ENRD networking mapping 2018

Working paper

May 2018

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1. Introduction

To support RDP implementation and networking activities appropriately it is important to have clear and up to date information about the current state-of-play of the NRNs. This survey has been conducted on a yearly basis, although some questions put to the rural networks changed each year, and for 2018 the title has been changed to reflect this. A questionnaire was prepared by the ENRD Contact Point and information was collected by CP staff supported by experts at Member State level. The contribution was not only drawn from MAs and NRNs, but also other relevant actors, allowing a wider and deeper insight into the situation in each MS or region.

Across the 32 NRNs (28 MSs with two regional networking profiles submitted from Belgium and four from the UK), 25 were completed by Mid-April. Since then two further profiles were received, and the findings from these and other later submissions will be included in further analysis of the information.

The first findings are summarised below; the final version of the ENRD networking mapping will follow later following feedback and further submissions.

2. Information on the state-of-play of networking activities related to RDPs implementation

2.1. Lessons learned

Twenty-three of the 25 submissions offered an answer to the question "What have been the main lessons learned over the last 12 months?"

Forty-seven lessons were mentioned, with the most reoccurring subject areas being communication, resource and event related lessons.
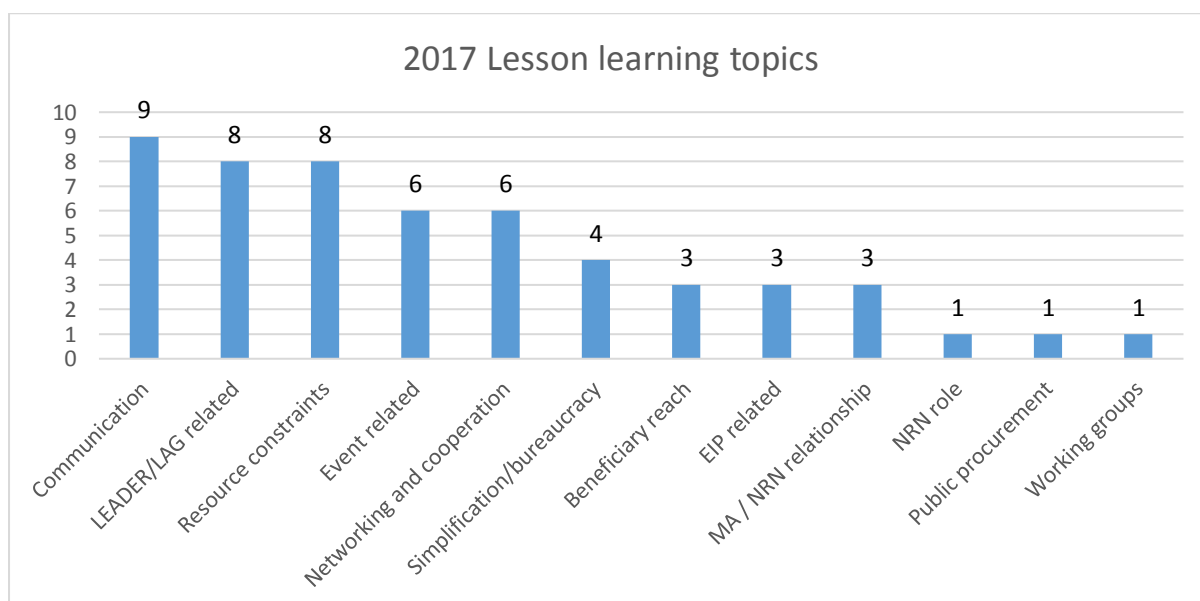
By way of examples of communication related lessons, in Greece a key success factor for Measure 16 implementation has been the high level of engagement amongst agronomists and technical staff of regional administrations. Agronomists are in direct contact with farmers and can play a pivotal role in transferring information and act as antennas for the NSU. The most active agronomists have even formed their own network. However, networking relies on personal relationships and when NSU staff changes either occur or are anticipated it can have an impact on network effectiveness. In Hungary, a lesson is that there is a need to strengthen and target communication activities to the specific needs and thematic interests (e.g. Short Supply Chains) of various stakeholders.

