

## Rural Vibrancy Measuring Index (RVMI)

The Rural Vibrancy Measuring Index aims to give local rural communities, and those supporting them, a tool to help them to reflect on key aspects that relate to the vibrancy of their communities. This tool could be used to identify strengths and weaknesses to help in allocating or targeting resources more efficiently.

### A definition of 'Rural Vibrancy', as agreed by the Rural Alliances project partners is:

'Rural Vibrancy' describes the nature of a rural community, which is characterised by active involvement and the creative, dynamic interaction of people from different groupings with the capacity to create common objectives and to act jointly to develop their community. It is desirable from the perspective of the Rural Alliances consortium that vibrant rural communities follow the aim to develop and/or maintain social, cultural and economic benefit, adapt to change and improve quality of life for everyone within the community.

### The Rural Vibrancy Measuring Index

The RVMI is a tool that is being devised by Philipps Universität Marburg and the University of Wales, Trinity St David – partners in the Rural Alliances project. This has been developed with input by the 10 other partners across North West Europe and subsequent piloting with rural alliances operating in different partner regions. The RVMI, as it currently stands, is the result of several transnational workshops, the evaluation of partner questionnaires and literature research. Partners will pilot the RVMI during the course of the project, honing it into a transferable tool for use across Europe by 2015.

### The Rural Alliances approach

The RVMI is not a method of scoring vibrancy, or measuring one community against another. (Previous attempts at this approach have failed). The Rural Alliances approach has been to identify key success factors that contribute to the social, economic, environmental well-being of rural communities. Not all of these indicators will apply to all situations; however, many of the indicators provide the opportunity for communities to reflect on what they have achieved and/or where there are gaps that need to be filled for further developments. Furthermore, by using this method they will be in a better position to shape their own future, react to changes, identify where resources are needed and target their efforts and resources more efficiently.

The RVMI tool should also enable partners to gain information that will enable them to provide appropriate assistance to the rural alliances in their regions.

## Categories within the RVMl

A questionnaire is used to gather information from each rural community, requiring "Yes", "No", "Don't know" answers. Each of these 3 responses is colour-coded, resulting in a visual pattern on a matrix. The questions fall into the following categories:

- Community involvement
- Finances and funding
- Cooperation
- Communication
- Inclusion and Integration
- Knowledge
- Governance

There is also provision for more detailed responses should these be required.

For more information: [www.ruralvibes.eu](http://www.ruralvibes.eu)

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## Rural Vibes Toolkit

### Why you should use the toolkit

...is a basic question. Do you want to improve your community activities, counteract the demographic change, ensure specific infrastructure and services, develop your community and capture vibrancy in a certain rural area? If your answer is YES, then the Rural Vibes toolkit can be an opportunity to guide you through a process of picturing certain demands of the community you live in, or are focusing on, through to the development of concrete actions.

### Benefits of this approach for communities and/or public authorities:

The Rural Vibes survey process:

- Brings people, ideas and strengths together
- Helps communities and public authorities to better understand what issues they need to focus on
- Helps to diagnose demographic challenges and identify ways to address these
- Provides information that will enhance alliance activity and lead to better informed communities
- Supports rural development practitioners and policy-makers to direct their efforts effectively
- Leads to community-owned action plans to improve your own vibrancy (and therefore ownership of actions)

You need to inform authorities about the Rural Vibes survey process in order to get their buy-in - be aware that they may wish to influence the questions.

### What you need....

...is a community that is willing to share their perceptions of how vibrant they consider their community to be. Secondly, you need a facilitator to guide through the process, help to analyse the data, chair the community events (discussion forum), and work with the community and experts to develop Action Plans.

### How-to in 7 steps:

- 1 Promotion of the toolkit (facilitator)
- 2 Providing the 2 tools (online version, paper version) animation and guideline (manuals etc.) as an introduction
- 3 Using the group questionnaire for community groups or alliances and individual (online) surveys for the community and their inhabitants
- 4 Analysis and summary of the compiled data
- 5 Inviting all community members (individuals and groups) and decision makers, critical friends etc.
- 6 Community happening (feedback from facilitator and discussion)
- 7 Basic information for community vibrancy action plan

More information about the process on [www.ruralvibes.eu](http://www.ruralvibes.eu)



### Introduction

The goal of National Landscape Het Groene Woud is to maintain and advance the quality of the region by developing projects and involving inhabitants, entrepreneurs, governments and education - on nature, water, heritage, green economy (agriculture and tourism) and vibrancy - by stimulating and facilitating local and regional alliances. Without the involvement and cooperation of inhabitants, entrepreneurs, governments and NGOs the goal will not be achieved.

