

Added Value of Networking



Finland Study Visit: 11th – 14th March 2013

| Basic information | |
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| NRN: | Wales Rural Network, (Welsh Government) |
| Theme: | Success story |
| Coordinator: | Ryland Smith |
| Partners: | Cadwyn Clwyd, Powys and Monmouthshire LAGs |
| Beneficiaries: | The Finland Study Group comprising thirty individuals of mixed and varied background, led by representatives of Finland's Department of Education and Culture |
| Resources: | n.a. |
| Period: | 11 th March 2013 – 14 th March 2013 |
| Main element of networking: | Collection, analysis and dissemination of good practice, success stories and relevant experience |
| Other elements of networking: | Exchange of relevant experience and know-how amongst stakeholders |

Background

In November 2012, the Wales Rural Network was contacted by Finland's Department of Education and Culture with a request that we host a Study Visit from 11th to 14th March 2013. From prior research, the Finnish organisers considered there to be similarities in the way Finland and Wales made best use of natural / cultural resources and community capacity building.

Keen to determine the results that had been achieved via the Regional Development Programme, they wanted to bring a group of thirty individuals to focus on a wide range of cultural projects funded under RDP. Through the visit, it was hoped that they would be able to see and receive presentations on examples of best practice and learn how different sectors co-operate and how individual projects linked to local communities and economic development.

Main activities

The Finnish organisers had specifically asked that we include one specific project from North Wales and thereafter that the main (but not exclusive) focus be on projects in Powys which was the area they felt



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to most closely resemble Finland. With that in mind, the itinerary for the visit was arranged as follows:

Tuesday, 12th March 2013

The North Wales Open Studios Network: Working to develop and promote cultural tourism by the creation of a network of artists who live and work across North Wales and now have the ability to open their studios to visitors and exhibit their work more widely.

The 'Living Stones' Project (Llanfyllin / Llanrhaedr Ym Mochnant): A church heritage trail linking churches and chapels in the region of Llanfyllin in North Powys. The project undertakes historical research in promoting the trail and each of the individual sites.

Mid-Wales Arts Centre (Caersws): 'Maesmawr' house and grounds provide great potential for a gallery and sculpture park as well as a centre for learning and encouraging the arts.

Wednesday, 13th March 2013

'Art in the Park' (Llandrindod Wells): A small scale project which encouraged local artists to work alongside the local inhabitants and visitors to the Rock Park during the town's Victorian Festival.

Thomas Shop, Woollen Mill and Museum (Penybont): A step into the past to revisit a typical store from the 19th Century. In addition to the shop and woollen mill, Glasu has helped in the production of prototype hand-carved Welsh Dolls, dressed in the traditional costumes of all thirteen 'original' Welsh counties.

Usk Rural Life Museum (Monmouthshire): Owned by the Rural Crafts Preservation Society, the museum supports a wide-ranging education and out-reach programme and houses an extensive collection of rural artefacts dating from Victorian times to the 1940s.

'Raglan Roots' Project (Raglan): The project raises awareness of historic buildings, places, people and events by marking sites of specific local historic interest and the residences / graves of any person who made a significant contribution within the district of Raglan.

Thursday, 14th March 2013

Chepstow Museum (Interpretation Room): A new, exciting multimedia and interactive interpretation exploring a wide range of historical themes in respect of Chepstow and the River Wye.



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Walking with Offa: A cross-border co-operation project which has identified sustainable tourism as the top priority for development along the National Trail and the wider area of Offa's Country.

Networking Event: A lunch-time event which provided an opportunity to compare Finland and the Welsh Government's approach to the current RDP programme and the way forward to the next.

Main results/benefits

The Study Visit provided an excellent opportunity for the visitors to experience the work undertaken by Welsh LAGs in promoting a variety of cultural projects which provide a positive impact to local economic development. From evaluation received, it has been confirmed that in one case, the visit to one specific project had prompted the delegate to contact a local council and church to forge ahead with plans which had seemingly lain dormant up to this point.

It is difficult to determine whether there were any benefits to the hosting groups as well as the visitors. Certainly, some interesting discussion took place but with the projects already operational, it is unlikely that comments at this stage would have made too much of an immediate impact on their forward planning.

Success factors

Following the Study Visit, the Finnish organisers sent out twenty-eight Evaluation Forms, of which sixteen were returned.

The average rating for the success of the visit (where '1' was deemed 'Very Poor' and '5' 'Excellent') was marked at '4.38' with particular reference made to the level of organisation, provision of pre-information, the number of diverse projects visited and the charisma and commitment of those involved in making them work.

The Group flew in to Manchester on the evening of 11th March and left Tintern en route to London on 14th March. Despite such arrangements having been made by the Finnish organisers, the less positive comments focused on the overall distance travelled over the three days and commented on a perceived lack of flexibility in the programme. Power-point presentations didn't appeal to everybody but were deemed the best way to share information within the limited timescale available.

Added value of networking

The networking function of the Wales Rural Network was key in making this trip possible. Following the initial request, which provided a basic framework for the visit, WRN identified the geographical areas



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best placed to participate in the programme, made initial contact and thereafter maintained an active overview to ensure that local planning tied in with the overall requirements. Regular contact with Finland and the three groups resulted in the establishment of good relationships which streamlined the overall planning and delivery process to the benefit of everybody involved.

Contribution of the NSU

From receipt of the initial request, the Wales Rural Network maintained the key role in organising the required visit. The areas best placed to meet the visitors' requirements were identified and recruited to pinpoint a varied range of high quality projects and thereafter to liaise with project managers/workers on our behalf.

Once the choice of projects had been approved by the Finnish organisers, WRN set out to create a detailed itinerary which also provided a brief overview on each project to ensure each visitor had at least a basic idea of the work undertaken at each site.

Visit packs were presented to the visitors as they boarded the coach in Manchester which provided all necessary information likely to be required throughout the visit, along with a copy of a Case Study booklet highlighting examples of the vast range of additional RDP projects undertaken throughout Wales.

The visitors were welcomed by the WRN Senior Manager at the start of the first day and thereafter, were accompanied by at least one WRN official throughout the visit. The tour ended with an informal networking event involving a wider array of officials from the Welsh Government and representatives of some of the Welsh LAGs. The event provided an opportunity for networking and to compare the approach of the Welsh Government and Finland in working through the current programme and preparation for that of 2014-2020.

Contribution of the partners

The contribution of the partners was key to the overall success of this visit. Each (Cadwyn Clwyd, Powys and Monmouthshire LAGs) identified appropriate projects which best met the specific requirements of the Finnish organisers, provided effective liaison between WRN and the project managers throughout the planning period and arranged for staff members to be available at each project to support the local project staff and provide full and meaningful answers to any project/area specific questions raised by the group.



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Additional information

n.a.

Pictures



Picture 1: Finland Study Visit: Group Photograph - Llanrhaedr Ym Mochnant (12th March 2013)



Picture 2: Finland Study Visit: Group Photograph – St Pierre Hotel, Chepstow (14th March 2013)

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Picture 3: Living Stones – St Dogfan's Church, Llanrhaedr Ym Mochnant (12th March 2013, Presentation by local historian – Mrs Edwards)



Picture 4: The Thomas Shop – Penybont (13th March 2013)
Source: Wales Rural Network, (Welsh Government)

Last Update

April 2013



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