

Midlands Engagement process



This process is supported by the START technical assistance activities from the European Commission's Platform for coal regions in transition.

CONTACT

Midlands Regional Transition Team

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Introduction

This guidance assists community-based organisations and public sector and private sector, and other third sector organisations to identify and propose projects for potential support which will support a Just Transition in the wider Midlands as peat production and power generation end. In keeping with just transition principles, these should be projects which create new opportunities and reduce negative consequences on communities and individuals most affected by the move to a low carbon society. The guidance also explains how organisations, especially community-based ones, can identify the support they need to develop and deliver project proposals and comment on the wider process.

Organisations across the region are working together through the wider¹ Midlands Regional Transition Team (MRTT) to promote a positive transition process in the area. This process is being supported by the Irish Government and its Just Transition Commissioner, and the European Union (EU).

The MRTT want to gather project proposals which can assist affected communities as groups prepare for the future. By developing an inventory of credible and applicable proposals, the MRTT will have an overview of the nature and spread of potential projects and collaboration opportunities across the Midlands. In

¹ Wider region refers to those communities impacted by the end of peat harvesting located in Laois, Longford, Offaly, Westmeath, Roscommon, East Galway, Kildare and North Tipperary.

addition, the MRTT can group, where appropriate, similar proposals to promote their feasibility, complementarity, and efficiency. The inventory will also assist the MRTT identify which proposals require further support and development to make them viable contenders for funding when available, either in the short or longer term.

It is anticipated that projects can be funded from a variety of sources, including the Irish Government's Just Transition Fund, the EC's Just Transition Fund and Project Ireland 2040 funds, as they become available (several of which are still in development). Projects which are at an advanced stage and have notable impacts and benefits will be best placed to access earlier funding. Given that funding is finite, it is anticipated that not all projects included in the inventory will receive funding.

Please note you must register your project through this engagement process, to proceed with an application for funding to the national Just Transition Fund.

These are uncertain times for the wider Midlands, Ireland and the EU as communities address the process of decarbonisation and come to terms with the Covid-19 outbreak. However, the MRTT and its partners believe it is important that the wider Midlands moves forward with the identification and assessment of projects that will support communities and groups affected by peat phase-out.

Messages from Just Transition Stakeholders

Unfortunately, due to current circumstances it is not possible to engage directly in a face to face manner. However, the following three short video clips provide information on the joined-up approach to responding to peat phase-out, the work of the MRTT and the project proposal process.



Kieran Mulvey
Just Transition Commissioner



Anna Marie Delaney
Chief Executive, Offaly County Council



Robert Pollock
*Senior Advisor, EU Platform for coal regions
in transition, START Team*

How to use this guidance

This guidance is aimed to facilitate project proposals from:

1. Constituted community-based groups/third sector organisations which want to submit a project proposal(s)
2. Public and private and other third sector organisations which want to submit a project or programme proposal(s) to assist affected communities and groups at a local or wider level

This guidance is accompanied by relevant project proposal forms for each type of project proposer (see Community-led proposal form; and Public, Third and Private Sector-led proposal form). It is important that the appropriate form is completed.

The guidance is made up of three sections and also provides links to appropriate forms:

1. Emerging economic activities and opportunities in rural communities

This section explores the drivers and opportunities of change in rural communities across the EU. The section is not an exhaustive account of forces of transformation in rural communities. It is provided to help stimulate thinking on the kinds of project ideas that organisations might wish to discuss and consider. In addition, sources for additional information and reading are noted.

2. Examples of Community-led Development Projects

This section identifies examples of local development projects from across European rural communities. Again, these examples are provided to help stimulate thinking on the kinds of project ideas that organisations might wish to discuss and consider.

3. Assessment Criteria for Project and Programme Proposals

This section details the criteria which will guide the assessment and selection of project proposals and programmes by the MRTT for inclusion in the inventory. There are two sets of criteria: criteria for community-led projects; and criteria for public and third sector-led projects and programmes. Organisations which plan to submit a project proposal(s) should review the relevant criteria before completing their appropriate form.

Please note you must register your project through this engagement process, to proceed with an application for funding to the national Just Transition Fund.

Queries

Should you have any questions or queries about this guidance, please submit them to justtransition@mrtt.ie by Tuesday, June 2nd 2020. These questions will be collated, and answers published on midlandsireland.ie.

Email

justtransition@mrtt.ie

Deadline

Tuesday, June 2nd 2020

Propose a project

If you wish to propose a project(s), please read this guidance and download and complete the relevant form and submit it to justtransition@mrtt.ie by Friday, June 12th 2020.

Form for community-led project proposals

(with supporting commentary where required)



Community-led proposals form

Form for public, third and private sector-led projects and programmes proposals

(with supporting commentary where required)



Public, Third and Private Sector-led proposals form

The forms also provide an opportunity for proposing organisations to identify the support they need to deliver projects and make comment on the wider transition process.

Privacy statement

The Midland Regional Transition Team is a non statutory body, supported by Offaly County Council and is bound by the principles of its Privacy Statement, which can be accessed at <https://www.offaly.ie/eng/Privacy-Statement>.

All communications in response to this engagement process will be bound by the above referenced privacy statement, and the members of the MRTT reserve the right to communicate with all parties who interact with JustTransition@mrtt.ie via contact details provided, and to share project details with potential funding streams.

Propose a project

If you wish to propose a project(s), please read this guidance and download and complete the relevant form and submit it to justtransition@mrtt.ie by Friday, June 12th 2020.

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Opportunities and emerging economic activities in rural communities

Introduction

Rural communities will have an important role to play in addressing many of the most pressing national and international challenges of the 21st century, such as climate change, sustainable energy production and resource utilisation, protection and preservation of the environment and biodiversity, safe and secure food production, and demographic change. Likewise, rural communities need to adapt to take advantage of changing social and consumer behaviour and expectations, such as remote working, holidaying closer to home, and demand for local sourcing of products and services.

At the time of writing, we must also expect that Covid-19 and its aftermath will profoundly influence the future development of rural areas as it will for urban areas. Certainly, we can foresee that the pandemic may lead many people to reconsider their living and working patterns and how they spend their disposable income and free time.

To respond to the challenges they face, rural communities in the Midlands, as elsewhere across Europe, will need to harness drivers of change such as digitalisation, innovative and sustainable tourism, and circular economy principles to diversify their local economies and develop and grow new and existing enterprises that can provide alternative employment opportunities for the future.

With the intention to encourage local community groups and champions to bring project ideas forward for discussion, this section highlights some of the external factors that are reshaping rural communities and provides examples of projects and actions that have successfully embraced opportunities for change. These examples should be read in conjunction with Section 2 (Seizing new opportunities), which provides more information on development projects from across Europe that illustrate emerging opportunities for rural communities.

A feature of many of the successful projects is the way that positive changes have been enabled through a

bottom-up approach, building on local community involvement, supported by a clear vision and planning, and multi-level (local, national, EU) policy making and funding. Accordingly, as a starting point, the next sub-section looks at how local communities can be actively engaged in rural development processes. The subsequent sub-sections outline some key factors behind the creation of new business and employment opportunities in rural areas, before highlighting the specific cases of digital hubs, tourism and the agri-food sector.

Engaging local communities to harness emerging opportunities

Rural development policy has shifted from a top-down approach to a community-led approach. This change reflects a recognition that overarching policies which provide the general enabling conditions for local development, derived from a traditional top-down approach, need to be complemented by a community-led approach involving all local stakeholders to implement local actions. At the same time, rural policy now supports diversification in rural areas beyond the primary sectors of agriculture, forestry, and fishery by promoting business development and entrepreneurship, and fostering opportunities related, for example, to the circular economy and bioeconomy¹.

Through the LEADER² programme and other local development initiatives³, the EU has facilitated the emergence and development of new opportunities by enabling local communities to lead or participate in the design and development of local development projects. Such community-led initiatives aim to build new forms of cooperation and alliances and develop the capacities of local authorities to support and implement local development strategies based on specific rural challenges, needs and opportunities.

Local needs are usually better addressed when people are involved, and multi-level governance is in place. Effective implementation of policies typically requires a realistic discussion between local, regional, and national authorities to align objectives, and secure the cooperation of people and the private sector in identifying local needs and targeting interventions⁴. A participatory approach to identification of the

challenges faced by rural communities can bring an increased sense of shared responsibility and collective ownership of local initiatives. Moreover, fostering cooperation and a sharing of ideas among sectors, stakeholders and local actors can strengthen the regional ecosystem and create a basis for innovation.