An example of a resource constraint related lesson has been experienced in Austria, where a lesson is that real networking' is not possible given the existing resources. Furthermore, target groups named in the NRN task description are not reached to a consistent extent, although this is partly due to historical reasons (e.g. LEADER stakeholders are historically much closer to the NRN than many farmers). In Poland, the principal lessons learned over the past 12 months are directly linked to the organisation of a call for project proposals from network partners which has enabled a better understanding of the constraints of the financing model and the significant administrative burden placed on network partners.

A summary of the specific lessons that have been learnt in 2017 are shown in the table below.

Lesson learning subject	Specific 2017 lesson that has been learnt
Beneficiary reach	Target groups reached to variable extent, partly for historical reasons.
	Very important to have direct contact with grassroot stakeholders
	Difficult to engage with RDP schemes as focus is on spending
Communication	Feedback from regional partners is crucial
	Development of new NRN website requires strong guidance
	Need to target communication to specific needs and thematic interests
	Face to face meetings are most effective communication method
	NRN members not consulted on RDP implementation
	Facilitated networking of potential partners pays off
	Repeat important messages through multiple channels
	NRN must be visible with clear targets and responsibilities and good communication
	Communication and M&E within RDP is weak
Cooperation and networking	Team work and cooperation important
	Don't give up on utilising contacts and social networks, led to EIP study tours
	Collecting best practice examples relies on cooperation with advisors
	M16 success due to engagement of agronomists and regional technical staff
	Sharing experiences contribute a lot to improve the RDP implementation.
	Early cooperation led to joint outputs
EIP related	Top-down RDP and bottom-up EIP
	EIP challenged by high bureaucracy
	EIP actors need further training and examples from other MSs
Event related	Limit to number of seminars and excursions that can be organised.
	Events with high interaction work well
	Joint PA and LAG regional seminars helped solve implementation problems
	Peer to peer and thematic meetings work well with facilitated networking
	Some of the most successful events organised with the LAGs' representative organisation
	International events have multiple benefits
LEADER/ LAG related	Top-down RDP and bottom-up LEADER
	LEADER challenged by high bureaucracy
	LEADER and LDS quality depends on equal opportunities, LAG competencies and TNC

	Governmental bodies more and more recognise the expertise of the LAGs
	LAG actors need further training and examples from other MSs
	LEADER workshop requirement ensured applicants were aware of administrative rules
	Good foothold with LEADER
	LAG baselines have reduced need for regular information requests
MA / NRN relationship	Slow MA decision-making held up network support work
	Need greater interaction between the NRN and MAs to utilise NRN potential.
	Low awareness amongst MA and other stakeholders of NRN potential.
NRN role	NRN plays a key role in rural area development
Public procurement	Public procurement processes can cause difficulties
Resource constraints	Real networking is not possible given the existing resources
	Limit to number of seminars and excursions that can be organised.
	Staff turnover harms networking
	Complexity and size of RDP is challenging because of limited capacity within the MA and NSU
	Call to fund network partners has revealed financial and administrative constraints
	Communication activities under resourced
	Developing case-studies is resource intensive
	Some approved RDP scheme held back by lack of co-financing
Simplification/ bureaucracy	Slow MA decision to put in place some RDP measures, NRN support helps in implementation
	Project funding and structures are too complicated
	High levels of bureaucracy, there are significant concerns about the possibility of simplification
	By implementation of some projects better understanding of the administrative burden
Working groups	WGs need more animation, and to focus on fewer issues.

2.2. Significant achievements

Across the 25 submissions reviewed, 55 achievements were stated in response to the question "Please describe your most significant or interesting achievement over the last 12 months. i.e. what are you most proud of?".

