

Scotland's Rural College

Learning from European Rural Movements

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Photo: Scottish Rural Action

Learning from European Rural Movements

Research to inform a Scottish approach

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Executive Summary

What were we trying to find out?

To inform the development of a rural movement in Scotland, this report explores the key characteristics, roles and methods of engagement employed by established rural movements in other European countries.

What did we do?

We studied rural movements in 10 countries (Albania, England, Estonia, Finland, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Northern Ireland, Sweden). We collected information via a desk-based review of relevant literature, interviews with representatives from each of the movements, and an online seminar to discuss the initial findings (hosted by the European Rural Communities Alliance).

What did we learn?

We identified six overarching themes with associated learning points for Scotland. The themes relate to the structure of the organisation, collaboration, purpose, activities, relationship with government, and place-based action.

The findings demonstrate how rural movements represent an organised approach to providing a network and voice for rural areas, their people and those working to support rural development. An important role for the movements is advocacy to shape local, regional and national policy, while another important role is enabling shared learning and knowledge exchange. The character of each movement reflects and responds to the national context in which it operates, including the system of administration and culture.

What do we recommend?

Three insights can be put forward from this research to inform the Scottish approach. We suggest that these are used as a basis for ongoing discussions between Scottish Government, Scottish Rural Action and others seeking to develop an effective and impactful Scottish rural movement:

1. A Scottish rural movement should bring together diverse actors to inform and influence policy.
2. A Scottish rural movement needs a clear identity and clarity of purpose related to networking and knowledge sharing.
3. A Scottish rural movement should be supported to develop constructive relationships with LEADER LAGs and staff to ensure that the movement represents local issues and needs effectively.

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Introduction and approach

In 2019, the Scottish Government committed to support the development of a rural movement in Scotland:

"We will work with Scottish Rural Action and others to support the development of a rural movement that will engage with communities between rural parliaments to include a more diverse range of voices, including those in disadvantaged communities."

Programme for Government in Scotland (2019-2020, p.84)

To inform the development of the Scottish movement, this research explored the key characteristics, roles and methods of engagement employed by established rural movements in other European countries, to develop lessons to inform the Scottish approach.

The research involved three stages:

1. A desk-based review of relevant literature.
2. Interviews with representatives from European rural movements.
3. An online seminar to discuss emerging findings (in conjunction with the [European Rural Communities Alliance](#), ERCA).

Rural movements in 10 countries were studied in detail (these are listed in Box 1). The researchers interviewed a representative from each rural movement, to learn about each organisation's history, purpose, structure, activities, funding and relations with government. A list of the interview questions is in Annex 1 and a table in Annex 2 provides a descriptive overview and comparison of the characteristics of each movement.

At the online seminar on 28 February 2022, the researchers presented six key themes that emerged from the work. The themes were discussed with representatives from the 10 studied European movements, representatives from movements in other countries (Germany, Iceland, Belgium), Board members of ERCA and [Partnership for Rural Europe](#) (PREPARE), and representatives from Scottish Government.

Box 1 *Contributing organisations*

ALBANIA [Albanian Network for Rural Development](#) (ANRD) – *Rrjeti Shqiptar për Zhvillimin Rural*

A genuine civil society initiative for improved well-being of rural communities.

ENGLAND [Action with Rural Communities](#) (ACRE)

Its vision is of rural communities that are thriving, inclusive, economically active and which have the services needed to ensure equity for all residents.

ESTONIA [Kodukant](#) – the Estonian village movement

Kodukant embodies the spirit and values of the villages and is driven by a passion to retain rural life and traditions.

FINLAND [Village Association Finland](#) (SKR) – *Suomen Kylät Finlands Byar*

Promotes and develops village action and locally initiated rural development on the national level.

IRELAND [Irish Rural Link](#) (IRL)

Represents the interests of locally based rural groups in disadvantaged and marginalized rural areas at local, national and EU levels.

LATVIA [Latvian Rural Forum](#) (LRF) – *Latvijas Lauku forums*

Prompting balanced development of rural territories in order to create it as a place where contented people live, and are able to meet their economic and social needs in the place of their residence.

LITHUANIA [Lithuanian Rural Communities Union](#) (LRCU) - *Lietuvos kaimo bendruomenių sąjunga*

Aims to unite the rural communities of all regions of Lithuania and represent their interests.

NETHERLANDS [National Association for Small Cores](#) (LVKK) – *Landelijke Vereniging voor Kleine Kernen*

LVKK supports more than 4,000 village and village hall organizations in the Netherlands and many local citizens' initiatives with tailor-made expertise.