Active participation can take place through consultation processes and workshops on a wide range of topics; for example, topics may include different economic opportunities, regional branding, local renewable energy strategies, community-based climate action, and rehabilitation and reconversion of local assets (e.g. former industrial sites and other assets relating to previous economic activities, such as peat extraction etc.) In the context of energy transition, people can be engaged through community-led initiatives to formulate amongst other actions, local renewable energy strategies and development plans, or at an operational level through community-based service provision, climate actions, and the rehabilitation and reconversion of local energy-related assets. Engaging the local population can fill the gap arising from lack of a strong and common territorial energy vision⁵ and can prove pivotal in determining how to combine energy solutions with local services, for example by creating a local energy information point⁶. Community consultation processes can also initiate local renewable energy production and consumption projects, setting-up actual energy self-sufficient towns or villages where residents can benefit from the local energy provided by the community-owned plants.⁷

Rural networks and Green Clusters can provide a mechanism for rural communities to cooperate and to link local natural capital, resources and skills for novel applications, maximising the benefits different assets can deliver through an integrated approach.⁸ With a growing importance of decentralised renewable energy systems, consumer involvement is necessary to realise the full potential of the energy transition, based on cooperatives, community trusts and foundations, where the initiative is owned by a community, or a hybrid model including also public and private organisations. Profits from cooperatives or community-based initiatives feed back into the local community, by generating direct employment (e.g. for maintenance and management) or indirectly by reinvesting profits into the community itself.⁹

Familiar challenges ... New opportunities

Challenges facing rural areas are well documented across EU Member States.¹⁰ Peripheral and rural regions commonly exhibit a declining and an ageing population, often accentuated in areas centred on traditional, dominant economic activities.¹¹ Outward migration of young people to urban centres or prosperous regions amplifies this trend which, in turn, is reinforced by the lack of employment opportunities, lower wages, or lack of basic services, such as public transport, utilities, education, and social amenities, in rural areas.¹²

Low population densities and remoteness affect basic service provision in rural areas. Higher costs of serving rural areas can discourage infrastructure investments (e.g. in broadband networks) and result in lower levels of service provision, less choice, and higher costs when compared to urban users.¹³ By way of example, rural areas often provide fewer local educational opportunities and choices, resulting in a less diverse skills base and a higher proportion of early school leavers than found in urban areas.¹⁴ Similarly, there is a notable rural-urban digital divide, with rural areas lacking infrastructure and basic digital skills, thereby lowering the chances for rural workers and communities to exploit the benefits of available digital technologies.¹⁵

Yet, despite their challenges, rural areas will be central to tackling societal challenges such as climate change, halting loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services, or supporting an energy transition based on renewable energy sources. Equally, food and agriculture require innovations to meet the demands of a growing population. Enabled by digitisation and new technologies, many of today's emerging economic opportunities in rural areas revolve around the creation of value through sustainable use of raw materials, and utilisation of natural assets and environment to develop new production and consumption processes. Of key importance for the creation of new business opportunities and job creation in rural areas are:¹⁶

- ▶ **Digitalisation:** digital infrastructure and technologies provide platforms for new forms of communication, knowledge exchange, and service delivery that can reduce the relevance of location and physical proximity. These technologies can

greatly facilitate remote working, which can be supported in rural communities through the provision of co-working facilities and digital hubs.

- ▶ **Sustainable Tourism:** increased awareness of the value of ecosystem services¹⁷ and of the need to act as custodians of rural environments and landscapes so they may sustain future generations provides opportunities for rural areas. Recognition of environmental issues and climate change, combined with an increasing interest in touristic activities linked to nature and rural environment, emphasises the importance of appropriate ecosystem services in rural development, especially for the emergence of a sustainable tourism industry.
- ▶ **Bioeconomy:** the development of the bioeconomy – based on production of renewable biological resources and the conversion of these resources and waste streams into value added products (e.g. food, feed, bio-based products and bioenergy)¹⁸ – has the potential for creating bio-industries with a strong rural base.
- ▶ **Circular economy:** ‘closing the loop’ of product lifecycles through recycling and re-use, which maintain and add to the value of products, materials and resources, while minimising the generation of waste, is of particular relevance for rural industries such as forestry, agriculture and food production.
- ▶ **Renewable energy:** creation of synergies between the transition from fossil fuels to renewable energy sources and rural development, both through the development of sustainable supply chains for bioenergy and through community-gain schemes and projects for decentralised, and often small-scale, local clean and renewable energy supply for rural communities.¹⁹

These drivers have different implications for the various sectors that constitute the rural economy. The following sub-section sketches some of the main economic opportunities for rural areas, focussing on digital services, sustainable tourism, bioeconomy and circular economy opportunities that are particularly relevant to the agri-food sector.

Emerging opportunities in rural economic sectors

Digitally enabled services

With increasing connectivity, digitalisation is supporting the shift of rural economies towards the services sector and increased integration of digitally enabled services within primary and industrial (e.g. manufacturing) sectors. Opportunities relating to digitalisation complement traditional offline markets. Rural manufacturers can operate their own dedicated trading space, via e-commerce and other online platforms, in which they manage their product catalogue, prices, sales, collections and invoicing, flexibly managing the availability of their products and services and extending their reach far beyond their local customer base. They can also widen the range of services accompanying the manufacturing process by offering more than the mere products, adding delivering and installation, repairing and maintenance services after the purchase of the final goods, all of which can provide additional revenue streams²⁰. Enabling businesses to take such steps may require targeted support for skills training and financing for their transition to becoming processors, distributors, marketers and eventually customer relationship managers.

Digital platforms can enable farmers to link directly with customers and diversify their customer base beyond their traditional reach, while capitalising on shorter and local value-chains. Farmers across EU Member States have diversified their customer base, delivering produce directly to households in their local and urban vicinity. This can be combined with the increasing consumer trends for greater traceability and organic products, whereby consumers wish to understand the production and transportation processes. Food quality concerns and the need to reduce waste and employ shorter distribution channels can lead to the creation of circular farm networks. “Food Assemblies”²¹ across EU Member States provide both online and offline platforms that enable local producers to group together to deliver their products to urban customers, meeting the need for more environmentally friendly and sustainable consumption patterns through short supply-chains. One observed consequence of the Covid-19 outbreak is that it appears to have further encouraged urban-based consumers to increase their sourcing of food and drink products from local rural communities.²²

Rural digital hubs are one means to support rural communities overcome common shortcomings in digital infrastructures, services, and skills and knowledge, enabling them to harness the opportunities of the digital economy. Hub facilities can help to retain local small business or attract new ones, in some cases encouraging them to relocate to rural areas by linking the option of remote working to lower living costs combined with a higher quality of life. The Midlands already has a number of these in place.²³ Implemented in many rural areas, digital hubs have created spaces for work, exchange of ideas and collaboration. Typically, a prerequisite for creating a hub is the availability of high-speed broadband and wireless internet connection. Where these are unavailable, it may achieve through community-based service provision (e.g. implementing a community-owned fast broadband network to serve remote rural areas).²⁴

In some cases, communities have used the setting-up of a hub as a vehicle to make use of and rehabilitate previously unoccupied buildings or refurbish recently vacated premises.²⁵ Functions and services delivered by digital hubs may, among others, include:

- ▶ Support to local businesses and entrepreneurs through the provision of digitally enabled working environments (both closed and co-working) and provision of digital technologies (video conferencing, product modelling software, 3D printers, or workshop spaces, etc.)
- ▶ Supporting remote working (teleworking) within rural communities.
- ▶ Enable collaboration between local entrepreneurs and research facilities.
- ▶ Provision of training in areas such literacy, digital skills, career pathway development, starting a business, or more specific business development activities (e.g. project management, managerial and leadership skills, communications and marketing). Such services may be delivered in the facility itself or remotely.

Rural digital hubs are more than business incubators since they go beyond a purely business focus and provide both existing and future businesses with collaborative spaces via a viable digital ecosystem.

In some cases, they may adopt a sectoral focus (e.g. food, light engineering, software development). Or they may target younger generations, for example by providing technology courses (e.g. coding and programming) as part of embedding the development of STEM²⁶, to strengthen resilience and future-proof rural areas and communities. They may also provide wider socio-economic and community services, such as providing local groups with spaces for collaboration and networking or providing community-based services and a base for social enterprises²⁷; for example, by linking to the provision of health services based on digital applications, shared mobility services (such as carpooling options or local pick-up services for pupils in an effort to reduce congestion) and e-enabled community outreach services.

