

VILLAGE SOCIAL ENTERPRISE LEARNING MATERIAL, GUIDANCE AND NETWORKING PROGRESS OF THE FIRST YEAR

Dear Friends,



The aim of our project is to support social entrepreneurs by offering tools, methods and materials to help rural actors to work for the community good especially in rural areas. Successful social entrepreneurship is gaining more and more attention in different countries as a way to respond to the contemporary challenges, such as diminishing or lacking services, long distances and so on. We have noticed that in addition to business planning it is important to take for example the concept of community into account: how do you define your community? How do you make sure each member of your community is paid attention to? How do you bring out the potential of your community or how do you find and identify your local assets? These are the questions, for example, we are trying to solve with you in our project.

The most important way to do that is to ask straight from rural actors themselves how our learning materials, tools and methods are working in practice. This is done by asking selected local rural representatives or communities to take a look at our gathered learning material, test and pilot it and let us know the results. This has been a challenging work for us as we really wish to meet our target groups' needs. And yet it has been extremely fun to get to be part of local community activities by participating and discussing with active people working for their community.

The first year of ViSEnet-project has been busy. The project has achieved a lot, yet there is still much more to do. The main adventures for last year have been the face-to-face project meeting we had in Germany hosted by Nürtingen-Geislingen University. It was a great opportunity for the project crew and our rural representatives we had invited to the meeting to meet each other. We had also the pleasure to visit beautiful German landscape and local social enterprises. Other achievements include gathering material to our first two learning modules and piloting the first one with our rural representatives.

This year is fulfilled with exciting plans. We will have our second international meeting in Scotland, intend to gather more learning material and test it in practice with the help of our rural representatives, and support the networking of rural social entrepreneurs in national and international levels.

On behalf of our project crew, I am happy to welcome you to follow our progress via newsletters, project website and social media. We are looking forward to hearing from you: your thoughts, ideas and comments are important and will help our work to deliver piloted material to support the important work of rural actors.

Katja, project manager

University of Helsinki Ruralia-Institute



Project website

The project has its own website and domain: please click in and visit www.visenet.net to find out the basic information of our project and the latest news and upcoming. This work is yet developing but still ongoing. In the pages you will find our growing collection of project blogs, learning diaries and access to the learning materials. Meanwhile, please click in and find out how the project got started in the first place: <https://bit.ly/2QZKBjM>

Learning materials

Based on earlier experiences and the expertise of project partners the learning material consists of three modules: Community Activation and Participation Methods in Rural Areas, Partnerships and Networking of Social Entrepreneurs and Social Enterprise Solutions for Sustaining Rural Communities and Measuring Social Impact.

At the moment we have finished the piloting phase of the first module Community Activation and Participation and collecting material of the second module of Participation and Networking. The first module Community Activation and Participation Methods in Rural Areas consists of following subchapters:

- Community Engagement
- Defining your community
- Needs and Opportunities
- Prioritizing and Action Planning
- Unlocking the Assets within community
- Stakeholder engagement

Material is digitalized and will be finalized and available online during the spring of 2020.

Piloting process and results of module 1

The project partners have been working with learning material of module one with local rural representatives and the overall results of the material are encouraging.

The main point at this phase is to notice that the target groups, i.e. social entrepreneurs or people interested in being one, are in different stage of a development processes in their areas and this is why there is a need for diverse material to meet different needs. Variety of the material may seem overwhelming to rural actors at first. As a result it was suggested that we might need to create some kind of a timeline or guide to help to choose and find the right material.

The main results are disseminated by partners in their own areas and some of the results are shared in our project website. As an example of national piloting, please click on the video of Romanian results: <https://bit.ly/2QZOFR4>

News from project meetings

The project partners had the first face-to-face meeting in Nürtingen, Germany on 15.–16.4.2019. We had participants from five project partner countries, altogether 10 project staff and 11 rural representatives. The first day meeting programme consisted of getting to know each other and learning from others. We had also opportunity to visit some interesting German enterprises.



The feedback gathered after the meeting showed that the most important part of the meeting was to meet other rural actors:

"It was very interesting to learn about everyone's background and where their organization fits into the social enterprise in their country. I enjoyed the networking parts of the visits with the projects we visited and with the other countries over lunch and dinner. It was very interesting to understand how each country government fits into the communities it represents. Discovering what types of projects people have taken on through social enterprise and how these might influence our projects back in Scotland. I am looking forward to the relationships developing over the next 2 years and how we share ideas, learning experiences and aspirations."

"It was really motivating to hear about the stakeholders who take part in the project and some local organisations in the visited area."

"I did learn that village action is fundamentally cross European phenomena with villages facing similar kind of challenges across the continent. The examples from Romania were something that put everything else into a perspective (language barriers/ethnic questions/the legacy of the communist regime). I also learned that it actually could be possible to achieve permanent or long lasting results with social entrepreneurship. I also learned that I'd really like to visit Scotland for further information about social enterprises."

"First of all, I'd really like to follow up the contacts made. We have already discussed about arranging a meeting in Finland between the Finnish partners. I'd also like to visit Scottish partners for further information about their projects."

"I believe if we manage to accomplish at least 80% of the objectives, it will benefit our community."

As a result of the meeting it was decided to continue of including our rural representatives participation on project's meetings. The next meeting will take place in Scotland, Argyll on April 27th–30th 2020. The meeting will be hosted by our project partner from Scotland, InspirAlba. The theme will be networking and future utilization of learning material provided by the project. There will also be study visits to Scottish social enterprises.



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

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