NORTHERN IRELAND [Rural Community Network](#) (RCN)

Works with rural communities to address issues relating to poverty, inequality, community and good relations and strives to develop the capacity and skills of groups to articulate their voice at a policy influence level.

SWEDEN [Rural Sweden](#) (HSSL) – *Hela Sverige ska leva*

A national civil society organisation for rural development focussing on priority issues related to services, local influence, culture and infrastructure.

Key themes

Six overarching themes emerged from the interviews, and these were discussed in more detail at the online seminar (Box 2). The themes are presented in turn in this section, incorporating insights from both the interviews and the online seminar. Where appropriate, illustrative examples are provided from the countries. For each theme, key learning points are distilled for further consideration in the context of the Scottish approach.

Box 2 Key themes

1. **Structure of the organisation** – *National networks with strong support for regional representation and engagement*
2. **Collaboration** - *The need for strong relationships with other stakeholders*
3. **Purpose** - *The importance of a shared vision, transparency and communication*
4. **Activities** - *Pursuing a diverse portfolio of activities to ensure financial sustainability*
5. **Relationship with government** - *Being a helpful yet critical friend*
6. **Place-based action** – *Developing community capacity and the role of village halls (or similar)*

THEME 1: Structure of the organisation

National networks with strong support for regional representation and engagement

All the rural movements that took part in the research have adopted an approach that combines national-level advocacy and support with regional/local membership, partnership and/or networking. There is an emphasis on bottom-up development of the membership and local/regional groups. Members are generally institutional (community organisations, NGOs, etc.) and several have sought to achieve good geographical coverage, to ensure nationwide representation of rural areas. In this type of approach, it is possible to mobilise at the local and regional levels, focussing on priority issues. For example, ACRE (England) is a national charity with 38 independent 'network members' (rural community councils) that cover all of the rural counties of England. Rural Community Network (Northern Ireland) employs a slightly different 'hub and satellite model', with autonomous network members at the sub-regional level that have their own management board and membership. However, they encountered some challenges when distributing government funding to these local

levels, as some networks found it hard to reconcile their desire for autonomy and independence with their reliance on RCN to distribute their funding. In short, this centralised control of funding allocations to the sub-regional networks and the requirement for the networks to report on their spend damaged internal working relationships.

ANRD (Albania) has good geographical coverage, with 30 member organisations bringing good 'reach' and expertise to the network and the membership of LCRU (Lithuania) has grown to include institutional members, including LEADER Local Action Groups (LAGs), and regional/local umbrella unions. Their membership now covers over half of the country's regions. SKR (Finland) has a good geographical balance of people on their boards and committees to take account of diversity of rural areas. In the Netherlands and Sweden, LVKK and HSSL have a regional association in each province. In the Swedish regions, there are sometimes 2-3 associations, as well as networks within the municipalities and around 5,000 village action groups. In all these countries, the national organisation tends to bring the regional level actors/association together to lobby the national government and to help them to exchange knowledge and experience.

IRL (Ireland) does not have a formal regional/local structure and instead works with a network of 'volunteer champions' who act as eyes and ears at the grassroots level. It adopts a 'community of interest' approach which involves working with a variety of smaller voluntary and community sector organisations and focussing on specific themes/issues rather than places (e.g. rural transport, care services, biodiversity). This encourages its various members to form 'single issue networks' under the umbrella of IRL, without the effort/cost involved with maintaining a national network. The organisation is run by a Board with 11 seats for community groups (reflecting diversity) and four seats for institutions (two academics, two farming organisations). There are no strict criteria for selecting Board members but an approval mechanism is used to check for relevant experience. IRL is funded by a mix of government projects and income for servicing umbrella networks.

Involvement of local authorities in the work of the organisation, either as formal members or in a more informal way, can affect the establishment of local groups/action. In Belgium, for example, in areas where the local authority engages positively with the movement, it is easier to establish successful local groups as the working relationships between the grassroots and

local government are constructive. In Germany, in regions where local authorities place less emphasis on working with grassroots organisations, it is hard for rural people to participate in local decision-making.

Learning points

- Geographical coverage is important to ensure local/regional views and priorities are understood and represented.
- If geographical coverage is not possible, governance within the organisation can be structured to ensure representation from communities and institutions.
- It is common that the national movement co-ordinates the flow of information from and between the regions, while ensuring that regional/local levels of the movement can take a bespoke approach that suits their needs.
- Care needs to be taken if funding flows directly from the national rural movement to partners (to ensure transparency and fairness).
- Relationships with local authorities can affect the success/motivation of local/regional groups.

