

PROJECT RESPONSES TO COVID-19

Dear Friends,



This has truly been an exceptional year with unpredictable consequences to rural communities and businesses. These special circumstances have affected also the implementation of our ViSEnet-project as well. Planned face-to-face project meetings had to be postponed and meetings with our pilot villages had to be cancelled. It was obvious that we needed to think alternative ways to communicate with each other and to keep interaction between project partners and our pilot village rural representatives alive and ongoing. This dilemma was discussed in one of our project meetings and all the sudden the solution was clear: we needed to turn our future actions to take place virtually online.

This was quite a bizarre turn in our project: online learning has been one of our project's objectives all along but it was not quite thought that it could be applied up to this amount of project activities. Once we realized that we would be able to transfer most of our actions online it also allowed us to include more people into our project than it would have been otherwise possible. It has also increased communicating and networking with the project team and rural communities to a whole new level in the project.

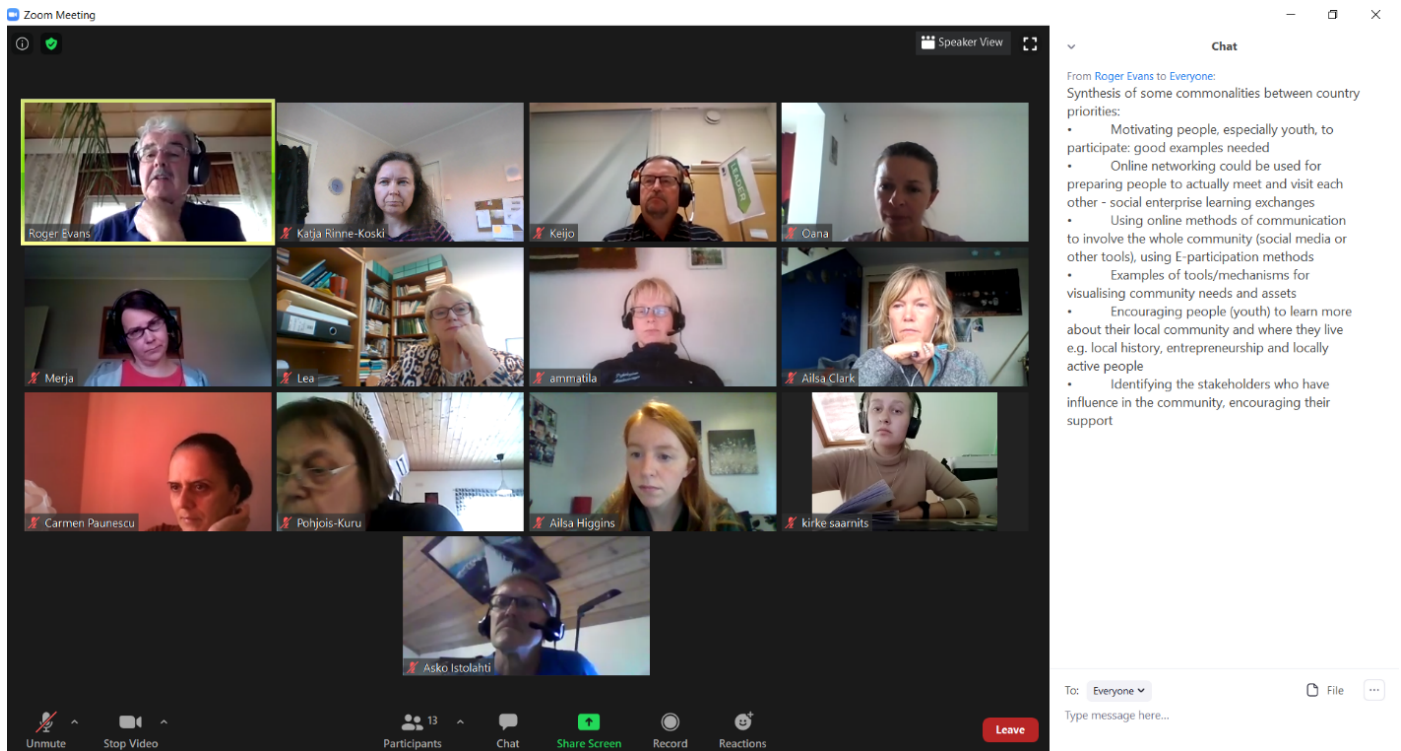
However, despite all the great sides of turning the project actions online, there have also been challenges. Changing the courses of the project actions has required a great amount of flexibility from the project team and ability to bear with uncertainty as we had to figure out new methods to accomplish our objectives and tasks. The project team has proven to be phenomenally resourceful and solution oriented team seeking alternative routes and ways to take the project and its objectives forward. This applies also to our rural communities who have been participating online meetings and project actions open mindedly. It's either win or learn, said Nelson Mandela, and we can certainly agree on that one.

As the current situation with COVID-19 seems to continue for a while, we will carry on our online approach in the project. We are currently working with the final module of our learning material and hopefully will be able to get feedback from our rural communities while testing and piloting out the materials. We have also launched a series of online networking meetings with our rural communities discussing different themes and have been very lucky to be able to collaborate with The Rural Social Enterprise Hub in networking and sharing our learning material resources. These are opened up more in this newsletter.

Let's all keep safe and well!

Katja, project manager

University of Helsinki Ruralia-Institute



Online meeting on 31.8.2020 with rural communities.

