



# Village Development Plans and Local Governance

Final report

March 2008

A transnational LEADER+ project between

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LAG South Jutland, Denmark  
Galway LAG, Ireland  
LAG Kärnan i Västra Götaland, Sweden (Lead partner)

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Website of the project (this document is published on this website)  
[www.villagedevelopment.eu](http://www.villagedevelopment.eu)

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

During the period from the end of 2006 to February 2008 the transnational Leader project Village Development Plans and Local Governance took place. This report is the final report of the project and gives an overview of the activities and results.

The project is a transnational cooperation project of four Leader areas in four European countries. LAG Zuid Twente in the Netherlands, LAG South Jutland in Denmark, Galway LAG in Ireland, LAG Kärnan i Västra Götaland in Sweden. The project coordination was co-ordinated by Gaston Remmers (Bureau Buitenkans), Marieke Koot and Marije Pouw (both ETC).

The project aims to improve the quality and effectiveness of village development plans by paying explicit attention to *local governance*, i.e. the web and quality of relations between villagers, Leader Local Action Groups, local and regional government and other relevant parties.

Thanks to the input of all the participants of the feedback-visits a lot of experience was shared and information was exchanged which made the project a success.

In this final report you can find, per chapter:

2. Global project description (goals, project set-up, partnership)
3. Description of project activities (Preparation of background material, VDP-feedback visits, Final Seminar)
4. Impact of the project (general impact, general learning, specific learning)
5. A summary of 4 Exchange Visits: case description, key-questions and feedback given
6. Results of the Final Seminar



## 2. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Throughout Europe, villagers engage in making development plans for their villages. Their efforts are often astonishing; yet, the effectiveness of these efforts is often small: the local action points are not or only partially implemented. One of the key-reasons for this are the weak links with local and regional Administration and other institutional parties, which leads to local people acting in a void, and hence to frustration. This project aims to improve the quality and effectiveness of village development plans and local efforts, by paying explicit attention to the links between villagers, Leader Local Action Group, local and regional Administration (i.e. municipalities, counties, provinces etc) and other relevant parties. The project will thus lead not only to better and more effective village development plans, but also to empowered citizens and improved local governance. In this chapter you can find the specific goals, the project setup and partnership of the project.

### 2.1 GOALS OF THE PROJECT

The project aims to improve the quality and effectiveness of village development plans by paying explicit attention to the links between villagers, Leader Local Action Groups, local and regional government and other relevant parties.

Specific goals are:

**A) Improve the links between informal community based plans and the formal, statutory plans of (Local) Authorities.**

*Involved issues:* Concertation between different parties who are involved. Dynamic, type of agreements, status of village plans, how to link plans content wise, protocols, working culture, etc

**B) Work towards the integration of a diversity of local activities in a coherent local plan at village level**

*Involved issues:* How can we bring all different activities and action in a village together in one plan, that is coherent, that facilitates interaction with local government, and that serves as a reference point (and linking pin) for the villagers?

**C) Enhance capacity-building and democratic inclusion of volunteers in local development processes**

*Involved issues:* How can citizens become more involved in democratic processes? How to generate and maintain the motivation of volunteers (especially in times when one is waiting for funding?) What responsibility can volunteers carry? How can their capacity be improved? What methods ways of working are available that appeal to volunteers? What methods facilitate joint decision making? What skills and knowledge do we need to achieve all of this?

**D) Strengthen the implementation of plans**

*Involved issues:* How can we go from nice plans to implementing these plans? How can we sustain the development process after finishing the plan? What new ideas are available to organize and implement tourist-based recreational projects

**E) Improve regional learning and scaling-up of local plans**

*Involved issues:* How can we go from single-village based VDP's to VDP's that not only link between one another, but also with the regional agendas? Can villages learn from each other and collaborate between them?

## 2.2 PROJECT SET-UP

The project builds on two lines of action which support each other: A) the development of Village Development Plans in each of the partner countries, and B) transnational learning through mutual and structured feedback visits.

### A) The development of village development plans

The source material for this project is the engagement of the partners in the making and implementation of village development plans, and the search for adequate linking mechanisms with local and regional authorities. This implies that, over the course of the current transnational project, partners either engage in the preparation of village development plans, or will engage in evaluating past experiences with preparing village development plans, with the explicit aim to arrive at working methods, procedures and linking mechanisms that enhance quality and implementation of village development plans and local governance. Based on this source material, partners engage in transnational learning and exchange.

### B) Transnational Learning

The transnational learning part of the project will be used to generate feedback for the partners (LAG, communities and local and regional Administrations) so that the ongoing process of making the village development plan will be strengthened. At the same time, the lessons learnt will be documented on a website, insightful not only for current partners, but also for other parties.

Learning within the project will be done by:

- *Preparation: generating common standards for comparison and understanding*

1. description of the general context
2. Preparation of a VDP-feedback tool.
3. Case descriptions of Village Development and Local Governance practices.

- *Transnational exchange and learning*

Using four interaction mechanisms:

4. 1 kick-off meeting
5. 4 VDP-feedback visits
6. 1 big concluding seminar, open to interested parties throughout Europe
7. Website

## 2.3 PARTNERSHIP

In the project four LEADER Local Action Groups participate. The all have been busy with or are busy with village development plans. The input of the partners differs, because of state of the process and the content of the plans. See below for an overview of the partners:

Country	Area, village	Co-ordinator
Sweden	Municipality of Vara, LAG Kärnan i Västra Götaland, villages of Arentorp, Vedum, Håkantorps, Kvånum	María Andersson
Ireland	Galway County Council, Galway LAG, villages of Kinvara and Eyrecourt	Catherine Corcoran
Denmark	LAG South Jutland, village of Branderup	Bodil Bertelsen
The Netherlands	LAG Zuid Twente, Village of Bentelo	Saskia Croes

Project coordination was done by:

- Gaston Remmers (Bureau Buitenkans, the Netherlands)
- Marieke Koot / Marije Pouw (ETC, the Netherlands)

The coordination was responsible for the set-up of the visits, facilitation of the visits, setting up the website, and compiling the feedback reports.

### 3. DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT ACTIVITIES

In this chapter the project activities of the preparation phase and the execution phase are described.

#### 3.1 PREPARATION OF BACKGROUND MATERIAL

In order to enable a maximum of learning between the partners, some preparatory documents were made. A website was developed where all documents and results of the project were made available. [www.villagedevelopment.eu](http://www.villagedevelopment.eu).

##### - Description of the general context

Each country described the general context of its experience in village development planning, explaining the following issues:

- Political System and Administrative Units
  - What are the administrative units in your country? (municipality, county etc?)
  - What are the powers of the Authorities linked to these units?
  - What is the usual way in which people are involved in policy making?
- Leader
  - What is the specific role of LEADER in your political system?
  - How is Leader organized?
  - How many Leader groups are there in your country?
- Planning system
  - What is the usual planning system in your country?
  - How do village development plans relate to the formal planning instruments?

##### - Preparation of the VDP-feedback tool

A tool was developed to generate a maximum of learning during the feedback visits. This tool contains a series of 'must-do' elements in each visit. For more information about the set-up of the feedback visits see chapter 3.2.

##### - Description of the source material of each partner, i.e. their VDP-case

On order to understand better each others experience with village development plans and local governance, all partners prepared a document describing the following issues.

1. General characteristics of the VDP conducted in the village
2. Goals and scope
3. Process architecture
4. Output
5. Follow-up and implementation
6. Other issues?
7. What are the issues that, as a hosting partner, you want to receive feedback on?
8. What are the issues that, as a visiting partner, you want to learn from?

##### - Kick off meeting with all the partners

On the 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> of February 2007 a kick off meeting took place. During this meeting the scheme of the feedback visits was decided, as were the themes and global key-questions of the visits. This meeting was the culmination of a long preparatory period, and was important to get to know each other and to express and share the common interest for the project.

#### 3.2 VDP-FEEDBACK VISITS

The visits constitute the heart of the transnational project. The VDP-feedback tool, an innovative mechanism specially designed for this project, is meant to generate a maximum of learning and inspiration among the partners. The partners develop structured feedback based on key-questions of the hosting partner. Each visit zooms in on the case of the receiving partner, and specifically aims to increase interaction between different stakeholders in local governance.

Each partner has chosen its own theme within the general project theme to focus the feedback visits. Within this theme, the hosting partner experiences problems in the development of its projects, and feels an ambition to do better.

### Themes and data of the feedback visits

Country (receiving partner)	Theme	Data
The Netherlands	Volunteers and scaling-up	26 and 27 March 07
Sweden	Integrating activities in a local plan	22 and 23 May 07
Ireland	Implementation of local village plans	17 and 18 September 07
Denmark	Upscaling of local plans and regional learning	22 and 23 November 07
Sweden	Final Seminar	22 and 23 January 08

#### *Mixed delegation*

Per VDP-feedback visit, the host partner receives a small but mixed delegation of each the 3 other partners (totaling 10-20 persons). The mixed delegation represents different stakeholders in local governance: villagers, civil servants, decision makers or political responsables (or any other stakeholder the visiting partners considers important). This results in a dynamic multi-actor, multi-level and multi-theme learning process for all involved stakeholders. Each partner may rotate the persons to be sent for each VDP-feedback visit, in order to generate as much learning as possible.

#### *Role of the receiving partner and visiting partner*

The receiving partner prepares questions related to VDP&LG they would like to receive feedback on. These questions refer in the first place to the general and important themes of the transnational project: how to link successfully with local and regional authorities, methodologies for generating a local action agenda etc. In the second place, the questions address specific issues of relevance to the receiving partner and its specific theme.

The visiting partners bring with them their home experience to ask questions, and provoke lively discussions. All *visitors* together will act as a 'feedback-team'.

#### *Program of the visit*

Each VDP-feedback lasted 2 full days. Key components were

- A preparatory moment for the visiting partners, before arriving at the host area, reading the background documentation
- A session to generate a shared framework and focus among the feedback team members and hosting partner
- Meeting(s) with representatives of the village
- Meeting(s) with representatives of the local authorities, and other relevant institutional parties
- A field excursion: drive or even better walk through the territory, under the guidance of local people
- A working session of the feedback team, to gather and detail impressions, specify feedback on the questions of the hosting partner, and, last but not least, to specify lessons-learnt of the visiting feedback team members that they will take back home.
- A concluding meeting with villagers and municipality representatives, in which the conclusions of the feedback team are given.
- A playful moment of interaction with local people or the area (visit a farm, a local craft, natural history, a joint dinner or dance evening etc)
- A moment on day 2 (1 hour), that has no content, but that can be used as needed.
- An evaluation moment, to share most important suggestions for improvement of the next visit



*Feedback team and receiving partner during the visit in Ireland*

Accommodation was arranged for as much as possible in a local fashion, providing as much as possible opportunities for visitors to get a taste of what is happening locally: staying with volunteers, local bed and breakfast, making use of small scale farm tourist facilities etc.

#### *Facilitating learning*

The VDP-feedback tool was used to assist a purposeful planning and facilitation of the meeting. The preparation of background material, the description of the 'source material', and the formulation of key questions were instrumental in maximizing learning for the hosting partner. It forced the partners to succinctly present the process and the results achieved, and provided in itself a learning process: "wow, have we done this and that, we failed here and succeeded there." Etcetera. The coordinators gave special attention to the drafting of the key questions in the period preceding the exchange visit, in order to make the output as valuable as possible. The questions posed by the visiting partners during the visit helped again a lot in raising consciousness about the local achievements and points to improve.

#### *Output of the Exchange Visits*

Learning was documented both ways; at the end of the visits, not only feedback was given to the hosting partner, also learning points 'to-be-taken-home' were solicited. Per exchange visit a feedback report was drafted, including the key questions and the feedback provided by the VDP-feedback team.

The feedback provided and lessons learnt are documented and put on the website [www.villagedevelopment.eu](http://www.villagedevelopment.eu).

### **3.3 FINAL SEMINAR**

In this seminar the main lessons of the project were presented. What has happened as a result of the transnational exchange in this project? How have partners benefited from the interaction for the sake of their village development planning and local governance activities? What were the learning points taken on board?

The main objective was hence to present the results obtained, and inspire third parties to engage in VDP&LG, not only 'new' villages, administrations, LAG's etc, but certainly also colleagues of the ones participating in the project.

Each participating country hosted a workshop for the participants of the final seminar. These workshops elaborated the key-themes of the project. The workshops aimed to generate emerging issues for further elaboration.

The audience of the final seminar was broader than during the visits. Also other interested people were present. For example a delegation out of Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, Leader Observatory. A special workshop about the Dutch workplace format was given (about educational learning with the region). In chapter 6 you can find more details about the final seminar.