Sustainable tourism

Increasing demand for local outdoor activities and public awareness of natural environments and biodiversity offer potential avenues for development of tourism in rural areas; for example, holidaying-at-home ('staycationing'), where a holiday is formed around day-trip leisure activities within driving distance of a family's or person's home, has been a growing market after the economic crisis of 2008. In response to Covid-19 this may further increase, as people may wish to minimise long and medium haul journeys.

Rural areas may choose to strategically plan network of natural and semi-natural areas designed to deliver a range of recreational opportunities, aiming to improve health & wellbeing, enhancing biodiversity and increasing ecosystem resilience, strengthening the landscape character, climate change resilience and supporting a sustainable economic development. Offers of outdoor activities depend on the local natural assets, including greenways, blueways, mountain bike tours, water-related activities such as canoeing and paddle board safaris, guided walks, summer camps, climate change facilities and schools, biodiversity field trips, and the emergence of designated 'Dark Sky'²⁸ locations, alongside various forms of tourism-based environmental and cultural education programmes.

Integrated tourism approaches may also identify a combination of local assets as the basis for packaged tourism offers, including specific site visits related

to food and drink processors, or sites of cultural and heritage value, benefitting the wider community and building a regional or local brand. For example, greenspaces can be used for sustainable food production, contribute to flood management and at the same time provide access to nature for informal recreation. The inter-relationship and connections between the individual projects carried out in a geographically defined area are essential aspects to be considered to ensure that opportunities for shared positive outcomes and mutual benefits are maximised.²⁹

Bioeconomy and circular economy opportunities:

Through their involvement in farming, fishing, and forestry activities, rural areas are uniquely positioned to take advantage of the opportunities presented by the bioeconomy. Rural communities can benefit from the jobs and value creation brought by bioeconomy activities and related ecosystem services (e.g. using modern digital technologies to manage water and soil resources more efficiently).

By pushing for biologically produced inputs into other industries, the bioeconomy enables a diversification of agri-food towards value chains related to chemicals, pharmaceuticals, and plastics, together with the production of nature-based alternatives to traditional fertilisers, paints, glues, or pharmaceuticals. Local agricultural business can provide residues and by-products from the growing and processing of crops to be processed in biorefineries to produce waste-based products, like using tomato and olives waste to develop fertilisers, food-packaging, bio-based coatings consisting of a vegetable fraction or entirely made from bio-based materials such as vegetable oils and natural pigments³⁰, natural additives, aromas and functional food products with health benefits³¹ and lastly, biofuels.

Industries and activities associated with the bioeconomy, which are characterised by research and development activities and use of new technologies, have strong innovation potential for products and production processes. Also, in combination with digital technologies, bioeconomy activities can stimulate innovative business practices and increases overall rural competitiveness and growth.³² Digital tools can enhance performance of farming, fisheries and forestry sectors by supporting precision production methods; for

example, through the use of data-driven management tools to optimise crop production. Digital technologies can enable innovative systems such as hydroponic³³ or aquaponic³⁴ farming which, in turn, can be combined to reduce nutrient waste through reuse, making the food production system circular and sustainable.³⁵ Further, moving towards more innovative cultivation methodologies and business practices can increase the attractiveness of farming activities to younger generations.³⁶

The circular economy provides opportunities in rethinking existing production processes and recognises the value of waste-stream to feed into new processes or products, contributing to innovation, growth, and job creation.³⁷ A circular economy approach underlies the EU Farm-to-Fork Strategy, one of the major building blocks of the European Green Deal, which aims to further develop efficient food production systems, better storage and packaging, healthier consumption and more sustainable processing and farm transport.³⁸ Rural agri-businesses can tap into the potential of circular economy synergies within food production and distribution to diversify their products and activities, for example making use of specific waste and by-products of the local agricultural streams to provide high-quality food and drink products. Specific examples are a vodka-distillery using non-marketable potatoes³⁹ or the development of “Beer crackers” produced using grains from microbreweries which would otherwise be thrown away.⁴⁰

Production and consumption of renewable energy in the EU have been increasing, but further efforts are still needed if the EU’s renewable energy targets are to be met. Here, sustainable bioenergy (i.e. production and use of biomass for energy generation) has an important role to play. Biomass is the most significant renewable energy source in the EU, making the agriculture and forestry sectors particularly important to renewable energy production. Further development of sustainable bioenergy value chains has the potential to deliver a positive environmental impact and create an economic opportunity which is greater than, for example, solar or wind projects that have limited impact on rural job creation and development.⁴¹

Through the mobilisation of wider geographic networks, rural communities can cooperate to mobilise enough resources to enable larger scale waste management and renewable energy projects. Locally produced manure, crop or wood residues can provide the necessary input to run a local biogas plants⁴² to provide gas, electricity and heating to local households, offices, or public buildings. In return, farmers can use the digestate⁴³ as fertilisers.⁴⁴ Where such projects aim at community-gain, excess revenues from cooperative projects can feed back into the local community, for example by supporting other energy initiatives such as energy efficiency retrofitting of buildings, and employment generating activities.

Endnotes

- 1 See the Cork 2.0 declaration https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/sites/enrd/files/cork-declaration_en.pdf
- 2 https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/leader-clld_en
- 3 European agricultural fund for rural development (EAFRD). <https://ec.europa.eu/info/food-farming-fisheries/key-policies/common-agricultural-policy/rural-development>
- 4 OECD, 2019: OECD Regional Outlook 2019: Leveraging Megatrends for Cities and Rural Areas. <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264312838-en>
- 5 Waasland Region, in Belgium, provides an example of an initiative to enable the local communities to engage with the citizens and participate in climate action and raising public support for energy saving actions and renewable energy was the aim of the Waasland Region, in Belgium. For more information, see: https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/sites/enrd/files/project/attachments/gp_be_waaslandenergy_web_388_fin.pdf
- 6 See the example of Aragon, Spain, in Section 2: Seizing new opportunities
- 7 See the example of Feldheim, in Germany in Section 2: Seizing new opportunities
- 8 See the example of Green Infrastructure in Wales, UK in Section 2: Seizing new opportunities
- 9 See the example of Emissions Zero in Wallonia, Belgium, in Section 2: Seizing new opportunities
- 10 See, for example: OECD, 2016: Regional Outlook. Productive regions for inclusive societies. <https://regions20.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/OECD-Regional-Outlook-2016.pdf> and Eurostat, 2019: Eurostat regional yearbook 2019. <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/3217494/10095393/KS-HA-19%E2%80%91001-EN-N.pdf/d434affa-99cd-4ebf-a3e3-6d4a5f10bb07>
- 11 See, for example: OECD, 2016: Rural 3.0 - A framework for rural development. <https://www.oecd.org/cfe/regional-policy/Rural-3.0-Policy-Note.pdf> and Eurostat, 2019: Eurostat regional yearbook 2019. <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/3217494/10095393/KS-HA-19%E2%80%91001-EN-N.pdf/d434affa-99cd-4ebf-a3e3-6d4a5f10bb07>
- 12 Eurostat, 2019: Eurostat regional yearbook 2019. <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/3217494/10095393/KS-HA-19%E2%80%91001-EN-N.pdf/d434affa-99cd-4ebf-a3e3-6d4a5f10bb07>
- 13 ENRD, 2018: Smart Villages. Revitalising rural areas. https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/sites/enrd/files/enrd_publications/publi-enrd-rr-26-2018-en.pdf
- 14 See, for example: Eurostat, 2017: Statistics on rural areas in the EU. https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Statistics_on_rural_areas_in_the_EU#Education and European Parliament, 2019: Demographic trends in EU Regions. <https://ec.europa.eu/futurium/en/system/files/ged/eprs-briefing-633160-demographic-trends-eu-regions-final.pdf>
- 15 ENRD, 2017: Seminar on 'Revitalising Rural Areas through Business Innovation'. https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/sites/enrd/files/s4_rural-businesses-factsheet_digital-hubs.pdf and ENRD, 2018: Smart Villages. Revitalising rural areas. https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/sites/enrd/files/enrd_publications/publi-enrd-rr-26-2018-en.pdf
- 16 See, for example, Rubizmo 2018: Anticipated Futures for Modern Rural Economies, Short policy brief. <https://rubizmo.eu/attachment/render/fbbb3655-bef5-4ed6-9a49-3db33baa2cf7>
- 17 The term 'ecosystem services' refers to the direct and indirect benefits to humans gifted by the natural environment and from healthy ecosystems (e.g. terrestrial, freshwater and marine ecosystem). Ecosystem services include: the products obtained from ecosystems such as food, fresh water, wood, fibre, genetic resources and medicines ('Provisioning services'); the benefits obtained from the regulation of ecosystem processes such as climate regulation, natural hazard regulation, water purification and waste management, pollination or pest control ('Regulating services'); the provision of living spaces for plants and animals and maintaining the viability of gene-pools through biodiversity ('Habitat services'); and non-material benefits that people obtain from ecosystems such as spiritual enrichment, intellectual development, recreation and aesthetic values ('Cultural services'). See, Biodiversity Information System for Europe (BISE) <https://biodiversity.europa.eu/topics/ecosystem-services>
- 18 EC, 2012: Innovating for sustainable growth: a bioeconomy for Europe. <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/1f0d8515-8dc0-4435-ba53-9570e47dbd51>
- 19 See, for example: OECD, 2012: Linking renewable energy to rural development. https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/urban-rural-and-regional-development/linking-renewable-energy-to-rural-development_9789264180444-en#page3 and European Court of Auditors, 2018: Renewable energy for sustainable rural development: significant potential synergies, but mostly unrealised. <https://op.europa.eu/webpub/eca/special-reports/renewable-energy-5-2018/en/>

