The Interreg IVB North Sea Region Programme

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

September 2013

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Vital Update 5
Vital Rural Area Newsletter

Vital Rural Area – Rural Power Pack

Peter Laan - Project Manager - Vital Rural Area - Coordinator Rural Power Pack.

The Rural Power Pack (RPP) is at the heart of Vital Rural Area (VRA) and is the sustainable legacy of the project. It has its origins in the three VRA Work Packages (SME empowerment, regional branding and optimising services) and comprises tools derived from the delivery of partners' 'best practice' projects.

Based on project results and partners' experiences, the toolbox focuses on the **applicability, transferability** and **integral added value** of the projects for the region.

By using the comprehensive knowledge built up by the VRA partners, the RPP offers practical solutions and problem solving for other regions throughout the European Union.
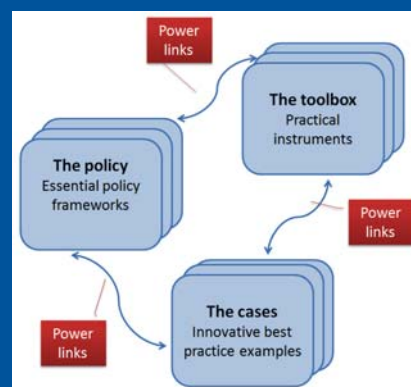
Modelling the Rural Power Pack

The RPP originated from a model developed by the Scientific Team in early 2012. This model was based on the 'RPP triangle' comprising:

Prof. Anne-Mette Hjalager - University of Southern Denmark - Vital Rural Area - Scientific Team.

The basic Rural Power Pack model.

■ *The case corner* where inspiring and illustrative case studies from partners and others are presented. Initially, the focus is on the project partners' experiences. Later case studies from other partners involved in the same types of rural development projects can be included. The case studies and project experiences reinforce the work package themes: regional branding, SMEs and service issues.

■ *The toolbox corner* offers validated tools for those who want to benefit from new experiences in rural development. The tools are based on scientific knowledge and practical evidence and are straightforward and readily used by external partners.

■ *The policy corner* contains policy frameworks and policy initiatives. It links up VRA with EU, OECD and other key policy documents and explains the context.

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Making the RPP operational

To make the model operational, the VRA pilots were aligned into uniform project formats. This focused partners on problem analysis and led to specific solutions for issues encountered in the region. In all project case studies, the impact of the results for the whole region was considered by discussing and verifying the results with local stakeholders. This is known as the Co-operative Agreement Approach (see p6).

Then a **key question list** was added to each project format, containing information on the applicability, transferability and sustainability of the results. Additionally, links to related innovative best practice examples from elsewhere were included and finally, tools derived from the projects were formulated.

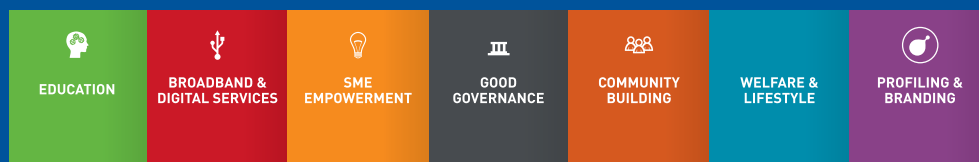## Towards an improved model of the Rural Power Pack

The description and presentation of project results in uniform formats, demonstrated that there was a lot of common ground between project outcomes in the three work packages. For example, projects focussing on SME empowerment by using broadband applications (work package 1), could easily be connected to those projects executed in the field of education or services (work package 3), which also use broadband applications. So by summarising the project results, broad overarching themes were created which offered more comprehensive solutions for the problems encountered.

Based on this knowledge the 42 projects delivered by VRA were sorted into seven themes:

1) Innovative approaches to education

2) Broadband and digital services

3) SME empowerment and entrepreneurship

4) Good governance

5) Community building

6) Welfare and lifestyle

7) Profiling and branding

To create opportunities to connect the projects to other networks, programmes and databases, key words for each project were developed and added to the project formats. This is an important mechanism for the sustainability of the project and a useful communications tool connecting our partnership with other EU networks and databases.

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

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The RPP – developing a methodology

In the last phase of the RPP's development, a core group comprising VRA partners from several countries, chaired by Peter Laan (project management, RPP co-ordinator), came together for three working sessions to make the RPP operational. Three elements were central to this final phase:

The RPP Core Group.

Eve Cronin — Els Oyaert — Filip Meuris — Peter Laan — Wim Beernaert — Simon Simonsen

a) Although the basic model is a challenging one, when the three corners of the RPP triangle are linked by key words, we need a more problem-directed methodology, which will help toolbox development derived from project case studies and themes.

b) The RPP should have a web-based structure to facilitate connection to other programmes and networks.

c) The presentation of the results should be engaging using 'storytelling' and visualisation.

