

Smart & Competitive Rural Areas

ENRD Thematic Group Report

Final Report

July 2016

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Smart Competitive Rural Areas – Summary, Outputs and Actions

Summary of Thematic Group Activity

The thematic group on Smart Competitive Rural Areas covered three meetings and a final Seminar, starting in September 2015 and concluding in May 2016

The first meeting and subsequent feedback from stakeholders including the European Commission, Rural Networks Assembly, Steering Group and NRN, NSU and MA feedback and other partners highlighted the topics of interest.

On this basis, three meetings were held:

- 1st Workshop: 18th November in Brussels
- 2nd Workshop: 24th February in Brussels
- 3rd Workshop: 27th April in Brussels

An opportunity was also given for attendees to come to a joint field trip (with the Thematic Group on Promoting the Transition to the Green Economy) on 6th April in Rotterdam.

First Workshop

The [first workshop](#) in Brussels on 18th November addressed the three topic areas for development as follows:

- Smart Agriculture
- Smart Supply Chains
- Smart and Viable Villages

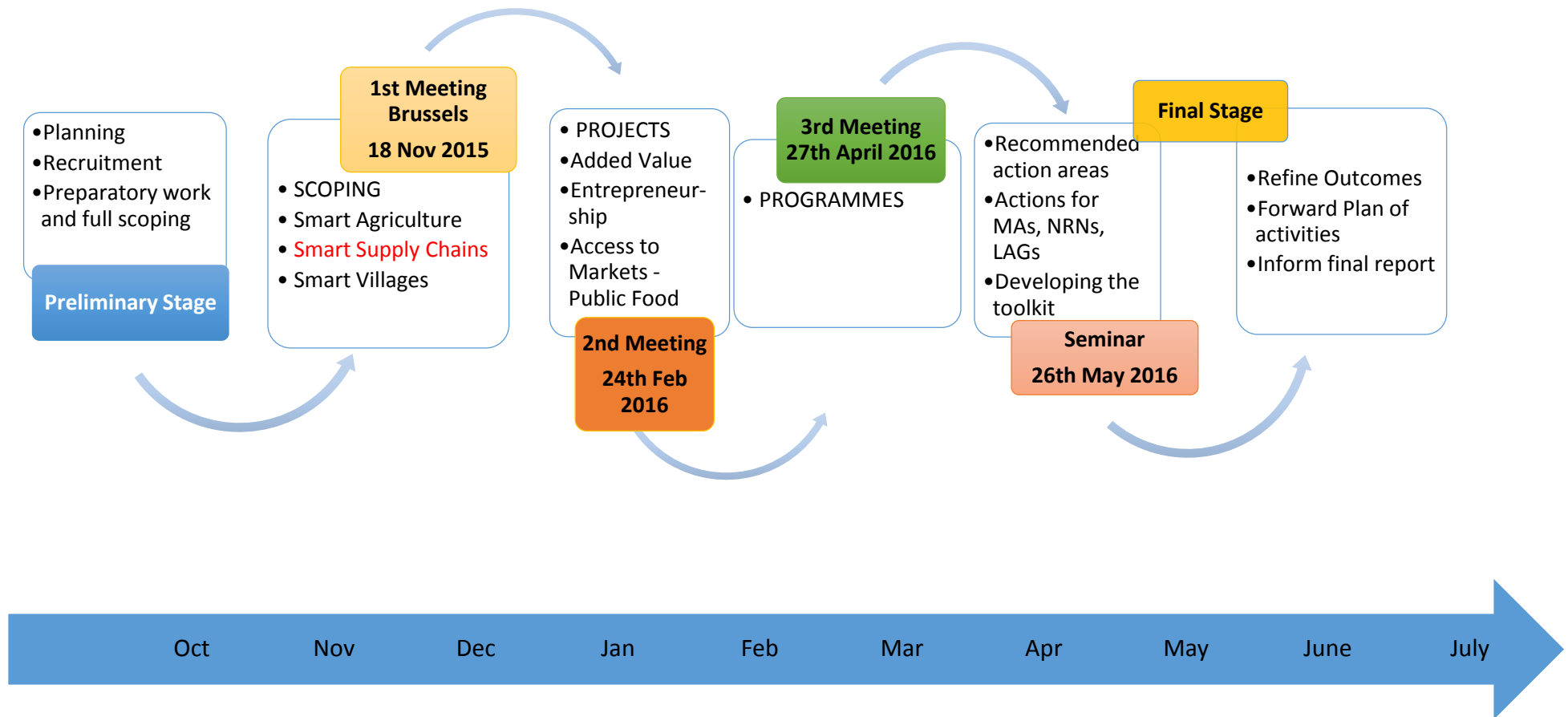
Presentations were made on these topics, including the opportunities to develop practical and constructive actions in developing projects and programmes on these topics, and also considering where there were clear examples of best practice in using the RDP programmes to develop these areas.