- 20 To maintain and increase its customer base, a family-run Polish company, Zakład Wyrobów Metalowych Dojnikowscy (ZWM,) needed to offer more than the mere production of metal goods and so developed a range of services, from the initial design, delivery and installation, to repair and maintenance services after purchase. See <http://www.zwmdojnikowscy.pl/en/about-us/>
- 21 See the example of Food Assemblies in Section 2: Seizing new opportunities
- 22 The Guardian, 2020: Milk floats ride to the rescue of locked-down British households. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/11/milk-floats-ride-to-the-rescue-of-locked-down-british-households>
- 23 See the example of Ludgate Hub in Skibbereen, Ireland, in Section 2: Seizing new opportunities
- 24 See the example of Molenwaard, in the Netherlands, in Section 2: Seizing new opportunities
- 25 See the example of Ludgate Hub in Skibbereen, Ireland, in Section 2: Seizing new opportunities
- 26 STEM stands for: science, technology, engineering and mathematics.
- 27 A social enterprise is a business run by a group of volunteers who charge for a product or service, where all traded income is reinvested in sustaining and developing the business, and where the product or service provided is a response to a local relevant social need. The business is therefore managed by the workers, acting like a cooperative providing customised jobs and training to the long-term unemployed, people with mental illnesses or limited skills, or to migrants.
- 28 See, for example: Dark Sky Ireland (<https://www.darksky.ie/>), Mayo Dark Sky Park (<http://www.mayodarkskypark.ie/>), and Kerry Dark Sky Reserve (<http://www.kerrydarkskytourism.com/>)
- 29 See the example of the Green Infrastructure in Wales, UK in Section 2: Seizing new opportunities
- 30 Royal HaskoningDHV [undated], Factsheet Bio-Based Coatings. <https://biobasedprocurement.eu/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Biobased-Coating.pdf>
- 31 See the example of “Agrimax, multiple high-value products from crop and food-processing waste” examples from Italy and Spain, where two pilot biorefineries are to be set up: one to process waste from tomatoes and cereals at a family-run farm in northern Italy, the second one, at a fruit producing facility in southern Spain, will process olive and potato waste to produce fibres, protein and aromas. More details at: <http://agrimax-project.eu/#overview>
- 32 EIP-Agri Workshop, 2019: Opportunities for farm diversification in the circular bioeconomy. <https://ec.europa.eu/eip/agriculture/en/event/eip-agri-workshop-opportunities-farm>
- 33 Hydroponic greenhouse production methods entail growing plants in a porous material – other than soil – and allowing water containing mineral nutrients to filter through it.
- 34 Aquaponic is a cropping system combining a hydroponic unit with aquaculture, i.e. raising aquatic animals in tanks.
- 35 Danner, R.I. et al, 2019: Designing Aquaponic Production Systems towards Integration into Greenhouse Farming, Water 2019, 11(10), 2123. <https://doi.org/10.3390/w11102123>
- 36 EC, 2019: DG Agri Research Factsheet: Digital transformation in agricultural and rural areas. https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/food-farming-fisheries/farming/documents/factsheet-agri-digital-transformation_en.pdf
- 37 EC, [undated]: Circular Economy webpage. https://ec.europa.eu/growth/industry/sustainability/circular-economy_en
- 38 EC, 2020: Farm to Fork Strategy for sustainable food. https://ec.europa.eu/food/farm2fork_en
- 39 See the example of a Danish distillery in Section 2: Seizing new opportunities
- 40 See the example of the BIGH Farm in Brussels, Belgium, in Section 2: Seizing new opportunities
- 41 European Court of Auditors, 2018: Renewable energy for sustainable rural development: significant potential synergies, but mostly unrealised. <https://op.europa.eu/webpub/eca/special-reports/renewable-energy-5-2018/en/>
- 42 See the example of Emissions Zero in Wallonia, Belgium, in Section 2: Seizing new opportunities
- 43 Digestate is the material remaining after the anaerobic digestion of a biodegradable feedstock.
- 44 ENRD, 2019: EAFRD Projects Brochure: Bioeconomy. https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/sites/enrd/files/enrd_publications/publi-eafrd-brochure-09-en_2019.pdf



Seizing new opportunities: examples of innovative and community-led rural development projects

This section identifies examples of local development projects across European rural communities. The selected projects represent community-based approaches which have assisted the diversification of rural communities, supported the skills and capacity development of local stakeholders, and brought positive change at the local level. The examples are illustrative in nature and are aimed at stimulating the development of project ideas and thinking in the Midlands.

It should be recognised that all the identified projects have been uniquely shaped by their specific economic, social and institutional contexts, thereby limiting the simple transfer of lessons to other locations. Following on from the previous section, the selected examples are presented by overarching themes. These are related to community involvement and services, digital infrastructure, tourism and heritage, renewable energy, agri-business and diversification, and entrepreneurship and training.

Community involvement and services

Including citizens in the energy transition dialogue: Catalan Institute for Energy and Aragon Infoenergy Project - Spain

Including citizens in the energy transition debate to identify local alternative energy sources, challenges and concerns is the objective of two separately run projects in Spain, namely the Catalan Institute for

Energy workshops and Aragon InfoEnergy Project. The Catalan Institute for Energy (ICAEN) initiated a participatory approach to include citizens in the energy transition debate in order to identify solutions towards the Catalonia energy model of 2050. It organised two open sessions (the inaugural and the final) and three workshops, where attendees - citizens and experts – were able to reflect, debate and jointly propose needs and solutions in three pre-identified challenges: “Photovoltaic self-consumption and solar communities”, “Electric vehicle and energy storage opportunities” and “Digitization of energy”. 71 project proposals arose from the participatory approach and are currently being evaluated.

Aragón Infoenergía is a network of eight LEADER Local Action Groups that jointly implemented a project to promote an energy transition by local and renewable resources and with the involvement of the local communities. The Local Action Group Bajo Aragon-Matarrana initiated the project, which subsequently expanded to include seven other Local Action Groups. The collective project established several specific actions such as information provision, conferences, and advisory services to promote and support the development of rural renewable energy projects. The collaboration set up a communication strategy to make local entities and companies aware of the project. They created an info energy point and specific digital management tools. Auditors and experts have provided advice to local entities and citizens on better energy solutions to reduce energy consumption.

Source: <https://www.asiader.org/>

Social Enterprise Planning - Ireland

A social enterprise is a business run by a group of volunteers who charge for a product or service they provide, responding to a locally relevant social need, whilst all traded income is reinvested in sustaining and developing the business. The aim of the Social Enterprise Community Planning in Offaly was to support the social, recreational and economic regeneration of the community. The support focusses on key strengths and opportunities for future social and economic development of the area and on the identification of the priority actions to take advantage of such opportunities. Local communities are enabled to take ownership of the actions and have a lead role in engaging with other stakeholders to develop a social enterprise in their own local area. The support was tailored for each community, as different areas have different community resources, assets and gaps to be filled. Facilitators were pivotal in helping local groups making the leap from idea to reality, from the brainstorming to addressing the practicalities of many aspects of a final overall plan and waiting for feedback on many legal and formal aspects of the plan.

Source: <https://offalydc.ie/enterprise-supports>

Creetown Initiative – Scotland (UK)

Creetown is a village with a population of around 750. The Creetown Initiative was formed in 2002 by local residents who wanted to improve services and quality of life for people living in the village. It has carried out a wide range of projects in the village and surrounding area. The initiative now employs 14 staff and have expanded the scope of their work to include a consultancy service to other communities and organisations in Scotland. Projects undertaken include leasing motorcycles to young unemployed people to allow them to access work or training while staying in the village; undertaking a community arts project to redesign the village square; managing the youth club; and redeveloping the closed down bar to create a space for community businesses focussed on the tourism sector.

