THE RURAL SOCIAL ENTERPRISE GUIDEBOOK OF GOOD PRACTICE:

Experience from Estonia, Finland, Germany, Romania and Scotland

ViSEnet project

THE RURAL SOCIAL ENTERPRISE GUIDEBOOK OF GOOD PRACTICE:

Experience from Estonia, Finland, Germany, Romania and Scotland

Authors:

Clark, Ailsa

Evans, Roger

Fetzer, Ellen

Higgins, Ailsa

Lähdesmäki, Merja

Linno, Kaisa

Matilainen, Anne

Păunescu, Carmen

Rinne-Koski, Katja

Staicu, Daniela

Sudakova, Lea

Sumsion, Rosie

Erasmus+

Hochschule für Wirtschaft und Umwelt Nürtingen-Geislingen

www.emu.ee
Eesti Maaülikool
EMU Estonian University of Life Sciences

InspirAlba

UNIVERSITY OF HELSINKI
RURALIA INSTITUTE

CONTENT

2021

THE FOLLOWING GUIDEBOOK MATERIAL WILL HELP AND SUPPORT YOU IN CREATING AND DEVELOPING COMMUNITY-BASED SOCIAL ENTERPRISES:

- to estimate the benefits and challenges of community-based social enterprise

- to find new ideas for developing your own community-based social enterprise

- with practical guidelines and methods to establish your community-based social enterprise

- to avoid the main pitfalls in establishing a community-based social enterprise

- to assist those already involved in community based social enterprise to build knowledge and improve practice.

THIS MATERIAL IS FREE FOR YOUR USE!

Foreword

Once upon a time, there were three researchers studying the possibilities of providing community-based services in Finnish villages in Southern Ostrobothnia. Their project lasted for two to three years and during this time they found out several things. The first was that there is a great deal of potential and interest towards community-based service production in rural villages. The second, that there was a need to support this action in order to bring out the full potential of rural communities. The third was the discovery that this could be done and supported by following the leading principles of social enterprise. They felt the need to take the development work further and since social entrepreneurship was quite an unfamiliar concept in Finland at that time, they needed more experience of the theme. The research crew had a colleague in Estonia, a trusted project partner, who had the experience of rural research and development as well as community-based and social entrepreneurship. So they asked if he was interested to join in. They decided to write a joint project application and thought that it might be beneficial to also involve other partners with a range of backgrounds and experience of social entrepreneurship to support the partnership in delivering the maximum benefits for the people interested in developing and establishing social enterprises in rural areas.

One thing led to another and soon they had a strategic partnership with The University of Helsinki Ruralia Institute (Finland), Estonian University of Life Sciences (Estonia), The Bucharest University of Economic Studies (Romania), Nürtingen-Geislingen University (Germany) and Inspiralba (Scotland). Inspiralba is a social enterprise from Scotland providing social enterprise business support, training and learning support as well as support for networking and collaboration for community-based organizations in rural communities.

The partnership shared the idea of the need to develop tools for people in rural areas to act for their community through the medium of business enterprise, so they decided to collect a set of good practices and produce learning material available to all. In addition, they identified the need for rural social enterprise networks supporting each other when tackling similar issues across Europe. These should all be collected in one place and documented by a guidebook of good practices, they thought.

The partnership wrote an application to the Finnish National Agency for Education with the hope of being funded by Erasmus+ Strategic partnership for adult education. The project secured funding and the Village Social Enterprise - learning material, guidance and networking (ViSEnet) - project was born.

The project ran from December 2018 to December 2021. It all started as planned but along the way we needed to adjust our work plans taking into account

the global pandemic of COVID-19. The pandemic impacted most strongly on our meeting and networking schedule as we were not able to travel. Luckily, we were able to use alternative tools to support the learning, networking and exchange of information in the project.

We are extremely happy to welcome you to *our Rural Social Enterprise Guidebook of Good Practices* and explore our experiences gained in the project. The project is dedicated to all of you active, enthusiastic people in rural areas, to support your endeavours in developing your local communities. We are happy to be involved with your important work and will try to support you with our shared expertise and partnership of the ViSEnet-project the best we can.

(This was first published in the project blog: www.visenet.net)

1. INTRODUCTION

In many countries, rural residents face similar challenges in maintaining the vibrancy and vitality of their communities and economies. Reductions in public financing, diminishing local services, geographical challenges with accessibility in remote areas, ageing population and the outmigration of young people are challenging residents to find new tools for rural communities to cope with the future. One interesting way for improving the available livelihoods, services and to further increase the development of these areas as well as to tackle problems of social exclusion, lack of jobs and meeting the needs of the aging rural population is local level social entrepreneurship.

Local communities have much potential, embedded knowledge and skills to participate in local service and welfare provision but setting up and running a social enterprise might need some support and tools. This is why there is a need to increase the capacity of the local people to better address the community potential and needs by increasing their knowledge and skills of community activation, partnerships and networking, business thinking and recognising the social impacts of social entrepreneurship in local communities.

1.1. What is social enterprise and community-based social enterprise?

In ViSEnet, we have defined social enterprises as businesses where the social impact of activities is prioritised to an equal or greater extent than making a profit.

According to the comparative systems report of social enterprises and their ecosystems in Europe (European Commission 2020) social enterprises are an important part of the social economy providing care services, creating job opportunities and addressing other societal goals. The problem is that the concept of social enterprise is not necessarily familiar in all areas and the stage of development of social entrepreneurship is diverse in different countries: some countries have highly developed structures to support social enterprises, while the others are just starting to acknowledge the existence of the business model. As a result, their potential is not fully explored.

However, over recent years there has been an increasing interest towards the potential of social enterprises. In Europe, the concept of social enterprise emerged in the early 1990s in the operations of the third sector. One of the very first countries to support this kind of action was Italy where legislation was amended to make it possible for associations to develop economic activities. Experiences proved to be successful which inspired other countries to follow

their example and as a result, several countries established new legal forms to enable the entrepreneurial approach of the third sector. This might also be the reason why most of the social enterprises are based on associations, mutual aid societies, co-operatives and voluntary participation. In some countries, the forms emphasise co-operational models and in others, the model is more open also to other structures in addition to the co-operatives. (Defourny & Nyssens 2012; Steiner & Teasdale 2015.)

One of the challenges is that there still is no commonly agreed definition of social enterprise in different countries. To overcome this dilemma the EMES-network has gathered and identified three main dimensions with nine indicators to characterize social enterprises: *Economic and entrepreneurial dimension* indicates continuous activity in providing service or goods, an economic risk taken by the members and workers, and employed workers in addition to volunteers. *Social dimension* includes an explicit aim to benefit the community and serve social responsibility, a collective initiative launched by a group of people or a community, and a limited profit distribution. The third dimension covers the themes of *participatory governance* with a high degree of organisational autonomy, an equal decision-making power not based on the capital share and involving various parties to participate who are affected by the enterprise. Because of different countries' legal and social backgrounds, there is a wide range of social enterprise operating models and associated legislative and funding structures in Europe. Against this background it is no wonder that the social enterprises have different status in the eyes of the public sector also. (Defourny & Nyssens 2012; also European Commission 2020.)

Two forms of social enterprise have developed serving different societal needs. The first focuses on integrating socially excluded people in community and society, usually by the means of work integrated social enterprise (WISE). The second form operates within local and community development. (Olmedo, van Twuijver & O'Shaughnessy 2019; European Commission 2020.)

An example of social enterprise operating in the field of local and community development is the community-based social enterprise (CBSE). These forms are usually embedded in a particular geographical location or a community with a strong emphasis on local involvement and participation.

Community-based social enterprises are recognised as having an increasing importance especially in rural areas as providers of missing services, and thus increases the local economic, social and environmental wellbeing and offering employment opportunities for the local community. Rural community-based social enterprises provide a range of care, transport and housing services while also maintaining shops, postal services and play an important role for instance

in supporting local farming and sustainable energy resources. (Olmedo, van Twuijver & O'Shaughnessy 2019; Steiner & Atterton 2015.)

Community-based social enterprises also have an important role as an intermediary between local and other levels through articulating local needs, and preferences and resources to the other actors, institutions and networks. They can also provide an important link to public administration and governance by offering new and alternative methods for co-operating and networking with the actors involved. (Steiner & Teasdale 2017; Richter 2017.) In other words, community-based social enterprises might be seen as local hubs of governance between the actors in their local environment. However, this might require new kinds of governmental thinking in public policy, and that is why there is a need for good examples.

The challenges that rural areas pose for local development may in some circumstances act to incentivise social innovations and community-based social enterprises could be considered as good examples of this. Scarce resources and other rural characteristics may act as a trigger for communities to provide for themselves, the services which they lack or to take actions in making greater use of the existing resources. (Steiner, Calò & Shucksmith 2021). However, it is important to recognize, as Steiner, Calò and Shucksmith (2021) point out, that the local context with its unique mix of resources will have a major impact on the local operational environment even though the challenges may be similar.

1.2. Responding to rural challenges

Broad social changes have contributed to the development of social entrepreneurship, one of which is the introduction of the neoliberal policy where the state withdraws as a public service provider and outsources its contracts. Another is the bottom-up reaction to such changes where communities become active and fill in the gaps in institutional welfare service provision through taking more responsibility for their own welfare themselves. In some countries, in the UK for example, the state has actively encouraged third sector actors to participate in the welfare service provision but there are still many countries unfamiliar with the concept. (European Commission 2020; Steiner & Teasdale 2015; Defourny & Nyssens 2012.)

It is quite usual for people in rural areas to work for their community on a voluntary basis. Conversely, it is not unusual that the most active people accumulate significant responsibility and workload but that after a while they get tired and withdraw from voluntary work because of lack of time and too much responsibility. This can lead to difficulties recruiting people because they are afraid of becoming overloaded or becoming involved in something they might not want to participate in or that takes too much of their time.

Against this background, to be more effective and sustainable community service provision needs more stable structures and a community-based social enterprise could provide this.

Greater stability would facilitate the possibility of employing people, even if only part-time, and this can reduce the reliance on voluntary workers, although there is a time and place for this too. It might also make community operations more strategic and improve their coordination and sustainability if there would be a paid employee taking responsibility for actions. It also could make a difference in people's thinking towards entrepreneurship and finding new and innovative solutions to challenges.

From the rural services point of view local community-based social enterprise could be a way to fill gaps in service provision especially in areas that do not have market-oriented enterprises, or they are not interested or able to provide these missing services. This might also benefit existing enterprises, improve operating conditions in the area and create new cooperation models between actors.

People's attitudes towards consumption are also changing, they are becoming more aware of sustainable ways of conducting business and the societal value of making an impact; local community-based social enterprises are a good example of this. People are also recognising that community-based social enterprises have an important social value by offering working opportunities, (additional) earnings and the contribution they make to the local good through strengthening social capital and togetherness in rural areas. Job opportunities and improved services are also working as pull factors when people, and especially young people, are considering their choices of residence. (also Steiner & Atterton 2015.)

It is also important to note that profits made by local community-based social enterprises can be invested back into the business or to improve the overall living conditions of the rural area. These profits can be used for example to support local food bank, build playgrounds for children to meet and get to know each other, cover the costs of village house maintenance to offer people places to meet or to support other services such as a village shop or care services. Community-based businesses are also much more likely to be aware of the needs of people living in the area and for that reason can better find their niche in the markets than external actors.

An important benefit of community-based social enterprise derives from their locally based operation meaning that the services and goods delivered are for the betterment of the community rather than an individual beneficiary. It has also been shown that people are more committed to using local services when they are provided by a community-owned business where the profit is

used for the benefit of the community. In order to be successful, local community-based social enterprise should ensure the approval of, and gain support from the important stakeholders, thus it is important to take the wider community into account when commencing with community-based social enterprise.

There are many different kinds of stakeholders and needs in rural areas and it is strongly encouraged that social entrepreneurs design their business models around the environment in which they are operating and that they build into their management systems the flexibility to adapt as these societal needs change. It is for these reasons that we have included learning material on the methodologies and concepts concerning listening to community needs, getting people involved and engaging them to either provide goods or services or to use them or both. (also Munoz, Steiner & Farmer 2015.)

One of the more important stakeholders in rural areas is the public sector, they can support community business through, for example, buying the goods and services offered by community-based businesses or by practicing supportive public procurement. In countries not used to providing services in cooperation with third and maybe even the fourth sector, this change of policy might require adjustment and new ways of governance. (e.g. Munoz, Steiner & Farmer 2015). Therefore, we have also gathered together some important key points of policy recommendations based on our experiences in this book for communities and administrators to consider.

1.3. What is ViSEnet all about?

The overall aim of the ViSEnet project was to support the creation and development of community-based social enterprises in rural areas through the designing of a range of learning materials. The target group for these learning materials are individuals interested in developing and sustaining their rural communities and willing to consider social enterprising solutions to assist their rural areas or individuals who already have an idea for social enterprise in rural areas, as well as individuals already engaged in social enterprise activity but wishing to gain new skills, knowledge and expertise to assist them in their venture.

Although there are lots of materials available for establishing businesses, there is a need for specially targeted learning material to support and develop social entrepreneurship suited to the particularities of rural areas since existing entrepreneurial materials are not necessarily clearly related to the needs of rural and regional development and entrepreneurs. Because of the complex issues many rural areas are faced with, there is a need for a broad understanding of socio-economic, cultural, political and environmental factors as well as creative use of communication and project management skills. A further problem is that

many study modules operate within their disciplinary limits: priority is given to subject specific competences; theory is primarily applied to mono-disciplinary practice cases. This context makes it difficult to trigger holistic approaches for rural community development.

Therefore, the project brought together a strategic partnership of multi-disciplinary research and development expertise in the fields of rural development, rural business and rural. By developing support for digital learning and using different technological solutions, the project focused on the rural context from a cross-sectoral (horizontal) point of view. The material has been piloted in local rural communities, who served as a testing ground for learners to develop their ideas and support peer learning.