Almost half (24) of the achievements mentioned were related to the delivery of events, including thematic workshops, seminars, conferences, study-tours and rural fairs.
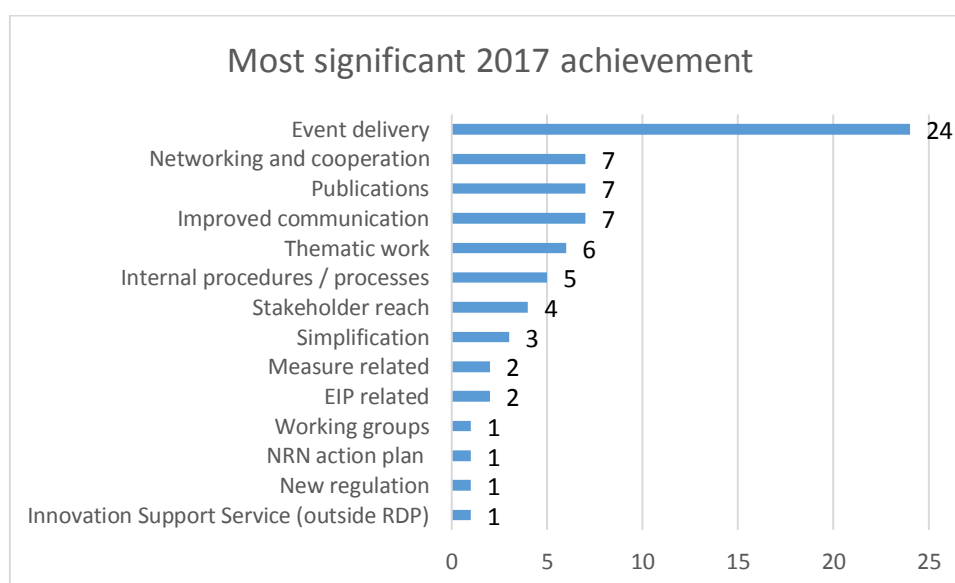
In Spain the NRN has increased its contact with stakeholders this year through the development of

meetings and workshops, creation of thematic working groups, better communication and more computer applications. Thematic work is appropriate, NSU staff is accessible, and communication has improved in all aspects. The capacity to deliver the work plan has improved, while the creation of a LEADER Cooperation Working Group allows problems to be tackled together by all LAGs.

In The Netherlands, the organisation of a RDP network meeting in November 2017 was an achievement, and the flyer and posters from sample projects were high quality. A number of well attended thematic meetings on short supply chains were also delivered.

In Estonia, the NSU has supported work on Short Supply Chains and the development of local markets by producing a newsletter to all stakeholders. Over 250 LEADER outputs have been mapped online to demonstrate the public goods delivered, and the NSU translated a young farmers' exhibition into English for the Estonian Presidency of the EU Council.

In Italy, a wide range of achievements were cited. The simplified and standard cost options have been introduced, a database presenting the results of more than 30 audits from all Italian regions has been created, and the NRN has created a new regional reporting system and a system to support entrepreneurs write a business plan on-line to access RDP measures. Thematic webinars for local administrations have been delivered, cooperation and exchange activities with the Polish administration on the EAFRD regionalised experience were organised, while the Italian MA managers participated in an international study trip.

2.3. Challenging aspects of work

When asked "As networks, which aspect of your work has been difficult or challenging to implement over the last 12 months, i.e. what could you have achieved given reasonable resources (human, financial etc.)?" 45 challenges were mentioned across the 25 submissions received. However, not all challenges have been due to resource constraints, as shown in the table below.

Challenging issue	Resource dependent? (Stated or implied)
NRN brand position and volume of content produced	Yes
Planning of outputs and outcomes	Yes
Attendance at European level meetings	Yes
Synergies with similar organisations	No
Engaging the agricultural sector	Yes
Communication activities	Yes
Focus only on LAGs	Yes
Clarity with MA over roles and responsibilities	No
Development of thematic topics (e.g. short supply chains)	Yes
Implementation of the communication plan	Yes
Change in regional NSU structure has made communication more difficult	No
Competition between NRN regional activities with similar participants	No
Utilise export potential of products	Yes
Limited knowledge of social farming	Yes
Translate more examples of 'Smart Villages'.	Yes

