

**Vital Rural Area** is a European co-operation project (2009-2014), comprising 13 project partners from six North Sea countries, focused on the strengthening of rural areas. The central part of the project is formed by the **Rural Power Pack**, a general working method for sustainable regional development created with a large number of best practice pilot case studies. This **Rural Power Pack** provides an interactive toolbox to be applied in other regions throughout the EU27.

The main goal of the **Vital Rural Area** project is to develop transnational strategies to strengthen regional rural areas by finding new and innovative solutions to three main socio-economical problems, encountered in most rural areas: lack of economic development and innovation, negative or insufficient regional promotion and downsizing of the level or accessibility of services and amenities. These problems were converted into three main challenges:

1. The empowerment of SMEs towards new economic prospects and innovations
2. branding of regions for professional marketing
3. optimising services, for more and better accessible services and amenities

Vital Rural Area's 43 projects focused on one of these three main issues, and covered one or more of these seven themes:



The projects evolved into best practice pilot case studies that have been discussed and improved and sometimes tested and implemented in other Vital regions.

The **Co-operative Agreement Approach** was used as an organisation and process instrument that ensured the sustainable implementation of project results.

Developed alongside the delivery of 'best practice' project results, the **Rural Power Pack** is an integral and general working method, that can be applied in many situations where commonly encountered problems or challenges are faced. It consists of a problem solving methodology including practical tools and instruments.

## THE RURAL POWER PACK

<b>THEMES AND CONTENTS</b>  <b>WORK PACKAGES</b> 1. SME EMPOWERMENT 2. BRANDING 3. SERVICES	<b>LOCAL/REGIONAL APPROACH</b> 1. PROBLEM ANALYSIS 2. PROPOSED SOLUTIONS 3. EXECUTION OF PROJECT 4. EXPERIENCES / RESULTS	<b>METHODOLOGY</b> 1. PROBLEMS/CHALLENGES 2. SOLUTIONS 3. BARRIERS 4. TOOLS
<b>THEMES</b> Education Broadband & Digital Services Sme Empowerment Good Governance Community Building Wellbeing & lifestyle Profile & Branding	<b>BEST PRACTICE PROJECTS</b> - Lessons learned / experiences - Applicability check - Sustainability check - Extension Of Knowledge By Exchange	<b>COOPERATIVE AGREEMENT APPROACH</b>  <b>KEY PROJECTS</b>  <b>PRESENTATION</b>

In Belgium our partners are Streekplatform+ Meetjesland, Province of West-Flanders and Intercommunale Leiedal. They specialized in rural issues related to branding and profiling of the region (Meetjesland and Province West-Flanders), broadband applications in health and services and in Good governance and community building (Leiedal).

## DISSEMINATION OF PROJECT RESULTS AND PARTNER SEARCH

Our project results and experiences are now being disseminated throughout other regions and EU-countries. We are searching for new regional partners who can contribute their experiences and ideas to improve our knowledge on specific subjects and the **Rural Power Pack**. To facilitate this process we have introduced 'country pages' on our website, maintained by the partners. A **Virtual Meeting Room**, containing a Skype conference facility, a live stream for connecting partners and a social media corner, facilitating webinars and master classes is now under construction.

## UPCOMING WEBINARS

Upcoming webinars using the Virtual Meeting Room will be launched in early 2014 and focus on the following:

1. **The Innovation House** concept introducing new partners working on stimulating and connecting young entrepreneurs  
(*Simon Simonsen, scs@vejenkom.dk*)
2. **Good governance practices**. Derived from the projects already delivered in Vital ("Ugly spots", "Leaner citizen service" and "Strong governance in a strong region", we are searching for new partners to share ideas on good governance practices, community building and profiling the region  
(*Filip Meuris, filip.meuris@leiedal.be / Peter Verheecke, peter.verheecke@west-vlaanderen.be*)
3. **Broadband implementation and applications**. In several Vital regions there is a vast experience on broadband implementation. We are now investigating future perspectives on optimal use of the broadband facility (services, care, education, entrepreneurship)  
(*Filip Meuris, filip.meuris@leiedal.be*).

We invite you to join us in these activities. Do not hesitate to contact one of us to share your knowledge



## PROJECT MANAGER VITAL RURAL AREA

**Dr. Peter Laan**, Project manager *Vital Rural Area* is an experienced project manager and rural expert, who has been working with EU-programming including LEADER for more than 20 years. In Vital Rural Area, Peter - together with the partnership - developed the Rural Power Pack and its methodology and is responsible for the dissemination of the project.











