



European Network for  
Rural Development

# Smart Rural Development

8<sup>th</sup> NRN Meeting: Jyväskylä, Finland

Meeting Highlights

The 8th NRNs' Meeting took the format of an '[Innovation Camp](#)' co-hosted by the Finnish NSU and the ENRD Contact Point. Application of the Innovation camp method meant exploring new ways of working within and among NRNs and NSUs.

The rural networks worked together in competing teams, to create ideas for innovative approach and ideas to implementation of the RDPs across four themes selected following feedback from the NRNs' meetings, and linked to the Cork 2.0 Action Plan

The teams worked intensively over two days to generate ideas, refine them and come up with a practical proposal which would be experimental and ambitious, but which could instigate real change.

## Event Information

**Title:** 8<sup>th</sup> NRNs' Meeting: Developing Smart Rural Development

**Date:** 27-28 June 2017

**Location:** Jyväskylä, Finland

**Organisers:** ENRD Contact Point and Finnish NSU

**Participants:** 56

**Outcomes:** Six "NSU teams" developed ideas how to improve implementation of the RDPs to be tested in practice by the Rural Networks

**Web page:** [https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/news-events/events/8th-nrnns-meeting\\_en](https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/news-events/events/8th-nrnns-meeting_en)

## Innovation Camp – Everyone's a winner!

Well, nearly...

Six teams of around 8 or 9 participants operated for the duration of the camp, with two members acting as team coordinators. All teams were supported by the facilitators and a group of three jurors drawn from different stakeholder groups. The most important role of the jurors was to help each team to produce the best possible ideas based on real needs.



The organisers of the camp would like to assure readers that no lasting harm came to the aquatic presenter himself

The jurors were tasked with choosing the "winning" proposal – thus the spirit of competitiveness was built into the process from the start. The ideas were measured both on their innovative qualities and how practical they would be to implement – at least at the initial 'experimental' stage. The jurors were asked to select the one they felt best met these requirements.

The six teams were assessed from three different perspectives:

- The **Jurors' vote** went to the idea for a Euruvation competition – based on engaging all the NRNs in a common endeavour to identify and promote innovative good practices examples.
- The **Popular vote** went to the idea to develop a Youth NSU – based on the need to embed young people's needs and aspirations into the work of the NRNs, commencing with identifying the network activities where young people could best and most immediately make a difference.
- The **facilitators' 'special award'** went to one of the communication teams for very literal interpretation of making the idea pitch 'from the lake'.

**The working method asked for a competitive approach and led to the selection of a "winning" idea, albeit all the ideas were considered important and could be tested in some practical way prior to the next NRNs' meeting.**

## Innovation Camp process

The 'Innovation Camp' is an intensive working method where ideas are encouraged. The process contains an element of competition.

The method started off with brainstorming. The six teams worked on four themes: Rural Proofing, Simplification, Communication (two teams) and Innovation (two teams).



Participants were presented with the format of the meeting, and were allocated into teams based on their own preferences. Each team had two coordinators (NRN representatives) who were guided by the external facilitators ([MDI](#)) in leading their teams through a process structured around 12 'tasks'.

Each task guided the teams through the formulation of the ideas that they would present. At each stage the teams were asked to refine and develop their ideas to ensure that while they started by being adventurous, they would end with practicality.

The only presentations made during the two-day working session were those made by the external facilitation team, and the short pitches made by each team. Feedback from the jury and guidance enabled participants to refine their ideas, and to consider how to make them practical, yet innovative and ambitious.

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## Rural Proofing

The NRN from England has some experience in rural proofing<sup>1</sup>. 'The task for the Rural Proofing team (team 1)<sup>2</sup> was to find innovative ways in which the NRNs can support rural proofing at MS level. The team created a proposed process with five steps:

1. The ENRD CP can run research to find out what rural proofing activities are taking place across the EU and what tools and methodologies have been used.
2. The ENRD CP can then organise an 'EU Rural Proofing' workshop to share the knowledge gathered and stimulate EU-wide rural proofing processes.
3. Each NSU can run stakeholder consultations at MS level to identify the main issues that need to be 'rural proofed' from the perspective of the local stakeholders and policy-makers.
4. Each NSU can organise a communication activity able to show in a 'shocking', innovative and engaging way why rural proofing is necessary.
5. Each NSU can organise a national event on rural proofing with the aim of 'opening our eyes' to the importance of rural proofing (e.g. using the outcomes of the communication activities organised), and plan a national rural proofing



The NRNs believe that they can have a more prominent role in coordinating rural proofing activities at national level and can be the organisers of discussion platforms engaging local stakeholders and policy-makers.