Yet to engage with forestry measures	Yes
Distribute RDP M&E results in appropriate formats	Yes
Collaborative decisions and communication difficult within regionalised structure	Yes
Limited training and events delivered by the EIP-Agri network	Yes
Organisation of a member assembly meeting	Yes
Internal procedures (e.g. MA approval for travel)	No
Translating ENRD and EIP products	Yes
Cooperation with MA	No
NRN's complex governance system	No
Financial management system	Yes
Diverse membership hold different goals and opinions	No
Consultation with NRN members	Yes
Programme implementation (minimal to date)	Yes
NSU/NRN activities are ad-hoc	Yes
LAG management turnover (leaving due to extreme delays has reduced capacity)	Yes
Website development (architecture, security and content delivery)	Yes
Focus on partnership calls have reduced other activities	Yes
Trust between the NRN/NSU and LAGs	No
Clarity over PA responsibilities	No
Delays due to appeals following calls	No
Delays in calls	No
Potential beneficiaries awareness about conditions of calls, long-term issue	Yes
Utilisation of tools such as the NRN website and WGs	Yes
Networking training	Yes
Sharing of best practice	Yes
Organisation of thematic events	Yes
Developing case-studies	Yes
Gaining recognition amongst traditional rural communities	No
NSU location within government restricts flexibility	No

3. NRN operational challenges and future plans

3.1. NRN membership

Across the 25 responses to the question "Has NRN membership changed in the last year? If so, how?", 13 said that membership had not changed, seven said it had, while one gave no answer and four said that the question wasn't relevant as the NRN membership is informal or open.

The membership changes amongst the seven who said NRN membership had changed in the last 12 months are shown below.

Member State	Change in NRN membership
Croatia	Yes. Five new members (mostly LAGs) joined the NRN in 2017, with the NRN committee deciding on membership. There are now 309 members.

France	Yes, there are six new members; Association Habitat des Possibles, E-Graine, Fondation Avril, Tercia, Association Nationale des Nouvelles Ruralités, Institut des Territoires Coopératifs (InsTerCoop).
Germany	Yes. The DVS is not a membership organisation as such, but as themes and topics change so partners need to change which can cause confusion.
Ireland	Yes. There is a target to increase membership by 20% each year. This was met last year.
Poland	Yes. Following the decision to allow open access for any organisation to become a network partner, all existing partners had to re-register. There are currently 2271 partners registered with 1255 new registrations in 2017.
UK_Northern Ireland	Yes. The NRN has increased its membership from around 1 000 to 3,500. This has come about through training events around setting up LEADER LAGs and work on LEADER Cooperation. Also from work around supporting the Rural Needs Act which is helping to link with the RDP and wider stakeholders.

3.2. Consulting with stakeholders

When asked "How does the NRN / NSU consult with their stakeholders? Please give examples of how this has taken place over the last 12 months" the most frequently stated means of consultation across the 25 submissions was Events (10), Newsletter (9), Website (8) and Thematic Working Groups (7). Some authors focussed on consultation at a strategic level (e.g. Spain), others at a grassroot level (e.g. Malta), while made their comments highly evaluative, stating what needed to improve (e.g. The Netherlands) or what was working well (e.g. Finland).

The means of consultation that were mentioned multiple times are shown in the table below.

Means of consultation	Member State
Events (conferences, seminars, study visits, workshops, consultations)	UK_Wales, Cyprus, France, Czech Republic, Estonia, Be_Flanders, Slovakia, Germany, Be_Wallonia, The Netherlands
Meetings	UK_Scotland, Lithuania, France, Spain, Be_Flanders, The Netherlands, Czech Republic, Estonia, Ireland
Newsletter	Austria, Slovakia, Malta, Germany, Croatia, UK_Scotland, UK_Wales, Hungary, Romania
Website / Webpage	Slovakia, Austria, Romania, Germany, Finland, Croatia, France, Cyprus
Thematic Working Groups	Cyprus, Finland, Austria, Poland, Be_Wallonia, Be_Flanders, Ireland
Social media	Slovakia, Romania, Poland, UK_Scotland, Finland

Monitoring Committee / Coordination Committee	Austria, Italy, Czech Republic, Cyprus
Executive Committee / Assembly	Spain, France, Be_Wallonia
LEADER learning networks / Working Groups / Coordination meeting	Be_Flanders, Romania, The Netherlands
Publications	Germany, Austria
Regional Working Groups / Meetings	Poland, Czech Republic
NRN steering group	Lithuania, UK_Northern Ireland
Themed stakeholder meetings	Be_Flanders, The Netherlands

(Some authors appear to discuss communication tools rather than consultation methods, but due to lack of explanation and for consistency all tools and methods stated were included in analysis.)