THEME 2: Collaboration

The need for strong relationships with other stakeholders

Collaboration is an important part of the work of all the rural movements (vital in Michael Dower's view), particularly in relation to bringing important issues to the attention of government. However, there needs to be clarity regarding the roles of collaborators (particularly those structured around voluntary effort), and the relationship between the local authority and the elements of the rural movement. In some countries, rural stakeholders are formal members of the organisation, while others actively collaborate with stakeholders working on similar issues. Collaboration need not only be within the country, with several organisations regularly learning from others through Hela Norden ska leva (the Nordic countries), ERCA, PREPARE and the Balkan Rural Development Network.

ACRE (England) works with other stakeholders (in a Rural Coalition) to evidence and address need, to inform and influence at national level, and to speak on behalf of rural communities (with a particular focus on disadvantage). LVKK (Netherlands) has a good relationship with organisations that are also active in relevant issues (e.g. elderly care). They find that they have a stronger voice when several organisations represent on one issue. In 2021, for example, LVKK joined five other organisations in a meeting with one of the government Ministries to talk about the 'big issues' for rural areas in the coming years. IRL (Ireland) places great emphasis on offering support to other sectoral rural interest groups (such as farmers), to build mutuality and trust.

In Albania, ANRD sees their member organisations as their main strength. With many of these operational before the organisation was established, they bring a lot of expertise to the network and support ANRD initiatives by mobilising stakeholders and disseminating their outputs. Looking out to urban areas, SKR (Finland) has set up an Urban Neighbourhood Committee to consider urban-rural interactions in their work. ANRD (Albania), SKR (Finland) and ACRE (England) have also worked closely with academics to carry out advocacy projects and inform the development of their work.

There are some differences in the extent to which the rural movements collaborate with LAGs. SKR (Finland) and VDB (Germany) have close co-operation with LEADER groups, and LRF (Latvia) has a very close relationship with LAGs (and therefore also the Ministry of Agriculture and the Paying Agency). Since 2017, LRF have convened a weekly meeting with all the LAGs (on Zoom), providing a 'safe space' for exchanging information, providing updates and running thematic skills sessions. LRF act as a mediator between the LAGs, helping to balance issues as they hold the least professional/personal interest. Similarly, LCRU (Lithuania) sees working closely with the LAG network as very important. LCRU consults the LAGs regularly to invite input to their advocacy work and ensure they have a common voice. Connections with LAGs are not as strong in Sweden nor were they in pre-Brexit England, although in Sweden there are close relationships with some groups at both regional and municipal levels.

Learning points

- Collaboration is important for influence and action but there is a need for clarity regarding roles and relationships, particularly with local authorities.
- Close relationships with LEADER Local Action Groups can enable local level engagement and access to financial and other support.
- Where there are many pre-existing organisations with a rural interest and/or existing membership, it is important that the rural movement constantly listens to the views of these organisations, building trust and involvement gradually.

THEME 3: Purpose

The importance of a shared vision, transparency and communication

There was strong agreement among those organisations that organise a Rural Parliament that these are powerful events for bringing together key people and identifying/discussing important issues. For several of the organisations, the Rural Parliaments have been very important from the outset, with the exchange of experience and ideas forming the basis for a lot of their work and providing an opportunity to discuss key issues with politicians and policy officials. It is also a very important platform for sharing new rural research and data, as well as facilitating engagement with the grassroots and motivating local actors to engage with the movement.

Many organisations emphasised the importance of a shared vision/mission and thoughtful/sensitive leadership. ANRD (Albania) facilitated two nationwide stakeholder consultation processes over the past five years (including civil society organisations, local authorities and the private sector) to build a clear identity and to help develop their relationship with government and stakeholders. This unified focus on needs and priorities helped ANRD to shape its position on key issues while simultaneously acquiring legitimacy through participatory policy processes. In England, ACRE has recently been working with its network of rural community councils around a shared mission, shared values, trust and mutual respect. They emphasise the importance of grounding a shared mission in evidence

of need because this helps in ensuring complementarity rather than competition with other groups.

RCN (Northern Ireland) reported ongoing discussions with partners about whether they should focus on core topics of interest rather than try to cover all issues. The tendency has been towards the latter because they are known as 'the rural voice' on all topics. Despite this challenge, they note the importance of having a clear purpose from the outset, as this will encourage everyone to come on board and coalesce around shared aims. SKR (Finland) has engaged regularly with research organisations to inform their action on key topics. Kodukant (Estonia) emphasised the importance of talking at an early stage about values and ensuring that members understand each other's values, rather than only focussing on shared goals (because often the reasons for wanting to achieve a goal can be different). They also encouraged the involvement of young people from the outset so that all ages are involved.

