

netbox news

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Introducing Netbox

NetBox is a community led lifelong learning initiative funded by the European Commission under the Lifelong Learning Programme. For the first time, NetBox aims to develop a micro-social network in rural communities that focuses on identifying all the educational assets and needs within these communities in order to build new learning partnerships generating educational resources relevant to local residents. NetBox offers a new and exciting approach towards facilitating learning opportunities and networking between different stakeholders in rural areas. The partners in the project are using best practice in online learning, social networking design and a blend of Asset-Based Community Development and Needs Based Community development approaches to achieve the aims and objectives of the Project. To follow the developments of the project over the next 12 months, please visit www.netboxproject.eu

The People behind NetBox

NetBox brings together nine partners from across Europe comprising both supporting and implementing partners. The six implementing partners are actively working with six local rural communities to develop and pilot NetBox, and they include Meath Partnership from Ireland (Project Co-ordinator), Superact from the United Kingdom, Association for Education and Sustainable Development (AESD) from Romania, Juanimo Karjeros Centras (JKC) from Lithuania, Institute for Human Resources Development (IRZL) from Poland and Santa Casa da Misericórdia de Santarém (SCMS) from Portugal. Together this motley crew have been working with each other and with their communities to develop, design and deliver the NetBox project.



Supporting their work are three partners from Cyprus, Germany and Finland. With expertise in community development practice and policy CARDET from Cyprus and Universität Paderborn from Germany are working alongside Innoventum from Finland with their technological know-how to advance the project objectives as part of the Consortium.

“Rural communities are, we believe, the key to their own destinies, they are their own best assets; it is up to us merely to help them to bring out ‘the greatness within’”

A Closer Look at the Partners Implementing Partners

Meath Partnership is a county-wide community organisation based in Kells, County Meath with responsibility for the design and implementation of local, rural and community development programme across their region. It specialises in building the capacity of local communities through the design and implementation of a range of projects and programmes tackling persistent incidence of exclusion and disadvantage.

Superact is a not-for-profit arts organisation, based in Taunton, Somerset. Working across a range of communities within the UK and internationally it uses the arts to make a significant contribution to people's lives; breaking down barriers, building self-esteem, promoting social inclusion and employability, and providing strong channels of expression and communication where previously they were not well established or perhaps did not exist at all.

AESD is an educational centre based in Calarasi, Romania. Its main activities are the implementation of courses for formal and informal lifelong education, building an organised system of mentoring, information provision and training at every stage of adult education.

Juanimo Karjeros Centras is a non-governmental organisation based in Kaunas, Lithuania with more than 10 years' experience supporting disadvantaged communities through non-formal education programmes and guidance services. They aim to meet public needs through educational, scientific, cultural, social and legal initiatives.

IRZL is a non-profit, non-governmental organisation located in Lublin, Poland. Its mission is to promote and support the sustainable development of local communities and the labour market through targeted education programmes.

SCMS is a non-profit, charitable institution acting in the municipality of Santarém, Portugal. The main aim of the organisation is to prevent situations of social exclusion by promoting suitable personal development. SCMS engages with senior citizens, families in distress, community support organisations, youth workers, youth-at-risk, childcare providers and support services for children-in-need.

Supporting Partners

CARDET is an independent, non-profit, non-governmental research and development organisation based in Nicosia, Cyprus with partners around the world. Its mission is to inspire next generation education and promote research, innovation and development through evidence-based practices, cutting-edge research and empowered people.



Innoventum is a web-development company based in Joensuu, Finland. It has significant experience in developing easy-to-use web-based applications for purposes ranging from e-learning to online shopping and live video streaming. Their goal is to be the forerunner in modern web technologies and web-based solutions.

Universität Paderborn, Germany is represented by the Department for Business and Human Resource Education. This department educates students in the first phase of teacher education for the field of adult education, vocational education and training.

NetBox in Brief

The NetBox Project aims “to pilot and validate a model for educationally self-sufficient rural communities where traditional consumers of educational services can become producers of educational services and content”.

The Project Objectives are to:

- Develop a new model for lifelong learning in small rural communities that considerably

increase the range and availability of educational resources and supports

- Create a greater sense of community engaging local residents, business owners and service providers towards a common set of learning goals
- Foster the development of many types of community learning exchanging assets, skills and knowledge
- Enable the growth of new learning partnerships at community level facilitated through easy-to-use and accessible ICT tools
- Promote inter-cultural awareness within the six pilot communities across Europe by linking them through online social networks

Pilot Communities get off to a flying start!

In order for NetBox to have meaning and be effective as a community led learning initiative; engagement and ownership at community level with local residents, businesses and services providers was essential from the beginning. In the majority of cases, local teams of volunteers formed Local Management Groups to drive project activities and to act as a test-bed for research, trialing and development work. NetBox Champions were born in each of the six pilot rural communities and it is hoped that these residents will continue to take an active part in the project over its lifetime and showcase their experiences at the Final Conference to be held in Poland in Spring 2014.



