The Interreg IVB North Sea Region Programme

Investing in the future by working together for a sustainable and competitive region.

October 2015

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Vital website
www.vitalruralarea.eu

European Regional Development Fund

Vital Update 10
Vital Rural Area Newsletter

Vital Rural Area Summary

Overview

Vital Rural Area (VRA), part of the INTERREG IVB North Sea Region programme, was a successful project in terms of goals and results. The project ran from January 2009 to December 2014, aiming to improve the socio economic wellbeing of rural areas.

The project was based on the cooperation of 13 rural regions in the North Sea Region Programme, with common challenges and approaches to tackling the needs of areas in decline. The NOFA municipalities: (North East Frisian Approach) was the lead partner.

The creation of a Rural Power Pack (RPP) was central to VRA. The RPP was constructed by converting the project's pilots and other activities into a sustainable method for regional development. It was tailored to regional situations using a four layer approach: problem analysis, proposed solution, barriers and tools. The recurring theme in this methodology is the Cooperative Agreement Approach (CAA), co-operation based on common vision and goals and shared resources and solutions.

Caption: Fibre installation Vejen Commune

Vital Rural Area key achievements

- Forty-five pilot projects delivered.

- All VRA indicators achieved e.g. numbers of citizens and entrepreneurs involved, newsletters, partner meetings and Policy Forums.

- Developed method for strengthening rural regions using the CAA and RPP.

- Created and strengthened networks e.g. quintuple helix networks, innovation houses, regional platforms.

- Produced two websites: the project website **www.vitalruralarea.eu** and **www.educationer.eu**, a website focusing on SMEs, for e-learning on energy solutions.

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Work Packages and pilot activities

Virtual Service Desk Demonstration Twijzelerheide Village Fair

The project comprised three content related work packages: WP3 on SME and Innovation, WP4 on Branding and WP5 on Services, along with work packages on Project Management and Communication that were more operationally focussed. WP6 Scientific Support concentrated on delivering the RPP. All partners participated in at least one of the content related WPs, each delivering several pilots.

WP3 SME Empowerment

WP3 contained a number of activities, including the development, testing and implementing of pilots, that often included transferable tools that can be applied elsewhere.

Some examples:

- Friese Poort/WAK designed a digital course on solar heating. This learning module in Dutch, English and German is designed for SMEs that specialise in installation and focuses on access to knowledge about innovative developments and tools. The students learn how solar water heaters should be designed and installed. The course helps SMEs increase job opportunities in the renewable sector. Similar modules were developed for Wind Power and Energy Saving (so far only in German).

- Finnøy set up a regional local-food centre to support local food producers/ entrepreneurs

- Norfolk: STEP (building a skilled and competent workforce) and Shaping Norfolk's Future (now part of New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership) have had a good response from entrepreneurs participating in curriculum building seminars and other promotional activities, leading to new business innovation, co-operation and spin-offs.

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- NOFA: pilots include Innovation House Lauwersdelta, which was a 'copy' of the Innovationshus in Vejen, and 'Golden Triangle' matching the needs and requirements of SMEs (skills and competencies of future employees) with the curriculum of vocational schools and higher education.

WP4 Regional Branding

As well as developing a branding manual, this WP contained a number of activities, focusing on the development, testing and implementing of pilots, that often included transferable tools to be applied elsewhere.

- NOFA: Dwaande website **www.dwaande.nl**, featuring tourism and doing business in the region, combined with a social media campaign. A network of ambassadors, as used in Meetjesland, was implemented.

- Zeeland Flanders learned from all partners, using best practice to roll out the regional branding model. The brand has been fully implemented and is used on products and services (local delicacies, but also holiday/ tourist packages).

- Meetjesland (West-Flanders: similar in approach and success): the regional branding has been a great success. This is due mainly to the VRA project. Since the start of the project the brand 'Meetjesland' has grown stronger and is used by 14 municipalities, 20 organisations and more than 60 companies, and includes a growing network of ambassadors.

- Langenhagen: the Pferdestärken Langenhagen Campaign was a success and led to a food and bicycle tour and several other activities and spin-offs.

WP5 Services

As in the other work packages, this WP also contained a number of activities, including the development, testing and implementing of pilots, that often included transferable tools that can be applied elsewhere.

- Leiedal featured several digital pilots on LEAN government services (cutting out waste and improving efficiency) and e-inclusion, e.g. 'Ugly Spots, co-curation of a public space'. This was based on an interactive web portal with GIS and social media links, where citizens could discuss and report

![The Interreg IVB North Sea Region Programme]

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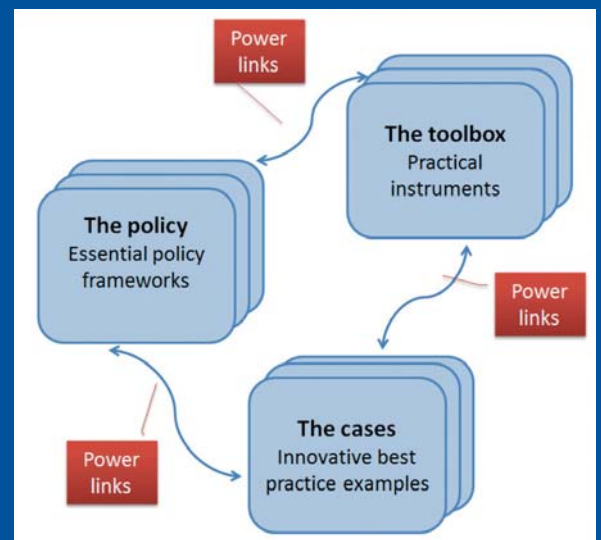## October 2015

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'ugly spots'. Suggestions for improvements were then presented by students and professional designers, and were also discussed on the platform, after which a selection of the plans and recommendations was implemented by local government.