Several organisations have assigned a lot of importance to good communications, both within and outside the organisation. Engagement and public awareness have been important to HSSL (Sweden) from the beginning, and they employ a communications officer to work on the newsletter, social media sites, reports, press releases, etc. Kodukant (Estonia) no longer has an office in each of the 15 counties and instead conducts all of its communications online. SKR (Finland) has a dedicated communications officer and increasingly uses digital and online platforms as mechanisms for young people to organise themselves and communicate with the organisation. They have also established a rural youth committee.

To 'ensure the information flow' within the organisation, staff from LRF (Latvia) visit local communities several times a month, facilitate active email exchanges (using listserv), phone calls, social media and WhatsApp groups (and more) and use all of these tools/meetings to gather information and ensure they have an accurate 'temperature check' from all regions on issues/policy changes. Similarly, LCRU (Lithuania) consults 40 members by email/phone before taking any opinion to the government. For several of the organisations, increasing digitalisation has helped to focus on engagement with young people.

Learning points

- A clear purpose is vital for engaging rural actors successfully in the work of the rural movement.
- Listening and collecting insights from a range of partners leads to more informed interactions with policy/government, using the Rural Parliament as one of the main vehicles for this.
- Rural movements play an important networking and communications role, assuming the movement is trusted as both a source of information and a communicator with government.

THEME 4: Activities

Pursuing a diverse portfolio of activities to ensure financial sustainability

We were struck by the wide range of projects being undertaken by many of the organisations we spoke to. Activities cover everything from broadband improvements, elderly care, rural transport, local environment, energy efficiency, public safety, Smart Villages, village hall services, rural housing, community development plans and more. For example, ACRE (England) is helping communities with a range of energy efficiency projects, including installation of solar panels and electric car charging points in village halls¹. There is a strong focus on improving rural quality of life, with projects attracting funding from regional and national government, the European Union and other sponsors.

Although not all the movements carry out these types of projects, a strong motivation for those who do is to ensure the financial sustainability of the organisation. Most of the organisations do not have long-term, core funding (except for HSSL in Sweden which has recently been awarded three years of hard-won government funding for its work). RCN (Northern Ireland) and LVKK (Netherlands) regularly receive some government funding, but this is only negotiated on an annual basis, which restricts long-term planning and creates uncertainty. Funding received by ACRE (England) from the government has fallen but

¹ For more information, see: acre.org.uk/action-on-climate-change/

remains crucial in holding the network together and ensuring national coverage. Other income sources include contracts to provide services to local councils, health boards and many others. Government support for IRL (Ireland) was withdrawn during the financial crisis and then partially reinstated so they now rely on a more diversified mix of government funds, projects and servicing umbrella projects. Most of the organisations see financial sustainability as the main risk to the success of their work.

Organisation/delivery of events is a key income source (particularly the Rural Parliament). For example, Kodukant (Estonia) runs events to promote rural lifestyles ('Day of rural life' and 'Village of the year'), which enables them to build relationships with municipalities and others to attract funding and increase their influence. LRF (Latvia) organises discussion circles and conferences, and provides services to municipalities/NGOs (e.g. writing development strategies, evaluations, etc.), and LCRU (Lithuania) holds an annual national festival for sharing ideas and discussions that feed into the Rural Parliament.

Learning points

- Reliance on financial support from national and regional/local government is normal.
- National organisations often distribute national funding to the regional organisations.
- Uncertainty around this type of funding (and the time it will be available for) limits the activities of the movement.
- Often, organisations undertake a range of income-generating activities to ensure financial sustainability, freedom to 'do what they want to do' and the ability to deploy/attract income under times of political change.

THEME 5: Relationship with government

Being a helpful yet critical friend

Positive and constructive relationships with government are clearly important for influencing rural policy and these relationships need to be developed and agreed at both national and local/regional levels. Engaging strategically with the most senior level possible in government is also important, alongside engaging with specific teams of officials on

particular topics and gaining political support and respect for the outcomes of the Rural Parliament. Mechanisms for structuring engagement between rural communities and government are varied, and include events, lobbying activities and structured meetings. For example, Kodukant (Estonia) convenes a jury to judge the 'Village of the Year' competition, with jurors including representatives from different government Ministries. HSSL (Sweden) takes part in formal meetings each year with the government departments responsible for regional and rural policies, while LRF (Latvia) is a member of the official monitoring committee for EU agricultural funds and participates in Parliament committees.