While compiling the material we were careful to also consider the andrological & pedagogical aspects of supporting information by using multichannel information for delivering the learning materials. We wanted to ensure that all learners and communities would find an information source suitable for their capabilities and preferences. As a result of this grass-roots approach to both the learning materials and the methods adopted for their delivery, rural people now have better access (both geographically and tailored to their skills base) to the training related to social entrepreneurship.

In addition to the tailored learning material, we wanted to address and support networking and learning from others. Throughout the project, we have emphasized the importance of sharing experiences and exchanging information among our stakeholders. This was extremely important since partner countries are at very different levels concerning the development of social enterprises: in Scotland social enterprises are very well known and supported by the means of rural development and business whereas in others the overall discussion on the benefits of social enterprises has only just begun. Therefore, we had an excellent opportunity to learn from others and ask for advice and good practice.

As a result, the main outputs of the project are

- **Open access online rural social enterprise learning material**
  - to support rural communities and people to foster the knowledge and awareness of social enterprise
  - to support the learning experience with evaluated and piloted methods.

- **International Network of Rural Social Enterprises**
  - to support the interaction of rural communities and exchange of experiences and good practice with other communities regionally, nationally and internationally by a digital networking.

- ■ The Rural Social Enterprise Guidebook of Good Practices
  - ● to support the development of social entrepreneurship (SE) in rural areas based on our experiences throughout the project and previous experience.

References:

Defourny, Jacques & Marthe Nyssens (2012). The EMES Approach of Social Enterprise in a Comparative Perspective. WP no. 12/03. EMES, European Research Network.

European Commission (2020) Social enterprises and their ecosystems in Europe. Comparative synthesis report. Authors: Carlo Borzaga, Giulia Galera, Barbara Franchini, Stefania Chiomento, Rocío Nogales and Chiara Carini. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. Available at https://europa.eu/!Qq64ny

Munoz, Sarah-Anne, Artur Steiner & Jane Farmer (2015). Processes of community-led social enterprise development: learning from the rural context. Community Development Journal, Vol 50, No 3, July 2015, pp. 478 –493.

Olmedo, Lucas, Mara van Twuijver & Mary O'Shaughnessy (2019). Rurality as context for innovative responses to social challenges – The role of rural social enterprises. Journal of Rural Studies, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2021.04.020.

Richter, Ralph (2017). Rural social enterprises as embedded intermediaries: The innovative power of connecting rural communities with supra-regional networks. Journal of Rural Studies, vol 70 (2019) 179–187.

Steiner, Artur & Jane Atterton (2015). Exploring the contribution of rural enterprises to local resilience. Journal of Rural Studies, Vol 40, August 2015, pp. 30–45.

Steiner, Artur & Simon Teasdale (2017). Unlocking the potential of rural social enterprise. Journal of Rural Studies, Vol. 70, August 2019, pp. 144–154.

Steiner, Artur, Francesca Calò & Shucksmith, Mark (2021). Rurality and social innovation processes and outcomes: A realist evaluation of rural social enterprise activities. Journal of Rural Studies, vol 85: July 2021. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2021.04.006

2. LESSONS LEARNED & ADVICE

Our experiences show that the main element in the process of rural development is finding the right ways to involve people. In our learning materials, we present several methods and tools for involving people, but these experiences show that it is also a matter of the local context that determines how the tools and methods work in a community.

In the next chapters, we share our main experiences and good practices relating to the rural context. These are the utilisation of digitalisation and e-learning, practical experiences of the development processes in rural areas, the key elements of networking and the good practices of working with communities. It is also important not to forget the youngsters' point of view.

2.1. Supporting local development by digitally enhanced learning

Within the lifetime of the ViSEnet project, both the project partners and the communities involved have undergone a profound learning process in the field of digitally enhanced communication and collaboration. The COVID-19 pandemic made face-to-face meetings literally impossible over more than half of the project lifetime. Even the remotest rural community has started to explore new ways of digital communication, running their own online meetings or testing out digital document sharing platforms. The original goal of the project, to enhance local development by digitally enhanced learning, was certainly achieved. We probably achieved even more than we had initially envisioned because of the unexpected dynamic developing out of this collective limitation. There is certainly a unique chance in this experience. Digitalisation is a great opportunity for overcoming physical distance between people, places, goods and services. The digital learning during the pandemic has opened up new opportunities and we hope that rural communities will further explore and develop them into innovative services and products.

Our project started with the idea of collecting good practices, methods and tools in the form of digital learning materials. The documents we have put together represent the knowledge and experience of the different partner institutions and thus provide a common European perspective on the topic of community-based rural development. While much of the content framework for these materials had already been specified in the project application, some more fine-tuning was required to make sure that the team identifies and collects materials in a coherent way, which would later be easy to work with for the target audiences from our rural communities. Various content templates were introduced which greatly enhanced the collective knowledge sharing process.

Since the focus of this development was in the beginning largely within the academic realm, our first ideas for presenting the learning materials were based on the learning management system ILIAS, which is hosted by consortium partner Nürtingen-Geislingen University in Germany. From the beginning, this system gave home to a collaborative working space for the virtual project team, allowing for document management, online meetings and communication in a forum. We have then tried to make ILIAS work for various aspects of the project: external communication with a publicly accessible area, team collaboration in a workspace, content production and delivery of a learning environment to the target audience.

While doing the project, we realised that ILIAS cannot serve all of these needs. The system is primarily a digital learning framework targeted to academics. Our target audiences, the rural community members, need much more intuitive environments. A website nested within the system of a university is counterproductive in this regard. We therefore adjusted our initial strategy after a first testing phase with the target groups. The result was that we kept

ViSEnet image map guides visitors visually to the various sections of the ViSEnet project.

ILIAS for the core project team as a communication and content sharing platform. In parallel, project partner Inspiralba initiated the development of a new platform that would primarily serve the community audiences. This platform is now the 'Network' part of the project and links to the Rural Social Enterprise Hub (https://www.ruralsehub.net). This hub will become the long-term environment through which ViSEnet outputs will be disseminated and exploited, in close cooperation with the community members who connect with the hub. Learning materials are easily accessible together with other relevant resources and enhanced by visual content guidance.

Coming back to the digital environment of the project itself: the image map below currently guides visitors visually to the various sections of the ViSEnet project. This section is available via the project domain: http://www.visenet.net

In line with the project plan, the following contents make up the ViSEnet Learning environment, both on the ILIAS platform and the Rural Social Enterprise hub:

A   Community Involvement
1. Defining your community
2. Community Engagement
3. Needs and Opportunities
4. Prioritizing and Action Planning
5. Unlocking Assets of Your Community
6. Stakeholder Engagement

B   Networking and Partnerships
1. Social Enterprise Networking
2. How to organise networking activities
3. Guidance for Digital Networking
4. Social Enterprise Learning Exchanges
5. Partnership Working

C   Social Enterprise Solutions
1. Introduction to social enterprise
2. Social Impact
3. Understanding your market
4. Collective Leadership
5. Good Governance
6. Who will be involved?
7. Succession Planning
8. Investment and financial planning
9. Business Planning

All materials are very practice oriented and meant for self-study. They primarily
take the format of PDFs, each short and concise enough to be easily overseen
and understood. They are also easy to share, reproduce and use within a com-
munity context. The materials address people located in rural areas willing to
start new or improve forms of community cooperation and entrepreneurship
to enhance local sustainability. By engaging with the material, they are conf-
ronted with essential questions they need to address when developing existing
or setting up any type of new cooperation or initiative. On that basis, they can
advance iteratively within their diverse local processes and contexts.

Integrating VISEnet learning materials and
piloting summaries into teaching

Methods of use in classroom teaching
experienced at
the Bucharest University of Economic Studies Romania

Social entrepreneurship discipline

European Erasmus + VILLAGE SOCIAL ENTERPRISE LEARNING MATERIAL, GUIDANCE AND NETWORKING

Check out how the learning material can be used in teaching also: https://
blogs.helsinki.fi/hy-ruralia/files/2021/11/VISEnet-Integrating-VISEn-
et-learning-materials-and-piloting-summaries-in-teaching-SE-vf-4.pdf

The online resources are also interactive – taking the learner to relevant sections
for more detail as they work through tasks or providing case study material to
consolidate the learning. The www.ruralsehub.net space includes a directory to
support networking and peer to peer learning across different geographies on
shared themes or interests. In parallel, the Rural Social Enterprise Hub is meant
to be a room for networking among peers facing similar backgrounds and lo-
cal rural challenges. During our field testing we have realised how important
networking, exchange among peers and personal consultation are. Therefore,
the role of social media is also very relevant in this digital learning context.
While a formal preparation and structuring of learning materials is of course ne-
cessary in order to generate a common ground, social media allow the rural ac-
tivists to built up their own worlds and networks. These social media identities
evolve around shared locations, interest in specific services, client relationships,
shared impact goals and various other dimensions. Their role is really relevant
in this context and represents a new and evolving learning dimension.

2.2. Rural representative point of view: experiences of piloting the learning material

Overview of the piloting process. Pilot studies can play a very important role in examining the feasibility of an approach or tool that is intended to be used in a larger-scale study for which a broad impact is expected. A pilot study is a small-scale, preliminary study which aims to establish the validity of the main project in its area of study and relevancy for its target audience (Van Teijlingen and Hundley, 2002). It investigates crucial components of a main project in order to inform the project managers about its feasibility and identify modifications needed. A pilot study establishes the validity of research based upon the expert knowledge and skills of potential beneficiaries or other researchers in its

Rural representatives enjoying the 1st piloting activity.

area of study. It provides valuable feedback so that researchers can revise and improve their work. Overall, the process of piloting gives the researchers or the project managers the confidence that they are measuring what they intended to measure. Also, it ensures that beneficiaries are getting the best experience and learning possible (Van Teijlingen and Hundley, 2002).

Piloting of the learning material developed in the Erasmus+ ViSEnet project was used as a process of testing, on a small sample of respondents, the validity and relevance of the material for the rural communities. Rural representatives in four countries --Estonia, Finland, Romania and Scotland-- participated in several piloting studies and offered their perspectives on the learning material tested. The purpose of piloting was to assist the project members in identifying both the benefits as well as the weaknesses of the learning material tested. Also, piloting was conducted to gain insights regarding what went best and worst in the pilot implementation, as well as what the potential risks in the piloting process were. Through the piloting, sharing of main lessons learned was strongly encouraged and suggestions for improvement and advice for other rural communities were invited.

Participants in piloting. Over 150 rural representatives from more than 20 rural communities from Estonia, Finland, Romania and Scotland participated in four rounds of piloting studies, from April 2019 to March 2021. Pilots tested included descriptive learning material, case studies, tools, methods and good practices on community activation and participation, partnerships and networking, rural social enterprise solutions, and social impact assessment.

In Estonia, the operators of SMEs within Lahemaa National Park (where there are over 70 villages and more than 3000 inhabitants) on the north coast and from the rural community of Haanja in south Estonia participated in the piloting process of the learning materials.

In Finland there were five villages participating in the piloting process of the learning materials: the village of Kainasto, Ylistaro (https://kainasto.fi/), the village of Nopankylä, Ilmajoki (https://nopankyla.com/, the village of Vuolenkoski, Iitti (http://www.vuolenkoski.com/), the village of Eskola, Kannus (http://www.eskolankyla.fi/en/frontpage/) and villages of Pohjois-Kuru (https://pohjoiskuru.wordpress.com/in-english/).

Check out also the presentation video of Pohjois-Kuru made in the project: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eI0G78vvJ5E.

In Romania the community of Bahnea participated in the piloting process of the learning materials, the commune is located in the southern part of Mures county, North-West Romania. It is composed of seven villages and it has 3700 inhabitants. One of the first documentary attestations of Bahnea is found in 1291. Some important businesses in the community are: Valea Verde resort and

Manufactura de Branza. In the commune there are registered 23 small family businesses. Bahnea has two important cultural sites: the Bethlen Castle and the Reformed Church, a former Catholic church; it was the first in the village and has documentary attestation from 1301.

In Scotland we piloted materials and involved rural representatives from several different contexts, including: Glenbarr Community Development Association, a newly formed group in mainland Kintyre formed to ensure community benefit from a community led wind project Fyne-Energy-Press-Release-February-2019.pdf (scrt.scot), South Islay Development on the southern Hebridean island of Islay who are well established and have a number of social enterprise activities, including fuel filling station (South Islay Development | Rural Social Enterprise Hub (ruralsehub.net)) on the island and Kintyre Recycling a social enterprise from Campbeltown who undertake reuse and recycling activities to support employment for people with barriers to work (KRL - Kintyre Recycling Ltd – Bike Reuse Scheme & E-Bike Hire (kintyrebicycles.org.uk)). We also piloted some of the materials with a group of young people from across Argyll through a work experience programme to learn about social enterprise Youth Employment and Work Experience - InspirAlba.

- ■ Check out the piloting diaries to find out what kind of feedback other communities have given about the material and a template to help you reflect the material in your community: https://ruralsehub.net/feedback_and_piloting/

What rural community members said about the learning material tested?

Benefits and gains. There were various benefits and gains acknowledged by the participants in the pilot testing. The material helped villages to find out the local opportunities creating business and gave participants an opportunity to compare contexts and realise the resources and opportunities available in their own context. Also, the material gave villages something to start with, through availability of tools, methods and templates meant to assist villages to proceed with community business ideas. The material helped villages understand the need to involve other stakeholders in the process of identifying needs, finding and working on solutions.