### **3.4 WEBSITE**

All preparatory documents and the results of the feedback visits are collected on the website [www.villagedevelopment.eu](http://www.villagedevelopment.eu). Per visit is described: Key questions, the program, feedback given, lessons learnt, press coverage, presentations given and the participants. Further more you can find per country the case description, general context and involved partners.



## 4. IMPACT OF THE PROJECT FOR THE PARTNERS

The impact of the project for the partners and the learning within the project are important results of the VDP project. In this chapter the impact and learning are described in general and per country.

### 4.1 GENERAL IMPACT

In general, the exchange visits had a quite a big impact on the participants of the visits, and the projects they work on. In the first place, each country sent an average of 3-6 participants to each exchange visit, totaling 15-20 people per visits, paired by at least an equal amount of people from the receiving partner. The results were brought back home, and debriefed with their colleagues.

The mixed composition of the delegations (politicians, administrative officers, villagers) led to renewed linkages between actors. This led e.g. to a big delegation of the Irish partner to the final seminar in Sweden, with a strong representation of politicians, interested in finding new ways to support the rural areas.

Second, when hosting an exchange visit, the receiving partner mobilized a lot of local actors, notably those that played a crucial role in the process that was on at that moment.

Third, all partners attracted press coverage due to the visit. Especially the Dutch partner was very active and successful, leading to big articles in both a regional and a national newspaper, a television broadcast of a popular station (SBS6), and even a life radio interview while visiting the Swedish partner. The Danish partner did not lobby very much to get press coverage, but the mere exchange visit provoked independent press attention, leading to two national TV broadcasts on the village, and a revitalizing of the nation-wide debate on how to deal with village in so-called remote areas in Denmark, such as South-Jutland.



*Article in a Dutch regional newspaper about the feedback visit to Bentelo (March 2007)*

### 4.2 GENERAL LEARNING

All partners excelled in some issues that were much admired by the others, and inspired them work on the issues at home. We summarize a few of them here.

In Sweden and Denmark, the involvement of local businesses in the build up of community infrastructure was impressive, a point much admired by the Dutch and Irish. In The Netherlands, the ability to secure media attention to create an atmosphere of success and positivism, was much admired by the Danes, Swedes and Irish. Also the Dutch ability to link quickly with higher Administrative and political bodies was point taken by the Danes. The Irish impressed the other partners by their thorough, integral approach of village development planning. In turn, the Irish realized the importance of a formal Administrative body is close to the village level.

### 4.3 SPECIFIC LEARNING

In this section, we provide some quotes of participants, citing their main learning points.

#### **The Netherlands**

*Saskia Croes, project leader Better Beantel, after receiving the partners in the Netherlands:*

“There is much recognition: others have the same issues! For example the organization of volunteers. The work, capacities, skills and knowledge of the volunteers in the our project were esteemed highly by the guests. We realized how professional our volunteers are.

Even more reason to be proud of them. It seemed that the structures in which volunteers operate, differ from country to country, most important being that a structure is given and that for a lot of volunteers activities should be tangible, and broken down in small enough parts. A lot of tips as how to deal with volunteers very pleasantly and effectively were exchanged. Contribution from real life!”

“Scaling up is difficult, very secure processing. Processing means building bridges between local communities and local authorities, each being sincerely involved, and still talking different languages. Processing asks for a lot of transparency at the start about roles, tasks, the issues to deal with, the different scopes, and what is out of scope, the phases of the process. A lot of sensible advises were given regarding the scaling up process. Some of the advises were easy to put into practice, others were more elaborate and not very tangible. Still, also the last were very valuable because of the explanation.”

*Ellen te Riele (volunteer in the project Better Beantel), after the visit to Sweden:*

“It was wonderful to see how other people in different countries were successfully by working together to their goals. I truly enjoyed the visit and learned a lot. The people from Sweden, but also from Ireland, Denmark and our own Holland inspired me tremendously. Surprise was the Dutch broadcasting company RTV-Oost who called me while we were in Sweden for a life interview in their radio program in The Netherlands.”

*Saskia Croes (project leader), Henk Nikkels (civil servant municipality Hof van Twente), Theo Venhoeven (villagers of Bentelo), after the visit to Ireland:*

1. The ‘gebiedsuitwerking’ (area plan) Bentelo– Hengevelde is an island. We’re going to other countries but forget our own ‘backyard’: communities around us that can profit from the learning process!
2. How to involve the local members within the ‘gebiedsuitwerking’ (area plan) to reach the local communities. In Ireland the local members themselves write the local program for local government and local communities!! In Bentelo – Hengevelde the input of the local people itself is only marginal.
3. Using the political parties in the process to influence the government.

## **Sweden**

*Maria Andersson, project leader municipality Vara, after the visit to the Netherlands:*

“The most important lesson learnt, for us in Sweden, is how to get the villagers and other volunteers involved in the process and how to keep them involved. It is important, as Ole Post (Denmark) said, not to keep the volunteers in the project for too long and to give them rewards for their work. The concept in Ireland, with elected volunteers in committees, is also very interesting as it gives volunteers a formalised way of expressing views and participating in the decision making process”.

“An important lesson is also how to keep a balance between entrepreneurs, making money, and volunteers, devoting their own time. It’s important that the volunteers feel that they actually get something out of their work, and that they are not only helping the entrepreneurs make more money.”

*Maria Eriksson, project leader municipality Vara, after the visit to the Netherlands:*

“A true bottom-up perspective is probably the most important aspect of a successful rural development project. It is true, that is hard to have a bottom-up perspective in the initiation phase, but it is sometimes better to have more top-down perspective in this phase to get things started, and then change to a bottom-up perspective. It is perhaps easier to involve the government and other structural actors, if there is a top-down perspective from the beginning, a sort of “sanctioned from above”. In the following phases the bottom-up perspective is easier, and more important, to follow.

To be able to involve active and interested volunteers and entrepreneurs, it is utterly important that they feel like it is their project, not something imposed on them by the government.”

*Michael Albansson, (villagers of Kvanum) after the visit to the Netherlands:*

“If, as a municipality, you demand a village to reach the goals, please first learn to cooperate with the village”.

*Irene Karlsson (member of the executive board of Vara Municipality) after the visit to the Netherlands:*

“We have about the same experiences and the same problems. That strengthens this work you do at home.”

*Maria Eriksson and Ann Britt Martinsson (municipality Vara) and Micheal Albansson, after the visit to Ireland:*

"It was interesting to learn about how the Irish government is organized and about local governance, the distance between citizens and politicians and its consequence for the dialogue. There is a striking resemblance between the countries in the project, when it comes to challenges and opportunities for the villagers to influence and develop their village."

*Maria Eriksson and Ann Britt Martinsson, after the visit to Ireland:*

"We feel that the attention that the project gives contributes to a pride of the village – that you are been seen. Our visit and the conversations and dialogues that we have had shows that there are similar problems elsewhere and that the only thing you can do is to fight. Tips and ideas might contribute to continue the work. But the important thing is to create good communication between the parts of society that can contribute to the development."

## **Ireland**

*Louise Butler (Galway Rural Dev. Company) after the visit to the Netherlands:*

"I did learn that the problems in Holland are the local authority and the relationship of distrust with the local community is the same as Ireland and would appear to be the same in the other countries. There was a lot of laughing in disbelief and the shaking of heads by the local community on Wednesday during the meeting in the council office. What I took from this is the lack of communication between the local authority and the council and the lack of information shared and understanding of the two sides of each others constraints."

*Catherine Corcoran (Tipperary Institute), after the visit to the Netherlands:*

"What I take from this visit is:

- The extreme importance of having the Local authority in the lead of the planning process meetings and their active involvement in the overall project
- Have local politicians on board
- The PR aspect was a clever way to get political buy-in"

*Catherine Corcoran (Tipperary Institute), after the visit to Denmark:*

"What I take from this visit is:

- What can be achieved when local people work so well together
- The common struggles that we all have in getting central policy and decision-makers to respond to rural issues
- How hard we have to work to change systems and make them responsive
- That elected representatives have so much to offer if given the free time and space to listen and respond
- The struggle to develop and maintain overall vision and objectives without letting small details always get in the way"

*Catherine Corcoran (Tipperary Institute), after receiving the partners in Ireland:*

"I was very pleased with the visit. I think that the issues of implementation were well addressed and the visitors gave many ideas. The most important thing I think is that the 2 communities of Eyrecourt and Kinvara gained a lot from the process and I hope it gave new life to the process there. Thanks to all for the enthusiasm and see you all soon! You injected life back into the Galway process."

"Other points I learned in this visit were:

1. The involvement of the local communities gave the visit real life and relevance
2. There are still barriers to be lifted to get the Planners on board
3. The commitment of the C.E department to implementation is palpable and I think the proposed scheme can go ahead with key support from Leader and the Politicians
4. Continue to press the County Manger for support
5. Other key agencies besides the Galway County Council need to be involved
6. If the Galway County Council and Leader stick with the communities in the process a lot can be achieved- Funding will come eventually if plans are good!"

## Denmark

*Bodil Bertelsen (Municipality of Tønder), after the visit to the Netherlands:*

"It is important to have some drivers to initiate like Saskias company (Croes and Horst, The Netherlands). And very good to force people to work together in the project though it was private persons who got the money. If have seen that's it's possible to get the enterprises involved in local development."

*Ole Post (Villager of Branderup), after the visit to the Netherlands:*

- 1) The organization behind Better Beantel and the co-operation between the not so few levels of authorities are quite impressive. There seem to be a strong support all the way through the systems. I do realize a lot of foot-work lies behind, but the agreement towards common goals has been reached.
- 2) 13.000 hours of work by volunteers is in itself impressive. The fact, that these hours are compensated into the overall budget is news to me, but alas, probably not possible in Denmark.
- 3) Support to local entrepreneurs. It was underlined that a measurable spin off could be noted. This is a lesson to be remembered.
- 4) Professionalism as opposed to volunteers. There is much to be said in favour of volunteer work and enthusiasm. But I have to realize when it comes to Euros that plans of a certain scale indeed needs professional work and backing.

*Valdemar Schultz (Chairperson Local Council Branderup), after the visit to the Netherlands:*

"What comes to my attention is the proven fact that many privately funded projects can, -- if supported by a "red thread" through the process -- grow into something important for the community. To succeed it needs common understanding and support."

*Kirsten Willadsen (Member of the Local Council Branderup), after the visit to Sweden:*

"We learnt that it is possible to involve the firms and factories in supporting the local initiatives both with work and money. And we think that the municipality of Vara also take great responsibilities in the process and that the local politicians participate."

*Ole Post (Villager of Branderup), after the visit to Sweden:*

"First: Nothing comes from nothing.. Except fluff in your pocket. Once again it became underlined the VDP must be founded on solid grounds with at least three components. The economic capabilities of the municipality, the engagement of local citizens and the responsibility of local enterprises. In the shown cases in Sweden the latter seemed far more existing compared to Denmark."

*Valdemar Schultz (Chairperson Local Council Branderup), after the visit to Sweden:*

"Nothing comes by itself. This was made clear in Håkantorps. The attitude was basically to blame the municipality for the disintegration of the small village. If the local would invest the time they used in attempting to make contact with the municipality in making an effort in their own village, they probably would get further and the decision makers in the municipality would be more ready to help economically. Wishing the local citizens took initiative in being creative and engaged."

*Kirsten Willadsen, Villager of Branderup, after the visit to Ireland:*

"In Denmark are very privileged in terms of democracy and in participation in decision making. We pay for many things with our high taxes but we are sure to get tax money to our area and there are a lot of issues that we don't have to use our voluntary local powers on."

*Ole Post (Villager of Branderup, after the final seminar):*

“Quite apart from the sessions in Ireland - but very much inspired by – this lesson comes to mind: The direct line between local committees working for the benefit of villages and the governing administration is yet again important. Local Development Plans are worked out in detail, but focusing on involvement at early stages by higher level authorities and indeed voted politicians is essential.

At the end of the day: Politicians are voted for by showing engagement and marking their positions and interest in serving the public.”

“It is important to ensure a broad back-up by local communities when local plans are made. It takes a great effort by individuals in stepping forward inspiring and make ideas feasible. But it may happen such persons (or narrow groups) advance too single focused or moving outside the “hidden” consensus in the village or parish. Expectations must correspond with reality. Success is measured by the distance between expectations and facts. Less the distance, greater the success. Once again: no funds from wherever, no significant progress.”



*Discussing the key-questions in Denmark*



## **5. SUMMARIES OF THE FEEDBACK REPORTS**

Over the course of the project period (2007), four Exchange Visits took place. This chapter summarizes these Exchange Visits. Per visit you will find a short description of the case of each partner (i.e. its experience with Village Development Plans and Local Governance, that formed the basis for the exchange visit). It is followed by the set of key-questions that gave focus to the Exchange Visit, and concluded by a summary of the feedback given by the visiting partners. The complete feedback reports, as well as detailed case descriptions can be found on the website [www.villagedevelopment.eu](http://www.villagedevelopment.eu).