Source: <http://creetowninitiative.co.uk>

Monmouthshire Green Infrastructure Strategy – Wales (UK)

Green infrastructure (GI) is a strategically planned network of natural and semi-natural areas designed and managed to deliver a wide range of ecosystem services, e.g. water purification, air quality, space for recreation and climate mitigation and adaptation. The network can improve environmental, economic and social benefits through natural solutions, supporting the green economy, creating job opportunities and enhancing biodiversity, based on an integrated and joined up approach. Monmouthshire, in Wales, UK, has developed a Green Infrastructure Strategy, recognizing the multi-functionality of Green Infrastructure assets and aiming to maximise benefits through an integrated approach. Projects are identified based on their inter-relationship and connections to ensure that opportunities for shared outcomes and mutual benefits for the involved communities are identified. The five objectives of the GI Strategy are: improving health & wellbeing; enhancing biodiversity & increasing ecosystem resilience; strengthening the character of the landscape; increasing climate change resilience; and supporting a sustainable economic development are the five objectives of the GI Strategy.

Source: <https://www.monlife.co.uk/connect/green-infrastructure/green-infrastructure-strategy-2019/>

Digital infrastructure and networks

The Ludgate Hub - Ireland

Skibbereen, Ireland, used to be a town characterised by very low-level broadband and a lack of e-centre or enterprise parks which failed to attract and provide a diversity of employment opportunities. Initiated by a board of eleven local people operating on a pro-bono basis, the hub is in a rehabilitated bakery shop. A steering group of local entrepreneurs, digital ambassadors (volunteers) and local business owners / enterprises, including business and service providers, retailers, teachers, farmers, students, and the local authority were all involved in the project initiation phase. Through pro-bono contributions, the project development made use of the available local human

capital, used for mentoring advice, financial / legal advice, (inter)national network opportunities / contacts, marketing and technical support. The Chamber of Commerce supported the re-branding of the rural town, by developing a dedicated website. A joint venture between the Electricity Supply Board (ESB) and Vodafone delivered a 100% fibre-to-the-building broadband network and installed 1GB of internet connectivity. The Hub provides numerous offers through which the local residents and businesses can use its services, such as desks and rooms for both short- and long-term use, conference and training spaces for private meetings, workshops or trainings, providing state-of-the-art digital and non-digital equipment and technologies. It has developed into a beacon of innovation enabling new spin-off enterprises to develop. The hub created an ecosystem of creativity and ultimately made Skibbreen a hotspot for technology start-ups and relocation. Today, the hub activities are self-sustained, and it employs 11 permanent staff. It attracted 25 Co-Working Companies and enabled €1.8 Million in local services & trades since 2015. 15 new hub members have permanently moved to the rural area with their families. Through the organisation of events, the hub has supported over 2,800 bed nights in the local area.

Source: <https://www.ludgate.ie/>

Cowocat_Rural Network of coworking spaces in rural Catalonia - Spain

'Cowocat_Rural' aims to attract young skilled professionals to rural areas and tackle outmigration by providing a network of co-working spaces in rural areas. The aim is to boost the creation of employment and economic activity in the rural areas and to promote the values of coworking and teleworking in the participating territories. It promotes networking through a database identifying local actors and enables the connection of rural professionals who are part of the coworking ecosystem. It further encourages collaboration between the existing coworking spaces, public or private, and organises networking events and workshops. New coworking spaces can build on support material provided by the organisation, in terms of business development support and technical advice. Furthermore, the organisation has established programmes to promote coworking opportunities with

universities or high-school students. The Coworking Rural Visa (also called RuralPass) promotes the mobility of professionals within and between rural and urban areas. The RuralPass facilitates and allows all coworkers part of the Cowocat_Rural Network to work for three days a quarter, free of charge, in another rural area with an affiliated coworking space or in one of the urban coworking spaces in Catalunya. Coworkers of urban spaces can also use this service to go to rural areas. The Rural&Go programme offers a tourism package which combines work and holiday, making the coworking spaces available whilst offering the benefits of the rural areas for leisure and recreational purposes. Over 18 spaces and 130 professionals are today part of the network. Twelve networking meetings have been organised with over 300 attendees. The network created a coworking space in a University and organised a training programme in two Universities to promote the concept of coworking. It also organised the 'Catalunya Coworking Day', offering training to 50 participants and the opportunity to exchange experiences.

Source: https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/sites/enrd/files/project/attachments/rr-es_rr-01_cowocat_ok_dl_cdp_ok_0.pdf

Tourism and local cultural and heritage sites

Big Pit National Coal Museum – Wales (UK)

Big Pit is an award-winning British national museum which still retains many features of its former life as a coal mine. The Museum is set in a unique industrial landscape, designated a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 2000 in recognition of its international importance to the process of industrialisation through iron and coal production. It is one of the few mining museums where visitors can descend in the pit cage and visit the places where generations of coal miners worked. With facilities to educate and entertain all ages, Big Pit offers a multimedia tour of a modern coal mine with a virtual miner in the Mining Galleries providing access to those who may have difficulty accessing the site, and surface exhibitions and displays held in the Pithead Baths and original colliery buildings. Through the Underground Tour, visitors can go 300 feet underground with a real miner and see what life was like for the thousands of men who

worked at the coal face. Big Pit is an anchor point on the European Route of Industrial Heritage. The route comprises 850 sites across 32 countries and showcases the diverse industrial history across the continent. Big Pit is a reminder of the coal industry in Wales and the people and society it created.

Source: <https://museum.wales/bigpit/>

Landschaftspark Duisburg-Nord - Germany

The Landschaftspark Duisburg-Nord was formed on the former site of the Thyssen Ironworks which closed in 1985. The silhouette of the ironworks defined the townscape and demolition would have resulted in the loss of the industrial heritage. It is one of 25 attractions on the Ruhr Industrial Heritage Trail. It has created a large open recreational space for the population, as well as opportunities for sports and leisure; and cultural activities such as theatre and concert performances. Over time, biodiversity has increased and in addition to the landscaped areas, there is a wilderness area where no visitors are allowed. The parc has managed to attract over 1.2 Million visitors in 2019, attracting visitors through lightshows, fairs (jobs and sectoral), festivals, outdoor activities (such as movie projections) and competitions (such as mountain-biking, sand buildings, hiking and running trails).

Source: <https://www.landschaftspark.de/en/>

St Fagans National Museum of History – Wales (UK)

Previously known as the Museum of Welsh Life, the museum is intended to preserve aspects of rural life exploring history together with the visitor through people's everyday lives. The museum stands in the grounds of the St Fagans Castle and gardens, a late 16th-century manor house. Since 1948, over forty original buildings from different historical periods have been re-erected in the 100-acre parkland, among them houses, ironmen cottages, a farm, a school, a chapel and a Workmen's Institute. The site holds displays of traditional crafts, with a working blacksmith forge, a pottery, a weaver, a miller, and a clog maker. It also includes two working water mills: one flour mill and one wool mill. Part of the site includes a small working farm which concentrates on preserving local Welsh native breeds of livestock. Products from the museum's bakery and flour mill is available for sale. Visitors gain an

insight into the rich heritage and culture of Wales, and the Welsh language can be heard in daily use amongst craftsmen. Throughout the year, St Fagans hosts festivals, music and dance events, exploring all aspects of how people in Wales have lived, worked and spent their leisure time.

Source: <https://museum.wales/stfagans/>

The Vistula Valley regional Branding – Poland

The Vistula Valley in the Kujawsko-Pomorkie region, Poland, is a region of rich cultural and culinary heritage. A project co-funded by the European Agricultural Fund for Regional Development (EAFRD) set out to promote the food and cultural attractions in the area, resulting in a package of thoroughly researched offers for tourists, a new cultural and food brand and a more business-like approach to attracting tourists. It built on a participatory approach, where over 100 locals took part in workshops, study-trips and activities aiming to share knowledge, improve skills and develop new approaches in the tourism industry. Extensive analyses were undertaken to identify the tourism potential, the development of a local brand that clearly identifies the cultural identity of the area, involving experts of the tourism industry to match the offers with the demands and mobilising an extensive stakeholder network for a successful identification of tourism packages. The project resulted in the launch of a new network promoting food and culture tourism in the Vistula valley and the creation of 6 food-themed tourist packages including trips to the Vistula Valley and the Dobrzynska area.