Meet the Communities at Work...

Oldcastle is situated in the far northwest corner of County Meath, bounded to the north east by County Cavan, to the west by Westmeath and to the south by the natural boundary of the Loughcrew Hills. Oldcastle has a rural population of 2,226 people located within the town and throughout the rural hinterland. There was a need identified during the consultation to provide a training service to the residents of Oldcastle to tackle issues of unemployment. With adequate supports and resources in place, this project can potentially be fundamental in stimulating some undeveloped industries in Oldcastle, like the tourism industry for example. The nature of NetBox means that an open and strong community spirit was needed in order for the resources of the knowledge sharing zone and the Skills Market to be fully exploited. In this regard Oldcastle is the ideal village for which to pilot NetBox. This is the belief held by Meath Partnership but has also been echoed through the community activism and the want for economic stimulus which has been expressed throughout every stage of the community consultation process to date.

Wiveliscombe is a town in Somerset, 9 miles from Taunton. With a population of 2,670, it acts as a centre for the surrounding parishes and has a strong independent character. It is a very active community used to taking things into their own hands, and as such it was a very good candidate as a pilot town. For example, 16 bungalows for the elderly and a new children's centre have been created over the past couple of years. The Community Office is open six mornings a week, acting as a focal information point, and for over 12 years residents have produced their own free paper, the Messenger, which is hand-delivered by volunteers. There is also a community radio station, 10Radio, as well as a cinema club and every night of the week groups meet for a host of activities. In the community centre, volunteers run a weekly day centre for the elderly and housebound.

Vale de Figueira, and São Vicente do Paúl, Portugal are the two communities chosen by the Portuguese partner for the piloting of NetBox. They were chosen because of the close links between the two villages and their close proximity, only 14 kilometers from Santarém. Rural depopulation has been a concern of both communities; however it has affected them both very differently. In the parish of Vale de Figueira, the movement of residents out of the parish has led to the

community losing their services and businesses, leading to the fears developing among remaining residents that their parish is extinguished and that they may lose more support services in the future. On the other hand, in the parish of São Vicente do Paúl the collapse of services and businesses has not been such a major problem. While residents from this parish would welcome more employment prospects, they are happy with the existing community services. This parish, as well as having a range of community supports and services, is also home to a business area composed of small businesses, and a Pastoral Centre which promotes learning.

Gmina Ryki, Poland is located in the north-western part of the Lublin region surrounded by the Wieprz and Vistula rivers. With its picturesque and fertile countryside, Ryki has been traditionally associated with agriculture. However with just under 50% of the employees of this region working in agriculture, this area has an unemployment rate of 15.8%. Because of this, one fifth of the population now lives below the poverty line. Women, having less employment opportunities than men, are particularly vulnerable. In the traditional family model, women are confined to housework, which puts them at a comparative disadvantage in the labour market. They also tend to lose their qualifications and skills during long periods of unemployment. As the Ryki region is relatively poor, the local authorities are confined to providing only basic public services. This community, however, is willing to actively support any initiative aimed at improving living conditions in the area and it is for this reason that they were chosen as a pilot community in NetBox.

Ștefan cel Mare, Romania has 3,450 inhabitants, and is located to the extreme north-eastern part of the county of Calarasi. The town has a young and growing population.

Because of this, there have been more than 300 new houses built in the area in the last 20 years. This expansion in population has been due in part to its location, not far from a major town, and also its access to the railway network. There is no specific economic activity in the area.

There are only 2,000 hectares outside of the built-up areas of this region, and there are only 24 economic agents, most of who are engaged in agricultural and trade activities. Having had the same Mayor for 22 years, having a homogeneous local council, and with a population that is open minded and eager to learn new things; the commune has a set of goals for the future. These include connecting the area to a gas pipeline for domestic use; bringing cable TV to the area; building an ecological garbage deposit; establishing a medical-sanitary unit, planting trees in an area of 20 hectares of degraded land and participating in the NetBox Project!

Kulautuva, Lithuania is situated approximately 20 minutes from Kaunas city, and sits within the Kaunas district municipality, in central Lithuania. It is situated on the right bank of the Nemunas River, and houses a population of 1,367 people. The community has an existing infrastructure, necessary for various community activities. The welfare of the community is ensured by the presence of service providers, including a children's hospital, Kulautuva dispensary, the fire station, a pre-school, 2 schools, a cultural centre, a library and a community house. The community has created a lot of new physical assets with the help of EU financial support, including a multi-functional playground, in which various sport activities, such as basketball, tennis and volleyball can be run, as well as a special playground for smaller children. This community welcomes the piloting of the NetBox project to their region, in the hope that this will further support their own growth and development over recent times.

**To follow the NetBox Story in each of these communities, please visit
www.netboxproject.eu**



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