



**END
BACK
TO THE FUTURE**





2007...

Juha-Matti Markkola





The Finnish Rural Network started its work in October 2007.

We were eagerly waiting for other networks and the ENRD to start and craving for peer-to-peer discussions.

The ENRD Contact Point was not yet operating then.



So we invited our Swedish, Danish and Estonian colleagues in Finland.

That was exactly 11 years ago, in April 2008.

This was the start of the Nordic-Baltic NRN co-operation and Latvians, Lithuanians and Polish joined in.

Since then we have had excellent co-operation around Baltic Sea.



There have been a lot of highlights. For example the first TNC-meeting, at Levi in Finnish Lapland in March 2009. It gathered together 200 Leader people around Europe. Our role as networks is to build platforms where people can meet and experience things together. Sometimes the platform is a sauna bench or seminar room or a bus or something else. You never know!



Working in an NRN has been a great privilege.

You can see the whole chain from the farmer, village developer or rural entrepreneur to the EC. Especially it is the privilege to get to know all these people.

Sometimes the goal “lost in translation”, sometimes literally but more often operationally. We have to be careful with that. We should not lose our common goal.

The other thing is courage. Try and experiment things, learn from the results and try again!



2008 – 2009...

Gaëlle Marion

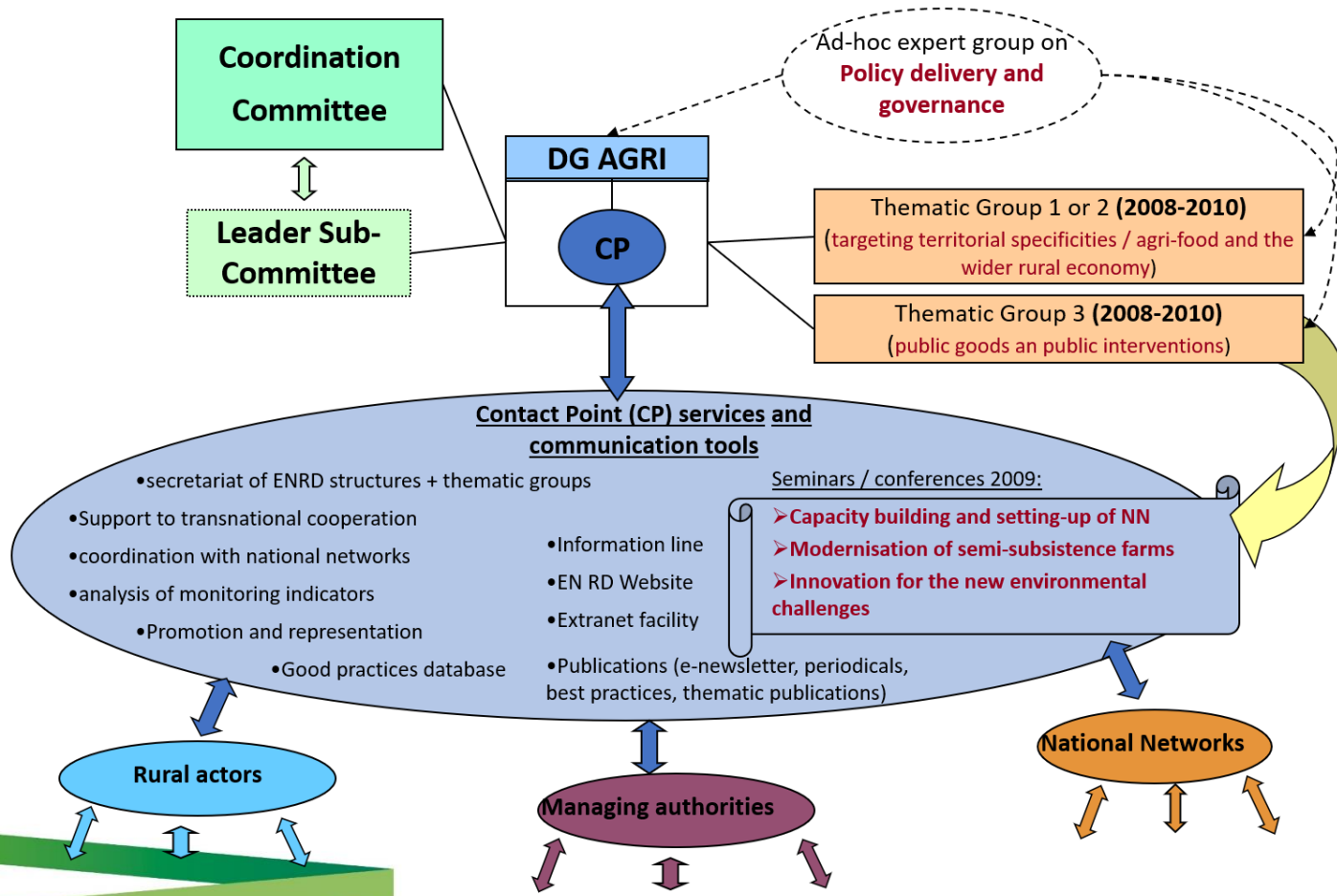




It was very intense work at the initial stages of setting up of the ENRD. Mike was there too, and he could confirm!

As you say, the need was clearly there. There was recognition that links between all branches of rural development (farming, environmental care, rural businesses, social inclusion...) are key for success stories, and exchanges between actors bring new ideas, and new models.

Networking wasn't new of course. An EU network existed for Leader groups, and many stakeholders' initiatives and EU associations had been active for many years in the field of agricultural and rural development.



Many things were new for the ENRD: The scope of networking the entire field of rural development, including the old «axis 1», «axis 2» and «axis 3», and thus the need to link with many more stakeholders; The setting-up of the network, with formal expert groups of the EC, the link with a new Evaluation Network, the involvement of more people in DG AGRI at a higher level.

A couple of examples of challenges we faced: We had the challenge to bring added value to all the different interests and expectations.

I think we also had true communication issues, and I wanted to show the first slides we presented in the first meetings of the Coordination Committee...

They look frightening!



I saw during my years of involvement in the ENRD significant changes. Changes in methods.

We improved in terms of communicating what networking is about, but also in terms of participative approaches. Meetings became more efficient, and the methods were adapted to encourage inter-personal interactions.

Real relationships were built through the different activities, and this is, I think, a success.

