



# Vital Update 8

## Vital Rural Area Newsletter



## Special Report: Fourth and final Policy Forum, Sint-Laureins, Meetjesland 26-27 September 2013

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### Overview



*The impressive entrance to the Policy  
Forum venue, the Godshuis*

and the Belgian partners, a large delegation (30+) was present from lead partner NOFA. Other partners, such as nearby Sluis, but also Vejen and both Norwegian partners, were present with relatively large delegations of around 10 people.

Following on from the preparations for the fourth and final Policy Forum, which began in late 2012, the Forum itself on 26 and 27 September 2013 in Sint-Laureins, Meetjesland/BE was a success with 230 delegates attending. The overall project results and the initial findings of the Rural Power Pack (RPP) were presented and discussed with a number of experts and keynote speakers.

The success was largely due to the local support of our partner Streekplatform+ Meetjesland, who shared the event management responsibilities and, along with all other partners, contributed to the programme content. Besides Meetjesland



*Local actor escorts a delegate into the Godshuis*

All partners and guests were invited to an informal gathering and excursions, parallel to the Vital partner meeting on 25 September.

Two local actors escorted all delegates into the Godshuis on arrival, and also staged entertaining sketches during the Forum, such as checking some participants with a metal detector before they were allowed to leave the room at breaks.

Newsletters 5 to 7 were finalised and published in time for the Forum and can be downloaded from our website, [www.vitalruralarea.eu](http://www.vitalruralarea.eu).

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*The wonderful Meetjesland team welcoming delegates*



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### First day: plenary sessions and discussions

#### Keynote speakers



Katja Retsin

The first full day of our final Policy Forum comprised mainly plenary sessions with more than 200 participants. It began with an introduction by our host for the day Katja Retsin. This was followed by an opening speech from Marga Waanders, mayor of the Dutch municipality of Dongeradiel and president of the NOFA Steering Group for the Vital project.



Marga Waanders

The strapline for our Forum was 'be inspired'. We were definitely inspired by our keynote speakers. Our former project director, Eise van der Sluis, gave his perspective on rural areas from his new role as director of the Northern Netherlands Cooperation SNN. He then reflected on his and our common history in the Vital project. This was followed by an 'intermezzo' from our new project director Bauke Schat, who with the project management team, focused on some of the Vital results and then thanked our Meetjesland hosts for their excellent organisation of the Policy Forum.



Eise van der Sluis



Bauke Schat

Podium discussions, inspiring musical performances by Ensemble Querceto and voting sessions kept all participants engaged in following the issues presented and discussed. A number of our partners' representatives were chosen to come forward for one-to-one interviews with Katja Retsin on their 'Vital project life'. Also Peter Laan and other members of the core group were asked in an interview format about the RPP and the website, that were both finalised during the summer.

The early afternoon session was opened by Jan Briers, governor of East Flanders, who highlighted some of the results of Vital Rural Area in his region, from the branding campaign to ambassador events for SMEs, and European projects as a whole. This presentation helped us focus on the future of rural areas and possible follow-up projects, the inspiring thread throughout our Policy Forum.



Adjiedj Bakas

Our final keynote speaker, trendwatcher Adjiedj Bakas, gave us a superb performance with insights to global trends and what they may have in store for our rural regions. He discussed the increasing use of new (social) media links to broadband networks, supporting our daily life and work, but also the downsides of the World Wide Web. He also considered the counter trend to a more 'real' social life and participative society, which has never left our rural villages and towns and will be picked up there promptly. Also other trends, such as more localised sustainable food and energy production, are good news, especially for young people in rural areas, as they will stimulate the job market and lead to new service oriented business ventures. Mr Bakas provided a valuable connection to our youth forum discussion at the end of the day.



Jan Briers



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### Forum/podium discussions: ambassadors, entrepreneurs and youth

The pace and variety of our Forum was largely due to a good mix of keynote addresses and 'intermezzos', of which the podium discussions were a key element. Four video interviews also covered a wide spectrum of interests, from a European parliament member focusing on rural transport, to the former Belgian Prime Minister



*Entrepreneurs' Discussion*

van den Brande, who discussed the new EU funding opportunities. All interviewees reflected on at least some of our individual partner areas.

The first entrepreneurial discussion was staged with two local/regional ambassadors, who looked at the importance of the regional brand for their

products and success, both in improving their regional share of the market and providing 'export' opportunities outside their home region.

The second discussion with entrepreneurs highlighted new initiatives Vital supported in other regions, from a rural Norfolk hotel to the Vejen based Innovation Centre, that has already been copied by two of our other regions. Katja Retsin guided us through these interviews, bringing the participants on stage for inspiring discussions on their future and that of their regions.