## 5.1 BENTELO (MUNICIPALITY OF TWENTE), THE NETHERLANDS: CASE, QUESTIONS AND FEEDBACK

### Case description

Bentelo is a small village (1600 inhabitants + 800 inhabitants in the countryside around Bentelo). Bentelo is part of the municipality Hof van Twente, a rural municipality with ca. 35.000 inhabitants in 6 'villages' some with more economic vitality than others. When the project Better Beantel started in 2005, some ideas and project proposals were already brought in to local and provincial authorities for some kind of funding, unfortunately without result. LEADER + stimulated to realize a joint bottom-up approach: Leader coordinator Antje Grolleman then asked Croes en Horst Project management to bring initiatives and people together and write an project proposal for Leader. This proposal, called "Better Beantel" (dialect for "improving Bentelo", was granted, and enabled to bring synergy to different small projects in a single village development plan.

Most of the project proposals of the inhabitants of Bentelo had a tourist theme. So during the process the idea emerged that the development of tourism in Bentelo might bring money to Bentelo and thereby economic development. The existing economic and welfare facilities could survive and hopefully prosper. The entire project is a bottom up process, from the initiative phase up to and including the implementation. The inhabitants of Bentelo have put their heads together, using tourism as a red thread, creating a.o. the revitalization of a historic, wooden carpenters workplace, cycling and walking routes, culinary facilities based on local entrepreneurship (sausages, wine), etc.

Although the complete process has been carried out by the inhabitants of Bentelo, the complete project would not have succeeded without the helpful attitude of the local municipality, willing to handle as applicant / client of the Leader application. As such they were formally in charge of the complete project. In effect, they kept distance to the project, being interested and stimulating, but not controlling.

The output of the project is the realisation of the individual plans / project proposals. All targets and action-points are accomplished. And the project took into account the opinions of the local stakeholders to organise more small 'events' for the local inhabitants. Precisely these events bridged worlds between the project as a whole and the local inhabitants.

After the official ending of the project a society (Stichting Better Beantel) was established that ensures the follow up of the project. Further more, an official regional development plan on a larger scale is now being carried out, as a first step to stimulate other projects in the region of Bentelo and the neighbouring village of Hengevelde. This process takes into account all relevant regional plans, national and regional trends, the agricultural, landscape, water, economic and social vitality tasks that lie in the region. Result will be a report of the present situation in the region, a profile of the desirable direction of development within the region, and a program with timetable and financial estimate of the concrete future project proposals.

### Key-questions

#### *Volunteers*

1. How to maintain the quality of the activities / projects when working with volunteers?
2. How to deal with formal responsibilities?
3. How to keep volunteers involved and active? (question of project management, government)
4. How do you generate a collaboration between tourist entrepreneurs and volunteers?
5. How to capitalize on the efforts, knowledge and skills of volunteers
6. What can be the role of local people in decision making / generating / performing social services (such as sports facilities, library, transportation etc)? (Question of government, project management)

#### *Scaling-up*

7. What is a good workable structure (regarding decision making, consultative processes) between villages and government, and between villagers themselves?
8. How to scale –up How to link with the wider regional issues/ agenda's? Which instruments should be used? Which organizational structure is appropriate? Which financial structure?
9. Can a village development plan be used as an integrating concept, linking a variety of activities? And how can we use it as a communicating tool wit local government?

## **Feedback given**

### *Volunteers*

Most of the time volunteers want to contribute something to their area or village. And they can contribute a lot, to different kind of projects and activities. They know the area/village as their own pocket and feel both concern and responsibility to do some work for the common sense of the village. They offer their work with pleasure, for free. But they need to see that their work is being appreciated. Hence, their contribution depends on a few conditions:

- Make sure that during the whole project there is a clear communication about the ambitions, limits and rules of the project and that people know who is doing what, when and how.
- Find the common and shared goal for volunteers and entrepreneurs for working together. Make sure that the urgency to take action is clear ('why do you need me?'). Both parties have to have a benefit for working together.
- Maintaining the motivation of volunteers is crucial to create sustained project quality. Important is:
  - To define milestones that are measurable and that everyone agrees to.
  - To be always open for other or new volunteers (and employees of municipalities) that might be able to take over from a volunteer when (s)he done. Then you can keep on moving.
  - To start a project with small activities that benefit the whole community
  - Provide training for volunteers when needed
  - Get volunteers on board with an inspiring and wide vision, who may be able to convince other volunteers to contribute.
  - Provide constructive feedback to the work of volunteers (no whipping!)
  - Give volunteers decision making power: their judgment counts!
  - Don't ask volunteers to work for something, when there is nothing going on. Volunteers work with more interest when they see that their works had added value to solving a problem, or creating a possibility.
  - Have available a series of tangible tasks that can be done by a volunteer.  
Make these tasks known: through a local website, a notice at the local shop etc

### *Scaling up*

Important is to create an open work structure. Both villages and government should come with integrated proposals (village plan), funding opportunities (budget lines) and expertise.

*Before scaling up, scale out!* This means that while making an integrated area development plan, go beyond the 'usual suspects', and make your activities interesting for others in the village. Simply ask people! Create a website for internal village use. By making it more integral, it becomes also more interesting for other government departments.

Translate your plan to a map. Many issues of village life have a spatial dimension. Make use of this fact by mapping these issues (may ask a landscape architect or a planner to help you with this). It is a great way to integrate your vision in a simple piece of paper, and government people love it.

### *Suggestion for the village of Bentelo:*

- Be proactive as a village, and seize the initiative! Don't wait and half heartedly adapt to proposals from local and regional government, but develop your selves a proposal for developing an area vision/community/action plan. Propose this to the government.

### *Suggestions for local government*

- Create conditions (providing time, seed money, experts) in which both villages can develop their own vision on how to work together and build a joint vision.
- Look for a really independent area coordinator/chairman of area committee (not living in Benterlo nor Hengevelde)
- Based on village prioritization then develop integrated village plans with detailed proposals, funding lines, expertise. This means creating an open work structure that can incorporate any aspect of village development whether that is spatial, social or economic in focus.

## 5.2 MUNICIPALITY OF VARA, SWEDEN: CASE, QUESTIONS AND FEEDBACK

### Case description

Vara municipality is one of five municipalities in Sweden, which are a part of a project for 'increase the participation, through influence, for groups of citizens in alienation'. In Vara three main target groups were identified: youths; local development groups and the local commercial and industrial life. The aim of the project is to create permanent methods for these groups to participate more in policy making. Vara has been working for a long time with the local development groups to develop the rural areas, with the main goal to keep or increase the number of people living in the municipality and to increase the number of employment opportunities. Therefore it was natural to connect the 'participation project' and the work with the development groups in the work to conduct VDP's.

The municipality of Vara formally took the initiative to join the translational VDP project, but at least three of the four villages had already started developing their own VDP's, although maybe not in such structured way as they work now. The four villages where VDP's are conducted are: Arentorp with 450 inhabitants, Håkantorps with 220 inhabitants, Kvänum with 1 300 inhabitants and Vedum with 1 000 inhabitants. Because of having the focus on a series of villages, the villages can learn from each other during the process. It is also interesting to follow the villages in their work, as their starting points are completely different.

The VDP's were going to focus mainly on developing the countryside to make it an inviting place for people to live in, and also on how to get the villagers to take their own responsibility for their village, together with the Authorities and the local commercial and industrial life. The themes have been pre-set, but are probably going to shift slightly during the development process.

The output of the project is first of all good VDP's, which will be completed for all four villages. Second, a guide to writing VDP's will be produced. At last the wish of the project was to develop a policy about how VDP's can be integrated in the planning process. This will hopefully lead to more VDP's being written in other villages, and help show that the villages views are important and should matter in the planning process.

Since the VDP's are not completely finished yet, the question of follow-up and implementation will have to be discussed further. The goal is to have long-sightedness in the issue and for the plans to always be 'living' and up-dated. When a new village wants to write their VDP they should be able to use these four villages as consultants in the process.

### Key-questions

1. How do we integrate all the ideas that the villagers into one coherent vision, and not one project today and another one tomorrow?
2. How do we get the villagers, local development groups, local associations and the local business life to take their responsibility in implementing the VDP's?
3. What different methods can be used to write a VDP, since all villages have different starting-points?
4. How do we get the local politicians and civil servants working with planning to change their work methods to integrate VDP's in the planning process?

### Feedback given

#### *An inspiring vision for the municipality and for the villagers*

The goal of the municipality of growing from 16.000 to 17.000 inhabitants seems neither challenging nor inspiring enough. A suggestion is to make the vision more explicit, more inclusive, and loaded with identity. Same for the villages: It seems that the village development plans that are now being prepared focus too much on objects and singular issues (a bath lake, a hotel, a sports hall etc), while they are not embedded in a wider perspective on the development of village. At least we were not able to sense this wider perspective. A greater effort should be taken to make explicit what kind of village inhabitants would like to live in.

### *The village of Vara and the other villages*

While perfectly understandable from a helicopter perspective to centralize some services, like the concert hall, in Vara itself, from the point of view of the smaller villages, more directed attention seems in need for these smaller villages. Often it means the generation of small and tangible results: e.g. providing means and materials to sustain a weekly children meeting in Håkantorp. These small steps are very important to increase people's participation, pride and sense of responsibility.

### *Diversity of villages demands a diversity of approaches*

- Stronger Local development groups  
Although some Local Development Groups are already viewed as strong groups, they can still learn from each other, and improve their skills. Being a strong group does not mean the villagers do not need any help, assistance or compliments during or after the VDP process. It would be good to check whether the strong group really represents all issues in the community and that the group is open to all ideas coming from the municipality and new members. That is meant with *inclusiveness*. If this is not the case: work on it! Make sure that the experience of the strong groups inspire others – (including municipality)!
- Weaker local development groups  
Some investigation is needed to assess the reason for weak local development. This assessment is used to select the most yielding approach. What exactly is the problem why the group is weak? This needs to be sorted out in order to find a possible solution in making the LDG perform better and the VDP implemented in the villages. Both partners have to be clear about their expectations and their responsibilities. Once the reason for weakness is known, the focus should be on developing the group, not the plan. First the group issues should be dealt with; otherwise a (good, workable) VDP will never be compiled.

### *Integrate all the ideas of the villagers into one coherent vision*

- Make explicit the sense of place / identity of a village
- Sort and prioritise ideas well
- Link with the wider agenda – formulate the wider agenda also in terms of an identity rich vision
- Use graphic material (maps) to visualize the integration between different ideas and projects
- Additional observations: tools for generating visions and creating options for villagers to 'buy in'

### *Involvement of all actors for implementation*

- Create co-ownership of ideas, projects, and vision of the future -
- Create tangible requests for participation of businesses
- A key issue of capacity building seems to be to create co-ownership, among the municipality and with the villages.

### *Changing the work method local politicians and civil servants working with planning to integrate VDP's in the planning process?*

- Create pressure (press, actions etc)
- Seduce them
- Involve them

## 5.3 EYRECOURT AND KINVARA (GALWAY COUNTY), IRELAND: CASE, QUESTIONS AND FEEDBACK

### Case description

Within Galway County, located in the West of Ireland, the Local Authority called Galway County Council in partnership with Leader and Tipperary Institute have developed a partnership approach to planning with 2 communities, Kinvara (950 inhabitants) in South Galway and Eyrecourt (530 inhabitants) in East Galway. The idea behind these partnerships was that local people would take part in a planning process where they would have effective involvement during all stages of the plans development and would explore options regarding the quality, nature and scale of development for their area. This partnership approach, adopted from the start of the programme was a cornerstone of the whole process.

Integrated Area Planning or IAP may be defined as a practical and participatory process to collect, compile and analyse information about the needs and priorities of people in an area. The plan is put together by local people themselves, assisted by an independent facilitator and in partnership with state agencies. The plan is produced, and at the same time the skills and structures needed to prepare and implement the plan are developed. This plan can then be used by state agencies in preparing development plans for the area, confident that these plans reflect local people's wishes.

An essential aspect of IAP is the involvement of the Local Authority as the sponsor of the project. In Kinvara, the Planning Officer from the Council in particular was a key member and her presence ensured a smooth flow of communication and consistency between the Council and the Community. In Eyrecourt the representative of the Community and Enterprise section was the link to the local authority.

A major step in the IAP is the appointment of a local steering group. This group is charged with ensuring that the plan is produced and that all of the appropriate bodies are consulted and that local people are constantly involved in the development of the plan. Perhaps the most essential guiding principle in establishing a steering group is that the group be as representative as possible and that all of the different sectors within the community have an opportunity to be represented on the group. An important part of the process was developing the skills and capacity of steering group members to enable them to develop the plan and to implement it in the future.