Rural representative online meetings – peer support, examples and guidance despite COVID-19

One of our topics in the rural community networking has been coping with global challenges by COVID-19. We have offered peer support and examples of local solutions and shared the challenges caused by the situation in the online meetings that has been set up by regular basis.

Each meeting has had its own theme of which we have had presentations, introductions and lively discussions. First meeting's theme was launching the networking meetings, get to know each other a bit better and a discussion of digital tools to help communication. Second meeting was about resilience activities in local areas, third was about rural tourism, fourth was discussing about virtual learning exchange and the latest one was about tools to host a virtual learning exchange and a discussion of the future roadmap in supporting networking in the project. The online networking will be continued with different themes. If you have ideas of themes or topics, please let us know. Meetings are open for everyone interested, just contact anyone from the project team to join in.

The very latest opening to networking activities is to encourage young people living in rural communities to communicate with other youngsters in other communities involved in the project. The aim of the ViSEnet Junior -subgroup is to give youngsters encouragement to develop their knowledge, feel pride in their home communities and to share these with other communities. At its best it will be a way to get people of different age groups involved in community actions, transfer the knowledge in and between communities and give tested ideas and tools to the toolbox of community activation and participation. We will keep you posted!

Introducing the Visenet platforms: the Hub and ILIAS

The Rural Social Enterprise Hub

The Rural Social Enterprise Hub is a digital site, hosted by our partners InspirAlba. The Hub is a focal point for research, news, and development activity in Scotland and further afield. It is an online space for collaboration, peer to peer learning, and knowledge exchange between all those committed to thriving rural social enterprise. The Hub is also a communal space to share news, opportunities, and showcase the contribution that social enterprise makes to our rural communities.

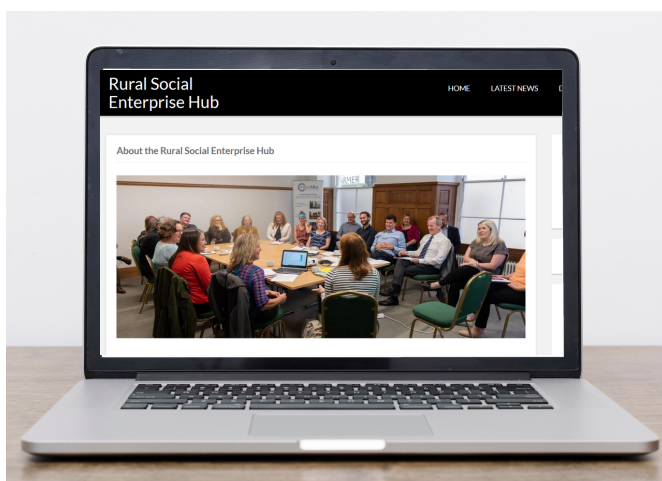
The ViSEnet learning resources are hosted on the Rural SE Hub, and are available to download as free PDFs. As well as accessing learning materials, you can sign up to the Global Directory – where you can search an interactive map by geography or key word search, to find organisations working on similar areas of interest, or in your area.

The Hub also hosts an online events calendar, where you can view upcoming virtual and (eventually) real-life events which are of interest to rural social enterprise. We are planning to include a function to ‘add your own events’, which will allow people to share and add their own events. Our Rural SEN, co-hosted by Senscot, runs monthly networking meetings for rural social enterprises and supporters, to allow people to share ideas, experiences, and highlight areas for collective action and collaboration. You can sign up here to become a member of the Hub for free, and add your organisation’s details to the Directory so that others can find out about you, and get in touch!

Ailsa Higgins

Want to learn more about the Hub?

- Check <https://www.ruralsehub.net/about-the-rural-social-enterprise-hub/>
- Check out also the ViSEnet learning resources: <https://bit.ly/3jMgnO4>



ILIAS and visenet.net

You have also opportunity to follow our project in the www.visenet.net located on the ILIAS, which is a learning platform maintained by Nürtingen-Geislingen University, our project partner from Germany. There you will find project blog, videos, newsletters and press releases and so on.

When communicating ViSEnet-project in social media, please use **#ViSEnet**

Learning material: click in to check it out!

We have so far gathered and piloted our learning material for Learning Modules 1 (Community Activation and Participation Methods in Rural Areas) and Module 2 (Partnerships and Networking of Social Entrepreneurs). Material for module 3 is about business planning and social impacts and will be completed by the end of the year. The construction work is still ongoing in both our platforms, so the content will be modified and complemented along the progress.

Meanwhile, please check the plan of the modules and let us know what you think! Do you think there is something missing? Something that seems out of context? Or maybe you would like to comment or discuss about materials? Or see, what our pilot communities have commented? Click in the Hub: https://www.ruralschub.net/feedback_and_pilotin_g/.

Coming up

We will be able to pilot the online learning material for module 3 in the coming months. Please follow the project communication if you are interested in piloting results and finding out the material. We are keen to learn your user experiences after the material has been published, and for that reason we will be reaching out, for example, to the teachers interested in using the material in their classes and courses to give us feedback.

One of our products is going to be a Book of Good Practices that will be based on our experiences of the project. The book will be gathering together lessons learned and stories told alongside the project and aims to give recommendations and good practices. It should be very interesting challenge to write this one as the context of community business has been challenged so many and unexpected ways. But we have no doubt about it: **Together we can do it!**

Together we can do it



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

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