There are variations in the extent to which the European movements work with local authorities. How far the local authority is involved in rural areas impacts the purpose/activity of the movement, with the local authority sometimes relying on the movement to develop community self-reliance in some places. Where action from the local authority is strong, there may be less need for activities by the rural movement.

Several organisations also noted the importance of being a 'critical friend' to actors across government and not being afraid to challenge government officials and politicians on key issues. Again, the Rural Parliament plays an important role, providing an opportunity for a strong lobby to national politicians around key themes. The regional associations of LVKK (Netherlands) also facilitate regional rural parliaments to discuss important issues with regional government.

ACRE (England) feels it can still advocate energetically on behalf of rural communities (notably through the wider Rural Coalition Stakeholder Group) and act as a critical friend to the relevant government department. IRL (Ireland) has become integral to national policy and lobbying structures through recognition by government as representing rural areas in the negotiation of key policies, and LRF (Latvia) participates in parliament committees and tries to be close to decision-makers at regional and national levels. They also regularly produce joint opinion papers with national NGOs.

Several organisations noted the importance of structured development of relationships. For example, Kodukant (Estonia) involves government officials in their high-profile events and LVKK organises twice-yearly fieldtrips with staff from the relevant Ministry to have an

exchange with them about what happens in different villages (e.g. highlighting work on housing co-ops, elderly care and solar power). LVKK see this as an effective way for the government to see and understand how things work in practice and the trips also include a more fundamental discussion about how to make these things happen.

However, it is also seen by some as important to have some 'distance' from government so that the organisation can be critical and independent when necessary. This is the view of RCN (Northern Ireland) and HSSL (Sweden). LRF (Latvia) tries to be 'diplomatic but good friends', focussing on 'fragile issues and direct contact' and striving to be apolitical. To do this, they focus on bringing people around the table to talk about important issues. If they have the resources, they try to invite Ministries and others to join meetings and to share the views of their members and invite a reaction. Similarly, LCRU (Lithuania) tries not to be 'the conflict person', ensuring the Chairperson/organisation is free from any vested interests.

Learning points

- The movement needs to engage strategically with the highest possible level in government. There are different ways to do this, using both informal and formal mechanisms.
- The organisation should be able to act as a 'critical friend' to government, advocating energetically and in a well-informed manner on behalf of rural communities, while also retaining government's trust and value.
- The movement can be well-placed to 'get the right people around the table' to talk about key issues.

THEME 6: Place-based action

Developing community capacity and making local connections

Some of the rural movements have a strong focus on offering capacity development to communities and supporting the network of village halls/buildings that are used by rural communities.

For example, the ACRE network (England) supports the 80,000 volunteers and 1,000 staff who run England's 10,000 village halls. Similarly, LVKK (Netherlands) work closely with the network of 'village houses' that are central to the strong movement of village initiatives that build co-ops for community care, transportation projects, digital projects, and so on. An important 'heart of rural community life', these places provide a hub for social activities, classes and services such as post offices, doctors and shops. In terms of local capacity development, Kodukant (Estonia) offers a project-based advisory service and training programme for community leaders and potential leaders. The aim is to increase capacity in communities (particularly in terms of social capital for running local/regional organisations), while also developing another income stream for the organisation. ACRE (England) has also supported the preparation of village plans to guide place-based action and promoted community-led affordable housing initiatives.

There are also some challenges related to incorporating/working with single purpose groups that are established at the local level to respond to a particular issue (e.g. a school closure or affordable housing need). It is important to recognise that there will be divisions and disagreements in communities, therefore the challenge for a rural movement is to co-ordinate at the local level, build bridges between groups and organisations, and demonstrate that there are advantages to working together.

Learning points

- A rural movement can demonstrate the connections between local issues/themes and create a sense of community around these.
- The extent to which a rural movement can support village halls/other community facilities depends on its core purpose.

Insights for Scotland

The findings of this work demonstrate how rural movements represent an organised approach to providing a network and voice for rural areas, their people and those working to support rural development. An important role for the movements is advocacy to shape local, regional and national policy, while another important role is enabling shared learning and knowledge exchange. The character of each movement reflects and responds to the national context in which it operates, including the system of administration and culture.

Based on the thematic analysis of the interviews and online seminar discussion, the following three insights can be put forward to inform the Scottish approach. These insights can be used as the basis for ongoing discussions between Scottish Government, Scottish Rural Action and others seeking to develop an effective and impactful Scottish rural movement.