In Kinvara and Eyrecourt, local development groups initiated the process. However, in order to ensure proper representation from all sides of the community, Steering group members were selected at a large public meeting, divided into various sub-groups, each of which nominated a representative. Where groups were not represented, people were later co-opted on to redress the balance. Throughout the process, members of Galway Co. Council were active steering group members.

A wide range of actions in specific areas has been identified in the plans. The defined actions and associated objectives have been categorized into short, medium and ongoing/long term activities. Associated with the activities are a range of stakeholders and agencies that will have various functions in relation to the outlined actions. The entire implementation process requires an underpinning commitment by the community supported by the statutory agencies to ensure that the spirit and the essential material elements of the plan are realized.

### Key-questions

Central theme: How do we move the process along from plans to implementation?

1. SCHEME – Is it feasible to introduce an agreed 'scheme' between Local Government, Local Development and Communities where a series of Integrated Area Plans (IAPs) can be prepared?
2. CRITERIA –
  - 2a) what criteria can local authorities and local development agencies use to select villages/communities for Integrated Area Planning?
  - 2b) and under what criteria should communities consider before engaging in IAP with local authorities?
3. AWARENESS - How can we raise awareness on IAP as a process be promoted in County Galway?
4. DEMOCRATIC INCLUSION - How can democratic inclusion in the preparation of Integrated Area Plans be improved?

## Feedback given

### *General feedback on how to increase implementation*

- Focus on positive developments - Acknowledge that you take small steps in the right direction. Do not stop and freeze in your tracks because of one large dilemma (i.e. sewage system).
- Create and celebrate successes - Success is critical for continuation, however small; it is needed to keep high spirit & enthusiasm.
- Review and monitor your village plan regularly - The village inhabitants must make their own priorities; they should not do this only once, but preferably every year.
- Refresh the board of the Community council once in a while - When the plan is made, it is time for implementation. The work in the villages must start afresh. Have a kick off meeting and show the positive things you have accomplished in your village. This should provide new energy and you should try to blend the experience with new blood.
- Appoint a joint 'working group' to monitor implementation - Keep the relation between local government and community council going, especially when plan is finished. A time schedule should be made -> when / whom to contact. "Keep the kettle boiling."
- Broaden focus from government to other organizations - Don't think that all depends on government. Try to ally and understand the agenda of other 'big' actors in your area, including both institutional organizations and private business.
- Manage expectations - Sort out expectations from every party: be realistic.
- Multi-faceted process - One major suggestion is to rethink IAP as a game of 'ladders and snakes'. The process of the IAPs in Eyrecourt and Kinvara were developed quite linearly. That means: we do the IAP process, and then start thinking about implementation. In reality, Village Development planning is so multi-faceted that it is advisable to generate multiple and early wins, while the game is on.

### *Scheme and criteria (questions 1 and 2)*

A scheme as the IAP is indeed very useful, as a way to accommodate for the distance between villages and Lowest Administrative level. A well designed scheme will clarify roles and expectations, will prevent the loss of social capital, provides a routine for interaction where there is none, will intensify contacts and hence mutual learning and will, last but not least, increase chances for implementation. But a checklist should not become a bureaucratic instrument in itself. Likewise, it will only work well if there is a minimum level of trust.

- Most likely, it is in the highly dynamic areas that budget is more easily available. This makes it all the more important that when IAP is conducted in areas further away from economic or policy dynamism, budget is prepared. If budget is out of sight, do not conduct an IAP.

### *Awareness is essential at all levels.*

It is necessary and very important. All levels must be aware of what is going on. By everyone, we mean the people in the villages and the surroundings, the politicians and the municipality/county (or other) officers that will be involved, either from start or later on in the process must be informed before start.

- Try to organise a project kick off meeting to which you invite all villages, politicians and other stakeholders.
- To reach the politicians you must tell good stories and use the media spreading the news. You also need to ensure to get your politicians out to the area
- It is essential to use press / media to inform a large group about the project and the village.
- Create an association of (small) villages at the level of County Galway, and organize attractive events.

### *How can democratic inclusion in the preparation of Integrated Area Plans be improved?*

- An IAP is a document of the village, and should continue to inspire them
- Establish contacts between elected politicians, civil servants and regions within Galway County more frequently
- Provide IAPs with statutory character
- Create an Association of Villages at the level of County Galway

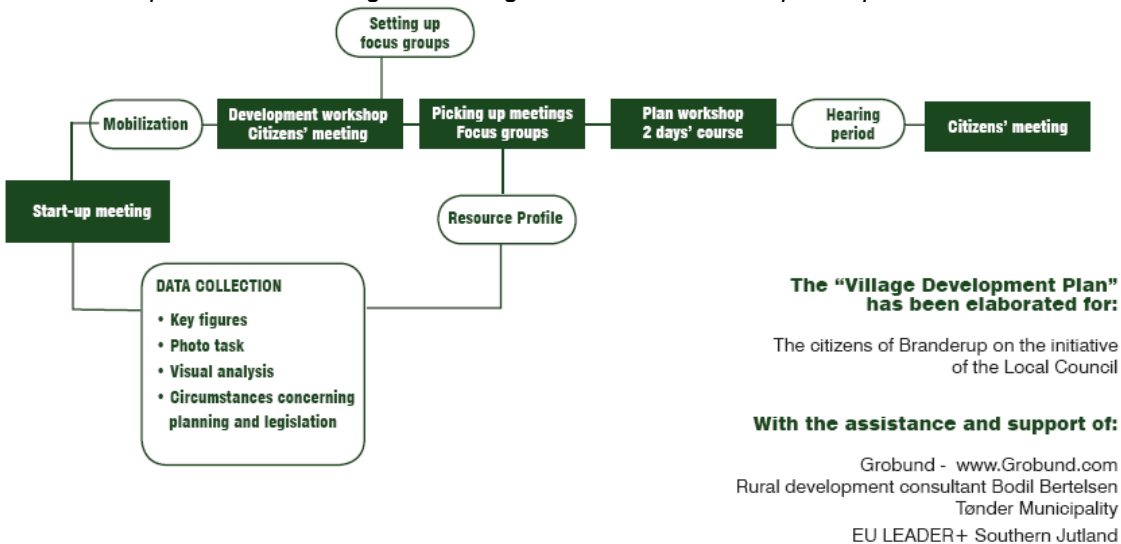
## 5.4 BRANDERUP (MUNICIPALITY OF TØNDER), DENMARK: CASE, QUESTIONS AND FEEDBACK

### Case description

The citizens of Branderup, a village in Southern Jutland, Denmark are active and enterprising people who have shown at several occasions that they do not leave things as they are but that they themselves take the lead in relations concerning the society in which they live. Following this line of action, the local village council took the initiative (spring 2006) for starting a longer lasting process which will eventually result in a visionary development plan for Branderup. The plan is an important tool to secure the future of Branderup. The wish was

- To have a wide, popular debate of needs, opportunities and wishes for Branderup,
- To establish a united voice,
- To involve the associations of the village as well as the institutions and as many citizens in their own right as possible
- To concretize ideas and visions in a “Village Development Plan for Branderup”.

*Outline of the process concerning the making of the ‘citizens development plan’.*



The fundamental thought behind the “Village Development Plan” is that it’s the citizens’ own plan. The contents are the citizens’ own proposals, visions, aims and suggestions for action directed at how you secure the best possible future for the village and the surrounding country. The plan is meant to be a tool for use both “internally” among the citizens of the village and for “external” use aimed at influencing decision makers as well as possible newcomers to the area. Thus the plan is directed at creating a common identity in the village, clarifying a common aim and strengthening the cooperation and solidarity “internally” among the citizens of Branderup. The Village Development Plan for Branderup is also the tangible proof that the citizens are enterprising, active and committed people who take the lead and the future in their own hand instead of simply leaving things as they are.

The actual description of the plan took place in the start of November 2007. I.e. that in this period the multiple inputs and wishes were structured, phrased and visualized for the real plan document. On the 18th of January the finished plan was presented for the whole village at a festive citizens’ meeting.

### Key-questions

*General question: Upscaling of local plans and regional learning*

1. What comments could you give us on the way we undertook our VDP?
  - Do you see any weaknesses? How could the process of conducting the VDP be improved a next time?
  - What do you see as our next challenge? How do we move on?

2. How can we achieve a similar level of vital collaboration at the regional / municipal level? What can we do as villages about that? What can the municipality do? In short: how can we strengthen regional learning?

*Thematic questions: the future of Branderup*

- 3) What does it take for Branderup to attract tourists?
- 4) How do we as a village attract entrepreneurs and niche productions?
- 5) How to integrate local traditions and expectations of the villagers?

### **Feedback given**

*General recommendations for local government:*

- support the exchange of experiences between the villages of Tønder
- use the village development plans as important building stones for the Local and Regional Spatial Plans – it will save government money
- create as soon as possible supportive regional policy in various domains: tourism, entrepreneurship, housing etc
- intensify the search for additional financial resources (e.g. through European collaboration)

*General recommendations for Branderup:*

- claim more with more intensity regional support and vision
- visualize more your achievements – they will bring you rewards

*General feedback on the VDP as conducted in Branderup*

- Sell your achievements
- Media relations are vital
- State clearly your problems and their impact
- Broaden your core group
- Broaden the affiliation to outside the village,
- Reach out to the big local stakeholders.
- Develop an action plan
- Develop key selling points for the municipalities.
- Political support for your VDP and for Branderup is vital.
- Clarify decision making

*Vital regional collaboration / up-scaling of the Branderup experience*

- Use existing political structures
- Collaborate with other villages
- Integrate facilities, entrepreneurs in business centers
- Make a SWOT analysis at village level, and match it with a SWOT at regional level
- Elaborate two up-scaling perspectives: Branderup vis-à-vis municipality of Tønder and region of South-Jutland (also rural-urban), and South-Jutland vis-a-vis Denmark as a whole. You need different strategies for both up-scaling processes. Try to go beyond the urban-rural dichotomie, and sell your efforts as solutions for the urban problems.
- Increase entrepreneurship

*Thematic questions: the future of Branderup*

- You have to exploit what is already there, what you have naturally. So think about exploiting the natural countryside, you have a great asset there.
- You have a fantastic asset in your village: the old “Kommunhaus”, the former village meeting centre. This centre has enormous potential! Develop your own community enterprise centre in this facility. You may also think of starting a local cooperative shop in this centre, staffed by the community, you can do this even if the opening hours are limited.
- Research the needs of the new families and involve them in the activities and services available, make them feel welcome and appreciated.



## 6. RESULTS OF THE FINAL SEMINAR

The final seminar was held at Bjertop castle in Vara, Sweden, in January 2008. It brought together some 60 villagers, administrative officials, politicians and other involved professionals, from 9 European countries: Ireland, Sweden, the Netherlands, Denmark, Hungary, Finland, Poland, Latvia and Lithuania and a representative of the European Leader observatory.

The programme was as follows

Day 1, morning: setting the scene: what is the subject we talk about?  
Day 1, afternoon: field excursion  
Day 2, morning: local governance and multistakeholder alliances  
Day 2, afternoon: exploring emerging issues

Day 1 started with a review of the goals, achievements and future challenges of the project, by project coordinator Gaston Remmers. It was immediately followed by interactive workshops. On both mornings, a total of 10 workshops were held. All workshops were hosted by project partners, and reflected the central themes of this project. The first half was dedicated to a presentation of the outcomes of the transnational project. The second half aimed to identify, through a discussion with attendants, new emergent issues related to village development plans & local governance, for further discussion on Wednesday afternoon. An additional workshop was organized, in which a new, Dutch approach to the involvement of higher education and research in village development planning and local governance was discussed. On day 2, Ciaran Lynch of Tipperary Institute (IR) gave a key-note lecture on multilevel governance and the relevance for village development planning.

The following issues emerged as topics for future elaboration:

1. How to clarify and strengthen the role & effectiveness of LAG's in VDP planning
2. How to stimulate networking between villagers
3. How to reinforce commitment of builders to deliver community infrastructure?
4. How to bring together visions of villagers and municipalities?
5. Which democratic processes facilitate VDP best
6. How to create a new VDP & LG project with new partners
7. How to generate funding (villagers, vdp's competences)
8. How to involve Higher Educational in VDP's
9. How to integrate issues of sustainability and integrality in VDP's

See for more details the report of the final seminar, and [www.villagedevelopment.eu](http://www.villagedevelopment.eu) for the presentations.