This led to a new understanding of how the RPP should be presented and how our results and best practice could be adopted in other regions.

This problem solving methodology was adopted:

■ what exactly is the problem?

■ how to solve it?

■ is the solution a real solution to the problem, or are there any other available solutions?

■ what barriers were there to solving the problem?

■ what did we learn from running through this process and what tools can be used in other situations?

From this, we arrived at the final version of the RPP: a comprehensive method for tackling rural problems, comprising three approaches. (see p.4)

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RURAL PROBLEMS OR CHALLENGES		
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 Education Broadband & Digital Services Sme Empowerment Good Governance Community Building Welfare & Lifestyle Profiling & Branding	**BEST PRACTICE PROJECTS** Lessons learned / experiences Applicability check Sustainability check Extension Of Knowledge By Exchange	**COOPERATIVE AGREEMENT APPROACH** **KEY PROJECTS** **PRESENTATION**

1 Local / Regional Approach
The basis of the model is the local or regional approach, covering the pilot project results in the standard format and enriched, integrated and connected to other projects by the key question list. The key questions check the regional integration of project results, sustainability and the tools applied.

2 Themes and Contents
The pilot project results may fit into one or more of the defined themes, connecting rural issues and solutions. The seven themes cover most of the problems and the solutions encountered in contemporary rural areas.

3 Methodology
The methodology addresses problems, challenges or barriers frequently encountered across rural areas, using the tools derived from and tested by the pilot projects, or from other related case studies. The RPP's aim is that stakeholders, working on one of the seven themes, can use it.

By checking and comparing the results we discovered that, as a starting point, problems can be described as '*lacks of*'. We identified seven main topics that cover most of the problems encountered in rural areas:

1) Lack of **ambition**

2) Lack of **education**

3) Lack of **empowerment**

4) Lack of **services**

5) Lack of **infrastructure**

6) Lack of **jobs**

7) Lack of **young talent**

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Parallel to the description of problems/challenges in the 'lacks' list, the obstacles that regularly impede implementation can be attributed to one or more of these main subject areas:

1) Regulations

2) Demography

3) Money

4) Time and timing

5) Politics

6) Ownership

7) Landscape

8) History, culture and customs

West Flanders.

The RPP Toolbox

Th RPP toolbox is not an instrument suitcase *sensu stricto*, but is a mix of case studies and tools e.g. checklists, instructions and manuals. The RPP is not a tools package that can be used independently of local circumstances. It offers the reader access to our knowledge and experience of the issues encountered in contemporary rural areas. We invite you to share your knowledge with us to improve the RPP.

The Rural Power Pack Online

The RPP is available online within the VRA website, www.vitalruralarea.eu. A selected number of best practice project cases studies are presented in a storytelling format, along with tools to help the user. In addition, website users are invited to connect with VRA members by sharing experiences, either via one of the themes, a specific project or a region/country.

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Co-operative Agreement Approach (CAA)

Connecting all VRA partner regions is their clearly defined approach to rural problems. This is summarised as the 'co-operative agreement approach', a process that ensures the common realisation of goals by connecting people and organisations.
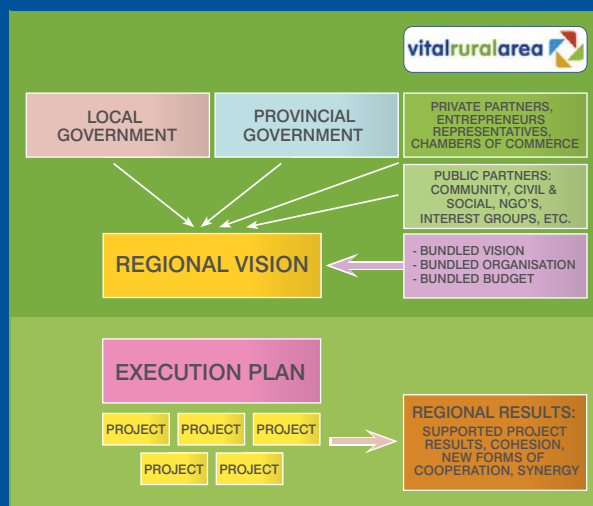The CAA was tested and implemented in most of the projects executed in VRA and used as a common standard for public private partnership.

Andree Hofer - contact person CAA

It consists of two main areas:

a)   Gathering all potential partners in the region (local, regional, public, private, different sectors, knowledge institutes).

b)   Facilitating a process based on respecting responsibilities and knowledge that brings together energy, creativity and budgets (EU, public, private)

This results in a shared development strategy for the region, forming the basis for integrated and sustainable new solutions and efficient use of budgets and resources.

The CAA has proved itself as a process instrument that ensures sustainable project implementation, including a methodology for complete assessment of the results and the participation of different groups of stakeholders. Moreover, the CAA offers a framework to help new rural alliances emerge and is the basis for innovative approaches.

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.