1. A Scottish rural movement should bring together diverse actors to inform and influence policy

In Scotland the mechanisms to ensure rural voices are heard are fragmented. With such a diversity of geographies, populations, community-based organisations and local issues/needs, finding a way to channel voices is important. This needs to be done in a way that illuminates common threads, while also maintaining and respecting that regional and local diversity. A Rural Parliament is part of this, providing a valuable opportunity to collect information and increase trust in, and engagement with, the movement. Yet, others need to be involved in the governance of the rural movement and the rural voice needs to interact with many institutions, not least government and its agencies.

Several of the European organisations contributing to this research project place a strong emphasis on sharing information and communicating ideas between a range of actors, suggesting that this central networking role may be important in the Scottish context. The European organisations also engage regularly with public sector organisations and non-rural actors, acknowledging the importance of rural-urban interactions when addressing key issues that affect rural communities.

2. A Scottish rural movement needs a clear identify and clarity of purpose related to networking and knowledge sharing

Scotland has many community-based/thematic organisations working in and on behalf of rural communities. It is important to be clear about whether the rural movement is a 'collective' of these organisations, whether these organisations become 'members' of the movement, or whether they act independently of the movement. Based on the findings of this research, it seems again that the most appropriate core focus of a Scottish rural movement would be to network/bring together and listen to the views of existing organisations, creating a more joined-up and inclusive rural voice which brings together national, regional and local rural stakeholders.

As an overarching representative of that voice, the movement needs to be confident that all views are included and that the movement itself is advocating on behalf of its members/collaborators rather than in its own right. If done effectively, and with the support of rural actors, the movement could then become an invaluable critical friend to government, enabling it to hear the authentic voices of rural Scotland, 'speaking truth to power'. To chart the impact of the rural movement, a simple and regular independent evaluation would be beneficial.

3. A Scottish rural movement should be supported to develop constructive relationships with LEADER LAGs and staff to ensure that the movement represents local issues and needs effectively

After leaving the EU, Scotland is in a transition period with respect to future community-led local development (CLLD) funding arrangements. Scottish Government can think about how to ensure that the work of LAGs and LEADER staff continues, perhaps supported by new

sources of funding. If this is achieved, there is an opportunity for LEADER groups and staff to become an integral part of a Scottish rural movement, enabling networking and collaboration between the LAGs themselves, between LAGs and other rural actors (e.g. community councils and development trusts), and across multiple scales.

There are opportunities to learn from other countries' experiences here, and indeed by this means to continue to exchange knowledge through pan-European networks. While the Scottish Government continues to fund LEADER network activity, this may be a resource-efficient approach, assuming that there is a long-term commitment to that support.

Annex 1: Interview questions

1. Who drove the process of setting up a rural movement in X originally? How and why was the rural movement in X established?
2. What have been the main activities of the rural movement since its establishment and how has the rural movement evolved over time?
3. How is the rural movement in X structured and what is the governance model? Who are the membership?
4. How is the rural movement resourced? Does this funding arrangement create any challenges/tensions?
5. How does the organisation interact with government?
6. How effective has the rural movement been in achieving its purpose/s? What have been the key success factors for the rural movement in X?
7. How have the impacts/outcomes of the rural movement been recorded, monitored and measured?
8. Are there any issues that the rural movement has focused on with particular success?
9. Does the rural movement in X include/reflect the diversity of rural actors/stakeholders? If so, how does it do this? If not, why not?
10. Does the rural movement in X give voices to marginalised groups/quieter voices? If so, how does it do this? If not, why not?
11. Are some stakeholders/sectors excluded from the rural movement in X? If so, why? If not, how has inclusivity been achieved?
12. What kind of communications strategy has the rural movement used to ensure that everyone is aware of it and what it does? Who has led the creation/delivery of this strategy?
13. How has the Covid-19 pandemic impacted on the rural movement in X?

Annex 2: Descriptive comparison of the movements

Organisation	Established	Core purpose	Governance structure	Funding	Key strengths	Key challenges
ALBANIA: Albanian Network for Rural Development	2015	<p>To adopt a participatory and bottom-up perspective for advancing the national rural agenda.</p> <p>To enable participatory and sustainable rural development through the implementation of the CLLD/LEADER approach.</p>	A network with around 30 formal members, including a range of civil society organisations with rural interests. Established some regional structures to develop more functional organisation of ANRD at the local level.	Members pay a modest fee. Income from EU-funded programmes and other donors.	<p>Well-represented territorially through four important regional structures – covering the whole Albanian territory.</p> <p>A wide pool of experts from the member organisations offers expertise in different areas of rural development.</p> <p>Well-recognised actor in the rural development sector.</p> <p>Acquired substantial legitimacy by gathering 30 civil society organisations and communicating with many stakeholders during consultations on rural policies.</p>	<p>Negative perceptions of policymakers for watchdog civil society organisations.</p> <p>Formal consultation processes from Ministries limit the potential for meaningful input and contribution from ANRD.</p> <p>Limited possibilities to be an active participant in policymaking processes, due to project-based approach of ANRD.</p> <p>Low financial viability that does not allow ANRD to participate actively and contribute to policymaking processes</p> <p>Communication is often one-way and ad hoc (low responsiveness from the Ministry side).</p>