Participants of the final seminar:

Villager	11
Municipality	16
Regional government	8
National government	4
LAG	10
EU	1
Others	11
Total	61



*Plenary presentation during the final seminar, Sweden*



# Village Development Plans and Local Governance

Final report

March 2008

A transnational LEADER+ project between

LAG Zuid Twente, the Netherlands  
LAG South Jutland, Denmark  
Galway LAG, Ireland  
LAG Kärnan i Västra Götaland, Sweden (Lead partner)

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Website of the project (this document is published on this website)  
[www.villagedevelopment.eu](http://www.villagedevelopment.eu)

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

During the period from the end of 2006 to February 2008 the transnational Leader project Village Development Plans and Local Governance took place. This report is the final report of the project and gives an overview of the activities and results.

The project is a transnational cooperation project of four Leader areas in four European countries. LAG Zuid Twente in the Netherlands, LAG South Jutland in Denmark, Galway LAG in Ireland, LAG Kärnan i Västra Götaland in Sweden. The project coordination was co-ordinated by Gaston Remmers (Bureau Buitenkans), Marieke Koot and Marije Pouw (both ETC).

The project aims to improve the quality and effectiveness of village development plans by paying explicit attention to *local governance*, i.e. the web and quality of relations between villagers, Leader Local Action Groups, local and regional government and other relevant parties.

Thanks to the input of all the participants of the feedback-visits a lot of experience was shared and information was exchanged which made the project a success.

In this final report you can find, per chapter:

2. Global project description (goals, project set-up, partnership)
3. Description of project activities (Preparation of background material, VDP-feedback visits, Final Seminar)
4. Impact of the project (general impact, general learning, specific learning)
5. A summary of 4 Exchange Visits: case description, key-questions and feedback given
6. Results of the Final Seminar



## 2. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Throughout Europe, villagers engage in making development plans for their villages. Their efforts are often astonishing; yet, the effectiveness of these efforts is often small: the local action points are not or only partially implemented. One of the key-reasons for this are the weak links with local and regional Administration and other institutional parties, which leads to local people acting in a void, and hence to frustration. This project aims to improve the quality and effectiveness of village development plans and local efforts, by paying explicit attention to the links between villagers, Leader Local Action Group, local and regional Administration (i.e. municipalities, counties, provinces etc) and other relevant parties. The project will thus lead not only to better and more effective village development plans, but also to empowered citizens and improved local governance. In this chapter you can find the specific goals, the project setup and partnership of the project.

### 2.1 GOALS OF THE PROJECT

The project aims to improve the quality and effectiveness of village development plans by paying explicit attention to the links between villagers, Leader Local Action Groups, local and regional government and other relevant parties.

Specific goals are:

**A) Improve the links between informal community based plans and the formal, statutory plans of (Local) Authorities.**

*Involved issues:* Concertation between different parties who are involved. Dynamic, type of agreements, status of village plans, how to link plans content wise, protocols, working culture, etc

**B) Work towards the integration of a diversity of local activities in a coherent local plan at village level**

*Involved issues:* How can we bring all different activities and action in a village together in one plan, that is coherent, that facilitates interaction with local government, and that serves as a reference point (and linking pin) for the villagers?

**C) Enhance capacity-building and democratic inclusion of volunteers in local development processes**

*Involved issues:* How can citizens become more involved in democratic processes? How to generate and maintain the motivation of volunteers (especially in times when one is waiting for funding?) What responsibility can volunteers carry? How can their capacity be improved? What methods ways of working are available that appeal to volunteers? What methods facilitate joint decision making? What skills and knowledge do we need to achieve all of this?

**D) Strengthen the implementation of plans**

*Involved issues:* How can we go from nice plans to implementing these plans? How can we sustain the development process after finishing the plan? What new ideas are available to organize and implement tourist-based recreational projects

**E) Improve regional learning and scaling-up of local plans**

*Involved issues:* How can we go from single-village based VDP's to VDP's that not only link between one another, but also with the regional agendas? Can villages learn from each other and collaborate between them?

## 2.2 PROJECT SET-UP

The project builds on two lines of action which support each other: A) the development of Village Development Plans in each of the partner countries, and B) transnational learning through mutual and structured feedback visits.

### A) The development of village development plans

The source material for this project is the engagement of the partners in the making and implementation of village development plans, and the search for adequate linking mechanisms with local and regional authorities. This implies that, over the course of the current transnational project, partners either engage in the preparation of village development plans, or will engage in evaluating past experiences with preparing village development plans, with the explicit aim to arrive at working methods, procedures and linking mechanisms that enhance quality and implementation of village development plans and local governance. Based on this source material, partners engage in transnational learning and exchange.

### B) Transnational Learning

The transnational learning part of the project will be used to generate feedback for the partners (LAG, communities and local and regional Administrations) so that the ongoing process of making the village development plan will be strengthened. At the same time, the lessons learnt will be documented on a website, insightful not only for current partners, but also for other parties.

Learning within the project will be done by:

- *Preparation: generating common standards for comparison and understanding*

1. description of the general context
2. Preparation of a VDP-feedback tool.
3. Case descriptions of Village Development and Local Governance practices.

- *Transnational exchange and learning*

Using four interaction mechanisms:

4. 1 kick-off meeting
5. 4 VDP-feedback visits
6. 1 big concluding seminar, open to interested parties throughout Europe
7. Website

## 2.3 PARTNERSHIP

In the project four LEADER Local Action Groups participate. The all have been busy with or are busy with village development plans. The input of the partners differs, because of state of the process and the content of the plans. See below for an overview of the partners:

Country	Area, village	Co-ordinator
Sweden	Municipality of Vara, LAG Kärnan i Västra Götaland, villages of Arentorp, Vedum, Håkantorps, Kvånum	María Andersson
Ireland	Galway County Council, Galway LAG, villages of Kinvara and Eyrecourt	Catherine Corcoran
Denmark	LAG South Jutland, village of Branderup	Bodil Bertelsen
The Netherlands	LAG Zuid Twente, Village of Bentelo	Saskia Croes

Project coordination was done by:

- Gaston Remmers (Bureau Buitenkans, the Netherlands)
- Marieke Koot / Marije Pouw (ETC, the Netherlands)

The coordination was responsible for the set-up of the visits, facilitation of the visits, setting up the website, and compiling the feedback reports.

### 3. DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT ACTIVITIES

In this chapter the project activities of the preparation phase and the execution phase are described.

#### 3.1 PREPARATION OF BACKGROUND MATERIAL

In order to enable a maximum of learning between the partners, some preparatory documents were made. A website was developed where all documents and results of the project were made available. [www.villagedevelopment.eu](http://www.villagedevelopment.eu).

##### - Description of the general context

Each country described the general context of its experience in village development planning, explaining the following issues:

- Political System and Administrative Units
  - What are the administrative units in your country? (municipality, county etc?)
  - What are the powers of the Authorities linked to these units?
  - What is the usual way in which people are involved in policy making?
- Leader
  - What is the specific role of LEADER in your political system?
  - How is Leader organized?
  - How many Leader groups are there in your country?
- Planning system
  - What is the usual planning system in your country?
  - How do village development plans relate to the formal planning instruments?

##### - Preparation of the VDP-feedback tool

A tool was developed to generate a maximum of learning during the feedback visits. This tool contains a series of 'must-do' elements in each visit. For more information about the set-up of the feedback visits see chapter 3.2.

##### - Description of the source material of each partner, i.e. their VDP-case

On order to understand better each others experience with village development plans and local governance, all partners prepared a document describing the following issues.

1. General characteristics of the VDP conducted in the village
2. Goals and scope
3. Process architecture
4. Output
5. Follow-up and implementation
6. Other issues?
7. What are the issues that, as a hosting partner, you want to receive feedback on?
8. What are the issues that, as a visiting partner, you want to learn from?

##### - Kick off meeting with all the partners

On the 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> of February 2007 a kick off meeting took place. During this meeting the scheme of the feedback visits was decided, as were the themes and global key-questions of the visits. This meeting was the culmination of a long preparatory period, and was important to get to know each other and to express and share the common interest for the project.

#### 3.2 VDP-FEEDBACK VISITS

The visits constitute the heart of the transnational project. The VDP-feedback tool, an innovative mechanism specially designed for this project, is meant to generate a maximum of learning and inspiration among the partners. The partners develop structured feedback based on key-questions of the hosting partner. Each visit zooms in on the case of the receiving partner, and specifically aims to increase interaction between different stakeholders in local governance.

Each partner has chosen its own theme within the general project theme to focus the feedback visits. Within this theme, the hosting partner experiences problems in the development of its projects, and feels an ambition to do better.

### Themes and data of the feedback visits

Country (receiving partner)	Theme	Data
The Netherlands	Volunteers and scaling-up	26 and 27 March 07
Sweden	Integrating activities in a local plan	22 and 23 May 07
Ireland	Implementation of local village plans	17 and 18 September 07
Denmark	Upscaling of local plans and regional learning	22 and 23 November 07
Sweden	Final Seminar	22 and 23 January 08

#### *Mixed delegation*

Per VDP-feedback visit, the host partner receives a small but mixed delegation of each the 3 other partners (totaling 10-20 persons). The mixed delegation represents different stakeholders in local governance: villagers, civil servants, decision makers or political responsables (or any other stakeholder the visiting partners considers important). This results in a dynamic multi-actor, multi-level and multi-theme learning process for all involved stakeholders. Each partner may rotate the persons to be sent for each VDP-feedback visit, in order to generate as much learning as possible.

#### *Role of the receiving partner and visiting partner*

The receiving partner prepares questions related to VDP&LG they would like to receive feedback on. These questions refer in the first place to the general and important themes of the transnational project: how to link successfully with local and regional authorities, methodologies for generating a local action agenda etc. In the second place, the questions address specific issues of relevance to the receiving partner and its specific theme.

The visiting partners bring with them their home experience to ask questions, and provoke lively discussions. All *visitors* together will act as a 'feedback-team'.

#### *Program of the visit*

Each VDP-feedback lasted 2 full days. Key components were

- A preparatory moment for the visiting partners, before arriving at the host area, reading the background documentation
- A session to generate a shared framework and focus among the feedback team members and hosting partner
- Meeting(s) with representatives of the village
- Meeting(s) with representatives of the local authorities, and other relevant institutional parties
- A field excursion: drive or even better walk through the territory, under the guidance of local people
- A working session of the feedback team, to gather and detail impressions, specify feedback on the questions of the hosting partner, and, last but not least, to specify lessons-learnt of the visiting feedback team members that they will take back home.
- A concluding meeting with villagers and municipality representatives, in which the conclusions of the feedback team are given.
- A playful moment of interaction with local people or the area (visit a farm, a local craft, natural history, a joint dinner or dance evening etc)
- A moment on day 2 (1 hour), that has no content, but that can be used as needed.
- An evaluation moment, to share most important suggestions for improvement of the next visit



*Feedback team and receiving partner during the visit in Ireland*

Accommodation was arranged for as much as possible in a local fashion, providing as much as possible opportunities for visitors to get a taste of what is happening locally: staying with volunteers, local bed and breakfast, making use of small scale farm tourist facilities etc.

#### *Facilitating learning*

The VDP-feedback tool was used to assist a purposeful planning and facilitation of the meeting. The preparation of background material, the description of the 'source material', and the formulation of key questions were instrumental in maximizing learning for the hosting partner. It forced the partners to succinctly present the process and the results achieved, and provided in itself a learning process: "wow, have we done this and that, we failed here and succeeded there." Etcetera. The coordinators gave special attention to the drafting of the key questions in the period preceding the exchange visit, in order to make the output as valuable as possible. The questions posed by the visiting partners during the visit helped again a lot in raising consciousness about the local achievements and points to improve.

#### *Output of the Exchange Visits*

Learning was documented both ways; at the end of the visits, not only feedback was given to the hosting partner, also learning points 'to-be-taken-home' were solicited. Per exchange visit a feedback report was drafted, including the key questions and the feedback provided by the VDP-feedback team.

The feedback provided and lessons learnt are documented and put on the website [www.villagedevelopment.eu](http://www.villagedevelopment.eu).

### **3.3 FINAL SEMINAR**

In this seminar the main lessons of the project were presented. What has happened as a result of the transnational exchange in this project? How have partners benefited from the interaction for the sake of their village development planning and local governance activities? What were the learning points taken on board?

The main objective was hence to present the results obtained, and inspire third parties to engage in VDP&LG, not only 'new' villages, administrations, LAG's etc, but certainly also colleagues of the ones participating in the project.

Each participating country hosted a workshop for the participants of the final seminar. These workshops elaborated the key-themes of the project. The workshops aimed to generate emerging issues for further elaboration.

The audience of the final seminar was broader than during the visits. Also other interested people were present. For example a delegation out of Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, Leader Observatory. A special workshop about the Dutch workplace format was given (about educational learning with the region). In chapter 6 you can find more details about the final seminar.

