

The 15th NRN meeting – co-organised with the [Réseau Rural Français](#) – brought together participants from 22 Member States, representing 23 National Rural Networks (NRNs), with many French regional networks also attending.

The meeting explored ways of improving territorial cooperation and consulting with stakeholders on the work of the NRNs. Many of the National Support Units (NSUs) attending stayed on to participate in the meeting of the French Regional Networks taking place the next day, which focussed on the development of the future EU and national CAP Networks.

The meeting concluded with a site visit to a European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) funded project which created a social enterprise providing a restaurant and accommodation in a rural French village.



Isabelle Boudineau, Vice President of Nouvelle Aquitaine (NA), welcomed participants and provided context, noting that the region is the largest in France, larger than some Member States by area, and is covered by three Rural Development Programmes (RDPs). Yves Auffret from France's Ministry of Agriculture then provided further information from a national perspective. He encouraged participants from the French regions and the other Member States to use the meeting to share best practices and identify topics and experiences that could be useful for informing the roll-out of CAP 2020+ and each Member States' CAP Strategic Plan (CSP).

Helen Williams from the European Commission, representing DG AGRI, was pleased to see such strong interest in territorial development and cooperation. She underlined that the agenda had been driven from the bottom-up – from feedback from NSUs) – rather than via a top-down approach. The meeting would involve a theoretical session first ('out of the box thinking') followed by practical sessions focussed on sharing knowledge about how NRNs and Managing Authorities (MAs) can consult and engage with rural stakeholders on current RDPs or for preparation of CSPs, as well as how to reach out to rural citizens through participation campaigns.

## Territorial Cooperation

Giuseppe Bettoni, Professor of Geopolitics at the University of Rome, presented a theoretical approach on opportunities to think differently about territorial development and cooperation. He observed how today

### Event Information

**Title:** 15th NRN Meeting

**Date:** 19 September 2019

**Location:** Poitiers, France

**Organisers:** ENRD Contact Point, FR NRN and Région Nouvelle Aquitaine

**Participants:** 74 participants from 22 MSs

**Outcomes:** Exchange of best practice on territorial cooperation and stakeholder consultation.

**Webpage:** [https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/news-events/events/15th-nrn-meeting\\_en](https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/news-events/events/15th-nrn-meeting_en)

## Meeting Highlights

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we have a vision of territory that is based on a 'dichotomy of urban and rural areas' but in his opinion this split is not at all useful. He said that while zoning has its purpose for public policy analysis, most people living day-to-day within a territory do not really recognise such an urban-rural dichotomy. He therefore proposed a discussion focusing on 'how to put together a territory without these labels' and promoted the idea of territories testing different approaches to blend urban and rural areas through a common vision and common actions. He emphasised that this can be useful in order to maximise the potential of a territory.

Masimiliano Piattella from Italy's NSU joined Professor Bettoni in the panel discussion session. He presented a practical example of how his country's authorities are exploring innovations in territorial development through a new concept known as '[Inner Area Strategies](#)' (IAS). These are considered a European good practice in territorial strategy and 39 strategies have been prepared to date in Italy.



Discussions amongst delegates in the following panel session included perspectives on the role of citizens in planning territorial development activity. The debate focussed on the challenges involved in consulting a wide cross-section of citizens compared to consulting their elected representatives. The group concluded that the opinions and experiences of both citizens and their elected representatives can help improve the 'quality' of territorial development outcomes. For consultation and subsequent projects developed to be successful, there is a need for everyone to 'speak the same language' and fully understand different perspectives. Pilot projects were considered useful for testing smaller scale innovations that could act as the catalyst for wider territorial action. Brigitte Reau from the host region also highlighted the work taking place in the region which focusses on [developing contracts for rural revitalisation](#).



France's Mobilisation Collective pour le Développement Rural (MCDR) programme was presented during this part of the workshop, through a project example called Économie Sociale et Solidaire (ESS) which covers innovation in territorial development and is being used to inform preparations for the CSP. It centres around opportunities provided by a territory's rural social economy and examines how efficiencies can be achieved through new thinking by traditional actors. It is an

experimental research project funded by the NRN and aims to reduce duplication of effort by adapting existing resources, rather than reinventing new ideas.

To conclude the morning discussions, an example of Local Action Group (LAG)/Fisheries Local Action Group (FLAG) cooperation in France showed how cooperative decision-making processes are already working in practice from a territorial planning perspective. Noteworthy quotes from participants during the MCDR discussions included: "It is about knowledge sharing and not knowledge duplication" indicating that "less can really be more" and the project's roots in "social economy and solidarity" objectives are anticipated to facilitate notions of "territorial living instead of territorial planning".