The learning material condenses and collects relevant information in one place, making it easy to find and digest new knowledge. Participants were able to visibly see 'best practice techniques' which are listed in the resource and understand why these are important, especially in the rural context. Participants

also identified the value in collectively addressing and talking about some of the shared challenges faced by community and social enterprises in the rural context. The material increased participants' awareness and knowledge of the importance, methods and means of creating, sustaining and developing networks and partnerships. It gave villages confidence that there is assistance available and that the other rural areas have done these things as well.

- ◾ *"With the help of this material I was trying to learn new 'tricks' to improve my activities and to bring our community closer together in tourism development."*

- ◾ *"The material consisted of several thoughts that I have experienced before, so it gave me confidence. But, also, some new ideas."*

- ◾ *"It was helpful to see the already filled in template with local needs and suggestions to show what kind of things others have discussed about (e.g. Needs and opportunities - Enterprise Assessment Tool)."*

- ◾ *"The benefits of the pilot is the hub of information. There is so much information out there that, especially when first starting, it can be 'information overload'. This provides one avenue and tool to access the information you need and to also share and learn with others."*

- ◾ *"The best in the pilot implementation was the really good information that was given to me and the examples from other rural social enterprises."*

- ◾ *"The pilot appeared to be very useful. It made me realise how important it is to take responsibility for inviting people together."*

- ◾ *"For me, the learning materials provided all the learning that was expected, and I now have a greatly improved understanding of rural social enterprise."*

Other benefits gained included: understand how to formulate and work on concrete and feasible solutions for the community issues, assess rural social enterprise ideas and consider market failure, also understand how to consult the community and how to close partnerships with the mass-media and other types of partners, according to the village needs and to attract funding. There are many examples of social entrepreneurs from the ViSEnet countries, all adapted to rural areas, which allow for a better understanding of the different types of social enterprise activities in rural areas and communities.

Moreover, the learning module provides very good guidance for creating more effective and sustainable community activities, learning how to get started on measuring social impacts and what actions are needed, and what data are necessary. The learning material explains everything one needs to know in a simple and easily understandable way, regarding for example how to set the goals, and what social impact information can be used for. It is helpful to realise that social enterprises create different types of impact in a number of different sectors. Overall, there is a strong appreciation for the existence of free and on-line learning resources, linked materials, specifically for rural social enterprise, where people can come back to in the future.

Check out also a video about the first piloting activity results from Romania. https://www2.helsinki.fi/fi/unitube/video/57ecea10-b0d9-4e04-a240-731cab-4c36b3

Lessons shared. Through participation in the piloting studies, rural representatives were able to share with other village communities the varied lessons they learned and which they benefited from. As such, setting-up an initial **motivational workshop** with the participants to create excitement and defining expectations about the process of change of attitude is very helpful. Knowing the community in advance is a plus. Paying attention to **preferred communication channels** in villages is a must. An interesting lesson regarding making sure one identifies enough people within the community who are committed to working out the solution selected. Therefore, **choosing a good team, willing to work together** for the sake of the community is critical. Learning from mistakes and taking the positives out of negatives is very important.

Looking for resources and partnerships first within one's own communities and then outside the communities is advisable. By **identifying the range of skills available** so as for particular areas of work there would be an understanding of who might be able to assist and contribute. Setting up a **workshop where solutions come from the stakeholders only** is essential, since co-owning a solution will create engagement among stakeholders. **Under-promise and over-deliver**. Small village enterprises should **follow societal trends** every now and then and **look more broadly at issues that might have an effect on them**. There is a lot of free information available for almost every stage of social enterprise development. It is important to find out about other local social enterprises, consider collaborating with them, and learning from them.

Having a clear idea of what the **social impact** will be and being able to **communicate** this clearly to the community, to funders, and to customers is critical. It is also essential to **have a plan for how to measure the social impact**, including what metrics to be used, frequency of measurement, and how the impact is shown.

As a practical advice, producing a **'Village Newsletter'** which provides an overview of the work done in the community and plans for future, as well as highlighting opportunities for people to provide heritage stories and get involved is more impactful for community members. **Other pieces of advice** include: starting with something small, if no earlier experience is available, talking with the locals about the solutions implemented and benefits they see, and focus more on (incremental) step by step guidelines, easy to use practical tools and methods.

- *"Although bringing people together is part of my everyday practice it is still good to look at some theory and other people's experience from time to time."*
- *"We can't stress enough the importance of community engagement in the result of the whole process of local development."*
- *"We learned that there are assets and potential in the village, it just has to be seen and turned into a business opportunity."*
- *"Think carefully about the key people who should be present at your event and put effort into inviting them."*
- *"It was really inspiring to see other social enterprises in different countries having innovative ideas and inspiring employees that worked in clever and versatile ways. For me, it really re emphasised the change social enterprise can make on people's lives and how important this will be moving forward. It is a great opportunity for social enterprises to interact."*

> ■ *"I would advise other rural communities to keep their information relevant, user-friendly, and accessible. Pictures and examples that tell real stories are often the most inspiring. Not everyone is aware of what is going on even in their own rural areas so this pilot can be used to raise the profile of social enterprises locally and internationally."*
>
> ■ *"It is especially important for rural communities to be open and share their challenges as well as successes. There is a tendency on learning exchanges for the host to share the big successes, but we must remember that it is just important to discuss the failures and the hard parts. It is important to be honest and open, and that is how the best learning, partnerships and relationships will be formed."*
>
> ■ *An honesty to share things that didn't work and for what reason they did not work would really make this pilot beneficial."*

Possible risks. Several risks were outlined during the pilot testing. When dealing with small communities, the **mutual relationships** of people is a critical aspect which should not be overlooked. Bringing people together appears to be very time-consuming, so, it has to be well thought through how to make the most of it. **An open attitude and will to change** are crucial for the development of change in a community. If those are not well set from the very beginning, little action may result. Whilst there are a range of potential skills available in the village, people's **availability and time** is a critical factor. People are less likely to highlight their own skills and expertise or experience as assets, therefore, without time, they might lose the opportunity for establishing a sustainable development process. **Ensuring continuation of processes** in villages is also vital. There are a number of digital communication issues in rural areas which should be analysed carefully, and applying the methods and tools might **require guided workshops** to help communities get started. It is also worth mentioning that **potential tensions** between certain community groups can become barriers in small communities, leading to a lack of consensus on collective leadership. **Other challenges** might include: not finding enough motivated people in the local area, not gaining the involvement of sufficient people, not getting sufficient insights and diverse discussion, there might be a need for further and longer term assistance and mentorship so establishing a network of mentors who can be contacted if questions arise may be helpful.

References

Edwin Roland Van Teijlingen and Vanora Hundley (2002). The Importance of Pilot Studies. Nursing standard: official newspaper of the Royal College of Nursing 6-33:(40)16, DOI:10.7748/ns2002.06.16.40.33.c3214

2.3. Recommendations for successful networking

Advantages of networking

Networking has never been easier than now when you can almost instantaneously begin to build a far-flung network of professional people on online social networking sites such as LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter.

The most successful, effective networking should not always be about you and what your network contacts can do for you, but networking is about what you can do for your contacts and members of your network. And, you need to hope that the seeds of trust that you sow now, will grow and you will get a return on your investment.

Most importantly, if you focus on this as you plan your networking opportunities, you will be much calmer and positive as you interact with your contacts both new and old. If you take away the focus from you/your organisation—how you feel, how you look, what the contact will think of you—make your networking all about them, and you will benefit more than you can imagine!

General principles of communication

Communication has three parts: a sender, a message and a receiver and these change from one situation to another. Think every time about what the receiver thinks you are, what the message is, and what you know about the receiver. Always ask what the purpose of your communication is.

Make sure you communicate with the right person and who can turn the purpose of your communication into reality. Try to involve the key people of all necessary stakeholder groups.

Different (cultural) backgrounds

Communicating with people from different (cultural) backgrounds should be taken into account when planning your methods of working and messaging. Take account of possible cultural differences, do not be too quick in judging others to be rude or stupid. E.g., we, Estonians tend to be too straightforward, that does not mean we are impolite. It is in our veins to get straight to the point, not to waste anyone's time.

You should put yourself in the receiver`s shoes, take time to understand the cultural aspects and think about what obstacles to good communication for him/her there might be. Make it easier for them to communicate and give them:

- time to react
- a correct return address/telephone number
- do what you can to reduce uncertainty
- be clear about what you expect.

Trust is a key element of any relationship. Keep your promises. If you cannot or it is not realistic, you should not make them. Observe your own deadlines, this is being reliable. If you cannot, it is better for them to hear 'no' than to hear nothing at all. It is not important to be right. It is important to reach the goals you set for yourself, while often arguing about small things is not, so keep your long-term objective in mind. On the other hand, it is good to change ideas and true development only happens in groups that do not agree on everything in the first place.

Some ways for NGOs and SEs to build networks:

- Take the initiative, if networking is not for you, you might ask your board and volunteer members to get involved as they may have networks already. Lack of initiative and inactivity will not help, so you will need to take initiative for networking.

- Make a networking plan.

- Build a network of partners to look out for new opportunities for you, and vice versa, you for them. Networking is only really effective when it is mutually beneficial.

- Identify the people you would most like to meet either directly or indirectly through your contacts. Grow your network with partners & colleagues who have a network that you cannot develop by yourself.

- Build visibility within your sector or community by raising your profile. Attend as many social and business gatherings that are feasible.

- Build visibility within your community to assist your organisation to develop a reputation as an employer of choice. It will help you recruit and retain great employees and volunteers. Your community will look upon you as the face of your social enterprise or organisation.

- Build a strong network with co-workers within your social enterprise, organisation and community to accomplish work more successfully by utilising your network of mutually beneficial relationships.

- Create a wide and varied network of people where you can share ideas and gather information. Nothing is more effective than bouncing ideas back and forth with another professional whom you respect. Other social entrepreneurs and professionals have much to teach and share if you are open to learning and exchange of ideas. When you consider them your partners, not competitors, they tend to do the same with you and you can learn from each other.

- Keep your network up to date on the work you are doing. This can be via email, newsletters, reports, pictures, graphics, videos, testimonies, anything! Having no information to share would suggest you are not very active.

- Create a database of contacts, collect the contact details of all the people you meet. This contact information will grow if you keep attending events and conferences, meet-ups, etc. With this information, create a database of contacts and save this as one of your email lists too.

- Contribute to charitable and community causes, many of which might include opportunities to attend social enterprise and business networking events involving fundraising or volunteering. For people who are shy when meeting new people, these are often the most comfortable events to attend. Everyone is attending for the same reason, and the event's sole focus is not just networking, this is a secondary benefit of doing good.

- Participate in events, there are a lot of events going on all year round related to the NGO and SE sector, civil society, and CSR. Participation in these events can be very fruitful for networking, building connections, and potential partnerships in future.

- Develop an online network of colleagues with whom you can share all of the advantages given above. Although worldwide is not local, it is the new face of networking, and it is also easier for people who may be uncomfortable in a face-to-face setting. Just don't use it as a substitute for your networking in person.

- Show interest and remember the principle of reciprocity, keep up to date with what others are doing. Read about them, explore their stories through their websites, blogs and social media pages. Show an interest in them, their work and events and remember their interests.

- Consider that you can actually make friends, since the people you meet when social enterprise networking will have a lot in common with you. You might also find that you can share common non-SE/business interests and fun.

In summary

1. Be more interested, than interesting: Focus on listening before asking for something;
2. Follow up, follow up, follow up;
3. Ask and arrange a second meeting;
4. Stay in touch with the connections you have already made;
5. Incorporate social media into your networking plan;
6. It is important to remember who your audience is: your target will be others interested in the NGO sector and this may include private sector organisations. Thus, you need to evaluate and make a plan that is tailored towards the NGO sector.

2.4. Good practices of working with rural communities

A two-tiered approach

Social enterprises in rural areas are more likely to be focused on community development. That is, *'rural social enterprises are motivated by community development and/or prefer to use a community development approach in their application of social enterprise. They are motivated to develop and sustain local services rather than being primarily focused on economic or social return.'*[1] Nurturing good practice therefore needs to support both community development and social enterprise approaches.

Utilising available assets

Rural communities are able to draw on a wider availability of social capital to take forward social enterprise activity and overcome challenges such as limited infrastructure to find creative solutions (Wiesinger, George (2007). This is cultivated when there is a strong sense of shared ownership and belonging which relies on effective community engagement, wide buy-in and shared sense of purpose.

Whilst it is important for rural communities to prioritise issues and identify needs, it is equally important to recognise and develop from a community's strengths and resources. An asset-based approach enables rural communities to identify their available social capital as well as wider infrastructure and support mechanisms to build capacity.

---

1 'Identifying the Characteristics of Rural Social Enterprise' - Cat Aitken, Inspiralba March 2021 https://www.ruralsehub.net/identifying-the-characteristics-of-rural-social-enterprise-in-scotland/

A Charter for Rural Communities (June 2007) identified 10 interrelated characteristics of a dynamic, vibrant, engaged, sustainable rural community of the future. These are:

- Identifying, utilising and optimising assets
- Achieving fairness for everyone
- Empowering local governance
- Increasing resources for community benefit
- Enjoying locally relevant services
- Enriching social capital and well-being
- Valuing local distinctiveness
- Developing reliable infrastructure
- Enhancing environmental capacity
- Supporting a dynamic local economy (Bearing fruit Good practice in asset-based rural community development, DTAS and Carnegie UK.).

Good practice in working with rural communities should therefore assist in developing these characteristics, supporting rural communities to:

- Value people and work well in groups	- Focus on a local area
- Develop local leadership (collective leadership)	- Focus on community assets
- Recognise the importance of working together	- Appreciate and celebrate past successes
- Connect outward and focus on the future	- Develop participatory approaches
- Recognise the importance of relationships	- Ensure equality and social inclusion
- Strengthen civil society	- Deliver with transparency and accountability
- Address power issues	- Learn from experience
- Establish a balanced approach that integrates economic, social, environmental and cultural considerations	- Be ambitious
	- Achieve a balance of social impact and sustainable income generation.