Organisation	Established	Core purpose	Governance structure	Funding	Key strengths	Key challenges
ENGLAND: Action with Rural Communities	1987 (reconfiguration of the Rural Community Council [RCC] movement that began in 1920)	Initial aim: to coordinate voluntary effort for social services in rural areas, develop “self-government at the village level”. Current purpose: a national charity speaking up for and supporting rural communities.	The ACRE network consists of ACRE and 38 independent rural community councils. Small team of 3 full-time and 4 part-time associates.	DEFRA funding. Over 95% is passed directly to member RCCs. A separate membership fee is levied on all members of ACRE. Bids to other funds and sponsors.	A comprehensive England wide coverage of all rural areas by 38 members is the ACRE Network’s key strength. ACRE provides the link into government and other national stakeholders and specialist support for members on the ground. Overall, the ACRE network delivers: a national village and community halls service that reaches every rural community, support for community and economic development initiatives on the ground including community led planning, health and wellbeing projects, village agents/good neighbour schemes, rural housing enablers etc.	Vulnerability to further funding reductions or loss of funding from DEFRA. Maintaining a clear focus on rural communities when increasingly the policy and the funding focus tends to be targeted at urban areas where need is more concentrated geographically.
ESTONIA: Kodukant village movement	1997 (work began in 1992)	Advocacy of local communities.	Has changed over time from having county-based organisations to now having members across all administrative scales. Currently the structure is quite mixed.	Limited options to apply for funding from government. Started their own tendering process inviting	Rural Parliament and ‘Village of the Year’ competition to promote village life. Projects: advisory service; training for community leaders (strengthen local capacities); e-village project.	Succession (“the generation gap still needs to be addressed”).

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				<p>bidders for social care work.</p>	<p>Influence in government to provide financial support for local communities.</p> <p>Good relationships with association of LEADER groups and local municipalities.</p>	
<p>FINLAND: Village association Finland</p>	<p>1997 (but with action since the 1970s)</p>	<p>Advocate for villages, LEADER groups and district associations and an advocate of local development.</p>	<p>National network working with LEADER groups, provincial village associations and individual village associations.</p>	<p>Funding from government/ LEADER funding.</p>	<p>Significant political support and involvement from academics.</p> <p>Establishment of Rural Youth Committee an Urban Neighbourhood Committee.</p> <p>Good geographical balance to take account of diversity.</p> <p>Solid membership base.</p>	<p>Having impact in urban neighbourhoods (hence new Committee).</p> <p>Engaging with young people (although again steps have been taken).</p>
<p>IRELAND: Irish Rural Link</p>	<p>1991</p>	<p>Represents (at local, national and EU levels) the interests of locally-based rural groups in disadvantaged and marginalised rural areas.</p>	<p>Board has 11 seats for community groups and 4 seats for institutions. The country is regarded too small for formal regional and local structures. Network of 'volunteer champions' at the grassroots.</p>	<p>Mix of government funding, projects and servicing the umbrella networks for a fee. Main government funding was withdrawn during the 2007-2008 recession.</p>	<p>Relationships with other organisations, building mutuality and trust.</p> <p>Highlighting, publicising and responding to key rural issues through operational projects and programmes.</p>	<p>Financial sustainability. They need to ensure a range of income sources.</p>

