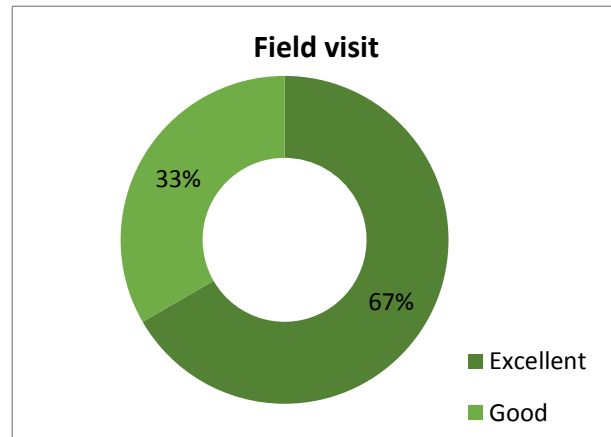
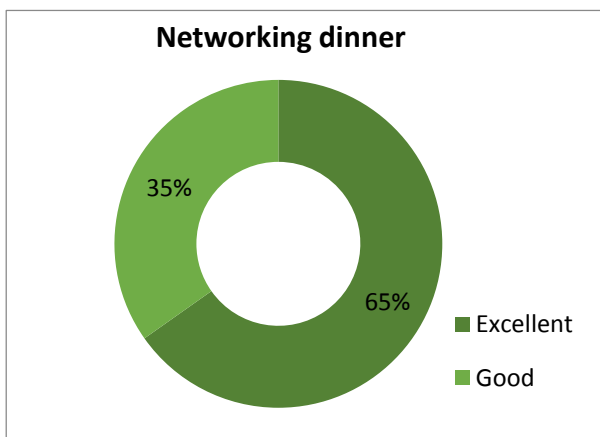
The following pages set out the specific feedback by the different sessions.

Feedback: Day 1 Organisation, field visit & networking dinner



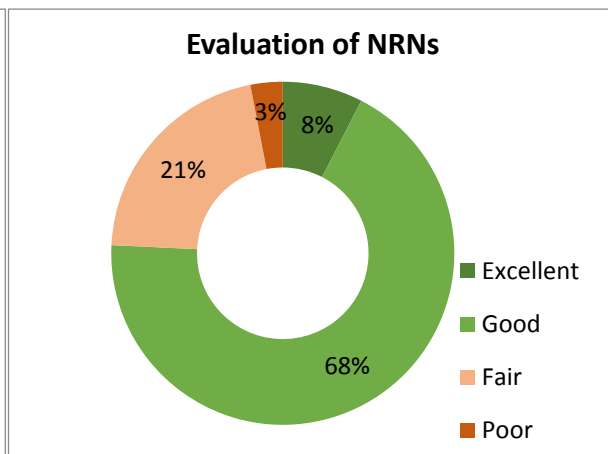
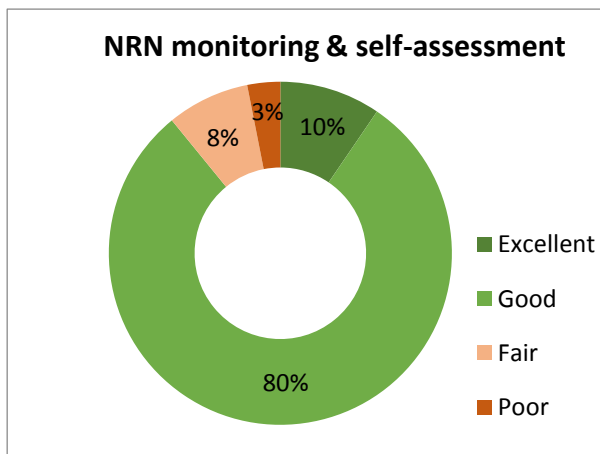
The **general organisation** of the event including (communication about the event prior to the meeting, venue, organisation at the meeting and networking opportunities) has been rated high, 68% of the respondent participants rating it excellent, 29% rating it good and 3% rating it fair.

Both the **networking dinner and the field visit** was rated excellent by most participant (the rest rated it good)