Adapted from Appreciating Assets for rural social enterprise context (O'Leary, Tara; Burke, Ingrid & Braithwaite, Kate 2011).

In addition, the ability to mobilise a range of key stakeholders, including; the wider community, local businesses, local government, and other voluntary and community organisations is an important factor in developing good practice working with rural communities.

Effective Community Engagement

The need to engage with and mobilise a range of stakeholders to ensure success, highlights the importance of effective community engagement.

There are five basic guiding principles of successful community engagement (Bassler, A. et al. 2008):

- ■ Increasing citizens' knowledge about a community and/or the issue you are seeking to address.

- ■ Encouraging citizens to co-create additional knowledge and understanding and applying that knowledge.

- ■ Using that knowledge to improve the community or address an identified problem.

- ■ Creating future opportunities for citizens to engage with each other.

- ■ Ensuring that these opportunities and effective communications become a regular and on-going component of the process.

Examples of good practice in community engagement include Urras Oighreachd Ghabhsainn (Galson Estate Trust) who have used a community conversation consultation to inform the development of their Strategic Plan 2017–2037.

'They viewed this process as a re-engagement with the community they served, it was not just about the data collection but genuine relationship-building'. Urras Oighreachd Ghabhsainn – Galson Estate Trust - Community Engagement - Good Practice - Our work - Scottish Land Commission

This approach underpins the prioritising of business activity and allocation of resources within the context of community benefit. Community involvement also ensures there is an understanding of why some more difficult decisions must be made, for example to ensure financial sustainability or as a result of limited resources.

Identifying priorities to support a shared sense of purpose and clear direction

A clear outline of priorities enables rural communities to create effective plans.

An overview of actions required, resources necessary and key personnel can then assist in providing the required detail for planning, which in turn supports informed operational delivery.

Social Enterprises in rural areas are more likely to flourish and be more effective if they have a strong social structure (networks and quality of relationships as well as organisational capability procedures), shared goal and shared values. Good practice builds on those networks and supports positive relationships whilst also building organisational capacity.

Knowledge, capacity and capability

Rural communities are more able to take forward successful social enterprise activity when they have the required knowledge, capacity and capability, as well as access to assets (including human assets, skills, knowledge and networks alongside physical assets such as premises, renewables, funding, etc).

There is a strong prevalence of collective leadership in rural social enterprise. Collective leadership describes a group of people working together towards a shared goal, shared decision making and shared responsibility (Collective Leadership Institute, 2021).

Collective leadership approaches also draw on available social capital accessing a wide network and existing relationships as well as widening the pool of expertise and skills.

Support for organisational capacity is important to ensure priorities and actions can be delivered. Scotland has a strong support infrastructure which assists communities to develop capacity and capability to assist in delivering social enterprise solutions in rural communities.

Highlands and Islands Enterprise have 50+ years of taking this approach and some examples of the communities they have supported are included in this Community Account Management Case Study: https://www.ruralsehub.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/cam-case-study.pdf

The agency aims to integrate economic growth and strengthen communities across the region. Their approach is threefold:

- Investing in building community capacity, confidence and business skills.
- Empowering communities to acquire, manage and exploit community assets for community benefit.
- Enabling sustainable growth in the social economy through strong social and community enterprises.

In addition, a range of other measures can assist rural communities develop skills, confidence, capability and secure required investment to start, sustain and grow social enterprise activity, including;

- Promoting social enterprise to young people to increase awareness and develop social enterprise skills, to encourage the next generation.

- Raising the profile of social enterprise as an approach for rural communities.

- Support for social enterprise start up (including grant funding and business support)

- Providing business advice, training, workshops and skills development for individuals and organisations.

- Ensuring investment is available to enable rural communities to take forward social enterprise activity, including grant and loan funding.

These measures of support can assist rural communities to utilise their assets to take forward, sustain and grow social enterprise solutions.

Engaging young people from a young person point of view

Youth engagement is a crucial part of any long-term social enterprise development plan, but when it is poor, it can stop young people working with you completely. Therefore it is important to do it right.

Many organisations know that engaging with young people is beneficial, but they're less clear on how and why they should be doing it. Before reaching out to young people, it's important to reflect on the current state of your youth participation and the capacity for development. Use the questions below to guide your discussions.

- **To what extent do we currently engage with young people?** In which areas of our work and to what level? It may be helpful to compare your current work to Hart's Ladder of Participation

- **Why do we want to engage young people?** Your answer to this question should be more than 'we want to hear their opinions', dig deeper into why you need their voices and what the impact of involving them will be. A quick way to generate ideas is to split into pairs with one person answering the question and the other person responding with 'why' each time. Do this for 2 minutes and then feedback.

- **To what extent do we want to engage young people?** Refer back to the Ladder of Participation, or discuss in regards to specific projects and roles.

■ **What is currently stopping young people engaging with us?** Common barriers include lack of awareness from young people, clashes with other commitments such as school, uninviting environment, distrust that they will be listened to.

■ **What can we do to overcome these barriers?**

■ **How do young people benefit from engaging with us?** This could be through skills development, creating an impact in their community, getting to complete an award, or accessing training.

■ **What else do you need to know or learn to engage with young people?** This might be about consultation, doing wider research, or training for staff.

After answering these questions, you should be left with a core document that outlines why you want to engage young people, your goals for youth engagement, your current state of engagement, and what needs to change to achieve your goals.

Do's	Don'ts
- Clearly explain to young people the purpose of their involvement and the impact it will have - Encourage open communication and accountability - Be flexible - Provide young people with accessible training or information on your enterprise/project - Talk to young people about what they hope to gain	- Expect to get it right straight away - Treat young people as a resource rather than as people - Assume you know what young people will think/want/need - Bombard them with information that is irrelevant or difficult to understand

It may also be helpful to look at this Twitter thread in which young people have shared their 'red flags' for poor youth participation: https://twitter.com/MsypRosie/status/1387317182338637827

There are also many models and systems of youth participation, this framework is just one example: Participation Framework - HUB na nÓg (hubnanog.ie)

The main thing to remember is make sure young people feel valued, have the right information and support to succeed, understand their role in a wider context, and have fun working with you.
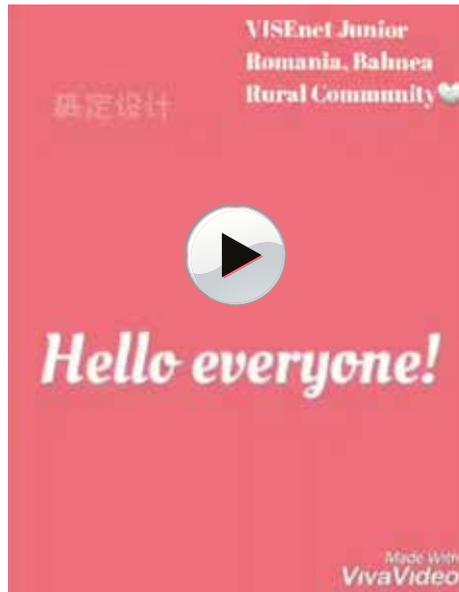
Check out how the Romanian students from Bahnea village, Mures county with their professor Oana Manuela Stan are presenting their community for their peers in the ViSEnet project in the ViSEnet Junior activity. https://www2.helsinki.fi/fi/unitube/video/bf67e7f5-798c-45b6-a569-54f4de43ee51

References:

Bassler, A. et al. (2008) Developing Effective Citizen Engagement: A How-to Guide for Community Leaders." *Center for Rural Pennsylvania*.

Bearing fruit Good practice in asset-based rural community development, DTAS and Carnegie UK.

O'Leary, Tara; Burke, Ingrid & Braithwaite, Kate (2011). Appreciating Assets (p22)

The Art of Leading Collectively › Collective Leadership Institute

Wiesinger, George (2007). The importance of social capital in rural development, networking and decision-making in rural areas. Journal of Alpine Research, 95 (4), 45 - 56.

3. Cases: in search for excellence and good practice

The aim of the following chapter is to highlight the variety of the development and learning processes in rural communities by describing one case from each of the participating project partners.

The Estonian case is about Lahemaa, a national park preserving the natural and cultural heritage, showing a case of community tourism networking. The case from Finland represents a story of a declining village which grew into a national pilot of community-based social enterprise providing a variety of services for the local good. The German case is about a programme supporting individuals in the rural areas of the so-called 'German East'. The Romanian case, Bio&Co is about a social business supporting organic farming in a village selling a large variety of products in short chains directly to the customers. The mission of the farm is to promote the integration of people in difficulty into the labour market. The case Cothrom from Scotland tells the story of a Community Learning and Development Organisation focusing on adult learning and training opportunities.

3.1. Estonia: Case Lahemaa

Community

Geography – where we are.
Lahemaa (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lrmfVE0eiRU), the oldest national park in Estonia, has had different stages of co-operation in its 50 years of existence. The Park is situated on the northern coast of Estonia a little over 50 km east of Tallinn city centre.

Lahemaa with over 70 villages and more than 3000 inhabitants has always been divided between two county administrative areas and several local municipalities. Understandably enough, due to the economic system at the time not too many locals were involved in either the management of the park or tourism during the 1970's and 1980's. Nowadays though, the Environmental Board, a state agency governing the park, pays a lot of attention to the involvement of the community and it has helped to plant the seeds of cooperation.

Lahemaa national park was formed to protect and present both the nature and the cultural heritage typical of Northern Estonia. The facilities and infrastructure for exploring nature are countless and of very good quality. Lahemaa being one of the most important forest protection areas in Europe has hiking trails taking visitors deep into the forests, over bogs and near to the sea and rivers.

Opening of the Lahemaa Mobile Information Cafe in August 2019 with EMÜ staff and local stakeholders.

Characteristic features of the park are its four lovely peninsulas, outstanding manors, unspoiled nature and active community.

Community tradition

In the past, the lifestyle of the Lahemaa coastal village communities used to differ from those further inland. The seaboard has the most erratic boulders and fields of stones in Europe and since the soil is stony and infertile, communities had to rely on the sea for their living with fishing, timber transport, shipbuilding and sea trade. Moving around was easier by sea than on land, the connections between the coastal villages of Estonia and Finland were very close and the local dialect spoken by peninsula inhabitants was like Finnish.

Between the two world wars, the village economies flourished with smuggling but following annexation by the Soviets the Estonian coast became part of the border of the big Soviet Union and was closely guarded. Locals were not allowed to go to the sea anymore, harbours were closed and fishermen`s boats were destroyed. Even though Estonia has been independent for 30 years, fishing is still rare, but the Lahemaa coastal villages are much used for summer holidays. The ruins of former Soviet army buildings strewn along the Lahemaa coast are part of military heritage that is worth visiting as much as the admirable coastal villages and beautiful nature.

The development of inland villages has been strongly influenced by the Baltic Klint, a limestone escarpment. Ancient settlements, old villages and manors are situated on the edge of the Klint and surrounded by alvars with junipers. Lahemaa is known for its four excellent examples of manor culture. Three of the manor complexes have been nicely renovated and you can spend hours there, taking part in event programmes and walking along the paths under old trees.

The people living inland were mostly engaged with agriculture but there have also been some small industries in the area, several watermills and a cardboard factory. The community has been more stable here than that by the sea and nowadays most people live in the villages the whole year round, even if they work in nearby towns.

Estonian national culture in Lahemaa is very much kept alive through numerous community centres in active use; with the many choirs and folk-dance groups, children are proud to learn folk dances and songs at school. When coming to Lahemaa not only should you explore the countryside to sense its peace and quietness but also visit a local event or two to get the feeling of uniquely vibrant community life.

Networks and partnerships

Community tourism networking was started by NGO Ökokuller in 2016 with the aim of bringing all stakeholders together.

Collaboration with the Estonian University of Life Sciences (EMÜ)

The cooperation between EMÜ and the Lahemaa community has been developing since the spring of 2018 when an international intensive educational programme for students was held in Lahemaa. In 2019 the Community Innovation Lab (CIL) was initiated as part of the Erasmus+ CLLC (Community Learning for Local Change) project to involve locals in community entrepreneurship. The aim of CIL was to run a series of training and development workshops utilising expert inputs from experienced entrepreneurs and service providers. CIL brought all cooperation projects together, the topics of the workshops were based on the needs of the community and coincided with the objectives of the projects. Workshops that covered the topics of marketing, providing services, creating the persona of the customer, etc were held in off-season, while in summer EMÜ students helped the entrepreneurs in Lahemaa as part of their summer placement.

In spring 2019, the Lahemaa community got involved in ViSEnet (Village Social Enterprise learning material, guidance and networking) Erasmus+ project. The other Estonian community in the project was from South-Estonia - Haanja and the ViSEnet project enabled the two communities to make peer

visits to learn from each other's experiences, two cooperation seminars and an art camp. Besides that, ViSEnet learning materials have been tested and several online seminars organised to see good examples of active communities from all over Europe.

Social impact

Biggest outcomes of the collaboration

a) One of the results of the collaboration projects was the idea of a community-led tourism organisation that would include all the stakeholders of the whole national park and the buffer zone around it. Thus, in March 2020 the Lahemaa Tourism Association (LTÜ) was established. By the spring of 2021, LTÜ had 40 members - entrepreneurs, NGOs and private individuals, and an advisory board of local municipalities, EMÜ and other essential institutions. LTÜ and EMÜ will continue with creating and implementing the community tourism concept in Lahemaa. At first with the help of CLLC, ViSEnet, Rural Lifestyle and other EU projects, but also working on making it sustainable.

