

Added Value of Networking



Success Story – Looking towards a ‘Rural Future’

Basic information	
NRN:	Rural Network for Northern Ireland
Theme:	Success story
Coordinator:	Aileen Donnelly
Partners:	n.a.
Beneficiaries:	n.a.
Resources:	n.a.
Period:	October 2012
Main element of networking:	Effective stakeholder engagement
Other elements of networking:	n.a.

Background

One of the key aims of the Rural Network for Northern Ireland (NSU) is to engage with stakeholders to promote the implementation of Northern Ireland Rural Development Programme (NIRDP). To this end the NSU coordinate a range and activities and events such as study visits, thematic working groups as well as a LAG networking forum. In October 2011 the Rural Network for Northern Ireland held an RDP Networking event ‘RDP Across the Clusters and Beyond’. Subsequent evaluation prompted the Network to coordinate an enhanced two day seminar in October 2012 on the theme ‘*Rural Futures: Inspire, Innovate, Create*’.

Main activities

The event included a mix of inspirational speakers and relevant thematic workshops. It brought together those involved in rural development, enhanced essential networking across the programme and encouraged skills sharing between Local Action Groups/delivery bodies and EU regions. A networking dinner on the first evening also formed part of the programme.

The event was themed ‘*Inspire, Innovative, Create and*’ included a range of contributions looking at how rural could contribute to the region; thinking futuristically about the needs, wants and opportunities for the future and examined how rural people are adapting, innovating and creating new opportunities to



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support long term, positive rural futures. Conference speakers included Maura Walsh of Duhallow LEADER company in, Co. Cork (Republic of Ireland) who spoke of the success of the LEADER 'bottom-up approach' in developing rural areas and Paul Keating of Limerick Institute of Technology (Republic of Ireland) who covered opportunities for Creative Change. Alan Mitchell of Oxford Economics (Northern Ireland) gave a frank summation on the state of the rural economy and how it could be cultivated to create jobs and future sustainability. An innovative panel session was hosted by a former BBC Northern Ireland Rural Affairs journalist who facilitated discussions between a mix of those involved in the agri, food, community and business communities. This session proved particularly topical and insightful as members of the panel discussed a wide range of issues and answered questions from the floor. Group work sessions and a focus on the next Rural Development Programme were followed by an inspirational presentation from Pam Warhurst of the Incredible Edibles Movement on Local Sustainable Development in England.

In addition to speakers and presentation there was also space and time for group work session and all conference activities were recorded by video with delegates encouraged to take part in 'vox pop' feedback sessions. All conference coverage is now online. www.ruralnetworkni.org.uk

Main results/benefits

Evaluation form feedback was hugely positive with delegates enjoying and finding useful the wide range of speakers, group work and interview style session with people who are actually working on the ground in rural areas. The majority of evaluation forms indicated that Networking events such as these are essential for LAG members and other axis representatives to sharing learning, knowledge and experience.

Success factors

In this two day seminar the NSU aimed to showcase a wide variety of speakers on the themes Inspire, Innovate, Create and the event was very much future focused. The packed agenda lent itself to animation of LAG members as they absorbed and participated in a range of ideas and discussions. Perhaps in the future more time could be given to group work exercises and experiences to allow further one to one networking to take place.

Added value of networking

This conference was billed as a Networking event from the demand of the previous year and feedback has suggested that it was very successful in that aim. Delegates had the opportunity to meet, discuss and build relationships and connections.



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Contribution of the NSU

The NSU coordinated and evaluated the event.

Contribution of the partners

n.a.

Additional information

All conference materials are available to view on Rural Network website www.ruralnetworkni.org.uk

Pictures



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Source: Rural Network for Northern Ireland

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