### **3.4 WEBSITE**

All preparatory documents and the results of the feedback visits are collected on the website [www.villagedevelopment.eu](http://www.villagedevelopment.eu). Per visit is described: Key questions, the program, feedback given, lessons learnt, press coverage, presentations given and the participants. Further more you can find per country the case description, general context and involved partners.



## 4. IMPACT OF THE PROJECT FOR THE PARTNERS

The impact of the project for the partners and the learning within the project are important results of the VDP project. In this chapter the impact and learning are described in general and per country.

### 4.1 GENERAL IMPACT

In general, the exchange visits had a quite a big impact on the participants of the visits, and the projects they work on. In the first place, each country sent an average of 3-6 participants to each exchange visit, totaling 15-20 people per visits, paired by at least an equal amount of people from the receiving partner. The results were brought back home, and debriefed with their colleagues.

The mixed composition of the delegations (politicians, administrative officers, villagers) led to renewed linkages between actors. This led e.g. to a big delegation of the Irish partner to the final seminar in Sweden, with a strong representation of politicians, interested in finding new ways to support the rural areas.

Second, when hosting an exchange visit, the receiving partner mobilized a lot of local actors, notably those that played a crucial role in the process that was on at that moment.

Third, all partners attracted press coverage due to the visit. Especially the Dutch partner was very active and successful, leading to big articles in both a regional and a national newspaper, a television broadcast of a popular station (SBS6), and even a life radio interview while visiting the Swedish partner. The Danish partner did not lobby very much to get press coverage, but the mere exchange visit provoked independent press attention, leading to two national TV broadcasts on the village, and a revitalizing of the nation-wide debate on how to deal with village in so-called remote areas in Denmark, such as South-Jutland.



*Article in a Dutch regional newspaper about the feedback visit to Bentelo (March 2007)*

### 4.2 GENERAL LEARNING

All partners excelled in some issues that were much admired by the others, and inspired them work on the issues at home. We summarize a few of them here.

In Sweden and Denmark, the involvement of local businesses in the build up of community infrastructure was impressive, a point much admired by the Dutch and Irish. In The Netherlands, the ability to secure media attention to create an atmosphere of success and positivism, was much admired by the Danes, Swedes and Irish. Also the Dutch ability to link quickly with higher Administrative and political bodies was point taken by the Danes. The Irish impressed the other partners by their thorough, integral approach of village development planning. In turn, the Irish realized the importance of a formal Administrative body is close to the village level.

### 4.3 SPECIFIC LEARNING

In this section, we provide some quotes of participants, citing their main learning points.

#### **The Netherlands**

*Saskia Croes, project leader Better Beantel, after receiving the partners in the Netherlands:*

“There is much recognition: others have the same issues! For example the organization of volunteers. The work, capacities, skills and knowledge of the volunteers in the our project were esteemed highly by the guests. We realized how professional our volunteers are.

Even more reason to be proud of them. It seemed that the structures in which volunteers operate, differ from country to country, most important being that a structure is given and that for a lot of volunteers activities should be tangible, and broken down in small enough parts. A lot of tips as how to deal with volunteers very pleasantly and effectively were exchanged. Contribution from real life!”

“Scaling up is difficult, very secure processing. Processing means building bridges between local communities and local authorities, each being sincerely involved, and still talking different languages. Processing asks for a lot of transparency at the start about roles, tasks, the issues to deal with, the different scopes, and what is out of scope, the phases of the process. A lot of sensible advises were given regarding the scaling up process. Some of the advises were easy to put into practice, others were more elaborate and not very tangible. Still, also the last were very valuable because of the explanation.”

*Ellen te Riele (volunteer in the project Better Beantel), after the visit to Sweden:*

“It was wonderful to see how other people in different countries were successfully by working together to their goals. I truly enjoyed the visit and learned a lot. The people from Sweden, but also from Ireland, Denmark and our own Holland inspired me tremendously. Surprise was the Dutch broadcasting company RTV-Oost who called me while we were in Sweden for a life interview in their radio program in The Netherlands.”

*Saskia Croes (project leader), Henk Nikkels (civil servant municipality Hof van Twente), Theo Venhoeven (villagers of Bentelo), after the visit to Ireland:*

1. The ‘gebiedsuitwerking’ (area plan) Bentelo– Hengevelde is an island. We’re going to other countries but forget our own ‘backyard’: communities around us that can profit from the learning process!
2. How to involve the local members within the ‘gebiedsuitwerking’ (area plan) to reach the local communities. In Ireland the local members themselves write the local program for local government and local communities!! In Bentelo – Hengevelde the input of the local people itself is only marginal.
3. Using the political parties in the process to influence the government.

## **Sweden**

*Maria Andersson, project leader municipality Vara, after the visit to the Netherlands:*

“The most important lesson learnt, for us in Sweden, is how to get the villagers and other volunteers involved in the process and how to keep them involved. It is important, as Ole Post (Denmark) said, not to keep the volunteers in the project for too long and to give them rewards for their work. The concept in Ireland, with elected volunteers in committees, is also very interesting as it gives volunteers a formalised way of expressing views and participating in the decision making process”.

“An important lesson is also how to keep a balance between entrepreneurs, making money, and volunteers, devoting their own time. It’s important that the volunteers feel that they actually get something out of their work, and that they are not only helping the entrepreneurs make more money.”

*Maria Eriksson, project leader municipality Vara, after the visit to the Netherlands:*

“A true bottom-up perspective is probably the most important aspect of a successful rural development project. It is true, that is hard to have a bottom-up perspective in the initiation phase, but it is sometimes better to have more top-down perspective in this phase to get things started, and then change to a bottom-up perspective. It is perhaps easier to involve the government and other structural actors, if there is a top-down perspective from the beginning, a sort of “sanctioned from above”. In the following phases the bottom-up perspective is easier, and more important, to follow.

To be able to involve active and interested volunteers and entrepreneurs, it is utterly important that they feel like it is their project, not something imposed on them by the government.”

*Michael Albansson, (villagers of Kvanum) after the visit to the Netherlands:*

“If, as a municipality, you demand a village to reach the goals, please first learn to cooperate with the village”.

*Irene Karlsson (member of the executive board of Vara Municipality) after the visit to the Netherlands:*

“We have about the same experiences and the same problems. That strengthens this work you do at home.”

*Maria Eriksson and Ann Britt Martinsson (municipality Vara) and Micheal Albansson, after the visit to Ireland:*

"It was interesting to learn about how the Irish government is organized and about local governance, the distance between citizens and politicians and its consequence for the dialogue. There is a striking resemblance between the countries in the project, when it comes to challenges and opportunities for the villagers to influence and develop their village."

*Maria Eriksson and Ann Britt Martinsson, after the visit to Ireland:*

"We feel that the attention that the project gives contributes to a pride of the village – that you are been seen. Our visit and the conversations and dialogues that we have had shows that there are similar problems elsewhere and that the only thing you can do is to fight. Tips and ideas might contribute to continue the work. But the important thing is to create good communication between the parts of society that can contribute to the development."

## **Ireland**

*Louise Butler (Galway Rural Dev. Company) after the visit to the Netherlands:*

"I did learn that the problems in Holland are the local authority and the relationship of distrust with the local community is the same as Ireland and would appear to be the same in the other countries. There was a lot of laughing in disbelief and the shaking of heads by the local community on Wednesday during the meeting in the council office. What I took from this is the lack of communication between the local authority and the council and the lack of information shared and understanding of the two sides of each others constraints."

*Catherine Corcoran (Tipperary Institute), after the visit to the Netherlands:*

"What I take from this visit is:

- The extreme importance of having the Local authority in the lead of the planning process meetings and their active involvement in the overall project
- Have local politicians on board
- The PR aspect was a clever way to get political buy-in"

*Catherine Corcoran (Tipperary Institute), after the visit to Denmark:*

"What I take from this visit is:

- What can be achieved when local people work so well together
- The common struggles that we all have in getting central policy and decision-makers to respond to rural issues
- How hard we have to work to change systems and make them responsive
- That elected representatives have so much to offer if given the free time and space to listen and respond
- The struggle to develop and maintain overall vision and objectives without letting small details always get in the way"

*Catherine Corcoran (Tipperary Institute), after receiving the partners in Ireland:*

"I was very pleased with the visit. I think that the issues of implementation were well addressed and the visitors gave many ideas. The most important thing I think is that the 2 communities of Eyrecourt and Kinvara gained a lot from the process and I hope it gave new life to the process there. Thanks to all for the enthusiasm and see you all soon! You injected life back into the Galway process."

"Other points I learned in this visit were:

1. The involvement of the local communities gave the visit real life and relevance
2. There are still barriers to be lifted to get the Planners on board
3. The commitment of the C.E department to implementation is palpable and I think the proposed scheme can go ahead with key support from Leader and the Politicians
4. Continue to press the County Manger for support
5. Other key agencies besides the Galway County Council need to be involved
6. If the Galway County Council and Leader stick with the communities in the process a lot can be achieved- Funding will come eventually if plans are good!"

## Denmark

*Bodil Bertelsen (Municipality of Tønder), after the visit to the Netherlands:*

"It is important to have some drivers to initiate like Saskias company (Croes and Horst, The Netherlands). And very good to force people to work together in the project though it was private persons who got the money. If have seen that's it's possible to get the enterprises involved in local development."

*Ole Post (Villager of Branderup), after the visit to the Netherlands:*

- 1) The organization behind Better Beantel and the co-operation between the not so few levels of authorities are quite impressive. There seem to be a strong support all the way through the systems. I do realize a lot of foot-work lies behind, but the agreement towards common goals has been reached.
- 2) 13.000 hours of work by volunteers is in itself impressive. The fact, that these hours are compensated into the overall budget is news to me, but alas, probably not possible in Denmark.
- 3) Support to local entrepreneurs. It was underlined that a measurable spin off could be noted. This is a lesson to be remembered.
- 4) Professionalism as opposed to volunteers. There is much to be said in favour of volunteer work and enthusiasm. But I have to realize when it comes to Euros that plans of a certain scale indeed needs professional work and backing.

*Valdemar Schultz (Chairperson Local Council Branderup), after the visit to the Netherlands:*

"What comes to my attention is the proven fact that many privately funded projects can, -- if supported by a "red thread" through the process -- grow into something important for the community. To succeed it needs common understanding and support."

*Kirsten Willadsen (Member of the Local Council Branderup), after the visit to Sweden:*

"We learnt that it is possible to involve the firms and factories in supporting the local initiatives both with work and money. And we think that the municipality of Vara also take great responsibilities in the process and that the local politicians participate."

*Ole Post (Villager of Branderup), after the visit to Sweden:*

"First: Nothing comes from nothing.. Except fluff in your pocket. Once again it became underlined the VDP must be founded on solid grounds with at least three components. The economic capabilities of the municipality, the engagement of local citizens and the responsibility of local enterprises. In the shown cases in Sweden the latter seemed far more existing compared to Denmark."

*Valdemar Schultz (Chairperson Local Council Branderup), after the visit to Sweden:*

"Nothing comes by itself. This was made clear in Håkantorps. The attitude was basically to blame the municipality for the disintegration of the small village. If the local would invest the time they used in attempting to make contact with the municipality in making an effort in their own village, they probably would get further and the decision makers in the municipality would be more ready to help economically. Wishing the local citizens took initiative in being creative and engaged."

*Kirsten Willadsen, Villager of Branderup, after the visit to Ireland:*

"In Denmark are very privileged in terms of democracy and in participation in decision making. We pay for many things with our high taxes but we are sure to get tax money to our area and there are a lot of issues that we don't have to use our voluntary local powers on."

*Ole Post (Villager of Branderup, after the final seminar):*

“Quite apart from the sessions in Ireland - but very much inspired by – this lesson comes to mind: The direct line between local committees working for the benefit of villages and the governing administration is yet again important. Local Development Plans are worked out in detail, but focusing on involvement at early stages by higher level authorities and indeed voted politicians is essential.

At the end of the day: Politicians are voted for by showing engagement and marking their positions and interest in serving the public.”

“It is important to ensure a broad back-up by local communities when local plans are made. It takes a great effort by individuals in stepping forward inspiring and make ideas feasible. But it may happen such persons (or narrow groups) advance too single focused or moving outside the “hidden” consensus in the village or parish. Expectations must correspond with reality. Success is measured by the distance between expectations and facts. Less the distance, greater the success. Once again: no funds from wherever, no significant progress.”



*Discussing the key-questions in Denmark*



## **5. SUMMARIES OF THE FEEDBACK REPORTS**

Over the course of the project period (2007), four Exchange Visits took place. This chapter summarizes these Exchange Visits. Per visit you will find a short description of the case of each partner (i.e. its experience with Village Development Plans and Local Governance, that formed the basis for the exchange visit). It is followed by the set of key-questions that gave focus to the Exchange Visit, and concluded by a summary of the feedback given by the visiting partners. The complete feedback reports, as well as detailed case descriptions can be found on the website [www.villagedevelopment.eu](http://www.villagedevelopment.eu).