In Austria, interested stakeholders are clustered in five strategic thematic advisory groups. A similar approach is followed in Cyprus, where members fill in application forms for Thematic Group participation which is examined by the Coordination Committee against set criteria. Representatives of Thematic Groups participate in the Coordination Committee and so can influence the shaping of the NRN's annual action plan. In Ireland consultation mainly takes place through the NRNs five sub-groups, each of which is made up of different stakeholders who improve the NRN's outreach.

In Spain the main way of consultation is through the Executive Committee and meetings have increased from one to two a year. The Committee is valued positively, but an increased orientation to decision-making and improved communication between the Executive Committee and the Implementation Committee, would be valued by stakeholders.

In France, institutional communication and consultation through an assembly and themed committees. The NRN website has been renewed to facilitate interaction, and in an effort to follow a less top-down approach the NRN now includes time for dialogue during participative workshops.

The Finnish NRN uses electronic work platforms very effectively (eg. the 'Viima' interactive participative tool) to gather feedback on annual action plans, while to avoid "speaking to the same people" the Scottish NRN now engages in less formal consultation and more outreach through partner organisations.

3.3. Future plans

When asked to share their plans for the next 12 months, seven NRN's were yet to finalise their action plan. Across the remaining 18 submissions, some NRN answers list objectives (e.g. Finland, Germany) while some list specific activities (e.g. Austria, France).

The most frequently mentioned topic or theme for the next 12 months activity was Innovation or EIP mentioned 12 times, LEADER (10), Agriculture (four) and Forestry (three).

