

# VILLAGE SOCIAL ENTERPRISE LEARNING MATERIAL, GUIDANCE AND NETWORKING (VISENET)



## Learning material tested by local rural communities in each participating countries

The main purpose of the project is to provide methods and tools to local rural communities to help them enhance social enterprises in their areas. One of the key elements to achieve this is to provide open access learning material supporting the establishment and development of social enterprises.

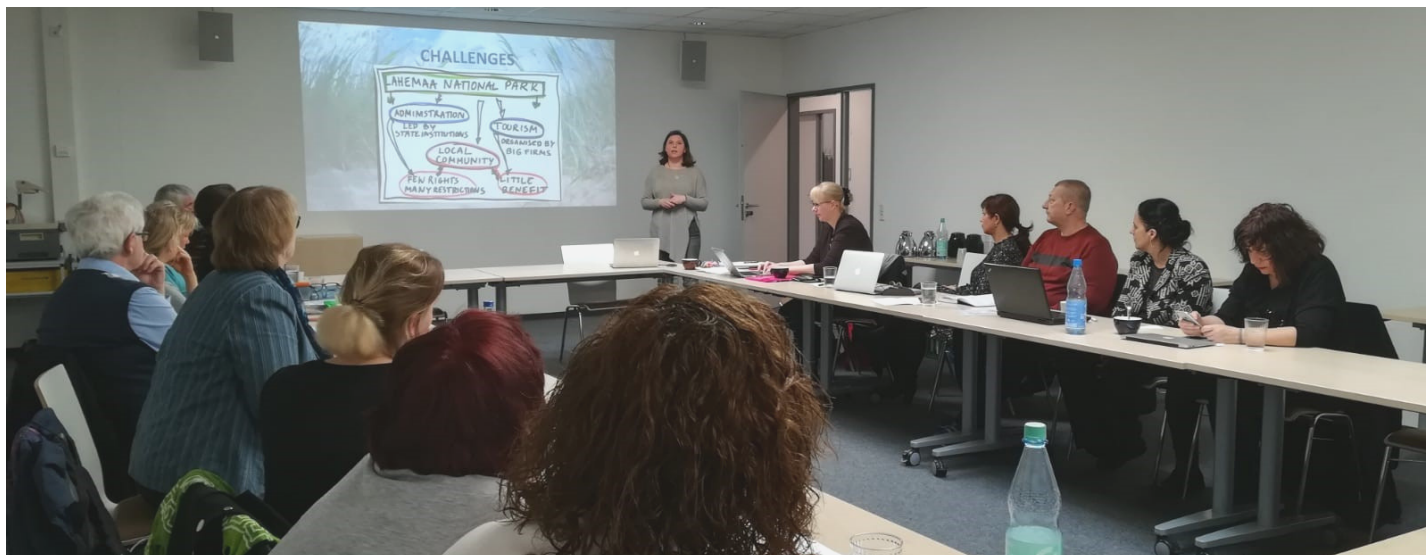
– We need to be sure that the material is suitable for rural areas and easy to adopt for the benefit of rural communities. This is why we have local communities involved to test and pilot the material, tells the project manager Katja Rinne-Koski from University of Helsinki Ruralia Institute.

In Finland the pilots are five rural village associations. Two of them are located in Southern Ostrobothnia, The Village Association of Kainasto and The Village Association of Nopankylä and one is located in the Pirkanmaa area, The Village Association of Pohjois-Kuru. These villages are interested in the possibilities social enterprises are offering in the rural areas and are willing to further explore its potential. Two other village associations involved in the project, Eskola and Vuolenkoski, are more advanced in rural social entrepreneurship and are interested in networking with other social enterprises in rural communities in Europe.

### Village Social Enterprise learning material, guidance and networking (ViSEnet)

The ViSEnet project is aimed to individuals who are interested in developing and sustaining their rural communities, who are willing to consider social enterprise solutions to assist their rural areas or individuals who already have an idea for social enterprise in rural areas. The project will also provide learning and networking for individuals already engaged in social enterprise activity but wish to gain new skills, knowledge and expertise to assist them in their venture.

