

The capacity to identify needs, assets and opportunities in the local rural communities and collaboration are critical for rural communities in Estonia, Finland, Romania, and Scotland

The data was collected during the first phase of the ViSEnet Erasmus + project for social entrepreneurship in rural communities

The rural communities must be able to meet their basic needs, such as clean water, health, education and employment and paraprofessionals already exist in villages and their wisdom, traditional knowledge and practical skills are not identified, mobilized or applied. Through Erasmus + program "Village Social Enterprise learning material guidance and networking" (ViSEnet), the international team composed of experts and professors from the academia and rural communities representatives, aims to develop various skills in rural communities to fit their needs for development of social enterprises.

During August - November 2019, 64 people from rural communities in Estonia, Finland, Scotland and Romania participated in local workshops focused on "Methods of community activation and participation in rural areas" divided into five subjects of analysis (figure 1), to stimulate the development of social enterprises in their communities.



Figure 1. Subjects addressed during the local workshops

A variety of teaching methods were employed: community mapping in terms of needs, assets and opportunities (the Enterprise Assessment Tool), brainstorming, the empathy map.

In Estonia, NGO Ökokuller coordinated the workshop which included two communities, one from North-Estonia - Lahemaa and one from South-Estonia - Haanja. The facilitator, with the help of the ViSEnet learning material aimed to bring the communities closer together in tourism development and as a result, ***this workshop helped to strengthen a group of locals to make them ready for further tourism development activities.***

In Finland, the activities were coordinated and developed by the University of Helsinki Ruralia Institute. The two villages participating in the project are at different stages of developing social enterprises. Together with the three facilitators, the participants assessed the resources and opportunities available in their own context by community mapping. The

workshop gave the participants the confidence that there is available assistance for business development and that other rural areas have done such social enterprises. The main lesson drawn from this workshop was that **“there are assets and potential in the village, it just has to be seen and turned into a business opportunity.”**

In Romania, 19 members of a rural community composed of seven villages, were guided by the Bucharest University of Economics professors in a process of mapping the local needs and untapped resources. The participants worked around the concepts of “community activation” and “community participation” and collaboratively identified both the critical needs for the school community, the assets of their school community and potential connections between the needs in the community and the assets available. However, there is a need for continuous assistance and training regarding the use of different tools to turn opportunities into business models. At the end of the activity, a group of four participants declared that they want to **“voluntarily work on the activities resulting from the workshop”**.

In Scotland, the activities were coordinated by Inspiralba and the focus was on identifying assets in the community, in particular in relation to human assets. Moreover, the team identified a range of physical and natural assets within the village. The group also recognized that whilst there were a range of potential skills available in the village, people’s availability and time was a factor. Future plans of the group of participants imply that **“there is a need for a second session to identify the range of skills available in particular areas of work”**.