The community tourism concept will:
- Bind together different projects like: CLLC, ViSEnet, Rural Lifestyle, Rural Community Development etc
- Rely on stakeholders` trust that has been built up
- Help the community to do what they want to do and to do it better
- Provide quality placements for EMÜ students looking for entrepreneurship experience
- Create and record a model that can be used elsewhere
- Be an action research/process research
- Be sustainable, have an exit strategy after the projects
- Have a strategy that is not exclusive but flexible, and an action plan for every six months

b) CIL workshops greatly encouraged the local enthusiasts who were involved in the collaboration projects, to develop and grow their ideas during these years and to create different tourism products. Just two examples of these are:
- Kolga manor is an old manor complex which now houses an art gallery, a summer café, a museum and offers several tourism products that carry EHE ecotourism quality label for Estonian rural tourism products.
- In Tammistu sheep farm the sheep breeders have created a tourism product where visitors can walk along a well-kept restored coastal mea-

dow to get acquainted with sheep and the cattle dogs and learn about old traditions for the maintenance of semi-natural communities.

c) Celebrating the Day of the Parks in 2020 and creating a national collaboration model (https://vimeo.com/425268952?fbclid=IwAR0SXIM6RX-Iu-MOuImbOzvt5gF_pF93YTWxVOW3t9IclZxoRLljBh8wtA3Q)

Due to the 2020 Coronavirus pandemic, tourism almost ceased throughout the world and for months most events were either cancelled or transferred online. But, when in spring 2020, Estonian restrictions became less severe, the Lahemaa Tourism Association took an initiative and used the "Day of the Parks", a traditional European annual event (which in 2020 was celebrated online in most countries), for a campaign to open the post-corona season. Other protected areas in Estonia were invited to participate and the campaign became national. On 24th May 60 European Day of Parks themed events were organised where more than 770 guests were able to visit 35 protected areas in small groups with local guides on hiking, canoeing and other programmes. In Lahemaa, a dozen hikes took place, from shorter cultural history walks to longer Nordic walking tours. Other activities included manorial and cinematography heritage, management of semi-natural communities and appreciation of edible flowers. Local restaurants were open, some offering take-away picnics.

This new model of co-operation where important state agencies help small firms was appreciated by all parties involved and has been used several times for organising other events since then.

d) Green Destinations programme as a means of developing a sustainable DMO

Tourism awoke in the summer of 2020 after the first phase of the Corona pandemic and entrepreneurs in Lahemaa were busier than usual. Lahemaa Tourism Association decided to take part in a 2-year Green Destinations pilot programme organised by Visit Estonia. We have now reached the first phase and Lahemaa has already been announced as one of the TOP100 global sustainable destinations. Hopefully it will become one of the Green Destinations in the summer of 2021.

3.2. Finland: Case Eskola

Where we are

Eskola is a small village of approximately 400 inhabitants some 12 kilometres from the city of Kannus in the central Finnish province of Central Bothnia

Although it is a rural village, there is very little agriculture. There are three major industrial workplaces in Eskola: a window and door factory, a sawmill and a concrete foundry. Most of the basic services in the village are provided by the village itself and it is for this that Eskola was nominated National Village of the Year in 2001 and again in 2017.

Community tradition

The village has a history of being a railway junction with the Finnish Forest and Park Service's narrow-gauge railway that served the state's timber transport from the 1920s to the 1960s. Eskola's narrow-gauge railway of 'Pikkurata' (which translates as "a small track"), was a unique phenomenon in the history of Finnish timber transport. During these 40 years, about two million cubic metres of timber were transported along the Pikkurata by four small locomotives that were called Pikku-pässi, "the small ram". At its height, Finnish Forest and Park Service's narrow-gauge railway was almost seventy kilometres long. The timber was transported to Eskola, where it was transferred to the state railway wagons. The narrow-gauge railway was an important employer for hundreds of people in the area and the neighbouring municipalities. (http://www.kotinet.com/arto.ojakangas/)

Eskola community house where there are kindergarten and other services run by the community.

In the early 1960s, the narrow-gauge railway closed down and the number of village residents decreased. However, the operations of the Pikkurata lead Eskola to be one of the most industrialised villages in the region with several blooming industrial companies. Nowadays, the villagers have taken up the task of collecting and preserving the narrow-gauge railway tradition, and its history and timber transport has had a great impact on the village's cultural heritage. This shows in the village even today with the village branding.

Perhaps because of their cultural heritage, Eskola has been able to maintain its activity during the structural change that has affected every village in the country over the years. The village is famous for its active aspiration of keeping

Eskola village logo - honouring the community tradition of railway history.

the village vibrant and maintaining its local services, which are mainly provided by the villagers themselves through a community-based social enterprise. Nowadays the village is one of the pioneers in providing welfare and other services by villagers themselves.

The village social enterprise, created by the villagers themselves, has the right to use the Finnish Social Enterprise Mark granted by Association of Finnish Work. The services it provides include day care and lunch and they also offer domestic home services, a tourism and housing service, as well as lecture and education services on local rural services and development.

Community: from village committee to a community-based social enterprise

Community organisation
The people in the village have a reputation of being active and getting things done by themselves. After the narrow-gauge railway was closed in the 1960s, the community experienced a structural change and a severe loss of residents. In order to respond to the changes, the community set up a village committee in 1981 to gather the village resources together. As a result, active villagers and the village council, with assistance from the town of Kannus established "The Eskola Village House" in 1986. The village house was part of a project aimed at improving the living conditions of the elderly and providing rental housing

in the village. The community housing construction project received national and international attention. The housing community, which serves different age groups, was conceived with the cooperation of active villagers, the village council and the municipality, with funding from the Finnish Slot Machine Association. From 1986 to 1990, terraced houses were built in the courtyard of the locomotive garage of the old forest line used as a village house, to provide rental housing for the elderly of the village and the working-age population. (Eskolan Kyläyhdistys 2018; Kattilakoski 2015; Koskinen & Lemponen 2021.)

In 1997, the Eskola Village Committee became the Eskola Village Association. It was a strategic choice to enable the community to apply for EU projects. After this, project funding has played a significant role in the development of the village's community activities. This changed the status quo between the village and the municipality and previous municipally driven development work became even more community-based. (Kattilakoski 2015.)

The community's entrepreneurial thinking led to the establishment of the Cooperative "Nelikataja", founded in 2004 with the aim of employing the long-term unemployed and the disabled in the municipality. The cooperative employs 5 to 10 people per year. Nelikataja's field of activity includes subcontracting work for local industry, home and renovation services, cleaning assistance and household work. In 2009, the village established Eskola Development Ltd, a community development company owned by villagers, to develop the village's housing production and to conduct the missing business in the village. (Eskolan Kyläyhdistys 2018; Kattilakoski 2015; Koskinen & Lemponen 2021.)

A path to a village service provision

The need for developing local services began when the city of Kannus needed to cut local service provision in the village and centralise them into the municipal service centre in order to saving money. The critical factor was when the municipality closed down the village library and a day care centre in 2013. From 2014 onwards there would not be a village school either, which led to the closing of the school kitchen. (Kattilakoski 2015; Koskinen & Lemponen 2021.)

The loss of municipal services led the village to consider alternative ways to secure the availability of local services. The village had previously drawn up and implemented three village plans, which mentioned the development of village services. Instead of a new village plan, it was decided to make a village service plan. There were former projects piloting different service delivery models in areas such as home services, outdoor areas and route maintenance, library and cultural services. These experiences led to a plan of the village association's own service company. (Eskolan Kyläyhdistys 2018; Koskinen & Lemponen 2021.)

As a result, the village association took over the closed library and made a contract with the municipality for the books and other material. Nowadays the village association has an arrangement with the municipality's main library to borrow books and other material for the village library and further to the villagers. (Kattilakoski 2015.)

In late 2013, Eskola and nearby villages residents and other supporters set up a second limited company Eskola Village Service Ltd to provide the necessary local services itself. 70% of the company's shareholders are from Eskola and the rest are from nearby villages or other supporters. The company operations started in 2014 by the establishment of a private group day-care centre. At the same time, the village had to learn to act as an enterprise in cooperating with the municipality. (Eskolan Kyläyhdistys 2018; Kattilakoski 2015; Koskinen & Lemponen 2021.)

The village had negotiated with the municipality the conditions of continuing the school in the village in the same year. Almost half of the village residents signed a municipal initiative to continue basic education in the village but that did not change the result. Instead, the municipality sold the school premises to the Eskola Village Services Ltd. The village company transformed the school into a village building, the Eskola House. In addition to the kindergarten, the Eskola House is a home to a company-owned kiosk, lunch canteen and home service office. The lunch canteen prepares meals for the kindergarten and offers lunch for the villagers and, to an increasing extent, other customers as well. A company home service office provides support services for homes, such as cleaning and transaction services. (Kattilakoski 2015; Koskinen & Lemponen 2021.)

Other activities

In addition to the services in the Eskola House, the premises can be rented by outsiders. Villagers and associations operating in the village can use the premises free of charge. Some of the village's services are organised in the old locomotive garage, which serves also as a gathering place for villagers, other village associations and hobby groups. (Koskinen & Lemponen 2021.)

Since 2004, the village association has performed an annual summer theatre performance, excluding the summer of the pandemic 2020. The Summer Theatre gathers about 3 000 spectators every year and is the major income of the village association. The theatre also supports other services, such as catering: they sell tailored theatre packages with a theatre menu or coffees, which is a significant source of income for both the association and the Village Service. (Koskinen & Lemponen 2021.)

Eskola Village Services Ltd and the Village Association in cooperation with other actors in the village have developed an information centre that aims, among other things, to pass on the good practices. The centre gives lectures on the development of the village based on the village's own experiences, organise guided tours and tourist services to the village's attractions. Local village attractions are an important part of the village's history. There is a 12.5 kilometre long nature trail that has been built in the village and cultural heritage is maintained by the Forest Railway Museum with a scale model of the forest railway. There is also a special route around them that can be reached along the old forest trail on foot, by bike or even by car. The route can be followed by the *Genius Loci* website and app. (Village website 2021.)

Covid-19
Covid-19 has prevented the village from organising many events. The biggest challenge has been the loss of income since the summer theatre plays had to be cancelled and the village had to think of alternative sources of income.

Networks and partnerships
The village actively seeks opportunities to work together with other villages, associations, enterprises and public administration. For example, maintaining and developing nature attractions and trails is done through cooperation with local associations, such as local sports and the hunting clubs, the cooperation benefiting both parties. The same also goes for the other way around: local enterprises support the village company by using its services and participating in voluntary work. The success of local companies and enterprises is vital to the overall income and vitality of the village: every enterprise is valued.

The neighbouring villages are also an important network and stakeholder for Eskola and are viewed as potential customers and service users over the administrative borders. The village services are also improving their service level and as such, the partnership is based on mutual benefits.

It is also important to maintain good relationships with the local administration. The impact of land planning, for example, has a major impact on the village. It has also been seen as very important to get the public administration to know and be updated with the operations that are taking place in the village. While there has also been some negotiating in the relationship with the municipality, mainly due to the lack of resources. The village is also an important partner to the local administration as a local employee.

The village has a history of seeking solutions even when there seems to be no answers left. After the closure of Eskola School in 2014, the teaching

was organised locally with the support of the parents' association HanhiKukko and local companies. In 2018 the village took part in the unique pilot, where the primary school students of Eskola village received teaching from Lapinjärvi municipality, which is located approximately 500 kilometres away. The main idea was to use digitalisation in traditional teaching methods and utilise various software applications. The experiment ended after the spring semester of 2020.

The main and the most important stakeholders for the village are its residents. A commitment to the village's own services is an act for the benefit of the living community and the living environment. The relationship is built by taking people into account of, and responding to, the local needs and inviting all residents to participate in village actions.

In addition, the village is very interested in international co-operation, exchanging of experiences and learning from others. They have been actively involved in several national development projects and nowadays Eskola village is one of the example villages in EU's Smart Village initiative.

Social enterprise solutions

Organisation format

Eskola Village Service Ltd is a community-based social enterprise. When the residents in the village decided to provide local services by themselves, it was clear that there is a need for new kind of approach:

> *A new limited company Eskolan Kyläpalvelu Oy has been tailored for service production. We want to keep control of the company; in which case the village association is the largest shareholder in both companies (Eskolan Kehitys Oy and Eskolan Kyläpalvelut Oy). The profit is not distributed to the owners but is used for the benefit of the villagers,* says Miia Tiilikainen.

The challenge was that the village had no models or examples of setting up a community enterprise: they had to learn by doing. They had no earlier experience of providing services or running a village enterprise. Because of a lack of financial structuring for these kinds of organisations, the village doubled their opportunities for securing funding by having one part of the village action run by an association and the other by a limited company, thus they have access to different kinds of funding. In Finland, there is no special legislation or organisational form for social enterprises: a social enterprise can have any of the current organisational forms, but to be recognised as a social enterprise, they need to have their social goal or impact clearly written in their rules.

Along the process, they realised that a critical issue when running a community enterprise was not to put all the eggs in the same basket. Community revenue is too small to be composed of only one income source and it would make sense to diversify the supply of services. By combining actions, the community would be able to gain small amounts of income from several sources. As a result, they are not dependent on only one income source and are less vulnerable to changes in service demand. This is also a good way to create and support co-operation and gain synergy: the village shop, for example, can be privately owned and still operate on the same premises. There still are many opportunities to expand the enterprise functions as there is a need for a village meeting place, such as a bar or a café. There is also a need for accommodation services that could be developed in reference to the local history-based cultural tourism.

Leadership

The village association is run by a board with a chairperson, secretary and treasurer supported by additional board members from the village. The focus of the village association's activities is to increase the services and welfare of the villagers and to cherish the history of the village, especially the forest railway tradition. The village association manages various development and renovation projects and organises rehabilitation work activities in Eskola. The village association is the largest single owner in Eskola Village Service Ltd.

The Village Service Ltd has an executive board working on a voluntary basis without reward and employs six permanent and several part-time paid staff.