Feedback - Day 1 NRN self-assessment & evaluation

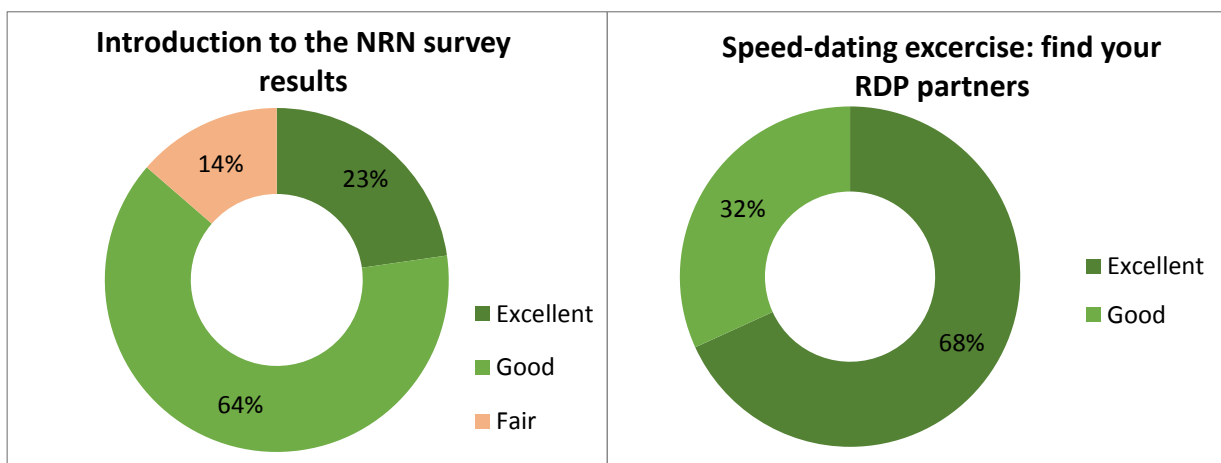
Day 1 sessions on NRN self-assessment and evaluation rated relatively lower than other sessions of the meeting. While some 90% and 76% rated the self-assessment and evaluation sessions good or excellent respectively; 11% rated the self-assessment fair or poor and 24% rated the NRN evaluation fair or poor. The NRN self-assessment session rated slightly higher than the NRN evaluation session.



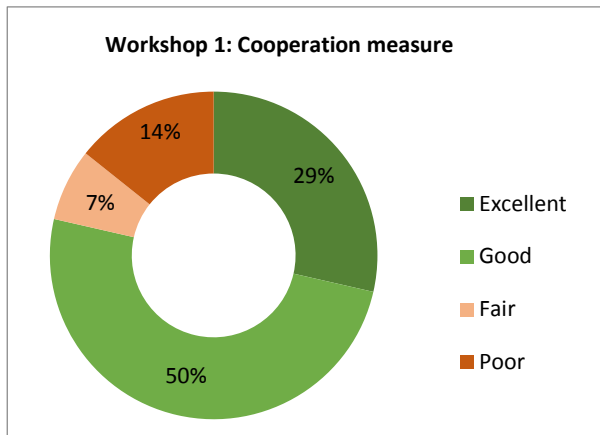
Feedback Day 2 Speed-dating

The speed-dating session has been highly successful, and was the highest rating session of the event (other than the networking dinner and field visit). Some of the comments reflect the need of participants for exchanging more among themselves, and NSUs to drive the agenda of such meetings:

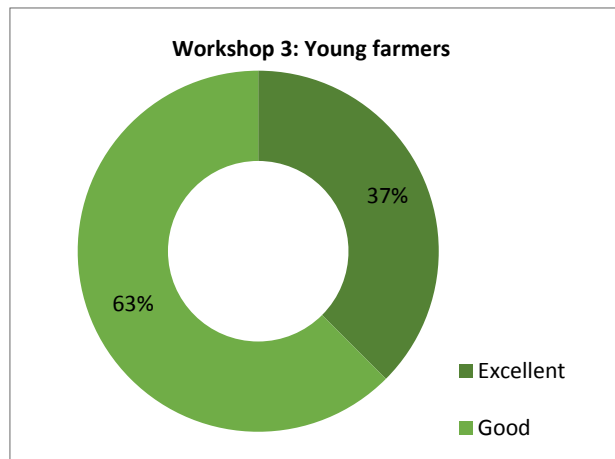
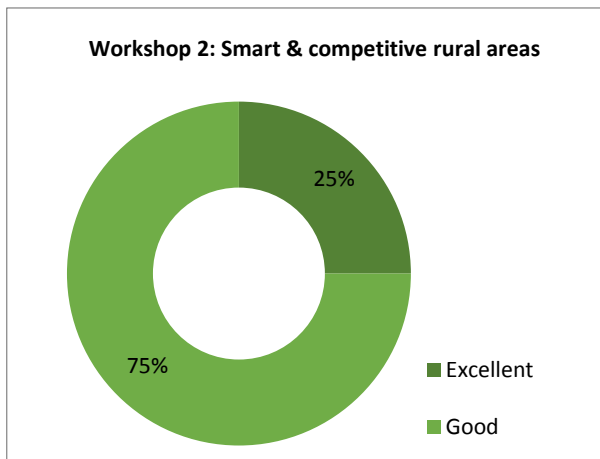
- “More and more use of the collective knowledge and intelligence across the NSUs.”
- “Networking is the most important aspect this is why the matching was useful. More opportunities for NRNs to set the agenda of the meeting would be good.”
- “The matching and open space sessions were great but we need more of this type of discussion, tailor by the participants. Less time for presenting and explaining.”



Feedback - Day 2 Workshops



The assessment of the three workshops varies slightly (while all are based on relatively few 7 to 8 responses): The workshop of the cooperation measure (workshop 1) was rated lower (21% - 2-3 people out of 7 - rating it fair or poor and 79% rating it good or excellent); the workshops on 'smart and competitive rural areas' and 'young farmers' received only good and excellent ratings (young farmers getting slightly higher scores).



Feedback - Day 2 Open space discussions

The open space discussions were mostly rated positively, 97% of respondents finding it good or excellent.

