



Vital Update 6

Vital Rural Area Newsletter



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Welfare, Lifestyle and Rural Development

Supported by Broadband and Digital Services

Broadband is an invisible infrastructure but still a key factor for development and new opportunities in Vital Rural Areas. Broadband - or lack of broadband - plays an important role for welfare and improved lifestyle in all themes covered by Vital Rural Area.

Access Matters

Lack of service opportunities must be met by new innovative solutions. Even if we live in rural areas, sometimes far away from service utilities, it is a citizen's right, and perhaps the essence of democracy, that everybody participates in community life on equal terms.

In times of financial crisis and depopulation, new solutions must be considered. Access to the internet and new digital services provide an opportunity to meet some of the challenges. Access to broadband is equally as important as access to roads and water and electricity supplies.

Broadband – access to services

Vital Rural Area partners have completed many pilot activities based on the use of ICT. Most important is the impact that these activities have had on welfare and development in rural areas. We discovered that development, and the introduction of digital services, depends on whether citizens and enterprises have access to broadband networks with sufficient bandwidth.

When good broadband infrastructure is present, a wide variety of digital services and new content can be introduced. Lack of education and ICT competency has been a common issue in the partners' rural areas. As a result, the introduction of new digital public services and self-service solutions has been combined with training programmes for citizens and public servants.

Vital website

www.vitalruralarea.eu

European Regional Development Fund





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Vejen Kommune – ‘best practice’ example

At the end of 2002 three small municipalities in a rural part of South Jutland, Denmark agreed the vision ‘Fibre to Everybody’. Lack of fast broadband connections was considered to be a major hindrance for the future growth, development and settlement in the area, and for the introduction of new digital services by the municipalities. Distance is always a key issue in rural areas and fibre networks were an important advance.



Fibre installation.

Ten years on, almost every enterprise and household in the area has access to the superfast fibre network (FTTH-fibre-to-the-home). Vejen Kommune and the Midtsoenderjylland region is now the leading and best served broadband area in Denmark. The region was mentioned as an example of best practice in ‘Guide to Broadband Investment’ published by the EU-Commission in December 2011. A study of this guide is highly recommended.

All Vital partners now consider broadband as an important issue in rural areas. Without an infrastructure with a large up and download capacity, access to digital services will be limited. Fibre broadband projects in North Friesland, The Netherlands, and Leiedal, Belgium, have particularly been inspired by the Danish project.

Impact on welfare and quality of life

Here are some examples from the Vital Rural Area project demonstrating how the internet can be used to improve and distribute digital services and solutions to citizens, enterprises and public institutions.



Translation by video Vejen Kommune.

In North Friesland, The Netherlands, young people produced their own videos and distributed them via YouTube. ‘Think – don’t drink’ is the message. The videos can be found by searching ‘Tinke – net drinke’.

Another example is the web based lifestyle project at Finnøy and Rogaland County, Norway.

Citizens living on the small islands in the fjord can get information about health, better food and exercise via the web portal, www.livsstil.finnoy.no.

In Vejen Kommune, Denmark, video communication has been introduced for meetings to reduce time and transport costs. Interpreters can translate by video link at meetings with refugees and foreigners in the Job Centre and the Integration Centre. And when a patient leaves a regional hospital, nurses at the municipal Elderly Care Centre can communicate and get advice from the hospital via video, about care and further treatment.



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Digital services in Vital Rural Areas

Remote access to public services has been tested in Twijzelerheide, North Friesland, The Netherlands. A virtual office service point in the village, with video communication to the municipality and the police, reduced the need for transport. In Burum village, this idea has been developed into 'Smart Rural Network Society', with a community based web portal for the local citizens: <http://burum.openportaal.nl>.



Virtual Service Desk Demonstration Twijzelerheide.

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Leiedal, Belgium's project 'Ugly Spots: Co-Creation of Public Place' was based on an interactive web portal with links to GIS-system and social media. Citizens were encouraged to discuss and report local ugly spots. Afterwards they were invited to participate in a policy setting and the co-creation process.



Training Digital Ambassadors in Vejen Kommune.

In Vejen Denmark many digital self-service solutions have been introduced to the citizens via the municipality website and via the national portal: www.borger.dk (=citizen.dk). As well as this, more than 500 'Digital Ambassadors' have been trained to assist their fellow citizens and neighbours in using digital services. The European Union now rates Denmark as the leading country in Europe for developing citizens' use of digital services and digital communication with public authorities.

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Strengthening SMEs

Distance e-learning can be an important tool for strengthening SMEs and their employees in rural areas. Vital partners Friese Poort Bedrijfsopleidingen, The Netherlands and Wirtschaftsakademie Schleswig-Holstein, Germany have developed two e-learning modules for ‘Solar Water Heating’ and ‘Geothermal Energy’. A Digital Commerce toolkit has been designed in Vejen Kommune to support SMEs who want to do business with their customers via an ‘e-shop’. Also ‘My Business’, a web portal for interactive business advice, has been prepared in Vejen Kommune.

The solutions mentioned will be further developed, and with proper broadband connections the problems of isolation for SMEs in rural areas can be reduced.

Regional Branding

The internet is a great tool for regional branding for communication with enterprises, citizens and tourists and for social media platforms. Some Vital examples are Langenhagen Germany: www.pferdestaerken-langenhagen.eu, Meetjesland, Belgium: www.meetjesland.be and North Friesland, Netherlands: www.dwaande.nl.



North Friesland.

Barriers and Tools

Areas that suffer from poor fast broadband connections will fall behind when it comes to use and development of digital services. Investment in infrastructure like FTTH and better wireless networks, is definitely recommended in rural areas. Advice and training sessions to help enterprises and citizens become comfortable with use of ICT and digital solutions are important as well.

Read more about broadband, digital services and all pilot activities in our Rural Power Pack: www.vitalruralarea.eu. Do contact the partners featured on the website who will be happy to share their experience and answer questions.

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, Norway, Friese Poort Bedrijfsopleidingen, Leeuwarden, The Netherlands, Province of Fryslân, Leeuwarden, The Netherlands, Streekplatform+ Meetjesland, Eeklo, Belgium, Municipality of Sluis, Oostburg, The Netherlands, Intercommunale Leiedal, Kortrijk, Belgium, Province of West Flanders, Brugge (Sint Andries), Belgium