Financial

The aim is to increase the year-round use of the facilities and to develop services for the needs of people of different ages. The day-care, originally created to take care of 12 children, has grown to take care of 35. The restaurant hires two people and the domestic services have even been providing services for people outside the village. The Village Service Ltd's turnover has grown from around 90 000 to 300 000 euros in seven years and it is making profit. That profit is used for the further development of the services, none of it goes to shareholders.

Nowadays the turnover of the village association is between € 60 000 and 90 000 per year. The major income (about 70%) comes from a summer theatre. Other ways of financing activities include a Christmas publication every two years, village parties and other fundraisers, a village book and so on. The village association also manages and rents out the village hall, which is used for meetings, parties and community college courses.

Social impact

The main objective for the village company is to maintain the welfare of the villagers. All the efforts have had a great impact, since without the company's activity, there would not be many services available in the village and it also employs people. The main challenge is to document and measure costs and the effects on children.

Lessons learned:

- Acknowledging that different activities can be executed through different organizational models enables efficient utilization of (financial and human) resources

- Clear and transparent division of leadership and other responsibilities increases trust and credibility of the community business among stakeholders

- That operations based on real community needs and resources increases the resilience and sustainability of community businesses.

Social media and website

Eskola Village: http://www.eskolankyla.fi/en/frontpage/

Eskola Village Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/eskolankyla/

Eskola Village Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/eskolan.kyla

Video about village services and activity: https://www2.helsinki.fi/fi/unitube/video/bba2f529-da08-4744-a5db-69ecd95f936f

References:

http://www.kotinet.com/arto.ojakangas/

Kattilakoski, Mari (2015). Kylien yhteisöllinen palvelutuotanto – paikallista hallintaa palvelujärjestelmämuutoksessa. *Maaseudun uusi aika*, 1, 19–36. http://www.mua-lehti.fi/kattilakoski

Koskinen, Keijo & Virpi Lemponen (toim.) (2021). *Verkostoituminen ja yhteiskunnallinen yrittäjyys maaseudulla*. Karelia-ammattikorkeakoulu, sarja B, Oppimateriaaleja ja kokoomateoksia: 69. Joensuu.

Palveleva Yhteisö -hanke, Eskolan Kyläyhdistys ry (2018). *Eskolan kyläpalvelut Oy 5 vuotta, historiikki*.

3.3. Romania: Case Bio & co

Geography – where we are

Ciocanari village is in Niculesti commune, Dambovita county, in south-east Romania, 40 kilometres from Bucharest, the country's capital. The area of Niculești commune is 2,886 ha with 4,436 inhabitants.

The Bio& co farm, social business operates in the Ciocanari area, and is located outside the village. It supports organic farming in a village with 1461 inhabitants and grows 80 varieties of vegetables, without pesticides and without mechanical processes. It sells in short chains, directly to the consumer, via a weekly subscription system. The Bio & co organic farming activity is certified by the Romanian accreditation body Ecocert.

The farm consists of 4 hectares of agricultural land, 4,000 square metres of solariums and a platform of 1,000 square metres for composting food and organic waste. In addition, the founders set up a pedagogical farm, where children can learn in a practical setting about healthy eating, biodiversity, waste reduction and environmental protection.

About Bio & co

The Bio & co rural social enterprise is an initiative of Ateliere Fără Frontiere[3], Romanian association (NGO). To fulfill its mission, Ateliere Fără Frontiere has created three insertion enterprises (Educlick, Remesh and Bio&Co).

The mission of Ateliere Fără Frontiere (AFF) NGO, and of Bio & co farm as well, is to promote the integration of people with difficulties into the conventional labour market. These people were victims of violence, people with addictions, disabilities, affected by long-term unemployment, deprivation of liberty, homelessness, school dropout, and so on. The organisation helps people who have been labelled "non-employable" to be capable of managing their own livelihoods, and once at AFF, they no longer receive social assistance in a passive and dependent way. The organisation helps these people transform from excluded and marginalised people into independent and dignified people, and from passive beneficiaries, they become active citizens, taxpayers.

Person-centred approach

The beneficiaries of the mission of this social enterprise are people from the Roma community from Ciocanari village, mainly women with children, without education or work experience. In the commune, 3.18% of the population are Roma and unemployed.

Bio & co provides an adapted workplace for disadvantaged workers who benefit from an individualised socio-professional accompaniment in the pro-

Bio&co employees at work.

duction of healthy and tasty vegetables. The integration of these vulnerable people through their contact with nature and performing outdoor work reaps many benefits, including increased solidarity, protection of the environment and promotion of biodiversity (European Network for Rural Development, 2021).

The enterprise has an employee with the role of Insertion Counsellor to help the employees learn how to manage their personal problems. Most of the time, beneficiaries with social problems present themselves at work unpredictably, but with the support of the Counsellor, they can become reliable employees, taxpayers, and financial and moral pillars for their families and community.

The children of the beneficiaries who were with the enterprise from the beginning are now enrolled in school, and even in higher forms of education found at village level such as vocational schools or high school. The impact is measured using statistics provided by the human resources department, interviews with the insertion counsellor and the person in charge with each family situation.

Networks and partnerships

Helping people through agriculture

Starting point – Helping people from a small community by creating jobs in agriculture

The beneficiaries of the mission of this social enterprise are people from the Roma community from Ciocanari village, mainly women with children, without education or work experience. Bio & co provides an adapted workplace for disadvantaged workers who benefit from an individualised socio-professional accompaniment in the production of healthy and tasty vegetables. The integration of these vulnerable people through their contact with nature and performing outdoor work reaps many benefits, including increased solidarity, protection of the environment and promotion of biodiversity.[1]

The main challenge related to the beneficiaries was that in the agricultural field there is a shortage of qualified human resources willing to work in Romania in general, and rural areas especially. The enterprise manager says that enterprises who are running or plan to run a social business in rural areas should plan to train and retain their employees. It is essential to prepare to face issues such as employees coming to work late or getting themselves into fights. A solution for such issues is to hire a person for the position of Insertion Counsellor which can help the employees transition from a life without a job to one with responsibilities and rights at work.

Plan A – Reaching out to the community

When Bio & co opened their business in the small community of Ciocanari, communication was key: the enterprise had good communication with the local community, with the authorities, and with the workers employed from this community.

Bio & co started production in the summer of 2015, after a year of preparation. The team lost several crops because they did not have much experience. However, in 2016 they managed to obtain 900 baskets of vegetables, without using pesticides or too much technology. The main challenges in running the business in Ciocanari village were related to the soil structure which is not the best for growing a very varied range of vegetables, lack of qualified staff, and working with disadvantaged people in the village.

The farm also had security measures in place such as surveillance cameras and a security plan considering that the farm is located outside the village.

"Consumer- actors" is the term used by Bio & co when talking about subscribers who pay in advance for subscriptions. They are considered more than just consumers because, by their choice, they not only adopt a healthier diet for themselves, but support the entire Bio & co system (Green-Report.ro, 2017).

Their clients are higher educated people, with an above average income, activities, or interests in the NGO environment of civic or ecological activism, expats accustomed to this model of social vegetable farms, people who are willing to expand their culinary experience by cooking unparalleled vegetable varieties. Since sometimes it is difficult to cook a variety of vegetables at once, Bio & co provides recipes for their clients.

The Bio & co partners are companies interested in offering to their employees a model of good practice both in the social field and related to healthy diet, companies which have in their portfolio the commercialisation of ecological inputs for agriculture or even other NGOs.

The enterprise discovered most of the beneficiaries, clients, and partners largely through recommendations. Moreover, their clients also came via the social media channel: https://www.facebook.com/atelierbio.co

Among the challenges the enterprise had both with the beneficiaries and the clients were the "unsaid" expectations. In the case of customers, for some it proved to be more challenging than they expected to constantly cook the great diversity of vegetables received. In short periods of overproduction, it proved difficult to find new subscribers to take all the excess vegetables.

Lessons learned

Bio & Co team learned several lessons related to managing good communications and good relationships with and between the employees and these include

- Plan to train and retain their employees.
- Get to know your employees' "unsaid" expectations.
- Create the role of Insertion Counsellor for one of your employees to help the other employees learn how to manage personal problems.
- Identify and preserve relevant connections in the community.

The variety of the vegetables produced at the farm.

Political support

Bio & co intend to identify and preserve relevant connections in the community. The villagers saw and still see the organic farm with confidence. Bio & co is considered a good employer, who offers the employees stability, decent working conditions and appreciates the social counselling the enterprise is offering.

When Bio & co opened their business in the small community of Ciocanari, communication was key: the enterprise had good communication with the local community, with the authorities, and with the workers employed from this community. They also had security measures in place such as surveillance cameras and a security plan considering that the farm is outside the village. Also, it was important for the enterprise to identify and preserve relevant connections in the community.

Covid-19

When Covid-19 hit Romania, the farm had already set-up an online shop with direct delivery to clients and in fixed delivery points: https://bio-co.ro/p/cat/cosurile-bio-co.

Their model of business was adopted by many Romanian vegetable producers and it supported this type of business through this difficult period.

Lessons learned

Bio & co team learned several lessons related to their clients.

- Identify your clients' "unsaid" expectations. It proved to be more challenging for the clients to constantly cook the great diversity of vegetables received.

- Think creatively about promoting your products. In short periods of overproduction, it proved difficult to find new subscribers to take all the excess vegetables.

- If you have good quality products, the customers will recommend you.

Social enterprise solutions

Organisation format

Set up as a Work Integration Social Enterprise in 2016, Bio & co is managed by NGO Ateliere Fara Frontiere as sole shareholder.

Leadership

Bio & co is led by a manager, who oversees the operational management of the organisation. The social business functions under the umbrella of Ateliere fara Frontiere NGO.

At this moment, Bio & co social farm supports 8 to 12 beneficiaries who are the enterprise's employees and who work together with two horticultural engineers, one driver and one development coordinator. The employees in difficulty come from the local community and extremely disadvantaged people from Bucharest, referred to Ateliere Fără Frontiere by partner institutions and NGOs providing medical-psycho-social services. Each employee from a disadvantaged group benefits from an individualised socio-professional support course made by specialists in professional insertion.

Financial

The main sources of funding are own revenues from the agricultural activities and private contributions (Carrefour Romania and Carrefour Foundation), as well as donations. However, the vegetable production activity is not the only income generator at Bio & co. Employees collect vegetables and fruit from Carrefour supermarkets and egg shells and shells from three hotels in the Accor Hotels chain. It transports them to Ciocănari, where they are turned into compost. For now, the compost is used on the farm, but, given the impressive amounts of waste generated by retail and HoReCa, the initiators of the project intend to sell it soon.

Bio & co is continuously diversifying the range of products available in their baskets. Recently, the team built six nursery areas for herbs, which will contain thyme, basil, mint and other goodies, which will be included in the weekly Bio & co basket.

Social impact

At the time of writing (2021), the Bio & co social farm supports 8 to 12 beneficiaries who are the enterprise's employees and who work together with two horticultural engineers, one driver and one development coordinator.

In 2020, Bio & co helped 24 beneficiaries. The children of the beneficiaries who were with the enterprise from the beginning are now enrolled in school, and even in higher forms of education found at village level such as vocational schools or high school.. The impact is measured using statistics provided by the human resources department, interviews with the insertion counsellor and the person in charge with each family situation.

The challenges in achieving the social objective of the business were the fact that most beneficiaries did not have stable, legal, predictable jobs which caused them to be absent from work without reason, alcoholism, housing and personal problems.

You can find out more about the farm's activities and results here in their video story: https://bio-co.ro/povestea-noastra

Social media and website

Bio & co Website: https://bio-co.ro/
Bio & co Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/atelierbio.co
Bio & co video story (available in English language): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tl1gcqbVovA

Video tour of Bio & Co farm

A journalist from Green-Report.ro visited the farm and gave a presentation and virtual tour of the farm, focusing on their production site and 1000m² their platform for organic waste composting. View this on YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=REFBWGAZXys&t=1s

3.4. Scotland: Case Cothrom

Geography – where we are

The Outer Hebrides is a chain of Atlantic islands, located about 70 kilometres off the north west coast of mainland Scotland comprising over 100 islands and small skerries, 15 of which are inhabited. Across the Outer Hebrides, Scottish Gaelic is the predominant spoken language, although English speakers form a majority in some areas. The islands are among the last remaining strongholds of Gaelic language and culture in Scotland. The largest islands include Barra, Benbecula, Berneray, Harris and Lewis, North Uist, and South Uist.

Cothrom, meaning *opportunity* in Gaelic, is a Community Learning and Development Organisation located on the island of South Uist. It serves a population of approximately 6,000 people, spread across 9 islands that stretch for 128 kilometres from Berneray to Vatersay. The main focus of their work is adult learning and provision of training opportunities, but the organisation also comprises a Gaelic Nursery and childcare facility called Cothrom Òg, and a furniture restoration and recycling enterprise called ReStore. Cothrom also has a small satellite learning centre on the nearby Isle of Barra.

Barra is a small island which is roughly 60 square kilometres in area. A single-track road runs around the coast of the island, following the flattest land, and linking the many coastal settlements. The interior of the island is hilly and

Identifying assets session with Glenbarr Community Development Association.

largely uninhabited. Barra has a population of around 1264 people[2], and is the only place in the world where scheduled flights land on a beach. South Uist in comparison is the second-largest island of the Outer Hebrides and has a population of around 2000 people.

Community tradition

The Highlands and Islands of Scotland are noted for their great traditions of community activity and resilience, which have been strengthened by a collective memory of traumatic historical events such as the Highland Clearances and Famine, and preserved the wealth of few over the wellbeing of many. More recently, rural depopulation and the decline of the Gaelic language have generated collective support for cultural and political action (Wightman, 2015).