Source: https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/sites/enrd/files/project/attachments/gp_pl_vistula_valley_brand_webv.pdf

Mid-Ireland Adventure - Ireland

Tourism in rural areas offers great potential due to the increasing demand for outdoor activities. Mid-Ireland Adventure is a start-up company that aims to supply the growing demand in outdoor activities in rural areas of the Midland region. It provides a wide range of activities, including mountain bike tours, guided walks, summer camps, stand up paddle board safaris, as well as environmental and cultural education programmes. Through LEADER support, the start-up has been able to

purchase further equipment. Not only has the start-up secured a permanent position, it is also expected to expand with the growing demand and contributes to spin-off benefits to the rural communities, by attracting local, national and international customers, which make us of local retail, hospitality and accommodation.

Source: www.midirelandadventure.ie

Local renewable energy development

Community owned renewable energy plants - Belgium

Emissions Zéro is a citizen cooperative created in 2007 investing in the production of renewable energy in Wallonia and Brussels. It is part of a wider Federation of Citizens Renewable Energy Cooperatives (REScoop EU) and counts over 2000 members. Its aim is to boost the development of a 100% Belgian green electricity - from wind, hydro, PV and biomass – and to promote and ensure the citizens' control over both the production and the consumption of such energy. Emissions Zéro selects sufficiently profitable projects to be able to develop the cooperative while offering a reasonable financial return to the partners active in the production of green electricity. It has installed and operates: 2 wind turbines located in the Dour-Quévrain wind farm, of which it is a 50% owner in partnership with the municipalities; provided financial support in form of a subordinate loan of €250,000 to the Monceau-sur-Sambre hydroelectric power station on the Sambre River – whilst providing capital for the facility in association with another 8 citizen cooperatives; an agricultural bio-methanisation unit in Ochain, operational since 2017 for the production of electricity (in turn, doubling its capacity with the installation of a second cogeneration engine); finally, acting as third-party investor in photovoltaic installations, and operating photovoltaic resources installed on roofs of public buildings, car parks, and schools. It provides a total of 17000 MWh of electricity annually sold to a green supplier or to the co-operators at a fair and stable price.

Source: <https://www.emissions-zero.coop/>

Energy self-sufficient village Feldheim - Germany

In the Feldheim district, Brandenburg, a comprehensive concept for a decentralised renewable energy supply for companies, private households and municipalities has been realised. The project was developed and implemented in partnership-based cooperation between the city of Treuenbrietzen, the residents of the district, the agricultural cooperative Fläming eG and the project developer Energiequelle GmbH. Energiequelle GmbH planned the building blocks of the concept based on state-of-the-art modern wind energy and biogas plants, linking it to the regional energy supply network via a newly built distribution system. The wind farm forms the backbone of the local power supply, while the heat is supplied by the local biogas plant. The natural fluctuations of the wind power supply will be compensated in a second expansion phase by a battery storage system. A modern wood chip heating plant is available for the additional heat requirement on particularly cold days. The speciality of the Feldheim concept is the separate local heating and power network through which the heat and electricity produced on site is routed directly to consumers. In this way, costs and dependencies on the networks of traditional energy suppliers are avoided. Ownership of the local heating network is held by the Feldheim Energie GmbH & Co. KG, through which the connected households, companies, and the city of Treuenbrietzen have come together. Energiequelle GmbH and Co. WP Feldheim 2006 KG are the owners of the separate electricity networks to supply the connected end-consumers. The investments required to build the separate electricity and heat supply networks were covered by local, regional, national and EU funds.

Source: <https://nef-feldheim.info/the-energy-self-sufficient-village/?lang=en>

Previous mining town to 100% renewable energy sourced community - France

Loos-en-Gohelle is a town of 7000 inhabitants located in the North of France. The city, just like its surrounding area, was deeply affected by coal mining industries, active from the 1850s until their closure in the 1980s. With strong political support from its mayors, the town has since chosen the road towards renewable energy through strong citizen involvement. The previous mining

sites were converted into cultural and sustainable development centres, setting up PV panels on 12 public buildings. A private operator finances and takes care of the construction works. They aim for the development of eco-construction (for social housing and municipal buildings) and new approaches to urban planning and the environment (water infiltration on the plot, greenbelt, differentiated management of green spaces, etc.). Developing a new identity with renewable energies in a location that has a deeply engrained identity with the coal mining industry was at first challenging, as well as involving all local stakeholders in the process. Citizens had to rediscover their capacity to drive actions and personal initiatives. Projects and initiatives were initially carried out “on an ad hoc basis”, though these actions have gradually developed into a coherent framework. Loos-en-Gohelle is now considered a “pilot city for sustainable development” in France, and in 2015 it joined the network “100% Territoires à énergie positive” (100% Renewable Energy Sourced communities) aiming to have 100% of their electricity coming from renewable energy sources by 2020 and to rely 100% on renewables by 2050.

Source: <https://www.renewables-networking.eu/documents/CaseStudyLoos-en-Gohelle-FR.pdf>

Farming and agri-business development

State-of-the-art hydroponic greenhouse farm - Romania

Dissatisfied by the quality and supply of vegetables in supermarkets, a family from Constanta, Romania, decided to relocate into a rural community approximately 30km from their town, to develop a state-of-the-art greenhouse hydroponic farm. The vegetables grown were to supply the urban supermarkets. The objectives were to reintroduce new tomato cultivation methodologies, to use renewable energy sources, and create a sustainable business for the local community by generating jobs for the local workforce and increasing the added value of agricultural products. The family was supported by the Agricultural Chamber of Constanta, where they followed agronomy courses, received specialised advice on hydroponic applications and the necessary equipment, and support on their funding application for the Regional Development Programme (RDP) along with a private bank loan (both

granted in 2011). The funding helped building the greenhouse and purchasing the equipment, such as trolleys and platforms for harvesting and storing the crops, an electromagnetic pollination systems or foil for soil cover. Operational spaces for the hydroponic production system included also a warehouse, thermal plant - using pellets and briquettes - a refrigeration unit, weighbridge, etc. The family is the sole local producer of tomatoes and provides supermarkets as well as wholesalers directly. The production accounts for 350 tons in a single production cycle and is able to deliver 2 tons daily. The project created 12 direct jobs and the family has applied for further funding to extend their primary processing area.

Source: https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/sites/enrd/files/project/attachments/gp_ro_polytunnels_renewable_web.pdf

The BIGH Farm - Belgium

The BIGH Farm project has defined its mission to create a network of sustainable farms that build on the existing urban infrastructure, using buildings and their energy loss, rainwater, CO2 and natural potential for space, orientation, microclimate and solar exposure. Located in Brussels, the BIGH Farm project aims to build its network based on circular economy principles, i.e. identifying waste-streams to minimise raw material input such as energy, water and crops, and create a no-waste production process through an aquaponic farming ecosystem. It identifies its opportunities on a zero-tolerance for chemicals, antibiotics or Genetically Modified Organism (GMO) policy. Short distribution channels support the delivery of fresh and high-quality produce, creating direct and indirect employment opportunities in the production, processing and delivery systems. The BIGH Farm cooperates with local agri-businesses, such as the Beer Food Company, which uses the grains of urban microbreweries to transform into crackers – this approach to creating a network of cooperating farming and agri-businesses is accelerating the development of circular food production systems and is applicable in urban as well as rural areas. The BIGH Farm has diversified its portfolio in offering also guided visitor tours, a location for corporate events and environmental education programme for schools and universities alike.

Source: <https://bigh.farm/>

Lammefjorden's Distillery - Denmark

Inspired by a 200-year old local tradition of high-quality alcohol production, three local entrepreneurs initiated a micro-brewery using the locally produced surplus potatoes, which were otherwise deemed non-marketable. The potatoes grow in reclaimed, vitamin-rich soils which gives the vodka and brandy a distinctive spice and is a sought-after product across the world. Next to its vodka, the distillery offers visitor attractions through a tour to observe the entire production process, from growing the potatoes to the final product. It is the first company in Denmark to produce Danish vodka and schnapps from potatoes and the first delivery of the product took place in fall 2018. The three entrepreneurs undertook several preparatory activities to develop their business plan for the development and establishment of a distillery and identification of local potato producers; obtaining price quotes for the interior infrastructure and equipment; and building on the experiences of other micro-distilleries in the region. They also approached the Danish Technological Institute (Agrotech) for their product development, branding and marketing. After 2.5 years of start-up phase, the distillery was finally built in a retrofitted farmhouse and a first batch arrived on shelves in 2018. The distillery has so far created one further employment opportunity but is expected to grow with a growing number of products to be developed. Through its tours, the distillery is expecting around 1000 visitors annually.

