

The 10th NRN's meeting – co-hosted by the German Network Support Unit – looked at inspirational project examples on three topics: rural mobility, smart supply chains and digital villages. Participants undertook project visits and discussed how to learn from best practice in these areas.

A 'village simulation game' encouraged those attending to consider social, economic, cultural and environmental effects on rural development planning.

Discussions on key themes proposed how the activities of NRNs could contribute to the priorities of both the ENRD and of NRNs themselves.

### Event Information

**Title:** 10<sup>th</sup> NRN Meeting

**Date:** 20-21 March 2018

**Location:** Neuhardenberg, Germany

**Organisers:** ENRD Contact Point and German NRN

**Participants:** 67 participants from 24 MSs

**Outcomes:** Learning from inspiring examples of rural development projects and development of further collaborative projects and exchanges

**Web page :** [https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/news-events/events/10th-nrn-meeting\\_en](https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/news-events/events/10th-nrn-meeting_en)

## Meeting Highlights

The meeting entitled "Rural development - building the future" focused on the upcoming work of the networks themselves and examples of future-oriented initiatives and projects.

A parallel event taking place, the meeting of German village actors, presented an opportunity to meet local village stakeholders and discuss current rural development issues in Germany with them.



During the field trips organised by the German NRN, meeting participants visited various rural development project initiatives, funded through both EAFRD and national funds.

These examples included environmentally focused adaptive research projects being implemented at the [Leibniz Centre for Agricultural Landscape Research](#), solar energy, e-bikes and socially oriented initiatives at [Trebnitz Castle](#) which create a platform for the engagement of civil society

Sandwiched between these field visits, the NRN meeting discussions held in Neuhardenberg Castle included joint NRN activity and exchanges and three in-depth parallel workshops on Digital Villages, Rural Mobility and Smart Supply Chains. A final morning session on March 21st allowed those taking part to play a role in a Rural Village Simulation Game.

## Joint Activities & Priorities



The opening session led by the ENRD Contact Point provided an update of the themes that were already elaborated during previous NRN Meetings, particularly information on ongoing work on Common Network Statistics and the thematic activities of NRNs.

A session on upcoming ENRD & NRN Priority areas was divided into two rounds. In a first round, participants discussed and proposed actions where NRNs can support or increase involvement across several topics as follows:

- Smart villages – creating national Smart Village competitions; considering the role of LEADER
- Green Economy with a focus on bioeconomy – delivering project examples and exchanges
- Efficient networking – more physical exchanges and peer-to-peer learning, clustering of NRNs, sharing communication tools
- LEADER/CLLD – collaboration in events, holding a cooperation fair, capacity building on self-assessment.

The second round created an opportunity for NRNs to suggest other areas where they would be interested in leading or coordinating. Among a number of interesting proposals, the following topics were put forward

- Enhancing Rural image / communicating rural development
- Youth
- Small farms & social farming
- Short supply chains – next steps
- Evaluation and impact research

---

## Clusters & Partnerships

An update was provided on areas where NRNs can create further partnerships and exchanges. There are several ways in which these can be achieved, including geographical clusters and joint thematic work. A meeting between Estonia, Finland and Sweden in April 2018 – the 'Vibrant Rural North' - will consider areas where they can work together, while work continues developing further joint activity in rural proofing, innovation and communication. Updates were provided at the meeting on ongoing and future activities on these topics.



An exercise to consider NRN staff exchanges received 9 responses from NRNs, with nearly all looking to undertake a shadowing exchange between network support units. These exchanges will be encouraged and supported in the coming months to enable further linkages and to encourage capacity building between NRNs.

## Digital Villages

Two fascinating case studies were presented in the workshop: Digital Villages in the South of [Germany](#) and a web database for recording the history of a rural area in [Estonia](#). This sparked an avalanche of examples of IT applications in rural areas – from digital high streets in Ireland, to car sharing in Scotland, care for the elderly in Finland and various apps for better communication with municipal governments. There were also examples of community-led broadband and IT training for the elderly.

Participants also pointed to some of the barriers to progress and examples of how they can be overcome. Not just better connectivity but also education – starting in schools and continuing into life-long learning; local digital ambassadors with a holistic view of the whole picture and a mandate to make it better; and a reduction of the legal constraints.

## Rural Mobility

Interesting examples of rural transport initiatives were presented from [Brandenburg](#) (Germany) where an integrated public transport system is delivered and Bute (UK) which successfully operates a car hire/share scheme on a small island. Examples from [Estonia](#) of a cinema and an animal clinic demonstrated that it can also be the services rather than the people which are made mobile.

The participants contributed their own knowledge of a range of rural mobility initiatives in France, Germany, Greece and elsewhere, with the following discussion leading to several pointers for future work being identified. Namely:

- Flexibility is key
- Good mobile internet connection is important and facilitates effective modern rural mobility, especially for real-time apps.
- It is important to ensure that the population is aware of rural transport options and to reverse the poor perceptions of rural transport services
- The need to identify if there are legislative bottlenecks. In some circumstances they do because requirements did not foresee the different organisational forms that rural transport can now take
- Identification, elaboration and dissemination of good practices will be useful as rural transport initiatives often do not know about each other. Sharing of lessons learnt and success and non-success stories will be useful.

## Smart Supply Chains

A total of five examples were presented in the workshop, with a focus on the ‘smart’ systems that enable efficient and user-orientated delivery. The initiative from [Mecklenburg-Schweiz](#) (Germany) includes a cooperative shop in a small village, a bespoke regional label, and deliveries using electric vehicles powered by solar energy.

Three examples were presented from [Austria](#), and one from [Poland](#). These illustrated the benefits of digital presence, and how to link tourism and even recipe sites driving consumers to products – in one example ‘Smanckerl-Navi’ - literally navigating them through GPS to small producers. The workshop illustrated the benefits of connectivity, whether joining producers together to support joint logistics or marketing, or in supporting direct B2B or B2C relationships.