For example, South Uist and neighboring islands of Benbecula and Eriskay were involved in Scotland's biggest-ever community land buyout in 2006. After a long campaign for collective ownership, the Stòras Uibhist[3] community company now manages 37.6 hectares across the three islands, which are connected by causeways. The ethos of Stòras Uibhist is about putting the wellbeing of islanders and sustainability of communities at the heart of all their activities.

Studies of common tradition in rural Scotland have found that residents of rural communities consider collective behaviour and action a means of claiming space, in an effort to assert identity and resist oppression (Busby & MacLean[4], 2010; Smith, 1993[5]). This, coupled with increasing market failure and austerity-led public service cutbacks, has resulted in a high density of social and community enterprises – which exist to provide vital services to sustain communities, and fulfil community aspirations.

About Cothrom

Cothrom was initially set up in 1992 to support women returning to work but has grown into an established SQA (Scottish Qualification Authority) accredited training provider, with a diverse range of options for adult learning and skills training. Each year, Cothrom has about 200 learners engaged in adult learning, employability programmes, SVQs (Scottish Vocational Qualifications), and Modern Apprenticeships. In 2007 Cothrom moved into a purpose-built learning

2 Outer Hebrides Island Area – Resident Population Change 1981 to 2011, National Records of Scotland. Available from: https://www.cne-siar.gov.uk/strategy-performance-and-research/outer-hebrides-factfile/population/island-populations/ (29.04.2021)
3 Stòras Uibhist Website. Available from: https://storasuibhist.com/ (29.04.2021)
4 Busby & MacLean (2010). Rural Identity in the Twenty-first Century: A Community of Crofters or Crofting Communities? *Journal of Law and Society*, 37(4), pp. 592-619. Available from: https://www.jstor.org/stable/40958934 (3.12.2019)
5 Smith, S. J. (1993) Bounding the Borders: Claiming Space and Making Place in Rural Scotland. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 18(3), pp. 291-308. Available from: https://doi.org/10.2307/622461 (29.04.2021)

centre in the middle of South Uist, which includes a Gaelic medium pre-school nursery, Cothrom Òg.

The organisation is now comprised of three parts – *Cothrom*, the main learning centre, *Cothrom* Òg, the Gaelic medium pre-school nursery, and *ReStore,* their furniture recycling and training enterprise.

Cothrom recognised that some learners thrive better out with the traditional classroom setting, and to complement their existing range of training provision, they set up ReStore in 2006, combining community recycling and upcycling services with the growth of transferable skills through practical workplace learning. ReStore now supports Intermediary Labour Market[6] opportunities for adult learners and is an important routeway for people who cannot access employment or work experience opportunities with local businesses.

In 2017, ReStore moved into a purpose-built recycling centre next to the learning centre, and has grown into a significant social enterprise diverting furniture, textiles, and household items from landfill sites, providing work experience, and mentoring opportunities, and delivering training in a range of skills.

Over the last decade, Cothrom has deepened its impact locally, and served as a community anchor organisation, supporting local development initiatives and community organisations, hosting Local Development Officers, undertaking research on the rural economy, and influencing economic development policy. Cothrom offers mentoring and coaching opportunities for staff and learners and is a popular and accessible venue for community groups and events.

Person-centred approach

Cothrom use a people-based approach to making learning more accessible for people in the local community, or who face barriers to participation in education, training, or employment. They work with people of all abilities, supporting individuals to build their confidence and break down barriers to accessing learning. They offer a broad range of learning opportunities, including certified national qualifications, employability support, community-based adult learning, and classes on childcare, retail, and furniture recycling.

Their operational area is very broad, spanning 9 remote and sparsely populated islands. This means that learners often have to travel considerable distances to attend the learning centre. Many islanders rely on a poor transport network and infrastructure, which can significantly increase journey times – acting as a barrier to participation.

---

6 The intermediate labour market. Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2000). Available from: https://www.jrf.org.uk/file/36474/download?token=BCEs5muH&filetype=findings (29.04.2021)

To address this, Cothrom have prioritised digital engagement, and offer virtual learning options to enable people to access learning remotely. However, they do believe that everyone coming together in the learning centre is really important for peer learning and social engagement.

Networks and partnerships

Digital engagement
Starting point – The search for broadband

The current manager of Cothrom came into post in 2017 and was met with an ongoing fight to get a broadband connection to the centre. As well as having no broadband connection, the centre had hugely outdated computers, systems, and equipment, along with very low staff skills. A 'don't touch' attitude was pervasive throughout the team, who depended on one person for technical knowledge and skills. This was bad for overall sustainability, but also poor for team morale.

When Cothrom inquired about installing a broadband connection, they were advised that installation would cost around £70K, a sum which was well beyond their means.

Plan A – Dreaming big

At the time, Cothrom had a Development Worker who had been employed to progress digital engagement. They developed a plan to seek seed corn funding from the Ufi VocTech Trust (https://ufi.co.uk/grant-funding/)– which would enable them to attract and secure investment to pay for broadband installation.

Their proposal was to create a Ufi-funded digital roll out project, to create a bespoke learning environment which could be accessed by all users and modelled for roll out in other areas and organisations. The virtual learning environment would be supported by high quality broadband and equipment for staff and learners. This was an ambitious project, designed to attract investment for broadband and equipment.

Plan B – Rethinking the focus

Cothrom progressed with appointing a consultant, writing a project plan, undertaking consultation meetings with key clients, staff, and stakeholders. Ultimately however, the project was too ambitious, overly complicated for the needs of staff and learners, and people began to become confused and disengaged.

Cothrom reflected on this and made the brave decision to walk away from the project due to the lack of buy-in or interest from staff and community, but

also realising their lack of in-house technical skills and expertise would hamper their ability to successfully develop and deliver the project.

Lessons learned:

- ■ An ambitious project is not always the best fit for your community. You need to listen to your stakeholders and consider their needs, issues, and goals.
- ■ Know your limitations and understand the options you have.
- ■ Be realistic about your staff capabilities and consider usability.
- ■ Consider cyber security and personal privacy.

Political support

In the meantime, Cothrom identified influential stakeholders who could help them access funds, and they lobbied their local Member of the Westminster Parliament, the Scottish Government's Department of Education, and worked with the local community to raise the profile of the campaign.

Ultimately, successful stakeholder engagement, networking, and political input persevered, and Cothrom ended up paying only £3500 for the broadband installation. They also secured £40k investment from the local council, and from the Highlands and Islands Enterprise Agency, to upgrade digital equipment, and to upskill and train learners and staff.

Staff undertook significant training to improve their knowledge and understanding of how to use digital tools and systems, resulting in reduced frustration, and improved satisfaction, capability, and confidence. This also increased the baseline of local people who wanted to be involved in IT.

Covid-19

When Covid-19 hit, the islands went into lockdown, and Cothrom had to restrict face to face delivery. They had a limited number of staff working from home who were delivering recovery support and staying in contact with learners. They found that online learning and activities during lockdown was dependent on learners having the motivation, technical understanding, and equipment to access learning from home now that they can't be in the centre with staff.

Digital engagement was accelerated by the pandemic, and staff had to find simple and accessible ways to retain communication with learners. They learned a lot from this process, finding that some people wanted a simple check-in and socialisation, with others preferring to continue learning online.

They found that traditional tools work best. People are a lot more comfortable with email, phone, or face to face communications. Some groups are comfortable with Zoom, but Microsoft Teams is never going to work with a very broad or elderly client group.

Lessons learned

Cothrom has learned a number of lessons about digital engagement since the pandemic, and throughout the process of trying to improve staff and learner confidence and skills.

- Inclusive language is essential to ensure that everyone understands and can be involved.

- Equipment is a critical factor. You need to consider that people may not have access to high-speed internet or digital equipment, and therefore people will have hugely different user experiences. For example, people accessing Zoom on a laptop, phone or tablet can create huge variation in experience and ability to participate.

- Digital inclusion and participation aren't just about technical ability, but there are also social and environmental factors to consider.

- Listening to stakeholder views, and address issues or concerns is important

- Be realistic about your own capabilities and ability to support others.

Social enterprise solutions

Organisation format

Set up as a Company Limited by Guarantee, Cothrom is a Registered Charity, community owned and managed, with 650 local members drawn from the communities across Uist and Barra. Each year the Company holds an Annual General Meeting, where members elect Directors who serve as members of the Board.

Leadership

Cothrom is led by a Manager, who oversees the operational management of the organisation. Strategic leadership comes from the Board of Directors, composed of elected community members. This ensures that Cothrom is acting with accountability and transparency, and that organisational activities are meeting the needs of the local community.

Cothrom has a small number of full-time staff, who coordinate the main learning centre, ReStore and Cothrom Òg nursery, as well as a large cohort of part-time staff – who provide support to the nursery, as learning tutors to the centre, and as support workers. The organisation also benefits from the dedication of a small group of volunteers, who support various aspects of work.

Financial

Cothrom generate two-thirds of its income each year through trading from Cothrom Òg nursery provision, and from sales made via ReStore. The organi-

sation also generates income from a number of grant funding sources, and as a provider of adult learning opportunities and programmes. For more detail, you can view their annual accounts here: https://www.cothrom.net/latest-news/cothrom-accounts-2018

In the rural context, it is important to recognise the role that market failure plays, and the higher costs associated with infrastructure, travel, and buying or transporting goods and services.

Social impact

Cothrom's **aim** is to provide community-based learning and training, supported by quality Gaelic childcare, which enables inclusion and encourages full participation in the economic, social, and cultural life of the Western Isles.

They have four **objectives** to achieve this:
1. To provide support and learning opportunities for the local community.
2. To develop a sustainable economic and environmental strategy for the organisation.
3. To promote the language and culture of their local community.
4. To support the local community to become more resilient, enterprising, and sustainable.

To measure quantifiable social impact, Cothrom is able to measure how many people are engaged with their Cothrom learning and training opportunities, how many children attend the nursery, and how many people gain employment experience and skills training at ReStore, as well as the volume of recycling processed, and value of sales made.

You can read their annual statement here, which includes measurable impact figures: https://www.cothrom.net/latest-news/cothrom-accounts-2018

Social media and website
Cothrom Website: https://www.cothrom.net/
Cothrom ReStore Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/cothrom_restore/
Cothrom Learning Centre Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/Cothrom-LearningCentre/

Virtual tour of Cothrom
Manager Kirsty MacCormick gives a presentation and virtual tour of Cothrom, focusing on their digital engagement learning journey. View this on YouTube: https://youtu.be/ga9Kjrk6MNE

3.4. Germany: Neulandgewinner

The programme

'Neulandgewinner' means literally 'The one who gains new territory'. This expresses quite nicely the innovative character of this programme: to start with the individual who has an idea. 'Neulandgewinner' is a programme funded by the Stuttgart-based Robert-Bosch-Stiftung and implemented by the Thünen Institute for Rural Development eG since 2012. More than 97 initiatives have been funded since then within the framework of five calls for funding, for which 1425 applications had been received. Common good orientation was built in as an important criterion for the award. The Robert-Bosch-Stiftung has invested 7,5 Million Euro in total. 'Neulandgewinner' has become one of the most important programmes for promoting vibrant communities in the rural areas of eastern Germany in recent years

Community

The goal of the programme is to support individuals in the rural areas of the so-called 'German East', i.e., the parts of the German federation that have belonged to the GDR before 1990. These areas have undergone huge transformation over the thirty years. Rural out migration and decline of public services creates a complex set of challenges for those who have remained. However, the retreat of public service also creates room for new solutions. This is exactly the context in which the Robert-Bosch-Stiftung wishes to invest in people and new ideas. The programme includes not only funding for individuals but also a coaching programme, establishment of a network and a lot of publicity activities, which in sum all benefits the individual action on site. The coaching programme also helps linking the local civil society initiatives with partners from economy and politics in order to increase their impact and visibility.

The programme is rather innovative for the German context. Rural development is of course nothing new for Germany, but these processes are usually very much driven by administrations. There are on the other hand funding programmes for individuals with business ideas (EXIST programme), but in that context the community and social aspects are not relevant, only the economic viability counts.

'Neulandgewinner' initiatives usually embrace activities in the following domains: innovative models for rural living and working, new concepts for mobility and energy supply, building community through art and culture. The key for community activation is that the programme supports persons who are already embedded in the local context and thus able to activate and involve others.

Tonndorf Castle in Thuringia, Germany, has been the starting point of a bottom-up rural development process. After 15 years of revitalisation of the old castle the group living there has recently started to involve the village people, called 'Talvolk' ('the people from the valley') into this process. This has been supported by the 'Neulandgewinner' Programme. Source: Thomas Dörfer, Wikimedia Commons.

Starting from 2023, the leadership for the programme will be handed over to the self-standing organisation 'Neuland gewinnen e.V.', which is by itself a spin-off of the programme. This way, the Neulandgewinner approach has successfully emancipated itself from the big institutions that once had initiated it. Meanwhile, there is also significant co-funding coming from the respective German Länder.

Project example: Talvolk e.V.

The Talvolk – literally: the people from the valley - started as a citizens' initiative for good coexistence and sustainable development in the four villages of Hohenfelden, Nauendorf, Tiefengruben and Tonndorf in Thuringia, Germany. In the meantime, they have become a non-profit association and have launched car-sharing benches, regular village cinema performances, revived orchards and inspired solidarity farming. All activities - whether ecological, social, cultural or economic - are aimed at learning together for a sustainable regeneration of our shared living space. Gradually, more and more people, also from other villages, are taking part. They get to know each other better and their projects become bolder, such as the founding of a free local school with a broad network of learning places and many supporters. For more information: http://talvolk.de

Networks and Partnerships

The funded projects typically revolve around the following topics: participation, culture, social cohesion, infrastructure, sustainable tourism, digitalisation, agriculture and much more. They usually take the organisational form of cooperatives, social businesses or local associations. Check this link for a full overview of all funded projects: https://neulandgewinner.de/projektuebersicht.html

Next to the individual local projects, the Neulandgewinner initiative supports three networking formats:

- **Forums:** Six of them have been held so far and the connect the funded individuals with other actor groups
- Überland **Festival:** a three-day festival in Görlitz held usually in early September. It brings initiatives from all over Germany and beyond for exchange, co-creation and having a good time
- **Open Neuland:** A one-day conference of actors in which they share experiences on a topic in workshops, lectures, or thematic rooms. Open Neuland takes place at different locations in cooperation with local activists.