Source: <http://www.nordicsoil.dk/>

The Food Assembly – multiple Member States (BE, DE, ES, FR, IT, NL)

The Food Assembly is a network of farmers and processors that sell their produce directly to the consumer. Through so-called Hives, the farmer can sell their produce to consumers in several different localities within their proximity. The Food Assembly is thus offering a new opportunity for producers, which set their own prices and receive an income that is both fair for them and good for the local economy, and encourages a more environmentally friendly and sustainable shopping experience through short supply-chains. Buyers can choose and select products from a range of farmers and agri-businesses on dedicated online platform and collect it at a defined location in their town or city,

bringing the farmers products directly into urban areas. Each Food Assembly or Hive has its own online platform and physical site looked after by a Host. The farmers and agri-businesses have their own dedicated trading space in which they manage their product catalogue, prices, sales, collections and invoicing, flexibly managing the availability of their products so to avoid producing waste from unsold stock. Farmers are effectively shifting from producers to processors, distributors, marketers and customer relationship managers. They earn 80% of pre-tax turnover, and the remaining 20% goes to the Assembly Host, which provides technical and commercial support.

Source: <https://laruchequiditoui.fr/en>

Entrepreneurship and training

GrowBiz rural start-up support – Scotland (UK)

Start-up enterprises face specific challenges in rural areas and require a more targeted support system. The GrowBiz project aims to provide comprehensive support services for new and existing enterprises in rural Perthshire in Scotland, to support the development of employment opportunities, improved skills and a stronger local economy. GowBiz and the Enterprise Rural Perthshire project provide community-based enterprise support in rural Perth and Kinross, through a combination of one to one support for start-ups, peer learning and training sessions, a mentoring programme and networking events. So far, they have worked with over 400 rural businesses; 2500 people have participated across 200+ learning and networking events; three women's networks were set up which now meet at a monthly basis; over 100 new businesses and 200 jobs created in the area and 45 mentors trained. The added value of the 'relational' approach, which is based on long-term relationships with businesses and encouraging collaboration and knowledge-sharing, is the network and legacy that it leaves behind - new businesses are equipped with tools and skills to do well on their own.

Source: <https://www.growbiz.co.uk/>

PISMA-NOVSKA Business incubator - Croatia

The metal industry has a long tradition in the Sisak-Moslavina County and is one of the priority economic sectors. To use the untapped potential, an entrepreneurial incubator has been built to support and promote entrepreneurs in their business endeavours and create new employment opportunities in the predominantly rural area. PISMO is the first digital innovation hub located in Sisak Moslavina county with the outspoken objective to support the successful shift of traditional industries to modern ones. To do so, it provides services to companies that are eager to adopt digital technologies in dominantly traditional activities. The core business of PISMO is in smart skills development through the enhancement of existing skills base and creation of a modern labour force for smart specialisation. PISMO also partly focuses on providing services for the metal processing sector. It is expected to improve the position and competitiveness of the Croatian manufacturing industry focused on fabricated metal products for the international market. The business incubator provides all the necessary equipment, such as a CNC machine, a 3D printer, a music and film studio and software in over 26 functional spatial units. Currently, PISMO is also engaged in creating technical documentation for a gaming campus (university, student dormitory, e-sport arena).

Source: <http://inkubator-pismo.eu/en/digital-innovation-hub/>

Caberfeidh Horizons – Scotland (UK)

The Caberfeidh Horizons Transition & Training Project offers training, jobs and employment and personal development opportunities for young people and adults living in the rural area of the Cairngorms National Park in Scotland. The project covers two parts: Transition and Employability, and Training. The Transition and Employability targets young people from 15 to 24-year-old, transitioning from school to work. The Training part provides specified work experience opportunities for young people in need of additional support, including learning disabilities, mental health problems and long-term unemployment. Since its start in 2017, the project has recruited 46 trainees. The training has successfully led to three achieving Sports Leader Awards, courses in

computing skills, video skills or graphic arts. The project also holds a weekly drop in/outreach event in Aviemore in partnership with High Life Highland.

Source: <http://caberfeidhhorizons.com/training---transition-project.html>

Odisseu, bringing back the youth to rural areas - Spain

Odisseu aims to fight the brain drain that affects most rural areas in Catalonia, Spain, and provide solutions for generation renewal, with a focus on people aged up to 40. The organisation enables young people in rural areas to participate in site visits of local companies to discover the locally available business network for potential future employment opportunities in the area. Participants can connect to the network directly through an online tool, named “Retorna” (Return). To attract young talents back into the rural areas, the organisation has developed guides on available services, such as housing, coworking, health, education, sports, culture etc. Finally, they conducted a study to identify the required profiles to incorporate young professionals into the agricultural sector.

Source: <http://www.odisseujove.cat/>

Resources from the Platform for coal regions in transition

The European Commission’s Platform for coal regions in transition develops support materials to assist practitioners in coal regions across Europe. Toolkits, guidelines and reports, covering key transition-related issues for coal regions in transition in Europe, will be uploaded in 2020.

Website

www.coalregions.eu



3

Assessment Criteria for Project and Programme Proposals

Purpose

This section sets out the criteria for guiding the assessment and selection of project and programme proposals for inclusion in the MRTT's inventory. The inventory will collate project and programme proposals which are recognised by the MRTT as having the potential to make a notable contribution to successful transition. Funding resources are finite and competitive. It should be anticipated that not all proposals included in the inventory that apply to subsequent related funding schemes will receive funding.

The creation of the inventory will ensure that there is a register of credible, appropriate and complementary proposals as funding becomes available from varied sources, such as the Irish Government's Just Transition Fund, the EC's Just Transition Fund and Project Ireland 2040 funds. Importantly, the inventory will also facilitate: the grouping of similar proposals; collaboration opportunities across communities and the region; identification of proposals requiring further support / advice; and comprehension of the geographic spread of potential projects and programmes.

Overview

Selection criteria clarify how project and programme proposals will be selected for inclusion in the project and programme inventory, thereby promoting transparency in the selection process. The criteria relate to projects and programmes which are seeking public sector support and which will contribute to just transition outcomes in the Midlands. It is anticipated that proposals will be generated via two processes:

- ▶ A more streamlined process which will be used to identify community-led projects aimed specifically at affected communities, groupings of affected communities and affected groups. These projects will be proposed by properly constituted community-based groups / third sector organisations.
- ▶ A more rigorous process which will identify projects and programmes aimed at i) affected communities and groups and ii) projects and programmes at the county/regional levels which will demonstrably assist the process of transition in affected communities and groups but have wider impacts. These projects and programmes will be proposed by public sector, private sector or third sector organisations.

The criteria for both processes are broadly similar in form but tailored to the above noted characteristics.

Selection criteria will ensure that proposals which:

- ▶ Best align with the aims of a just transition process (i.e. support economic development, social development, energy transition and environmental rehabilitation in relevant affected communities and groups) and can secure appropriate transition outcomes are included in the project inventory.
- ▶ Have evident merit and applicability and which are realisable are included in the project inventory (appropriate proposals not at this stage can be deferred for further adaptation and elaboration and noted for potential future consideration).
- ▶ Demonstrate viability of the project and programme are included in the project inventory.

This section will firstly consider the potential criteria for community-led projects and, subsequently, public sector, private sector and third sector-led project and programme proposals.

Eligibility criteria for community-led projects

- ▶ Location: the project or programme should be located within the wider Midlands. Projects and programmes should be aimed at communities and groups affected by Bord na Mona and ESB plans in relation to the planned closure of bogs and power plants.
- ▶ Applicant: a project will be proposed by properly constituted community-based group or third sector organisation.
- ▶ Capacity: a project applicant demonstrates the capacity to develop, deliver and manage / maintain the project (or that this can be done through an identified, appropriate partner).
- ▶ Thematic relevance: a project relates to one or more of the following thematic aims of intervention:
 - Economic development - the project will support job and enterprise creation and the development of new economic activities within an affected community and/or the creation of new or additional relevant skills within an affected community;

- Social development - the project will address demographic and social challenges in an affected community and/ or develop social capacity/capital in an affected community;
- Energy transition - the project will promote a community-led renewable energy, heating and energy efficiency initiatives to reduce domestic dependence on peat in an affected community;
- Environmental rehabilitation - the project will promote environmental rehabilitation within or close to an affected community.