One of the most detailed action plans reviewed is from Austria, which has five themes with
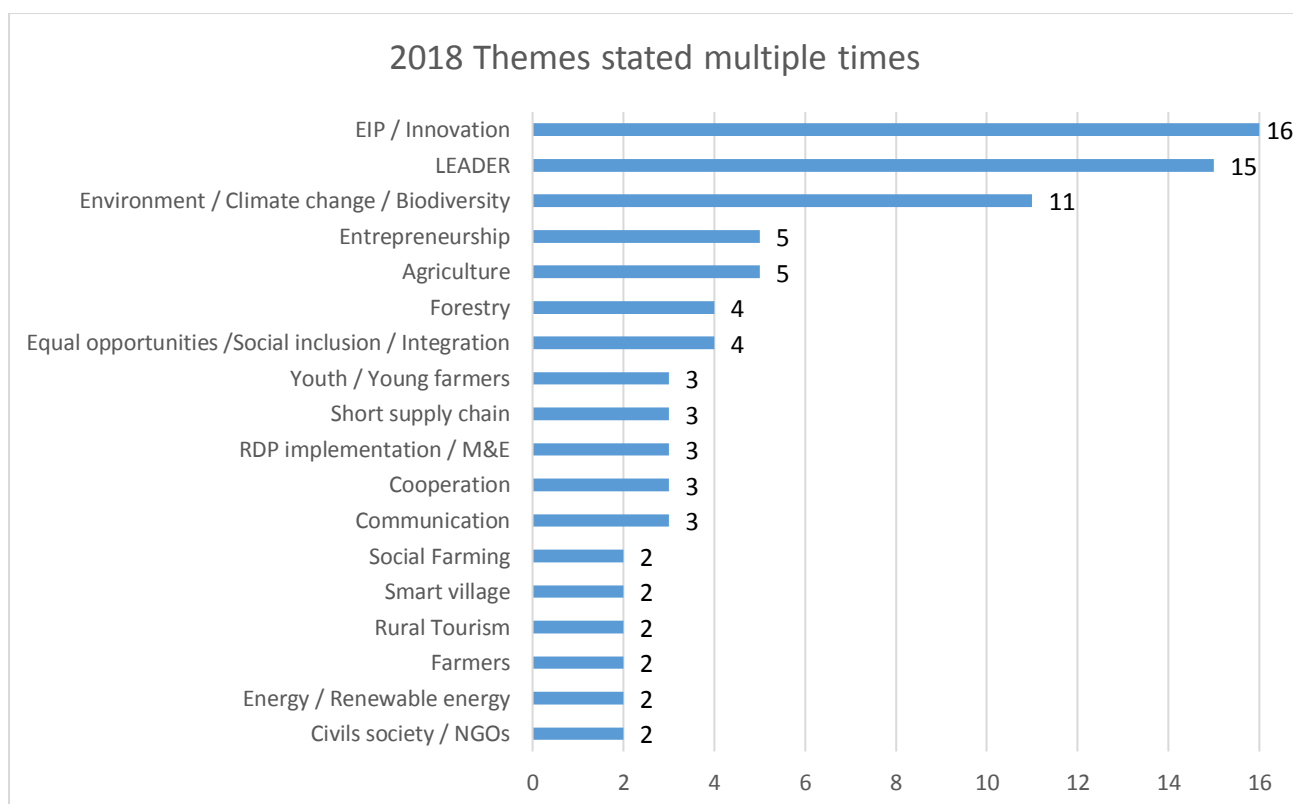
associated activities. For example, under the innovation theme the NRN will act as an innovation broker, deliver webinars, and implement an agricultural innovation strategy. In Be_Flanders events and meetings are planned the following themes; start-up support, agricultural education, 'Europe nearby', innovation, agri-environmental good-practice from other MSs, LEADER learning network, water quality and biodiversity. The Netherland, Estonia and Poland all give detailed thematic action plans, while Slovakia and Be_Flanders base their plans on event delivery, for example Slovakia plan to deliver conferences, field trips, workshops, seminars and meetings mainly focused on farmers, LAGs and innovation.
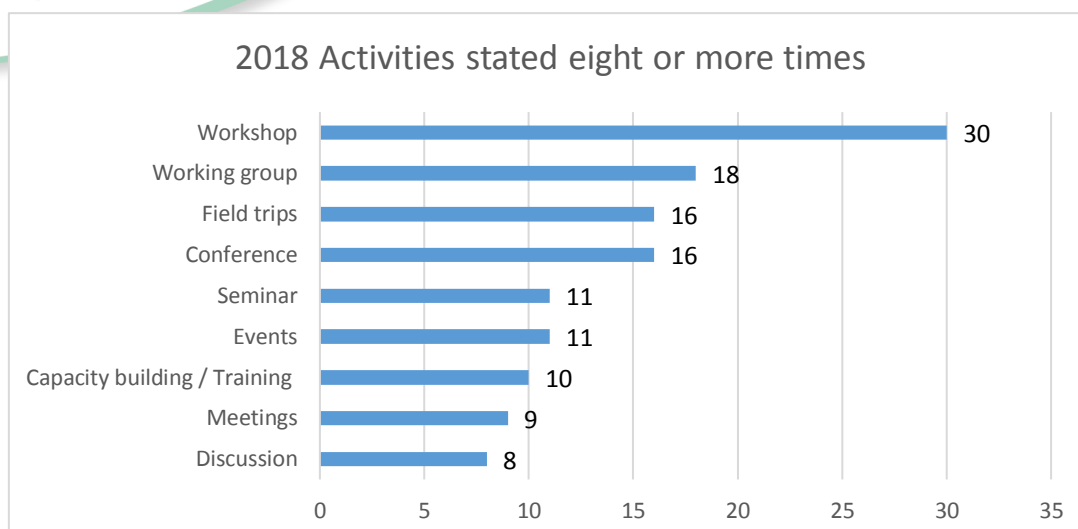
4. Thematic activity

4.1. Themes to address in 2018

In response to the question "What themes is the NRN addressing in 2018? Please describe current and planned 2018 activities by each theme."

Across the 22 Member State submissions that provided an answer, 19 themes and 23 activities were stated more than once, shown in the graphs below.

2018 Activities stated eight or more times

Activity	Count
Workshop	30
Working group	18
Field trips	16
Conference	16
Seminar	11
Events	11
Capacity building / Training	10
Meetings	9
Discussion	8

4.2. Stakeholders to involve

In response to the question "Which stakeholders should you involve to support or add value to your thematic activity in 2018, and how?", 18 of the 25 respondents offered an answer.