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LATVIA: Latvian Rural Forum	2004	To encourage sustainable development of rural areas, strengthen the development of rural civil society, represent rural people, and co-operate with government and others.	Large, formal member network (almost 90 from across the country). Around half are 'full' members and the remainder are 'associated' members. Around 3,000 other partners in the network.	No core funding. Reliance on applications for projects, delivering services to municipalities/ NGOs (e.g. evaluations, event organisation, etc.). Small income from membership fee.	<p>Biannual Rural Parliament for engaging interest, with community gatherings in alternate years. Quarterly meetings on thematic issues. 'Community week' in the autumn when they travel around the regions to talk to people and hear issues/concerns.</p> <p>Very close relationship with LEADER LAGs. Weekly meeting with all the LAGs (on Zoom for an hour). 'Safe space' for exchanging information, updates, etc. Thematic skills sessions.</p> <p>Very active communications: community visits, newsletters, email lists, WhatsApp groups, fisheries groups, regional groups, etc.</p>	Financial sustainability.
LITHUANIA: Lithuanian Rural Communities Union	2002	Uniting the rural communities of all regions and representing their interests.	Network of members that cover 36 of the 60 regions. Members include LAGs and regional/local umbrella unions.	No core funding. Support from government to hold annual festival, funding from National Rural Network	<p>Annual festival attended by over 1,000 people – opportunity for conference, sharing ideas (these feed into the Rural Parliament).</p> <p>Constructive relationships with alliance of NGOs with good</p>	<p>May be hard to get people to 'come back' after Covid.</p> <p>Financial sustainability.</p>

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				to arrange the Rural Parliament. Some support from national government budget that supports NGOs.	links into local government and politicians with rural roots. Inclusivity – always consulting members on issues before taking any opinion to government. The common voice is very powerful. The Union is supporting LAGs now as well – good relations.	
NETHERLANDS: National Association for Small Cores	1976	At the outset: to build village councils. These councils are still the basis of LVKK (about 1,500 of them). Stimulating a village movement across the 12 provinces. Recent focus: quality of life, village halls and how to shift more power/decision-making to communities.	Regional association now in ten of twelve provinces, with LVKK as ‘the mother of those’. Village councils are members of LVKK through the regional associations. LVKK brings the regional associations together to lobby government and exchange knowledge and experience.	Very limited funding before 2010. Now receiving a yearly subsidy from national government (Ministry of Internal Affairs).	Strong structure that makes it possible to work both at the grassroots and also have a voice at national and regional levels. Good relationships with other organisations. Network of 6,000 volunteers at national, regional and local levels. Range of successful projects on rural quality of life issues (e.g. energy).	LVKK need a more structured base for finance. Annual funding negotiations with government create uncertainty. Adapting to evolving issues, such as how to navigate the housing crisis, sustainability and maintaining village houses. Challenges connecting with migrant workers in rural areas.

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NORTHERN IRELAND: Rural Community Network	1991	Working with rural communities to address issues relating to poverty, inequality, community and good relations. Also works to develop capacity and skills of groups to articulate their voice at a policy influence level.	Established sub-regional rural networks (hub and satellite model). Each network is autonomous with a management board, staff and membership. RCN became the regional networking organisation for those independent networks.	Most networks active and applying for their money. At one stage in development central funding from government allocated via RCN (this created tensions around how this was allocated among the groups and RCN) and also because they had to report back to RCN on spend.	Strong partnerships with colleagues across sectors and topics. Involvement in rural proofing anti- poverty strategy and other government policies.	Overarching role over the sub-regional networks phase damaged relationships (RCN seen as "supervisor"). Ongoing discussions about whether to focus on core topics of interest rather than try to cover everything (they want to remain relevant to all). Unstable government and lack of strong policy and research community around rural development. Long-term sustainability – never in receipt of more than one year of funding.
SWEDEN: Rural Sweden/All Sweden shall live	1989 at the end of a government-supported campaign (All Sweden shall live) to address	Providing support and knowledge to local communities, strengthening the village movement and the civil society at the local level.	Rural Sweden is a national non-profit organization whose membership consists of thousands of local community groups.	Steady income from government over the years and also funding from projects.	'Reorganising rural Sweden' – strengthening civil society in rural areas. Biennial Rural Parliament and other 'national gatherings'.	Enough staff support. Security of funding.

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	rural issues at the time.	Influence the rural policy on priority issues, raise opinion, run pilot projects.	<p>Members are also about 35 national organizations.</p> <p>The organization has 24 regional level associations.</p> <p>Annual General Assembly.</p>	Recent commitment to three years of funding. Small amount of member fees from NGOs. Some sponsors, both long term and on particular projects.	<p>Projects on issues to help civil society (e.g. working with young people, co-operation with municipalities).</p> <p>Strengthen locally with handbooks, inspiration materials sharing others' experiences, reports on important topics,</p> <p>Meet politicians and decision-makers as well as participate in different arenas to make the voice of rural areas heard in different arenas.</p> <p>Together with others, identify original solutions directly adapted to the conditions in rural areas. For example, developing local action plans, establish broadband, welfare, services and infrastructure as well as culture and attitudes.</p> <p>Exchange of experience (within Sweden and also across Europe).</p>	