Assessment criteria for community-led projects

Relevance and need

- ▶ Relevance: the extent to which the project addresses one or more of the relevant thematic aims of economic development, social development, energy transition; environmental rehabilitation.
- ▶ Strategic fit: the extent the project links with existing community plans.
- ▶ Need and Demand: the extent to which the project responds to, and is consistent with, an identified need and demand at the community or group level.
- ▶ Appropriateness: the extent to which the project and its proposed delivery method are appropriate for the local situation
- ▶ Spatial spread: the number of other project proposals from the same community (although all projects need to have met the wider selection criteria for inclusion on the inventory).
- ▶ Conditionality/additionality: the extent to which achievement of the project outcomes is dependent on obtaining support and/or the extent to which the provision of support will generate additional outcomes and benefits.

Costs and funding

- ▶ Cost: the extent to which both capital and revenue costs are identified over financial years.
- ▶ Funding sources: the extent to which actual or potential funding sources are identified.

Impact

- ▶ Assessment and explanation of scale of relevant impacts in relation to community:
 - Employment
 - Enterprise
 - New economic activities e.g. tourism, remote working, innovation hubs
 - Creation of new and/or additional relevant skills
 - Demographic stability
 - Social capacity/capital
 - Decarbonisation
 - Environmental enhancement
- ▶ Cost effectiveness: from the above impacts, an assessment of the balance of proposed costs of the project (including other technical/organisational support needs) versus projected outcomes.
- ▶ Innovativeness and replicability: assessment of the innovative of the project and the potential for this to be successfully replicated in other affected locations.

Deliverability & Sustainability

- ▶ Feasibility of project: in terms of the project timetable, legal and administrative requirements (e.g. planning permission), financial requirements and ongoing viability.
- ▶ Project maturity: assessment of feasibility will incorporate the degree of maturity of project conceptualisation and preparation, including, for example: clarity regarding inputs, activities, outputs and outcomes, feasibility and options assessment, planning, risk assessment.

- ▶ Capacity to deliver the project, for example in terms of available / access to technical, legal, financial, administrative and project management capacity.
- ▶ Technical feasibility of the project, for example in terms of the adequacy and appropriateness of technical solutions to achieve the project objectives /outcomes.
- ▶ Consensus and consultation: for example in terms of consensus among the community on the importance of project objectives and community input to project development and realisation.
- ▶ Risk exposure and management: exposure and proposed responses to (main) project risks (e.g. in terms of demand, design, financing, procurement, execution, operation, legal and regulatory).

Eligibility criteria for public, private and third sector-led projects and programmes

- ▶ Location: the project or programme should be located within the wider Midlands. Projects and programmes should i) be aimed at communities and groups affected by Bord na Mona and ESB plans in relation to the planned closure of bogs and power AND/OR ii) demonstrably assist the process of a just transition at county or the wider Midlands Region level, especially in affected communities and groups.
- ▶ Applicant: A project or programme will be proposed a public sector, private sector or third sector organisation.
- ▶ Capacity: the project applicant demonstrates the capacity to develop, deliver and manage / maintain the project (or that this can be done through an identified, appropriate partner).
- ▶ Thematic relevance: projects should relate to one or more of the following thematic aims:
 - Economic development - the project or programme will support job and enterprise creation and the development of new economic activities and/or the creation of new or additional relevant skills

across the MRTT area and demonstrably assist the process of transition, including in affected communities and groups

- Energy transition - the project or programme will support energy transition and the reduction of GHG emissions in the MRTT area, including in affected communities and groups
- Environmental rehabilitation - the project or programme will support environmental rehabilitation across the MRTT area and demonstrably assist the process of transition, including in or adjacent affected communities and groups
- Social development - the project or programme will support social and demographic development, especially in affected communities and groups

This could include:

- ▶ Structural transformation and diversification of economic activities e.g. moving away from peat and carbon intensive activities towards more sustainable economic activities, including tourism, remote working, digital hubs
- ▶ Job creation and economic growth e.g. creation of new job and economic opportunities, particularly with reference to workers and communities most affected by transition from peat related activities
- ▶ Skills development e.g. training / reskilling affected groups to address skills shortages and gaps in current and emerging labour demand
- ▶ Transformation of energy systems e.g. increasing the deployment of renewable / alternative energy technologies and provision of secure and affordable energy supply
- ▶ Improved energy efficiency e.g. increasing the adoption / deployment of technologies to reduce energy consumption, retrofitting
- ▶ Improved environmental conditions e.g. improvements to air quality, remediation of damaged and contaminated land and water, biodiversity promotion
- ▶ Reclamation and reconversion of land and buildings e.g. regeneration, particularly with reference to

rehabilitation / repurposing of former peat-related sites in line with sustainable regional / local economic diversification

- ▶ Social cohesion and resilience e.g. addressing demographic and social challenges in affected communities (depopulation / ageing, opportunities for younger persons / younger families etc.); preservation of cultural / industrial heritage and regional / local identity

Public, private and third sector-led projects and programmes

Relevance and Need

- ▶ Strategic relevance/alignment: the extent of the project or programmes' contribution to relevant policies and strategies. relevant policies and strategies may include, for example:
 - EU / national / regional strategies for energy (transition) and climate change, including 'Just Transition' strategies and policies.
 - National / regional / local strategies and policies for economic development, including spatial, economic and socio-economic plans e.g. Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy, Regional Enterprise Plans, Local Economic and Community Plans.
- ▶ Strategic complementarity: the extent to which the project complements activities (implemented, in implementation, or planned) covered by other relevant initiatives.
- ▶ Need and Demand: the extent to which the project responds to, and is consistent with, an identified need and demand within the MRTT geography.
- ▶ Appropriateness: the extent to which the project and its proposed delivery method are appropriate for the local/regional context.
- ▶ Conditionality/additionality: the extent to which achievement of the projects' outcomes is dependent on obtaining support and/or the extent to which the provision of support will generate additional benefits of the project outcomes.

Costs and Funding

- ▶ Cost: the extent to which both capital and revenue costs are identified over financial years, including whole-life costs where appropriate.
- ▶ Funding sources: the extent to which actual or potential funding sources are identified.

Impact

- ▶ Detailed quantitative and qualitative assessment and explanation of scale of relevant impacts, including in affected communities and groups, in relation to:
 - Employment (direct, indirect and induced)
 - Enterprise
 - New economic activities
 - Investment
 - Training and creation of new and/or additional relevant skills
 - Demographic stability
 - Social capacity/capital
 - Decarbonisation
 - Environmental enhancement
- ▶ Cost effectiveness: from the above impacts, assessment of the balance of proposed costs of the project (including other technical/organisational support needs) versus projected outcomes.
- ▶ Innovativeness and replicability: assessment of the innovativeness of the project and the potential for this to be successfully replicated in other affected locations.

Deliverability & Sustainability

- ▶ Feasibility of project: in terms of the project timetable, legal and administrative requirements (e.g. planning permission), financial requirements and ongoing viability through project and programme life cycle.
- ▶ Technical feasibility: for example in terms of the adequacy and appropriateness of technical solutions to achieve the project objectives / outcomes.

- ▶ Capacity to deliver the project, for example in terms of available / access to technical, legal, financial, administrative and project management capacity.
- ▶ Project maturity: degree of conceptualisation, business planning, preparation, including, for example: options assessment, financial analysis, economic analysis, environmental impact assessment
- ▶ Consensus and consultation: a demonstrable consensus among stakeholders on the importance of project objectives and consultation on project development and realisation.
- ▶ Risk exposure and management: exposure and proposed responses to (main) project risks (e.g. in terms of demand, design, financing, procurement, execution, operation, legal and regulatory).
- ▶ Governance: appropriate governance and control measures identified.

Background Information Sources

- ▶ Leader Tool-Kit “The strategy Implementation: How to define the project selection criteria”: http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/enrd-static/leader/leader/leader-tool-kit/the-strategy-design-and-implementation/the-strategy-implementation/en/how-to-define-the-project-selection-criteria_en.html
- ▶ ENRD, “Implementing LAGs and Local Strategies: Effective project development and selection”: https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/leader-clld/leader-toolkit/implementing-lags-and-local-strategies-3_en#six
- ▶ EIB-JASPERS, “Coal Regions in Transition – Standard Project Proposal Assessment” (unpublished)
- ▶ EIB-JASPERS, “Coal Regions in Transition – 5th Plenary & Working Group Meeting”, presentation by Šarūnas Bruzgė
- ▶ Platform for Coal Regions in Transition materials: https://ec.europa.eu/energy/topics/oil-gas-and-coal/EU-coal-regions/resources_categories_en?redir=1