Social Impact

The programme has recently been evaluated by the team of sociologist Prof. Dr. Heinz Bude, Kassel University. From their observations, the following findings can be concluded:

The idea of investing into individual people and their ideas has proven to be very effective. This is different to 'classical' funding approaches where grants are typically given to existing organisations or NGOs. Neulandgewinner is always about individual people, their dreams and capacity for change. Typical participants of the programme bring an interesting mix of characteristics with them: practical abilities, a sense for politics and a will to designs. 60% of them are female and 18% are returnees who had previously left their region in Eastern Germany. Sociologists assume that an important success factor is linked to the creation of a new local milieu of co-creation and shared responsibility. The initiative also benefits a lot from a general societal trend to leave the bigger cities and to search for new opportunities in small towns. The most important question for the moment is to evolve from a structure of projects to a new form of local culture and governance.

Further information

Website, videos and reports are all in German language

Main website: http://neulandgewinner.de

Video library: http://neulandgewinner.de/service/mediathek.html

Landlebtdoch is to become a platform for stories, inspirations, projects and knowledge about villages, small towns and rural areas: https://landlebtdoch.de

4. Policy recommendations

One important stakeholder in rural development is public administration, whose actions and decisions have a major effect on rural communities and to their development efforts. Therefore, based on our experiences in the project, in the next chapter we present recommendations for policy measures to support the development of rural social entrepreneurship.

Support and capacity building

Public policies should create an enabling eco-system for developing social businesses and facilitating, among other aspects, access to funding. This includes promoting social enterprise as an approach and providing business development services and support structures as well as access to finance (loan and grant) to develop capacity, skills and capability and enable rural communities to take forward innovative solutions to rural challenges using social enterprise approaches. An effective support infrastructure also enables rural communities to take forward social enterprise approaches to the range of non-public sector opportunities, creating enterprise approaches to delivering key services such as fuel filling stations and village shops which whilst outwith the public sector are critical for the sustainability of rural communities. Support for skills development and business support is particularly important within the rural context where organisations are smaller and have less in-house capacity along with a reliance on volunteers.

Influencing the next generation

Mainstreaming social enterprise as an approach with young people is an important factor in encouraging social enterprise activity and attracting young talents into the sector. This is particularly important in the rural context where issues of outmigration and depopulation can affect the sustainability of rural communities and enabling young people to be involved in social cohesion activity as well as recognising local opportunities can assist in retaining and attracting young people to rural communities. Policies which promote and develop skills for young people in social enterprise through the education system should be encouraged as well as initiatives for young people in the social economy and integration of young people in the enterprises of the social economy. Where possible this should draw from and engage with local activity to enable young people to participate with local initiatives and ensure effective succession planning for rural social enterprise.

Social procurement

Social procurement provides an opportunity for government and corporate spending to deliver social and environmental benefits as part of the contracting arrangements.

Socially responsible public sector procurement can provide a framework to address the impact on society of the goods, services and works purchased by the public sector. The European Commission has published a collection of 71 good practice cases showing how public buyers have implemented socially responsible public procurement (SRPP), to promote employment opportunities, decent work, social inclusion, accessibility, compliance with social and labour rights in the EU and globally, while delivering high quality social services and facilitating access of social businesses to public tenders. This includes policies requiring the use of social clauses to support employment of specific groups, policies focused on supporting access to public contracts by social enterprises and not-for-profit organisations, and policies on Social Return on Investment. Making socially responsible public procurement work - Publications Office of the EU (europa.eu)

Communication and open interaction

Municipal communication on future procurements and other municipal service needs, plays a key role in supporting and promoting social entrepreneurship: rural communities may also be willing to take responsibility for providing a service or activity.

The municipality should also listen to the service needs of rural communities when planning the municipality's service activities and discuss service implementation together with the communities. Even if there is no provider in the community for the required service, rural residents will be able to influence and be heard in the village services, which in turn will support and develop local democracy and participation. A good way to strengthen communication and interaction is, for example, partnership table activities.

Attention to procurement

One of the challenges for rural social enterprises has been to respond to municipal tenders, as tenders and procurement are often too large for small players to respond to. With regard to procurement, the municipality should pay special attention to open market dialogue with all potential service providers (including villages), dividing procurement into smaller parts, procurement criteria and local and social impact assessment.

Focus on partnerships

The provision of services in cooperation between the municipality and the village community benefits both the municipality and the village: the partnership strengthens the interaction and trust between the municipality and the village, supports the well-being and vitality of the village and increases the weight of

the countryside in the municipality. Communities can also contribute to complementing the provision of public services by cooperating with the municipality or producing services that the municipality is interested in providing but cannot implement.

Exploring service production alternatives

Municipalities should take into account the operating conditions of a social enterprise, especially in areas where there is little competition due to the small size of markets or revenue streams: a social enterprise may well be interested in providing the necessary service and thereby bringing social good to the area. To support this, municipalities should have their own contact person for social entrepreneurship, with whom those interested in social entrepreneurship could contact.

Sustainable investment

Social Enterprises like any kind of business require investment at different stages of their life cycle, from start-up to development of new services. Availability of both grant and loan finance are important to support social enterprise in the rural context. Policy which recognises the potential return on investment from grant support for start-up and growth can facilitate development and growth of rural social enterprise activity. Securing investment from mainstream banking can be more difficult due to lack of understanding of the social enterprise business. Policy which supports the creation of an effective marketplace for investment in social enterprise can address these gaps.

Projects and experiments

The development and support of social - and especially rural social entrepreneurship - needs experiments and good examples to tell others what all the municipalities and social enterprises in rural areas can do together and what impact such activities have.

When supporting the rural social enterprise, the different stages of the development should be taken into account. For instance, study tours to other communities might be useful when forming the social enterprise initiative group to give first ideas. Later there might be a need for capacity building support as the investments would make big changes.

Further research

Further research on rural social enterprise can identify good practice and inform future policy and should be supported at a policy level.

5. Important stakeholders and networks for rural social enterprises

It might be challenging to find out where to start looking for guidance and support in the field of social entrepreneurship. In addition to national, regional and local networks and advice organisations there are international networks and organisations who can offer peer support and guidance that might benefit rural social entrepreneurs.

Rural SE Hub

The Rural Social Enterprise Hub www.ruralsehub.net works collaboratively to build the knowledge base on rural social enterprise and the unique characteristics that allow rural areas to develop enterprising solutions to the challenges they face. This includes opportunities for peer-to-peer learning and knowledge exchange nationally and internationally. The Hub supports networking for social enterprise and hosts the ViSEnet learning tools and resources as well as a directory of rural social enterprise.

The Smart Villages network

Smart Villages are communities in rural areas that use innovative solutions to improve their resilience, building on local strengths and opportunities. They rely on a participatory approach to develop and implement their strategy to improve their economic, social and/or environmental conditions, in particular through mobilising solutions offered by digital technologies. Smart Villages benefit from cooperation and alliances with other communities and actors in rural and urban areas. The initiation and the implementation of Smart Village strategies may build on existing initiatives and can be funded by a variety of public and private sources. (source: The European Network for Rural Development).

Promotion and networking within the EU Smart Villages Network is possible through the EU Smart Village platform. **The Smart Villages digital exchange platform** is available at: https://smart-villages.eu/language/en/home/

The mechanism to access the platform is provided below:
1. Access https://smart-villages.eu/language/en/home/ website
2. Create an account.
3. Check the Best practices map
4. Click on the country/area of interest and check the contact details.

The good practices of the Smart Villages community are available for consultation on: **Smart Villages website**: https://smart-villages.eu/language/en/good-practices-categories/

Pilot Project on Smart eco-social villages report: https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/news-events/news/pilot-project-smart-eco-social-villages-final-report_en

Social Enterprise World Forum

The Social Enterprise World Forum SEWF (sewfonline.com) provides an opportunity to engage with and learn from social enterprises from a global perspective. SEWF aims to grow the global social enterprise movement to accelerate the transition to a global impact economy. SEWF has engaged with thousands of social enterprise leaders and practitioners from over 50 countries worldwide, holding forums in cities as diverse as Rio de Janeiro, Addis Ababa, Seoul, San Francisco and Christchurch. In 2020, due to the coronavirus pandemic, SEWF established their first digital event, which was their biggest global event to date, with over 5,000 participants across 100 countries.

SEWF works throughout the year to support the global social enterprise movement, including through policy and social procurement work as well as separate events for rural social enterprises, young people, policymakers and academics. This includes a SEWF Rural Forum, which brings together experiences of rural approaches to social enterprise from around the world to share experience and draw learning recognising the important role many social enterprises play in sustaining rural communities.

Nordregio

Nordregio, an international research centre for regional development, policy and planning, was established by the Nordic Council of Ministers in 1997. The purpose of the research centre is to provide Nordic policymakers and practitioners new knowledge and tools supporting the formulation and implementation of effective socio-economic and environmentally sustainable regional development policies. Nordregio specialises in conducting solution-oriented and applied research within rural, urban and regional studies.

Nordregio has published several publications regarding social innovations that are useful to the social entrepreneurs and policy makers as well:

- https://nordregio.org/publications/social-innovation-in-local-development-lessons-from-the-nordic-countries-and-scotland-2/
- https://nordregio.org/key-actors-in-social-innovation-in-rural-areas/
- https://nordregio.org/research/regional-collaboration-on-service-provision-and-social-innovation/
- Rural Attractiveness Project Cases - Nordregio projects

Further information: https://nordregio.org/

The European Leader Association for Rural development *(ELARD)*

The European Leader Association for Rural Development (ELARD) is an international non-profit association set up to improve the quality of life in rural areas and to maintain their population through sustainable, integrated local development. It brings together over 2,200 Local Action Groups and Fisheries Local Action Groups from 28 countries, including from countries that are not members of the European Union but have adopted and are implementing the LEADER methodology. Since ELARD aims to support rural and regional development under LEADER philosophy, to promote experience sharing through its members and partners, and to promote networking and cooperation through transnational projects, community based social entrepreneurship as a topic sits well amongst the interest areas of ELARD. Social entrepreneurs and people interested in the topic can e.g. search potential projects and good examples from the network's database.

Further information: http://www.elard.eu/

Social Economy Europe

Social Economy Europe is the voice of 2.8 million social economy enterprises and organisations in Europe. We are the social economy reference point at European level.

They are a strategic partner to European institutions and have led on EU policy on the social economy. Created in November 2000 under the name of CEP-CMAF – the European Standing Conference of Cooperatives, Mutuals, Associations and foundations – with the purpose of establishing a permanent dialogue between the social economy and the European Institutions. In 2008, CEP-CMAF changed its name and officially became Social Economy Europe. Since its foundation, Social Economy Europe has been the secretariat of the European Parliament's Social Economy Intergroup.

Further information: https://www.socialeconomy.eu.org

Acknowledgments

The background of the ViSEnet-project is based on the experiences of developing community-based tourism which led us to think about the potential of rural communities to provide needed services by themselves. The overall framework for the project was built around social entrepreneurship which was still a rather unknown business model in Finland at that time. We are extremely thankful that the Finnish National Agency for Education saw the potential of the project and granted our partnership the funding for supporting the rural communities by creating learning material targeted especially to the rural areas.

As social entrepreneurship was something we had only little experience of at the time, it was important to have an accomplished project group with diverse expertise to support the project. With the help of our trusted project partner EMU we gathered a strategic consortium of universities of Estonian University of Life Sciences, Nürtingen-Geislingen University and Bucharest University of Economic Studies to strengthen the knowledge of rural social entrepreneurship. In addition, we were extremely lucky to have a social enterprise, Inspiralba from Scotland, to join in the consortium with an extensive experience of social entrepreneurship in rural areas. We would like to thank all the partners for your commitment for the project even though the COVID-19 did make us rethink some of the project actions. During the COVID-19 the project group proved to be very innovative and determined to find solutions where others were seeing problems. It has been a privilege to work with you all.

The greatest thanks of all are directed to the rural communities who have been involved in the project. Your expertise, participation and dedication have been invaluable, and we are grateful to have had the opportunity to work with you. It has been a privilege to get to know you, and we are hoping to meet you again, hopefully in face to face this time.

At this moment we have a brand-new national strategy to promote social enterprises in Finland that also acknowledges the community-based social enterprises usually located in the rural areas. We are proud to be able to contribute the development work of rural community-based social entrepreneurship from our part with the intellectual outputs created in the ViSEnet project.

University of Helsinki Ruralia-Institute, Seinäjoki, Finland

Merja Lähdesmäki, Principal Investigator: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0787-8871
Katja Rinne-Koski, Project Manager: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8569-4248
Anne Matilainen, Project Expert: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6726-3636

Project partners:

University of Helsinki Ruralia Institute, Finland (coordinator):
Contact: Katja Rinne-Koski, katja.rinne-koski@helsinki.fi

Estonian University of Life Sciences, Estonia:
Contact: Roger Evans, evanter.ou@gmail.com and Lea Sudakova, lea.sudako-va@emu.ee

Nürtingen-Geislingen University, Germany:
Contact: Roman Lenz, roman.lenz@hfwu.de and Ellen Fetzer Ellen.Fetzer@hfwu.de

Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Romania:
Contact: Carmen Paunescu, carmen.paunescu@ase.ro

Inspiralba, Scotland:
Contact: Ailsa Clark, aclark@inspiralba.org.uk

All website links were correct at the time of publishing.