I saw as well is that the outcomes of ENRD activities to start to influence policy reflexions – at least certainly in DG AGRI.



So, well, what I learnt is totally obvious:

It was about working with the right methods, on the right topics, in a inclusive way with all stakeholders.

This inclusiveness will continue to gain importance in the future of course, with the ENRD supporting the «CAP Strategic Plans» even broader in scope than the current rural development programmes...

So I wish you all a good continuation!



2010 – 2011...

Riccardo Passero





Rural development policy in Italy involves regional authorities (Regional RDPs).

Rural Network is a “Programme” and it has been operational since November 2007.

It helps interconnect with European and other MSs’ Networks.

First “study visit” of a foreign Rural Network in Italy was exactly 10 years ago (April 2009) with the Finnish Network.

We met at the Ministry in Rome and then visited RDP projects in Emilia Romagna and Tuscany Regions.



That study visit is still a good memory for all of us.

This initial activity among NRNs proved to be valuable.

We all share the same CAP – There are aspects concerning implementation in other MSs that we needed to learn and to know about.

The rural network tool allowed for the first time this exchange.

"Rural networking" was taking first steps in those years, but it was already showing its full potential.



In 2010-2011 the Italian Rural Network organised several international events, e.g. NRNs meeting in Rome (March 2010) / the European seminar on post-2013 rural policies (April 2010) / the Cross-compliance seminar (October 2010), etc. A milestone event was on “Communicating rural development to citizens”, Milan (November 2011) in collaboration with Lombardy Region, with the participation of DG AGRI and MAs from several Member States.



The event gave visibility to communication products considered as good examples.

Special reference to the use of new media emerging (social networks, institutional web-communication, digitalization of public administration, cross media marketing etc.).

"Room 360", a multimedia exhibition room, set up for the occasion, with a projection screen of 360°.



118 RDPs are implemented at regional or national level in the Member States. The link between them is ensured by the "networks".

Ultimately "networking" is what makes the European rural development policy truly "common". Interaction and networking are needed to address future challenges and the "new performance-based delivery model" in the next programming period.

A recommendation is to always consider the point of view of the operators and stakeholders. To achieve this, "networks" (European and national) must increasingly evolve as a tool for achieving results.



2012 – 2013...

Kristiina Tammets





My main goal is to show the continuity and growing opportunities of networking.

Networking is not just one action or project, but a long-term process and commitment.



The LINC 2012 was a multi-level networking experience!

It grew stronger as regional network of LAGs in South Estonia - ready for following collaboration projects.



5 LAGs and NRN were involved in organising it.

This year we celebrate 10 years anniversary of LINC in Estonia, Pärnu area!