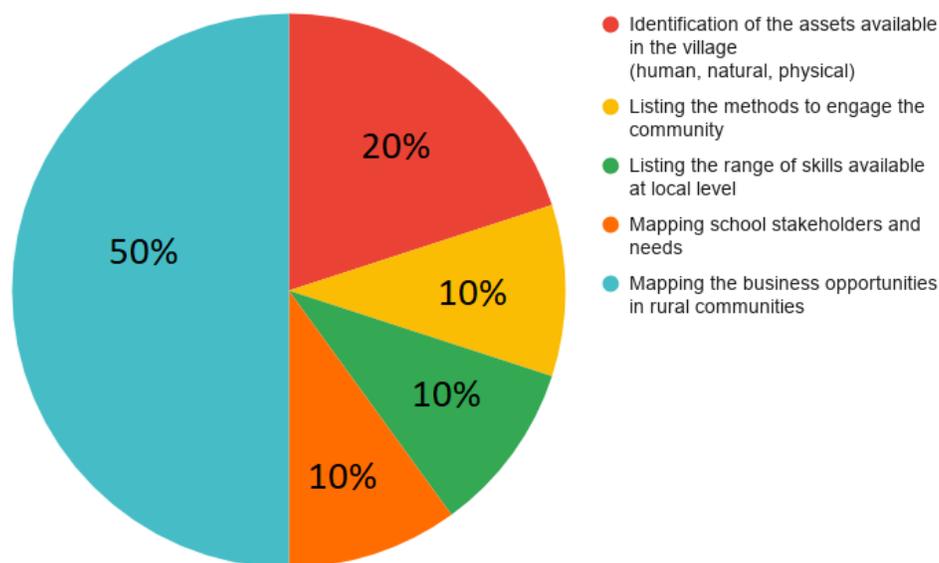


Figure 2. Main priorities of local communities resulted from the four local workshops

The main priorities of local rural communities resulting from the local workshops (figure 2) are related to mapping local opportunities which have potential to be turned into business opportunities with a high impact on the social context of each particular community, and to identifying rural human, infrastructure and natural assets.

Moreover, the facilitator teams in all the countries-partners concluded that paying particular attention to community activation and participation in rural areas helps foster local social entrepreneurship in many ways. In conclusion, the content about community activation and participation developed by the ViSEnet team may be a means **to strengthen**



the communities (Estonia), to foster the potential of the community (Finland), encourage local activation and initiative (Romania) and enhance continuation of local development processes (Scotland).

The premise of the ViSEnet Erasmus + project is that in rural communities there is a lot of local potential, knowledge and skills needed to improve the provision of local services and employment, but people do not know how to use the resources of the local community or the region. A possible solution for the development of the local economy is social entrepreneurship, a sustainable initiative for which the social purpose prevails and where the profit is reinvested in the local community, however, relatively new in rural development in Europe. Therefore, it is necessary to develop the capacity of the locals to identify and use the potential of the community, by developing the skills of community activation, of creating partnerships and networks for the recognition and support of social entrepreneurship. The next workshop scheduled for 2020 will focus on “Creating partnerships and networks for community development”.

The ViSEnet project is funded by the EU Erasmus+ Strategic partnership for adult education.

Website: www.visenet.net

Source: **The Power of Unreasonable People: How Social Entrepreneurs Create Markets That Change the World Hardcover by John Elkington (Author), Pamela Hartigan (Author), Klaus Schwab (Foreword).*

Available at: <https://www.amazon.com/Power-Unreasonable-People-Entrepreneurs-Markets/dp/1422104060>

The resources related to “community activation” and “community participation” developed during the first phase of the project and piloted with the rural communities partners during the workshops are available for examination online: https://ilias.hfwu.de/ilias.php?ref_id=24071 HYPERLINK

A video about the workshop held in Romania: <https://youtu.be/l0Vibs9CJ3g>

The European Commission is not responsible for the content of this press release.

Partners:

University of Helsinki Ruralia Institute, Finland (coordinator): <https://www.helsinki.fi/en/ruralia-institute/visenet-village-social-enterprise-learning-material-guidance-and-networking-0>

Contact: Katja Rinne-Koski, katja.rinne-koski@helsinki.fi

Estonian University of Life Sciences, Estonia: <https://www.emu.ee/en/about-the-university/news/uudis/2019/01/31/visenet-village-social-enterprise-learning-material-guidance-and-networking/>

Contact: Roger Evans, evanter.ou@gmail.com and Lea Sudakova, lea.sudakova@emu.ee

Nürtingen-Geislingen University, Germany: https://ilias.hfwu.de/goto.php?target=cat_22160

Contact: Roman Lenz, roman.lenz@hfwu.de



Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Romania: <http://fabiz.ase.ro/erasmus-visenet>

Contact: Carmen Paunescu, carmen.paunescu@ase.ro

Inspiralba, Scotland: <http://www.inspiralba.org.uk/visenet-learning-and-networking-for-rural-social-enterprise/>

Contact: Ailsa Clark, aclark@inspiralba.org.uk