## Update on EU rural networking activities

During the update on EU rural networking activities, several key presentations were made:

- The European Network for Rural Development (ENRD) Contact Point (CP) provided an update on its [activities](#). The CP team noted that the new Thematic Group on 'Bioeconomy and climate action' will focus on delivering climate change initiatives and tools that can be used in line with CAP interventions.



Feedback on specific projects in these areas is sought from NSUs and also on the outcomes from the [NRN Screening giving an EU-level overview of NRNs and their activities](#). Participants were reminded, via the presentation of a [recent example](#), of the possibilities for facilitated exchanges between NSUs.

- An update on ENRD Evaluation Helpdesk [activities](#) highlighted the new content provided in the ['back to basics' section](#) on the ENRD website and the publication of Working Package 2 'Appraisal of the assessment of needs including the SWOT' of the Thematic Working Group 7- Preparing for the ex ante evaluation of the CAP Strategic Plan.
- Feedback was presented from the Agri-Innovation Summit in Lisieux, France and the [EIP-AGRI activities](#) where key priorities for joint working in 2020 were presented.

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## Stakeholder Consultation

The afternoon interactive sessions enabled participants to engage in discussions on different methods for stakeholder consultation. The discussion took place across four working groups in a 'World Café' exercise. France's MCDR experts presented short case studies, while there were three other examples presented from Finland, Greece and Latvia.

The Finnish case study described the process and challenges involved in preparing a LAG Local Development Strategy (LDS) using a participative SWOT analysis. The resulting SWOT itself was summarised into a one-page handout. Latvia's outreach techniques for the inclusion of stakeholders in preparing the CSP were presented, whilst the fourth case study featured lessons from the Greek NSU's work on how to involve farmers in innovation support.

Many useful and interesting experiences were shared and peer-analysed during this part of the meeting. Key points drawn from the different experiences included the following:

- Stakeholders are more likely to become involved with territorial development planning if they can see the benefits they will derive. Proactive effort is needed to explain the benefits and dedicated support for new stakeholders to help them develop successful projects which bolster their confidence in being/staying involved in territorial development.
- A SWOT analysis should separate the external and internal/helpful and harmful factors in order give an indication of exactly what is possible. Territorial strategy planning should incorporate best-case scenarios and worst-case scenarios.
- MCDR thinking could be useful for improving the implementation of the CAP in France by involving cooperatives more as social economy actors; encouraging new entrants into rural economies; and improving the sustainability of rural buildings that have social economy benefits for rural environments.

- Farmers may participate more in consultations when they feel a sense of ownership of the process. We should also aim to host participation events on farms and at times that are convenient for farmers.
- Use stakeholders' own communication channels to increase the effectiveness of outreach and seek out 'multipliers' (such as farm advisors) who are already well respected/trusted by the target audience.
- Paying Agencies will be key partners in the future CSPs. They bring a lot of value and knowledge which can be enhanced by stronger involvement and mutually beneficial links with NRNs. The PAs can, via networking, receive valuable inputs from increased interaction/direct conversations with beneficiaries, NGOs and other stakeholders.
- The new CAP delivery method should ensure better coordination between Pillar 1 and Pillar 2 actors who will need to work together within the new EU and national CAP networks. The wider scope of the new networks will improve transparency and accountability. Networking policy can then better complement the full breadth of EU and Member States' agricultural and rural development policy.
- A key aim of any stakeholder involvement process is for all participants to understand each other properly in order to resolve issues and find common solutions.
- Timing is important to ensure the required engagement in consultation processes. Sometimes you need legislation in place in order to discuss something concrete but other times it's the opposite that is true and 'blue-sky' thinking should not be restricted by regulatory frameworks.
- Facilitation processes must remain independent and must not be biased towards any one group of stakeholders.
- Avoiding duplication increases value-for-money and consultations for territorial strategies can be designed to cover all ESI Funds as well as national funds at the same time. This also helps to identify synergies and can attract more funding, resources and expertise in the consultation process. Commonalities can be found in strategies for broadband, social economy, climate, transport, utilities, education and health and entrepreneurship/incubators, amongst other areas.



## Outcomes and Actions



The meeting provided specific examples of how NSUs can foster and encourage participation and thereby continue to contribute to their MS RDPs and future CSPs, and the role of stakeholders in contributing to that development. In closing, Helen Williams pointed out that “as the future CSPs roll out differently and flexibly adapted to each MS needs under the future CAP, there will be even more opportunities and value for people to learn via networking about the different approaches adopted by MSs— e.g. on how to tackle climate change, address rural depopulation, or communicate about the CAP and its achievements. Hence, the networks and NSUs will have a key role to play in the future.”

Further discussion on these topics continued in the [meeting of the French regions](#) on 20 September, which included an update on [post-2020 CAP networking](#) and on [networking for innovation](#). NSUs and regions were then invited on a field visit to a remote French village to see how EAFRD is being used in two interlinked projects to restore rural amenities and create opportunities for local cohesion.