## 5.1 BENTELO (MUNICIPALITY OF TWENTE), THE NETHERLANDS: CASE, QUESTIONS AND FEEDBACK

### Case description

Bentelo is a small village (1600 inhabitants + 800 inhabitants in the countryside around Bentelo). Bentelo is part of the municipality Hof van Twente, a rural municipality with ca. 35.000 inhabitants in 6 'villages' some with more economic vitality than others. When the project Better Beantel started in 2005, some ideas and project proposals were already brought in to local and provincial authorities for some kind of funding, unfortunately without result. LEADER + stimulated to realize a joint bottom-up approach: Leader coordinator Antje Grolleman then asked Croes en Horst Project management to bring initiatives and people together and write an project proposal for Leader. This proposal, called "Better Beantel" (dialect for "improving Bentelo", was granted, and enabled to bring synergy to different small projects in a single village development plan.

Most of the project proposals of the inhabitants of Bentelo had a tourist theme. So during the process the idea emerged that the development of tourism in Bentelo might bring money to Bentelo and thereby economic development. The existing economic and welfare facilities could survive and hopefully prosper. The entire project is a bottom up process, from the initiative phase up to and including the implementation. The inhabitants of Bentelo have put their heads together, using tourism as a red thread, creating a.o. the revitalization of a historic, wooden carpenters workplace, cycling and walking routes, culinary facilities based on local entrepreneurship (sausages, wine), etc.

Although the complete process has been carried out by the inhabitants of Bentelo, the complete project would not have succeeded without the helpful attitude of the local municipality, willing to handle as applicant / client of the Leader application. As such they were formally in charge of the complete project. In effect, they kept distance to the project, being interested and stimulating, but not controlling.

The output of the project is the realisation of the individual plans / project proposals. All targets and action-points are accomplished. And the project took into account the opinions of the local stakeholders to organise more small 'events' for the local inhabitants. Precisely these events bridged worlds between the project as a whole and the local inhabitants.

After the official ending of the project a society (Stichting Better Beantel) was established that ensures the follow up of the project. Further more, an official regional development plan on a larger scale is now being carried out, as a first step to stimulate other projects in the region of Bentelo and the neighbouring village of Hengevelde. This process takes into account all relevant regional plans, national and regional trends, the agricultural, landscape, water, economic and social vitality tasks that lie in the region. Result will be a report of the present situation in the region, a profile of the desirable direction of development within the region, and a program with timetable and financial estimate of the concrete future project proposals.

### Key-questions

#### *Volunteers*

1. How to maintain the quality of the activities / projects when working with volunteers?
2. How to deal with formal responsibilities?
3. How to keep volunteers involved and active? (question of project management, government)
4. How do you generate a collaboration between tourist entrepreneurs and volunteers?
5. How to capitalize on the efforts, knowledge and skills of volunteers
6. What can be the role of local people in decision making / generating / performing social services (such as sports facilities, library, transportation etc)? (Question of government, project management)

#### *Scaling-up*

7. What is a good workable structure (regarding decision making, consultative processes) between villages and government, and between villagers themselves?
8. How to scale –up How to link with the wider regional issues/ agenda's? Which instruments should be used? Which organizational structure is appropriate? Which financial structure?
9. Can a village development plan be used as an integrating concept, linking a variety of activities? And how can we use it as a communicating tool wit local government?

## **Feedback given**

### *Volunteers*

Most of the time volunteers want to contribute something to their area or village. And they can contribute a lot, to different kind of projects and activities. They know the area/village as their own pocket and feel both concern and responsibility to do some work for the common sense of the village. They offer their work with pleasure, for free. But they need to see that their work is being appreciated. Hence, their contribution depends on a few conditions:

- Make sure that during the whole project there is a clear communication about the ambitions, limits and rules of the project and that people know who is doing what, when and how.
- Find the common and shared goal for volunteers and entrepreneurs for working together. Make sure that the urgency to take action is clear ('why do you need me?'). Both parties have to have a benefit for working together.
- Maintaining the motivation of volunteers is crucial to create sustained project quality. Important is:
  - To define milestones that are measurable and that everyone agrees to.
  - To be always open for other or new volunteers (and employees of municipalities) that might be able to take over from a volunteer when (s)he done. Then you can keep on moving.
  - To start a project with small activities that benefit the whole community
  - Provide training for volunteers when needed
  - Get volunteers on board with an inspiring and wide vision, who may be able to convince other volunteers to contribute.
  - Provide constructive feedback to the work of volunteers (no whipping!)
  - Give volunteers decision making power: their judgment counts!
  - Don't ask volunteers to work for something, when there is nothing going on. Volunteers work with more interest when they see that their works had added value to solving a problem, or creating a possibility.
  - Have available a series of tangible tasks that can be done by a volunteer.  
Make these tasks known: through a local website, a notice at the local shop etc

### *Scaling up*

Important is to create an open work structure. Both villages and government should come with integrated proposals (village plan), funding opportunities (budget lines) and expertise.

*Before scaling up, scale out!* This means that while making an integrated area development plan, go beyond the 'usual suspects', and make your activities interesting for others in the village. Simply ask people! Create a website for internal village use. By making it more integral, it becomes also more interesting for other government departments.

Translate your plan to a map. Many issues of village life have a spatial dimension. Make use of this fact by mapping these issues (may ask a landscape architect or a planner to help you with this). It is a great way to integrate your vision in a simple piece of paper, and government people love it.

### *Suggestion for the village of Bentelo:*

- Be proactive as a village, and seize the initiative! Don't wait and half heartedly adapt to proposals from local and regional government, but develop your selves a proposal for developing an area vision/community/action plan. Propose this to the government.

### *Suggestions for local government*

- Create conditions (providing time, seed money, experts) in which both villages can develop their own vision on how to work together and build a joint vision.
- Look for a really independent area coordinator/chairman of area committee (not living in Benterlo nor Hengevelde)
- Based on village prioritization then develop integrated village plans with detailed proposals, funding lines, expertise. This means creating an open work structure that can incorporate any aspect of village development whether that is spatial, social or economic in focus.

## 5.2 MUNICIPALITY OF VARA, SWEDEN: CASE, QUESTIONS AND FEEDBACK

### Case description

Vara municipality is one of five municipalities in Sweden, which are a part of a project for 'increase the participation, through influence, for groups of citizens in alienation'. In Vara three main target groups were identified: youths; local development groups and the local commercial and industrial life. The aim of the project is to create permanent methods for these groups to participate more in policy making. Vara has been working for a long time with the local development groups to develop the rural areas, with the main goal to keep or increase the number of people living in the municipality and to increase the number of employment opportunities. Therefore it was natural to connect the 'participation project' and the work with the development groups in the work to conduct VDP's.

The municipality of Vara formally took the initiative to join the translational VDP project, but at least three of the four villages had already started developing their own VDP's, although maybe not in such structured way as they work now. The four villages where VDP's are conducted are: Arentorp with 450 inhabitants, Håkantorps with 220 inhabitants, Kvänum with 1 300 inhabitants and Vedum with 1 000 inhabitants. Because of having the focus on a series of villages, the villages can learn from each other during the process. It is also interesting to follow the villages in their work, as their starting points are completely different.

The VDP's were going to focus mainly on developing the countryside to make it an inviting place for people to live in, and also on how to get the villagers to take their own responsibility for their village, together with the Authorities and the local commercial and industrial life. The themes have been pre-set, but are probably going to shift slightly during the development process.

The output of the project is first of all good VDP's, which will be completed for all four villages. Second, a guide to writing VDP's will be produced. At last the wish of the project was to develop a policy about how VDP's can be integrated in the planning process. This will hopefully lead to more VDP's being written in other villages, and help show that the villages views are important and should matter in the planning process.

Since the VDP's are not completely finished yet, the question of follow-up and implementation will have to be discussed further. The goal is to have long-sightedness in the issue and for the plans to always be 'living' and up-dated. When a new village wants to write their VDP they should be able to use these four villages as consultants in the process.

### Key-questions

1. How do we integrate all the ideas that the villagers into one coherent vision, and not one project today and another one tomorrow?
2. How do we get the villagers, local development groups, local associations and the local business life to take their responsibility in implementing the VDP's?
3. What different methods can be used to write a VDP, since all villages have different starting-points?
4. How do we get the local politicians and civil servants working with planning to change their work methods to integrate VDP's in the planning process?

### Feedback given

#### *An inspiring vision for the municipality and for the villagers*

The goal of the municipality of growing from 16.000 to 17.000 inhabitants seems neither challenging nor inspiring enough. A suggestion is to make the vision more explicit, more inclusive, and loaded with identity. Same for the villages: It seems that the village development plans that are now being prepared focus too much on objects and singular issues (a bath lake, a hotel, a sports hall etc), while they are not embedded in a wider perspective on the development of village. At least we were not able to sense this wider perspective. A greater effort should be taken to make explicit what kind of village inhabitants would like to live in.

### *The village of Vara and the other villages*

While perfectly understandable from a helicopter perspective to centralize some services, like the concert hall, in Vara itself, from the point of view of the smaller villages, more directed attention seems in need for these smaller villages. Often it means the generation of small and tangible results: e.g. providing means and materials to sustain a weekly children meeting in Håkantorp. These small steps are very important to increase people's participation, pride and sense of responsibility.

### *Diversity of villages demands a diversity of approaches*

- Stronger Local development groups  
Although some Local Development Groups are already viewed as strong groups, they can still learn from each other, and improve their skills. Being a strong group does not mean the villagers do not need any help, assistance or compliments during or after the VDP process. It would be good to check whether the strong group really represents all issues in the community and that the group is open to all ideas coming from the municipality and new members. That is meant with *inclusiveness*. If this is not the case: work on it! Make sure that the experience of the strong groups inspire others – (including municipality)!
- Weaker local development groups  
Some investigation is needed to assess the reason for weak local development. This assessment is used to select the most yielding approach. What exactly is the problem why the group is weak? This needs to be sorted out in order to find a possible solution in making the LDG perform better and the VDP implemented in the villages. Both partners have to be clear about their expectations and their responsibilities. Once the reason for weakness is known, the focus should be on developing the group, not the plan. First the group issues should be dealt with; otherwise a (good, workable) VDP will never be compiled.

### *Integrate all the ideas of the villagers into one coherent vision*

- Make explicit the sense of place / identity of a village
- Sort and prioritise ideas well
- Link with the wider agenda – formulate the wider agenda also in terms of an identity rich vision
- Use graphic material (maps) to visualize the integration between different ideas and projects
- Additional observations: tools for generating visions and creating options for villagers to 'buy in'

### *Involvement of all actors for implementation*

- Create co-ownership of ideas, projects, and vision of the future -
- Create tangible requests for participation of businesses
- A key issue of capacity building seems to be to create co-ownership, among the municipality and with the villages.

### *Changing the work method local politicians and civil servants working with planning to integrate VDP's in the planning process?*

- Create pressure (press, actions etc)
- Seduce them
- Involve them

## 5.3 EYRECOURT AND KINVARA (GALWAY COUNTY), IRELAND: CASE, QUESTIONS AND FEEDBACK

### Case description

Within Galway County, located in the West of Ireland, the Local Authority called Galway County Council in partnership with Leader and Tipperary Institute have developed a partnership approach to planning with 2 communities, Kinvara (950 inhabitants) in South Galway and Eyrecourt (530 inhabitants) in East Galway. The idea behind these partnerships was that local people would take part in a planning process where they would have effective involvement during all stages of the plans development and would explore options regarding the quality, nature and scale of development for their area. This partnership approach, adopted from the start of the programme was a cornerstone of the whole process.

Integrated Area Planning or IAP may be defined as a practical and participatory process to collect, compile and analyse information about the needs and priorities of people in an area. The plan is put together by local people themselves, assisted by an independent facilitator and in partnership with state agencies. The plan is produced, and at the same time the skills and structures needed to prepare and implement the plan are developed. This plan can then be used by state agencies in preparing development plans for the area, confident that these plans reflect local people's wishes.

An essential aspect of IAP is the involvement of the Local Authority as the sponsor of the project. In Kinvara, the Planning Officer from the Council in particular was a key member and her presence ensured a smooth flow of communication and consistency between the Council and the Community. In Eyrecourt the representative of the Community and Enterprise section was the link to the local authority.

A major step in the IAP is the appointment of a local steering group. This group is charged with ensuring that the plan is produced and that all of the appropriate bodies are consulted and that local people are constantly involved in the development of the plan. Perhaps the most essential guiding principle in establishing a steering group is that the group be as representative as possible and that all of the different sectors within the community have an opportunity to be represented on the group. An important part of the process was developing the skills and capacity of steering group members to enable them to develop the plan and to implement it in the future.

