

15th NRN - Open Space event

Can a Rural Parliament be the NRN?

This discussion kicked off as a result of a process that is currently underway in Scotland – i.e. working towards a rural parliament for Scotland.

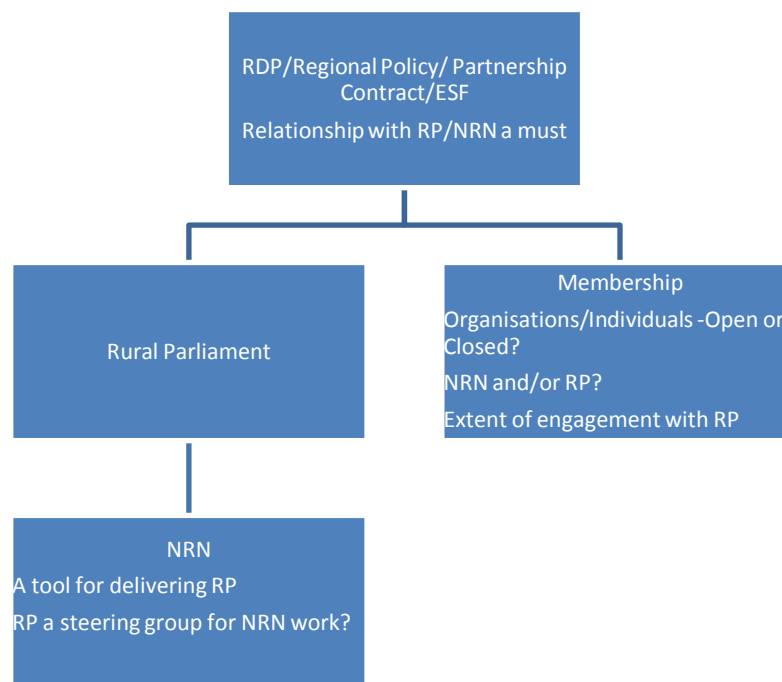
The accompanying PDFs outline possible approaches.

- a 'Scene Setting' paper for the event in Edinburgh on 29 May.
- Executive Summary of the Rural Policy Centre's Report into European Rural Parliaments (weblink below)

<http://www.sac.ac.uk/ruralpolicycentre/pubs/thrivingcommunitiespublications/ruralparliaments/>

It was clear from the discussion that the answer to the question is – **IT DEPENDS!**

What are the **ACTIVITIES/SCOPE/OBJECTIVES** of the Rural Parliament?
What is the **EXTENT** of **STAKEHOLDER PARTICIPATION AND/OR MEMBERSHIP?**



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We then had a chat about legitimacy – **organisations or individuals being members of RP and/or NRN.**

There was agreement that success very much depended on the governance models adopted by both the NRN and the RP from the outset to deliver desired outcomes.

For example:

An NRN can have a spectrum of actors involved in its work/or overseeing but they need not necessarily be members of the NRN.

The same could be said of a Rural Parliament – although it could also be argued that an RP could represent a broader church from Rural Society.

SO MEMBERSHIP IS IMPORTANT.

Who are the target group?

What form will the membership take? What will be the level of participation?

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Governance models, legitimacy, & stakeholder participation.

Governance of Rural Networks.

Aims of improving governance model: active stakeholder participation and (ideally) shared agenda setting by all actors: i.e how to come to an actor driven network.

The question of governance is in close relation to Alistairs question where the Scottish idea of setting up a rural parliament in order to have all stakeholders engaged in a process in which they actively participate.

What can we do to improve the stakeholder engagement and work not for the network but facilitating on behalf of the network actors. Could there be a mechanism in which the stakeholders themselves (all the players in the network) are at the core of the governance? How to improve the NRN framework?

Comments: you have make explicit how the stakeholders are involved in the network and what the relation is between the MA, the NSU and actors in the network.

What we see as a deficit in the current framework of the network is the lack of clearly defined role of members/stakeholders. There is also no exchange of information of how this has been dealt with in different NRNs. The Dutch NSU feels the need to have an overview of the situations in different NRNs on how the governance model works and what questions of legitimacy and stakeholder participation are present.

The discussion revolved mainly around 3 things:

- The position of the NSU: There are different forms of governance structure. Generally the NSU is situated within the ministry or governmental unit or the NSU has been contracted out to a (consortium of) private organisation. Within the governance model there is some form of membership: there is a broad range in different MS how membership is defined/perceived:
 - Formal membership through subscription by either individuals or organisations.
 - Informal 'membership' through subscription on our periodical and newsletter, attendance at events & workshop we gain our network can be made visible.
- Legitimacy: for whom is the NSU working? Regardless of the structure, separate thought has to go into how to enable actors in the field. The form of membership nor the governance model give any guarantee about the participation of stakeholders. However the question of how stakeholders are formally addressed has to be clear.
- Participation: to what extent are rural actors actively involved in the network? We have been exploring the idea of 'shared agenda setting' – how to come from supply to demand driven network facilitation where the actors themselves are the true drivers of the network in which the NSU is supportive.