It became clear from the discussions in the first meeting that there were a number of productive areas for joint working, particularly with regard to Smart & Competitive Supply Chains. The remaining

workshops focussed specifically on this theme, and on specific topics raised in the course of the meetings:

- Developing Added Value
- Accessing New Markets – Public Food
- Urban Food Policy
- Regional and National Food Strategies
- Smart Specialization
- Integrated links with the RDPs

Workflow for the Thematic Group



Second Workshop

The [second workshop](#) in February concentrated on some of the topics identified, principally:

- To discuss how to access markets within the topic of ‘smart and competitive rural areas’.
- To develop the tools for delivery to support in developing competitiveness and connectivity.
- To develop actions in developing new initiatives for rural businesses

The outcomes from the meeting focussed on developing and sharing practical examples that can be used by the networks, and considering how the RDP Programming can focus on these issues. A draft factsheet was prepared address the areas where action can take place following the discussions on the topic.

Third Workshop

The [third workshop](#) in April followed on from a [field visit](#) to Rotterdam, and while specific project best practices were shared, the presentations focussed on strategic level programmes, with presentations from Scotland, Estonia and Catalonia, and coverage of opportunities to develop a regional and integrated approach, including the development of links between rural and urban areas using the RDPS.

Rural Seminar

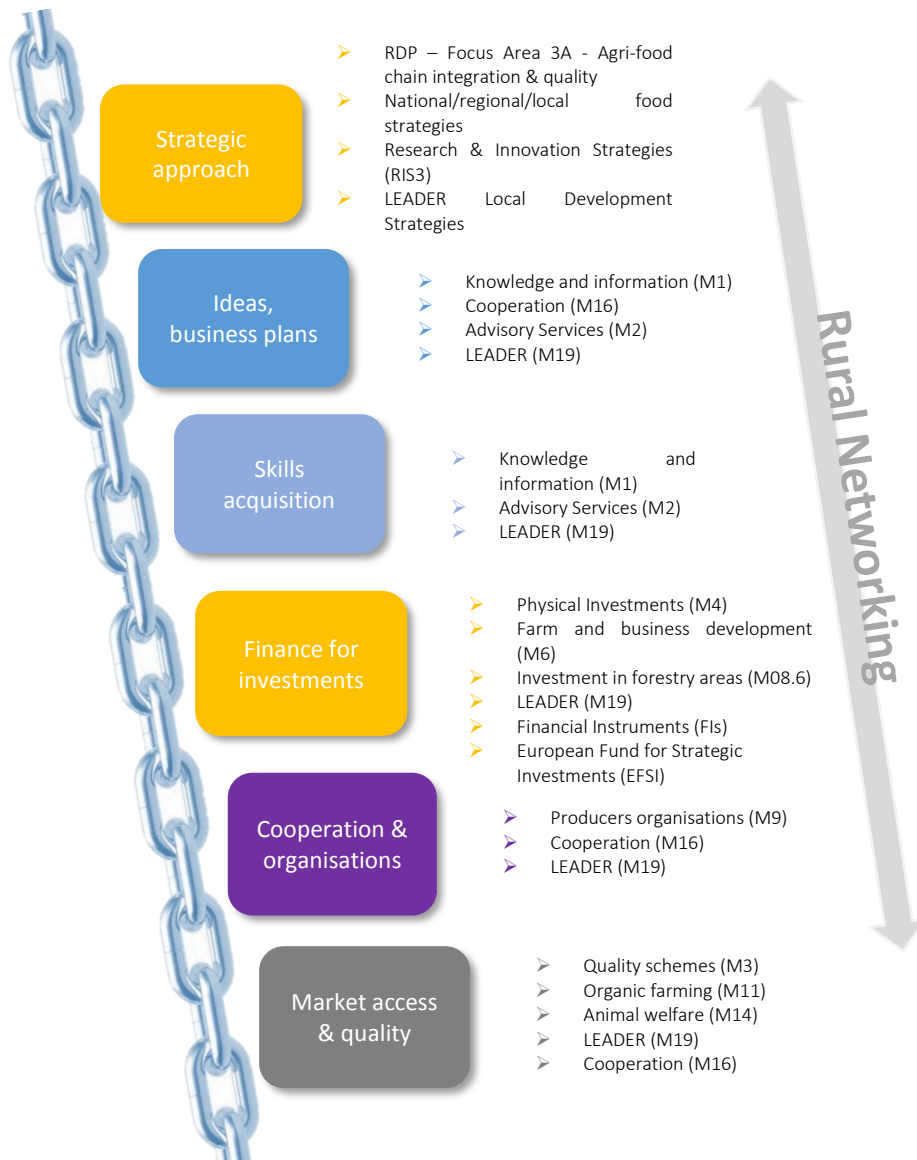
The [Rural Seminar](#), held at the Hotel Metropole in Brussels, on May 26th was entitled **Forging the Links – Connecting RDPS to the food and drink supply chain** and both built upon and crystallised the theme. It looked at examples of strategic approaches, and how these can be delivered in agri-food supply chains through the RDPS, how an integrated approach can make an impact, and at the clear opportunities for linking with consumer actions and civil society within urban markets.