- Fryslân (and NOFA): successful pilots in this WP include 'Klasseglas', bringing fibre to the classroom and connecting lessons with the outside world and schools elsewhere, and 'Small Rural Network Society', a digital portal in Burum village offering general information (on events etc.), but also video e-contact for elderly people with healthcare providers, book swap and a bulletin board matching demand and supply for voluntary services, such as shopping and gardening.

- Rogaland/Finnøy: the lifestyle training course has now been implemented with over 150 participants and has been included in several strategy plans and budgets, both regional and local. For example, the long-term budget for the municipality has confirmed that the pilot can continue after the end of the project period. Also, the pilot has been 'exported' to at least seven other municipalities in different parts of the country.

- Vejen: a number of pilots around broadband networks and services were set up, including a digital e-commerce toolkit, a portal for SME advice, a network of digital ambassadors providing an introduction to digital self-service, and improvements to elderly care by video-conferencing. This made Vejen one of the digital rural capitals in Europe, featuring in the European Commission Digital Agenda, a Whitebook on broadband and digital services, and rural best practice.

Rural Power Pack

The RPP was presented at the final Policy Forum in September 2013. The RPP process began with a review of WP activities, and resulted in an integrated toolbox of methods and best practices embedded in the VRA website. The CAA was included in the RPP as its overall framework.

The RPP includes a detailed description of all pilots/best practices, provides a SWOT analysis (problems/challenges, solutions, barriers, tools), describes their specific features and models/tools used, and supporting documentation. The pilots are grouped into seven themes that are based on the WPs. The RPP is the backbone of the VRA website.

![The Interreg IVB North Sea Region Programme logo]

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Partner meetings, Policy Forums, dissemination and specific meetings

Fourteen partner meetings were organised. The last partner meeting in June 2014 included a 'Get Together' event on the third day, hosting 15 visitors from regions outside the Vital partnership.

Four Policy Forums were staged: Norwich UK (September 2009), Billund Denmark (October 2010), Rinsumageest The Netherlands (May 2011) and Sint Laureins Belgium (September 2013).

Policy Forum Sint Laureins

The Policy Forums brought together policy makers, entrepreneurs, experts and practitioners from the partner regions, national agencies and the EU. They resulted in a transfer of knowledge and early dissemination within and outside the Vital family.

Several individual partner visits were organised, often entrepreneurial visits within and between regions e.g. in West-Flanders and Northeast Fryslân and between Meetjesland and Sluis/Zeeland Flanders. There were also visits by the Norwegian partners and NOFA with groups of entrepreneurs to the Innovation House in Vejen, leading to the establishment of a 'copy' of the Innovation House in both regions.

The dissemination phase resulted in several expert webinars using Skype on subjects such as internet and digital health services; local branding campaigns and events in almost all partner regions; master classes and so far 10 country pages on the VRA website from partners and some external regions. More external country pages will be added in the near future.

Sustainability of the project

Dissemination was an important component of the project and all partners have been involved in this phase. The aims and results of European co-operation, The North Sea Region programme and VRA have been presented on several occasions, as a first step to discuss opportunities for new projects.

Event in Zeeland-Flanders

Following the final Policy Forum in September 2013, conversations and meetings about future projects were carried out in the second half of 2014 e.g. master classes in North East Fryslân, and the final partner meeting with the 'Get Together Event' on the third day.

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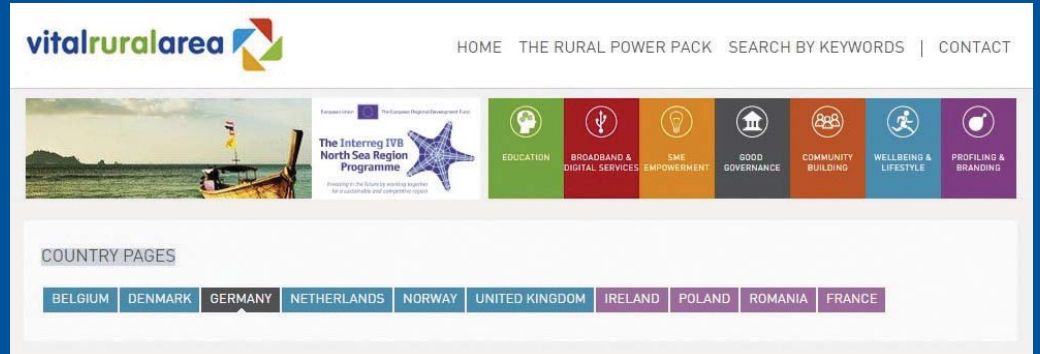
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During 2015 most partners have been involved in a new project application for INTERREG VB NSR, cross-border or other EU Programmes. The VRA website will be updated based on the final activities and reports, and will continue to be updated, adding links to follow-up projects and new partners and countries linked to VRA, with some best practice added to the RPP.

The legacy of the project will be dynamic – not just reports and websites, but active partner participation in future projects, boosting or updating some of the pilots and continuing the implementation of and lessons learned in the RPP and CAA in other projects and regions.

First examples are the INTERREG VB project proposal SELF www.interregself.eu on local participation and sustainable communities, in which several VRA partners are participating, and the project idea Smart Brands, which was developed by partners and is based on the results of WP4 Branding.