<sup>1</sup> Rural Proofing is defined as 'a process which ensures that all relevant executive policies are examined carefully and objectively to determine whether or not they have a different impact in rural areas from that elsewhere, because of the particular characteristics of rural areas, ([DEFRA, 2002](#))

<sup>2</sup> Teams were numbered to distinguish between the teams working on the same topics

## Communication

Teams 2 and 3 worked on the two main communications needs related to the Cork Declaration and Rural Development policy:

1. Changing attitudes to the potential of rural area
2. Raising awareness of the opportunities and successes presented by the RDPs

The two teams took different approaches, as follows:

**Main challenges** the groups sought to address:

1. Improve and modernise communications tools to reach out to new audiences (Team 2)
2. Reduce duplication of effort between networks trying to communicate similar messages (Team 3)

**Ideas explored:**

- Team 2 considered how digital technologies, apps and geo-caching (location tagging) could be utilised to communicate rural development messages and improve the visibility of rural businesses and services
- Team 3 explored the extent to which rural network support units (national and European) could plan joint communications strategies, implement joint campaigns and use common communications tools to pool resources and effort.

**Final proposals:**

- Team 2 proposed '**Ruramon**' – a cartoon-style character to be used consistently across apps, games, educational packages and other tools promoting rural areas and rural potential
- Team 3 proposed '**Stealing ideas**' - a dedicated network of communications officers of the different network support units to share materials, build on each other's work and potentially work towards joint campaigns in



## Simplification



Team 4 worked on simplification, starting with the premise that RDPs are too complicated, especially for those stakeholders who are potentially interested in the investment Measures.

The target was therefore to:

- identify practical solutions
- provide practical ideas

The target group would be stakeholders in each country (beneficiaries of the RDP Measures).

The proposal was a stakeholder consultation process with NSUs coordinating the discussions at national level. Stakeholders, MAs and PAs would be asked to identify problems and propose practical solutions for implementation.

This process would be piloted by the NSUs from Finland, Portugal, Estonia, Poland, France and others, working with the MA, PA, possibly auditors and others. The ENRD CP and European Commission could support the collecting and sharing of ideas at European level.

The timetable for activities was expected to start after the summer, reporting in 2018. The process would be as inclusive as possible, looking to encourage stakeholder participation and submission of ideas, including practical proposals.

## Innovation

The task for Teams 5 & 6 was to come up with a format that would help to create and share innovation in practice.

Team 5 proposed to plan and pilot a **Rural Youth NSU** at either regional or national level, potentially in Finland. The NSU would plan and provide the required resources, recruit the participants and oversee the process, working with existing networks of youth organisations (Youth LAGs, young farmer and entrepreneur associations, 4H, educational organisations etc.)



Outside experts would be used to identify possible issues in the innovation processes. The Youth NSU would plan and execute outputs, supported by the NSU. The process would start in 2018, with a 14-month pilot stage.

The proposal by Team 6 was to create a **Euruvation Contest** to share, foster and celebrate innovation, bringing together all 32 Rural Networks for one 'innovation day' on 26 June 2018. Each Rural Network would nominate an innovative project through a two-minute video shared on an online platform. The 'Euruvation Contest' would then see an award ceremony, celebrating innovation on the premises of a host project and showcasing innovative projects and products. The winner would be announced live on the platform, where all the projects could also be viewed.

This day would be the final part of a week where rural actors and multi-sectoral innovators come together from across Europe to share and present projects and innovative ideas and methodologies, helped by specialists and creative peer-to-peer exchange approaches.



## Outcomes and Actions

Responses from the participants in the Innovation Camp indicated that they thoroughly appreciated the method used. The ideas developed were seen as highly interesting and different NSUs expressed interest in taking them further – either in parts or as a whole.

The role of the NRNs as coordinators in each team meant that they were active in leading and driving the content of the meeting.

Participants in particular emphasized the importance of "neutral" role of the organisers - the Finnish NSU and ENRD CP – who were acting as members of teams rather than as facilitators.

The process itself was seen as bringing the ENRD network closer together through the work in teams involving experienced NRNs with new networks, longstanding NSU staff with newcomers, and NSU staff with ENRD CP colleagues. This way of working was seen by many participants as something durable since these teams now aim to continue working together in implementing their ideas around the themes addressed.

The challenge now is to put the ideas presented into action – the model for this was presented as identifying actions to be taken within six days, six weeks and six months. Responsibility now passes to the network members to initiate and to implement their ideas!