Discussion Brief
WORKING DRAFT
Strengthening local communities

Context

Strengthening local communities, integrating marginalised groups and new arrivals, improving cooperation among local stakeholders are key concerns of all rural areas. However, the specific challenges largely depend on the specific Member State and rural area context. It is important to note that a 'pre-requisite' for successful community development is also overcoming basic economic and social challenges (such as poverty, lack of employment, lack of services etc.).

Methods & examples

The bottom-up approach is crucial for strengthening local communities, and the LEADER/CLLD approach has a strong track record in this regard.[1] Below we highlight a few approaches and perspectives for community-building activities in different rural contexts and through different methodologies.

The role of arts & culture

The role of arts and culture has been stressed during several discussions about social inclusion in Europe. For instance, the Amsterdam Rural Forum & NRN meeting had a specific focus on how arts and culture can help to improve the situation and social cohesion of rural areas.[2] The recent Social Hubs in Rural Europe ENRD workshop[3] also featured several examples of how rural communities can benefit from the involvement of (external) cultural and arts workers. People that are 'outsiders' to rural communities can help to break down long-standing barriers within communities and reinforce innovation.

Young people in rural areas

In order to overcome rural demographic challenges, it is crucial to keep young people in rural areas. However, for this, one needs to be able to address the needs of young people and ensure that rural areas offer new opportunities and good living conditions also for the younger generations.[4] The direct involvement of young people is at the core of several youth initiatives (i.e. not just *for* but also *by* young people).

One example is the long-term youth strategy carried out by the Irish LAG South East Cork Area Development (SECAD)[5]. In the face of growing youth mental health issues in their rural catchment area, SECAD commissioned the development of a major report with University College Cork which was called "Where do you go when you go out?". The purpose was to identify with young people the main barriers

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[1] See the factsheet on LEADER/CLLD & social inclusion:
https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/sites/enrd/files/w8_factsheet1_leader_clld.pdf
[2] See more info: https://ec.europa.eu/eip/agriculture/en/event/5th-nrn-meeting-amsterdam-rural-forum
[3] https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/news-events/events/enrd-workshop-social-inclusion_en
[4] See factsheet on youth and social inclusion: https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/sites/enrd/files/w8_factsheet2_youth.pdf
[5] See more: https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/sites/enrd/files/w15_social-inclusion_youth-hub_howard.pdf

that exist in enabling their own social and mental development and how these could be addressed. The methodology set a series of animation, capacity-building and capital investment programmes across the whole LAG area which continue to evolve today.

The role of community centres

In order to improve the quality of life in rural areas and to engage the community in activities that strengthen the ties between the locals, rural villages in Europe often set up community centres. These centres offer various services and support activities as 'one-stop-shops' and serve also as meeting points for local people. In some cases, the creation of the community centre comes from the efforts of the community itself including considerable voluntary work; and this way setting up a centre may become a community-building activity itself.

Often existing service spaces (e.g. post office building, community shops, rural digital hubs – i.e. centres offering digital services and access to new technologies, even pubs etc.) have been extended to offer activities for the community and act as community centres. The Cocotte Numérique Digital Hub[6],

located in the small market town of Murat in France, provides 100 square meters of co-working and digital work office space, offers services for businesses such as training and competitions, operates as an education centre and offers 'welcoming' services for incoming entrepreneurs and their families in the area.

The Ludgate Hub[7], located in Skibbereen (Ireland), was created thanks to the very active participation of the local community and the pro-bono work of many of its members. It provides several co-working spaces and technologies for remote working, organises several activities and services for local businesses and facilitate digital literacy in the region; as well as provides a wide range of activities for the local community (including kids, young people and older people).

Getting involved in the discussion

The ENRD Contact Point aims to generate discussion and exchange about useful approaches among interested stakeholders and improve the RDP implementation. **The creation and sustainment of community centres can be relevant in many different rural contexts. Is it relevant in the context of your Member State and/or your work?**

> **Get involved in the discussion – Tell your ideas through Viima**
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> - What are the specific issues that arise in the context of your region/ Member State? What are the specific examples that you have?
> - Are there any practical challenges that you are facing with regard engaging local rural communities?

Read the other Social inclusion discussion briefs on 'Supporting basic needs' (food, health, housing)'; 'Supporting jobs & employment'; 'Supporting social cohesion & strengthening local community' and 'Social proofing rural programmes and policies'.

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[6] http://www.cocotte-numerique.fr
[7] https://www.ludgate.ie