*Anne Kristensen (DK) youth forum*

For the last session, a new (but to the Vital family already well-known) host, Annegreet Miedema, moderated a discussion with young people from almost all of our partner regions. They shared their thoughts with us on their region and their own future. For most of them their future and region were closely linked! Though some did see a future outside their region. Others were clear that they would return to their hometown or region after a time abroad. Some saw themselves eventually starting their own business back home. Their vision of the future was mainly optimistic and inspiring, thus presenting us a 'grand finale' for the first day.

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*Annegreet Miedema*



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## First day: side and evening programme

The Policy Forum also included a small project market, in which not only the partners were represented, but also some of their local or regional partners. VRA pilots like the Innovation House Vejen, Kenniswerkplaats NOFA, health and the lifestyle pilot Finnøy/Rogaland and local branding initiatives such as Meetjesland, Dwaande and their products were presented. A total of 20 stands filled the entire market area.

In the evening, some of the participants relaxed with a short cycle tour of the area, enjoying the fabulous autumn (or rather late summer) weather. Others went to a cooking workshop, hosted by a local chef who focused on recipes for local sweet treats!

An early evening aperitif was the welcoming introduction to a wonderful formal dinner, with lively discussions at all of the dinner tables. A casino and music/DJ-night until the early hours finished off the successful first day.



Project Market



Project Market



Formal Dinner



Cycling Expedition



Cookery Workshop



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### Second day: workshops and project follow-up

On the second day, which was moderated by Peter Laan (project management), two sets of five parallel thematic workshop sessions were organised, with almost 100 participants.



Day two workshop

The themes of the workshops and the

key pilots projects presented followed the seven themes in the RPP. Each of the workshops was moderated by a member of the core group, supported by a member of the scientific team, or an external expert. The scientific team/expert commented on the theme and the key thematic pilots, which were presented by a partner representative who was responsible for the pilot, either at the content or local political level. The comments by external experts in each

workshop, and the discussion with participants on the theme and pilots provided valuable input to the RPP, project dissemination and follow-up activities.



Simon Simonsen (DK)



Eve Cronin (UK)

There was a lively discussion on health and lifestyle services, both for an ageing population and as a basic requirement for attracting and maintaining a vital population in declining rural areas. Viable rural villages were also discussed, a follow-up to the youth forum of the previous day.

### Second day: Vital Rural Area dissemination and closure

In the last plenary session, Peter Laan, who is primarily responsible for the dissemination of the Vital project, gave us some insight into the way the project results and the RPP are leading us into the next phase of the project. Dissemination will last until July 2014. In this final stage of the project, our best practice results will be shared with other partners and regions throughout EU28, a process that may lead to further evolution and development of both the Vital themes and RPP methodology.

After the Policy Forum closed, all delegates departed to their homes, with some taking a short walk to buy chocolates and other local specialities in Ghent.

A selection of pictures and videos from the Policy Forum are available on our website.



Peter Laan



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### News from project management

#### Final partner meeting

The next and final partner meeting, to discuss the project's closure, is scheduled for 4 and 5 June 2014 in Northeast Friesland (NL). We will reflect on the final results of our project and look ahead to follow-up activities!



Wietse Hermanns



Peter Laan

#### Newsletters

After finalising the RPP and uploading the new website, featuring the RPP, we are now working on the final stages of the Vital project. Our main focus will be on dissemination, including regions outside the partnership, and the roll out of the RPP. Under the guidance of Peter Laan, we will begin building country pages on the website, as a start for the planned 'observatories' featured in regions in the six member states in our partnership and six regions outside Vital.

The final newsletters will follow during the first half of 2014, focusing almost entirely on the results of the RPP, its key projects, tools and methodologies, and all other activities, events and results of the final dissemination phase of our project.

We will update you on the forthcoming newsletters through our website and twitter.

### Partners Vital Rural Area Project



NOFA, Buitenpost, The Netherlands - lead partner, Norfolk County Council, Norwich, United Kingdom, Streekplatform+ Meetjesland, Eeklo, Belgium, Province of Fryslân, Leeuwarden, The Netherlands, City of Langenhagen, Germany, Wirtschaftsakademie Schleswig-Holstein, Büro Husum, Germany, Vejen Kommune, Denmark, Municipality of Sluis, Oostburg, The Netherlands, Rogaland Fylkeskommune, Stavanger, Norway, Finnøy Kommune, Judaberg, Norway, Friese Poort Bedrijfsopleidingen, Leeuwarden, The Netherlands, Intercommunale Leiedal, Kortrijk, Belgium, Province of West Flanders, Brugge (Sint Andries), Belgium.