In Kinvara and Eyrecourt, local development groups initiated the process. However, in order to ensure proper representation from all sides of the community, Steering group members were selected at a large public meeting, divided into various sub-groups, each of which nominated a representative. Where groups were not represented, people were later co-opted on to redress the balance. Throughout the process, members of Galway Co. Council were active steering group members.

A wide range of actions in specific areas has been identified in the plans. The defined actions and associated objectives have been categorized into short, medium and ongoing/long term activities. Associated with the activities are a range of stakeholders and agencies that will have various functions in relation to the outlined actions. The entire implementation process requires an underpinning commitment by the community supported by the statutory agencies to ensure that the spirit and the essential material elements of the plan are realized.

### Key-questions

Central theme: How do we move the process along from plans to implementation?

1. SCHEME – Is it feasible to introduce an agreed 'scheme' between Local Government, Local Development and Communities where a series of Integrated Area Plans (IAPs) can be prepared?
2. CRITERIA –
  - 2a) what criteria can local authorities and local development agencies use to select villages/communities for Integrated Area Planning?
  - 2b) and under what criteria should communities consider before engaging in IAP with local authorities?
3. AWARENESS - How can we raise awareness on IAP as a process be promoted in County Galway?
4. DEMOCRATIC INCLUSION - How can democratic inclusion in the preparation of Integrated Area Plans be improved?

## Feedback given

### *General feedback on how to increase implementation*

- Focus on positive developments - Acknowledge that you take small steps in the right direction. Do not stop and freeze in your tracks because of one large dilemma (i.e. sewage system).
- Create and celebrate successes - Success is critical for continuation, however small; it is needed to keep high spirit & enthusiasm.
- Review and monitor your village plan regularly - The village inhabitants must make their own priorities; they should not do this only once, but preferably every year.
- Refresh the board of the Community council once in a while - When the plan is made, it is time for implementation. The work in the villages must start afresh. Have a kick off meeting and show the positive things you have accomplished in your village. This should provide new energy and you should try to blend the experience with new blood.
- Appoint a joint 'working group' to monitor implementation - Keep the relation between local government and community council going, especially when plan is finished. A time schedule should be made -> when / whom to contact. "Keep the kettle boiling."
- Broaden focus from government to other organizations - Don't think that all depends on government. Try to ally and understand the agenda of other 'big' actors in your area, including both institutional organizations and private business.
- Manage expectations - Sort out expectations from every party: be realistic.
- Multi-faceted process - One major suggestion is to rethink IAP as a game of 'ladders and snakes'. The process of the IAPs in Eyrecourt and Kinvara were developed quite linearly. That means: we do the IAP process, and then start thinking about implementation. In reality, Village Development planning is so multi-faceted that it is advisable to generate multiple and early wins, while the game is on.

### *Scheme and criteria (questions 1 and 2)*

A scheme as the IAP is indeed very useful, as a way to accommodate for the distance between villages and Lowest Administrative level. A well designed scheme will clarify roles and expectations, will prevent the loss of social capital, provides a routine for interaction where there is none, will intensify contacts and hence mutual learning and will, last but not least, increase chances for implementation. But a checklist should not become a bureaucratic instrument in itself. Likewise, it will only work well if there is a minimum level of trust.

- Most likely, it is in the highly dynamic areas that budget is more easily available. This makes it all the more important that when IAP is conducted in areas further away from economic or policy dynamism, budget is prepared. If budget is out of sight, do not conduct an IAP.

### *Awareness is essential at all levels.*

It is necessary and very important. All levels must be aware of what is going on. By everyone, we mean the people in the villages and the surroundings, the politicians and the municipality/county (or other) officers that will be involved, either from start or later on in the process must be informed before start.

- Try to organise a project kick off meeting to which you invite all villages, politicians and other stakeholders.
- To reach the politicians you must tell good stories and use the media spreading the news. You also need to ensure to get your politicians out to the area
- It is essential to use press / media to inform a large group about the project and the village.
- Create an association of (small) villages at the level of County Galway, and organize attractive events.

### *How can democratic inclusion in the preparation of Integrated Area Plans be improved?*

- An IAP is a document of the village, and should continue to inspire them
- Establish contacts between elected politicians, civil servants and regions within Galway County more frequently
- Provide IAPs with statutory character
- Create an Association of Villages at the level of County Galway

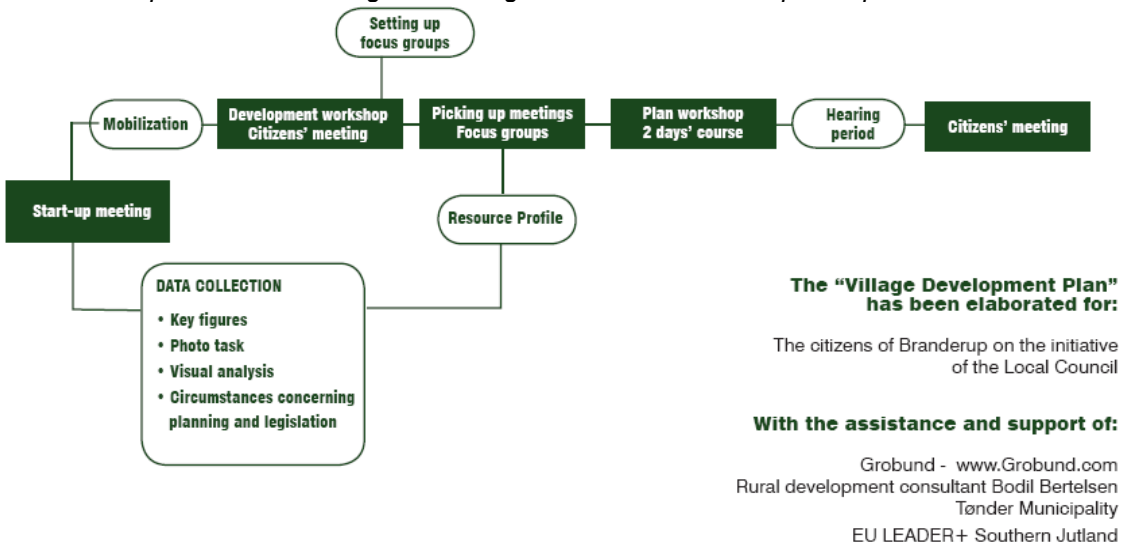
## 5.4 BRANDERUP (MUNICIPALITY OF TØNDER), DENMARK: CASE, QUESTIONS AND FEEDBACK

### Case description

The citizens of Branderup, a village in Southern Jutland, Denmark are active and enterprising people who have shown at several occasions that they do not leave things as they are but that they themselves take the lead in relations concerning the society in which they live. Following this line of action, the local village council took the initiative (spring 2006) for starting a longer lasting process which will eventually result in a visionary development plan for Branderup. The plan is an important tool to secure the future of Branderup. The wish was

- To have a wide, popular debate of needs, opportunities and wishes for Branderup,
- To establish a united voice,
- To involve the associations of the village as well as the institutions and as many citizens in their own right as possible
- To concretize ideas and visions in a “Village Development Plan for Branderup”.

*Outline of the process concerning the making of the ‘citizens development plan’.*



The fundamental thought behind the “Village Development Plan” is that it’s the citizens’ own plan. The contents are the citizens’ own proposals, visions, aims and suggestions for action directed at how you secure the best possible future for the village and the surrounding country. The plan is meant to be a tool for use both “internally” among the citizens of the village and for “external” use aimed at influencing decision makers as well as possible newcomers to the area. Thus the plan is directed at creating a common identity in the village, clarifying a common aim and strengthening the cooperation and solidarity “internally” among the citizens of Branderup. The Village Development Plan for Branderup is also the tangible proof that the citizens are enterprising, active and committed people who take the lead and the future in their own hand instead of simply leaving things as they are.

The actual description of the plan took place in the start of November 2007. I.e. that in this period the multiple inputs and wishes were structured, phrased and visualized for the real plan document. On the 18th of January the finished plan was presented for the whole village at a festive citizens’ meeting.

### Key-questions

*General question: Upscaling of local plans and regional learning*

1. What comments could you give us on the way we undertook our VDP?
  - Do you see any weaknesses? How could the process of conducting the VDP be improved a next time?
  - What do you see as our next challenge? How do we move on?

2. How can we achieve a similar level of vital collaboration at the regional / municipal level? What can we do as villages about that? What can the municipality do? In short: how can we strengthen regional learning?

*Thematic questions: the future of Branderup*

- 3) What does it take for Branderup to attract tourists?
- 4) How do we as a village attract entrepreneurs and niche productions?
- 5) How to integrate local traditions and expectations of the villagers?

### **Feedback given**

*General recommendations for local government:*

- support the exchange of experiences between the villages of Tønder
- use the village development plans as important building stones for the Local and Regional Spatial Plans – it will save government money
- create as soon as possible supportive regional policy in various domains: tourism, entrepreneurship, housing etc
- intensify the search for additional financial resources (e.g. through European collaboration)

*General recommendations for Branderup:*

- claim more with more intensity regional support and vision
- visualize more your achievements – they will bring you rewards

*General feedback on the VDP as conducted in Branderup*

- Sell your achievements
- Media relations are vital
- State clearly your problems and their impact
- Broaden your core group
- Broaden the affiliation to outside the village,
- Reach out to the big local stakeholders.
- Develop an action plan
- Develop key selling points for the municipalities.
- Political support for your VDP and for Branderup is vital.
- Clarify decision making

*Vital regional collaboration / up-scaling of the Branderup experience*

- Use existing political structures
- Collaborate with other villages
- Integrate facilities, entrepreneurs in business centers
- Make a SWOT analysis at village level, and match it with a SWOT at regional level
- Elaborate two up-scaling perspectives: Branderup vis-à-vis municipality of Tønder and region of South-Jutland (also rural-urban), and South-Jutland vis-a-vis Denmark as a whole. You need different strategies for both up-scaling processes. Try to go beyond the urban-rural dichotomie, and sell your efforts as solutions for the urban problems.
- Increase entrepreneurship

*Thematic questions: the future of Branderup*

- You have to exploit what is already there, what you have naturally. So think about exploiting the natural countryside, you have a great asset there.
- You have a fantastic asset in your village: the old “Kommunhaus”, the former village meeting centre. This centre has enormous potential! Develop your own community enterprise centre in this facility. You may also think of starting a local cooperative shop in this centre, staffed by the community, you can do this even if the opening hours are limited.
- Research the needs of the new families and involve them in the activities and services available, make them feel welcome and appreciated.



## 6. RESULTS OF THE FINAL SEMINAR

The final seminar was held at Bjertop castle in Vara, Sweden, in January 2008. It brought together some 60 villagers, administrative officials, politicians and other involved professionals, from 9 European countries: Ireland, Sweden, the Netherlands, Denmark, Hungary, Finland, Poland, Latvia and Lithuania and a representative of the European Leader observatory.

The programme was as follows

Day 1, morning: setting the scene: what is the subject we talk about?  
Day 1, afternoon: field excursion  
Day 2, morning: local governance and multistakeholder alliances  
Day 2, afternoon: exploring emerging issues

Day 1 started with a review of the goals, achievements and future challenges of the project, by project coordinator Gaston Remmers. It was immediately followed by interactive workshops. On both mornings, a total of 10 workshops were held. All workshops were hosted by project partners, and reflected the central themes of this project. The first half was dedicated to a presentation of the outcomes of the transnational project. The second half aimed to identify, through a discussion with attendants, new emergent issues related to village development plans & local governance, for further discussion on Wednesday afternoon. An additional workshop was organized, in which a new, Dutch approach to the involvement of higher education and research in village development planning and local governance was discussed. On day 2, Ciaran Lynch of Tipperary Institute (IR) gave a key-note lecture on multilevel governance and the relevance for village development planning.

The following issues emerged as topics for future elaboration:

1. How to clarify and strengthen the role & effectiveness of LAG's in VDP planning
2. How to stimulate networking between villagers
3. How to reinforce commitment of builders to deliver community infrastructure?
4. How to bring together visions of villagers and municipalities?
5. Which democratic processes facilitate VDP best
6. How to create a new VDP & LG project with new partners
7. How to generate funding (villagers, vdp's competences)
8. How to involve Higher Educational in VDP's
9. How to integrate issues of sustainability and integrality in VDP's

See for more details the report of the final seminar, and [www.villagedevelopment.eu](http://www.villagedevelopment.eu) for the presentations.

Participants of the final seminar:

Villager	11
Municipality	16
Regional government	8
National government	4
LAG	10
EU	1
Others	11
Total	61



*Plenary presentation during the final seminar, Sweden*