The Yellow windows route opened in 2013 in cooperation with National Geographic. It is an ongoing regional - transnational collaboration - networking!

It promotes networking at very local level – between communities and businesses. 500 organisations in the network in Estonia. Sustainable development and innovation are the strong focus.

In 2019, Yellow Windows expanded to Finland and Northern Ireland. Now we are preparing the European Capital of Culture - yellow windows - flag ship events - full programme in Tartu and the South Estonian region!



2016 – 2017...

Svetlana Boyanova





I have a strong background in EU Rural networks as Deputy Minister of Agriculture and responsible for the development of the first NRN.

Since 2013 I have been Chairperson of Institute for Agro-strategies and Innovations - promoting EIP-AGRI in Bulgaria. I work with farmers and the other stakeholders explaining EIP AGRI, facilitating the exchange of expertise and good practices.

I also supported the government to draft legislations for M16.1 RDP and the National Strategy for Digitising the Agriculture and Rural areas.



This is a photo from the First conference in Bulgaria - First steps towards EIP-AGRI“ with more than 120 participants;



First EIP-AGRI Seminar in Bulgaria – “Data revolution: emerging new business models in the agri-food sector” - more than 130 participants from BG and EU;



And the High Level Forum on e-agriculture “2gether 4 Strong Digital Agriculture”, organized with MAFF and the FAO under the BG Presidency with more than 270 participants from BG, EU and WBC.

Important points:

Knowledge sharing is a must and Networking is crucial;

Encourage farmers and support their efforts to test and to introduce innovations;

Political support and engagement of public authorities is important for establishing an environment for innovations;

If you have the will, anything can be achieved!



2018...

Paweł Krzeczunowicz





It has been less than a year and a half since I officially took charge of the Polish Rural Network.

It has been an eye-opening experience.

Not that networking activities are new to me – involved in the PREPARE Network & European Rural Parliaments.

Noteworthy was on the one hand the mutual support shown by networks to one another;

On the other hand, the support provided by the contact point.



What has struck me more is the enormous variety of approaches and ideas that the various national networks bring to the table.

While we share common objectives, often we take different approaches, due to different administrative settings, or because the stakeholders and issues differ, from country to country as well as between regions in a particular country.

The approach to networking in Poland includes a significant effort to support ideas and initiatives presented by our rural development partners.



We bring them forward through a series of annual grant competitions. It is the ideas that they come up with – at national and regional levels – that have been particularly interesting.

We provide support through grants – private companies, public agricultural advisors, NGOs, and; Units in each of Poland’s 16 regions, local associations of voluntary fire brigades or rural women’s organizations.

As a result over the last year we saw the need for:

- training for LAG staff in animation;
- research on the reduction of nitrate pollution in water or degradation of soil;
- study visits on a variety of topics.



There is certainly no end of things to improve, e.g. about how we do our work.

But what has struck me most is the openness and willingness between the various national networks to share and support one another.

We are very fortunate to be part of the Nordic-Baltic cooperation among networks, as well as the newer grouping of networks from central Europe.

The exchanges and airing of problems – and of how to deal with them – is very helpful and well worth for every national rural network to engage in.



2018...

Joonna Hellman







2019...

Elona Moerdijk





Last year I started at the Dutch NRN.

I used to work at a ministry with 2000 colleagues in The Hague

Now I work in a team of 5 persons, on the 12th floor, in Utrecht.

It was quite a change.



Every day I go to the office by train.

Besides reading - I look outside and see the meadows, the birds and cows.

Those views are precious to me. I like the idea I can contribute to that.



My first network event was Hortus, a really old botanical garden in Leiden. - Gathering of people participating in a network, called Food families. A policy officer of the province told us about the Dutch kitchen and its history, a young entrepreneur served wine that she made herself from a pine tree and I ate a burger made of beans.

What touched me the most was their enthusiasm and their belief in a more sustainable world, where food is made in a fair way and biodiversity is taken into account.

Really loved it that I was part of that energy!



This is the illustrator Jefta Bade made 4 paintings about agricultural collectives.

‘To connect’ is the magical word. Inside the Dutch NRN, with the Dutch rural network. And above all with all the member states of Europe.

The begin stage of the Rural Development Programme has come to an end. We are now in a stage of harvesting.

There are beautiful examples of projects that really contribute to a vital rural area. Let’s share them with our citizens and let’s share them with each other.

We can learn a lot from each other and together we can make things better!