The developed factsheet from the inputs of the working groups, and the [draft version](#) was presented to the Seminar, as a basis on which to consider further recommendations within the afternoon workshops.

The factsheet outlined a number of steps that can be taken within Rural Networking, and linked with specific measures within the RDPS, which developed from a market-led approach. One of the main messages within the factsheet is that it is not the size or number of the individual measures that matters,

but rather the manner in which they are combined in a smart or strategic way to enable action and development.

The final links each of these stages with projects identified through the thematic group, all of which have been or will be uploaded through the [ERND website](#) thematic page.



Parallel workshops delivered a series of recommendations for taking activity forward:

- Facilitate the setting up of cooperation by providing support in the early stages, including cooperation, creation of proposals and to business planning, and this includes links to advisors and to programmes of knowledge exchange and peer-to-peer exchange. Pilot projects can be used within measure 16 to develop opportunities, and share success stories from these, as it is important to learn from successful innovation, and innovators.
- Promote food strategies for cities ensuring that links are made between civil society and consumer-led initiatives at urban level to involve rural actors (including producers, cooperatives and advisors) and with delivery of the RDPs to create urban-rural strategies. Facilitation of these exchanges may be required.
- Support farmers through knowledge exchange and training in new markets, product development and technology areas. This means the creation of programmes, discussion groups, demonstration farms, and most importantly delivering the technical and specialist training to ensure knowledge is up to date with the latest developments. This should include knowledge of options for adding value and marketing support in supply chains.
- Develop animation for project initiatives, as otherwise they may not happen on their own. Animation of groups is an important function, and vital for creating cooperation and interaction. It is therefore important to develop and share best practice in animation – techniques, methods and project approaches.
- Simplify through flexibility in selection criteria, reducing administrative burdens, and encourage ‘one-stop-shops’ to cover a wide and integrated range of support services. Consideration should also be given to placing incentives - advance payments, higher funding rate, more flexible selection criteria – for innovative projects.
- Consider the flexibility and adaptation of RDPs to support added value development and integration of measures to support value chains. This will include the adaptability of programmes and greater coordination between stakeholder organisations and managing authorities.
- Coordinate at EU level at the integration of funding to develop and support actions at the rural level, and encourage the use of financial instruments. Coordination between organisations at the EU level – within the commission- can enable greater strategic and integrated

development of funding support. This should be reflected by national frameworks at Managing Authority level, which should ensure the coordination of funds.