The changing society, higher levels of education, time, increasing digital means to exchange information and to work together and discontentment with governments and institutions, leads to active citizens alliances taking their own control. People want to be involved in their own living environment. Regional House Het Groene Woud wants to use this trend as much as possible. In the Vibrancy Agenda 2013 the Regional House made an inventory and analysis of alliances of citizens groups in the region. There were 160 active groups at that moment, primarily active on vibrancy, energy, care, food and maintenance of nature/landscape.

As a part of the inventory the groups' views on how they wished be facilitated were gathered. They need:

- a quick insight of the feasibility of their initiative
- governments to be clear, resolute and decisive (prevent delay)
- a one window stop
- trust and support (cover their backs)
- shared knowledge and experiences
- help to bring people together
- help to find their way in existing rules, regulations and financing
- an intermediary organization or civil servant as a guide#

The Interreg project 'Rural Alliances' provides these needs, but only during the project. Therefore Regional House Het Groene Woud takes the lead to implement the Vibrancy Agenda to create a structural base of facilitating (new) alliances or groups of active citizens and entrepreneurs.

### Concept and ambition

The regional Vibrancy Agenda consists the operationalization of a joint facilitating structure, a (help yourself) service-package and the conservation and sharing gained knowledge. In a combination of digital means and live interaction:

[1] Putnam quotes 'If you don't go to somebody's funeral, they won't come to yours' (p. 20).  
[2] Study 2005 'Projet en campagne' cited in Bertrand & Kreibich.

## 1. Joint facilitating structure

To facilitate in a one window stop and a quick insight of the feasibility of an initiative the facilitating organizations/windows have to cooperate and act like one window. They have to invest in getting to know one another and each other's networks and services. To insure that an initiative gets to the right help in minimal steps and to prevent window shopping.

The Regional House and the province Noord-Brabant are organizing an initiative-group of participating facilitating organizations. At this moment nearly 10 applied, the group will expand in time.

Also the Regional House started with a regional training for civil servants to learn from each other in a practical way (by discussing cases) how to deal with and facilitate civil initiatives.

## 2. (Help yourself) service-package

Behind the window there are several tools available to help starting and developing an alliance or a project. The digital services are meant to help you; additionally, one could request help for live contact or support from the joint partners of the Vibrancy Agenda.

*For example:*

- facilitating network meetings,
- training, workshops and coaching, advice,
- communities of practice,
- exchange market for products and services,
- a digital platform (a regional version of the existing 'Idealenkompas'),
- self-testing tools (rural vibes index, RVMl group survey, skills plotting)
- searching tools for financing, such as the alternative financial handbook, governance handbook, (regional) funds, crowdfunding, revenue models and examples of circular economy.

The development, testing and introduction of new tools will be ongoing.

## 3. Conservation and sharing knowledge

The digital platform will be the main instrument/group to evaluate and conserve knowledge and experiences. Interested people can join the platform to bring and get information.

The province Noord-Brabant is a partner to spread the concept to other regions, if proven useful.

### RESULTS

1. To create a facilitating structure there has to be a joint vision on how to facilitate civil initiatives and criteria on what initiatives will be or will not be facilitated. Each partner has appointed one or a few intermediate employees and have shared their operation and tools.  
Experiences on facilitating (new) initiatives are shared and developed.
2. The service-package is filled with tools, brought to the attention of and being used by civil initiatives in the region.
3. The gained knowledge and lessons learned so far are conserved and shared, through several media, to other regions and alliances.
4. A continuing 'flow' of initiatives/projects of local alliances, contributing to the regional goals of Het Groene Woud.

## **Partners**

At this moment: Regional House Het Groene Woud, water board De Dommel, municipality of Best, province Noord-Brabant, Rabobank Hart van Brabant, University of Tilburg, HAS, Brabantse Milieu Federatie, KNHM Noord-Brabant, IVN and foundation Duurzaam Eindhoven.

And as mentioned above, 13 municipalities, 2 water boards and the province are taking part in the regional training.

## **Planning**

The implementation of the Vibrancy Agenda is taking 2 years (july 2014 till july 2016). The first year, as part of Rural Alliances, will be used to organize the facilitating structure, to expand the number of partners and to fill the service package with existing partners' tools. The second year, after Rural Alliances, to expand, to develop the number of (new) tools and to share gained knowledge. After two years it should be a joined-up sustainable self-sufficient (help yourself) facilitating structure.

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