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:

EDUCATION | BROADBAND & DIGITAL SERVICES | SME EMPOWERMENT | GOOD GOVERNANCE | COMMUNITY BUILDING | WELLBEING & LIFESTYLE | PROFILING & BRANDING

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

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

In Germany, our partners are Stad Langenhagen and the Wirtschaftsakademie Schleswig-Holstein, Büro Husum. They specialised in branding / profiling their region and healthy ageing (Langenhagen), and on developing and spreading knowledge on renewable energy (solar, wind, earth warmth) for regional entrepreneurs (WAK, Husum).

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. E-learning development. Derived from the projects already delivered in Vital (solar water heating by "de Friesche Poort" and earth warmth by WAK, Husum), we are searching for new partners (from knowledge institutes and companies) to develop new e-modules and to find new markets for regional entrepreneurs
   (*Lieuwe Feenstra / Peter Laan, peter.laan@faro-advies.nl*)

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)
   (*Simon Simonsen, scs@vejenkom.dk*).

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-enterpreneurship/55-37innovation-house

Rural Power Pack methodology	
PROBLEMS/CHALLENGES	Lack of jobs, education, ambition and power
SOLUTIONS	A concept/place to support SMEs and entrepreneurs
BARRIERS	Culture and habits, politics and timing Money for investment
TOOLS	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. E-LEARNING FOR REGIONAL WORKERS ON RENEWABLE ENERGY

http://vitalruralarea.eu/component/content/article/39-sme-empowerment-and-enterpreneurship/projects-sme-empowerment/156-e-learning-module-solar-water-heating-nl

Rural Power Pack methodology	
PROBLEMS/CHALLENGES	Lack of knowledge and education
SOLUTIONS	Empowering of regional SMEs by providing them with training on new technologies
BARRIERS	Attitude and lack of ambition and knowledge on innovation processes
TOOLS	E-modules on the practical implementation of different types of renewable energy in different languages A website (www.educationer.eu) to be used in several countries A European network of regional workers and institutes working on renewable energy

SMEs in the installation sector, especially the small ones with 1-15 employees, lack knowledge of the latest innovations. This is thought to be a threat to their long term survival. The main objective of this project is to empower existing SMEs and establish new SMEs in rural areas, by providing training in (new) technologies on renewable energy.

The institute for vocational training Friese Poort (Leeuwarden, the Netherlands) combined with an experienced company in renewable energy (Kenteq), was the first one to deliver an e-learning module for Solar Water Heating. The course is qualified to the high standards of the energy sector. And available on the website www.educationer.eu, ready for use for both the designer and the installer.

Simultaneously, Wirtschaftsakademie Schleswig-Holstein (Büro Husum) delivered a course on the use of Earth Warmth to employees of SMEs and students at the Academy. The website www.educationer.eu provides an excellent tool for adding new modules to the series, depending on the demands of the region or country involved.

We are now searching for new partners that work in the field of installation technology and renewable energy.

3. BROADBAND-APPLICATIONS

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

Rural Power Pack methodology	
PROBLEMS/CHALLENGES	Lack of infrastructure, services, education
SOLUTIONS	Fibre network (FTTH) to everybody Digital services, training programmes
BARRIERS	Politics, regulations, (change of) culture and habits Money (missing broadband investment)
TOOLS	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.