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## INSPIRING EXAMPLES LOOKING FOR NEW PARTNERS AND CONNECTION TO OTHER RURAL WORKERS

### 1. THE INNOVATION HOUSE

<http://vitalruralarea.eu/sme-empowerment/24-sme-empowerment-and-entrepreneurship/55-37innovation-house>



Rural Power Pack methodology	
 <b>PROBLEMS/CHALLENGES</b>	 Lack of jobs, education, ambition and power
 <b>SOLUTIONS</b>	 A concept/place to support SMEs and entrepreneurs
 <b>BARRIERS</b>	 Culture and habits, politics and timing  Money for investment
 <b>TOOLS</b>	 SWOT analysis for preparation  Case studies from other Innovation Houses

The main objective of the Innovation House concept is for it to be **an incubator to stimulate and support SME empowerment and entrepreneurship**. The general idea is to gather different SMEs and entrepreneurs in inspiring surroundings, collaborating with a supporting and inspiring staff. Enterprises in the house will have a distinct sense of community and must be willing to establish links with each other, but enterprises outside are welcome to use the services as well.

The Innovation House cannot exactly be copied from one place or one country to another, but a number of key elements can be identified and










combined in a local setting. One element is a house with different sized offices, meeting facilities and one meeting room equipped with support for idea-generation and creativity.

The original concept, developed in Vejen Kommun, was introduced and implemented in the Vital region of Lauwersland (Friesland, the Netherlands) and in Rogaland (Norway) in 2012 and 2013 and we are now searching for new partners who have experience in this field and are willing to share this with us.

### 2. GOOD GOVERNANCE PRACTICES

<http://vitalruralarea.eu/good-governance/25-good-governance/90-strong-governance-in-a-strong-region>



Rural Power Pack methodology	
 <b>PROBLEMS/CHALLENGES</b>	 Lack of power
 <b>SOLUTIONS</b>	 Reorganising cooperative network within a region
 <b>BARRIERS</b>	 Regulations, politics, ownership, history
 <b>TOOLS</b>	 <a href="http://vitalruralarea.eu/files/documents/Handbook%20of%20Multilevel%20Urban%20Governance%20in%20Europe.pdf">http://vitalruralarea.eu/files/documents/Handbook%20of%20Multilevel%20Urban%20Governance%20in%20Europe.pdf</a>  <a href="http://vitalruralarea.eu/files/documents/Strong%20Government%20Strong%20Region%20-%20Approaches%20and%20Results.pdf">http://vitalruralarea.eu/files/documents/Strong%20Government%20Strong%20Region%20-%20Approaches%20and%20Results.pdf</a>

Good governance is the act of building relationships and interactions between government, citizens, business and voluntary sector. In a globalised and fragmented world, good governance builds a framework to ensure quality of life and sustainable growth in the region. It is the responsibility of local government to unite all sectors and all players to work together. In doing so, the government should reach out to other organisations.

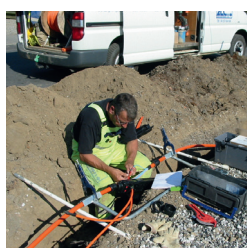
Good governance adds to the quality of a region in many ways. It results in:












- greater effectiveness
- unifying efforts in overcoming sectoral divisions
- equal access to good service-delivery
- allowing citizens to take part in community life - on equal terms (democracy)
- solving lack of transparency, coordination and responsibility division.

We are now searching for new partners that have developed good practices in this field and are willing to share their experiences and knowledge with us.

### 3. BROADBAND-APPLICATIONS

<http://vitalruralarea.eu/broadband-digital-services/23-broadband-and-digital-services/138-20broadband-and-digital-services>



Rural Power Pack methodology	
 <b>PROBLEMS/CHALLENGES</b>	 Lack of infrastructure, services, education
 <b>SOLUTIONS</b>	 Fibre network (FTTH) to everybody  Digital services, training programmes
 <b>BARRIERS</b>	 Politics, regulations, (change of) culture and habits  Money (missing broadband investment)
 <b>TOOLS</b>	 EU's 'Guide to Broadband investment'  Business-case tool

Since distance is always a key issue in rural areas, lack of fast broadband connection is considered to be a major challenge for future growth, development and settlement in rural areas. Networks based on fibre technology are therefore supposed to be a necessity to keep up life quality and company perspectives in the near future.

The Vital project performed in Vejen has become a leading example of broadband application in Denmark and is mentioned as an example of best practice by the EU-Commission. Next to that, other broadband

projects by Vital Rural Area partners have been inspired by experience from the Danish project, and in the Vital Rural Area project, broadband and ICT-applications have been the basis for many different pilot activities.

The actual challenge is to develop and implement new applications for fast broadband in services, care issues, and education. The time is ripe to capitalise on the facilities that can benefit from fast broadband, resulting in saving money for longer periods and therefore opening opportunities to maintain and develop quality and accessibility of basic services.