Stakeholders mentioned four times were; EIP stakeholders / groups / networks Managing Authority and Paying Agency. Farmers, LAGs, NGOs and potential beneficiaries were all mentioned three times, while the following were all mentioned twice; Environmental organisations / interest groups, General public, LEADER Working / Thematic Group members, Ministry of Agriculture and Education / Ministry (unspecified), NRN members and Village / community representatives.

Whilst most did not offer a clear answer to how stakeholders will be engaged, in Poland the membership of the innovation Thematic Group is being adjusted to ensure better representation from research institutes. The establishment of three task forces to cooperate with EIP-AGRI Focus Groups is also currently under way. In Finland the NSU believe that rural youth should be better involved and so the NRN is starting a new campaign with a young YouTube star Joona Hellman. Rather than trying to reach a target group directly the NRN is involving existing umbrella organisations or social structures to deliver a message through them.

4.3. Most successful delivery formats

Nineteen of the 25 submissions received offered an answer to the question "What are the most successful formats for delivering the thematic activity, and why?".

As shown in the table below, the most popular formats for delivery were meetings and workshops of various types.

Format for thematic activity delivery	Frequency
Meetings	6
Workshops / Thematic Workshops / Large Workshops / Participatory Forums	4
Events (unspecified)	2
Working Groups / Thematic Working Groups	2
Field Trips / Peer to Peer Exchanges	2
LEADER Learning Network	2
Temporary Working Groups	1
Exhibitions	1
Grant scheme for NRN partners	1
Information Sessions	1
Plenary Sessions	1
Thematic Newsletters / Publications	1
Youtube videos	1

As seen in the table, there was wide variation in the answers received, so it was not always possible to regroup or standardise the information received.

In Finland, Thematic Working Groups are the most successful format as their action plans bring strategic vision and efficiency into implementation. In BE_Flanders the LEADER Learning Network and interactive stakeholder meetings have been successful, as the latter allows topics to be identified with stakeholders who are really interested in the given topic. Finally, in Lithuania Temporary Working Groups have been successful. They meet on a regular basis for a defined period (e. g. once a week for ten weeks), with an aim of producing an output (e. g. guidelines) by the end of the period.

4.4. Methods for communicating outcomes

Nineteen of the 25 submissions received offered an answer to the question "What are the best methods for communicating the outcomes? How do you assess this?"

Methods that were mentioned multiple times are shown in the following graph.

Best method to communicate outcomes

Method	Value
Websites	13
Reports / Publications	7
Newsletter	7
Events (discussions, workshops, networking events)	6
Social media	5
Videos	3
Exhibitions and fairs	2
Printed journal, magazine	2
Storytelling	2

Of the 19 Member States who included an answer, the following 12 submissions gave an assessment method or tool to evaluate the communication method specified.

Member State	Best methods for communicating outcomes?	How assessed?
Austria	Active and participatory events (discussions, networking events); Follow-up event documentation and publication online. Results communicated via a newsletter, NRN magazine and website.	Events assessed through feedback forms and an annual stakeholder survey.
Cyprus	The NRN's website and the MA facebook page.	The number of visitors, likes and shares.
Romania	Quickest methods are digital; website, forums and platforms, general and personalised messages, radio and TV broadcast. More resource consuming methods are face to face events, activities and ongoing personal links.	Assessment is quantitative, based on the number of users, feedback, questions or proposals. Also whether new partnerships, joint and strategic projects, personal involvement, trust and capacity are developed.
Finland	Storytelling and social media; most effective methods have been through the rural development communication network, stakeholder umbrella organisations and social groups.	An external evaluation of communication activities is about to take place.
Germany	Trainings, events and workshops; Newsletter, printed journal and special publications; Fayres.	Participation numbers, distribution figures and feedback received.
Czech Republic	NRN brochures.	Evaluation questionnaire.
Croatia	NSU website.	Web statistics.
Italy	Website.	At the moment the NRN self-evaluates but an assessment by an independent evaluator will soon take place.
Estonia	Oral presentations; Focused articles in the weekly newsletter; Exhibitions; Posters/banners; TV reports; Social media, website.	Web material assessed by traffic.
France	Online (youtube, website); seminars.	Website statistics; Evaluation survey after each seminar.
Lithuania	Online communication and seminars.	Survey.
Be_Wallonia	Social networks, website and publications.	Annual evaluation via surveymonkey.