- Connect local strategy with regional innovation strategy in order to develop knowledge and skills, and this includes using models such as LEADER in cooperation with regional initiatives, or strategies such as smart specialization. Also consider LEADER cooperation both at interterritorial and transnational level
- Use the NRNs as key influencers to share knowledge, including combined approaches between NRNs to explore potential joint activity and actions, particularly relating to supply chains. this can include the fostering of cooperation and identification of best practice in innovation and animation.

Outputs

The outputs from the Seminar linked closely to the topics discussed and developed during the work of the Thematic Group. This included the following publications:

A [projects brochure on Smart & Competitive Supply chains](#) which features projects from across the wider topic, including modernising agriculture and rural businesses and villages.

A number of [Good Practices](#) on Smart & Competitive Supply Chains were created, and these focussed on two areas, project examples which can inspire and motivate rural people by showing the practical benefits on the ground as well providing lessons for how rural actors could do something similar.

Project examples include the following:

- [Developing access to Public Food in Slovenia](#)
- [Using GPS mapping to link food businesses in Austria](#)
- [Developing added value products in Finland](#)
- [Direct marketing in Slovakia](#)
- [Adding value from waste production in Malta](#)
- [Transforming production methods in Latvia](#)

There were also methodological and programming good practices developed. The methodological examples include the following:

- [Linking food businesses with tourism in Scotland](#)
- [Developing a programme of support for food & drink businesses in Wales](#)
- [Delivering a support programme for food & drink businesses in Scotland](#)

Programming Case Studies have been developed to highlight how an integrated approach can be developed, and these have highlighted regional and national approaches in the Basque Region of Spain, Estonia, Ireland, the Nord-Pas-de-Calais region of France and in Scotland.

In total there over 30 Good Practices linked with smart & competitive supply chains published on the ENRD website, which include farm modernisation for food production, cooperation, added value, accessing public food markets, linkages with tourism and integration projects.

The linkages with other funding sources across the EU were seen as an important aspect, and good practices are also fed into the [EU Results webpage](#), which highlights Good Practices across the EU budgets.

A **final factsheet** covering the development of smart & competitive supply chains has been developed, which brings into focus the steps required to develop an approach using the RDP measures to create an integrated approach to Smart & Competitive Supply Chains.

The range of topics covered by the Thematic Group is also addressed through the publication of **Rural Review 22 on Smart & Competitive Supply Chains**, which covers the central topics of the developments in the supply chain and in market access, but also the strategic opportunities available to develop these through RDPs and complementary actions.

Follow-Up Actions

This is a policy field which will grow in importance. Mobilising strategic investments to create sustainable growth and jobs in key supply chains is a major priority for this Commission. The agri-food chain is just such a case and we want to ensure that the RDPs work alongside other EU instruments like EFSI to get the best deal for farmers and rural areas.

- The issue of jobs, growth and investment in the agrifood supply chain will be taken up in the high level conference in Cork on September 5th to 6th, which will also look at further opportunities for developing viability in rural areas
- The EIP-Agri Network is organising a workshop on Cities and Food in September which will look to develop the linkages and opportunities for rural areas to connect with city food policies
- The development of supply chains will be adopted and developed by Operational Groups and LEADER partnerships, including the Smart Leader Conference in Spain in November. EIP-Agri will also consider further action and focus group activity in the area.
- Around a dozen NRNs are working specifically on food and the supply chain and there will be ongoing opportunities for exploring the best ways of seizing all the opportunities offered by the RDPs, and to create linkages and cooperation between NRNs, regions and LAGs.
- The next ENRD Thematic Work stream will continue to be on Smart & Competitive Rural Areas, but focused on **Smart Businesses** and this can look at opportunities in the rural sector to develop horizontal linkages with other rural actors, creating shared economy opportunities and linking services to create destinations and economies of scale, while considering the vertical linkages

which integrate supply chains, develop greater linkages, and include rural broadband for increasing knowledge, information and market opportunities.