The project will develop methods for promoting and supporting social entrepreneurship in rural areas by providing open access online learning materials of community activation and participation, partnerships and networking as well as social enterprise solutions for sustaining rural communities and measuring social impact. The project aims also to support rural social enterprises by establishing an international network of social enterprises to share experiences and good practices.



In Estonia two target groups have been chosen for piloting: Lahemaa local community from North Estonia and Haanja youth group from South-East Estonia. There has been a very active Village Movement called Kodukant in Estonia. Today local action groups are the driving force for rural community and entrepreneurship development and they will ensure that the project outcomes and support for the social entrepreneurship will be continued after the end of the project.

In Romania the target groups will be represented by small farmers, micro-cooperatives, community foundations and schools located in distinct rural geographic areas who need support to develop farming activities and are willing to consider social enterprise approaches to tackle local issues.

In Germany the target groups are the region of the Biosphere Reserve as well as Geopark Suabian Alb. During the last years, a kind of “creative milieu” developed and led to many small and innovative activities by individuals as well as small production communities.

In Scotland the target groups are from across the Argyll and Islands region, supported by the social enterprise network, including the mainland geography and 23 inhabited islands. We will engage with individuals who may be interested in sustaining vital rural services, who are willing to consider social enterprise approaches to tackle these issues and individuals working in existing social enterprise who seek to develop skills, knowledge, understanding and benefit from networking.

## Partner and Rural Representatives visit to Nürtingen, Germany

To ensure we are on track with our development work, we held an initial partner and rural representatives meeting in Nürtingen in Germany in April 2019. Rural representatives interested in promoting rural social enterprises in their areas from five countries attended the visit.

The visit provided an opportunity to have the input from the rural representatives who were able to share their experiences from different perspectives, countries, contexts and approaches. This highlighted the mutual value of networking and peer learning and the visit has provided a great basis for future networking in the project and further evidenced the value of networking for rural social enterprises.

– We were very happy to discover that rural reps felt that the project has something to offer them and they have something to give to the project and to each other, says Ailsa Clark, Development Manager in Inspiralba. Inspiralba provides business and project development and employability support for and with social enterprises across Argyll and Islands in Scotland and is one of the project partners.

The first day of the meeting was all about getting to know each other by hearing presentations of local and national contexts and interests towards social enterprises. The second day was dedicated to the study trip tour in the beautiful landscapes of rural Germany with interesting visits in local social enterprises. According the feedback gathered, the main benefits of the meeting was to learn about different circumstances of different countries regarding social enterprises as well as learn the different ways to boost up the local rural development by social enterprises.

– This meeting was a great foundation to the future networking of rural social enterprises we are creating and supporting in the ViSEnet-project, tells Roger Evans from Estonian University of Life Sciences.





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## Join the ViSEnet-facebook community

One of the concrete action towards future networking the participants of the meeting decided to set up a shared and informal community of rural social enterprises. The community takes place in the Facebook to start with. The main purpose of the community is to support the networking and create a place where social enterprises may exchange thoughts, ideas and ask for peer support. The ViSEnet-Facebook community is open to everyone interested, just send a request to join: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/282745289271832/>

## Next steps in the project

The next phase of the project is to gather rural areas piloting experiences from the first learning module material. The theme of the module is community activation and participation methods. The piloting phase will take place during the summer and early autumn.

– Each piloting area will be delivered an evaluation form to help pilot areas to collect their views and experiences of the learning material. The learning material will be modified according the feedback to ensure the quality. This is why the piloting phase is crucial in the project, says Professor Carmen Paunescu from The Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Romania.



## Project partners

The project has five partners: Estonian University of Life Sciences (Estonia), The Bucharest University of Economic Studies (Romania), Nürtingen-Geislingen University (Germany), InspirAlba (Scotland) and University of Helsinki Ruralia Institute (Finland).



**More information will be available in project partner's websites:**

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